

# Revelation Thirteen (vv. 1-8)

## The Beast of the Sea [13.1-8], or The Counterfeit Christ

- In Revelation 12, the dragon was cast out of heaven into the earth at the midpoint of the tribulation. This is the beginning of the end for he has but “a short time” before the kingdom of Christ is established. In the time that remains, the Devil will seek to *destroy* what is of God (Israel) and fulfil his great desire to be *worshipped* as God.
- The means by which he will attempt to accomplish this will be the *two beasts* of Revelation 13. Together they form the *second* and *third* members of the Satanic trinity of evil of the last days.
- The *dragon* (Satan) is a counterfeit of the **Father**. He gives the beast his power and authority (13.2) and is the ultimate recipient of worship (13.4, cp. John 4.23). The *first beast* is a counterfeit of the **Son**. He fulfils the purpose of the dragon and receives a deadly wound that is healed (13.3, 14) – probably a stage-managed counterfeit death and resurrection. The *second beast* (false prophet, cf. 19.20) is a counterfeit of the **Spirit**. He is not worshipped himself but calls all men to worship the first beast (13.12, cp. John 16.14).

## Titles of the First Beast

- **Antichrist** (1 John 2.18). A *compound* Greek word made up of *anti* and *christos*. *Anti* can mean ‘instead of’ or ‘against’ (opposed to). There is a sense in which *both* beasts of Revelation 13 are opposed to Christ, but only the *first* beast is properly presented as a replacement Christ through his pseudo death and resurrection.
- **Man of Sin** (2 Thessalonians 2.3). Describes his *character* of lawlessness. He has no regard for the law of God and is the very personification of sin. He is a contrast to the Lord Jesus who was a man of *sorrows*.
- **Wilful King** (Daniel 11.3). Describes his *conduct* as one who shall *exalt* and *magnify* himself above every god, honouring only the “god of forces”, i.e. military might. He will worship at the altar of warfare and conflict.
- **Prince** (Daniel 9.26). A title associated with the *covenant* he will broker with Israel. The word ‘prince’ signifies an officer of rank, or chief official, literally, one who ‘stands before’ or ‘above the crowd’. He is a leader and ruler. This *coming prince* has links with Rome (or Roman citizenship) because *his people* are described as destroying the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem, which people were the Romans in AD70. Note. The Roman legions that destroyed Jerusalem may represent the people of the West (in general) and had a huge Muslim conscript. This suggests his ancestry is European, or, at least Gentile. A reference to the pagan “gods of his fathers” (Daniel 11.37, NET) suggests the same.
- **King of Fierce Countenance** (Daniel 8.23). This name is associated with his *conclusion* as “*he will rise up against the Prince of princes, yet he will be broken apart—but not by human agency,*” (8.25).

## Types of the First Beast

- **Nimrod**. The blasphemous ruler who originated and organised the kingdom of Babel in opposition to God (Genesis 10.8; 11.1-9). Babylon is consistently viewed in scripture as being the origin and centre of false religion (idolatry).
- **Pharaoh**. Who harshly oppressed the Israelites in Egypt and openly defied the one true God, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice?” (Exodus 1.11, 22; 5.2).
- **Nebuchadnezzar**. The Babylonian king who destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, persecuted Israel in exile, and sought worship as God, erecting an idolatrous object of universal worship (2 Kings 24.13-14; Daniel 3; 4.30).
- **Antiochus Epiphanes**. A Seleucid (Syrian) king. Mark Hitchcock says, “*Antiochus is often called the ‘Antichrist of the Old Testament’.* When he invaded and conquered the city of Jerusalem, his soldiers pillaged the Temple, defiled it by offering a pig – considered unclean – on the Temple altar, stopped the Jewish sacrifices, and instituted pagan worship by erecting a statue of Zeus in the Holy of Holies. Coincidentally, the face of the statue of Zeus just happened to look like the face of Antiochus.” These events took place on December 16, 167 BC (cf. Daniel 8.11-14).

