

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation
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Revelation Chapter 13

Rev 13 Introduction–

Revelation 12 offers a comprehensive view of human history going all the way back to the beginning of the cosmic conflict in heaven, which spilled out onto the earth and climaxes in an end-time battle. Centering on the impact of the cross (Rev 12:10-11) the chapter follows human history all the way to the final events, which are summarized in 12:17. But Revelation 12:17 is not just the climax of the chapter, it is a summary in advance of chapters 13 and 14. As such it is a duodirectional passage, much like 1:19, 3:21 and 6:9-10 before it. In duodirectional passages John embeds the introduction of the following portion of the book into the climax of the preceding portion.

The dragon's war against the remnant is summarized first in Revelation 12:17. Then the dragon's side of the war is elaborated in chapter 13. The remnant's side of the war, their message and the result of the conflict, is elaborated in some detail in Revelation 14. The final battle is described once more in even greater detail in chapters 16-18. So Revelation 12:17 is a crucial passage, introducing the final battle of earth's history, and setting the foundation for the visions in chapters 13 and 14.

In Revelation 12:17 the final events of human history are summarized as a battle between two sides, the dragon on the one hand and the remnant of the woman's seed on the other. The battle is introduced as a summary in a nutshell of what follows. The dragon's side of the final conflict is then elaborated in chapter 13, where he collects two allies, a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. On the other hand, the remnant's side of that conflict is elaborated in chapter 14, where the remnant is described first (14:1-5-- using the language of 144,000), then its mission is described (14:6-13), then the chapter concludes with the outcome of the conflict (14:14-20). So chapter 13 as a whole is to be seen as an elaboration and "exegesis" of the dragon's strategy and activities in the pursuit of its agenda at the end of history.

This chapter develops a counterfeit "trinity." In the Book of Revelation God is often spoken of in terms of threes (Rev 1:4-6, etc.). In this chapter the dragon adds a pair of allies, the beast from the sea and the beast from the land, making up an unholy three. The dragon has the fundamental authority (right to rule) and is the one who gives authority to the others. He counterfeits the position of God the Father.

The sea beast (Revelation 13:1-10) looks like the dragon, receives authority from the dragon, has a three-and-a-half year ministry, and also a death and a resurrection like Christ's. So the beast from the sea is portrayed as a parody or counterfeit of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

The land beast (Revelation 13:11-18) gives breath ("spirit") to the image of the beast. He does not promote himself, but rather promotes the sea beast, reminding of the Holy Spirit's

work in pointing to Christ (John 16:13-14, KJV). Like the Holy Spirit did on Pentecost, the land beast brings fire down from heaven to earth (Rev 13:13-14). So the dragon, sea beast and land beasts together counterfeit Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

No one would likely want to follow a monster or a dragon, so Satan disguises the true nature of evil in order to get people to follow him and his minions. As stated by Paul, Satan transforms himself into an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). The unholy trinity is an apocalyptic parallel to the text in 2 Corinthians.

The idea of a counterfeit trinity is one of several cosmic contrasts in the Book of Revelation. There is a counterfeit trinity here in chapter 13 (and in 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) and a true trinity elsewhere in the book (1:4-6; 4:8, etc.). There is the pure woman of Revelation 12 and the prostitute of Revelation 17. There is the contrast between end-time Babylon (Rev 17-18) and the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22). There is the sea of glass (4:6; 15:2) and the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10,14,15). There are the marked (13:15-17; 20:4) and the sealed (7:1-8; 14:1). There are the three angels (14:6-12) and the three demonic frogs (16:13-14), both of which spread their respective gospels throughout the world.

This series of cosmic contrasts shows that Satan is doing all he can to counter the true work of God and the gospel. Satan seeks to portray God as one who is severe, arbitrary, unjust and dictatorial. In so doing he is actually attributing his own character to God. But in the context of the cosmic conflict, Satan sows seeds of distrust which God counters not by force but by self-sacrifice (5:5-6; 12:10-11).

The two beasts of Revelation 13 (one from the sea and the other from the earth) function as assistants or surrogates of the dragon. As such they seem to function in many ways like the two witnesses of chapter 11 (regarding the role of two witnesses in the Jewish legal system see comments on Revelation 11:3-6). The two witnesses are modeled on Moses and Elijah. Like Elijah, they harm people with fire (Rev 11:5; 2 Kings 1:1-14) and shut up heaven so that it might not rain for three and a half years (11:6; 1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; cf. Luke 4:25-26; James 5:17). Like Moses, they turn water into blood (11:6; Exod 7:14-25) and strike the earth with plagues (11:6; Exod 7:14 - 11:10). Moses and Elijah appeared alongside Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13; Mark 9:1-13; Luke 9:27-36). Both Moses and Elijah were visited by the very presence of God on Mount Sinai (Exod 33:17-23; 1 Kings 19:9-13), one in a cave and the other in the "cleft of the rock."

