

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Ron Roberts

Lesson Fifteen

CHAPTER 13

INTRODUCTION:

The actual account of Jesus' birth is found in the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke's gospels, but we witnessed His entry into the world symbolically in our previous lesson, Revelation 12. The dragon, hovering over the woman as she experienced the pains of childbirth, attempted to devour Him, but He was "*caught up to God*" and his mother "*fled into the wilderness.*"

Verses 10-12 of that same chapter celebrate Satan being foiled "*by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.*" The words "*the blood of the Lamb*" cause some to misunderstand this passage and assume Jesus' death was the reason for Satan's failure. When was Satan foiled? Just before and immediately after Jesus' birth, which most scholars believe to be around 4 BC and, with a careful reading of the gospel accounts regarding the shepherds in the field among other things, probably in the early spring instead of December. Regardless of when he was born, though, his blood was not shed for another 33 years. So, that can't be the reason for Satan's failure.

Verse 10 says: *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ``Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ...*" There is no salvation without the shedding of Jesus' blood, of course. The proclamation "*now is come salvation,*" uttered when the baby was safely delivered, seems to suggest that this heavenly host had been "holding their breath," so to speak, not because they doubted God's ability to overcome this dragon, but because they knew this was a very vulnerable moment and they recognized that, as of this moment, God's plan was set in motion: Jesus would bring salvation to the righteous with the shedding of His blood. He would prevail!

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We must be quick to acknowledge that this one failure did not discourage Satan so as to convince him to give up the fight! As the last verse of chapter 12 tells us *“the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”*

The hostility of the dragon toward the woman is obvious in this chapter, but in reality Satan’s hatred is directed toward ALL who stand on God’s side... And, as we will see in chapter 13, it goes far beyond that. The battle of chapter 12 was in the sky, but now the war comes to the earth. Satan has been thwarted, and cast into the earth – the abyss, that bottomless pit – with all his followers. Though he is allowed out of the abyss, his hands are tied, so to speak. He cannot directly force the righteous to do his will — God won’t allow him that— but nevertheless he has made it his goal to make war with the remnant of the woman’s seed and all others who believe the testimony of Jesus!

And so begins another stage in the ongoing warfare carried on by the devil against God and all the righteous. Let’s reset the earthly time frame we’re dealing with here. In chapter 12 it was from **before** the birth of Christ (*possibly way before*) until the establishment of the Kingdom of Christ (the church) and perhaps a little later. Now, in chapter 13, we revert back to the original time frame we are familiar with: from the establishment of the church to the end of the world. Obviously, you and I are alive in this time frame, so the things discussed in this lesson will sound very familiar to you because we deal with them daily.

Jesus has accomplished everything He was sent to earth to accomplish: He delivered His message, He became the sacrificial lamb for the sins of mankind, He established His kingdom both in Heaven and on earth (*the church*). The church which bears His name was established fifty days (*on the first Pentecost*) after His resurrection, 3000 souls added to the 12 at that time. In its early stages, the church grew quickly in number because it offered forgiveness of sin and an eternal home in heaven for the

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faithful -- it still does! But, I'm sure that with each soul added to the church, Satan's hostility burned stronger. Even though he is limited now in how he deals with people on earth (*no longer able to have demons take possession of a person's body, or physically bring harm to any individual to subvert them*) his aim has not changed. He still has a three point goal: first and foremost, to destroy the church! We already know he will not be successful in this endeavor, but his second goal is to entice as many as he can to leave the church and follow him. And, while going about the business of trying to accomplish goals one and two, he is also fighting hard to keep people he already controls from hearing the truth and obeying the gospel. With the limitations God has placed on him, there is really only one tool in his arsenal, but it is a powerful one: enticement. In this lesson we will see how he begins to manifest himself in changing forms while better organizing his followers to help him sway individuals away from the truth. He entices with suggestions, half-truths, and outright lies, all intended to help him carry on this mental warfare with the church. Carefully read the text and let the scenes form in your mind before we discuss them.

The First Beast: (Revelation 13:1 – 10)

“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. 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. 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. 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? 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. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his

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tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. 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. 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. If any man have an ear, let him hear. 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.”

The Second Beast: (Revelation 13:11 – 18)

“And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercised 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. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 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 causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: 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. 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.”

If you're familiar with Daniel's vision from the Old Testament (Daniel 7), you know that in it he saw four beasts. Let's be clear that the two beasts of Revelation 13

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have no connections to those. I don't deny some of the traits are similar. They all speak of a war with the saints of the most high, after which the saints possess the kingdom, but we must not forget that those four beasts in Daniel's vision were interpreted immediately afterwards and revealed to represent four physical Kings (kingdoms) that were to rise up after Belshazzar, king of Babylon.

