

THE TWO BEASTS

REVELATION 13:1–18

The scene of Revelation 12 concludes with the dragon’s determination to engage in the final battle against the remaining ones of the woman’s offspring (12:17). This section describes the way the dragon moves in his final attempt to wage war against Christ and his followers at the time of the end. In order to fight and possibly win the battle, he finds support in his two allies—the beast from the sea (13:1–10) and the beast from the earth (13:11–18).

THE BEAST FROM THE SEA (13:1–10)

Crucial to a sound interpretation of the following section is an understanding of the organization of its structure. Revelation 13:1–4 introduces the first of Satan’s allies in the final crisis by giving his general description in terms of Daniel’s vision of Daniel 7. Revelation 13:5–7 provides further identification of the sea beast by describing his activities during the period of forty-two months. Thus, these two passages are parallel in thought.¹ Revelation 13:8 serves as a sort of introduction to the final conflict to occur in the closing days of earth’s history, which is described further in 13:11–18.

¹And he stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and upon his horns were ten crowns, and upon his heads were names of blasphemy. ²And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth was like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. ³And one of his heads was as slain unto death, and his mortal wound was healed. And the whole earth marveled after the beast, ⁴and worshiped the dragon, because he gave authority

to the beast, and worshiped the beast saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”

⁵And it was given to him a mouth to speak great things and blasphemies, and it was given to him to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, namely, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. ⁸And all those who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

**¹⁰If somebody is to go into captivity,
into captivity he goes;**

**if somebody kills with the sword,
with the sword he must be killed.**

Here is the endurance and the faith of the saints.

NOTES

13:1 He stood. Most modern translations read “he stood” (Gr. *estathē*) rather than the “I stood” (*estathē*) found in the King James Version which places John on the seashore watching the beast coming out of the water. The reading “he stood” is most likely the correct one, largely because it is based on the early Greek manuscripts, contrary to the King James Version reading which is based on a later Greek text. Accordingly, the phrase “he stood on the sand of the sea” refers to the dragon standing on the seashore awaiting the emergence of his first ally, the beast from the sea.

A beast. The Greek word *thērion* denotes a wild animal, a savage beast, and a being with a bestial nature, including monsters.² The description of the beast in Revelation 13:1–2 suggests a picture of a sea monster³ (see *Notes* on Rev. 12:3). The many-headed monster is mentioned in the book of Psalms (74:13–14). The symbol of the beast which stands for world empires goes back to the book of Daniel (cf. Dan. 7:17, 23). In Revelation, the beast stands as the symbol of the political power through which Satan works actively throughout the earth’s history, in general, and in the last days, in particular (Rev. 11:7; 13:1–18; 14:9–11; 15:2; 16:2, 10, 13; 17:3–17; 19:19–20; 20:4, 10).

The sea. Mention of the sea as the source from which the monstrous beast of Revelation 13:1 comes is a clear allusion to Daniel 7:2–3. This is evident from the fact that the composite beast incorporates the characteristics of all four beasts from Daniel’s vision (Dan. 7:3–7). In the Old Testament, the sea often symbolizes the abode of the sea monsters (Job 26:12–13; Ps. 74:13–14; Isa.

27:1; 51:9–10; Ezek. 32:2), from which the evil enemy powers come that oppressed Israel (see *Notes* on Rev. 12:3). The symbolism of the sea in Revelation seems to correspond to the abyss (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). In Revelation 17, John refers to the same beast (he has seven heads and ten horns, and is full of names of blasphemy; 17:3, 7, 12). This time he is said to come from the abyss (17:8). This might suggest that the sea and the abyss or the bottomless pit are the same symbolic place from which the beast of Revelation 13:1 comes (on the concept of the abyss as the abode of Satan and the demons, see *Notes* on Rev. 9:1). It is noteworthy that the “many waters” on which the harlot Babylon sits in Revelation 17:1 is parallel to the beast “full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns” on which the woman sits (17:3). The waters on which the harlot sits are identified as “peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues,” which are evidently the same as the ten horns of the beast (17:12–18). Eugenio Corsini argues that the sea here “represents the cosmic yet historical reality of the bottomless pit.”⁴ It is reasonable to conclude that the sea from which the beast of Revelation 13:1 comes may be a symbol of the “disturbed and stormy social and political conditions out of which tyrannies commonly arise”⁵ (cf. Rev. 17:15).