It should not be surprising, therefore, that there are numerous parallels between the two beasts of Revelation 13 and the two witnesses of Revelation 11. The two witnesses and the sea beast are both associated with a three-and-a-half year period (11:3; 13:5). The two witnesses and the land beast are associated with fire (11:5; 13:13-14). The two beasts work closely together, so that they are not easily distinguished in the final battle (13:12, 15). Similarly, the two witnesses are treated as if they were one (see comments on 11:5). The statement in Revelation 11:5: "If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed" (ESV) has an eerie similarity to 13:10. The land beast brings fire down from heaven (13:13), the two witnesses ascend up to heaven (11:11-12). The witnesses and the sea beast both have a death and a resurrection (11:7-10; 13:3,12,14). In both passages, reference is made to the crucifixion of Christ (11:8; 13:8). The two witnesses are prophets (11:3,6,10), the land

beast is the false prophet (16:13). The two witnesses receive God's breath (*pneuma*) of life (11:11), the land beast gives breath (*pneuma*) to the image of the beast (13:15).

The sea and land beasts are portrayed, therefore, as counterfeits of the two witnesses, which represented the Scriptures and the people of God (see comments on Revelation 11:3-6).

These parodies of the Trinity in chapter 13 seem deliberate. Like the cartoon movie *Lion King* this is an animal story on the surface, but it is not really about animals. This chapter projects that the last days of earth's history will be a time of great deception. There will be great confusion as to where God is working and where the enemy is at work. Satan will not only portray an angel of light (1 Cor 11:14) he will attempt to look, talk and act like God in order to deceive the world.

This chapter presents a counterfeit trinity, standing in the place of God on earth. The purpose of the counterfeit is to deceive the world as to which is the true God. In so doing, the allegiance of humans to God may be unwittingly compromised.

In Revelation Satan has two primary methods of dealing with human beings: 1) counterfeit (to deceive and persuade); and 2) force (to threaten and kill). In the course of history, force has prove to have its limits and persecution has often backfired. When a person's faith comes under threat, it often became stronger. Under opposition, the prayers become charged with importance and tend to be more fervent. In the final battle deception is refined to the point that many or most will not be able to tell which side is right--whether they are dealing with Christ or Satan.

The unholy trinity of Revelation 13 appears together again in chapter 16. There one finds the dragon, the beast and the false prophet (Rev 16:13). The beast is clearly the beast from the sea, as within Revelation 13 it is consistently called simply "the beast" after its initial appearance (Rev 13:2-5, 14-15, 17-18, in 13:12 it is twice called "the first beast"). Thus the "false prophet" in 16:13 must be a reference to the beast from the earth, who brings fire down from heaven like the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:24, 36-39; 2 Kings 1:9-12) and acts like the "spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10) in its counterfeit of the third person of the godhead.

There is good reason to think that the three parts of Babylon in Revelation 16:19 are to be equated with the unholy trinity of 16:13. If these are not connected, then it is uncertain why the three parts should be mentioned at all in chapter 16.

The concept of a great, worldwide, end-time deception that blurs the lines between the true God and the false raises a question not answered in Revelation 13. Why would God allow such a cunningly crafted deception? Why not make all things plain? A parallel text on end-time deception is 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 (see also Matt 24:24-27). In this text God not only allows the end-time deception but takes responsibility for it as being part of His plan. But the deception only comes on those who "did not receive the love of the truth in order that they might be saved." (2 Thess 2:10-11) This text divides the people of earth into three groups, those who love the truth, those who hate the truth, and those who are indifferently sitting on the fence between God and Satan. God's purpose in the end-time deception is to single out those who have not believed the truth and expose those who delight in wickedness even though they profess to be Christians. The purpose of the deception, from God's point of view, is that it gets

people off the fence, they end up either abandoning their apathy and committing to God or become more deeply entrenched in their opposition to the truth. So according to 2 Thessalonians 2 even a worldwide spiritual deception could serve a spiritual purpose.

Rev 13– As we have seen in chapters 11 and 12, when new main characters appear for the first time in Revelation they are often introduced with a visual description followed by a brief summary of their actions prior to the vision in which they are introduced. For example, the two witnesses are introduced in Revelation 11:3-6 and then act in the context of the vision in 11:7-13. The woman is introduced in 12:1-2 and then acts in the context of the vision from verses 5 and on in the chapter. The dragon is introduced in 12:3-4 and then acts throughout the rest of the book.

