

# Mark Of The Beast

(Revelation 13)

His People Endure Forever: Shelf 7 — Volume 63

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In order to correctly understand the book of Revelation, there are two very important principles of interpretation that must be honored as we come to the many visions that are recorded throughout the book.

### ≈ A Book Of Figures ≈

**Revelation is a book of figures of speech.** When studying other books of the Bible, the approach to interpret the contents of any particular book is to understand the context **literally**, unless there is reason to understand the text figuratively. **The reverse of this rule is true when interpreting the book of Revelation.**

In the very first verse of the book, John alerted us as to how we should approach this book. He wrote,

*The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave to Him to show to His bondservants, things that must shortly come to pass. And He sent and **signified** it by His angel to His bondservant John (Rv 1:1).*

The content of this book was “sent and **signified**.” In other words, through symbolic language, John recorded various visions that were revealed to him. In order to proclaim the message of the book, he used **cryptic** symbols to communicate the visions that were revealed to him. Cryptic symbols are figures of speech that are often terrifying and unreal. John used such in order to either produce shock or state emphasis concerning the message he was seeking to convey to his readers.

He also used such figures in order to conceal the apocalyptic message of judgment that would come upon Rome. If John were found by the authorities to be writing about the doom of the Empire, it would surely have been the end of him. He would not have simply been exiled to the island of Patmos. He would have been executed. Copies of the document of Revelation would have been hunted down and burned. Those who possessed the document would also have suffered the consequences of circulating insurrection “propaganda” concerning the end of the Roman Empire.

The book is **apocalyptic** in the sense that it is talking about future things in relation to the immediate recipients of the book. In this case, it was talking about the deliverance of Christians from the state persecution of the Roman Empire. Therefore, through many figures of speech the message of this book came to the immediate readers concerning things that were to come to pass shortly in their lives and their children.

**It is imperative to understand the content of the book first in a figurative manner, unless there is contextual justification to understand the material**

**literally.** If we do not apply this rule of interpretation to this book, we will end up at the end of the book greatly confused. We will twist the message of the book out of its original historical context, and thus fail to understand John's message as the first readers understood it.

### ≈ "Shortly Come To Pass" ≈

**The visions of Revelation would shortly come to pass.** There are two "bookends" in the book. Each makes the statement "*shortly come to pass.*" These time limitations are found in **1:1** and **22:6**. John alerted two groups of people concerning the time period of the visions. First, there were his **immediate readers** he sought to comfort by saying that the events of the visions were not something distant from their present. Their persecutors would soon meet their doom. The persecution would be terminated when God judged the persecutors.

Second, John also cautioned those of us **who were not of his immediate audience.** He wrote that the fulfillment of the prophetic visions were generally not for those **after** the historical context of his immediate audience. The "things" of the visions would **shortly take place.** This does not mean that they would occur over two thousand years later. Since John made this statement—"*shortly come to pass*"—at the beginning and ending of the book, **then we would assume that he wanted the immediate readers to give special heed to what he was saying.**

In the historical context of the visions, John wanted to comfort his immediate audience. We must not be "prophecy thieves" by stealing the comfort of the visions of John away from his immediate readers. We must not do so in order to satisfy our idle curiosity of supposed "signs of the times" in our present time. If we do such, we will not correctly understand the comforting message of the book that was first communicated to those early Christians who were going into about one hundred and fifty years of persecution by the Roman state.

As secondary recipients of the revelations, we today draw comfort from the book in that we can see God's work in the lives of the early Christians who were enduring persecution. In some sense, therefore, we look at the book of Revelation in the same way as we use the Old Testament. Paul wrote,

*For whatever things were written before were written [in the Old Testament] **for our learning**, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures **might have hope** (Rm 15:4).*

We gain comfort from the Old Testament Scriptures because we read of God's deliverance of His persecuted people. We also gain comfort from the book of Revelation because we see God's deliverance of His persecuted people from the worst of times.

We must emphasize, therefore, **that the historical events of the book refer primarily to John's readers**. However, when the angel concluded a particular vision in the book he often threw in the final fate of the unrighteous, as well as, **encouragement concerning the final destination of the righteous**. He did so in order to assure the righteous that God always delivers His people: *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord"* (Rm 12:19).

