

The Beasts

A Series on the Function of Revelation's Interludes: Part 3

After the seventh trumpet has sounded and before the bowls are dispensed, the apostle John continues with prophecies from the little scroll and begins by describing two signs. God uses signs as a way to globally signal time (Gen 1:14), or to specifically warn of an individual (Gen 4:15), or to commemorate an agreement (Gen 9:12-17). The signs appear to be intentional for John.

Described as "a great sign... in heaven," the first sign is of a Woman clothed with the sun, moon under her feet, and wearing a crown with twelve stars, and she is pregnant with Child. Very similar to Joseph's dream related to his brothers (Gen 37:9) and as the recipient of his father Israel's blessings (Gen 49:22-26), the sign of the Woman appears to symbolize the nation of Israel, those who are God's own possession, and the twelve stars appear to represent the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 12:1).

God's people are the object of God's covenant relationship. To Abraham and his descendants, God made unilateral and unconditional promises, and He was committed to fulfilling His promises as a faithful husband would in a marriage commitment.

Among the promises that God made, the most significant was the promise of a savior (Gen 2:12) and, elaborated in the Davidic Covenant, as King (2 Sam 7:12). While the gospel account is of Mary who is pregnant with Jesus (Luke 1:31-33), John's Revelation account is of Jesus being born from the nation of Israel.

The Child symbolizes Jesus Christ as He is identified as the one "who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev 12:5; 19:15-16).

The second sign is the Red Dragon with seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3). This figure of speech is explicitly identified as Satan (Rev 12:9); however, the significance of his seven heads and ten horns are unfathomable.

With the impending birth of Jesus, the apostle John's imagery of Satan's tail sweeping "away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (Rev 12:4) suggests that 1/3 of God's angels fell to follow Satan for the purpose of killing the coming Savior-King. Consistent with this view are the gospel accounts of frequent encounters with Satan and evil spirits and ultimately Jesus' death by crucifixion.

The apostle John's prophecy does not mention the death of Jesus. Following His birth, the apostle instead speaks of the Child being "caught up to God and to His throne" (Rev 12:5) which appears to be a reference to Jesus' ascension to heaven (John 20:17; Acts 1:9-11).

Imagery notwithstanding, there can be considerable confusion in the sequence of events here.

There are two instances of the woman being nourished for 3-1/2 years:

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. (Rev 12:6)

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. (Rev 12:14-16)

This restatement is a Hebrew literary style in which the essential elements of an account are repeated with some variation and introduces more specific information to emphasize or focus on the relevant elements of the account.

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Jesus' death and resurrection establishes His authority as Judge (Rev 12:10), which empowers the angel Michael and his angels to disbar Satan and his fallen evil angels' residence in heaven (Rev 12:7-9). Observe carefully that this war of angels did not result in any angelic death; instead, Satan and his fallen angels are "thrown down" to earth.

Jesus' death and resurrection also empowers Believers. The voice from heaven appears to be a heavenly saint of authority referring to tribulation saints, because he speaks of Satan as "the accuser of our brethren" and overcoming Satan by "the blood of the Lamb" and "the word of their testimony" regardless of their personal safety (Rev 12:10-11). The ejection of Satan, the deceitful accuser before God, physically from heaven is cause for rejoicing in heaven but a woe for earth, because Satan knows that Jesus Christ will render judgment soon (Rev 12:12; 1 John 3:8).

The imagery continues with Satan and his fallen angels, now confined to earth, bent on persecuting Believers (Rev 12:13). But through God's provision of "eagle wings", many have fled "into the wilderness from the presence of the serpent" for a period of 3-1/2 years (Rev 12:14).

As followers of Jesus Christ the Child, Believers are seen figuratively as the Woman's children, which he defines as those "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev 12:17).

The apostle John prophesy of Satan producing a flood to harm Believers (Rev 12:15-16) is difficult to understand, because it is not clear if this should be taken literally as a flood of water or a figure of speech as an overwhelming adverse event. In either case, it is a future event that has yet to occur.

Daniel, in contrast to the apostle John, uses the term "flood" as a metaphor. Instead of an event, Daniel uses "with a flood" to convey a sense of speed that events will unfold:

... And its end will come with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Dan 9:26-27).

The apostle John appears to introduce the Beast from the Sea after the "flood." In the prophet Daniel's reporting, the events of the end will occur very quickly and overwhelmingly as a "flood." And Jesus indicates that when the abomination of desolation stands in the Holy Place, the great tribulation will commence (Matt 24:15-25; Mark 13:14-20).

In light of this historical view, why is this interlude here and not earlier when the account may be chronologically easier to understand? This third interlude appears to provide some chronological context to Revelation by picking up with Daniel's 69th week (see the article: How does Daniel's 70th week correspond to Revelation? at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/12End/DanielRevelation.aspx) and its location serves two purposes:

1. It provides a sense of what is happening to Believers during the first 3-1/2 years of Daniel's 70th week.
2. It introduces the Antichrist and ushers in his reign.

The final two personal beings that the apostle John speaks of are the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Earth. The Beast from the Sea is described in the following manner:

An unfamiliar animal with seven heads with blasphemous names written on them and a total of ten horns each with a jeweled crown (Rev 13:1). The animal looked "like a leopard, with feet like those of a bear, and a mouth like that of a lion." And Satan enabled this Beast of the Sea to have political and military power (Rev 13:2).

