

“The Phantom Menace & The Faithful Lamb”*Revelation 13-14***Introduction** – Opening **CARTOON** – “*The End is near...*”

Today in our journey through Revelation we will come across the text that is probably the most famous—or infamous—of all, the verse that tells us the number of the beast, the “dark side of the Force” if you will. **SLIDE2** *Star Wars* story tells and movie maker George Lucas was right about there being a dark side of the Force. But the evil unmasked for us in today’s Rev. 13 vision is a Force more evil and sinister than Darth Vader or the Emperor Darth Sidious.

In Revelation 12 the apostle John described the dark Force as a giant blood red dragon **SLIDE3** whose attempt to devour and destroy the Christ child was foiled. The dragon’s war in heaven ended in failure with his being bounced out of heaven like a pile of dirty laundry (John’s way of depicting Christ’s victory over the devil on the cross). In his rage against Jesus Christ, the dragon goes after those who are nearest and dearest to Christ, *but not directly*. Instead, the dragon uses two puppet powers, two “Phantom Menaces” through whom he exercises his will on earth. John calls them “beasts” for the same reason the prophet Daniel did, because they are beast like in their character and actions.

Read Revelation 13 **SLIDE4****A) The First Beast (13¹⁻¹⁰)** **SLIDE5**

The first beast represents a dragon manipulated *political* power arising from the sea (symbolic of evil & chaos, and home to Leviathan,¹ “*the gliding serpent...the monster of the sea*” Is. 27¹). The second beast arises from the earth, and is clearly linked to the first beast yet distinct from it. There are many indications that the second beast represents a dragon manipulated *religious* power since, as we read in 13¹² that it “made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast” and in 13¹⁴ that it “ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast” and

¹ Leviathan (lit. “twisting one”) was a mythological sea serpent or dragon. Psalm 74 speaks of God as the one who “*broke the heads of the monster in the waters*” (v.13) and “*crushed the heads of Leviathan*” (v.14) at creation. In Psalm 89:10 the mythical monster of the deep is called “Rahab”, probably another name for Leviathan.

caused “all who refused to worship the image to be killed” (a rerun of Daniel 3). They are the official and deadly opposition. The intertwining of politics and religion and the idolatrous corruption and abuse of both has a very long and troubling history. It has been, & continues to be, the cause of horrific injustices, mass killings and the martyrdom of millions of faithful believers who refuse to give their primarily allegiance to anyone other than God, and God alone.

In Romans 13 the apostle Paul addressed the legitimate role of government and our duty to “the governing authorities...which God has established” (turn to it but keep your finger in Revelation 13). **Read** Romans 13⁴⁻⁷. But the apostle John was a living witness to the state making idolatrously and illegitimately demands, demands that Christians in good conscience could not obey (cf. Acts 4¹⁹). They would not worship the “Divine Caesars” nor fight the Empire’s wars. For in the visions John received he saw the so called “Great Empire” and “Divine Caesars” for what they really were, puppets of Satan who sought to portray himself as peaceable as Christ and his kingdom. Did you notice all the parodies? We’ll look at a few:

e.g. the “fatal wound” that had been healed²...parallel phrase in Greek^{hos esphagmenen} (translated “fatal wound”—13³ and “as if slain”—5⁶)

There is an evil which comes ultimately from the dragon and which is found both in the human heart and in the communities of men. And it apparently cannot be slain. Though wounded it rises again and will do so to the end of time, to people’s amazement.^{Morris,163}

e.g. the words of worship “Who is like the beast?” = a parody of Ex. 15¹¹; Ps. 113⁵; etc. (cf. Ex. 8¹⁰ and the number cross references)

- Allegiance to the state **FLAG**³ must never exceed allegiance to our Savior, whatever the cost. Military conscription = legitimate or illegitimate??
- Recently watching the PBS series “The American Experience: the Great War” and learned about the “Sedition Act in May 1918 that suddenly made it illegal to oppose or opt out of the war effort.) **Video Clip6**

² Whatever specific trick the beast used (Some refer to the Nero *redivivus* myth whereby people expected him to reappear in a resurrected form. Others think that Caligula is in view since he had a deadly illness and recovered), the effect was to convince the world of the futility of resisting the beast. See Leon Morris, *Revelation*, p. 162.

³ <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/july-august/should-churches-display-the-american-flag.html>

B) The Second Beast Makes His Mark (13¹¹⁻¹⁸) **SLIDE7**

Notice that the second beast “had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon”, betraying its true character and identity in its response to “all who refused to worship the image”. Notice its deathly economic sanctions and seizures against all who refused “to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads”. The mark of the beast is a micro-chip...NOT! But it is a mark of identification and allegiance with very real implications (e.g. ancient branding; contemporary branding; political correctness).

