

THE ANTICHRIST AND ANTICHRISTIAN KINGDOM

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The subject of this research is undoubtedly one of the most complex and puzzling concepts arising out of the apocalyptic literature in the New Testament, at least in view of the many interpretations proposed. Probably the driving motivation in the search for the correct interpretation of the “mark of the beast,” the number “666,” and other Antichrist ideas is man’s desire to know if the end of the world is really at hand. Thus, through the Christian centuries Biblical commentators have suggested a countless number of solutions to the problem of identifying Antichrist.

It is not the intention of this writer to set forth in any dogmatic way an identification of “Antichrist,” but it is hoped that this investigation will sort out some of the main strands of interpretation which seem to be valid. In section one some attention will be given to the origin and development of the Antichrist concept. The writer

in section two will deal with the interpretation of the relevant passages in The Book of Revelation.

THE ANTICHRIST CONCEPT, ITS ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

In the New Testament the word *antichristos* occurs only in the Johannine Epistles (I John 2:18, 22; II John v. 7), but the concept finds expression in other terms in II Thess. 2 and The Book of Revelation.

The prefix "anti" means "over against" or "instead of;" so the term "antichrist" may indicate one who opposes Christ or one who seeks to supplant Christ by taking His place. Some commentators find both ideas--that of opposing and supplanting--in the term.¹

The important question that needs answering is, "Where did the Antichrist concept originate and how did it develop up until the time of Paul and John?"² The date for the writing of The Book of Revelation is accepted as about 95 A. D.

¹ J. Marcellus Kik, "Antichrist," *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, I, 261.

² The basic source used as reference for answering this question was Wilhelm Bousset's article, "Antichrist," in Hasting's *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. His work, *Der Antichrist* (1895), translated as *The Antichrist Legend* (1896), seems to be the standard treatment on the subject., but it was unavailable for this study.

Bousset says that the conception of a God-opposing tyrant and ruler of the last times reaches back to Jewish Apocalyptic literature. Probably the ideas associated with the name Antichrist have "their deeper roots not in definite historical phenomena and experiences, but in mythological and speculative ideas, namely, the idea of the battle of God with the devil at the end of the world."³ The battle of Ahura Mazda with Angra Maimyu in Persian eschatology may provide the source for the conception that came over into Jewish Apocalyptic literature. The chief idea found in the Jewish source of the Testaments of the Twelve Prophets, which probably arose in the Maccabaeen period, is the opposition between God and the devil, who appears as Beliar, the enemy of the last times.⁴

Gunkel (*Schopfung und Chaos*, 1895) has proposed that the Antichrist concept finds its roots in the Babylonian chaos myth. Tiamat, the primeval dragon of the deep, fought with Marduk, but was overcome and bound by him. However, at the end of time it will raise its head again and break out in a final rebellion, to be vanquished this time forever. Bousset thinks that traces of these ideas are to be found in the Old Testament, and that the figure of the devil and the chaos monster came to be combined into one.⁵

The apocalyptic visions of the Book of Daniel, dating from the

³ W. Bousset, "Antichrist," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, I, 578.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

Maccabaeen age or earlier, set forth certain aspects of the Antichrist concept which are taken and remain as standard requirements of the legend. The "little horn" of Daniel 7:8 and 8:9 is thought to refer to Antiochus IV, the cruel persecutor of the Jews, and though it seems best to think of him as a prototype of the Antichrist, Bousset sees the actual idea of Antichrist as appearing in the Book of Daniel.⁶

The history of the legend was probably influenced greatly by the demand of the Roman Emperor Caligula (A.D. 37-41) that his statue be placed in the Temple. "The ever-recurring expectation of later times, that Antichrist would take his place in the Temple of Jerusalem, dates in all probability from this period."⁷(Cf. Mt. 24:15, Mk. 13:14).

