

# WHEN MEN BECOME BEASTS

by Ray C. Stedman

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The thirteenth chapter of Revelation brings before us the most famous number in the world -- 666. If you get that number on your license plate or on your credit card it sends shivers of fear down your spine! I learned this morning that a couple from this congregation had that as their house number. They were so disturbed they asked the city to change the number, which they did. Six hundred sixty six has become a sinister number in the eyes of many. Several movies have been based upon the powerful mystery connected with it. In this passage we will learn the secret of that strange number and of the beasts that are identified with it.

In Chapter 12, the Apostle John saw a great red dragon with seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns, which was clearly identified as a manifestation of Satan. Now, in Chapter 13, John sees a further manifestation of that same beast.

**And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his 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. 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 astonished and followed the beast. Men 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 make war against him?" {Rev 13:1-4 NIV}**

John saw this beast rising out of the sea, which, as we have seen several times in Revelation, is a symbol of the Gentile nations of the ancient world. This appearance is another manifestation of Satan as a worldwide evil power on the earth. In Chapter 12 the beast represented the Roman Empire of the 1st century and was the instrument of the devil to try to destroy the man-child that was born to the woman who symbolized Israel, i.e., Jesus himself. Here we see the same beast arising at a different time of history.

If you will read the seventh chapter of the prophet Daniel, you will find it ties closely to this chapter in Revelation. In that chapter, Daniel, too, saw beasts rising out of the sea, four of them. One was like a lion, another like a bear, and a third was like a leopard, the same symbols we find employed here by John. Along with those three beasts, Daniel saw a fourth beast, powerful but different looking than the other beasts, and with ten horns. In many ways, therefore, it was identical with the beast that John saw here.

We learn in Daniel that the beasts he saw represented the four great world empires of his day and following:

- First was Babylon, like a lion;
- Then Medo-Persia, like a bear; and
- Then Greece, like a leopard with four heads. John picks up these same concepts and sees them incorporated in this beast from the sea that appears as his vision unfolds.
- The strange fourth beast is identifiable in history as the Roman Empire, with its capital in Rome.

All of this is found combined into one beast which has, as it were, the lion-like ferocity of Babylon, the crushing bear-like power of Medo-Persia, and the swiftness of the Grecian leopard, but now appearing in the last days as a restored form of the Roman Empire, as we shall see.

I promised you that in Chapter 13 I would interpret the meaning of the horns, the heads and the crowns of this

beast. A great deal more information is given to us about this beast in the 17th chapter of this book. Though I shall not attempt to expound that chapter at this point, yet I do want to turn to it and bring out some of the things that John identifies for us:

In Chapter 17 John sees a woman sitting upon the red beast. I shall not deal with the woman now, but the red beast on which she sits has seven heads and ten horns, and an angel explains to him what these symbols mean. In 17:7, John writes:

**Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. [That ties in with much we have seen already in Revelation.] The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come." {Rev 17:7-8 NIV}**

That plainly identifies it with the beast we are looking at in Chapter 13, where, also, the whole world is said to be astonished by what has happened to this beast.

The phrase in Chapter 17, "the beast who once was, now is not, and yet will come," seems to tie in with what we have read in Chapter 13, Verse 3, "One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed." If, as we have suggested, this beast represents the same Roman Empire that John saw before, this is telling us there will come a revived form of the empire in the world during this last seven-year period of the history of civilization. Many scholars have pointed out that the Bible predicts a restoration, what might well be called a Revised Roman Empire, to emerge in Western Europe in those days.

Again in Chapter 17, the angel goes on in Verse 9 to explain further.

**"This calls for a mind with wisdom [Each of you has that, of course!]. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits." {Rev 17:9 NIV}**

A little later in this chapter the woman is identified as a great city. What city sits upon seven hills? Everyone in the ancient world (and everyone in the modern world) knows the answer! It is Rome. Once again we have a clear indication that the city of Rome will come prominently into the picture of these last days.

Now the angel adds:

**"They are also seven kings [or kingdoms]. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction." {Rev 17:10-11 NIV}**

That is clear, is it not? Clear as mud! But there are some things we can identify out of this revelation. We are told concerning these seven kings, "five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come." The Roman historian, Livy, wrote that there had been five forms of Roman government up to his time.

1. Rome originally began as a loosely-connected series of regional city-states, each one governed by a king.
2. This soon fell apart and instead of kings they elected consuls.
3. As the consuls fell upon difficult times they were succeeded by dictators, leaders from the people who would rise up and take over the government.
4. These in turn were overthrown and replaced by what the Romans called *decemvirs*, a term that means a council of ten rulers.

5. Eventually that form, too, failed and tribunes were elected by the people to rule the land.

Those were the five forms of government that had fallen.

