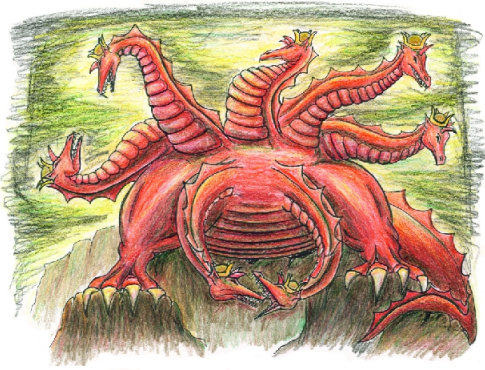


CHAPTER 13

In order to properly interpret chapter 13, we must first determine the symbolic meaning of a “beast” by using the Bible as our guide. In Daniel 7, the term “beast” is used symbolically in a manner similar to the way it is used in this chapter. Daniel sees a vision of four great beasts coming up out of the sea and, according to Dan. 7:16, he did not understand the meaning of the vision and asked to be told the interpretation. In Dan. 7:17, he was told that the four “beasts” were four kings that would arise out of the earth. Therefore, the symbolic meaning of “beast” is “king,” or more specifically “kingdom,” as will be discussed later. In Dan. 7:18, Daniel was told that the saints of God would take the kingdom and possess it forever. We know the kingdom that the saints possessed was the church. From Dan. 7:23 & 27, we learn that the saints possessed this kingdom during the time of the fourth beast. Daniel then asked if he might be told the meaning of the fourth beast because it was exceedingly dreadful (v. 19). Verse 23 defines this fourth beast as the fourth kingdom upon the earth. This was to be a worldwide kingdom because it says he “shall devour the whole earth.” The fourth worldwide kingdom to arise from the time of Daniel was the Roman Empire, and this was also when Christ established his kingdom, which will last forever. Daniel lived during the time of the Babylonian Empire. Persia and Greece followed, with Rome being the fourth. Therefore, the “beast” is a symbolic term used to represent governmental forces that rule in this world.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA

The first beast in chapter 13 rises up out of the sea and has seven heads and ten horns. As with many of the symbols in Revelation, there are several proposed interpretations of these seven heads, but there is only one that keeps the biblical meaning of the “beast” clearly intact. It states that these seven heads represent the seven worldwide kingdoms, which have existed throughout the



history of the world, namely Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Holy Roman Empire, which arose after the time of the writing of Revelation. Possibly many refuse to accept this interpretation because of the criticisms of false religion that are necessary if this interpretation is used; however, Coffman says he has reached this conclusion with “enthusiasm and confidence.”¹ The beast represents the forces of civil government that oppose God and his people, and the seven heads of this beast represent the seven governments, which have at one time controlled the major portion of the world. We might also add that since the number “7” represents divine completeness, the possibility of another worldwide kingdom arising must not be ruled out. But, we consider this unlikely because of the interpretation of the ten horns, which will be discussed later. Also, 17:11 states that an eighth beast does exist, which leads to the conclusion that these numbers have a numeric value as well as symbolic.

Since the number “7” symbolizes divine completeness, this indicates that all of these worldwide kingdoms have existed because God desired it. All we have to do to know

that this is true is read the account of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 4. In that chapter, both verses 25 and 32 state that God will give the kingdom of men to "whomsoever he will."

This interpretation is also in complete agreement with the symbolism used in Rev. 17. In 17:9, the seven heads are defined as seven mountains. In Jer. 51:24-25 & 29, a "mountain" is used symbolically to represent a strong nation or government that oppresses God's people. Significantly enough, the "mountain" in that passage represents Babylon, which is one of the seven governments that at one time controlled the world. Since we know the seven heads are seven mountains and that Babylon is represented as a "mountain," this interpretation is founded on biblical usages of these terms. (For more on this particular reasoning, see comments on 17:8, 9.)

