

Revelation 13 PART 4



(Rev 13:1-10)

(DISCUSSED) 1. Preliminary Considerations 2. Support for the identity of the Beasts

CHAPTER 13 DEPICTS THE WRATH OF SATAN AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN THE 3 ½ YEARS OF EMPIRE WIDE PERSECUTION (July 64 – June 68) INSTIGATED BY THE JEWISH PRIESTHOOD (THE BEAST OF THE LAND) AND ENACTED BY ROME AND NERO (THE BEAST OF THE SEA).

3. Contextual Interpretation

(1) = Rome (the Beast corporately), the “city on seven hills” (17:9) and ruler (“diadems”) of the inhabited world which included 10 provinces: Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain, Germany.

(2) =Nero (the Beast individually), the demon-possessed Caesar at the time Revelation was written (A.D. 64) who according to his contemporaries was often called “a beast” (Apollonius of Tyana, 4 BC-AD 96)and used to dress up in their skins as part of a perverse game of sexual mutilation.

(3-4): Kenneth Gentry’s view = These verses refer to the suicidal death of Nero which threatens the collapse of the Roman Empire as a whole: “...with the death of Nero, the Julio-Claudian line of emperors perished from the earth. In other words, the Roman Empire’s founding family vanished from rule. The blood line that had given birth to, extended, stabilized, brought prosperity to, and had received worship from the Roman Empire was suddenly cut off forever.” The weakness of Gentry’s view = it is anachronistic in regard to: (1) his death and persecution of Christians (Nero dies- v3, which happened in June of AD 68, then we are told he is persecuting Christians- v5-7, which actually started in AD 64); (2) his death and his “good relationship” with the Jews (“the whole land”—i.e. the Jews/Israel worship the beast after Nero is dead-v3-4,(again AD 68) yet it is Nero who orders the full military campaign against the Jews in AD 67, which means worshippers of Rome was the last thing the Jews were by the time of his death!). Chilton’s view:(3a)“mortal wound” = an indication of Gen 3:15 fulfillment and the subsequent success of the Gospel through the Roman Empire (consider again Satan’s close relationship to Rome – v2 “to it (Rome/Nero) the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.”; also the fact that Daniel prophesied this would take place in the days of the Roman Empire – Dan 2:40-44; e.g. Col 1:5-6); “but its mortal wound was healed” = Though the Gospel and Christianity experienced huge success in the first century, it also suffered great loss to Satan (through his influence over the Roman Empire—i.e. world -1Jo 5:19) in the form of heresy and heavy persecution (2Ti 3:1-4:5, 10, 16; Act 20:29; 2Pe 2:1; Jud 1:3-4; 2Th 2:7-12; Mar 13:22); Rev 12:12,17). “The fact that he receives a head wound should make us think of the scene in the Garden of Eden, when God promised that Christ would come and crush the Dragon’s head. Daniel had prophesied that in the days of the Roman rulers, Christ’s Kingdom would crush the Satanic empires and replace them, filling the earth. Accordingly, apostolic testimony proclaimed that Christ’s kingdom had come, that the devil had been defeated, disarmed, and bound, and that all nations would begin to flow toward the mountain of the Lord’s House. Within the first generation, the Gospel spread rapidly around the world, to all the nations; churches sprang up everywhere, and members of Caesar’s own household came into the faith (Phi 4:22). In fact, Tiberius Caesar even formally requested that the Roman Senate officially acknowledge Christ’s divinity

*(Tertullian, Apology, chapter 5). For a time, therefore, it looked as if a coup were taking place: Christianity was in the ascendant, and soon would gain control. Satan's head had been crushed, and with it the Roman Empire had been wounded to death with the 'sword' of the Gospel (Rev 13:14). But then the tables were reversed. Although the Gospel had spread everywhere, so had heresy and apostasy; and under persecution by the Jews and the Roman State, great masses of Christians began falling away. The New Testament gives the definite impression that most of the churches fell apart and abandoned the faith; under Nero's persecution, the Church seemed to have been stamped out entirely. The Beast had received the head-wound, the wound unto death—yet it still lived. The reality, of course, was that Christ had defeated the Dragon and the Beast; but the implications of His victory still had to be worked out; the saints had to overcome, and take possession .” ; *This coincides with the “mandate” of the book – OVERCOME (2:7, 11, 17, 26, 3:5, 12, 21, 5:5, 17:14, 21:7—also 12:11); (3b- “the whole earth/land marveled as they followed the beast” -4) = As discussed in previous studies, the Jews (lit. “the whole land”—meaning Israel or the non-Christian Jews) were initially avid supporters of the Roman Empire and her emperors (Joh 19:15)—especially when it aided them in persecution and destruction of Christianity. They were in awe and worship of Nero for his decision to blame the fires of Rome on Christians and to make them the legal targets of torture throughout the empire (“Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”). They were also worshippers of Satan (“the dragon”) according to Jesus (Rev 2:9, 3:9; Joh 8:44).*

(5-7) “mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words...It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is those who dwell in heaven” = As also discussed in previous studies, Nero exalted himself to the place of deity and expected worship as such. In this he blasphemed the only true God (2Th 2:3-4); “It was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months...Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given to it over every tribe and people and language and nation = These statements are in reference to the 42 mos/3 ½ yrs of persecution (enacted by the Beast—Rome and Nero, Nov, 64-Jun, 68) against Christians. It also indicates that it was empire-wide (“every tribe...tongue...people...nation”) meaning there was no safe place in the empire for the follower of Christ (John was suffering due to Rome's persecution of Christians as he writes-Rev 1:9). “(Nero) attempted to abolish the name of Christian.” –Sulpicius Severus

(8) = This verse supports Paul's words in Romans 9:1-6. Though God would save his Jewish people (as He promised –Jer 31:37), not all in the “land” (“earth”) were His people (written in the “book of life”) as witnessed by their worship of the beast.

(9-10) = In light of what was coming, John's audience (the seven churches—as well as all Christians within the empire) needed this kind of admonition if they were to overcome (and remain faithful to the end)—especially those who would face imprisonment or even death—which is what was ordained for many (“If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain”—these words are reminiscent of similar language used in the OT by the prophets when speaking of what God had decreed for His people to face-e.g. Jer 15:2, 43:11). These words are also very similar to the writer of Hebrews who is dealing with the same historical situation (Heb 10:36-39).

“To all appearance, at Rome, the Christian Church was drowning in its own blood in Nero's reign. We must consider the feeling of the ordinary Christian—the man on the street, so to speak—and look at it from his point of view. In later persecutions men had got to know that the Church could survive the furious edicts of Rome. But that was just the doubt which presented itself to the mind of the average Christian man in Nero's time.” –James Ratton