The primary persecutor of the saints in Revelation was the Roman Empire. After Rome's termination of national Israel in A.D. 70, Rome itself would eventually turn her attention to Christians by making Christianity an illegal religion. Throughout a period of a century and a half Christians would be tortured and killed by the state of Rome. This government opposition against Christians had its beginnings in the insane behavior of Nero who persecuted Christians in the early sixties. Nero's persecution of Christians was a personal vendetta that he had against Christians. However, what was coming in the lives of those who received the book of Revelation was state persecution.

Nero's persecution, though centered in Rome, would eventually set the pattern for a government

policy of opposition against Christians in the years of Domitian. This opposition would periodically arise and last well into the third century. However, one of the severest periods of this persecution would occur during the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

Only when Constantine became Emperor of Rome would the dark age of persecution be lifted from the shoulders of Christians. The official lifting of the persecution would occur by the issuing of the **Edict of Toleration in A.D. 311**, and then the **Edict of Milan in A.D. 313**.

Until the relentless persecution ceased, the saints would go through a time of persecution that has been unparalleled since. For this reason, God deemed it necessary to write a special book of inspiration in order to comfort Christians through their years of testing in any situation throughout the world and history. Regardless of what persecution may arise in the lives of Christians, the book of Revelation is God's comfort that in the end, there will be a final victory of those who live the gospel over all that Satan would do in order to destroy the work of Jesus in the lives of Christians.

By the time John arrived at chapters 12-14 in the book, he had completed three of the seven "video visions" of the book. Each of the seven visions is a picture of the forces of evil against the forces of God. The conclusion of each picture is always the same. This conclusion was simply stated in 17:14:

*These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.*

Regardless of the conflict between good and evil, **Christians will always emerge victorious**. For this reason, the principle thought of Revelation 2:10 must always be in the minds of persecuted Christians: *"Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."*

Chapter 12 begins the second major division of the

book with a series of seven visions. The vision of chapter 12 begins with a pictorial birth of Jesus and concludes with the dragon launching persecution against Christians as the body of Christ. In 12:17 the dragon became enraged with the woman (God's people who brought forth the Christ). He then *“went to make war with the rest of her offspring [the saints].”* When the vision comes to chapter 13, two beasts (**Roman government** and **imperial religion**) arise through the work of Satan to make war against the saints.

The first major persecutors of Christians after the Pentecost of A.D. 30 were the nationalistic Jews. Opposition toward the **“Man Child”** (Jesus), the woman (God's people of the Old Testament), and the woman's offspring (God's people of the New Testament) would be made by Satan through the proxy persecution of misguided nationalistic Jews. However, in A.D. 70 this persecuting force was essentially eliminated by the destruction of national Israel and the temple. After the demise of this persecuting force against Christians, a second and more terrible persecutor arose. This was the state government power of the Roman Empire.

In chapter 13 the inspired John pictured this persecutor as two beasts that emerged from the populations of humanity. The **Sea Beast** was the **legislative strength of the Roman Empire** that was launched against the saints. The **Land Beast** was Roman imperial religion that was upheld by the legislative power of the Sea Beast. Roman religion was forced upon all citizens of the Empire in order to stamp out any opposing insurrections against Rome. Jewish nationalism had sensitized Rome to always be alert for any insurrectionist movements that might develop throughout the Empire. And since Christians **would not** proclaim Caesar as lord, then Christians were considered insurrectionists in the Empire.

It is in the context of Revelation 13 that John pinpoints the persecution of the saints by a state government. It is possible that John received these visions during the reign of Vespasian, Caesar of Rome. This is the

“one who is” of chapter 17:10. Nero (A.D. 54-68) led a personal vendetta against Christians during his reign in the 60s. This persecution of Christians was only a prelude to what was to come under the reign of Domitian and later Caesars.

When Domitian became Caesar, he instituted **state** persecution of Christians by making Christianity an illegal religion. Those who would not give total allegiance to Rome were tried on charges of treason. Submission to Rome meant submission to Caesar as lord. **Those who would not confess Caesar as lord, therefore, were considered insurrectionist rebels of the Roman state.** Therefore, the persecution led by Nero was minimal in comparison to that which was unleashed by Domitian and succeeding Caesars in turning the Roman state against Christianity.

The visions of Revelation were given to John in order **to prepare the saints for the coming decades of persecution.** The message of the visions was to assure the Christians of Asia that persecution was coming. However, it would have an end. It would end when the instrument of Satan—ungodly Roman Caesars who used state government to satisfy their political ambitions—was taken out of the way. Christians, therefore, needed to be patient and endure, though doing such might cost them their lives (See Rv 2:10).