It is obvious that Christianity took over the main ideas concerning a God-opposing tyrant and reinterpreted them for its purpose. Paul from a Christian viewpoint shows a marked transformation of the concept in II Thess. 2. Here, says Bousset,

the Antichrist is no longer the God-opposing tyrant, but a seductive agency, which works by signs and wonders, and seeks to obtain Divine worship. Antichrist here is a false Messiah, a prophet, who, it is assumed, will call forth the faith of those Jews who have rejected the true Messiah (2:10-12). At the same time the idea is raised still further into the realm of the super-human (2:4 ...). Accordingly this

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 579.

false Messiah is now for the first time in a real and proper sense regarded as the opponent of the true Messiah.⁸

Thus, a significant change in the idea of Antichrist has taken place and this new conception seems to have found acceptance in wide-spread Christian circles. From such a point of view it is easy to understand how in John's Epistles Antichrist is connected with false teaching (I Jn. 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 Jn. 7), and how the appearance of false teaching came to be one of the signs of the last time. The "many antichrists" (2:18) most likely refer to those who have embraced Gnostic teachings and are perpetrating them, for it is a widely accepted view that John's Epistles were written in a time when Gnosticism was a rising heresy. The mention of "many antichrists" seems to indicate a comparison to the one Antichrist of whom these Christians had heard. From the passages in John alone it is difficult to determine conclusively whether an evil principle or an individual person is in mind, or both.

The fact that the Apostle John does not indicate a conspicuous Antichrist as prevalent in his day would seem to rule out the reigning Roman emperor as the designation of the term. The designation of a pagan Roman emperor is also negated by the fact that the antichrists "went out from us, but they were not of us" (I John 2:19).⁹

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kik, p. 262.

In The Book of Revelation the figure of the anti-Christian false prophet (16:13, 19:20) finds a place in John's vision and was the same as the beast out of the earth (13:11). But John could not give it independent significance, so he made it the servant and assistant of the first beast.¹⁰

After the apostolic period, the early Christians looked for Antichrist in a definite person, not as a polity or system. There was general agreement among the Church Fathers in representing 'the man of lawlessness' (II Thess. 2:3) as a person, but he is not identified. His appearance was expected shortly before the second coming of Christ and he would be destroyed by Christ. Irenaeus (c.130-c.202) developed some of the distinctive features still held by the 'futurist' school (See *Against Heresies*, book 5, chaps. 25, 26).¹¹

The main tendency throughout Christian history has been to identify the Antichrist with historical and contemporary persons. In order to conform to the number of the beast, 666, the name "Mohammed" was changed to "Maometis."¹²

The Papal-Antichrist theory began its development with the appearance of the Albigenses in the 11th century, the Waldenses in the 12th century, and the Hussites in the 15th century. A treatise by the Waldenses (c. 1120) describes the basis for their belief that the

¹⁰ Bousset, p. 579.

¹¹ Kik, p. 266.

¹² Martin Rist, "Antichrist," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, I, 143.

papacy was the Antichrist. This was also the view taken by many from the time of the Reformation until the modern period, e. g., Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, Beza, Calixtus, Bengel, Michaelis, almost all Protestant writers on the continent, and the English Reformers and Puritans.¹³

Among the many possibilities for identifying the Antichrist, it seems that there are four or five distinct categories in which solutions have been proposed. The following questions have to be answered: Is the Antichrist a definite historical person? Is Antichrist represented by a certain political system? Is Antichrist a certain religious system? Does Antichrist appear only as an evil principle, possibly more evident at the end of time? Can the Antichrist be identified only as a mythological figure? Or should a combination of these ideas represent the Antichrist?

The present-day view of the Antichrist, whether the concept is to be thought of as meaning an individual, group, or impersonal force and whether it has already appeared or is still to come, depends greatly upon the interpreter's overall method of interpreting The Book of Revelation. It is the view of this writer that the most appealing method is the one which gives special attention to the historical context in which the message had special meaning for the first readers, but also the method which finds an eternal message for God's people in every age. Thus, a combination of the Preterist thought and the Philosophy of History view seems in order.¹⁴

¹³ Kik, p. 267.

INTERPRETATION OF REVELATION 13, 17, 18

The Context

Chapter 12 begins a new section which may be outlined as ending with 20:10.¹⁵ Regardless of how one outlines this material, chapters 12 and 13 hang together and deal with the great conflict between Christians and the Dragon, which has two beasts as helpers. Chapters 17 and 18 deal with the fall of Babylon and relate closely to the material in chapter 13.