The vision of Revelation 11:7-13 is focused on the end-time, climaxing in the final proclamation of the gospel (11:11-13). But the two witnesses clearly existed before that time and their history includes the 1260 days mentioned in 11:2-3. The woman and the dragon clearly go back well before the birth of Christ, but the action of the vision moves from the ascension of the male child (12:5) to the final battle (12:17). These examples set the stage for the two new characters who appear in chapter 13.

Two new characters appear in chapter 13, a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. Each is introduced with a visual description (13:1-2, 11) followed by a summary of each beast's actions prior to the time of the vision (13:3-7, 11). Supportive of this general observation are the Greek tenses of the whole chapter. The main verbs of the introduction of the sea beast are entirely in past tense (Rev 13:1-7). Then the story shifts to present and future tenses (13:8-10), involving the beast's actions at the time of the final battle summarized in 12:17. The sea beast's actions at the time of the vision are continued in 13:12-18.

The same thing happens with the beast from the land in the latter part of the chapter. That beast is described and introduced (13:11), but the introduction is much briefer than that of the sea beast, suggesting that the land beast's history or pedigree is much shorter. The land beast then acts in the context of the final battle in 13:12-18. So there is movement in time with both beasts. Both have a record of past activity and they work together in the final conflict to accomplish the purposes of the dragon.

Rev 13 Introduction (spiritual lessons)–

1)– The Book of Revelation uses a lot of military language to describe the events of the end of history. But it is becoming clearer and clearer that the primary nature of that war has to do with words rather than guns or swords. The war in heaven (Rev 12:7-12) proved to be about Satan's accusations against the people of God and their response with a word of testimony. And his accusations against God's people are really accusations against God Himself.

In chapter 13 the dragon's war (Rev 12:17) is pursued by means of deceptive words and actions, creating confusion as to who God is and what God is like. The great battle at the end of time is more a battle for the mind than a battle that attempts to physically destroy the enemy. The purpose of Revelation is not to satisfy people's curiosity about political and military events of the future, but to motivate people to a true knowledge of God and to faithfulness in relationship with Him.

2)– What difference should knowledge of this end-time deception make in our lives? I

would suggest three things. As we approach the end of the world, we should pray as we have never prayed before. Pray for clarity, pray for a clean heart that is open to God and His ways. Second, we should search the scriptures as we've never searched them before. So often we read the Bible mainly to support conclusions we have already made on other grounds. The deceptions of the End require an openness to Scripture teaching as never before.

That means a third thing is vital. We need to exercise what I call "self-distrust." When we learn a little bit about the Bible or about God, we often feel so confident in our knowledge that God cannot teach us more. Unless we have a certain amount of self-distrust, we will tend to find in the Bible only support for what we already believe. But in order to know what we need to know, we have to distrust what we already believe just enough to be open to the Word of God no matter where it leads.

In the last days of earth's history Satan will seek to distort the scriptures by every possible means. In response we need to plead with God that He will help us to see what He wants us to see rather than what we want to see.

3)– Beginning with this chapter and throughout the last half of Revelation, a major theme develops. The end-time events will be arranged in such a way that people will have to clearly end up in one camp or another. To borrow language from 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12, in the final events, people will either be in love with the truth or deeply committed against the truth about God. There will be no more middle ground, no more sitting on the fence. The final proclamation of the gospel will produce a corresponding reaction against it, through the proclamation of a counterfeit of that gospel. The purpose of the deception from God's perspective is to clearly expose without a doubt where every person on earth stands.

Why would anyone be reluctant to commit to the truth about God? One reason is that such commitment can be very costly in human terms. Love of the truth above all else can cost you your job, your family, your reputation and even your life. Through the centuries, millions of people have experienced the cost of loving the truth. But the benefits outweigh the cost.

Rev 13:1-2 (Introduction)–

Assuming the most likely reading of the first sentence of this verse (12:18 in the Greek), the dragon, standing on the beach, calls a beast up out of the water. In the rest of this verse and the next a physical description of the beast is given in the order that his parts come out of the water. The arrival of the beast is first signaled by the appearance of its horns, rising up out of the water. Next to appear are the seven heads, perhaps on long necks that allow the beast's body to remain below the surface of the water for a moment. John's eyes then move to the ten crowns which are on the horns and the blasphemous names that are on each head.

As the beast continues to come up out of the sea, John notes that the body is like that of a leopard. Then he sees that the feet are like those of a bear. Finally, perhaps because the beast begins speaking, John's attention is drawn to the mouth, which is like the mouth of a lion. So these verses offer a physical and visual description of the beast from the sea. As when other characters in the Book of Revelation are introduced (the son of man in chapter 1, the two witnesses [11:3-6], the woman of Revelation 12 [12:1-2] and the dragon [12:3-4]) this beast is described visually before its actions in the past and present are described.