## **Verse 1** **Oppressed By Rome**

*And I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns and on his heads the names of blasphemy.*

The **Sea Beast** (See Rv 15:2; 16:13), Rome’s legislative power, is here set against the disciples. Rome originates from the **sea**, that is, **the restless and always changing populations of humanity** (See Is 57:20,21; Jr 49:23). World governments arise out of conflict among world population groups. Humanity is as a sea that continually gives birth to

different government powers throughout the ages (See Rv 16:3; 20:13; 21:1). The fact that populations are always restlessly changing, different governments arise to put down insurrection.

The Sea Beast had **seven heads** of great control. Rome was seated upon seven hills and we wonder if John did not take his imagery from this geographical position of the city in order to convey the identity of Rome's pompous power. The Sea Beast had **ten horns**, or ten kings who exercised complete governmental power (See Rv 12:3; 17:3). The Sea Beast had **ten crowns** of complete authority over other earthly governments.

John's vision refers to the fourth world kingdom of Daniel's recorded visions of **Daniel 2** and **7**. In the second chapter of Daniel, Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a great image. The vision was of four kingdoms, the first of which was the **Babylonian kingdom**. The fourth was **Rome**. It was in the days of this kingdom that had feet part of iron and clay, **that God would set up the kingdom reign of the Son** (See Dn 2:44). The kingdom reign to which John was referring would be established in the days of the Roman kings.

Daniel's personal vision of **Daniel 7** was also of four world kingdoms. Daniel's vision portrayed the rise of the Roman Empire as the fourth kingdom after the Babylonian Empire. Rome would be the beast that is "**dreadful and terrible**" (See Dn 7:7). It would be the kingdom that would devour and break the other kingdoms to pieces by conquering them. The kingdom glory of the previous three kingdoms would be exemplified in the totalitarian rule of Rome.

Daniel pictured the stirring of the sea of populations as the cause that produced throughout history the four government powers (See Dn 7:2). The origin of all government is from the people of the world. God has ordained that government exist to prevent anarchy (See Rm 13:1-7). However, people devise all types of government that originate from the populations of the world.



The fourth government power of the Middle East of Daniel's vision would unleash its strength against the people of God. This government would have a **blasphemous name**. It would be known to speak great things against those who represented God. This is the same beast of Revelation 17:3 that is identified by "*names of blasphemy*."

The visions of Revelation 13 and 17 have their background in the prophecy of Daniel 7. In view of this, **we must understand that the vision of Revelation 13 refers to the Roman Empire**. Therefore, the interpretation of Revelation 13 and 17 must be consistent with the fulfillment of Daniel 7. Daniel prophesied of events that would transpire during the days of the Roman kings. The fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7, therefore, cannot refer to any government powers that would exist after the fall of the Roman Empire.

The following are a few historical and interpretive thoughts that encourage a better understanding of Revelation 13 and 17:

### **1. Rome's Totalitarian Influence**

In **Revelation 17:9-12** the "heads" and "horns" refer to kings and their reigning control. Rome was seated upon seven hills. John may have been referring to this geographical fact in order to symbolize the powerful control that radiated from this seat of the Empire. Rome was the seat from which the "horns" exercised their power over the extent of the Empire. Thus, the symbol of "heads" and "horns" could be understood in this way in Daniel 7, Revelation 13 and 17.

### **2. God's Viewpoint Of Rome's History**

God looks at the beast of the Roman Empire from a "collective time" viewpoint. His omnipresence in time allows Him the privilege of such a view of history. In other words, **God sees the whole of the existence of a kingdom at one time**. He sees the existence of the Empire from beginning to end. He thus sees the beginning and ending simultaneously. It would be

like viewing (“watching”) a video as one would view a photograph. We who are limited to time must “watch” the video in the amount of time it took to first record it. However, God can push the “fast forward” button in order to see the totality of the events of the video in an instant. He would view the video as we would view a photograph.

Revelation gives us a viewpoint from heaven of the Caesars (kings) of Rome as they lived throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, God’s view of Rome’s history is from a “photograph” perspective of the video. What we see as unfolding in the early history of the Roman Empire, God has already viewed as a photograph in history. Through John in the visions, He gives us a view of the kings of this kingdom from such a view point. It is important to understand this “view” of the Roman Caesars in order to understand Revelation 17 as it relates to the history of Roman Caesars in chapters 13 and 17.

