

Who Is The Beast Of Revelation? (#10)

Ezra 7:11-12

Revelation 19:19-20

Revelation 13:18

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Jesus Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) may allow His enemies to gain power and recognition in the eyes of the world before He destroys them, but He does so in order that their defeat might be even more conspicuous to the horror of God's enemies, to the joy of Christ's faithful witnesses, and to the glory of His power and might (Psalm 73:18). Thus, when the civil Beast of Revelation ascends in power, and when the nations wonder blindly after him, our hearts are not to be overcome with fear. But to the contrary, our hearts rejoice; for we are assured that Christ (as King of kings and Lord of lords) has set that civil Beast upon slippery places, in order to make his fall and doom one of the greatest splashes in all of history.

We have noted in past sermons that the first Beast of Revelation that has seven heads and ten horns is a symbol for the Revived Western Latin Roman Empire that began in 800, when Charlemagne was crowned Augustus and Emperor of the Roman Empire by Pope Leo III. Because a number of fellow Historicists have taken a different position and have rather identified the Beast of Revelation that is revived as the Roman Papacy, we considered the chief arguments that have been offered for this view, and then responded to those arguments. But there is one other position that I would like to mention, which gives specific identity to the Beast of Revelation, who utters blasphemies against God and wars against the saints in Revelation 13, and that is the position of Preterists, who identify the Beast of Revelation as Nero Caesar. Just as we presented the chief arguments of fellow Historicists, who believe the Beast is the Papacy (and then responded to those arguments), so likewise, we will now present the chief arguments of Preterists, who believe the Beast is Nero (and then respond to those arguments). Chiefly, there are two arguments that are usually offered to promote this position by Preterists: (1) The Number of the Beast (666) Identifies and Points to Nero (Revelation 13:18); and (2) Nero is Identified as the Sixth Persecuting Head of the Roman Beast (Revelation 17:10). We will focus upon the first argument this Lord's Day, and then conclude (God willing) with the second argument next Lord's Day.

I. The Number of the Beast (666) Identifies and Points to Nero (Revelation 13:18).

A. First, let us provide a quick summary as to what Preterism teaches as a system of eschatology. Preterism teaches that the Book of Revelation was either entirely fulfilled in 70 a.d. (Full Preterism) or mostly fulfilled in 70 a.d. (Partial Preterism).

1. **Full Preterism** denies the future bodily Second Coming of Christ and the bodily resurrection of the dead, stating that Christ's Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead were realized in 70 a.d. However, the Apostle Paul states that to deny the bodily resurrection of believers completely subverts the gospel (in 1 Corinthians 15).

2. **Partial Preterism** (though orthodox in regard to the substance of the gospel itself) takes one's prophetic eye off of the Beast of Revelation as manifested in Revived Western Roman Empire of Europe and off the Antichrist as manifested in the Roman Papacy, and rather takes one back to Nero (circa 68 a.d.) as fulfilling these prophetic enemies.

3. Dear ones, if our Protestant Reformers had been Preterists, who knows for sure what degree of reformation would have been achieved in forsaking the Harlot Church of Rome. For it was because

our Protestant Reformers were convinced that the Roman Papacy was the Antichrist and man of sin, who was leader of the prophesied apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4), and that the Roman Catholic Church was the Harlot Church (Revelation 17:5), that they knew they were not to seek reformation from within the Romish Church, but rather were to come out of her (Revelation 18:4). To say that it would have made no difference at all to the Protestant Reformation as to how they viewed the Papacy and the Church of Rome is to deny the testimony of our Protestant Reformers. And dear ones, Preterism at the present time likewise takes our eyes off of the civil Beast of Europe and off of the Papal Antichrist, just as it was designed to do by the Jesuit, Luis Alcasar, who systematized Preterism in his commentary on Revelation (in 1614). Preterism was and is a Romish decoy intended to turn attention away from the Papacy as Antichrist, and the Romish Church as the Harlot of Mystery Babylon.