One other fact about this beast is that it has ten horns. In 17:12, these ten horns are defined as ten kings, or kingdoms, that will arise after the seventh head of this beast has fallen. (See 17:10.) Since "10" is the number that stands for human completeness, this shows that many kingdoms will have power in the world during the time of the "10 kings." The beast, or the powers of civil government, will be made up of many different nations, and each will possess a portion of the worldwide power of civil government. (For more information, see comments on 17:12.)

The final destiny of this beast is given in 19:20. It will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH

The second beast described in chapter 13 is the beast out of the earth that has two horns. Since it is a beast, we immediately recognize that it represents the power of civil government. In addition to that, the beast had the power to force people to make an image to the beast and worship it (v. 15). Therefore, the beast controlled, not only the physical actions of man, but his spiritual worship also. This

is the meaning of the two horns. It was a twofold beast. It possessed civil powers and spiritual powers.

Because of these spiritual powers, this beast is also called a “false prophet” in 16:13 and 19:20. This shows that the beast was a false religious power and caused many people to worship in ways other than those designed by God. Rev. 19:20 also explains the final destiny of this false prophet. It, too, will be cast into the lake of fire.

The beast out of the earth is the healing of the beast that received the death wound as described in verse 3. The beast out of the sea represents the Roman Empire that was wounded to death. The Roman Empire was resurrected in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, which is represented by the beast out of the earth. This was the healing of the death wound. (See comments on 17:8.) We know this is correct because verse 12 says that the beast out of the earth exercised all the power of the first beast, the beast out of the sea, whose deadly wound was healed. The religious power of this beast was that of the apostate church, which eventually manifested itself in the form of Roman Catholicism. (There is much additional information concerning this interpretation in the text of this chapter.)

THE FIRST BEAST

Verse 1. And I stood upon the sand of the sea, 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.

As the vision begins, John is standing upon the sand of the sea watching a seven-headed beast rise up out of that sea. We should not try to determine which sea this was, or exactly where John was standing, because these symbols are figurative, not literal. Although we might not be able to determine with any absolute certainty the meaning of the sea, it probably represents the masses of people dwelling upon the earth as explained in 12:16. The seven-headed beast, as explained in the introduction, represents the civil governments that control the world. Therefore, this vision describes the governmental powers of the world, which rise

up to control the people of the world.

The seven-headed beast has ten horns and ten crowns representing the power and authority of these civil governments. The names of blasphemy were written upon the heads of the beast. This shows that many governments of the world are opposed to its citizens worshiping the true God and are hostile to the practice of Christianity. Some governments may attempt to destroy all forms of religion and even go so far as to attempt to break the bonds of the family.

Verse 2. And 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.

This beast out of the sea is described as being like a leopard; having the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. These are figurative descriptions of some of the characteristics of these ungodly civil governments. This shows that these governments possess great powers of destruction. Many governments throughout the history of the world have controlled their people by the use of physical force, violence, hardships, and persecutions. Many times these forces have been used to prevent God's people from worshiping him, or to demand that they worship according to laws established by man. Just because we live in a nation that offers freedom of religion, we should not lose sight of forces which exist in this world that seek to prohibit God's people from worshiping him.

The power that these governmental forces possess is from the dragon, or the devil. This is one of the manifestations of the devil present on the earth today. The devil uses these forces to attack the church and attempt to destroy it. As was stated in 12:17, the devil has gone out to "make war" against the church.

Verse 3. And 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.

This verse should virtually prove to the serious student of Revelation that the beast does not represent any one person or king. If the heads of this beast represented successive kings of the Roman Empire, then one of them would have died and later been resurrected to life again. For Christians, who believe the Bible, to accept an interpretation such as this is hard to fathom. Even so, many conservative commentators interpret the head that was slain as the Roman Emperor Nero, and they seek to find the answer to the resurrection spoken of in verse 3 in a Roman myth of that time, which promoted the idea that Nero would be resurrected. Again, to base an interpretation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ on a myth, which may not have even existed, is almost absurd. Obviously, we realize that Nero was not resurrected, and to base an interpretation on a myth such as this is simply an effort to make these symbols fit a situation, rather than seeking to determine what the symbols really mean.

