

## Facts about the Beast (Rev 11-19)

From the very beginnings of the Christian Church, the end-time manifestation of the 'Antichrist' became a fixed element of Christian tradition. By the time of Irenaeus in the third century, the 'Antichrist' is a fully developed figure.<sup>1</sup> Scattered references to this figure occur in the New Testament and were later brought together and elaborated by the Church Fathers, together with information from other, less authoritative sources.

However, in the course of time, the tradition became so embellished with bizarre and fantastic speculations that its real and historical significance was obscured. As a result, the Antichrist tradition has, in modern times, come to be considered as an esoteric myth (the "Antichrist myth") with little or no relation to future historical events.

One way of recalling the historical significance of the Antichrist tradition is to return to the most authoritative sources, and in particular to the its final and most complete presentation in the canon of the New Testament. In the Book of Revelation, there is such an abundance of detail about the Antichrist, or 'the Beast from the sea', as he is referred to in this text, that it is scarcely necessary to look anywhere else for what is essential.

This is an attempt to present all the affirmations about the Beast in the Book of Revelation, in a way that they can most easily be grasped and understood. In our view, the best way to understand these historical 'facts' about the Beast is according to the temporal order implicit in the text, which begins with the period preceding his brief end-historical reign. Next, in temporal order, are: the full manifestation of the Beast at the start of this reign, the description of its main features and events, and its termination with the defeat of the Beast at the final battle. Each group of textual statements is followed by the inferences that can safely be made from the various statements, without unreasonably departing from content of the text or from its historical character.

1. The Beast with seven heads carries and supports a woman (17,3) who represents the great city with 'a kingdom over the kings of the earth' (17,18). Her name is a mystery: 'Babylon the great, the mother of the prostitutes and the abominations of all the earth' (17,5). The woman that is sitting on the Beast is also sitting on many waters (17,1.3), which represent 'races and crowds and nations and tongues' (17,15).

*Inferences:* Since the woman is sitting on the many waters and, at the same time, on the Beast, it is evident that the Beast is here depicted as being submerged under the waters, which represent 'races and crowds and nations and tongues' (17,15) – an expression used by the author to refer to the unredeemed peoples of the world (cf. 5,9; 7,9; 13,7). The fact that the Beast later emerges from the abyss (11,7), and sea (13,1), tells us firstly that the waters, the abyss and the sea are all synonymous terms for the unredeemed peoples of the world,<sup>2</sup> and secondly that this vision concerns the beast's

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief account of this tradition in the early Church, see: Aune, Revelation 6-16, Excursus 13B, 751-55; also Fausto Sbaiffoni, "L'Anticristo nel Pensiero del Cristianesimo Antico" in *La Fine dei Tempi: Storia e Escatologia*, edited by Mario Naldini, Fiesole: Nardini Editore, 1994. For a bibliography see: [http://wiki.faithfutures.org/index.php/Antichrist\\_Literature](http://wiki.faithfutures.org/index.php/Antichrist_Literature).

<sup>2</sup> This conclusion that is strongly reminiscent of St. Augustine, for whom the abyss symbolizes "the countless number of godless men whose bitter hatred of God's Church comes from the abysmal depths of their hearts" *City of God*, book 20 chapter 7. As Beale rightly comments: "The abyss is one of the various metaphors representing the spiritual sphere in which the devil and his accomplices operate" G.K.Beale, *The Book of*

condition before emerging and revealing himself fully (as at 11,7; 13,1). At this stage, he is simply supporting the woman, Babylon, in a secret and clandestine way, thus contributing to her worldly success and power.

2. The beast's clandestine relationship with Babylon constitutes a mystery (17,7), at the center of which is the Beast that 'was and is not, but is about to come up out of the abyss and then go to his destruction'. This reappearance of the Beast in all its fullness will cause the inhabitants of the earth to wonder – all those whose name is not recorded in the Scroll of Life (17,8).

*Inferences:* the mystery described here is the evil counterpart to the Mystery of God that was announced to his servants the prophets (10,7): it is the 'Mystery of Iniquity'. The mystery consists in the fact that the Beast that was in the world, 'is not', because it is presently hidden under the waters (of the abyss or sea). However, it is about to come up out of the abyss and reveal himself fully (11,7; 13,1), before going off to its destruction.