“The reason for this particular placement of the mark is not certain, but it includes the most visible portion of the human head and the hand both of greeting and of closing business deals.”^{Fee, 186} (i.e. the certificate of worship for official participation in the Emperor cult—“Once he had that certificate he was labelled as a worshipper of Caesar and a denier of Christ.”^{Morris, 168}; other distinguishing marks in history have been many⁴—e.g. Nazi’s use of the yellow star on Jews, loyalty or disloyalty markers)

- “the number of the beast...is the number of a man...666”
 - Two approaches: numeric (cryptogram & gematria...explain), and symbolic
 - **SLIDE8** 666 is the numerical equivalent of Nero Caesar (using Hebrew letters).⁵
 - **Symbolic** = trinity of evil, imperfect parody always falling short of the perfect #7
 - Not one “beast” but many beastly rulers through the ages...

- Journeys: Mennonite Stories of Faith and Survival in Stalin’s Russia

Nothing in their past experience prepared the Mennonites for the cataclysmic changes which enveloped them following the Bolshevik Revolution late in 1917...Roving soldiers collected valuables and money at gunpoint...^{p.3} The communist party, under pressure from Stalin, inaugurated its first Five Year Plan in 1928. One of its basic provisions called for the forced collectivization of agriculture [using the weapon of demonizing land owners, branding them as “kulaks”—the tight fisted.] The kulak formula was also easily applied to the destruction of the Mennonite clergy, both lay ministers and elders....^{pp.6-7}

Disenfranchisement, property confiscation and exile usually followed...prisoners where packed into red freight cars and, under terrible conditions, sent to [prison work

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_badge

⁵ See Mounce, Revelation, p. 264 for a brief but helpful explanation.

camps where *workers faced long hours...extreme cold...severe punishment...poor nutrition...the ravages of disease...and widespread death*].^{p.8}

Personal memoir by Anna Kroeker – *When my husband had been arrested in 1938 most of the men of Bergtal had been arrested as well. Some thirty-seven farmers lived in the village. Within one week there were twenty-five “widows” who were forced to work the land in their stead.*^{p.33} Anna's own father, a teacher, was also *denounced on account of his faith [and taken by] two policemen...As he was leaving the village, the “widows” and others stood by the roadside calling, “Peace has left the village!” Four months later, we received the news that he had died.*^{pp.33-34}

Read Revelation 14

C) The Lamb And His Flock (14¹⁻⁵) **SLIDE12**

1) **The Lamb** – “standing on Mt. Zion” (= the victorious king and his people saved and secure in the Holy City—Joel 2³²)

2) **His Flock** – recall the chapter 7 scenes and the identity of the 144,000... representing the *whole* people of God (complete number of OT & NT believers).

a) Their Song

- “sound like that of harpists playing their harps” (= awesome)
- “sang a new song” – the Greek word translated “new” signifies ‘fresh’ rather than ‘recent’ (i.e. can be refreshed or renewed vs. brand new).^{Morris,96}
 - New & renewed experience of salvation calls forth a new & renewed song.

b) The Singers (exclusive & inclusive)

- Exclusively those “who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins” – John is using symbolism...
 - E.g. Neg. Babylon symbolized as “the mother of prostitutes”^{17:5} who “made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries”^{14:5} and with whom “the kings of the earth committed adultery”^{18:3} (moral but also political and economic adultery...Sacrificing their values for power & wealth)
 - E.g. Pos. “Virgin” Israel^{2Kgs.19:21} & the church as “a pure virgin”^{2Cor.11:2} and as “the bride of the Lamb”^{Rev.21:9}
- Inclusively those “*purchased from among the human race and offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb*” (cf. “every nation, tribe, language, and people”^{14:6})

SLIDE13

D) Three Angelic Proclamations (14⁶⁻¹³) – interrelated and progressive

1) **Call to Worship** (vv.6-7) – As Darrell Johnson notes, “While the dragon and his two beasts are deceiving the world and working against the disciples of Jesus, the angels are preaching the [eternal] gospel.”^{p.261} The “eternal gospel” abbreviated here to simply “Fear God and give him glory”, not “Fear the beast and give him glory” as they have been doing (e.g. 13⁵).

- The “full” gospel = Jn. 3¹⁶ (“For God so loved the world...”); Rom. 5⁸ (“God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”); 1 Tim. 1¹⁵ (“This is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I’m exhibit A.”)

2) **Announcement of Babylon’s** (Impending^{prophetic perfect}) **Fall** (v.8) – symbolic & representative of many “great” but evil cities (e.g. “Sin City”).