### **3. Rise & Fall Of Roman Caesars**

As stated before, the “heads” of Revelation 17 refer to hills (See Rv 17:9,10). Rome was seated on seven hills. Therefore, the figure is probably a reference to the power that was manifested from the seat of Roman government by the Caesars (kings).

In Daniel’s vision, the eleventh horn (“king”) *“will subdue three kings”* (Dn 7:24). In the vision of Revelation 17, three of the kings (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) were simply **ignored** (See Rv 17:10,11). They were ignored because they were of no significance to Rome’s history or persecution of Christians. John used Daniel 7 as the prophetic historical background for counting the kings (Caesars) of Rome. He ignored the kings that had no significance in reference to the persecution of Christians.

In view of the preceding thoughts, consider the Caesars of the beast (kingdom) that were *“dreadful and terrible”* (Dn 7:7) as they relate to the early saints. The chart below is a list of Roman Caesars who were the head of the Roman state at the time the church

had its beginnings in the first century. These were not all of the Roman Caesars who reigned throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, these were those Caesars who affected the beginning of the church in the first century and the evangelism of the early Christians. When studying the New Testament, it is good to keep in mind those Caesars who were reigning at the time the early Christians were preaching throughout the Roman world.

ROMAN HISTORY	JOHN'S REVELATION	DANIEL'S PROPHECY
1. Augustus (27 B.C.-A.D. 14)	1. Augustus	1. Augustus
2. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37)	2. Tiberius	2. Tiberius
3. Caligula (A.D. 37-41)	3. Caligula	3. Caligula
4. Claudius (A.D. 41-54)	4. Claudius	4. Claudius
5. Nero (A.D. 54-68)	5. Nero	5. Nero
6. (Galba)	<b>IGNORED</b>	<b>SUBDUED</b>
7. (Otho)	Galba	Galba
8. (Vitellius)	Otho	Otho
	Vitellius	Vitellius
9. Vespasian (A.D. 69-79)		
10. Titus (A.D. 79-81)	6. Vespasian	6. Vespasian
11. Domitian (A.D. 81-96)	7. Titus	7. Titus
	8. Domitian	8. Domitian

One wonders why Daniel said that Galba, Otho and Vitellius were “subdued,” while at the same time this statement is not made in reference to the other kings. The reason may lie in the historical fact that these three Caesars never really exercised any power or influence during the two years of civil war when they rose and fell as Caesars. In a space of two years these three became Caesar, and then were quickly removed. **Galba** came to power by the sword. However, he enraged all classes of citizens in Rome. After being in power for only six months, the historian Seutonius says that **Otho** had him murdered by a group of assassins. Otho then seized power as Caesar. However, Otho came into conflict with Vitellius. After **Vitellius** defeated Otho in battle, Otho committed suicide. He had ruled only ninety-five days. The soldiers of Vitellius revolted against him as a result of his cruelty. After less than a year in control of Rome, Vitellius was likewise murdered by Vespasian’s guard. His body was thrown into the Tiber River. Because these three kings played

no significant role in the history of the Empire, they were ignored as “subdued” (or, “uprooted” in some translations). Daniel and John did not count them as Caesars of Rome.

#### 4. The Date Of Revelation

If the preceding interpretation is true, then the visions of Revelation would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian (A.D. 69-79). While John was experiencing the visions, he was not necessarily writing the book during the time he wrote, “*one [king] is*” (17:10). Five previous kings had fallen (See 17:10). Those who had fallen were **Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius** and **Nero**. Since John ignored the three who were subdued (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), then the one that **is** would be **Vespasian**. Thus, the visions of John would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian.

This date of the visions would harmonize with the historical context of the visions. John speaks of the great persecution that is yet to come. “*The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them [the saints]*” (Rv 11:7). The tense of the verb here is **future** in reference to the time the saints lived. The saints to whom John wrote were yet to endure a great persecution. The same future tense is again found in Revelation 17:8 in reference to the beast that “*will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.*”

#### 5. Persecutions Of Nero & Domitian

It is true that Nero launched a limited persecution against Jews and Christians alike. However, **this persecution was not an official legislative edict of the Roman government**. In fact, there is no evidence that this persecution spread to the rest of the Empire. It was limited to the city of Rome. Imperial Roman persecution of Christianity throughout the Empire would come later. Vespasian and Titus, as far as historical records are concerned, were indifferent to Christianity. However, Domitian unleashed an official

Roman policy against Christians.