But John is told "one is." That would be the imperial form, the emperors of Rome, beginning with Julius Caesar, before Christ, and continuing in a long series that history records as stretching well into the 4th century.

Now, says the angel, a seventh is yet to come, and "he must remain for a little while." Then the beast will appear. He will be one of the seven, revived, and thus constitute an eighth.

Something strange happens to it. It is called back into existence. "Its deadly wound is healed" and, thus, it makes its reappearance in history. No wonder the whole world is astonished at this revival. When we come to expound the 17th chapter in due course we shall learn some very startling things about the imperial form of Roman government.

I shall read but one more verse from Chapter 17 at the moment. In Verse 12, the angel says:

**"The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. {Rev 17:12 NIV}**

Bible scholars sometimes talk about a revived Roman Empire to be made up of 10 nations who will give their authority to a single individual. This satanically controlled man will rule in the geographic area of the old Roman Empire. That is why many people have been watching what is happening in Europe today, not only the ferment and upheavals of Eastern Europe, but also the changes in Western Europe, the site of the old Roman Empire. There, nations are softening their nationalistic passions and seeking to unite together in a United States of Europe. Some commentators have sought to identify this ten-kingdomed coalition with the European Common Market, or the European Economic Community (EEC). For awhile that organization did have ten members, but it has now increased to twelve or thirteen, so it is evident that it is not the actual revived empire, but it may be a predecessor. What is clear is that the direction of movement is toward the very thing we read of here. There will come a coalition of nations in Western Europe.

Let us now go back to Chapter 13, and look at the activities of this strange beast.

**The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months [We have seen that time-frame before]. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven [literally "those who tabernacle in heaven"]. {Rev 13:5-6 NIV}**

Blasphemy is not cursing. When you hear someone rip off a round oath that is not blasphemy. It is cursing. Blasphemy is to claim godlike powers, to claim to be God, or to identify God with lesser persons or objects. Idolatry, for instance, is blasphemy. That is what this individual becomes guilty of. He blasphemes God by claiming to have the powers of God, as we have seen. It would also involve an attack upon those who do not accept his claims. He ridicules and slanders those who do believe in God and in heaven (the unseen spiritual realm that exists), and whose thinking is centered upon and guided by the teaching of the Word of God. Those who thus "tabernacle in heaven" are not people who have died and gone to heaven. They are saints who live on the earth but whose lives are governed by heavenly realities. It is exactly what the apostle says about the church today. "Our citizenship," he says in Philippians, "is in heaven," {Phil 3:20 NIV}. We are strangers and sojourners on earth, but our true citizenship is in heaven.

Let us read on.

**He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth [literally "all the earth dwellers"] will worship the beast -- all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation**

**of the world. {Rev 13:7-8 NIV}**

The revived Roman leader is given great power. He is allowed to do fearful things, and thousands will die at his hand because of their faith. This agrees exactly with what we saw in Chapter 7, where the great multitude which no man could number come out of the tribulation from all nations and languages and tribes and people -- a group that "washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white" {cf, Rev 7:14} and became martyrs for the cause of Jesus Christ. This is the group that is mentioned here.

This leader's influence extends throughout the whole earth. It does not mean he actually rules over the whole earth but rather that his influence extends throughout it. It is very much like the Super Powers of our day. The influence of the United States and of Russia affects every nation on earth today because of the power and might these two nations represent. It will also be the case then.

There will be one class of people who will follow this leader blindly. They are called "those who dwell on the earth." We have seen this term before. It is a moral class, those who live for this world, who think only of the earth and its advantages, who are materialists and humanists, and who have no use for the things of God or the life beyond.

There is one group that resists this leader, and that is those "who tabernacle in heaven," whose names are written, we are told here, "in the book of life belonging to the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world." That is an amazing statement. We will say more about the book of life later on where it is mentioned again. I would like now to focus on the phrase, "the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world." That confirms again how time is not a factor in eternity. The death of the Lamb actually took place in time, on earth, at a specific date on the calendar, but here it is reckoned as an eternal event which has meaning for peoples from the very beginning of time, the creation of the world itself. The Lamb was slain, and the cross has impact upon all creation. Thus the Old Testament saints could be born again by faith because they were saved by the cross even though it had not yet occurred in history.

John now picks up on the phrase that Jesus used frequently and gives a word of encouragement to the saints of that day.