Ten crowns. The crowns on the horns of the beast are diadems—royal crowns (Gr. *diadēma*, “diadems”). For a fuller explanation of the concept, see *Notes* on Revelation 2:10.

13:3 Slain. The word “slain” here in Greek is *sphazō* (“to slay,” “to slaughter,” “to kill”). The same word in Greek is used with reference to the Lamb (Rev. 5:6, 9, 12; 13:8), which suggests that the mortal wound of the beast’s head was like that of the slain Lamb. The same word is also used with reference to the death of God’s faithful people as the result of their loyalty to God and the gospel (Rev. 6:9; 18:24). Elsewhere in the New Testament, the word is used in 1 John 3:12 which speaks of Cain who had “slain” his brother Abel.

13:5 Blasphemies. Blasphemy in the New Testament refers to the act of claiming equality with God (John 10:33; cf. Matt. 26:63–65) as well as the prerogatives of God alone (Mark 2:7). That the blasphemies of the sea beast have to do with God is evident in Revelation 13:6 where he opens “his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, namely, those who dwell in heaven.” As George E. Ladd states, the blasphemies of the beast consist of “the derogation of deity by his own claim to self-deification.”⁶

Forty-two months. This time period in Revelation is allotted to the oppressive anti-God powers (cf. 11:2; 13:5) in contrast to the 1,260 days consistently used with reference to God’s people (cf. 11:3; 12:6). Seventh-day Adventists have regarded A.D. 538 as the year when the church established itself as an ecclesiastical power to mark the beginning of the 1,260-year period. The year A.D. 1798 thus marks the end of this prophetic period. On the symbolism of this prophetic period and its historical application, see *Notes* on Revelation 11:2 and 12:6.

13:8 Those who dwell on the earth. See *Notes* on Revelation 6:10.

The book of life of the Lamb. See *Notes* on Revelation 3:5.

13:10 If somebody kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. This reading of the proverbial statement (found in KJV, RSV, and NASB) is based on some Greek manuscripts,

including the fourth-century codex Sinaiticus, and stresses the destiny of the beast as the persecutor. The variant reading is found in the NIV and NEB: “If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.” It is based on other Greek manuscripts, including the fifth-century codex Alexandrinus, and stresses the destiny of those who stay faithful to God. Although no satisfactory solution is found, the reading in the KJV, RSV, and NASB is most likely, for it echoes the declaration made by the prophet Jeremiah with reference to the judgment over the apostate people (Jer. 15:2) and Egypt (Jer. 43:11). This corresponds to the proverbial words of Jesus in Matthew 26:52: “All those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword.”

EXPOSITION

Frustrated in his efforts to destroy the church, Satan now directs his anger toward the remaining ones of the woman’s offspring.

13:1–2 The dragon is now seen standing on *the sand of the sea*, summoning his first ally, to invest him with his power and authority. John subsequently sees *a beast coming up out of the sea*. The reference to the sea as the source from which the beast comes is reminiscent of the vision from Daniel 7 in which the prophet saw the four beasts coming out of the sea (7:3). The beast coming out of the sea in Revelation 13 is described in detail later in Revelation 17, adding supplementary information with regard to the identity of this sea monster.

The physical description of the beast in John’s vision is introduced as the various parts of its body emerge from the water. The beast has *ten horns and seven heads*. The horns stand for political powers (Rev. 17:12). The ten horns of the sea beast are related to the ten horns of the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision; they symbolize the kingdoms arising after the breaking up of the Roman Empire (cf. Dan. 7:7, 23–24; Rev. 17:12). However, as William G. Johnsson states, the seven heads of the dragon represent “the kingdoms through which Satan has worked to oppress God’s people throughout the ages.”⁷ The beast was active throughout history in one after another of his heads. When one of the heads was mortally wounded, the beast ceased to be active. When in the future that head is healed, the beast would resume his activities. It is significant that the beasts of Daniel 7 have together seven heads and ten horns in total.⁸ The sea beast is described as having the same number of heads and horns as the dragon of Revelation 12:3. This implies “the oneness of the dragon and the sea beast in a parody of the oneness of God and Christ. As Jesus Christ and the Father are one, so the dragon and the sea beast are one.”⁹