B. Let us now consider the claims of Preterists in support of this argument that the number of the Beast (666) identifies and points to Nero.

1. **The first argument** used by Preterists in identifying the name that is associated with the number of the Beast (666) is to note that the Beast that rises from the sea (in Revelation 13:1), that has seven heads and ten horns (in Revelation 13:1), is identified with the civil Roman Empire (by comparing the Beast of Revelation with the fourth Beast of Daniel in Daniel 7:3-8). Note also that this fourth Beast of Daniel has ten horns (Daniel 7:7) as does the Beast in Revelation (Revelation 13:1), and that both Beasts arise from the sea (Daniel 7:3 and Revelation 13:1). There is a prophetic parallel between the fourth Beast of Daniel and the Beast of Revelation. Just as the fourth Beast of Daniel is the civil Kingdom of Rome, so likewise the Beast of Revelation is a continuation in prophetic history of the same fourth Beast of Daniel: namely, the civil Kingdom of Rome. Thus, when our text states in Revelation 13:18, "Let him that hath understanding count the number OF THE BEAST", the number 666 identifies in some way the Beast that rises from the sea and has seven heads and ten horns, which is the civil power of the Roman Empire.

a. As I respond to this **first argument** of Preterists, I begin with agreement that the Beast of Revelation that has seven heads and ten horns is indeed identified with the fourth Beast of Daniel that has ten horns, and that both of these Beasts represent the civil/political Roman Empire.

b. Thus, I agree that the name that is calculated by the number of the Beast (666) in Revelation 13:18 must reveal a name that is agreeable to the civil/political Roman Empire that is symbolized in Revelation 13:1 as having seven heads and ten horns.

2. **The second argument** for the Preterist in identifying the name that is associated with the number of the Beast (666) is to consider the blasphemous and persecuting nature of the Beast that has seven heads and ten horns (as related in Revelation 13:4-10). The Preterist explains that Nero solicited and received blasphemous titles and attributes of deity unto himself and was the first of the Roman Emperors to savagely persecute Christians (both Peter and Paul were executed, i.e. murdered during the reign of Nero). Nero also extended his bloody persecution against Christians for approximately 42 months. Thus, the Preterist argues that the description we find of this Beast in Revelation 13 fits well with what history reveals about Nero.

a. As I respond to **the second argument** of Preterists, here is where disagreement arises with their position. Although it is true that Nero exhibited the character of a beast in his blasphemy (by way of assuming the titles and prerogatives of God) and in his bloody persecution of faithful Christians, those bestial characteristics could be attributed to many rulers and/or kingdoms from the first century forward. Take one example of an Emperor subsequent to Nero, namely, Domitian (81-96 a.d.). While yet reigning, Domitian took the official title of "Lord and God", was offered sacrifices, and was known for his persecution of Christians. The Revived Roman Empire (subsequent to Charlemagne) in alliance with Roman Catholic Harlot blasphemously usurped the place of Christ as King of kings over the nations and became the persecuting machine and death squad for millions of faithful Christians over hundreds of years. Thus, the mere fact that

this Beast with the seven heads and ten horns is a blasphemous and persecuting power does not necessarily identify the Beast as Nero. A number of candidates throughout history have had the same bestial characteristics (particularly the Revived Western Latin Roman Empire of Europe).

b. As to the matter of the Beast having authority to rule and war against the saints for 42 prophetic months, this time period was specifically addressed in a few previous sermons in this series, where it was noted that the Holy Spirit Himself gives us the interpretive key to understanding such time periods in the Book of Revelation from certain Books of the Old Testament: Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6; and Daniel 9:24-27. In each of these cases (but particularly in the prophetic Books of Ezekiel and Daniel), the Spirit of God teaches us that one prophetic day equals one calendar year (The Scriptural Day-Year Principle). Thus, the 42 prophetic months in which the Beast with the seven heads and ten horns rules and wars against the saints is 42 months x 30 days per month = 1,260 prophetic days. And using the Biblical Day-Year Principle, 1,260 prophetic days = 1,260 calendar years. Thus, rather than this time period of 42 prophetic months pointing to the period of time in which Nero persecuted Christians, this time period of 42 prophetic months actually eliminates Nero as a possible consideration. For 42 prophetic months = 1,260 calendar years, which neither Nero, nor any single mortal ruler/tyrant could fulfill.