**He who has an ear, let him hear. {Rev 13:9 NIV}**

Jesus said this many times in his ministry. And, in Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation, in the seven letters to the churches the phrase occurs in each. By this exhortation Jesus is saying, "Listen carefully. Something important is about to be uttered." So John tell us what it is:

**If anyone is to go into captivity,  
into captivity he will go.  
If anyone is to be killed with the sword,  
with the sword he will be killed. {Rev 13:10a NIV}**

I am sorry to have to do this, but every now and then I must correct the translation of the New International Version. It is excellent in the Old Testament, but not as accurate in the New. But, since everybody uses it, I must too. If you have an NIV, cross out the words "to go." "If anyone is to go into captivity"; and in the next line, "If anyone is to be killed with the sword," read it, "If anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he will be killed." The verse means that if anyone takes others captive, he will himself become a captive (hostage). If anyone kills with the sword, he must himself be killed with the sword. It is a word of encouragement to the saints of that day. All over the earth people are being taken captive and are being killed. God is simply saying to the others, "Don't be discouraged, hang in there. Don't let this slaughter throw you."

Notice how John puts it.

**This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness [or faith] on the part of the saints. {Rev 13:10b NIV}**

The law of consequences cannot be endlessly evaded. God has not forgotten. It may look like evil has triumphed, everything has gone wrong, but hang in there. "God cannot be mocked," {Gal 6:7b NIV}. The law of consequences cannot be canceled. Sooner or later he who kills with the sword must himself be killed. He who takes hostages must himself be taken hostage. Wait for it! I have often quoted the splendid words of James Russell Lowell:

Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet 'tis truth alone that's strong.  
Truth, forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong, forever on the throne.  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadows  
Keeping watch above His own!

Now John sees another beast coming. We read of him in Verses 11-12:

**Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. {Rev 13:11-12 NIV}**

This beast arises from the earth, used throughout the book as a symbol of Israel. That is why most biblical scholars say this man is probably a Jew. He comes from Israel and has "two horns like a lamb, but he talks like a dragon." He looks like a lamb, but he talks like a dragon. He is, therefore, a fake lamb, to put it bluntly. This is the Antichrist, the one who comes instead of Christ, who offers himself as though he were Christ. It is for this reason I believe the term Antichrist is properly applied to this second beast, although both beasts are anti-Christian in character.

Horns speak of power, and this man has two lamb-like powers. Jesus also had these powers: the powers of a priest and of a prophet. This man acts as both. Jesus is a priest who leads men and women all over the world to worship the Father; and this individual is a priest, leading the world to worship the first beast.

Many have pointed out that we have here a kind of Satanic trinity -- the first beast corresponding to the Father, the false prophet corresponding to the Son, and the dragon himself, Satan, playing the role of the invisible Holy Spirit. It is Satan's imitation of the true God.

The false priest accomplishes his aim in getting the world to worship the beast in a very remarkable way, described in 13 through 15.

**He performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth [those who dwell on the earth]. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. {Rev 13:13-15 NIV}**

Here he acts as a prophet. The prophets of old did miracles to establish their credentials, their God-given authority. Moses and Elijah each did great miracles, and, as the two witnesses of Chapter 11, they call fire down from heaven. So this man must call fire from heaven. Paul tells us that the devil has the power to do miracles too. Thus we must not trust every miracle as though it were done by God. It may be the work of the enemy, the Evil One. This false prophet calls down fire out of heaven, and deceives the world by such means.

Many biblical scholars feel that, because he is a Jew, he has his headquarters in Jerusalem. I think that is highly likely. He is the one whom the prophet Daniel identifies as making a covenant with the Jews for one week (7 years), and thus solving the centuries-old problem of the Middle East, the enmity between the Arabs

and Israelis. During the first half of that week, the temple will be rebuilt on Mount Moriah. We saw that briefly in Chapter 11. For a seven-year period the Jews believe they are allowed to re-establish their worship in the temple. But, Daniel says, this "prince who will come" {cf, Dan 9:26 KJV} shall break that covenant in the middle of the week, i.e. after three and a half years, and entering the temple himself, begin to exalt himself as God, as Paul describes in his letter to the Thessalonians.

Since the political leader of the western coalition is in Rome, this religious leader in Jerusalem seems to feel it necessary to create an image of the Roman leader and put it in the temple for the worship of the world. He is able, we are told, to give breath to that image to make it seem alive.

In one of the exhibits in Disneyland you can find Abraham Lincoln sitting in a chair! He looks very real and while you are standing there he will get up out of the chair and walk over and talk to you! I shall never forget how impressive it was to see and hear Abraham Lincoln when I visited that exhibit!

The technology to make an image of a man that seems to live and speak and walk, is already here. The whole world will doubtless run tour buses to worship it. It is not necessary that they really think it is a living person, but they will worship it because it represents a living person, and they will honor that impressive symbol in that day. By means of that image this false prophet will claim godlike powers for himself and the first beast, and will command the loyalty and obedience of all on the earth.

In Verse 16 we learn this man also rebuilds the world's economic system.

