

# Revelation

A Complete Commentary

William R. Newell



**BAKER BOOK HOUSE**

Grand Rapids, Michigan 49516

## IS THE FIRST BEAST "ANTICHRIST"?

That the first Beast is the Antichrist of Scripture, may appear from the following considerations:

1. In John 5:43, our Lord says, "I am come in my Father's name and ye receive me not: if another shall come *in his own name*, him ye will receive." (The Greek is "en to onomati to idio," which we almost might read, "in name peculiar to himself".) But the second beast of Revelation 13, comes to establish the name of the first. He (the second beast) "causeth all, . . . that there be given them a mark . . . that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, *even* the name of the Beast (the first beast) or the number of his name" (*Revelation 13:16, 17*).

2. In Revelation 16:13, the *trinity of hell* is named "the Dragon . . . the Beast . . . and the false Prophet"; as also in 19:20, "the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight." A prophet is one who speaks for another, coming in the name of another, as all know. How could this second beast of Revelation 13 fulfil John 5:43, if he comes in the name of the first Beast, and not in his own name?

Mr. Darby says (Coll. Writings, Prophetic Vol. 1, p. 306) "When the question as to power comes on, and *Antichrist* rises up *in his full form* against the Lamb, *he* is finally cast down, and put, *with the false prophet*, in the lake of fire, and *his* followers killed" (italics mine). Whatever question Mr. Darby ever had regarding the identity of Antichrist, his words here reveal that when he wrote them he counted Antichrist as the *first* Beast, and the second merely as his "prophet."

Proper interpretation must regard these two Beasts of Revelation 13 as two *men*. They are on the scene at the same time; both have fearful energies of evil; but the second does nothing independently of the first. We read, "he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight" (or presence). He also works wonderful "signs" which are done "in the sight" (presence) of the first Beast. The word means just what the same word

(*enopion*) means in John 20:30, where our Lord's miracles are said to have been wrought "in the presence" of His disciples,—emphasizing that fact!

3. Practically common consent regards "the man of sin" of II Thessalonians 2 as the Antichrist. But of him it is said, "he . . . opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." But this is the exact contrary of the actings of the second beast in Revelation 13:12, 14, who "maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed . . . saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived." The second beast is nothing but the "prophet" of the first Beast. Once admit (which we shall find we must do) that the first Beast is a man, and not any kind of a system, not even the Fourth Empire as such (*Revelation 13:18*) and we are driven to conclude that the first Beast of Revelation 13 is "the man of sin" of II Thessalonians 2—the "lawless one": for he owns no one but *himself*. He could not be described as leading the earth to worship *another*,—as does the false prophet, the second beast of Revelation 13. And exactly the same is true of "the king" of Daniel 11:36.

4. Some assert that the character of the second beast as the "false prophet" to the first Beast, is a later form of his evil energy; the first stage having been as an independent or at least distinct "king" rising in Palestine and fulfilling in that country such passages as Daniel 11:36—the wilful king; or II Thessalonians 2, "the man of sin"; and later bringing by deceit the Jewish nation who have received him as Christ to subjection to and worship of the civil power, of the first Beast, etc. But such an interpretation cannot fill the picture drawn in Revelation 13, even if we could conceive of the second beast ever doing anything in his own name. For the first Beast is immediately set before us in Revelation 13 as himself the great and direct religious blasphemer of those days.

"And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, them that dwell (tabernacle) in the heaven" (that is, especially, the Church which has at that time been raptured and is "tabernacled," after the first stage of Christ's coming, in the regions out of which Satan has been cast).

He makes also immediate and successful "war with the saints." Again, there is given him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation (including Palestine!); and still again, "all that dwell on the earth shall worship him"—except the elect of those days (*Revelation 13:6, 7, 8*).

Moreover, there is given him "authority to continue forty and two months," *i.e.*, the whole duration of the tribulation, the last half of Daniel's seventieth week.

Now where is there room in this scene for more than one being to "set himself forth as God," in "the temple of God" or anywhere else on earth? All prophecy crowds down stupendous issues into this brief and terrible period!

