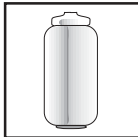


of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly" (v. 49), that is, of the Son of God who died for us and rose to glory.

Consequently, whatever ailments afflict us, we are to take comfort in the assurance that "our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also

eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able to subdue all things to himself" (Phil. 3:20,21, NKJV).



Prophecy, History and Archaeology

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The mark and number of the beast (1)

David Green

THE MEANINGS of the mark of the beast and its number (Rev. 13:16-18) are the subject of questions frequently asked in the mission field. To be able to give satisfactory answers it is necessary to keep in mind the New Testament context as well as the Old Testament background. The number 666 and the mark of the beast are associated in chapter 13 of the Apocalypse with certain beast symbols. These need to be interpreted first of all in order to establish the context of the references to the mark and the number.

The beast symbols of Revelation

The beasts are summarised as follows in the order of their appearance:

- 1 **The dragon** is first mentioned in chapter 12 and originally has seven crowned heads and ten horns (v. 3). In chapter 13 it is seen in vision giving power and authority and a throne to the next beast, which comes up out of the sea (v. 2). The next mention of the dragon is in 16:13.
- 2 **The sea beast** (13:1), like the dragon of chapter 12, has seven heads and ten horns, but this time it is the horns that are crowned and not the heads. This beast speaks blasphemies against God and persecutes His saints.
- 3 **The land beast** (13:11) supports the sea beast and also exercises the authority of the sea beast. This beast has two horns like a lamb but speaks like a dragon, and performs miracles and signs which deceive the earth's population.

- 4 **The image of the sea beast** (13:15) is given power by the land beast to live, speak and persecute those who fail to worship it. Its worshippers are forced by the land beast to receive a special mark.
- 5 **The scarlet beast** (17:3) has seven heads and ten horns, is ridden by the harlot woman and is destroyed by Christ (19:20) during the seventh vial period (16:19).

The meaning of the head and horn symbols

There is ample Scriptural evidence for the general meaning that underlies the use of beast symbols in prophecy. It is clear from the book of Daniel that this type of symbol refers to human kingdoms or empires, which trample, tear, and devour one another as they develop in power and strength (7:5,7,23; cf. 8:20,21).¹

The multiple heads are explained in the Apocalypse as being consecutive forms of government which rule an empire (17:10,11). This is fitting, since from a natural point of view the head contains the mind that rules and directs the body. It is the eyes and the ears in the head that receive the information that determines actions. Likewise the head contains the mouth that promulgates laws and issues commands to control the populace and guide the civil and military authorities.

1. For a more detailed treatment of the symbolism see "Symbols in Bible prophecy: beasts, heads and horns", *The Testimony*, Mar. 1998, pp. 88-92.

Multiple horns represent contemporary powers that contribute their strength to a beast empire (vv. 12,13; Dan. 7:24; 8:20) or alternatively arise from its break-up (Dan. 8:8,22).

With these general principles of interpretation in mind, it should be possible to identify the beasts of Revelation 13 and 17 by making use of the information provided in their descriptions and comparing that with the recorded history for the period indicated.

The Roman connection

Four pointers indicate that the series of beasts under consideration are connected with the Roman Empire:

- 1 The dragon, the sea beast and the scarlet beast all have seven heads. This connects them with the city of Rome and therefore with the Roman Empire. Concerning the scarlet beast described in Revelation 17 we are told: "This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman is seated" (v. 9, RSV). Many ancient Roman writers spoke of Rome being the city of the seven hills.² The inclusion of the seven hills within the city wall was celebrated in an annual festival called the Septimontium. In addition, a coin of Vespasian (c. A.D. 70) and a statue found at Corinth depict a woman, 'Roma', representing the city of Rome, seated on seven hills.³ Even *The Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledges the fact: "It is within the city of Rome, called the city of seven hills, that the entire area of Vatican State proper is now confined".⁴
- 2 In the next verse the seven heads are said to symbolise the seven successive forms of government for the empire that existed in the Apostle John's day. Clearly this was the Roman Empire: "There are seven kings, five have fallen, one is [that is, existed in John's day] and the other has not yet come" (v. 10, NKJV).
- 3 The dragon of chapter 12, the sea beast of chapter 13 and the scarlet beast of chapter 17 each have ten horns, so there is a clear connection with Daniel's fourth beast, which also had ten horns (7:19,20). Since this beast replaces the Grecian third beast, it must represent the Roman Empire. This Roman fourth beast persecutes the saints, as does the sea beast, and is to be destroyed and replaced by the Kingdom of God, as is the scarlet beast (vv. 21,26,27).
- 4 The ten horns referred to above also match the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image that

represent the divided state which would eventually develop in the Roman Empire, the fourth world empire counting from that of Babylon (2:40-44).