The material in chapter 12 must be understood in order to properly approach and interpret chapter 13. "A great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads" appeared in heaven and sought to devour the male child about to be born to the "woman clothed with the sun." But the child, being "caught up to God and to his throne" was protected and "the woman fled into the wilderness" (v. 6). Then Michael and his angels defeated the dragon and his angels and cast them down to the earth. The dragon is identified as "that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (v. 9). Verses 13-17 picture the hostility of the dragon as he attempts to destroy the woman, now on the earth, and her offspring, who are

¹⁴ Cf. Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1951), pp. 45ff. for a fifth method called "The Historical-Background Method" and its advantages.

¹⁵ Summers, p. xi. His subject for this section is "The Lamb and the Conflict."

identified as "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (v. 17). Commenting on this, Morris says, "Satan is at war with all Christians. He is not able to accomplish his purpose against God and therefore he does what he can in opposing God's people."¹⁶

The Beast out of the Sea

In 13:1-8 one is confronted with the appearance of a grotesque beast that comes out of the sea and is given authority by the dragon to blaspheme God and to make war on the saints. The significance of "rising out of the sea" is pointed out by Swete to be very meaningful, for "The sea is an apt symbol of the agitated surface of unregenerated humanity" (cf. Isa. 57:20), and especially of the seething cauldron of national and social life, out of which the great historical movements of the world arise.¹⁷ "The ancient world often associated evil with the sea. Who could tell what existed in its mysterious depths?"¹⁸

The description of the beast, Grk. *therion* meaning monster or "wild, savage, jungle brute"¹⁹ reminds one of Daniel 7:2-8 and also indicates a similarity to the dragon with its seven heads and ten horns (cf. 12:3). It is obvious that John had in mind the four beasts

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *Revelation. In The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, R. V. G. Tasker, ed. (London: The Tyndale Press, 1969), p. 165.

¹⁷ H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1909), p. 161.

¹⁸ Morris, p. 165.

¹⁹ Summers, p. 175.

of Daniel's vision, but the beast John sees is more horrible and combines the features of the four. Beasley-Murray remarks,

The characteristics of leopard, bear and lion in Dn vii. 4-6 were shared out among three prior Empires. Here they combine into one terrifying unity of power and wickedness, the leopard signifying cruelty and cunning, the bear strength, the lion ferocity.²⁰

The monster from the seas has "ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads." The horns symbolized great power and in 17:12 are said to mean "ten kings who have not yet received royal power." The "seven heads" mean seven rulers and this identification is so made in 17:10. "Ten diadems" would symbolize great authority.²¹

In seeking to interpret the symbolic language found here, one must not pin down the symbols too tightly. For example, John clearly sees kings as being symbolized by both "horns" and "heads" (17:10, 12), but "heads" also is a symbol for "hills" (17:9). In the same way one may become confused in trying to understand whether the Roman Empire, a Roman emperor, or the city of Rome is indicated. But in the prophet's mind they seem to be all tied in together. There is general agreement among many modern commentators that the Beast out of the sea symbolizes the Roman

²⁰ George R. Beasley-Murray, "The Book of Revelation," *The New Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 1184.

²¹ Summers, p. 174

Empire with its imperial power.²²

On the heads of the beast was "a blasphemous name" or "names" (Mss. evidence is divided). Although what the name was is not known with certainty, the best suggestion is that it was a divine title, such as *divus* or *augustus* which the Roman emperors had assumed. "No Christian, none at least of Jewish origin, could have read such inscriptions day by day without a shock to his inbred monotheism."²³

One of the keys for identifying the beast is the proper interpretation of the words in v. 3: "one of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed." Supposing that the beast does represent the Roman Empire, which of its emperors could be referred to as having had a deadly wound that was now healed? The general interpretation is that Nero is meant and this view was taken by the earliest of the Latin commentators.²⁴

In 68 A. D. Nero fled from Rome and committed suicide by stabbing himself in the throat. But a rumor got out that he was still alive and would soon return with a Parthian host to invade the empire he once ruled. In course of time the rumor changed and the legend was that although Nero had actually died, he would be restored to life and would lead an army, presumably from Parthia, to

²² Cf. Ashcraft, Charles, Swete, Pieters, Rist, Beasley-Murray, and others.