3. The interpreting angel further reveals that the seven heads of the Beast are the seven hills of Rome, on which Babylon sits, and are also seven rulers. The angel is explaining this immediately before the short rule of the 7th head: "five of these have fallen, one is now, and the other has not yet come, and whenever he comes he will remain for a short time only" (17,9-10). Then the Beast will be revealed in all its fullness as an 'eighth head', which is also one of the seven heads (17,11). One of his seven heads has recovered after being fatally wounded (13,3a).

*Inferences:* The city called Babylon is established in Rome and is also supported by seven successive rulers represented by the heads of the Beast. From the narrative point of view, which could be the time of writing or the time of announcing the prophecy, the next ruler will be the seventh and last before the full revelation of the Beast. But since the full manifestation of the Beast ("the eighth head") is also 'one of the seven' (17,11), and since the seventh head is the last of the series, then the eighth head can be identified with the seventh head after it has recovered from its fatal wound (cf. 13,3a).

4. The Beast rises from the abyss (11,7), or sea (13,1a), to 'make war' against the two witnesses, when they have finished their prophetic mission, at the end of the period of 1260 days. He kills them and has their corpses exposed for 3½ days in the 'great city', spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where 'indeed their Lord was crucified' (11,7-8). After rising from the sea (13,1), or abyss (11,7), the Beast was allowed to reign over the entire world for 42 months (13,5.7).

*Inferences:* The emergence of the Beast from the abyss, or sea, represents his full self-revelation or manifestation. This event takes place when the two witnesses have completed their mission, at the end of the period of 1260 days, and corresponds to the start of his reign of 42 months (13,5). The two time periods are therefore consecutive,

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*Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999, 987. Further arguments for the identity of the Beast of Ap 11,7 with that of ch. 17, and between this Beast and the Beast of ch. 13, have been set out by Adela Yarbro Collins in *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, (2001) 170-72.

starting with the 1260 days, finishing with the 42 months, comprising in this way a final 7-year period ('a week of years' or 'septennium'). The Beast reveals himself to slay the two witnesses in Jerusalem ('the city where indeed their Lord was crucified'<sup>3</sup>), which now receives the title that previously applied to Babylon: 'the great city' (11,8; 16,19). Since it was the Beast's support for Babylon that earned her the title of 'great city', then the transfer of this title to Jerusalem implies that this city will now receive the Beast's patronage and support. The implication is that, at the start of his reign of 42 months, the Beast transfers his favour from Babylon to Jerusalem, where he establishes his throne. This coincides with the trampling of the Holy City (Jerusalem) for 42 months (11,2), and her spiritual renaming as "Sodom and Egypt".

5. The Beast had received his power, throne and authority from the dragon (13,2b), and on account of the Beast's power the dragon is worshipped (13,4a). The dragon is the ancient serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world and the accuser of the faithful, who is thrown down to the earth with great fury, knowing that his time is short (12,9-10.12).

*Inference:* the fact that Satan permits himself to give his power, kingdom and great authority to the Beast, the reason for which he is subsequently worshipped, suggests that Satan and the Beast become one, or in other words, the Beast is the embodiment of the devil. Worship of the Beast amounts to worship of the devil.

6. The fully revealed Beast has 10 horns crowned with diadems and on his seven heads are blasphemous titles (13,1b), and his colour is scarlet (17,3). He is like a leopard with bear's feet and a lion's mouth (13,2a). He is a man, and the number of his name is 666 (13,18).

*Inference:* in form and colour the Beast is strikingly similar to the fiery-red dragon that has 10 horns and seven heads with diadems on its heads (12,3). This image suggests a family likeness, like that of a son to his father. The rest of the description depicts the Beast as a combination of all the four beasts described in Dan 7,2-8. All the beastly and monstrous forces depicted in the text are finally embodied in one man, whose name or title will add up to 666, according to the ancient number system, in which each letter has a numerical value (gematria).

7. The Beast is admired and worshipped by all the (inhabitants of the) earth, because of his military strength (13,4b). They worship him with words that resemble the ancient worship of God – "who is like the beast?" (13,4; cf. Ps 113,5; 89,7.9; 86,8; 35,10; Ex 15,11). Furthermore the Beast assumes a title ("the Beast that...was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss and goes to destruction" Rev 17,18) that parodies God's name ("The One who was and is and is to come" Rev 1,8). He is worshipped by those whose names are not written in the 'Scroll of Life from the foundation of the world' of the Lamb that was slain (13,8).

*Inference:* the Beast is worshipped through his exercise of the powers given to him by the devil, and this worship recalls the worship and status that was once given to God.