Setting the historical scene for Revelation 13

In Revelation 12 the dragon has seven crowned heads and ten horns that are uncrowned, teaching us that the prophecy related to a time when the Roman Empire was undivided. The vision in chapter 13 reveals a beast from the sea, which has ten horns that are crowned. This is a clear indication that the stage has been reached in history when the division of the Western Roman Empire has reached completion. There is now a series of independent kingdoms established in the West.

It should be noted that the number ten implies completeness rather than a precise number of ten parts or kingdoms arising from the break-up of the Western Roman Empire. This divided state of the Roman Empire came about through a series of barbarian invasions and reached completion about A.D. 476.⁵ Therefore the events symbolised by the series of beasts described in chapter 13 must occur after that date, whereas the events of chapter 12 refer to the prior period.

The history of the beast of the sea is set out in [Table 1](#) overleaf.

The beast from the earth

The Apostle John saw a second beast arise, this time from the earth. In Revelation 13:12 we read that this land beast was established in the "presence" of the sea beast (NKJV, RSV) and supported its pretensions. From this we conclude that we are dealing with the period in history when the papacy received military support from within Europe in place of the earlier support received from the dragon in the East.

In this period papal power increased not only by it being able to exercise increased spiritual

2. Six examples are given covering the approximate period 75 B.C.–A.D. 105 on pages 53-4 of *The Apocalypse—A Background Study*, Joseph Banta, 1985, Michigan, USA.

3. *Rome and Jerusalem*, p. 94, Graham Pearce, second edition, 1998, Christadelphian Scripture Study Service.

4. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Thomas Nelson, 1976, entry 'Rome'.

5. *The Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*, Colin McEvedy, p. 22.

Table 1 The history of the beast from the sea		
The dragon (ch. 12)	The dragon (ch. 13)	The sea beast (ch. 13)
7 crowned heads	Source of power and authority	7 heads
10 uncrowned horns		10 crowned horns
Scriptural details (Rev. 13:1-10)	Historical context	
v. 1. A beast rises out of the sea having seven heads and ten horns.	A new power arises in the Mediterranean arena of the Roman Empire. The ten horns mark it out as a phase of Daniel's ten-horned fourth beast that represented the Roman Empire (7:7). Daniel's fourth beast, like the three preceding beasts, was also seen rising out of the stormy waters of the great sea (vv. 2,3).	
v. 2. This beast has the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion.	These features are aspects of the three beast empires of Daniel that preceded that of Rome (7:4-6). Just as each empire devoured the preceding one, the Roman Empire came to incorporate aspects of the Babylonian, Medo-Persian and Grecian Empires. These wild beast features speak of power, speed, ferocity and strength, all of which were characteristics of the Roman Empire.	
v. 2. The dragon gives authority and power to the sea beast, so the dragon and sea beast must coexist as separate entities.	The Roman Empire has become divided into two parts, Eastern and Western. The dragon represents the Eastern part ruled by the emperor from Constantinople. He gives permission and military support to the civil and religious powers in the West.	
v. 1. The ten horns on the sea beast are crowned.	These represent a collection of relatively independent kingdoms in the West that arose from the barbarian invasions. They were completely developed by A.D. 476.	
v. 3. One of the heads was wounded to death.	This was the sixth head, representing the imperial rulership of John's day. It was replaced by the seventh head, representing the Gothic rule for the "short time" (Rev. 17:10, NKJV) of about sixty years, counting to the date of Justinian's first invasion of Italy in A.D. 536. ⁶	
v. 3. The wounded head was healed so that it came back to political life.	The armies of Justinian, the emperor of the East, invaded Italy and after a number of reversals of fortune freed Rome from Gothic control for the final time in A.D. 552. In this way imperial rule revived in the West, being exercised from Constantinople through a lieutenant residing at Ravenna to whom the pope was subject. This left a power vacuum in Rome that was filled by the pope.	
vv. 5,6. The revived head was given a mouth with which it spoke great things, and blasphemed God and His Name.	Justinian and then Phocas gave imperial support to the pope's ambitions to be 'Universal Bishop' and 'the head of all churches'. With its increase in religious authority the papacy made blasphemous claims to speak in the place of God and as the vicar of Jesus Christ. It also promulgated blasphemous doctrines and practices with its 'mouth'.	
vv. 5,7,10. The sea beast was given authority to make war on the saints for forty-two symbolic months.	On the day-for-a-year principle this time of persecution lasted for 1,260 years.	

(ecclesiastical) control but also by it gaining temporal (secular) control of an important area in Italy. When Pepin, king of the Franks, invaded Italy in A.D. 758 he granted three states⁷ to the pope, and this was later confirmed by his son Charlemagne, thus making the pope a true secular ruler.

The history of the beast of the earth is set out in [Table 2](#) opposite.