## Triumphs of the First Beast

- The Antichrist will be an **intellectual** genius able to overwhelm and captivate the world with his superhuman intellect and powers of perception (Daniel 8.23).
- He will be an **oratorical** genius speaking great words and having a perfect command and flow of language (Daniel 7.8, 11, 25; 11.36; Revelation 13.5).
- He will be a **political** genius not only brokering a peace treaty in the Middle East but also ruling over a united world empire of ten confederate states (Daniel 9.27; Revelation 17.11-12).
- He will be an **economic** genius as Satan’s CEO of the world’s economy, perhaps bringing much needed economic stability to a world that will not be able to buy or sell without his brand (Daniel 11.43; Revelation 13.16-17).
- He will be a **military** genius honouring the “god of fortresses”, i.e. military might and power. He will be able to subjugate the whole world and appear totally invincible (Daniel 11.38-39).

In summary, John Phillips says, *“The Antichrist will be an attractive and charismatic figure, a genius, a demon-controlled, devil-taught charmer of men. He will have answers to the horrendous problems of mankind. He will be all things to all men: a political statesman, a social lion, a financial wizard, an intellectual giant, a religious deceiver, a masterful orator, a gifted organizer. He will be Satan’s masterpiece of deception, the world’s false messiah. With boundless enthusiasm the masses will follow him and readily enthrone him in their hearts as the world’s saviour and god.”*

### His Description [vv.1-2]

**v.1.** The RV reads, “And he (the dragon) **stood** upon the sand of the sea. And I (John) saw...” This reflects a difference in the original manuscript readings, the majority making John the subject of the verb, “I stood”, whilst the older manuscripts make the dragon the subject, “he stood”. It is likely the dragon who stands on the sandy shore of the sea, as if superintending the nations to find a man fit for his demonic purpose. He oversees the rise of two beasts in order to realise his ultimate purpose of universal worship as the Most High (Isaiah 14.14). The first beast will be a political and military leader, the second beast a religious leader, thus uniting politics and religion in one global empire. John is an eyewitness to all this drama. In Revelation, **I saw** marks a transition to a new vision (scene).

John saw **a beast** rise up out of the sea. The word beast [*thērion*] indicates a wild and rapacious animal in contrast to the gentleness and meekness of the Lamb (Christ). The word likely points to the brutal, uncontrolled, and wild character of this diabolical dictator and his empire. The word *thērion* is neuter suggesting the beast symbolises both a personal individual (as the following verses and personal pronouns will show) and an empire. This is not unusual considering it is often difficult to separate a king from his kingdom. Often an empire can be epitomised in a person, such as Greece in Alexander, or Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar, “Thou art this head of gold” (Daniel 2.38). As far as the empire is concerned, the description of the beast in v.2 is clearly reminiscent of the vision of Daniel (7.1-8). Daniel saw a *lion* (Babylon), a *bear* (Medo-Persia), and a *leopard* (Greece), followed by an unnamed monster with ten horns. The animals represent empires that have dominated the world during the times of the Gentiles until dominion is ultimately given to the Son of man (7.13-14). The unnamed fourth beast likely represents the Roman empire (the world power at the time of the Lord Jesus), especially its future and final form during the tribulation. It is this fourth beast, identified by its ten horns (Daniel 7.7; Revelation 13.1), that is being more fully described here. The fact it displays the features of a leopard, bear *and* lion suggests it will gather into its power the combined characteristics and genius of past world kingdoms.

The beast **risers up out of the sea** (cf. Daniel 7.2) which represents the turmoil and political instability of Gentile nations (17.15) and suggests the kingdom and its king are largely Gentile in nature. Since the whole period from the captivity to the tribulation is termed “the times of the Gentiles”, the final ruler must himself be a Gentile. The beast is *also* described as ascending out of the abyss (11.7; 17.8). These are *two* separate comings of the same man – his *first* coming on the political world stage (13.1) and his *second* coming, as if from the dead, at the midpoint of the tribulation (13.3).