Here, in Revelation 13, we are not dealing with multiple earthly kingdoms, but Satan himself. He is a cunning old dragon, and his determination to destroy the kingdom of Christ by making war with the woman (*those faithful to God before the church was established*) and her offspring (*the church Jesus established*) is relentless.

Notice how these 3 Bible versions begin chapter 13:

King James Version (KJV): “And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up...”

American Standard Version (ASV): “And he stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up”

International Standard Version (ISV): “I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns...”

The confusion comes from a dispute over the chapter division between chapters 12 and 13. Most scholars before the 16th century believe the statement from the ASV, “*And he stood upon the sand of the sea,*” is referring to the dragon, and should be included at the end of chapter 12 where he stood on the sand after being “cast down to earth.” In their view, chapter 13 should begin with John saying, “*I saw a beast...*” as it is presented in the ISV.

Later scholars believe the chapter division is correct as the KJV has it, and John is the one standing on the sand who sees the beast coming up out of the sea.

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A third group believes the chapter division is correct as is, but it is Satan who is standing on the sand, and he is calling the beast up from the sea, as the wording of the ASV seems to suggest.

Since initially there were no chapter and verse divisions, I'm not sure this is an argument worth having. We know John is the one writing, so when he says "***I saw...***" (*as he has often before*) we can rest assured it was he who saw the beast coming up out of the sea. I think we would all also agree that Satan is the one calling up the beasts from the abyss. It seems clear that John saw the first beast rise up from the sea because in verse 11 he says "***And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth...***"

After we discuss these creatures' descriptions, it's best not to continue to view them as individual beasts, but as a team working together to destroy the church. They each have distinct characteristics, but a very common goal and singular purpose: to work together relentlessly, led by the dragon, to lure as many people as possible away from the Truth.

John describes this first member of the "team" as "***a beast that rises up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns. On his horns are ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.***" He had a body like a leopard, but the feet of a bear. His mouth was like a lion and he drew his power from the dragon. One of his heads appeared to have been severely wounded – to the point of death – but had healed. There's lots of symbolism here. Let's discuss it:

He came up out of the sea... The sea, especially to the people of John's day, represents the place where storms originate. Strong fierce storms often come raging ashore to cause "instability and turmoil." Isaiah recorded, "***The wicked are like the troubled sea, for it cannot rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.***" (Isa. 57:20)

Having 7 heads and 10 horns... Do you recognize these traits from the original description of the dragon? There is a definite relationship between the two. The

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dragon, though, had the crowns on his seven heads whereas this beast had them on his ten horns. The symbolism from the seven heads is “perfect in the sense of completeness” and from the 10 horns is “power”. This beast has the full knowledge and the complete power of the dragon -- all directed against the church and Christianity!

Ten crowns sit upon his horns... The Greek word translated “crown” here is NOT the word “stefanos” meaning “victory”, but “diadem”, the crown of sovereignty -- just like the dragon’s. The dragon’s crowns were on his head: he is the one with the slyness and knowledge to know exactly what to use against us, and the wisdom of when best to use it. The beast’s crowns are on his horns: though also sly and cunning, he has the power to wound, to carry out whatever assignment the dragon gives him. He is the instrument of Satan.

Upon his heads the name of blasphemy... We recognize the term “*blasphemy*” to mean “*speak evil*” of or against, but I doubt that specific word was what was written across each of the seven foreheads. We are not told what was written, only the nature of the words out of his mouth – blasphemous! My guess is that whatever was actually written on his heads conveyed a total rejection of Divinity and the power of God – while the dragon exalted himself. John is showing us the powers working against us -- absolute irreverence toward God and all that is righteous. This beast possesses all the characteristics and qualities of the devil, and his determination is the same -- to use that power to his advantage.

His body was like a leopard... The leopard is known for his swiftness and cunningness. He is a blood-thirsty hunter.

His feet as the feet of a bear... The bear is noted for its crushing force and tenacity of purpose, with claws that are long and sharp.

His mouth as the mouth of a Lion... The lion denotes reign and rule, “The King of the Jungle,” so to speak. When he roars all other animals pay attention.

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And the dragon gave him his power, his seat, and great authority... The dragon is the source of this beast's power and authority, limited though it is by Jesus.

The animal symbols John uses paint a picture of a terrifying creature. Could any normal person stand against this beast and be victorious? Nevertheless, notice what John says in 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.*** In regard to the wound, there are multiple views held by the leading commentators.