The image of the sea beast

We have already seen that a beast represents a human power that exercises military and civil control in the form of a kingdom or empire. The

Table 2 The history of the beast of the earth		
The dragon (ch. 13) in the East	The sea beast in the West Papal power (Rome)	The land beast giving support to the papacy
Scriptural details (Rev. 13:11-14)	Historical context	
v. 11. A beast coming up out of the earth.	A political power developing in the inland, central and northern parts of Europe.	
v. 11. Two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon.	The land beast was a dragon in sheep's clothing. It claimed to be Christian and holy but in reality was imperial, expansionist and unholy. The two aspects of its power were military and religious. The ecclesiastical aspect was exercised through the bishops headed up by the pope in Rome, so that the new empire represented by the land beast became known as the Holy Roman Empire.	
v. 12. Exercised all the power and authority of the sea beast "in its presence" (RSV).	This indicates a close tie between the sea beast and the land beast. The papacy in Rome, still part of the sea beast, was aided by the military might of the land beast, which forced the populations of conquered lands to convert to Christianity. At the same time, the papacy gave its ecclesiastical support to the land beast. This support by the pope reached a climax when he crowned Charlemagne with the imperial crown at Rome on 25 December 799 and declared him both Emperor and Augustus.	
v. 12. Caused everyone in the Roman earth to worship the sea beast.	Forced the non-Christian peoples of the area under its influence to be Christianised and to accept the overseership of the Bishop of Rome.	
vv. 13,14. Did great signs that deceived the people. Symbolic fire descended from heaven.	Pepin and his son Charlemagne achieved remarkable victories against all that opposed the papal power in Rome. Their opponents suffered destruction by the fires of war. Political miracles convinced everyone that their rulers had the support of divine authority. In addition there were the false miracles that were arranged by the religious leaders to draw worshippers to the many shrines of the Virgin Mary and the great multitude of saints. These were signs and lying wonders that caused the populace to be deluded and to believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:9-11).	

Greek word *eikōn*, translated 'image', "involves the two ideas of representation and manifestation".⁸ It follows that the formation of the image of the sea beast must represent the development in the West of a new power system that resembled the original imperial rule centred on Rome, which existed under the sixth head.

Historically this was fulfilled in the continued increase in the temporal and spiritual powers wielded by the pope until he assumed the position and authority of an emperor with kings as his vassals. The old Roman emperors were heads of the national religion as well as chief magistrates in civil matters, a position matched by that of the chief bishop of Roman Catholicism when the image of the sea beast was fully developed.

This image of the beast was formed with its power base in the small but significant territory of the states of the church situated in Italy, and having as its capital Rome, the city of the seven hills. However, at the height of its prestige the

papacy claimed and exerted spiritual authority over all the territories of the sea beast and the land beast, as well as its own secular territory. Not only that, but the pope also "claimed to dispose of, at will, all the lands and kingdoms of

6. Sicily was taken in A.D. 535 but the Ostrogoths were not completely destroyed until A.D. 563. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
7. These states were three kingdoms in Italy, one being the state of Rome. They were represented in Daniel's vision by three horns plucked up and replaced by a little horn (the papacy) speaking blasphemous or pompous words against the Most High (7:8,25, NKJV). By the fourteenth century the tiara worn by the pope was ornamented with three diadems or crowns to symbolise his temporal power over three kingdoms. This temporal power was eventually lost in the nineteenth century; the Vatican City in Rome is a smaller state granted to the papacy by Mussolini in 1930.
8. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, one-volume edition, 1964.

Table 3 The history of the image of the beast		
The sea beast	The land beast	The image of the sea beast
The Latin Kingdoms	Holy Roman Empire	Papal States and Rome
Western Europe	Central and Northern Europe	(Part of Italy)
Scriptural details (Rev. 13:14-17)	Historical context	
v. 14. The land beast causes the formation of an image of the sea beast in its healed sixth head manifestation.	The supportive actions of the Holy Roman emperors enabled the pope to build up political and secular power until he exercised supreme authority.	
v. 15. The image of the beast is given breath to speak, and the land beast causes those who do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.	The power of the Holy Roman Empire allowed the papacy to issue edicts and decrees that were backed up by force. Those that did not accept and support Catholicism were killed. It was a religious dictatorship under which papal edicts and decrees demanded the death of all unrepentant heretics, and this punishment was carried out by the secular authorities.	
v. 16. The land beast causes all parts of the population to receive a special mark on their right hand or forehead. This mark is called "the mark of the beast" in Revelation 16:2 and 19:20, and "the mark of his name" in 14:11.	It was usual practice for slaves, soldiers and religious devotees to be marked on forehead or hand as a sign of subjection, ownership or devotion. The universally used sign or mark with which the Papal power stamped its followers was the cross. All who accepted this mark were required to think (forehead) and work (right hand) for the good of Mother Church. The secular power of the land beast forced this mark on the whole population as a sign of subjection to the Church of Rome. Further information is given below in the section headed The mark of the beast .	
v. 17. Trading is limited to those with this mark.	Quite frequently authorities under papal influence have been ordered to prevent the faithful from practising commerce with heretics. In addition, spiritual trading (practising religion) has been limited to those ordained by Rome.	
vv. 17,18. In addition to the mark, the land beast has a name and a number	See later sections headed The name of the beast and The number of the beast in the next article.	

the earth".⁹ The image of the sea beast was fully developed in power and authority by the time of Pope Innocent III, A.D. 1198.