This observation may seem pointless, except that some interpreters see the order of details as representing chronological sequence. For example, the death and resurrection of the beast is mentioned before the 42 months. But if the order of details is more visual than chronological, too much should not be made of the order in interpretation.

While the beast comes up out of the sea, other beasts in Revelation come up out of the “abyss” (Rev 11:7; 17:8, see also 9:1; 20:1-3-- “bottomless pit” in some translations). So the sea and the abyss are parallel concepts in these texts, suggesting a demonic origin for the sea beast (see notes on Rev 9:1). Just as the locusts and scorpions of the fifth trumpet represent the agents of Satan (9:11– *Apollyon/Abaddon*), so the sea beast looks just like the dragon, which is the devil, Satan, and the ancient serpent (Rev 12:9). The sea beast, therefore, blends the images of Jesus Christ and Satan, the ultimate counterfeit.

The visual description of the sea beast is clearly grounded on the vision of Daniel 7. There are multiple verbal (horns, heads, leopard, bear, lion, sea), thematic (beasts representing earthly powers coming up out of the sea), and structural (beast of Rev 13 a composite of all the beasts in Dan 7) parallels between the two passages. In Daniel 7:3-6 you have three beasts which came up out of the sea. The first was like a lion, the second looked like a bear, the third looked like a leopard. All three beasts are mentioned in the description of the beast from the sea in this passage. The background of Daniel is clear. The fourth beast (Dan 7:7-8) is unlike any animal known in nature, but its actions are echoed in the actions of the sea beast (Rev 13:3ff.), so it too makes up part of the background here.

The seven heads and ten horns of the sea beast also equal the total number of heads and horns among the four beasts of Daniel 7. The leopard of Daniel (7:5) has four heads while the other three each have one. The fourth beast of Daniel (7:7) has ten horns, while the other three have none. So the seven heads and ten horns of the beast from the sea in this passage highlight the composite nature of this beast. It contains within itself the history and characteristics of all four beasts in Daniel 7. If the seven heads are consecutive (17:10) but all seven are in view here, the beast is being viewed from the perspective of the end, as is also clear from 12:17.

Rev 13:1–

The first part of this verse in the English is listed as Revelation 12:18 in the Greek, but that is not critical to interpretation. More critical is a major textual problem in this sentence. In traditional translations like the King James Version it says “And I stood upon the sand of the sea.” In this reading, it is John himself who stands on the sand of the sea (the beach). In contrast, modern translations have something like, “And he stood on the sand of the sea.” (ESV) In the latter case the “he” refers to the dragon, who was the subject of 12:17 (The NIV translates “the dragon” even though the word is not in any original). The reading “he” is the strongest in the earliest manuscripts of Revelation and is thus favored as the most likely reading. The reading “I” (John) is most common in the later manuscripts from the Middle Ages.

The dragon reading of this sentence puts the emphasis on the dragon’s actions and the continuation of those actions through the activities of both the sea beast and the land beast in chapter 13. If John is seen as the subject of the sentence, then the emphasis is on John’s

position as the one viewing the actions of the chapter.

The “dragon” reading also fits the story line better and is to be preferred. The dragon “goes away” to make war with the remnant. He goes away to the shore of the sea (presumably what we call the Mediterranean). From that vantage point he is joined by a beast from the sea on the one hand and a beast from the earth on the other. The combination of features in the narrative have the two new characters in the story joining forces with the dragon, thereby creating the “unholy trinity” (see previous comments on Revelation 13 as a whole). If the reading “I” (John) is accepted, the link between the dragon and the two new creatures is less obvious, but still necessary to the drama.

The beast from the sea has ten horns and seven heads. As such it looks just like the dragon of Revelation 12. This is part of the beast’s parody of Jesus Christ. In John 14:9 Jesus said, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” Jesus was the living embodiment of His Father’s character while He was on earth. If you have seen what He is like you know what the Father would be like if He had taken a human body the same way Jesus did. The sea beast looks just like the dragon. He is a counterfeit of Christ in this text. In character he is just like the dragon.

If the dragon represents Satan in the primary sense (as indicated in Rev 12:9– in a secondary sense it represents Rome, which sought to destroy the baby Jesus through the actions of Herod– 12:5), the beast from the sea represents an earthly power that also exhibits Satan’s character in the way it blasphemes God and persecutes His people. The supernatural world deeply impacts the world of history in the Book of Revelation.