The meaning of this symbolism lies in the fact that the Roman Empire was destroyed and resurrected again in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was destroyed in A.D. 476, and came back into power in the form of the Holy Roman Empire with the coronation of Charlemagne by Pope Leo III on Christmas Day, A.D. 800. This completed the alliance between the Roman government and the Papacy. For several hundred years to follow, these two powers worked together as they forced people to worship according to the edicts of the Pope. (See 13:15-17.) Those who would not submit were sought out, imprisoned, tortured, and even put to death. This cast the world into a period of time known as the Dark Ages. During this time, the Bible was chained to pulpits and only "priests" were allowed to read it. (For further information on this, consult articles on subjects such as the "Holy Roman Empire," "Papal Inquisition," "Spanish Inquisition," and the "Middle Ages.")

When the death wound of the Roman Empire was healed and it regained its powers in the form of the Holy Roman Empire, the world wondered after the beast. This would be

true because the vast majority of the world was directly under its control. Also, for a government as strong as the Roman Empire to fall and then rise again to regain its powers would be a feat the entire world would view with amazement.

Verse 4. And 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?

The dragon, which was defined in 12:9 as the devil, gave power unto this beast. Because of this, we recognize that the beast, or those governmental forces that oppose and persecute God's people, receives its powers from the devil. These forces are active in the world today as they make war against God's people, which is described in 12:17.

Notice that the people of the world are worshipping two things. They worship the beast and the devil, which gave power unto this beast. To worship this beast would be the same as worshipping the devil who provided the beast with its powers. As Christians we should be extremely careful to keep our priorities in order. We are members of God's kingdom first. We are subjects of our king in heaven – Christ Jesus our Lord. As Phil. 3:20 states, "Our conversation (citizenship) is in heaven;..." We must live in this world and be subject to the earthly powers that govern it, but we must also remember that many of the laws that governments bind upon their people originate with the devil.

This interpretation of this beast as being the Roman Empire reincarnated in the form of the Holy Roman Empire is strengthened by the fact that they worshiped this beast. The Holy Roman Empire thrived because it existed in conjunction with the apostate church, which devised laws for man to follow in his worship to God. This was totally against God's will and a perfect example of a government that received its power from the devil. The two questions that people asked at the end of this verse indicate that there was no force on earth that was equal to it. The Holy Roman

Empire possessed tremendous physical and spiritual powers over the people of the world.

Verse 5. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Out of the mouth of this beast came great speakings and blasphemies. This indicates that the governments in power upon this earth have the ability to speak, or do great things in the sight of men. Many times people are so overwhelmed by the powers possessed by worldly governments that they are fooled into thinking that these governments are the most powerful forces in existence. This leads many people to forget about God and put their trust in the earthly forces of men. (See v. 13-14.) Not only does this beast speak great things, he also speaks blasphemies. This would be only natural because their power comes from the devil. Many governments that exist in the world today seek to destroy all forms of religion because they see it as a threat to their own powers.

This beast was given power to exist forty-two months. This period of time represents the entire gospel age, just as it did in 11:2. The time period of “42 months” is used instead of “1,260 days,” or a time, times, and half a time, because it indicates a period of time when God’s people will suffer great hardships or persecutions. (See the introduction to chapter 12 for a discussion of the number 3½, which includes the symbolic forty-two months.)

Verse 6. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

This is a figurative expression indicating that these civil governments blaspheme God, his church, and all Christians.

In Old Testament times, the tabernacle was used by the Israelites as a place to perform their religious exercises. It contained the Holy of Holies, which was the dwelling place of God. Today, the church is a likeness to that tabernacle. It

is where we as Christians offer our worship to God. It is also the dwelling place of God as he dwells with his people here on earth. (See 21:3; 2Cor. 6:16.)