By far the most popular one is that this verse refers to the death of Nero. Nero was a great persecutor of the Christians, and his death most certainly was met with great rejoicing among them. Immediately following his death, Rome was plunged into political chaos. In the space of about 13 months (68 to 69 AD) three men would lead Rome before each was brutally murdered: Galba, Otho and Vitellius. Afterwards, Vespasian ruled for about 10 years working to restore law and order and return Rome to its former glory as a military giant. The persecution of Christians greatly eased in this period until the rebellion of Judea forced Vespasian to send his son Titus there. In 70 AD Titus besieged the city of Jerusalem and ultimately destroyed the Temple. He became the next emperor, followed by Domitian, whom those commentators say was "the healing of the wound."

However, by looking ahead a bit and continuing to remind ourselves of the nature of apocalyptic writing, we can see why that cannot be the correct interpretation. This text is not referring to the literal seven rulers listed above because the beast did not have seven literal heads! The "seven" refers to its symbolic definition – full knowledge and the complete power to use the pleasures of worldliness against the church and Christianity! Therefore, we're not being told here that one of the seven heads is "harmed," leaving six others to function perfectly – but that for a period of time the beast was less than completely powerful.

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Notice verses 3 and 4: “... *and all the world wondered after the beast. 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?’*” Who was amazed at the healing of the wound, impressed to the point of following after the beast and worshipping him? The whole earth!

The term “whole earth” used here is not literally speaking of the “entire world.” Instead, it is speaking of the “worldly,” the unrighteous. Notice in verse 4 that “they” worshiped him. Who are “they?” Of course, it is the “whole earth” of verse 3, or as we said – the worldly.

Now... I don’t believe Domitian or any other Roman ruler would inspire this type of reaction among the people. Notice it is stated “*all the world wondered after the beast.*” No, it must be something else. Certainly, the Dragon (*the power behind the beast*) craves the worship of his followers, but much more than that, he wants to win the war with God! And I believe there is an event in history that fits perfectly with what is recorded in verses 3 and 4: **The resurrection of Jesus Christ!** On that Friday, when Jesus was hung on the cross of Calvary, the Dragon and his worldly followers thought they had won. This included most of the hierarchy of the Jews – especially the Pharisees. They believed that pesky blasphemer, that thorn in their side, who claimed to be the Son of God was about to die. And at about 3pm, He did. Shortly afterwards a man by the name of Joseph of Arimathaea laid the dead body of Christ in his tomb, and the world rejoiced because they were finally rid of him! Can you imagine the celebrations that must have taken place that evening, all while the faithful remnant was mourning what they thought was going to be a great loss.

But then, early on Sunday morning, (*on the third day as the Jews counted time*) He raised himself from that grave and for the next 40 days appeared to over 500 people before ascending to heaven to take his place at the right hand of God.

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This struck a tremendous blow to Satan and his followers – Jesus was indeed more powerful than the dragon! He Himself said back in chapter 1:18, ***“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”*** He had the power over hell and death. Furthermore, about 50 days after his resurrection, His apostles stood before that great assembly in Jerusalem on Pentecost, and the events of Acts 2 took place, establishing the church. By about 65 AD, only 30 some odd years later, the gospel had been preached throughout the entire world. The apostle Paul records in his letter to the Colossians (Col. 1:23), ***“If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven...”*** Christians were traveling around the world convincing folks of His claims! Instead of being rid of Him Satan must now contend with more and more of Jesus’ followers! Great strides were being made, and for a time it looked like the world would succumb to the church. But then the wound healed; and the dragon was not done.

How did the wound heal? That power came from those who worshipped the dragon, saying, ***“Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”*** Satan had failed earlier when he tried to tempt Christ in the wilderness, so he understood he would need to “pull out all the stops” to gain followers. And so he (*Satan - the dragon*) renews with vigor his war against Christ by delegating more authority to the beast. He promises worldly pleasures, wealth and influence to all those who heed him. The dragons’ followers are convinced that he has great power and they believe he will succeed in his war against those ***“who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”*** (Rev. 12:17ff) The beast was given ***“a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.”*** (Rev. 13:5) The clause “given unto him” is used twice in this verse and elsewhere. Let’s examine that power that was “given to him”.