The ten crowns on the sea beast’s horns (these are “diadems” in the Greek rather than the victory crown of the Olympics [*stephanoi*]– see notes on Rev 6:2) draw immediate attention, as the dragon had crowns on its heads rather than its horns (Rev 12:3). There is a reason for the difference. In Daniel 7 the animals that came up from the sea described powers that would rule the entire world--Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. The last beast had ten horns symbolizing the break up of the Roman empire into ten parts (Dan 7:24). The crowns on the heads of the dragon would indicate that he operated during the time that these ancient nations (animals) had their power. The dragon was behind those ancient nations, including pagan Rome which sought to destroy Jesus at His birth (Matt 2:12-18). So having crowns the dragon's heads would recall the powers represented by the four beasts of Daniel 7.

Here author of Revelation tells us that the beast coming from the sea would represent a new power which follows pagan Rome. Just as the ten horns of the fourth beast of Daniel 7 acted later than the beast (Dan 7:24), the ten horns with crowns would represent that time in history after Rome fell. The sea beast is later in both time and authority than the fourth beast of Daniel 7. In the story, the beast receives its power and authority from the dragon, in history the power represented by the sea beast receives its power from the pagan Roman empire. To use other words, the images of Revelation 13:1-2 suggest Daniel 7 is a listing of the beast's family tree. That family tree includes all the powers that came before it; Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

The clearest definition of blasphemy in the Bible is found in John 10:33, where some Jewish leaders are ready to stone Jesus for blasphemy, which they define as a mere man (in

their understanding of Jesus) making himself out to be God. A similar charge was levied against Jesus at His trial before Caiaphas (Matthew 26:63-65; Mark 14:61-64). While the sea beast is clearly a political power, this language indicates gives the beast has a religious agenda as well.

A blasphemous name would be one that is deliberately chosen to demean God or assert a right to His place. In the case of the sea beast, these blasphemous names indicate a blasphemous political and religious power that is in direct opposition to God. The beast goes on to act on its character by speaking great, even blasphemous things, including blasphemies against God, his name and his tabernacle, namely those who live in heaven (Rev 13:5-6). This language recalls the little horn of Daniel 7, which followed after the ten horns and opened its mouth to speak great things against the Most High God (Dan 7:8, 24-25).

The blasphemous name on each head of the sea beast is compounded in Revelation 17:3 where the beast is described as “full of the names of blasphemy” (Rev 17:3). This power claims the prerogatives of God and equality with Him. This clearly indicates that this political power in the line of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome is also a religious power operating in opposition to God and His people. The beast claims the kind of worship that belongs only to Christ (Rev 13:3-4).

Rev 13:2–

As noted earlier, the three animals mentioned in this verse are the first three animals that came out of the sea in Daniel 7. The first beast there was a winged lion (Dan 7:4), an ancient symbol for Babylon, so represented on gates built by King Nebuchadnezzar himself (these gates can be viewed at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin). The second beast (Dan 7:5), a bear raised up on one side with three ribs in its mouth, represented the kingdom of Medo-Persia. The third beast, a four-headed leopard (Dan 7:6), represented Alexander the Great’s Grecian Empire. Clearly all four beasts of Daniel 7 are built into a composite in this passage. But the first three beasts are listed in reverse order in this verse. This suggests that the sea beast is most parallel to the fourth beast of Daniel 7, although it includes elements of the first three.

The sea beast of Revelation 13, therefore, has a pedigree grounded in the sequence of empires outlined in Daniel 7. This ally of Satan is a political power that is the successor of all the powers that went before him. The activities of this power would occur in history sometime after the breakup of the Roman Empire and the appearance of its ten successors.

One aspect of the fourth beast, however, is not directly stated in this chapter, its opposition to the law of God in the person of the little horn that arises later. However, as we will see, opposition to the first table of the ten commandments is a major focus of this chapter (see also Revelation 12:17 and 14:12). So opposition to the law of God is a thematic parallel between the sea beast and Daniel 7.

The dragon gives the sea beast his power, throne and great authority. The relationship between the dragon and the sea beast is reminiscent of the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ. Jesus declared in Matthew 28:18: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.” Who gave Him all that authority? Clearly His Father. This transaction is mentioned also in Revelation 2:27, 3:21 and 12:10). So we see here again how the sea beast is a counterfeit of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 12 and 13 lay out what is unsaid in Revelation 5. In Revelation 5 there is an unspecified threat to the throne of God. The call goes out for someone who is worthy (qualified) to open the scroll. Everything in heaven and earth seems to hang on finding such a worthy person (Rev 5:1-5). That person is represented by the slain Lamb (Rev 5:6). Unspoken in that scene is the great conflict between Christ and Satan, the great challenge to God's right to rule in the universe. That conflict becomes clear in Revelation 12 and 13, as we have seen. The beast from the sea is the counterpart to Christ on the side of the dragon/Satan. Just as Christ received His authority from His Father, so the sea beast receives his authority from the dragon.