“Them that dwell in heaven” is a direct reference to Christians. This same symbolism is used in 12:12 to describe Christians as dwelling in God’s kingdom, the church. Eph. 1:3 and 2:6 describe Christians as dwelling in “heavenly places in Christ,” and we know that to be “in Christ” means to be in the church. Therefore, Christians symbolically dwell in heavenly places while here on earth. This is the place where God’s people dwell today and have their sins forgiven by the blood of Christ.

Therefore, the idea being conveyed by the symbolism in verse 6 is that the beast, or ungodly civil governments that draw their power from the devil, speak strong sayings against God, his church, and his people. They do everything within their power to destroy religion, or worship of any kind, so that they may have complete control of their populace, both body and soul.

Verse 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.

This is similar to 12:17, which speaks of the devil going forth to make war against God’s people. This beast (wicked governments) receives its power from Satan, which makes this one of the ways the devil goes about waging war against Christians. Many of God’s people throughout the history of the world have been tortured, persecuted, and even killed, or as this verse puts it, overcome by the powers of wicked, worldly governments. In many places throughout the world today, it is against civil law to worship God, or preach, or teach his Word in public.

Power was given to this beast over all kindreds and tongues and nations, indicating that, to a certain extent, all people of all ages are affected by these powers. Some may be directly affected by persecutions, and others may be more subtly affected by the blasphemies spoken against God and his people. As Coffman puts it, “This means that

there is no place on earth where sin does not dwell, no place where the authority of the beast is totally absent.”²

Verse 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.

The point of this verse is to show that Christians will not worship the beast. Only non-Christians will worship it. Non-Christians are described here as those whose names are not written in the book of life. According to 21:27, Christians have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life. All those who dwell upon the earth, except Christians, will worship the beast. They will obey his laws and be overtaken by his powers. They will hold in high esteem the great things that he speaks (v.5) and be a part of his blasphemies against God.

There seems to be some question in this verse as to whether the phrase “from the foundation of the world” modifies “the Lamb slain” or “the book of life.” Most commentators agree that the KJV is correct in making it modify “the Lamb slain” over the ASV, which has it modifying “the book of life.” The controversy seems to arise from 17:8, which has the same phrase modifying “the book of life.” Although it is true that God’s plan from the foundation of the world was to write those people’s names who are obedient to him in his book of life, it seems clear that the intent of verse 8 is to show that the book of life is owned by the Lamb. The book of life exists, and Christian’s names are written in it because Jesus was slain. Without his sacrifice, there would be no redemption for man (5:9; Rom. 3:25). However, Jesus did make the perfect sacrifice for us when he died on the cross and redeemed us to God. This was God’s plan “before the foundation of the world” (1Pet. 1:19-20). Therefore, from the very beginning of all things, the foundation of the world, it was God’s plan that Jesus would be “slain” so that people could have the opportunity to have their names written in “the book of life.”

Verse 9. If any man have an ear, let him hear.

This calls special attention to the words that follow. An expression similar to this was used at the end of each of the seven letters to the seven churches in chapters 2 and 3. It means that if any man has the ability to understand and the willingness to do so, he should give special attention to the thoughts that follow.

Verse 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.

This verse has been used by many to teach everything from the idea that it is wrong to defend the church with physical force to it being wrong for Christians to take up the sword in battle. Although these subjects are important and need much study and thought, we do not believe this verse refers to these matters. We must use the context of chapter 13 to determine its meaning. The war or conflict being discussed in this chapter is between the beast and Christians. Verse 7 says, "And it was given unto him (the beast) to make war with the saints,..." What type of captivity is this? Verse 8 says that "all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him," except Christians. To worship the beast would be to serve the devil who gives the beast his power (v. 2). Therefore, the captivity spoken of here refers to being captive to the devil by worshiping the beast. From this we see that the beast (the civil powers of man) are used by the devil to overcome people spiritually and make them captives unto himself. Those who lead people into the captivity of the devil will someday go into captivity themselves. This captivity must refer to the final captivity in hell with the devil and his angels. Therefore, verse 10 is telling us that those people who lead others into the captivity of the devil by teaching his sinful ways will eventually themselves be captive in the devil's hell.