The history of the image of the beast is shown at Table 3 above.

The mark of the beast (v. 16)

An examination of the ancient inscriptions of various nations shows that crosses of many varieties were used in pre-Christian times.¹⁰ It has been suggested that this symbol originated from the letter *Tau*, the initial letter of the name of the Babylonian or Sumerian sun god Tammuz,¹¹ who gave his name to the fourth month of the Babylonian calendar, and who is mentioned in Ezekiel 8:14.

Apostate Christianity appears to have introduced the sign of the cross in the second century A.D. Tertullian of Carthage¹² wrote the following sometime between 195 and 220: "At every

fresh step and change of place, whenever we come in or go out, when we put on our sandals, or wash, or take our meals, or light our lamps; whether we are about to recline or to sit down, and whenever we begin a conversation, we impress upon *our forehead* the sign of the Cross".¹³ The following has been written of third-century Christians: "They supposed there was great efficacy in the sign of the cross against all sorts of evils, and particularly against the machination

9. *The Apocalypse and History*, p. 92. Boulton and Barker, The Christadelphian, 1949 edition.

10. *Babylon Mystery Religion*, pp. 49-55, Ralph Woodrow, 1966.

11. Vine, *op. cit.*, under heading 'Cross'.

12. Born circa 155-160 and converted to Christianity towards the end of the second century.

13. *De Corona Militis*, chapter iii.4. Quoted on pages 174-5 of *Catholic Belief*, F. D. Bruno, fifth edition, Burns and Oates, 1884.

of evil spirits; and therefore no one undertook anything of much moment without first crossing himself".¹⁴

The sign of the cross is frequently used during church services, especially when the Trinity is invoked. The Roman Catholic Church makes use of "this holy sign . . . in all the Sacraments".¹⁵ For example, when a priest is ordained, the bishop uses a holy oil called 'the oil of catechumens' to make the sign of the cross on his hands, which are held in the form of a cross.¹⁶ Again, on the occasion of confirmation the bishop anoints the forehead with 'chrism' in the form of a cross and recites the words, "I sign thee with the sign of the Cross . . .".¹⁷

The Church of England, a daughter church of Rome, also uses the sign of the cross, but to a lesser extent than the Roman Catholic Church. On the occasion of 'baptism' it is signed on the forehead of a child following the actual act of dipping in or pouring on water. At the same time the priest says: "We receive this child into the Congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him with the sign of the cross".¹⁸ A Church of England instruction manual comments that "the signing of the cross is retained as an old custom".¹⁹

In the past those who fought as soldiers of the church were called crusaders because they wore large crosses on their outer tunics and shields. The English word is derived from the Medieval Latin *cruciata*, meaning 'marked with a cross'. No doubt the crosses used by the Red Cross and on the English flag of St. George, the ensign of

the British Navy, are also derived from apostate Christianity.²⁰

The historical detail already mentioned shows that the Church of Rome adopted the mark or sign of the cross from paganism well before the image of the sea beast was given life. However, it was in that later period that the peoples of Europe were held most tightly under the thrall of Rome and so could be correctly described as being compelled to bear this mark. The subjects of the independent horn kingdoms of the West also readily accepted the mark of the cross, though it would not have been imposed on them as forcefully as it was for those living under the control of the Holy Roman Empire.

(To be concluded)

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14. *Ecclesiastical History*, Mosheim, p. 106, section 5.12, new edition edited by J. S. Reid, Ward Lock & Co, London.
 15. Bruno, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
 16. *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine*, p. 241, M. Sheehan, Gill & Son Ltd, Dublin, second edition, 1941. Compare *Eureka*, John Thomas, Vol. 4, Logos edition, p. 391.
 17. Sheehan, *ibid.*, p. 150. Chrism is a holy oil consisting of a mixture of olive oil and balsam that has been blessed by the bishop.
 18. *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments*, section entitled "Publick Baptism of Infants", Cambridge University Press.
 19. *The Catholic Faith: A manual for instruction for members of the Church of England*, p. 286, W. H. Griffith Thomas, Church Book Room Press, London, 1947.
 20. See also "The symbol of the cross", Trevor Maher, *The Testimony*, Oct. 2002, p. 365.