**He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.**

**This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666. {Rev 13:16-18 NIV}**

Evidently during these days worldwide commerce will be rigidly controlled from a central headquarters. Again we know that the technology to do this is already in place. If you have a credit card you know that your entire credit information can be imprinted on that little metallic strip on the back so that whenever you present that card everyone will instantly know whether you are a cheapskate or that you pay your bills. You cannot hide. Furthermore, we are told that it can all be actually implanted in a tiny disk in the skin on the back of the hand or on the forehead or wherever desired, so that information about you can be read by passing your hand under a beam of light just as they do now in the supermarkets with the bar codes. The technology is already available. It is remarkable how we are apparently drawing close to these days.

The mark, of course, is Satan's imitation of God's seal on his own people. In Chapter 7 we learned that 144,000 from the tribes of Israel were sealed on their foreheads by God. That indicates they are owned by God, they belong to him. The Apostle Paul says that Christians are sealed today. Every believer in Christ is sealed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God comes to dwell in us and he will never leave. It is the sign that we belong to God. "You are not your own ... you are bought with a price," {cf, 1 Cor 6:19b-20a}. You cannot live your life for yourself anymore. You belong to God. Christians in the 1st century often had to make a public choice once a year between declaring "Caesar is Lord," or "Jesus is Lord." Many of them died because they would not say "Caesar is Lord." So there comes again a scheme devised by these two leaders to force people to declare whether they belong to the beast or to the Lord. Which will it be, "the Beast is Lord" or "Jesus is Lord?"

The mark that is mentioned is said to be either the name of the beast or the number of his name. It is referring to the first beast, not the second. The second is called later "the false prophet," {Rev 16:3, 19:20, 20:10}. Also the first beast is simply called "the beast." The mark is the name of that beast or its number. His name is unknown. It is never referred to, but the number is given -- 666.

Surely the most foolish thing you can do is to try to identify this person today by using number 666. You know, of course, that the ancient languages used letters for numbers. If you use Roman numerals today you

use letters in place of numbers. The Greek language was similar. The letters have numerical value and many feel that when you add up the numerical value of certain names if it comes out to 666 that person must be the Antichrist. The problem is they try this with English letters. That is simply stupid, because you are working with the wrong language to start with. Also there is another excellent reason to view such a practice as foolish which I will show you in just a moment.

First let me give you a brief list of names that have been identified as the Antichrist by this means:

- Nero, of course, was one of the first. One of his predecessors as emperor was Caligula, the mad emperor, and his name supposedly adds up to 666.
- Then the successor to Nero was Domitian, and his name, with a little manipulation, can be added up in this way.
- So also was Mohammed, Oliver Cromwell, John Knox, Martin Luther, various popes, and, of course, Adolf Hitler.
- Even poor Henry Kissinger had to bear this stigma, and now, of course, it is Gorbachev.

It is really ridiculous to use this method because the clue given here is the important thing. Look what it says, "This calls for wisdom." No Tom, Dick, or Harry with a calculator can figure this out. This calls for wisdom! "If any one has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast."

Now here is the clue: "it is man's number." Not a man's number. It is man's number. It is the number associated with man. It is not an individual in view here at all. It reveals the character of the one who is talking and acting and living. If you see someone acting like God, claiming unusual powers, and teaching people that man is in charge of all things, that he can do anything, you are listening to a man, and his thinking reflects the number of man, 666. It is man's number.

Eugene Peterson says something very helpful on this:

Expose these religious pretensions. This religion has nothing to do with God. Get its number: it is a human number. This is not divine mystery, but a confidence man's patter; it is religion that makes a show, religion that vaunts itself, religion that takes our eyes off of the poor and suffering and holy Christ. In the language of numbers, 666 is a triple failure to be a 777, the three-times perfect, whole, divine number.

So we see that John is showing us how the devil works. He attempts to organize behavior and from that always comes violence. When any government turns totalitarian and seeks to control every deed, every act, of its citizens, it produces a violent reaction. Turn on your television sets and you will see it in every news broadcast today.

The Antichrist tries to organize belief as well as behavior, and when belief is organized it always produces deceit. There is nothing more deceitful than false religion. These are the weapons of Satan: He either intimidates or deceives. He has only two weapons, force and fantasy, lying and brutality, one or the other, or a mixture of both.

What this text is saying is that when he is violent, then wait, endure, be patient! God will work this all out. His rules will never be set aside. Sooner or later Satan's instrument will hang himself, as Judas did; he will be caught up in his own web. And when he lies, "Think," God says, "be critical, evaluate!"

When anyone acts godlike, makes pretentious claims, claims supernatural gifts and demands obedience, that is not God talking. He is not from God. It is just a man, that is all, thinking and acting like a fallen man. It is not the real Lamb -- it is only a fake lamb, so laugh at him and refuse to follow him. But be prepared to hold out even unto death! That is the message of this chapter.

I hope you can see how true this is, how it is confirmed by life around us every day. We are headed for these

very things at a greater speed then we have ever seen before in the history of the world.

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