

“REVELATION: DOES IT DESCRIBE OUR TIMES?” SERIES

#14: “Chapters 13-14”

INTRO:

This section, chapters 12-14, is the fourth time John’s vision pictures what we call “the church age,” although sometimes the vision is from the birth of Christ through the judgment, as in this section, and sometimes it is from the birth of the church in 30 A.D. through the judgment.

This section began with chapter 12, which we considered last week. So, turn in your Bibles to chapter 13, where we are introduced to two beasts.

LET’S DETERMINE WHAT THE BEASTS SYMBOLIZE.

We see the first beast in chapter 13. He has ten horns with a diadem on each. He has seven heads, upon which are written blasphemous names. He has the body of a leopard. The feet are those of a bear. He has the mouth of a lion. Satan gives him power and authority. One of the seven heads has what was a mortal wound that has healed. This is literally what John saw, but we can’t take this literally and expect to encounter this creature that we might see on the SYFY Channel. This “**beast**,” with all his horns and heads and terrifying features must *symbolize* something that is very real and powerful. What could it be?

Verses 3 and 4 says that ***“the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’”***

Here’s Hendriksen’s take on this picture revealed to John:

1. The “**sea**” the beast emerges from represents or symbolizes nations and governments that persecute the church; so, the beast is of human origin. It is Satan’s hand.
2. Its “**seven**” heads are the world powers against the church throughout the church age: Old Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Macedonia, Rome, Ottoman, etc. None of these were or *are* democratic republics. They all had or *have* or *will have* emperors or dictators.
3. The “**head**” that had received “***the mortal blow and healed***” is Rome, which had almost died as a persecutor of the church when Nero committed suicide, but came to life under Domitian, who resumed the persecution of Christians.
4. The beast continues to exist today, in the form of earthly powers, and it is feared, followed, and worshiped by most people on earth.

A second beast rises out of the *earth* and is described in verses 11 through 18. It’s not the fearful ogre that the first beast is, because its mission is to get us to worship the first beast. Who or what does this beast symbolize?

This beast has just two horns, like a lamb, but it speaks like a dragon. It ***“makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast. . . It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people . . . it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the (first) beast... And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.”***

This is the beast that causes all of the people on earth ***“to be marked on the right hand or forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. . . for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.”***

So, who is this beast? What is ***“the mark.”*** Who’s 666?

I believe this beast is ***“the false prophet”*** mentioned in chapters 16 and 19. He symbolizes false religion and false philosophies that appear and challenge Christianity all during the church age. He symbolizes that which seems as harmless as a lamb, but actually conceals the dragon – appealing to the eye, but deadly. Hendriksen wrote: ***“This second beast is the lie of Satan dressed up like the truth... The two beasts – antichristian **government** and antichristian **religion** – work in perfect cooperation”*** (p. 180).

But what is this ***“mark,”*** without which no one can buy or sell? Hendriksen explains: ***“In order to understand the expression ‘mark of the beast,’ we must remember that not only cattle, but slaves also were branded or marked. That mark meant: this particular slave belongs to or serves this master. Very soon the expression ‘to receive the mark of someone’ began to mean to belong to someone, to serve or worship someone. Let us prove this point. In Revelation 14:9 we read: ‘If any man worships the beast . . . and receives the mark on his forehead...’ Here, ‘receiving the mark of the beast’ seems to mean ‘worshipping the beast.’ Similarly, in Revelation 14:11: ‘**they that worship the beast . . . and receive the mark of the beast**’ seems to mean belonging to the beast, worshipping the beast. The ‘mark of the beast is the God-opposing, Christ-rejecting, church-persecuting spirit of antichrist, wherever and whenever it manifests itself. . . The forehead symbolizes the mind . . . The right hand indicates his deed, action, trade, industry, etc.’*** (pp. 181-182).

So, ***“the mark of the beast”*** is the whole being of a person that shows he or she truly worships and serves not Christ, but the world, Satan.

The number 666, according to verse 18, is ***“the number of a man.”*** Again, Hendriksen comments: ***“Now, man was created on the 6th day. Six, moreover, is not seven and never reaches seven. It ever fails to attain the perfection, that is, it never becomes seven. Six means missing the mark, failure. Seven means perfection, victory. Rejoice, O church of God! The victory is on thy side. The number of the beast is six hundred sixty-six, that is, failure upon failure upon failure!”*** (p. 182).

So, the 666 is not a particular man, but a symbol of the failure of the two man-originated beasts: persecuting governments and Christ-rejecting philosophies.

We come to chapter 14, which describes...

...THE TRIUMPH OF THE CHURCH.

As indicated by the headings in your Bible, this chapter has three parts:

The first part has the Lamb, or Jesus, standing on Mount Zion, along with 144,000 who have his Father's name written on their foreheads.

I remind you that this is what was shown to John. Our concern is the meaning of the picture, not trying to find such a scene in reality. For example, there's no way 144,000 people could stand on Mount Zion.

This picture is in heaven, and the 144,000 are the sealed saints of chapter 7, who were still living on earth, persecuted. Here, they are enjoying their reward after the final judgment.

The meaning of verse 4: ***"It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins"*** is simply that these represent those who were faithful to Christ, who were not defiled by sinful ways under the pressure of persecution.

The second part of the picture shown to John here is that of the messages of the three angels flying overhead.

The message of the first angel was to all the inhabitants of the earth; the gospel of Jesus. He is warning of the final judgment that is coming.

The message of the second angel is: ***"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*** We'll encounter this ***"Babylon"*** again in chapter 17 through 19. Suffice it to say here that the worldly city of Babylon *represents* every worldly, alluring aspect of the world – money, fame, sex, etc. – that draws people away from God. The world, symbolized by Babylon, will be defeated.

The message of the third angel was ***"If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."***

In other words, you can't sin, reject Jesus as your Savior, and get away with it! If you love this world, you're going to perish with it! This is the message to non-believers.

Then, John writes in verse 12: ***"Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."***

Then, in verse 13, he says he heard a voice from heaven telling him to: ***“Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”*** Then the Spirit says, ***“Blessed indeed, that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!”***

The last 6 verses of this chapter describe the final judgment as a twofold harvest.

14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, “Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe.” 16 So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

17 Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 And another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over the fire, and he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, “Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.” 19 So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as a horse's bridle, for 1,600 stadia.

Jesus is on the cloud of judgment. He has a sickle in his hand. He swipes it over the land and gathers the saved.

Then, he swipes it over the land again and gathers the lost, symbolized by grapes that are crushed in the winepress. John sees a lake of blood, so deep that horses can swim in it, which indicates that the lost will clearly outnumber the saved.

IN CLOSING:

Thus, we come to the end of the fourth description of the Christian dispensation. In chapter 15 we start all over again, and view it from a different perspective, seeing yet another aspect of the church age. Revelation is certainly describing our days.