5. We know from Daniel 9:26, 27, that the last prince of the Roman Empire will make "a firm covenant" or treaty with the Jews in their land for seven years, and that "in the midst of the week," *i.e.*, after half the seven years are passed, he (this Roman prince) will "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." If there is at that time in Palestine an "Antichrist" setting himself forth as God, where does the fancied alliance between this king and this false Christ in Palestine come in, so that Revelation 13 can be fulfilled? There is *no hint* that the second beast of Revelation 13 ever has been anything other than subservient to, or "prophet" of, the first Beast! It is without question the first Beast, the last Roman emperor, who will fulfil Daniel 9:27, causing Jewish worship to cease, and becoming "the abomination that maketh desolate" by "standing where he ought not" (*Mark 13:14*), "in the holy place" (*Matthew 24:15*) *i.e.*, in the rebuilt Jewish temple at Jerusalem as seen in Revelation 13, where, (although not yet owned of God) with respect to the Gentiles the place will be "holy."

It is reliably reported that Dr. Theodore Herzl, the great organizer of Zionism, in his zeal to secure a national home in Palestine for Israel, not only appealed to the Pope for help, but to the Sultan Abdul Hamid of Turkey ("Abdul the Damned"), even telling the latter that if he would let the Jews have Palestine, they would adopt him as their promised Messiah.

If we compare the history of the first Beast as seen in Revelation 13 with the career of the wilful king of Daniel 11:36 and "the man of sin" of II Thessalonians 2, we find complete simplicity and accord, the second beast of Revelation 13 coming in merely as what he is called—a *prophet* of the first. But if we undertake to name the second beast a mere Jewish Antichrist, deceiving that nation finally into worship of the "civil power," the Roman ruler, we cannot claim either II Thessalonians 2 or Daniel 11 as referring to him, because these passages set forth one operating "in his own name," in *resistless power*, and in self-deification.

6. The condition of the Jewish nation in the last days must be considered. First, they will say, "we (will be) like all the nations" (I Samuel 8:20). Second, they will be possessed of tremendous treasure in which they are trusting to "redeem them,"—to buy them independent political status. Third, they will have established their own worship in their own temple, with daily sacrifices, offerings, etc. Fourth, there will be a godly remnant living in Jerusalem and Palestine—though the mass of the nation will be apostate—who will sustain the fear of Jehovah, and His worship. Fifth, this worship will be interrupted by intrusion from without (according to Daniel 9:27), by a power in which the majority of the nation have a frightful confidence, according to Isaiah 28:15: "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol are we at agreement . . . We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves." This can be nothing else than a conscious and intelligent recognition of the source and nature of the first Beast; for he is "the beast that cometh up out of the abyss." He

will be a spirit from the lost world who will be allowed to come back on earth for Satan's purposes. Indeed, he will be one of the seven former emperors of Rome, according to Revelation 17:8, 10, 11. Here, then, is Jewish worship suddenly interrupted, not by a Christ who has arisen among them, but by the last prince of the Roman Empire (Daniel 9:27) who, as we shall find in studying Revelation 13 and 17, is Satan's counterpart and counterfeit of the risen Christ, having been "slain (margin Greek) unto death" and his "death-stroke was healed" (Revelation 13:3) to the amazement of the world. It will not do to call this "death-stroke" the fall of the Roman Empire.

7. We should remember also that Satan offered Christ "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matthew 4:8), if He would worship him. Our Lord refused, but another will accept, and receive these kingdoms (Revelation 13:7, 8).

But this is the first Beast and not the second! Our Lord Jesus Christ, we know, will finally take over the kingdoms of this world. "All kings shall fall down before him; all nations shall serve him" (Psalm 72:11). What else but a king was Christ to be? "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king, then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest it, because I am a king (margin Greek). To this end have I been born."

Consequently, we see in Revelation 19:19, "the beast and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat upon the horse, and against his army." What is this but Antichrist? It is the awful climax of intelligent opposition to the Lamb: "These (the ten kings and the beast) shall war against the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them, for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings" (Revelation 17:14).

