

The Synopsis

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1 THE REVELATION

1.1 Chapter 13

In chapter 13 we have the clear and full development of Satan's instruments of evil. They are two-the ten-horned and the two-horned beasts. To the first the dragon, who swept with his tail a third part of the stars to earth, Satan under the form of the Roman Empire, gave his throne and much authority.¹ The second not only wielded the first power administratively before him, but was the active power of evil to lead men to recognise the first, and therein the dragon. The beast is the original Roman Empire, but largely modified and in a new character. It has perfect completeness in its forms of government or heads, but is composed of ten kingdoms, indicating also, I doubt not, imperfect administrative completeness. It has not twelve horns; it is incomplete. Seven would be completeness of a higher kind. The Lamb had seven horns; the woman, twelve stars on her head. One is perfectness in itself; the other administratively in man. Seven is the highest prime number (you cannot make it); twelve, the most perfectly divisible, composed of the same elements, but multiplied, not added as a simple number. So four is finite perfection, as is a square and still more a cube, perfectly the same all ways but finite. But the beast had names of blasphemy. It was the open enemy of God and His Christ. It absorbed the previous empires and represented them. The dragon, Satan's direct power in the form of the heathen Roman Empire, gave his throne and power to this new beast. It was not of God. God owned no power on the earth now the assembly was gone, till He took His own. The earth was at war with Him.

One of the beast's heads (I doubt not the Imperial) was seen as wounded to death, but healed. The imperial head was restored and the world was in admiration; and they worship the dragon as giving the beast his power. Nothing in their eyes equals the beast; but God is wholly thrown off in the earth. The beast is given to have the greatest pretensions in his language and outrage against God. He blasphemed God, His name and dwelling-place, and the heavenly saints-all Christianity, and the God of it. The dragon had been cast out

¹We are not to be surprised, therefore, if the beast at the end had only local empire, though originally God had given universal empire to the beasts: how widely exercised we know.

from heaven; the raptured saints had been received there. He blasphemed, but could only blaspheme them.

As regards those who dwelt on earth (for the division was not merely a spiritual one now), all worshipped the beast, save the elect-those who had been written from the foundation of the world in the Lamb's book of life. Human resistance by force was not the path of obedience. Here the patience and faith of the saints were shewn. He who took the sword would perish by it; it is never Christ's way, but unresisting patience; but the beast who did would perish. This then was the imperial power, a blasphemous power set up by Satan, with the place of the old Roman Empire, which represented all four, modified in form, but the imperial head restored.

But there was a second beast; it rose not out of the mass of peoples (the sea) to be an empire, but out of the already formed organisation with which God had to say as such. It had the form of Messiah's kingdom on earth, two horns like a lamb; but it was the direct power of Satan. He who with a divinely taught ear heard it speak heard the voice of Satan at once. All the power of the first beast it exercises before it; is, with its power, its minister, and makes the earth and the dwellers on it worship it (that is, the Roman Empire restored to its head). It is Antichrist, the false Christ of Satan, who subjects the earth to the satanic Roman Empire. He does great wonders, so as to give men as good proof of the beast's title before men, as Elijah did of Jehovah's. Compare 2 Thessalonians 2, where the man of sin gives the same proofs, if lying ones, that Jesus did of being the Christ. He deceives the dwellers on earth by his miracles, making them set up an image to him. This image he gives breath to; so that it speaks and causes those to be killed who do not worship it. All likewise were obliged to take the stamp and the mark of the beast's service in their work, or open profession, and no man was allowed to traffic who had not the name of the beast as a mark.

Such is the power which has the character of Messiah's kingdom in its form, is animated with the fullest energy of Satan, and, recognising the public power which Satan had set up in the world, will have everyone bow to it, none to traffic without acknowledging it; and all will, save the elect. The anti-priestly power of Satan in the heavens is over; royalty and prophecy as yet remain to him, in opposition to Christ who has not yet appeared. These he assumes; but he does not and cannot set aside the power of the Gentiles-that remains for Christ to do-but sets it up as his delegate; and, as the apostate Jews of old, so now that people, save the elect remnant, as his instruments bow to it and minister to it. Thus you have all Satan's power exercised. But, in setting up his Messiah, he is obliged to deceive; and advances by his miracles of deceit what he cannot set aside-the Gentile power; and subjects the Jews to idolatry and to the Gentiles; and all the Gentiles themselves dwelling on the earth to the depository of Satan's authority-the first beast.

This is a singular state of things, far from Jewish feelings and modern Gentile hopes; but the unclean spirit of idolatry is to return to his house. Signs, not truth, will govern the superstitious mind of man; they will be given up to believe a lie. Here, though he takes the character of Christ in his kingdom, it is chiefly

his action on the Gentiles which is spoken of; the Jews are mixed up with them as we see in Isaiah 66, and Daniel. It is a liberal time, but one of most complete tyranny as regards all who do not bow to Satan's power and the ordinances established by him. What characterises it is the absence of truth.

As regards the number of the beast, I have no doubt that it will be very simple to the godly, when the beast is there, and the time of spiritually judging it comes, and that name will practically guide those who have to do with him. Till then, the speculations of men are not of much value; Irenaeus's old one of Latin man is as good as any.