This same logic applies to the killing with the sword. Those who kill or persecute Christians on this earth with the physical sword are doomed to an eternity in hell by the

spiritual sword, the gospel. This would be the “patience and the faith of the saints.” God may not immediately avenge the blood of saints, but eventually it will come to pass. (See 6:10.) If we keep the commandments of God, we will finally win that spiritual battle forever. We must be patient and have faith that God will keep his promise.

THE SECOND BEAST

Verse 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.

John sees a second beast coming up out of the earth. As discussed in 12:16, this “coming up out of the earth” presents the idea that this beast is born out of those people who practice false religion. This interpretation harmonizes with the overall meaning of this beast.

The second “beast” is similar to the first beast in that it possesses the powers of civil government. As explained in the introduction to chapter 13, this is the symbolic meaning of a “beast.” However, this beast also has the features of a “lamb.” The use of a lamb as a symbolic description immediately implies that this is also a religious beast because the “lamb” is often used as a symbol to describe Christ. This beast being “like a lamb” indicates that it only seemed to be religious, or it appeared to be like Christ. This appearance was used to deceive those upon the earth into worshiping him. (See v. 4.)

This beast also has two horns. In the Old Testament the “horn” is used to signify divisions of powers within a kingdom. In Dan. 7:24, ten horns symbolize ten kings, which arise in a kingdom. Therefore, the two horns of this beast indicate there are two divisions of power making up this one beast. This is exactly the situation that arose in the world after the fall of the Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire and the apostate church, which eventually became the Roman Catholic Church, joined forces to form a beast with a single purpose – to rule the world. The two horns then represent the two divisions of power of this beast

(Holy Roman Empire); (1) the civil power, which was headed by the Emperor of Rome, and (2) the religious power, which was headed by the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, this beast possesses great strength, both civil and religious, which it uses to war against the people of God. It should be noted that Christ was described as a lamb having seven horns (5:6). This teaches that even though great powers persecute Christians here on earth, the complete and final power is held by Christ Jesus our Lord.

This beast spake as a dragon. In 12:9, the dragon is used as a symbol to describe the devil. Also, the dragon has always been symbolic of a powerful force that is capable of destroying even the strongest people. This beast is like that. He speaks with powerful sayings, which are from the devil, and deceives many people.

Of all the interpretations that have been proposed as the meaning of this beast, none fit so precisely as does the apostate church, which grew into the system of Roman Catholicism and worked hand in hand with the civil powers of the Holy Roman Empire to rule the world. This beast hurled the world into the Dark Ages when only “priests” were allowed to read the Bible, and all men were forced to give their allegiance to the beast in both physical and spiritual matters.

Verse 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.

This religious beast (Holy Roman Empire) exercised all the powers of the beast that received the death wound but was healed (Roman Empire). The Roman Empire had fallen, or as stated in verse 3, was wounded to death. It had been “healed” or resurrected in the form of the Holy Roman Empire. The beast out of the earth (Holy Roman Empire) thereby obtained all the powers of “the first beast” (Roman Empire). By forcing all mankind to worship him, this religious beast caused “the earth and them which dwell

therein to worship the first beast.” This actually says that by worshiping this religious beast, people were worshiping the Holy Roman Empire, which was the Roman Empire resurrected.

Verse 13. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth In the sight of men,

This is a symbolic representation of the powers the religious beast claimed to possess. We should not view these as actual miracles but as great deceptions that the beast used to control many people. The fire from heaven indicates how persuasive these deceptions were. This beast performed things in the sight of men that were so amazing that they convinced the people his powers actually came from God. Verse 13 does not mean that the beast actually had the power to bring fire down from heaven, but he did have the ability to do those things that would deceive men into thinking he could perform such miracles.