3) **Eternal Consequences** (vv.9-13) – for the followers of the beast what happens in Sin City has eternal consequences, a fate fully in keeping with what they dished out to God’s faithful people in 13^{15,17}. What the people of Sin City get is a permanent hangover. For the followers of the Lamb, there are lasting consequences in the form of blessings (“rest” and rewards).

E) Harvest Time (14¹⁴⁻²⁰) **SLIDE14**

1) **The Harvester** – the identity markers point to the risen Christ (“seated on the [white] cloud”^{Dan.7:13; Mk.14:62} + “like a son of man”^{Dan.7:13; Mt.26:64} + “with a crown^{stephanos} of gold on his head”^{Dan.7:14} + “a sharp sickle in his hand”^{Mk.4:29}) who harvests the earth through his angel (either clearly = divine harvest). **SLIDE15**

2) **The Harvest** – There is a difference of opinion about this being a salvation harvest or a judgment harvest or both. Which group or groups of people are in the harvest (only the wicked^{Mounce}, **OR** the righteous in vv. 14-16 and the wicked in vv.17-20^{Fee} **OR** the harvest of what Jesus has sown^{Johnson}).⁶

Option 1: Salvation^{vv.14-16} & Judgment^{vv.17-20}

- Jesus’ parable of the Wheat *and* Weeds⁷ (Mt. 13^{30,40-42})

⁶ The point Darrell Johnson makes, following the lead of George Caird and F.F. Bruce, “is that the two actions [grain & grape harvest] seem to be about the same thing: it is salvation. Never in the Bible is the image of ‘reaping’ used for judgment. It is always used for gathering in what one wants to keep (see Mark 4:29; John 4:35-38).” *Discipleship On The Edge*, p. 263.

⁷ Other harvest references in the gospels include Mt. 9³⁷⁻³⁸; Mk. 4²⁹; Lk. 10²; Jn. 4³⁵⁻³⁸.

- Harvest = the hour of judgment *and* reward.
- The chapters that follow = the (original) tale of two cities, two outcomes, two destinies, full length versions of the harvest vignettes given here.

“This is striking imagery, intended to express the enormity of God’s judgment on Rome when it would finally take place.”^{Fee,206}

Option 2: Judgment – similar to option #1...vv.14-16 = summary, vv.17-20 = details

Option 3: Salvation^{Johnson, Bruce, Caird}

- ✓ Following on the heels of v.13 would be a positive anticipation (no break in Gk)
- ✓ A grain (& grape) harvest is always (mostly) viewed positively in scripture.⁸
- ✓ Two angels (v.15, v. 17) point to parallel harvests (“ripe” grain harvest & grape harvest).
- ✓ The location of the grape harvest (“outside the city” = the place of the unrepentant in 22¹⁵ but is also the place where Jesus was crucified—Mt. 21³⁹; Heb. 13¹²⁻¹³ making it the place of salvation, where the wrath of God was expressed^{Rom.3:21-26} against sin, but born for us).
- ✓ If so then the enormous amount of blood that flows from the winepress “rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia [= the traditional length of the Holy Land from north to south]” would be the blood of Jesus, abundant enough to cover the sins of all who repent.

Three Re-evaluations **SLIDES16-18**

In a *Peanuts* cartoon, Charlie Brown is watching TV in his favourite bean bag chair when his little sister Sally comes up to tell him that she had memorized the Bible verse she was supposed to learn for Sunday. So Charlie Brown asks her, “What verse?” “I don’t know” replies Sally, “you made me forget. Maybe it was something Moses said, or something from the Book of Re-evaluation”

The Book of Re-evaluation is not a bad mistake, because that is what Revelation was intended to do, to prompt some serious re-evaluations. THREE

- 1) Re-Evaluate where and how we are being tempted or intimidated into the ways of the beast (morally, politically, spiritually, economically). E.g. **Military spending**,⁹
- 2) Re-Evaluate what we value and what value we give it – the cult of self-indulgence,¹⁰ cf. recent “Break Point” commentary¹¹ called **Fur Babies**
- 3) Re-Evaluate your direction & destiny **SLIDE** – “Will the road you’re on get you to my place?” - GOD

⁸ As Fee notes, “The lone exceptions in the OT are Jer 51:33 and Joel 3:13, the latter being the only other place it is accompanied by the twofold outcome of harvest: in that case garnering the wheat and burning the chaff.” *Revelation*, p.206

⁹ Eisenhower said, “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.” (Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 220)

¹⁰ “The standard of living is the god of North America, and the ad man is its prophet.” (Sider, p. 172)

¹¹ Animals have become substitutes for actual children...an increasing number of women from the millennial generation are opting out when it comes to having babies.” The alternative is “pet parenthood”...“fur babies.” As one 30 year old put it, pets “give us a greater purpose without making our lives mainly about theirs.”