c. Not only does the length of Nero's reign fall far short of realizing that actual period of time in which the Beast has authority to war against the saints (namely, 1,260 actual years), but also Nero's reign does not even fall within the period of time in which the Beast with the seven heads and ten horns is noted to be ruling over the Roman Empire. In other words, there is no temporal connection between Nero's reign and the Beast's reign as depicted in Revelation 13. They do not overlap in time at all. In fact, there are hundreds of years that lapse between the reign of Nero and the reign of the Beast. Let us consider this point more carefully.

(1) First, the Beast with the seven heads is described by the Holy Spirit as having "ten horns, and upon his horns TEN CROWNS" (Revelation 13:1). These ten horns (as we have noted in previous sermons) represent ten kings/kingdoms that would divide the united Roman Empire (according to Daniel 2:40-43; Daniel 7:24).

(2) These same ten horns/kingdoms are mentioned in Revelation 17:12, but a very important interpretive statement is made there concerning these ten kingdoms: "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, WHICH HAVE RECEIVED NO KINGDOM AS YET." Thus, at the time that John penned the Book of Revelation by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these ten kingdoms had not yet obtained power to rule, and had not yet divided the united Roman Empire.

(3) However, when we consider the description of the Roman Beast in Revelation 13:1, the ten horns are wearing crowns, indicating that under this vision of the Beast with seven heads and ten horns (in Revelation 13:1), the ten kingdoms have obtained power to rule and have divided the united Roman Empire. Thus, the vision of the Beast with seven heads and ten crowned horns (in Revelation 13) takes us to a time period future to that of the Apostle John (Revelation 17:12) and future to that of Nero. Why? Because the Roman Empire was not divided by these ten kingdoms until the fifth and sixth centuries (hundreds of years after Nero), at which time the ten barbarian kingdoms swept over the Western Roman Empire like a flood.

(4) This division within the Roman Empire (of what is now Europe) was occasioned by the deluge of the following ten kingdoms: the **Heruli**, **Ostrogoths**, and **Lombards**, who occupied various parts of present Italy; the **Visigoths**, who occupied what is presently parts of Hungary, Austria, Croatia, and Serbia); the **Sueves**, who occupied what is presently Spain; the **Franks**, who occupied what is presently France; the **Burgundians**, who occupied what is presently parts of France; the **Anglo-Saxons**, who occupied what is presently Britain, the **Vandals**, who occupied what is presently parts of Italy and North Africa, and the **Alemanni**, who occupied what is presently Germany.

(5) The Provincial Governors of the Roman Empire at the time of Nero simply

cannot be the fulfillment of the ten kingdoms that divided the Roman Empire, for (1) these Provincial Governors were not divisive to the unity of the Roman Empire, but maintained and upheld the unity of the Roman Empire; and (2) there were not ten such Provincial Governors, but were 18 Provincial Governors (there were never simply ten Provincial Governors at the time of Nero's reign).

(6) Some Preterists realize they cannot find historical fulfillment for these ten horns among the Roman Governors and Provinces at the time in which Nero reigned, and so they have interpreted the number ten as a mere symbolic number rather than as a number that has historical fulfillment. However, the same Preterists want to interpret the seven heads upon the beast as seven literal heads (the sixth head they claim to be Nero in Revelation 17:10, which we will consider next Lord's Day). So the Beast according to these Preterists has seven literal heads and ten symbolic horns. Where's the consistency in that? Furthermore, the ten horns are not likely to be a symbolic number when in Daniel 7, three of them are said to be "plucked up by the roots" (Daniel 7:8), fallen (Daniel 7:20), and subdued or humbled (Daniel 7:24).