The beast has **seven heads** (a development from Daniel 7) **and ten horns**. The seven heads are explained in 17.9-10 as seven mountains representing seven kings. Jim Allen says, *“The seven heads are historical kingdoms (represented by kings) who have been agents of Satan in waging bitter war against Israel the people of God. These have followed each other across the stage of history: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome. The seventh is yet to come and will display the same satanic hatred with more terrible intensity.”* When John was writing, five had passed off the scene, whilst the sixth was still in existence – the Roman empire. Now John sees the arrival of the seventh head and the full display of satanic power and animosity against Israel. Unlike the heads, the **ten horns** are not sequential but contemporaneous, being described as *“ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet, but receive power as kings one hour with the beast”* (17.12) – hence the **ten crowns** [*diadēma*] which represent their regal authority. This final empire will be a ten-kingdom confederacy answering to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar’s image (Daniel 2) and ten horns of Daniel 7.7. The **name of blasphemy was upon his heads**. Whether this means a *single name* on all seven heads or *seven names*, one on each head, is not clear from the Greek. The blasphemy likely includes the spectrum of idol worship embraced by all these historical kingdoms. Such blasphemy will reach its zenith in this final world empire headed by the man of sin.

**v.2.** The **beast** John **saw** was **like a leopard** with the **feet of a bear** and the **mouth of a lion**. John lists the three animals in reverse order from Daniel, since he was looking backward in time. The final empire of the Antichrist will clearly be a composite of the empires that preceded it, and the man at its head will combine in himself the superior marks of Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander and Nero to name but a few! The **leopard** (representing Greece) is noted in Scripture for its swiftness, cunning and agility (Habakkuk 1.8). The **bear** (representing Medo-Persia) is a ferocious animal of formidable strength (Isaiah 13.17-18). The emphasis may be the animal’s voracious appetite and ability to pin its prey with its disproportionately large feet – this is a kingdom with insatiable hunger for conflict. The **lion** (representing Babylon) is used as a metaphor for cruelty and ferocity (Psalm 7.2), and hence for Satan himself (1 Peter 5.8). The lion’s **mouth** is associated

with tearing its prey (Ezekiel 22.25; Psa. 17.12). In summary, this final kingdom will combine the *speed* of Greece (leopard), and *strength* of Medo-Persia (bear) in its conquests, as well as the *authority* of Babylon in its rule (lion).

It is the **dragon** that gives the beast his **power** [*dynamis*] **seat** (throne) and **great authority** [*exousia*] to rule. Satan will empower and energise the beast – giving him both the power and ability to act (possibly through military might) as well as the authority (right) to do so.

### **His Deeds [vv.3-8]**

**v.3. His wounds.** If, in vv.1-2, the *empire* was primarily in view, then vv.3-8 turn their focus to the *emperor* himself. **One** of the **heads** of the beast (the seventh head, cf. 17.10-11) was **wounded to death**. Jim Allen says, “*It should be noted that it is not the beast which is slain but one of its heads, turning the thought directly from the empire to the one in whom empire is embodied, the head of that empire.*” The beast will be mortally wounded by a sword (v.14), which will inevitably weaken his empire. The phrase **as it were** is translated as “appeared to have been killed” [NET], suggesting Satan has in some way stage-managed the death of the beast. Whilst this is likely an apparent death, we should note that the *exact* same Greek words are used of the Lord Jesus and His death was certainly real (cf. 5.6)! Perhaps like Paul in Lystra (Acts 14.19), the beast will merely thought to be dead by the majority. But then, the **deadly wound was healed** in a striking parody of the death and resurrection of Christ. The beast was killed and by all human experience should have remained dead. But suddenly he is very much alive because of ‘resurrection’.

Ron Rhodes has an interesting note, “*Just as Paul’s spirit departed from his body and was taken to heaven, where he received further revelations, so the antichrist’s spirit may depart from his body and be taken into the abyss, where Satan will offer the world’s kingdoms to him. The antichrist’s spirit will then return from the abyss (11.7), re-enter what appears to be a dead body, and thereby give the appearance of a resurrection from the dead.*” All this takes place at the midpoint of the tribulation, when the Beast is identified as ascending out of the abyss (11.7). At this point, the Beast will be satanically indwelt. The apparent miracle of resurrection will cause **all the world to wonder after the beast** with awestruck amazement. Likely the events will go viral on social media creating a sense of stunned disbelief the world round.

