

The Revelation of Jesus Christ

In Chapter 13 we will meet two well-known but not fully understood characters: the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. One of these is thought to be the antichrist. *Anti* has three meanings in Greek, so this can be one whose nature is the *opposite* of Christ, one who *opposes* Christ, or one who *stands in the place* of Christ.

The term antichrist (or antichrists) occurs only in the epistles of 1 John and 2 John: four times as a singular persons and once as multiple “antichrists.” But there are many other references to a powerful and malevolent person (or persons) who will briefly dominate the world in the end times. All may refer to the antichrist. Let's look at some of the verses and the characteristics they reveal about the antichrist:

Daniel 7: The “Little Horn”

- Rises up as the foremost among its companions
- Boastful; “speaks great things.”
- Attacks the saints of God

Daniel 8: The Fierce King

- Intelligent
- Has great power but not his own
- Crafty and deceitful

Daniel 9: The Prince Who Is To Come

- Will make covenant for 3½ years.
- Will bring the abomination that makes desolate

Daniel 11: The Willful King

- Self exalting
- Blasphemes against God
- Apostate; has turned away from the gods of his fathers
- Militaristic (honors god of fortresses)
- Honors foreign/false god for military advantage
- Gives political power to those who support him

Matthew 24: False Christs and False Prophets

- Will perform great signs and wonders
- Have great power to deceive

Chapter 13

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2 Thessalonians 2: The Man Of Lawlessness

- Man of sin, or son of destruction
- Exalts himself above all gods
- Takes his seat in the temple of God,
- Proclaims himself to be God
- Performs false signs and wonders using Satan's power
- Deceives those who are perishing
- Will be slain by Lord Jesus

1 John 2: Antichrist and Antichrists

- “Antichrist” is coming in the last hour
- “Antichrists” have come; appear to be professing Christians who cause division by false teachings about Christ

So a common question is, which beast in Revelation 13 is the antichrist? Both have physical features that parody the true Christ: The apparently fatal wound on the first beast and the lamb's horns on the second.

The first beast from the sea, a Gentile military and political leader, better matches the descriptions of the kings in Daniel. It puts itself in the place of God and the second beast directs worship toward it. Matthew 24:24 refers to “false Christs and false prophets.” The second beast is called the false prophet in Revelation 16, 19, and 20 so perhaps the first beast is the false Christ.

On the other hand, Jews would hardly recognize a Gentile as the Messiah, so many believe the second beast is a Jew who stands in the place of Christ. It is the second beast who performs the fraudulent miracles.

It may be that the earlier prophecies do not refer to a single person but to multiple persons acting together. The dragon (Satan), first beast, and second beast form a sort of monstrous trinity. Like the true godhead, they are united in nature, spirit, and purpose but instead of truth and love they represent deceit and hatred. Perhaps “antichrist” refers to this unholy union as a whole rather than a single member of it. The first beast acts as a king, the second as a priest. Christ (and Melchizedek) were able to combine these offices but Satan may need two persons instead.

Notes on Chapter 13

13:1 The sea represents chaos. The beast may be one who rises to power on promises of “peace and safety” during turbulent times. The ten horns, seven heads, and ten diadems coincide with descriptions of the scarlet beast of Chapter 17. There the seven heads are called seven mountains, a common allusion to the city of Rome being sited on seven hills. This beast is therefore connected with the power of Rome.

13:2 The four beasts in Daniel represent successive empires, culminating in Rome. This beast seemingly heads a confederation of ten nations rising from the remnants of the defunct Roman empire. It gets its ideology and energy from Satan, the dragon.

13:3 Satan does not create; he counterfeits. The mortal wound on the beast's head, symbolizing the revived Roman empire, imitates the Lamb who had been slain in Chapter 5. But rather than portraying the reconciliation between God and man through Christ's loving sacrifice, this healed wound trumpets the restoration of irresistible military and political power. What a contrast.

13:5 The height of the beast's reign is the second half of the tribulation, the “great tribulation.”

13:5-9 The beast blasphemes God and Christians (now raptured to heaven) and pursues His saints on the earth. He stands at the head of an apostate society that has turned from God and now wishes to discredit Him and extinguish His people.

13:10 The saints on earth (essentially, believing Jews) are exhorted to endurance and faith.

3:11 The second beast also assumes features belonging to the Lord Jesus, in this case two horns like a lamb. But it speaks like a dragon (Greek *drakon* = large mythical serpent). The dragon's voice speaks Satan's false but enticing message, first heard by Eve in the garden.

3:12-14 The second beast acts as a priest (mandating worship) and prophet for the first beast. It also enforces the “commercial regulations” of the new regime. That it rises from the earth suggests he is one of God's earthly people, the Jews.

13:15 The semblance of speech from the lifeless image is one example of counterfeit signs and miracles promised in the end times. The ability to call down fire from heaven in verse 13 would be particularly deceptive as it was used by Elijah on Mount Carmel to establish God's primacy over the prophets of Baal. Here is turned upside down, exalting the antichrist in the sight of men.

13:16-17 Participation in ordinary transactions requires that one bear the number or name of the beast. Names are important. In the Old Testament, God often refers to Israel as “the people called by My name.” 1 Corinthians 5:11 calls for particular judgment for anyone bearing the name of brother, or fellow Christian. To bear the name of the beast implies complicity with the beast. Presumably, the saints of God are living outside the monetary economy, or “off the grid”

13:18 Many ciphers have been devised to arrive at the number 666 from the names of prominent persons. None are very satisfactory and some are ridiculous. We should probably assume that the exact decoding must wait until the proper time. Symbolically speaking, six is the number of man; man was created on the sixth day. To recognize only the first six days of creation is to glorify creation and reject the Creator. Such is the essence of idolatry. In this view, 666 translates to “Man, Man, Man,” exalting the pride and intellect of humankind over the trinity of “Father, Son, Holy Spirit.”

For most Bible students, combining the events of Revelation 13 with earlier prophecies gives this narrative: A charismatic but wicked leader assumes the leadership of a confederacy of ten nations that are descendants of the ancient Roman empire. He forms an alliance with the apostate nation of Israel and its deceitful leader. After three and half years, the Gentile leader breaks the treaty, defiles the temple in Jerusalem with an image of himself, and inflicts terrible persecution on the Jews. This dire state continues until the Lord Himself descends to defeat the two leaders.

This account does manage to tie together many different scriptures, but there are dangers in forming too precise an interpretation or attempting to correlate with current events.