The dragon, of course, is the source of the beasts' power. Remember how God gave Satan the power to deal with Job as he pleased (*except kill him*)? This same power was given to

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the dragon when Jesus gave him the key to the abyss after the fifth trumpet sounded. (Rev. 9:1) We might be puzzled as to why God would give Satan that kind of power, but we need to remember the importance and the value of having our faith tested! When God gave Satan the power to deal with Job, God knew that Job would remain faithful and would be rewarded many times over. The same can be said of our modern world: the faithful are being tried, but don't be misled – God isn't doing it. He is allowing Satan to do so because God knows His true, righteous, believers will not fall! Verse 5 tells us the beast had that power for ***“forty two months.”*** That is the “three and a half” we have seen before (*42 months = 3 ½ years*). You know what I'm about to say next: this is not talking about a specific period of time. How long will we be tested? Until the end of the world or we die, whichever comes first. These will be times that are “less than perfect.” But remember, the faithful are promised the reward of living with God in paradise – where all things are perfect – for eternity! Neither the beast nor the dragon can take our life as long as we remain true to God.

So what ***“great things” (tools)*** are given to the beast to entice us to move away from God and to worship Satan – the promise of things that appeal to our weaknesses. Satan knows what tempts each of us and finds ways to suggest that we can have (and should want) those very things – do you remember what the “old serpent” offered Eve? He apparently knew that her “tipping point” was a promise of wisdom & power. God had told them not to eat or even touch the fruit from the tree in the midst of the Garden or else they would die. The serpent said to Eve, ***“Ye shall not surely die, for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”*** (Genesis 3:4-5) The beast is spouting those same lies, deceit, and lame, empty promises because they are coming from the same source – that old Serpent!

In verse 5, we read that “blasphemies” come from the mouth of the beast. Every attempt he makes to attack the righteous and to belittle or depreciate the power of God, is blasphemy! And so, when in verse 6 he says ***“And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to***

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blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven,” this beast is essentially speaking evil of God, what God stands for, and His place of worship and all who worship Him. He cannot be trusted! His promises are hollow and those who give in will be on the wrong side on that last day. Notice verse 8 says, *“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.”* I want you to underline a part of this verse in your mind just as I have underlined it here so as not to forget it! Those who worship the beast... their **“names ARE NOT WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE...”** And now a quote from Revelation 20:15: *“Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”* That is the “second death” from which there is no escape! The promises of the world sound good! Spinning lies is what Satan does best. His job is to make war on this earth, but the saints must remember the words of that beloved song: *“This world is not my home.”* We are only sojourning here! If you have an ear, listen to the warnings. Don’t give in; don’t give up!

The expression “the Lamb’s book of life” is only found in two verses of the bible: One is Revelation 20 and the other is in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, 4:3. There, Paul says that those who “share in the struggle for the cause of the gospel” have their names in the book of life! When you “put on Christ” in baptism, you are “joining the struggle for the cause of the gospel” and your name is written into that book! Those who have not “put on Christ” will not find their names recorded there. There is also an implication in Paul’s letter: If we quit struggling for the cause of the gospel, then our names will be taken out of that book.

Now, let’s take a closer look at this first beast’s partner...

According to verse 11, this second beast is *“coming up out of the earth,”* instead of the sea. If the sea represents instability and turmoil, the earth represents the opposite: stability and order. This beast rises up from **“the settled, orderly society of man.”** This is subterfuge, though, because it isn’t what it appears to be! The dragon’s goal is to create a “universal appeal”

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if you will, for his enticements. By that I mean, whatever “tools of enticement” the first beast lacked, this second beast has them, and is perhaps doubly dangerous because he is able to hide his corrupt nature behind the appearance of a docile, harmless lamb as indicated in verse 11 where he is said to have ***“two horns like a lamb,”*** even though he ***“spoke as a dragon!”***

For many people, the “in your face” temptations of the world are easy to resist. They would say, “I don’t lie. I don’t steal. I am faithful to my spouse.” But this second beast seems to be responsible for the more subtle enticements of the world. It is said of him that he exercised ***“all the power of the beast before him,”*** which means his influence over men, even though less directly asserted, is equal to that of the first beast! We are going to see a little later that this beast is referred to as a “false prophet,” and Matthew records Jesus saying, ***“Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.”*** (Matt. 7:15) The apostle Paul wrote to Corinth that false prophets are, ***“deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.”*** (2 Cor. 11:12-15)

We are told in the remainder of this chapter that this second beast is able to do ***“great wonders”*** by making fire come down from heaven in the sight of men. He is able to deceive them that dwell on the earth, to the point where they make images of the first beast (*the one wounded, yet alive*), and worship them. He could even cause the image to speak, and to force people great and small to receive a mark in their right hand or their forehead. Under the spell of this second beast, no one could buy or sell without having that mark or the number of his name. **And that number is 666!**

We need to embrace the full significance of these two beasts and what they really are: a team working together to convince the world to follow Satan! Do you remember our discussion of the significance of the number two, and that it took two witnesses to convict? Well... these

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two beasts are working in harmony to do just that! There are two things that might cause us to reject the authority of God and turn to the world:

1. Enticements from without – the deceit of the Devil, the lure of the pleasures of the world, wealth, power, a life of comfort, and...
2. Enticements from within – when we manage to convince ourselves that seeking out those things the world values... is not wrong!