**v.4. His worship.** The ‘supernatural’ event will bring the world out in worship of the beast *and* the dragon – the source of the beast’s ruling authority (**power**). This is the final apostasy – the worship of Satan himself. **Who is like unto the beast?** echoes or even mocks similar language about the true God in the book of Exodus (15.11). Thus, the world claims the beast is without rival on earth, taking the position of supreme lord and god over all. **Who is able to make war with him?** suggests the world considers him to be at the apex of supreme power politically, religiously, militarily and commercially. No single person, kingdom or state can possibly challenge his absolute rule.

**v.5. His words.** There was **given unto him** (the beast) **a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies**. The verb ‘given’ is likely a *divine passive* (as 6.4; 7.2; 9.5), implying God allows (He is still in sovereign control!) the beast to blaspheme for a limited time. The description of his mouth recalls the “little horn” of Daniel which has “a mouth speaking great things” (7.8). He will be a persuasive orator speaking boastful things, including **blasphemies**, against the ‘Most High’. Blasphemy is a wide-ranging word including showing a lack of reverence for God (cf. Psalm 74.18) to a more extreme attitude of contempt for God by making claims of divinity for oneself (John 10.33). The beast will engage in all this, becoming the satanic mouthpiece. Again, the sovereignty of God ensures he can only **continue forty-two months**, the last 3.5 years of the tribulation. Little does the beast realise he is only acting by divine permission and only for the set period allotted. **v.6.** He **opened his mouth** is in the *aorist* tense and likely views the whole career of the beast – it is one of his continuing characteristics to speak **blasphemy against God**. He will speak contemptuously of God and **his name** (character and reputation) which could mean to demean it directly or appropriate it for oneself. The beast will also blaspheme God’s **tabernacle**, that is, **them** (those) **that dwell** (tabernacle) **in heaven** – probably the saints, as well as the angelic army that expelled the dragon from heaven.

**v.7. His war.** The beast will be permitted to **make war with the saints**, and **to overcome them**, suggesting all-out conflict against the people of God, and the martyrdom of many. Both Israel (12.17) and Gentile believers (Daniel 7.25) will be the focus of his ire – in fact, anyone who believes the gospel and gives allegiance to Christ. God will allow him to be given political authority (**power**) over the whole earth, embracing “every tribe and people and tongue and nation” [RV]. This is global dominion (cp. Matthew 28.18).

**v.8. His worshippers.** Not only will the beast have universal *political* authority, but he will also have *religious* authority – being ‘the’ object of **worship** for **all that dwell upon the earth**. Once again, this is a semi-technical expression in Revelation describing unbelievers who are hostile to God (cf. 3.10; 8.13; 11.10). It indicates their *physical location* as well as describing their *moral identification*. Earth is their home, and they want for no other home. Unbelievers are further described as

those **whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb**. The book of life is mentioned six other times in the AV translation of Revelation (3.5; 17.8; 20.12, 15; 21.27; 22.19) – it is the register of the citizens that belong to heaven, “*whose names are entered at the moment of their conversion*” (Jim Allen). The same book is mentioned in Philippians 4.3 and Christ alludes to it in Luke 10.20. The names of unbelievers do **not** ‘stand’ (remain) **written** in the book of life, the *perfect* tense emphasising a permanent situation. By implication, then, the names of believers *are* found permanently inscribed in the record! **From [apo] the foundation of the world** could modify the verb ‘written’ (as 17.8) but more likely modifies the Lamb who was slain. The reference is not to the actual timing of the Lamb’s death, but to the plan of redemption being in God’s mind from the very beginning (cf. 1 Peter 1.20). The preposition *apo* means ‘away from’ or ‘since’ – thus the death of Christ was planned *before* the world began (cf. 1 Peter 1.20) but took place in time *since* the world began. Thus, God’s eternal purpose is contrasted with the fleeting might of the powers of evil.