So that Mr. Darby's words quoted under point 2, express the exact truth!

To call the Antichrist merely an ecclesiastical deceiver of the Jewish nation, is not to fill the scripture account of this monstrous being, who sets himself above

all that is called God,—to whom the second beast is merely the “false prophet that wrought the signs in his sight” (Revelation 19:20). This “prophet” is always at the Beast’s side,—working in his presence.

8. The voice of history and tradition calls to us that the Antichrist and the last Roman emperor are to be identical. Victorinus, voicing an impression that was very common in early Christian centuries, says, “Nero will be raised from the dead, appear again at Rome and persecute the Church once more, and finally be destroyed by the Messiah.” Augustine first mentioned this idea concerning Nero. Even Tacitus, the Roman historian, spoke of many believing rumors about Nero’s possible return (Hist. II. 8; 1, 2). Sulpicius Severus said, “It is current opinion of many that he (Nero) is yet to come as Antichrist.” Note carefully, we are not insisting at all that Nero will be the Antichrist, but that the early Christians believed that a Roman imperial persecutor, possibly Nero, would be the Antichrist.

9. We are distinctly told in II Thessalonians 2 that “the man of sin” will be brought to nought by “the forthshining of our Lord’s arrival” (*Rotherham’s Translation, II Thessalonians 2:8*). The Greek words are, “*te epiphaneia tes parousias autou*.” Our Lord’s coming (parousia) opens with the rapture of the Church.\*

Note the exact meaning of the word in Philippians 2:12, “As ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence (*parousia*) only, but now much more in my absence (*apousia*).” Now, we know from Revelation 19:20, 21, that it will be at our Lord’s manifestation as described in Revelation 19:11-16, that this last World emperor will be brought to nought. Indeed, the lake of fire, long prepared, is at that time, according to Isaiah 30:33, to be “made ready” for him!

We are compelled, therefore, to view the future as filled with *one* great figure; although, as we shall see, the

\*We believe this occurs in *time* at Revelation 4:1, where Church testimony ends. It is *Christ*, in connection with His *ruling the nations*, who is the man child of Revelation 12:5 and His ascension is viewed there *only in connection with His rulership*, and not as to its date in history.

second beast will be “exercising all the authority of the first beast in his sight”; he is the active agent by means of Satanic signs and wonders, (done where the first Beast is,) in turning the worship of the earth to the man whose name is set forth by those numerals that express all that man in himself can be, or do, energized by Satan—“Six hundred and sixty and six.” We feel that the first Beast must be called the Antichrist.\*

In brief review, we find Revelation 13 to reveal:

1. As to Satan:

- (a) His hatred toward God and toward His saints.
- (b) His peculiar rage at being cast from heaven to earth.

(c) His deadly ambition to be worshipped as God.

(d) His copying God’s plan: of a “Christ,” or one fully empowered, under his control, through whom to work; and then of an agent or “prophet” of that false Christ, who will carry directly into effect the Satanic program; and of astonishing miraculous energy to accredit before the world his system and himself. (All this God calls “the lie” in II Thessalonians 2:11—Greek.)

2. As to Man:

(a) Man’s willingness to lose his own soul to gain the whole world (as do these “beasts,” who are human beings).

(b) Man’s desire, from the fall onward, to “be as gods.”

(c) The finale of man’s refusing to “have God in his knowledge,” and his turning to the “likeness of an image of corruptible man” (Romans 1).

(d) The development by man to the full of that final form of economic life, godless international commercialism, by which man falls into Satan’s steel-trap: they can “neither buy nor sell,” except they have the beast’s (that is, Satan’s) mark.

\*We desire to commend the three lectures of Joseph Seiss on Revelation 13, as found in the second volume of his, “Lectures on the Apocalypse.”

On Revelation 12 we cannot agree with Seiss that the Woman is “the Church of all the ages”; but his chapters on the Antichrist, Revelation 13, are spiritual, masterly, and very edifying indeed.