Domitian demanded of all Roman citizens their confession of him to be “god.” Those who would not so recognize the “deity of Caesar” were subsequently viewed as insubordinate to Roman rule. In the Roman Empire insubordination was equal to insurrection. Thus, capital punishment was handed down to any who would not submit to “Caesar as lord.”

## Verse 2

### The Collective Resurrection

*The beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.*

In Daniel 7, the lion of Daniel’s vision represented the Babylonian kingdom. The bear represented the Medo-Persians, and the leopard represented the Greeks. **Their collective power and glory was resurrected in the fierceness of the fourth beast, the Roman government.**

In Daniel’s vision, the “dominion” of the former three kingdoms was terminated (See Dn 7:12). However, *“their lives were prolonged for a season and a time”* (Dn 7:12). In other words, the power that was characteristic of government rule was continued in the existence of the fourth beast, the Roman kingdom.

However, their “lives” were prolonged only for a short season. The wickedness of the three former kings was added to the wickedness of the fourth. Their punishment would be fulfilled in the destruction of the fourth. Therefore, when God’s judgment came upon the fourth, **it also symbolically fell upon the first three, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece.**

Satan was working behind the scenes to persecute the offspring of the woman (the saints) with the totality of Rome’s government. Satan could not directly overthrow the power of God in the heavenly realm (See Rv 12:9), therefore, he “resurrected” in an ungodly king his work to lead a pagan government to carry out his mission. Satan is the *“god of this age”* (2

Co 4:4), the prince of the world (See Jn 12:31). He is the one who has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving in order to destroy the work of God through the saints.

### **Verse 3**

## **The Wounded Head: Nero**

*Then I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded. And his deadly wound was healed. And all the world was amazed and followed the beast.*

In his personal vendetta, Nero launched the first major state persecution against Christians in the latter part of his reign (A.D. 54-68). He was Caesar of Rome when Paul was beheaded sometime between A.D. 63 and 67. When Nero committed suicide, his personal vendetta against Christians ceased. Thus the wave of persecution that swept throughout the city of Rome was **wounded**. However, persecution went from the personal onslaught of one corrupted Caesar to the entire legislative government of Rome through the leadership of Domitian. A statement that was made by the historian **Eusebius** (A.D. 260-340) in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 3, Para. 17) is very significant concerning this transition in the focus of persecution. Eusebius wrote,

He [Domitian] finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us. With this agrees Tertullian, who said; A long time after, Domitian, a limb of the bloody Nero, makes some like attempts against the Christians ....

The historical significance of Eusebius' statement helps us to understand how the "deadly wound" of the beast was healed. Though Nero did not launch an official government persecution against Christians, the severity of his persecution would be resurrected and expanded later by other Caesars. Nero's persecution only gave birth to what would later become an official policy of the Roman Empire. This official policy would

be given birth (“resurrected”) by Domitian who would launch legislative persecution against Christians who would be considered to practicing an illegal religion. Domitian would resurrect the behavior of Nero in his persecution of Christians. Vespasian and Titus would be indifferent to Christianity. Therefore, we go from the personal persecution of Nero to the resurrected persecution of state persecution that was initiated by Domitian.

“**All the world**” is a limited figure referring to the world of the Roman Empire. The phrase is interpreted by passages as Luke 2:1 when a decree went out from Augustus that “all the world” of the Roman Empire be registered. The issuing of this degree certainly did not include the entire physical world. Only those who were within the jurisdiction of Rome’s control were to register. The same meaning is in the context of Revelation 13. Everyone in the Roman Empire marvelled at the strength and power of Rome in its conquest of many nations.

### **Verse 4**

## **Rise Of Imperial Religion**

*They worshiped the dragon who gave power to the beast. And they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”*

The world of unbelievers worshiped Satan in their reverence of Rome. When Domitian became Caesar, Roman imperial religion was propagated throughout the Empire through Caesar worship. Domitian claimed to be deity. The test for allegiance to Rome, therefore, became one’s submission to “Caesar as lord.” Those who would not so confess Caesar as lord, were accused of insurrection. Such insurrection carried with it the death penalty. This led to great persecution against Christians who would not confess Caesar to be lord.