²³ Swete, p. 162.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

ravage the empire (cf. Sibylline Oracles 5:361-67; 4:119-27, 137-390). In a later development this Nero *redivivus* became identified with the Antichrist (Sybylline Oracles 5:106-10; cf. 5:33-34). In the Christian Ascension of Isaiah 4:1-14 Nero is seen as the incarnation of Beliar (i. e. Satan or Antichrist).²⁵

Pretenders who claimed to be Nero arose in 69 and 79, and even as late as 88 or 89 (Tac. hist. i. 78, ii.8, Zonar. xi. 18, Suet. Nero 57). The legend of Nero's survival or resuscitation took root in the popular imagination, and Dio Chrysostom (orat. xxi. 9) at the end of the century sneers at it as one of the follies of the time.²⁶

The authority of the beast is the subject of 13:4-8. The beast receives its authority from the dragon and both receive the worship of men. According to v. 8, all men except the Christians will worship the beast. "The Caesars were not only obeyed, they were worshiped by the whole world."²⁷

It is well to notice that the scope and duration of the beast's awful work is limited. It could only utter "haughty and blasphemous words" and "exercise authority for forty-two months." As Beasley-Murray so well penned, "the real permission for his blasphemous utterances and deeds, and even the duration of his reign, comes from God; ... The sovereignty of God is never more apparent than during the rule

²⁵ Martin Rist, "Revelation," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 12, p. 461. Cf. Swete, p. 163, and Charles, II, 83ff.

²⁶ Swete, p. 163.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

of Antichrist."²⁸

The "blasphemies against God' are defined as being particularly against the name of God, and against those in whom God dwells. "God's dwelling is equated with God's people."²⁹ This blasphemy apparently meant the use of divine titles and honors demanded by the Roman emperors, especially Domitian. It is said that Domitian "demanded that he be addressed as 'Supreme Lord and God'" and "even refused to receive correspondence directed to him unless it used this salutation."³⁰

The Beast out of the Earth (13:11-18)

Another beast makes its appearance in 13:11 and it comes out of the earth. Swete suggests, "If the Beast from the sea denotes the world-wide Empire of the West, the Beast from the earth is of humbler pretensions, a native of the soil (•••)--a product of the life of the Asian cities."³¹ According to Rist, "This may be a survival of a tradition preserved in II Baruch 29:4 and II Esdras 6:49-52 of two beasts, one Leviathan, from the sea, and the other, Behemoth, from the earth."³² In the prophetic books these creatures "served to typify the God-opposing powers (see, e. g., Is. xxvii. 1, li. 9; Ezk.

²⁸ Beasley-Murray, pp. 1184-85.

²⁹ Morris, p. 168.

³⁰ Summers, p. 175.

³¹ Swete, p. 168.

³² Martin Rist, p. 463.

xxxii. 2f., etc.).³³

Interpreters are almost unanimous in their conclusion that the land beast represents the imperial religious establishment. The clues for identifying this second beast are four characteristics, and Summers describes them as follows:

Two horns like a lamb indicate an outward religious appearance; the lamb was a religious symbol. His having only two horns may symbolize his limited power as over against the seven horns of the Lamb of God (5:6). The voice of a dragon indicates that he spoke with the diabolical authority of Satan. He exercised the power of the first beast; his power was derived from the Roman State or the emperor. His work was to enforce emperor worship. All these characteristics seem to identify the second beast as the "Commune" or "Concilia" set up in Asia Minor to enforce the state religion. This was an official body which had charge of the state religion and had as its duty to force all to do homage to the image of the emperor.³⁴

Beasley-Murray gives an explanation which is very helpful in the light of later references to this beast in The Book of Revelation. His words are that

this figure represents the priesthood of the cult of the Emperor. It is later called "the false prophet" (xvi.13, xix.20, xx. 10). Yet as the seven-headed, ten-horned beast signifies the anti-Christian empire embodied in a personal Antichrist, it is likely that this heathen

³³ Beasley-Murray, p. 1184.