Causing fire to come down from heaven brings to mind the great prophet Elijah who did bring fire from heaven by praying to God (1Kings 18:37-38). This may be the reason this particular symbolism is used to describe the deceptions of this beast. Elijah was a true and faithful prophet of God who actually performed this miracle. This beast is a “false prophet” (16:13; 19:20) who deceived many people by working great wonders in their sight.

Verse 14. And deceived 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.

These miracles, or wonders that seemed like miracles, were used to deceive men into making an image to the beast, which had the wound by the sword and did live (Roman Empire). To make an image means to make a representation, or copy, of something. Images are used in idol worship to represent the god that people are

worshipping. Verse 15 says that people were forced to worship this image of the Roman Empire. How did they make an image of the Roman Empire that people could be forced to worship? The answer to this lies in the fact that a religious structure was set up that patterned itself after the governmental organization of the Roman Empire. The structure of the Roman Catholic Church is an image of the Roman Empire. Just as the Emperor was the supreme authority in the Roman civil government, the Pope became the supreme authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He claimed infallibility here on earth with the authority to make laws dictating how people should worship God. This was a man-made organization that set up the Pope as head of the church here on earth. This is in direct contradiction to the Bible, which stipulates that elders are to rule the individual congregations of the Lord's church. This structure was an image of the Roman Empire, and it required people to worship this image even under the penalty of death if they refused (v. 15). Under this system, men were forced to worship the Pope who had set himself in the place of God as head of the church. This very situation was foretold by Paul in 2Thess. 2:3-4. In that passage, Paul stated that the time would come when a man would set himself as God in the temple (church) of God, professing to be God.

Verse 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.

“And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast” means that the civil powers of the Roman government had the power to make certain the “image of the beast” (the Roman Catholic Church) existed. The laws of the land were used to force the subjects of Rome to worship according to the edicts of Roman Catholicism. History records many accounts of people who were persecuted, tortured, and even killed because of their refusal to worship as directed by Rome. (For more

information, you can easily research the actions of the Medieval Inquisition, a tribunal set up by the Catholic Church to investigate and eliminate heresy.) The Catholic Church sought out “heretics” and turned them over to the civil government of Rome for punishment. In this manner, the civil government of Rome gave life unto the religious beast and caused many to worship the religious image of that government.

Verse 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:

To cause someone to receive a mark in his right hand or forehead means that this person owes all his works, thoughts, and allegiance to the one whose mark he wears. In this case, the mark indicated that all men of all walks of life, small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, were forced to give their allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church. They had no choice because civil law required that people worship according to the methods established by the Roman Catholic authorities. If they did not worship in this manner, they were considered heretics who were sought out and punished.

We must remember that this mark was not a literal mark that could actually be seen by others. It is a figurative way of indicating to whom one pledges himself; gives his allegiance to, or worships. This same type of symbolism is used in 14:1 to show that Christians belong to God because they have his name written in their foreheads. Christians do not have God’s name literally written in their foreheads, but they do commit their minds and will to him. They figuratively have God’s name written in their foreheads. When men render their labors and allegiance to anything, they figuratively wear that mark in their right hand and forehead.

Verse 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.

This beast was in control of practically everything in this world. If any man expected to function in business or work, he had to be in subjection to this beast. He had to wear the mark of the beast, his name, or the number of his name. All of these indicate that the man was in agreement with the beast and gave his allegiance to him. When one worshiped according to the directions of the beast, he could “buy and sell” without fear of reprisal from these religious or civil authorities.

UNDERSTANDING THE NUMBER “666”

Verse 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.

Verse 18 has been interpreted in many ways by many writers. This is not surprising because the phrase, “Here is wisdom,” seems to imply that the correct interpretation of this verse is not an easy one. It requires that we have an “understanding” of the symbols used in this book and apply this knowledge to the number of the beast in order to determine its proper meaning.