In like manner, worship of a man as a god was also given to Herod. The unbelieving world said of Herod, *“The voice of a god and not of a man”* (At 12:22).

Herod was subsequently eaten by worms. Those on earth who would profess to be gods, will certainly find their destiny in the place where the *“worm does not die”* (Mk 9:44-48). We must keep in mind that no one is to receive worship from any individual, worship that should be given to God alone.

## **Verses 5,6**

### **Blasphemy Of God & His People**

*Now there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. And power was given to him to make war forty-two months. So he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven.*

Rome would set her course against those who would live the gospel according to the lordship of Jesus. Eventually, the Caesars would exalt themselves to the status of god. They would be as *“a mouth speaking pompous words”* against Christians (See Dn 7:8,20). Daniel prophesied of this in reference to Rome:

*Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper until the wrath has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done* (Dn 11:36).

The government authority that is given to the beast would continue for **forty-two months**. This was the time when the horn of Rome *“was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them”* (Dn 7:21). Domitian’s arrogance as deity would lead him to *“speak pompous words against the Most High”* (Dn 7:25). He *“shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time”* (Dn 7:25).

The *“time, times and half a time”* is the same period as the forty-two months (Rv 11:27). This is a definite time that was limited in duration. Thus, there would be an end of the persecution. It would not carry on



indefinitely. Though Rome would *“tread the holy city [of the church] underfoot for forty-two months,”* God would not allow the persecution to continue on without end. In Revelation 11:2 it is clarified that only the outer courtyard was given over to the Gentiles. The temple (the church) would not be given over to the Gentiles.

The **tabernacle** of God is the church (See Rv 11:1,2). Because the church received her origin from heaven (See Mt 16:18), blasphemous words that are spoken against her are spoken against God (See At 9:4,5). If any government or religion of people would accuse the saints of submitting to anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, then they would be accusing the church of originating from man and not God. This would be blasphemy against the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Verse 7**

### **Persecution Of The Disciples**

*And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Power was given him over all tribes and peoples and languages and nations.*

The deceived of the Roman Empire (See Rv 13:14) are led by the pompous behavior of Domitian to launch full persecution (**war**) against the saints. The duration of the persecution is limited (See Rv 13:5). Daniel had prophesied, *“I was watching; and the same horn was making war against the saints, and prevailing against them”* (Dn 7:21). In the heat of any persecution it seems that the enemies of the saints are prevailing. But the saints need to remember that God will never allow His people to succumb to the power of Satan (See Rv 17:14).

John’s vision of Revelation 11 revealed that *“the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them”* (Rv 11:7). Any who would persecute the saints will find their origin in the kingdom of darkness.

We must keep in mind that this authority to make war

against the saints was “**granted to him.**” Satan would be the immediate source of such wicked behavior. However, as in the case of Satan who worked against Job, God allows Satan to go about as a roaring lion to devour according to the divine historical plan (See 1 Pt 5:8). Satan is allowed by God to have his way with wicked governments.

God is not responsible for the wicked behavior of unbelieving governments whose dignitaries choose wickedness. It is Satan working in the individuals of government. God has ordained that government exist in this world. However, He does allow Satan to have his way with government officials who reject the will of God.

## **Verse 8** **Reverence Of Rome**

*And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

**All** who are under the jurisdiction of the Roman Senate gave their reverential allegiance to Caesar and the Roman state. Those who believe that reference here is to the entire literal earth, miss the hyperbole of the metaphor. John wants us to understand that in view of the fact that most of the citizenship of the Roman Empire paid homage to Caesar and Rome, the believers would be intimidated to do the same.

It would appear that everyone has been deceived by the beast and the false prophet of Roman government and religion. However, John says that those who have been so deceived are not written in the **book of life** (See Rv 20:12). The end result of those who are not written in the book of life will be eternal destruction (See Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9; Rv 20:12-14). Herein is the comfort of the saints.

The **Lamb** (Jesus) was foreordained before creation to be crucified for the sins of man (See Is 53). Those who choose to respond to the gospel of the cross, and thus, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, are written in

the book of life. God foreordained that the “recorded saints” (the church) would be destined to eternal salvation (See Ep 1:4-11). The church is predestined to salvation. Those therefore who individually choose to be a part of the church by obedience to the gospel are destined to heaven. They are destined to heaven because they are members of the body of Christ.