(7) Thus, the time period in history in which the ten crowned barbarian kingdoms divided the Western (or Latin) Roman Empire, spread throughout the Western (or Latin) Roman Empire, and eventually recognized the supremacy of the Emperors of the Western (or Latin) Roman Empire was not during the period in which Nero reigned, but was hundreds of years later, beginning in the fifth and sixth centuries and leading up to the Revived Western (or Latin) Roman Empire under Emperor Charlemagne in 800.

3. **The third argument** used by Preterists in identifying the name that is associated with the number of the Beast (666) is to consider that 666 is said to be "the number of A MAN" (Revelation 13:18). It is a well-established fact that most Ancient languages (such as Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) did not have a numerical system separate from the letters of the own alphabet. Various letters of their alphabet were given different numerical values as we see exhibited in Roman Numerals (I=1, V=5, X=10, L=50, C=100, D=500, M=1,000). And the same is true in the Greek language (alpha=1, beta=2 etc.). Interestingly, when the numerical value of the Hebrew letters used in the Hebrew spelling of the name, "Nero Caesar" (נֶרוֹן קֶסָר) i.e. NERON QESAR) are counted and added, they total exactly 666. Thus, Nero Caesar in Hebrew numerical letters is the number of a man that equals 666, and was an Emperor in the Roman Empire that blasphemously claimed the name of deity and fiercely persecuted the saints.

a. First, in reply to this argument that the name, Nero Caesar, in Hebrew equals 666 and is the number of a man, I respond that the actual number of the Beast (666) as it is written in Revelation 13:18 is recorded in Greek letters not Hebrew letters. The three Greek numerical letters in Revelation 13:18 are: chi—600, xi—60, stigma—6 = 666. I submit that it is far more likely that since the number of the Beast is recorded in Greek letters (chi, xi, stigma), that the name of the Beast is likewise in Greek letters rather than in Hebrew letters. Moreover, the Book of Revelation was originally written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Greek language and was sent to seven Greek-speaking Churches in Asia Minor. Thus, a Hebrew name with Hebrew letters is very unlikely what the Holy Spirit would have intended.

b. Second, in reply to this argument that the name, Nero Caesar, in Hebrew equals 666 and is the number of a man, I respond that there is a name that fits very well with the historical division of the Roman Empire by ten kingdoms, that is also the number of a man, that is the number of a name in Greek letters rather than in Hebrew letters, and that is of ancient origin (it was mentioned by Irenaeus in the second century, who was a student of Polycarp, who was a student of the Apostle John, as a probable solution): the Greek name LATEINOS, which means "Latin one", either referring to the Roman Empire as the Latin one or to a Latin man (LATINUS in Latin being the founder of Roman Kingdom). The Greek letters in the name LATEINOS equals the numerical value of 666: Lambda (L in English) is 30; Alpha (A in English) is 1; Tau (T in English) is 300; Epsilon (E in English) is 5; Iota (I in English) is 10; Nu (N in English) is 50; Omicron (O in English) is 70; and Sigma (S in English) is 200—which equals 666. The Western Roman Empire (with its capital in Rome) was the Latin branch of the Empire where the language of Latin predominated, whereas the Eastern Roman

Empire (with its capital in Constantinople) was the Greek branch of the Empire where the language of Greek predominated. And it was in the Western (or Latin) Roman Empire that the 10 barbarian kingdoms divided, spread, and took up their rule. Thus, I submit that the name and number of the Roman Beast in Revelation 13:18 is not likely Nero Caesar, but is much more likely LATEINOS. A much more detailed discussion of the number of the Beast is presented in a couple of the recent sermons.