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<sup>3</sup> For the literal interpretation of 'the city where indeed their Lord was crucified' as historical Jerusalem, see the article: <http://www.newtorah.org/Historical%20Jerusalem.html>.

This explains why the beast's worshippers are removed from the Scroll of Life of the Lamb.

8. He is allowed to rule for 42 months (13,5a), when he speaks 'great things' and blasphemies: he blasphemes against God, against His name and dwelling, that is to say those dwelling in heaven (13,6). His authority extends over every tribe and race and tongue and nation, including the saints whom he overcomes (13,7).

*Inference:* This period corresponds to the 'trampling' of the Holy City by the gentile nations for 42 months (11,2), and also to the 'time, two times and half a time' during which the 144,000 are protected and nourished at a mountain in the desert (12,14; 14,1-5; cf. Dan 7,23-25; 12,7). The Beast is a blasphemer of God and of his people, and during his brief reign he will persecute and conquer the rest of God's people (those not protected at the desert refuge).

9. He has an associate, described as a second Beast that comes up out of 'the land' and has two horns 'like a lamb' and speaks like a dragon (Rev 13,11). He is later called the false prophet (19,20; 20,10).

*Inference:* this character has a sacrificial appearance (like a lamb), but speaks on behalf of the devil. He is a sacrifice to the devil – recalling the scapegoat to Azazel in the rite of the ancient Day of Atonement. The identification of this figure as a 'false prophet' indicates that the beast, his master, is indeed a 'false messiah'. This is confirmed by his position in a hierarchy of three evil figures (the devil, the Beast and the false prophet) that the author contrasts with God, his Messiah and their prophet, John.

10. The Beast gives his authority to the false prophet, to coerce the inhabitants of the earth to worship him, whose fatal wound had been healed (13,12). The false prophet does this by means of:

- a. Deceptive signs: making fire come down from heaven in the sight of all (13,13), and by creating an animated speaking image of the first Beast 13,14-15). Those who do not worship the image of the Beast are put to death (13,15b).
- b. Forcing everyone to receive a mark (the name or number of the beast) on the right hand or forehead. Those who refuse the mark cannot buy or sell (13,17).

The people who worship him or his image, or receive his mark, will suffer eternal condemnation and torment (14,9-11). They will also suffer from the bowl plagues (Rev 16): they will be afflicted with a foul and malignant ulcer after the pouring of the 2nd bowl (16,2), and they will be scorched by the heat of the sun after the 4th (16,8). As a result of these plagues, they blaspheme God and do not repent (16,11).

*Inference:* So those who do not voluntarily worship the Beast will be forced to do so by the measures introduced by the false prophet. The result is the great tribulation (7,17), through which the martyrs 'overcome' the beast, his image and the number of his name (15,2-4). Since the Beast and the devil are one, the worship of the Beast is at the same time worship of the devil.

11. The Beast will rule for a short time with 10 kings, who are represented by its 10 horns. These will give their authority (17,12-13) and kingdom to the Beast (17,17), and together

they will destroy the once great city, Babylon, thus fulfilling the words of God (14,8; 16,19; 17,1;17,16-17). Finally, they will fight with the Beast in the forthcoming battle against the Lamb and his armies (17,14) at Harmagedon (16,16; 19,19).

*Inference:* Babylon is destroyed during the 42-month reign of the beast, and in doing this the Beast and the 10 kings are the agents of God's wrath and judgment against this city (16,19). The beast's conflict with the Lamb confirms that he is the ultimate antagonist of Christ, otherwise known to the Christian tradition as the Antichrist.

12. At the end of his divinely permitted rule, the beast's throne is struck by the 5th bowl plague, and his kingdom is then darkened (16,10).

*Inference:* this represents the imminent end of the beast's 42-month rule. The end follows promptly at a final battle:

13. After the 6th bowl the River Euphrates dries up to allow the rulers of the East to pass over. Unclean and deceitful spirits issue from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the dragon and of the false prophet, summoning the rulers of the world to assemble for the battle of the great day of Almighty God (16,13-14), at the place called Harmagedon (16,16), where they will fight against the Lamb and his armies (17,14; 19,11-19). The armies are defeated, and the Beast and the false prophet are thrown into the Lake of Fire (19,19-21), where they will later be joined by the devil (20,10), Death and Hades (20,14), and all those not written in the "Scroll of Life" (20,15).

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