³⁴ Summers, p. 178.

priesthood is also represented in a supreme head that directs its devilish work.³⁵

The main significance of the authority given the second beast is its power to set up "an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived" and "cause those who will worship the image of the beast to be slain. Also, it was to place a mark of identification, the name of the first beast or the number of its name, on everyone without exception. Those not having the "mark of the beast" were forbidden the right to buy or sell in the markets. "His power was great, coercive, deceptive, magical, and economical."³⁶

One of the most controversial symbols in The Book of Revelation is the number "666," which is the number of the first beast. Throughout Christian history people have been counting the name of the beast to determine its identity, hoping that they might find just the right key for unlocking all the secrets related to the Antichrist.

The Hebrews and Greeks had no numerical symbols other than the use of letters of the alphabet. The letters of the alphabet represented numerical values and would have been used to form the name or number of the beast. "This art, 'Gematria,' was popular in ancient times. Adolf Deissmann cited such writings on the walls of Pompeii. One reads, 'I love the girl whose name is 545'."³⁷ In

³⁵ Beasley-Murray, p. 1185.

³⁶ Morris Ashcraft, "Revelation," *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12, (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1972), p. 315.

order to understand the identification of the beast, if an actual person is meant, one must have the correct spelling of the name in the correct language and use the correct numerical key.

Probably the most commonly accepted answer concerning the meaning of the number "666" is Nero, especially sought because of the connection of the beast with Nero *redivivus* myth. But in order to come out with this solution, the Greek *neron kaiser* must be transliterated into Hebrew; thus, nun=50, resh=200, waw=6, nun=50, qoph=100, samech=60, resh=200, and these added together total 666. Even if the less attested variant reading of "616" (known by Irenaeus and found in the fifth century Codex Ephraemi) is accepted, one can still end up with Nero as the answer by writing it the Latin method, which is Nero instead of Neron.³⁸

Contemporary answers have always been sought and the following is an example. If one takes the English alphabet and lets A=100, B=101, C=102, etc., the name "Hitler" adds up to 666.³⁹

The Continuous-historical school takes a hint from Irenaeus, who suggested such terms as "Teitan" or "Lateinos." The view was that Latinus was the first Roman ruler and in Greek his name would be

³⁷ Ashcraft, p. 316. He cited Deissmann's *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 276.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 316-17. Also cf. Rist, "Revelation," p. 466.

³⁹ Thomas S. Kepler, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 147.

spelled Lateinos. By adding the numerical values of these letters (l=30, a=1, t=300, e=5, i=10, n=50, o=70, s=200), the total is 666. This theory could be used to identify the beast with either Roman political power or Roman religious power. But because many see apostasy in the Roman Catholic Church as opposed to true Christianity, they usually think of the Pope as the Antichrist. But Summers pointedly asks, "What possible meaning would this interpretation have had for the Christians of Asia in A. D. 95?"⁴⁰

The interpretation set forth by Gunkel and many others is that the name of an individual is not represented, but that the phrase "it is the number of a man" simply means that "it is a human computation" in distinction from a supernatural reckoning (cf. 21:17). The number "666" is equal to the name, "Primal Chaos" in Hebrew and represents the chaos monster, which serves as the basis for the figure of the dragon and the beast. This solution has not been taken very seriously because it is difficult to see how John's readers, knowing only Greek, would have been able to discover the answer. However, Beasley-Murray sees the value of this theory and points out that it would be just as intelligible to Greek-speaking as the idea of Nero's name in Hebrew.⁴¹

Following this thought, the proposal of Beasley-Murray is that John did not invent the number, but that the original name was a Hebrew one which he could have taken from a Hebrew source.

⁴⁰ Summers, p. 176.

⁴¹ Beasley-Murray, p. 1185.