c. Third, in reply to this argument that the name, Nero Caesar, in Hebrew equals 666 and is the number of a man, I respond that for nearly 1700 years no one in the Church was known or recorded (to the best of my knowledge) to offer Nero's name as the number of the beast (666). Moses Stuart (*Commentary on the Apocalypse*, pp. 457-458, 1845), himself a Preterist, identifies Professor Benary of Berlin (c. 1840) as the first recorded scholar to propose Nero Caesar (and particularly Nero Caesar in Hebrew letters) as the name of the beast. Although it is not impossible that the true meaning of the number of the beast (666) might be hidden from the whole Church until about 1840, it does seem very unlikely that such would be the case, especially when Nero Caesar is not known to have been even mentioned by any coming from the first century (prior to 70 a.d.) to whom (according to Preterists) the Book of Revelation was intended. According to the Preterists, those to whom the apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation were suppose to understand that Nero Caesar was intended by the number of the beast, and yet there is not a trace or even the mention of Nero Caesar as the name of the beast prior to about 1840. That seems remarkable to me.

B. Thus, I submit that there are very strong contextual and historical reasons why the Beast that has the seven head and ten horns is not Nero, and why the number of the Beast (666) is not likely to be Nero Caesar.

In conclusion and by way of application, the Beast of Revelation is characterized in Revelation 13 primarily by opening his mouth in blasphemy against the Lord and by making war against the saints in overcoming them. As the civil Beast usurps the rights and prerogatives of God, he makes himself out to be God and blasphemes God—that is treason against Christ, who is King of kings. As the civil Beast takes away the rights of God's people, he becomes a tyrant, and makes war against the saints by way of persecution. These acts by the civil Beast may not be seen by most people in the most obvious and conspicuous display of idolatry and tyranny (in which he is literally calling himself God and literally requiring people to bow down and worship him, or in which he is absolutely forbidding the worship of the one true living God revealed in Scripture, and torturing those who will not obey him); but dear ones, the civil Beast will use less conspicuous acts of treason against the Lord and less obvious displays of tyranny. But I assure you that the civil Beast yet practices his treason against God and his tyranny against God's people.

Many people in the United States are crying, "Tyranny, tyranny" over laws that legislate health care, education, and gun control (and I agree, these are examples of tyranny from an oppressive civil Beast). But dear ones, tyranny in depriving a nation of God-given rights found in God's Moral Law is simply the result of treason against Christ as King of kings. It is always the case that the civil Beast first usurps the place of Christ as supreme King of a nation by way of treason (through religious toleration and "equality", and getting rid of all religious "discrimination" in its Constitution), then the civil Beast applies its "equality" in all areas (reproductive rights through abortion, marital rights through same sex marriage, safety rights through gun restriction and confiscation etc.). First, there is treason against Christ, and then there is tyranny against man. Remove Christ as King and His royal Law found in Scripture as the supreme Law of the land (which is treason), then there is no barrier to tyranny and every form of abuse of God's institutions and God-given rights. Yes, Nero and other Emperors called themselves gods, but the civil Beast likewise does so in usurping the rights and prerogatives of Christ all of the time. Yes, Nero hunted Christians down and lit them up like torches to

light his garden, but Christians are persecuted by way of the toleration of false religion, covenant-breaking, Sabbath-breaking, abortion, no-fault divorces, adultery, same-sex “marriages” etc.

But dear ones, it is not only the Beast of Revelation that may practice treason against Christ and tyranny against man, your conscience may do the same thing. Your conscience may act as though it was lord and master of your life, rather than Christ (calling you to submit to it rather than submitting to Christ and His Word). And as a result, you may find yourself under the tyranny of an oppressive conscience that looks for different ways to find acceptance before God, and different ways to find relief from guilt. But dear ones, Christ through His death and resurrection has set us free from a treasonous and tyrannical conscience. We are no longer enslaved (WCF 20:1). He is our beloved King of kings.

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