Rev 13:3–

In this verse it is not the beast itself, but one of its heads that seems wounded to death (although verses 12 and 14 suggest the opposite). In chapter 17:8-11 it seems clear that the seven heads are to be seen as consecutive rather than contemporary with each other. In that case (and consistent with verses 12 and 14) the death of a head represents the death of the whole beast, which then comes back to life with a new head. In other words, this passage indicates that there is a time when the beast is dead, and then comes to life again. This is paralleled in Revelation 17:8, where the beast has an “is not” phase.

The resurrection of the beast leads to the present and future tenses of 13:8-10 and 12-18. So the resurrection of the sea beast seems to be the defining moment that introduces the end-time battle of 12:17 into the narrative of chapter 13. The 42 months, the death of the beast, the counterfeit of Christ, all of that is part of the introduction of the sea beast, actions in the past with regard to the end-time setting of 12:17. The sea beast is the successor of the dragon (Rev 13:2), reigns for 42 months (13:5), then experiences a death and a resurrection (13:3) before taking up its role in the final crisis (13:12-18).

The Greek expression regarding one of the heads of the beast is that it was “as it were slaughtered to death” (*hōs esphagmenên eis thanaton*). This is not simply a serious wounding with fatal potential, but is in fact a “slaughtering” to death. The word I translated “slaughter” is widely used in the Greek OT for the sacrifices in the sanctuary (Lev 8:15, 23; 9:8, etc.). It is also used in relation to murder, as in Cain's murder of his brother Abel (1 John 3:12). Even more important for our understanding here, the same word (*esphagmenou*) is used in Revelation 13:8 with reference to the cross of Christ (see also Rev 5:6, 9). So the death of the beast's head (and by implication the death of the beast itself) is a counterfeit of the death of Christ and part of the Christ parody played by the sea beast in this passage. The death of the beast in this verse, therefore, has both sanctuary and Christ-like overtones.

Interestingly, when this event is recalled in Revelation 13:12,14 it is not one of the heads, but the beast itself that received the mortal wound and “came back to life” (Rev 13:14; the same expression is used for the resurrection at the beginning of the thousand years in 20:4). This confirms that the deadly wound of this verse is a wound unto death and that the healing is in fact a resurrection. The beast lives consecutively through each of the seven heads. The head that was slaughtered in this verse is probably the seventh head of Revelation 17:9-11 (see notes on that passage).

The healing of the beast's fatal wound is part of the parody of the death and

resurrection of Christ (which is mentioned in Revelation 1:5,18 and 2:8). The sea beast functions as a counterfeit of Jesus' work, ministry, death and resurrection. The "had been healed" (NIV) is not a bad translation but in the Greek, the aorist indicative tense makes it a point in past time. There are several different ways to express past time in Greek: continuous past, completed past, and a past completed before the past, so to speak. The healing of the wound is a completed action in the past from the perspective of the chapter as a whole.

The use of past tenses throughout the first seven verses of this chapter suggest that John is describing this beast's characteristics, actions, and history from the perspective of the end-time war (Revelation 12:17). The calling up out of the sea is an end-time event, but before the beast acts in the context of the vision (13:8-10, 12-18, also chapters 16 through 18) its appearance and previous actions are described as a means of identification.

The whole world is astonished on account of the sea beast's resurrection and thus follows the beast. Since the main verbs continue in the past tense, this adulation of the beast, along with the verse that follows, occurs before the end-time events of Revelation 12:17 and the last part of chapter 13. While the sea beast acts in a universal context at the end of history, it is a power that also had nearly universal sway at some point in the past. Given the background of this passage in Daniel 7, the sea beast's historical dominance parallels that of the little horn after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Rev 13:4–

The resurrection of the sea beast causes humans to worship the dragon who gave the sea beast its authority, as noted in verse 2. People worship the sea beast because of its startling resurrection, and they worship the dragon because he is the power behind the beast.

The phrase "who is like the beast?" is not chosen at random. For one thing, it is a mocking counterpart of the Old Testament phrase "who is like You?" (addressed to God—Exod 15:11; Psa 35:10; Mic 7:18) It is also related to the Jesus Christ counterfeit in this passage. The previous symbolic reference to Jesus Christ is the term "Michael" in Revelation 12:7. (See notes on that verse for a survey of the uses of "Michael" throughout the Bible.) In Hebrew, the name Michael means "Who is like God?" In using this language the people of earth in the story are seeing the beast from the sea as a Christ figure. The beast's history involves a counterfeit of Jesus Christ and, therefore, the beast from the sea should be understood as the Antichrist, even though the term itself is not used in the book of Revelation.