## **Verses 9,10**

### **Captivity Of The Captors**

*If any man has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity will go into captivity. He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.*

John now demands that the readers give special attention to what he is saying (See Mt 11:15; Rv 2:7,11,17). The persecutors would take saints into captivity. However, there is here a turn of events in the war against the saints. The forty-two months (time, times and half a time) are now pictured at a close. The captors themselves will be led into divine captivity. Such is reminiscent of the destiny of the disobedient angels who, because of their rebellion against God, are *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6; See 2 Pt 2:4). And so is Domitian and his host of persecutors reserved today in the captivity of the hadean world in order to be condemned in the last day. They will eventually go away into punishment and final destruction (See Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9).

The second death is reserved for those who would launch carnal persecution against the city of God. When Christians know this, then they can maintain **patience** while enduring persecution (See Rv 14:12). They can maintain their **faith** in God who will eventually deliver them (See Hb 6:12). The principle was stated by the Hebrew writer: *“But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hb 10:38).

John’s statement in Revelation 13:10 is an

assurance to the persecuted saints that they have victory over the Roman state through faith in Jesus (See 1 Jn 5:4). Christians must therefore remain faithful (See Rv 2:10). They must remain faithful to their calling in view of the fact that they will receive a reward for their faithfulness to the Lord in times of persecution. They must not give in to the temptations of Satan. James, therefore, exhorted, *“Be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord”* (Js 5:7). In reference to deliverance from Jewish persecution, James continued, *“You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near”* (Js 5:8). This was the coming of the Lord in judgment in time on all those who would lay their hands against Christians.

## Verse 11

### Opposition Of Imperial Religionists

*Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. And he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon.*

John saw **another beast**. Here is **imperial religion**, or emperor worship, that forces upon all Roman citizens the worship of Caesar. This is the “false prophet” of Revelation 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10. This religion rises **out of the earth**, for it is of human origin. It is a religion created after the desires of people who seek worship.

This religion has the deceptive appearance of an innocent **lamb**. However, since this book of Revelation was originally directed to the saints in Asia, John possibly had in mind a figure of two powers in the Asian province that worked against the saints. First, the Roman **proconsul** of the area enforced Caesar worship on all citizens according to the law of Rome. Second, a religious **commune** was established in the area to promote the cult of emperor worship. John continues an explanation of what this religious cult did in the following verse.

## **Verse 12**

### **Theocratic Religion**

*He exercises all the power of the first beast in his presence. And he causes the earth and those who dwell on it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.*

Roman religion was forced upon the populace by the authority of the Roman government. Domitian claimed deity. Submission to him as lord signified loyalty to Rome. Those who did not submit were viewed as insubordinate to the Empire. In this theocratic condition of the Roman Empire at this time in history—the time of Domitian’s reign—government and religion were entangled together into a powerful cult that trampled on any who would resist total submission.

## **Verses 13,14**

### **Great Deceptions**

*So he performs great wonders, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. He deceives those who dwell on the earth by the signs that he had power to do in the presence of the beast, saying to those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound by a sword and lived.*

What the Roman religious commune sought to do reminds us of Jesus’ warning, *“Be not deceived”* (Mt 24:4,24). John later says that these religionists go out *“performing signs”* (Rv 16:14). This is the false prophet *“who worked signs in his [the beast’s] presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image”* (Rv 19:20). But these are those who are deceived, and who deceive (See 2 Tm 3:1-3). They worked great wonders that were false miracles (See 2 Th 2:9). If the wonders were actually miraculous, then those who followed the false emperor worship would not be deceived by believing the wonders. **They would have been believing that which was**

**true.** The deceivers' supposed supernatural work, therefore, would validate their being a representative of God on earth.

**God did not allow Satan to work miracles through false priests of Caesar worship in order to lead Christians to submit to the beast.** We do not serve a God that would cast a stumbling block before the saints at a time when they were under severe persecution, and thus, so vulnerable. **God does not allow Satan to have authority over the supernatural in order to work miracles before people.**

Only those who are deceived affirmed that **fire came down out of heaven.** *“Fire coming down out of heaven”* was a miraculous sign of the presence of God in the Old Testament (See Gn 15:17; Lv 9:24; Jg 13:20; 1 Kg 18). But here John uses the symbol, not to speak of something Roman religious leaders actually performed, but to show metaphorically the strength of deceptive power.