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Daniel has two visions about the fourth Gentile kingdom before the Divine Kingdom. In his first vision (Dan 2:40-43), Daniel describes some general characteristics of this kingdom: it will be militarily powerful (Dan 2:40) but somewhat divided and not uniformly united (Dan 2:33, 41-43). While Daniel's prophecy indicates that the fourth Gentile kingdom continuously succeeds the third (Greece), the apostle John's prophecy is focused more on the last king of the fourth Gentile kingdom.

In his second vision, Daniel's prophecy is more like the apostle John's:

It was an unfamiliar beast from the sea that was "dreadful and terrifying," and it was "extremely strong" with "large iron teeth" that "devoured and crushed" and "trampled down" with "its feet" (Dan 7:7).

It had ten horns. (Dan 7:8).

An angel interprets the fourth beast as "the fourth kingdom on earth," "different from all other kingdoms," "devour the whole earth," and "crush it" (Dan 7:23).

Because the apostle John's Beast from the Sea shares some physical similarities with Daniel's description of the fourth Gentile kingdom, it implies a possible association and relationship.

One of the most significant attributes of the Beast from the Sea is the apostle's description of one of the seven heads with a "fatal wound" that "healed," which establishes the Beast of the Sea as a supernatural being worthy of worship (Rev 13:3-4). Paired with this is Satan's portrayal as the one who gives "power (including supernatural), a throne, and great authority" (Rev 13:2), which was only possible if God allowed Satan to do so.

This observation is important to note as Nebuchadnezzar learns from his dream and Daniel's interpretation (Dan 4:24-25). The apostle Paul refers to this in his epistle to the Thessalonians, as God "restrains" Satan directly, Satan is unable to empower the Beast of the Sea and, in effect, Satan "restrains" the emergence of the Beast.

Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. (2 Thess 2:3-10)

The apostle John also reveals that Satan gave the Beast of the Sea a mouth to speak "arrogant words with blasphemies against God" (Rev 13:5-6).

Daniel prophesied of a similar individual:

It had ten horns. An additional horn emerged, small at first, but removed three existing horns by pulling them "out by the roots." Unlike the other horns, this one was personified with eyes "like the eyes of man and a mouth uttering great boasts" (Dan 7:8).

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The idea that the Beast from the Sea is the "Antichrist" comes from the apostle John's epistles. He defines antichrist as one who deceives and denies God the Father and / or His Son Jesus Christ. The apostle John's definition applies to anyone; however, the Antichrist is applied to one individual who comes in "the last hour."

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that **antichrist** is coming, even now many **antichrists** have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the **antichrist**, the one who denies the Father and the Son. (1 John 2:18-22)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the **antichrist**, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the **antichrist**. (2 John 1:7)

With Satan's power and authority, the Antichrist is given a time of 3-1/2 years to act, to make war and conquer the saints, to rule every nation given to him, and to receive worship from around the world (Rev 13:5-8).

Daniel has a similar prophecy including the destruction of the Antichrist and his entire kingdom, and he uses the ancient phrase "times, and half a time" to refer to 3-1/2 years of rule:

Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. (Dan 7:11)

Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, and which devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, and the meaning of the ten horns that were on its head and the other horn which came up, and before which three of them fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great boasts and which was larger in appearance than its associates. I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. Thus he said: "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever." (Dan 7:19-26)

When the Antichrist desecrates the Temple by entering the Holy Place, he is also known as the "abomination," and for his destructive intent, "of desolation." Jesus warns Believers to flee into the wilderness when the "abomination of desolation" stands in the Holy Place.

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Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. (Matt 24:15-25; Mark 13:14-20)

When correlating the 3-1/2 years with Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:27), this occurs in the last half of Daniel's 70th week. This can also be seen in the purpose of Daniel's 70th week: 1) to finish the transgression, 2) to make an end of sin, 3) to make atonement for iniquity, and 4) to bring an everlasting righteousness. This can only occur with the demise of the Antichrist at Armageddon.

Just as the Beast of the Sea personified an individual, the Beast from the Earth personified another evil human being. This is a distinction from the beast from the Abyss, which is an evil fallen angel, and who is responsible for killing the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:7).

This individual, described as having two horns as a lamb and spoke as a dragon, presumably was a male who spoke like Satan (Rev 13:11).

He has the authority to make the whole earth worship the Antichrist (Rev 13:12).

With the intent to deceive, he performs miracles to encourage the worship of the Antichrist including the making of Antichrist idols (Rev 13:14-15).

Anyone who did not worship the Antichrist or his image was killed (Rev 13:15).

In order to participate in any aspect of the economy, everyone in the whole wide world had to have the mark of the Antichrist or his number 666 on their right hand or forehead (Rev 13:16-18).

The apostle John does not say when the Beast from the Earth arrives nor the duration of his influence. Although he was introduced as the Beast from the Earth, the apostle later identified him as the False Prophet which described the role and relationship he had with the Antichrist (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

The third interlude is significant for two reasons: 1) it introduces Satan, his fallen angels and a sense of his war with Believers, and 2) it introduces the Antichrist and the False Prophet and their roles and relationship with each other.

For Believers who do not take the mark of the Antichrist, captivity and death awaits; instead of taking up arms, persevere and keep the faith (Rev 13:10).

For the world, Jesus Christ has come and Satan has been tossed from heaven, because of the supremacy of His atonement. Salvation from evil is possible for those who place their faith in the testimony of Jesus.