This number “666” is the number of the beast and also the number of a man. In trying to determine the meaning of “666,” many have used gematria, which is the assigning of a numerical value to certain letters of the alphabet. One common application of this is the use of Roman numerals, which have assigned numeric values. By taking the value of each letter in a person’s name and adding them together, you can obtain the total value for that name. Several names, and even offices people hold, have been suggested as the identity of this beast because the total value of the number of their name is “666.” Some of the more common proposals using this method are Nero, Lateinos (referring to the Roman Empire), Domitian, and even Hitler.

The problem that immediately becomes apparent with this method is that there are many possible answers. It soon becomes a matter of opinion as to which one we accept as

the correct interpretation. For this reason, we must reject this as the proper method of determining the identity of this beast.

We believe that an altogether different approach should be used to determine the meaning of the number “666.” First of all, we must realize this number is not given to identify the beast. We know the identity of the beast. This was explained in verses 11 through 17. This beast is that great religious power that united itself with the civil government of Rome to form the Holy Roman Empire. It later evolves into many different types of false religions that work closely with the governmental forces of this world in order to deceive many into following the ways of the devil. (See 17:5.)

If the number “666” is not used to identify the beast, then how is it used? Like most of the numbers in Revelation, it is descriptive. It is used to give certain information about this beast. We use numbers in a manner similar to this to a certain extent in our language. For example, some people believe specific numbers are lucky or unlucky for them. Also, we tend to associate the number “13” with someone who is superstitious or unlucky. Therefore, it becomes our task to “understand” what information is being given by associating this beast with the number “666.” As is the case with other numbers in Revelation, we believe the meaning of this number can be derived by examining how it is used in other passages in Revelation and applying that meaning to this passage. This also agrees with the message in this verse, which says we must have an “understanding” to be able to “count” the number of the beast. The “understanding” we must have may very well be an understanding of the entire book of Revelation, which we can use to determine the meaning of the number of the beast.

One objection, which might be offered to this method of determining the meaning of “666,” is that this is the only time this particular number is used in the entire book. This is true, but the number “6” is used in other passages and, interestingly enough, it is used three times. It is used in

each of the three series of seals, trumpets, and plagues to bring us to the end of all things, which would be the second coming of Christ. The seventh section in each of these three series then takes us into the time of Judgment, the final rewarding of God's people, and the final destruction of those who follow Satan. (See 11:18.) This enables us to take the meaning of the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth plague and learn what it means to have a number of "666." The sixth seal (6:12-17) teaches that at the second coming of Christ, all physical things of this earth will be destroyed. Those who have not obeyed God will seek to hide from him in any way possible to avoid his wrath. The sixth trumpet (9:13-21; 11:12-14) describes the terrible situation of those at Christ's second coming who are not spiritually-minded, or have not worshiped God. All those who claim to be spiritual, but worship according to man's laws, will be destroyed. The sixth plague (16:12-16) shows that God will gather all those together who have not been obedient to him into a place of unimaginable sorrow.

This enables us to conclude that the number "666" figuratively shows what will happen to the beast and his followers at the end of time. This beast will be completely destroyed at Christ's second coming. The physical powers of this beast will come to an end. There will be no powers in existence except God's. The spiritual nature of this beast will also be destroyed. The only people who have any spiritual hope at this time will be those who have trusted in Christ, not the beast. Finally, this beast will be brought before God in a very sorrowful state to receive his judgment and the final plague of God. This beast will be totally destroyed as described by the number "666."

This is the meaning of the number "666" when applied to the beast, but we must remember that it is also the number of a man. It will be the number of any man who puts his trust in something other than God. The powers of man have no meaning at all beyond our death or Christ's second coming. Therefore, we must put our hope in the almighty, eternal power of God in order to inherit eternal life. Let us continually strive to put our faith and trust in the Lord in

order to make certain that we do not wear the number “666.”

¹James Burton Coffman, *Commentary on Revelation* (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1979), p 293.

²*Ibid.*, p. 307.