It was *“given him to do.”* God allowed the deceptions by not countering with true fire from heaven. The deceptive works were not true for such would have nullified all the miraculous work that the Holy Spirit had done through the early saints in order to *“confirm the word”* they preached (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4).

Roman religionists set up busts (images) of Caesar throughout the Empire in order to promote Caesar worship. These **images** were the symbol of Rome's false religion. Those who would not submit to Domitian's image were subject to the penalty of death.

## **Verse 15**

### **Living Power Of Rome**

*It was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would both speak and cause to be killed as many as would not worship the image of the beast.*

The fact that John is not talking about real miracles in verses 13-15 is seen in the imagery of this verse.

The **image** certainly did not become a living thing and literally begin to speak as a man. Naive interpreters who believe Roman religionists actually worked miracles are inconsistent if they do not continue the literality of their interpretation of verses 13 and 14 into verse 15. If real miracles are indicated in verses 13 and 14, then certainly the same would be true of verse 15. But who wants to take the position that these statue images of Caesar actually began to speak like men?

John's point with the "speaking image" figure is to show the intensity of belief in false religion by those who refuse to worship the one true God. In fact, if one believes that the images literally spoke, then he is the problem. He is the one who is deceived, and thus preaches that others also must believe in the "speaking images."

Many Jews and Christians did succumb to the heat of Roman persecution. They were intimidated by the common belief of those who affirmed that the Roman religionists were actually working the miracles of some god. They thus confessed Caesar as deity. Those faithful Christians who did not reverence "lord Caesar" as deity were persecuted unto death. The angel warned in Revelation 14:9,10,

*If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God ... he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (See Rv 16:2; 19:20; 20:4).*

We would think that Christians should be very careful when they start believing that false religionists can work real miracles. We must remember that God would not allow Satan to work miracles through false religions in order to entice Christians to believe false teachings. If He did, then all Christians would be confused as to who they should believe. If false prophets can work miracles, then we would be confused as to what is truth.

## Verses 16,17

### Mark Of The Beast

*And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bondservant, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell, except the one who has the mark or the name of the beast or the number of his name.*

Rome commissioned that all citizens give both political and religious allegiance to Rome. In this sense, Rome became to some extent a theocratic system of government. At least from the view point of the Roman priests, one had to submit to the religious laws of Rome in order to be true to Rome itself. The **mark** refers to those who would direct their worship toward Rome (See Rv 14:9; 20:4). The mark, or identification, was both psychological (on their **foreheads**) and physical (on their **hands**).

Domitian wanted total allegiance. He wanted the minds of the people. He also wanted an outward manifestation of allegiance. If one would not submit to confessing Caesar as lord, then he or she was subject to the fury of the Roman government.

There was a boycott against those who would not worship Rome. They would not be able to carry on the normal work of life in buying and selling goods.

## Verse 18

### Insufficiency Of Man

*Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding count the number of the beast, for it is the number of man. And his number is six hundred and sixty-six.*

John knows that the **number** in reference to the beast can be understood by his immediate readers. As verse 10 stated the end of the “sea beast” (Roman government), so verse 18 signals the end of the “earth beast” (imperial religion).

John identified the beast by the **number** of man. It is not the number of **a** man. The Greek indefinite



article does not need to be placed in the text before the word “man.” It is simply the “number of man.” The same phrase structure is used in Revelation 21:17 in reference to the measuring of the holy city “*according to the measure of man.*” The absence of the definite article does not signify a specific man. It means only that the calculation was according to man’s numbering rules.

The number is **666**. The most consistent interpretation is to maintain the figurative significance of the numbers as John used them throughout the visions. The number six was used by the Jews as a gematria **to signify that which was imperfect or incomplete**. It was also the number to signify that which is earthly.

A Hebrew method of communication through numbers was to use the number of letters in words or numbers themselves **to signify something other than the numbers**. The three sixes used together in a gematria in this text would possibly indicate that which is “triple” imperfect or incomplete. It is that which originates “out of the earth,” but tries to claim heavenly origin. However, it is found to be fake and incomplete. And so it is with Caesar worship and the whole system of Roman religion.

Roman government originated from the populations of the world. Roman emperor worship originated from arrogant Caesars who claimed to be deity. Both government and religion were earthly and totally insufficient. When it came to religion, the beasts had insufficient truth and were incomplete in being acceptable to God. The number 666 emphasizes their incompleteness. They were incomplete in reference to what God would require for acceptance.



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