These beasts are not the literal beasts that we often see in pictures. They are nothing but the representation of a force that produces within us a motive to reject God and His Son! Yes, I understand that Satan holds a certain degree of power – but his power is subject to the will of God! He cannot tempt us beyond what we are able to resist. 1 Corinthians 10:13: *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.”* The sad truth is... many of us give in way too easily... and even more frighteningly, sometimes we don’t even recognize the temptation for what it is!

Back in Chapter 7 the faithful were “sealed”, each receiving a mark in their foreheads. It was not a literal mark, but represented the characteristics of Christian living. You have only to observe these people to know that they are “of God”. The “mark” spoken of in verse 16 is the counterpart of that. The beast imitates this “seal” by requiring that all that are in allegiance to him also have a mark. The symbolism of the “mark” comes from the Mosaic concept of placing the important things next to your forehead. We do that symbolically now by keeping what is important to the Christian – the word of God – foremost in our minds. However, giving “attention” to the beast makes us deceive ourselves into thinking that the wrong things – worldly things – are most important.

The “buying and selling” spoken of here isn’t literal, but uses the example of the goods needed in a time of famine (*like we discussed in the chapter concerning the seven seals*) to make

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a point about persecution. Anyone without the mark would be denied supplies, and wouldn't be able to feed his family, so Satan's enticement is..."unless you're one of us (*have the mark*), you will starve." Have you felt any pressure to conform to this politically correct world we live in – the 21st century? Unless you're one of us (accepting of a laundry list of things God has declared sinful), you're guilty of hate speech, and are banned from social media, shunned by friends and colleagues, viewed as backward and definitely expected to keep your mouth shut. It's a form of persecution only relieved by willingness to conform. That is Satan at work.

And then we come to the number of the beast. Revelation 13:18 is a verse that has caused much concern and discussion through the years: ***"Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six."*** The number "666" has come to mean many different things, most of them very bad! There have even been movies made about this number!

As you can imagine, a host of commentators have leapt into the fray, so to speak, with an attempt to explain what "666" might mean. Some have taken the phrase ***"for it is the number of a man"*** and tried to attach the meaning to a specific person. But as I have repeatedly warned: this is an apocryphal book not to be taken literally! Let's look at the symbolism for the number "666":

The number 7 symbolizes perfectness in the sense of completeness. We knew that. The number 6, therefore, falls just short of that completeness. Why is it repeated three times? The number 3 represents deity, the Godhead, and symbolizes completeness in the sense of enough. So, put these two pieces together: the number 6 repeated 3 times is telling us that anyone who strives to be God or equal to God... falls short! No one will ever be able to stand up against the true God of Heaven. All who try are doomed to failure and eternal defeat. Anyone who claims to be equal to God is nothing more than a sham or a con artist. This is the message of the second beast.

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How do we overcome self-deceit? With wisdom! Jesus warned His disciples that false prophets would arise and be able to show “great signs and wonders,” insomuch that they even would deceive the very elect. (Matt. 24:24) Remember how Pharaoh’s magicians in Exodus were able to trick him into believing they had the same powers as Moses?

There is an extremely good example of this in Acts 13:6-11.

“And when they had gone through the whole island unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesus; who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of understanding. The same called unto him Barnabas and Saul, and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn aside the proconsul from the faith. But Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fastened his eyes on him, and said, O full of all guile and all villany, thou son of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”

This “sorcerer” Elymas (Bar-Jesus) tried to stand against Paul and Barnabas with deceit and fake magical tricks. Paul recognized him for what he was – *“thou son of the devil, enemy of all righteousness”* – and called him out for it! We don’t have the abilities Paul had, but we can certainly pray for the wisdom to recognize lies, misleading innuendos, and deceit for what it is. Let’s not let ourselves be fooled by the trickery of the dragon through his two false teachers! The threat may not be blatant. But anything that attempts to lure us away from God, to convince us to live for the moment and seek earthly pleasure because...YOLO! (*you only live once* - a popular catchphrase) is from the devil. We plan to live forever.