

Comments on Revelation 13

This chapter is another interlude, discussing who the two beasts are and what they do. Both obtain their power from the dragon (v. 1a). One beast is from the ocean (v. 1b-10) and one beast from the land (v. 11-18).

In most cases when people discuss this chapter, they focus on a single beast, the first one. They tend to ignore, or miss, the second beast.

Remember this chapter is the middle of a three chapter set, comprising a treatment of the pre-mortal (ch. 12), mortal (ch. 13) and post-mortal (ch. 14) conflict between good and evil, with the force of evil being the dragon. This chapter is a generalized discussion of the conflict humans experience because of the adversary's influence over humanity, as opposed to the prediction of a specific event.

¹And I stood upon the sand of the sea,

v1a Most translations present John as standing on the seashore following the KJV, while some translations present the dragon as standing on the sea shore (e.g., AMP, LSB, MSG, NAS, NIV, OJB). The Greek is ambiguous owing to [differences between the ancient source texts](#). The most literal translation is best represented by the Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT), as follows:

And it was standing on the sand of the sea.

The question is what is the "it"? Following the subject of the preceding chapter, it was the dragon. This reading follows the subsequent text, as both beasts discussed in this chapter receive their power from the dragon. Also, the first beast rises up out of the sea and the second beast rises up out of the land, so it makes sense the dragon is on the edge between the two.

Also, the angel in 10:5-8 is standing on the sea and the land, suggesting that is part of the vision and not a literal location John is occupying.

Assuming the ambiguous "it" is John doesn't fit the visions being presented in these interludes. The text suggests John is experiencing the visions, not participating in them as a literal part of the revelatory experience. John is never presented as standing on the seashore in the book, the closest suggestion is the statement in 1:9 which says he is on the island of Patmos

when he receives the vision, and, of course, islands are ringed by seashores. From that point on there is nothing to suggest John is experiencing or participating in the vision in a literal way. There is nothing in the book suggesting John is standing on the seashore, or any other specific location, when experiencing this revelation.

As such, it is likely this "it" is the dragon, not John. Also note below the IV/JST moves this phrase, eliminating the discussion over who the "it" is.

and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. ²And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. ³And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. ⁴And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? ⁵And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. ⁶And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

v1b-6 discuss the nature and character of the first beast. The beast exercises power over the nations of the earth, and apparently enjoys the allegiance of various other earthly rulers (v. 1). He rules mercilessly by force and terror, and is aided to some degree by the adversary (v. 2). The beast suffers some loss or injury, but survives it (v. 3), and so people are astonished at him and fear him (v. 4). The beast blasphemes God and commits the abomination of desolation (v. 5-6).

This beast represents the abuse of human political and military power.

The harlot Babylon rides this beast (cf. 17:7) who then turns on her and attacks her (cf. 17:16-18), causing her downfall (cf. ch. 18). The final purpose of this beast is to bring about the destruction of the harlot Babylon, as purposed by the Lord (cf. 17:17), in fulfilment of Isa. 47. This beast is ultimately thrown into the lake of fire along with the second beast (cf. 19:20-21).

v1 The IV/JST differs from the KJV, as follows:

<u>KJV</u>	<u>IV/JST</u>
And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw	And I saw another sign, in the likeness of the kingdoms of the earth;
a beast rise up out of the sea,	a beast rise up out of the sea, and he stood upon the sand of the sea,
having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.	having seven heads and ten horns; and upon his horns ten crowns; and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

The IV shifts the one standing on the sand of the sea from John to the beast. That the beast stands upon the sands of the sea is probably an allusion to his relative power. In 10:2 we see the mighty angel with one foot on the land and one foot on the sea, and one hand in heaven in 10:5. In 10:6 the mighty angel swears an oath by the Creator. In contrast to this is the beast, who is only standing between the earth and the sea. He exercises some power over the earth and sea, but compared to the mighty angel, it is negligible.

“seven head”, cf. 17:9 for the meaning.

“ten crowns”, cf. 17:12 for the meaning.

v2 The imagery of the leopard, bear, and lion is derived from Hosea 13:7-8. It is indicative of one’s ability and intent to injure and harm.

v3 Contrast Nahum 3:19. The literal historical King of Assyria who harassed Judah at Jerusalem suffered a rather ignominious defeat and death, cf. Isa 37:36-38. Here, the beast suffers some sort of defeat and/or injury and yet survives it.

Some commentators suggest the grievous wound is a

v5 "forty and two months", likely referring to the abomination of desolation, cp. 11:2.

v6 Compare Isa. 10:12-14, Isa. 14:13-14, Dan. 7:25, Dan. 8:10-12, 2 Thes. 2:4.

⁷ And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. ⁸ And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. ⁹ If any man have an ear, let him hear. ¹⁰ He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

v7-10 A single strophe aimed at the faithful who are enduring terrible persecutions (v. 7). The whole world goes after the beast (v. 8). But, for those who will listen (v. 9), it warns them to rely on the arm of the Lord rather than their own flesh, because their oppressor will soon be banished (v. 10). Compare Dan. 12:12.

¹¹ And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. ¹² And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. ¹³ And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, ¹⁴ And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. ¹⁵ And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. ¹⁶ And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: ¹⁷ And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

¹⁸ Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

v11-18 A false messiah-prophet, the second beast, who works satanic miracles, deceiving the masses into worshiping the first

beast, cp. 16:13, 19:20, 2 Thes. 2:9-10.

This beast represents the abuse of human religious power, and he is subservient to the first beast. He is explicitly called the "false prophet" (cf. 19:20), and is thrown into the lake of fire with the first beast (cf. 19:20-21).

v11 "two horns like a lamb", he has the appearance of the Lamb, but is not, he is a false messiah.