Rev 13:4– (Excursus on Antichrist)

The multiple ways in which the sea beast counterfeits the life and work of Jesus Christ has caused many scholars of Revelation to identify the sea beast with the Antichrist. Our completion of Revelation 13:1-4 would seem to be a helpful place for an excursus that reviews the Antichrist concept in Scripture and in the ancient world.

The word "Antichrist" does not occur in the book of Revelation. Within the Bible it is found only in the letters of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). The term "Antichrist" is a compound word in the Greek. It is made up of "anti" and "christ." The Greek preposition "anti" means "against" or "in place of." It often expresses the idea of substitution, one in the place

that belongs to another.

The “Christ” portion of the term, of course, is the Greek equivalent of “Messiah,” the “anointed one.” When used in certain circumstances with a definite article; “the Christ,” it is a title rather than a name for Jesus (Matt 11:2; 16:16, 20; 22:42; 24:5, 23 and parallels in Mark and Luke; also Luke 24:26, 46; John 1:20, 25, 41; 3:28; Acts 2:41; 17:3; Rev 11:15; 12:10, etc.). One could simply translate “the Christ” into English as “the Messiah.” More often, especially without the article but sometimes with it, it can be translated simply “Christ.” In other words, the title became so commonly used for Jesus that it became simply another name for Him (Acts 3:6; 8:12; 10:48; Rom 3:22, 24; 1 Cor 1:10, 13, 17; Gal 3:13-14; Rev 1:1-2, etc.). So at its root in the New Testament, the concept of Antichrist would be someone who substitutes for Christ. He undermines or takes the place that belongs to the Messiah of Christian faith.

Since the term “antichrist” is fairly rare in the New Testament, a full understanding of the concept requires the examination of synonyms within the Bible and narratives in the ancient world outside the Bible in order to reconstruct a full portrait of this personage. In Revelation 13 itself, however, it is clear that the Antichrist figure has worldwide impact and influence, especially at the end (Rev 13:7-8, 14,16). The final spiritual fraud will be global in extent. No one will be excluded from the final test of true versus false worship. With the help of his friend, the beast from the earth, the Antichrist will enforce a global economic boycott (Rev 13:16-17) and a death decree against all who refuse to worship the image of the beast (Rev 13:15). In a sense he offers the attractive appeal: “Come with me, if you want to live.” To those who believe that the persecutions of the Middle Ages are forever gone, the future holds a big surprise.

Is there one Antichrist or are there many? The biblical answer seems to be “yes.” In the letters of John, the Antichrist is coming in the future, but is already present in the world (1 John 4:3). It seems that for John there were many antichrists in the present, but that these were only the predecessors of THE future Antichrist (from the perspective of John’s day). The “spirit of antichrist” (1 John 4:3, KJV) was already in the world, and it was present in the many antichrists of John’s day. But the full and final incarnation of antichrist was still in the future. The last and worst Antichrist was yet to come.

Revelation 13 seems to support this dual picture of the Antichrist. The sea beast of Revelation 13 has seven heads on one body. From Revelation 17:10 it becomes evident that the seven heads of the beast are consecutive in point of time, even though John sees all seven at the same time. So the slaughter of one of the heads of the beast results in the death of the beast itself. The beast then returns to life with a new head. Notice that in Revelation 13 verses 12 and 14 it is the beast itself that is wounded to death and comes back to life, not just one of its heads (13:3). So this one beast symbolizes the many different forms Antichrist has assumed in his opposition to God’s truth from one age to another.

An important feature of the Antichrist in 1 John is that it is not a furious persecutor, nor is it an agent attacking the church from outside. The primary feature of Antichrist in John’s letters is that of deception. Speaking of the multiple antichrists of his day, John notes that they had appeared within the community and went out from there (1 John 2:18-19). While within the community they misled others into thinking they taught correct doctrine and preached the

true Christ. They were, in fact, liars (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7).

Interestingly, Jesus predicted the very situation John was referring to here, except He didn't use the term "Antichrist." Instead, Jesus told His disciples that both "false prophets" and "false christs" would appear. So He set the table for John's plural use of "antichrist." The work of these false christs would be so deceptive that it would sweep away even the elect, if that were possible (Matt 24:23-25). So Jesus and John agreed on multiple, deceptive antichrists. They also agreed that these antichrists were human individuals, apostate believers. For Jesus, the false christs were coming in His name (Matt 24:5). For John, they were once part of the community that followed Jesus (1 John 2:18-19).