Being a Hebrew and assuming that he was familiar with the chaos myth, the name *Tehom Qadmonah*, "Primal Chaos," would not have been unknown to him. Furthermore, the solution which turns upon the Nero redivivus myth may also be right. The suggestion of Beasley-Murray is

that the prophet fused the myths of the chaos monster and Nero Redivivus to form his picture of the Antichrist; the adversaries of the church so perfectly embodied the ancient power of evil that they could both be described under the same historical summary, viz. they were and are not, and are about to come up out of the abyss, and go into perdition. A number, therefore, which could denote that evil principle as well as the Empire and individual in which it should be incarnated was more than heart could wish for, a perfect representation of devilry.⁴²

One other strand of interpretation concerning "the mark of the beast" emphasizes the importance of the number rather than the name. The symbolism of numbers must not be overlooked in apocalyptic literature. In the Sibylline Oracles (1:324) the cryptic number "888" was used as a symbol of Jesus. The reason is that the sum of the values represented by the letters of the Greek added up to 888. Just as Jesus goes far beyond the perfect "777," so the beast falls short.⁴³ The conclusion drawn by Morris is as follows:

⁴² Ibid., pp. 1185-86. R. H. Charles in *The Revelation of St. John*, Vol. 1 (*International Critical Commentary*) gives attention to Greek and Hebrew sources. He thinks that ch. 13 is mainly composed from three Hebrew sources, but he fails to include v. 18 in these. See pp. lxiv, 342-44.

⁴³ Summers, p. 177; Morris, p. 174.

The number may be meant to indicate not an individual, but a persistent falling short. All the more is this likely to be correct if we translate "it is the number of man" rather than "a man." John will then be saying that unregenerate man is persistently evil. He bears the mark of the beast in all he does. Civilization without Christ is necessarily under the dominion of the evil one.⁴⁴

Although Summers feels strongly about the representation of evil in the symbolism of the number "666," he is not content to leave it there. His conclusion points out another facet of the riddle by emphasizing that the nature of the person may be in view by the use of the number.

The beast to whom John gave the number represented the combination of malignant work embodied in political power and false religion. The name expresses the inner nature of the one to whom it is applied. ... This string of sixes represented to the Christians everything that was distasteful, evil, terrible, and brutal. The persecuting Roman emperor with his forced diabolical emperor worship was that "everything." He was the ally of the devil in an attempt to destroy the Christians. If the number is to be applied to one man, it appears that Domitian, monster of sin, cruelty, and degradation fulfilled that role. David Smith is close to this in his view that the number represents Nero redivivus.⁴⁵

Revelation 13 does not furnish us with all the information from John's visions related to the Antichrist, but it is primary. The material in chapters 17 and 18 must also be studied because of its

⁴⁴ Morris, p. 174.

⁴⁵ Summers, pp. 177-78.

importance for clarifying one's interpretation of the beast out of the sea.

The Fall of Babylon, or Rome (Rev. 17, 18).

One of the "seven angels" promised to show John the "judgment of the great harlot" even though it did not take place immediately. Calling a city a harlot finds precedence in the Old Testament prophets. Tyre is so-called by Isaiah (53:16, 17) and Ninevah is labeled a harlot by Nahum (3:1-4). The description of this harlot leads the majority of interpreters to understand it as meaning the city of Rome.⁴⁶ This is especially clear from the mention of seven hills upon which the woman sits (17:9). The "great harlot" was also "seated upon many waters." Behind this idea is probably Jeremiah's (51:13) description of ancient Babylon, which was located by the Euphrates and had an elaborate system of canals surrounding it. But "the waters" are the numerous nations, tongues and people which gave Rome her power (cf. 17:15).⁴⁷

In vivid language John describes the vision of the woman and "a scarlot beast" upon which she sits. The beast "was full of blasphemous names and it had seven heads and ten horns." Probably these names refer to titles of deity ascribed to Roman emperors as already suggested (cf. 13:6). Undoubtedly this beast and the beast out of the sea in ch. 13 are the same, and it is easy to

⁴⁶ Cf. Swete, p. 226; Rist, p. 489; Ashcraft, p. 330; Beasley-Murray, p. 1188, etc.