"spake as a dragon", he has the dragon's words in his mouth. This second beast, the false prophet, has a closer connection to the adversary than does the first beast, and is apparently the one with the keys to the pit, cf. 9:1.

v16 The mark in the forehead and hand might be literal (cp. Exod. 13:9 as the figurative and Exod. 13:16 as the literal application of that symbol), but is more likely figuratively representative of thoughts of the mind and deeds performed by the hand. The true believers are marked in the foreheads in 7:3 and 14:1, and we don't interpret that literally. See also Isa. 44:5, Alma 5:19, D&C 133:18.

v17 sounds a lot like the secret combinations of the Book of Mormon.

v18 This is arguably the most famous verse in the Bible, known among believers and non-believers alike because of the use of the symbol 666 in pop culture.

The common pop interpretation is to equate the number with someone's name (e.g., the Pope, Mikhael Gorbachev, Bill Gates, Barak Obama, etc.) by using numeric values associated with the individual letters of name in some fanciful combination. John never suggests a name-letter theme, and no other Scriptural authors have done such a thing. Using the "In the mouth of two or three witnesses..." test this method is lacking.

Another common interpretation is the number is not to be taken literally, but is representative of the beast's attempt to imitate God, and failing miserably. The divine number consistently employed throughout Revelation is 7. Since 6 is less than 7 and it is not a prime it is inferior to 7. The triple repeat in the Semitic mind is a superlative, a double repeat being an emphatic. This is seen in the Old Testament when something is repeated three times like "Holy, holy, holy..." Three "holy[s]" means most holy where two would mean

very holy. As examples in Rev. is 8:13 where the angel says "Woe, woe, woe...". So, the line of thought is that 6 is inferior to 7 and not only is it inferior, it is emphatically inferior as 6...6...6.

The KJV isn't the best translation on the verse in question. The Concordant Literal New Testament (CLNT) is better:

Here is wisdom. Let him who has a mind calculate the number of the wild beast, for it is the number of mankind, and its number is six hundred sixty-six.

In this case, it is plain John is self-interpreting the number: "it is the number of mankind", as in fallen man. So, the interpretation that it is referring to the emphatic inferiority of the beast is quite defensible.

Early Church leaders saw the number as being a symbol of the divisions within Sectarian Christianity:

Letter of Heber C. Kimball et al. to Messrs. Ebenezer Robinson and Don Carlos Smith Reporting Affairs in the British Mission. Manchester, England, October 12, 1840.... These salutations, in connection with a multitude of others, of a similar nature, continued to salute our ears from day to day, until we were about ready to conclude that London had been such a perfect depot of the systems of the nineteenth century, that it contained six hundred three score and six different gods, gospels, redeemers, plans of salvation, religions, churches, commandments, (essential and non-essential), orders of preaching, roads to heaven and to hell; and that this order of things had so affected the minds of the people, that it almost required a horn to be blown from the highest heavens, in order to awaken the attention of the people, and prepare their minds to candidly hear and receive the doctrine of one Gospel, one faith, one baptism, one Holy Ghost, one God, and one plan of salvation, and that, such as Christ and the Apostles preached. [History of the Church, Volume 4: Chapter 12, page 223]

We are informed by the revelation of St. John that in the last days there would be something like six hundred three score and six different religious sects and parties in the earth. Of course, there could be but one of them right; for

there is but one right way. There is but one gospel; there never was but one and never will be. That gospel never deviates from one generation to another. (Wilford Woodruff, *Millennial Star*, Volume 56, page 659)

At one p.m., attended meeting, I read the 5th chapter of Revelation, referring particularly to the 6th verse, showing from that the actual existence of beasts in heaven. Probably those were beasts which had lived on another planet, and not ours. God never made use of the figure of a beast to represent the kingdom of heaven. When it is made use of, it is to represent an apostate church. This is the first time I have ever taken a text in Revelation; and if the young Elders [i.e., full-time missionaries] would let such things alone it would be far better. (Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, Volume 5, Chapter 17, page 324; see also p. 341 and 345 of same)

This interpretation forwarded by Kimball and Woodruff, apparently derived from Smith's teachings, appears to have fallen out of vogue as I've not been able to find anyone forwarding the view since.

B. R. McConkie's explicit equation of the church of the devil and the beast with the Roman Catholic church in the 1st Edition Mormon Doctrine is commonly cited despite the fact McConkie was censured for this comment in specific, as well as a number of others, by Pres. D. O. McKay. It was subsequently omitted from the 2nd edition, but the tradition lives on. This is in part due to McConkie's Doctrinal New Testament Commentaries passages on Revelations wherein he insinuates the same point but fails to make the connection explicit. This view was softened, but perpetuated within the Church with a pamphlet entitled Which Church is Right? published in 1982 (colloquially known as the "Red Ripper" among missionaries).

The church of the devil cannot be the Roman Catholic church in specific as Smith explicitly identifies many sects of apostate Christendom (cf. JS-H 1:5) as part of the devil's kingdom (cf. JS-H 1:20), and does not even include the Roman Catholic church in that list.

An cross reference that is useful is 1 Ki. 10:14 (2 Chron 9:13), as it is the only other test employing the same number:

Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold.

This is just after Solomon entertained the Queen of Sheba, and is the turning point for Solomon when he turns away from the Lord. Thus, the number 666 would be the "sell-out" number of Solomon. Just as Solomon sold-out the Lord for 666 talents of gold, this suggests the second beast sells out to follow the first beast.

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