⁴⁷ Ashcraft, p. 330.

imagine how the Roman Empire could support the city of Rome.

On the forehead of the woman was seen the mysterious name, "Babylon the great, mother of harlots and of earth's abominations." Charles cites several Roman authors to the effect that Roman harlots wore on their brows labels inscribed with their names, so apparently it was a common practice.⁴⁸

John is bewildered by the sight of the woman and the beast, so the angel explains the mystery of them. First, there is the explanation of the beast and its seven heads. The "seven heads" symbolizes seven hills and also "seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while" (v. 10). The beast itself is an eighth king on the order of the seven. The line of interpretation followed in identifying these eight kings usually begins with Augustus, omits the three pretenders to the throne, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, and ends with Domitian. Vespasian is the sixth, Titus fits as the seventh who will reign a short time, and Domitian would be the eighth, the reincarnated Nero.⁴⁹ There are problems with this interpretation, but they are not insurmountable. Either John transferred his thought to the time of Vespasian, "interpreting past events under the form of a prophecy after the manner of apocalyptic writers,"⁵⁰ or he

⁴⁸ R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, Vol. II. In *The International Critical Commentary*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 65.

⁴⁹ Ashcraft, p. 332. Listed as supporting this proposal are Swete, p. 220f.; Charles, p. 69; Barclay, p. 190; Morris, p. 210.

makes use of an earlier source without revision.⁵¹

Many commentators do not think that an attempt should be made to identify the "seven kings." They base their view on the symbolism of the number seven which stands for completeness, and think that John did not intend it to be taken literally.⁵²

Another possible line of interpretation is the suggestion made by Beasley-Murray of a fusion of the ideas of the chaos monster and that of Nero Redivivus. He makes special reference to the history of the chaos monster in the Old Testament.⁵³

The "ten horns" represent "ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast" (v. 12). "They will make war on the Lamb," but the Lamb will be victorious because "he is Lord of lords and King of kings" (v. 14). Then according to verse 16, these ten horns along with the beast will hate the harlot and bring about her destruction. Finally, the woman, or harlot, is said to be "the great city which has dominion over the kings of the earth," (v. 18), certainly meaning Rome.

⁵⁰ Swete, p. 221.

⁵¹ Cf. Charles, vol. I, pp. lxiii-lxiv. This suggestion is also noted by Ashcraft, p. 332, Beasley-Murray, p. 1189, and Rist, p. 494.

⁵² See Rist, p. 495; Beckwith, p. 708; Caird, p. 218.

⁵³ Beasley-Murray, p. 1189.

There are many suggestions for identifying the ten kings. The most reasonable proposal is that they "must refer to the vassal kings, rulers of Rome's provinces, who receive authority from Rome and enjoy this delegated authority for a very short time."⁵⁴

The pronouncement of Babylon's fall is made by the angel in the early verses of chapter 18. The kings of the earth, the merchants, and the sailors all wept and lamented greatly over the fall of Babylon, but John called upon the saints and apostles and prophets to rejoice (18:20). It was God's judgment upon that wicked city in which "was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on earth" (18:24).

CONCLUSION

This investigation into "The Antichrist and Antichristian Kingdom" has led this writer to conclude that John specifically had in mind the persecuting Roman Empire as personified in Emperor Domitian. But Domitian was like a reincarnated Nero, so here the Nero Redivivus myth fits his purpose very well although he does not declare a belief in it. Based on the background study, it appears reasonable that the chaos monster cannot be dismissed from the picture. In other words, a mythological figure seemingly is in the background.

⁵⁴ Summers, p. 192.

The conclusion drawn here is that Antichrist is basically an incarnation of evil in a person who had great political power and uses it against Christ and His Kingdom. Although the Beast (Domitian and the Roman Empire) has already come, there is a sense in which Antichrist could appear anytime in history as an incarnation of evil in opposition to Christ. Prophecies can have a double fulfillment and seemingly some in the Old Testament did. Just as the Asiarchs supported and enforced Emperor worship, the Antichrist will probably have the help of some religious system in the form of false prophets.

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