In the letters of John, therefore, Antichrist is much more than a single figure, it is a whole way of thinking and operating. Christians are invited to "conquer" the antichrists by discerning the true anointing from the false (1 John 2:20, 27). As we have seen, there is a strong emphasis in John that the Antichrist would be involved in lying and deception (1 John 2:22; 2 John 7). This is consistent with the Jewish tradition that false prophets would try to counter the true prophet (Deut 18:15, 18) when he would come.

According to John, the Antichrist would come at the "last hour" (1 John 2:18) but in a sense the last hour had already come in the multiple antichrists (1 John 2:18) already present. The last days of John's community were heralds of the very last days of earth's history. In the letters of John, therefore, the future Antichrist is brought into the present experience of the church. He saw the Antichrist not as some future outside enemy, but as an internal danger which would lead to secessionist movements within the church. These writings were forerunners of the Reformers, who identified the Antichrist with the Pope.

There are multiple parallels between the sea beast of Revelation 13 and the "antichrist" figure of 2 Thessalonians 2. Both of them exalt themselves to the place of God (2 Thess 2:4; Rev 13:5-6). Both demand worship (2 Thess 4; Rev 13:4, 8, 12). Both use miracles in order to deceive (2 Thess 2:9-10; Rev 13:13-14). And both are destroyed by Jesus Christ at His second coming (2 Thess 2:8; Rev 14:9; 19:11-21). If the beast from the sea represents a counterfeit of Jesus Christ, so does the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2.

Instead of Antichrist, Paul uses the term "The Lawless One" (2 Thess 2:8— *ho anomos* in the Greek). Many scholars see the language of 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 and 8-9 as modeled on Antiochus Epiphanes, who was understood by Jews of the time as a type of the Antichrist, and also the blasphemous king of Daniel 11:36-39. Antiochus was king of Syria around 165 BC and invaded Palestine, oppressing the Jews. Among other things he sacrificed a pig on the temple altar in Jerusalem, forced Jews to eat pork, and forbade the keeping of the Sabbath.

The Lawless One in Second Thessalonians is clearly an apostate figure. He usurps the throne of God, sets himself up in God's temple, and proclaims himself to be God (2 Thess 2:3-4). So he is more of a religious leader than a political leader. Antichrist is not likely a dictator, general or president. They don't normally demand worship or proclaim themselves God. In 2 Thessalonians 2:9 the lawless one counterfeits the earthly ministry and second coming of Jesus and is then destroyed by the brightness of Jesus' coming (2 Thess 2:8-9). In Paul there is also a demonic side to this "Antichrist," he comes "in accordance with the work of Satan (2:9). By his very name ("man of lawlessness," "lawless one"— 2 Thess 2:3, 8) this figure is one who seeks to

undermine the law of God, is arrogant to the point of blasphemy, is an agent of Satan, has characteristics of Satan himself, comes with miracles and signs, tries to deceive the world and is destroyed with those who follow him.

This figure in 2 Thessalonians is not one of the many antichrists referenced in the letters of John (1 John 2:18-22; 4:3; 2 John 7). This seems to be THE future Antichrist that was still coming in John's day (1 John 2:19), although the "mystery of lawlessness" was already at work in the church in Paul's day (see the "spirit of antichrist" in 1 John 4:3).

A further biblical dimension to the Antichrist concept can be seen in the beasts and little horn of the Book of Daniel, particularly in chapters 7, 8 and 11 (which many scholars have identified with Antiochus Epiphanes, although that historical figure did not meet every detail of the little horn descriptions in Daniel). The strong parallels between Revelation 13 and Daniel 7 have already been noted. Also the parallel between 2 Thessalonians 2:4 and Daniel 11:36-39.

The little horn power of Daniel would have human eyes (Dan 7:8), speak "great things" (7:8, 20), make war against the saints (7:21), speak against God Himself and think to change "times and law" (7:25, Hebrew and Greek; "make alterations in times and in law," NASB), overthrow the stars of heaven and even the sanctuary itself (8:10-11), and operate with deceit and destruction (8:24-25). The king of Daniel 11:36-39 seems the same or a parallel figure within Daniel. He exalts himself over all gods and operates by force. Interestingly, Hippolytus (early church father) saw Daniel 11 as well as Daniel 7 in the background of Revelation 13:4, calling the three horns that were uprooted in Daniel 7 (8, 20, 24) Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia (Dan 11:42-43). So the sea beast image is strongly based in the prophecies of Daniel.

Turning to Antichrist traditions outside the Bible I am particularly indebted here to the scholarly research work of my friend Josephine Massyngbaerde Ford (note her commentary on Revelation in the Anchor Bible series), which she shared as a private paper. In early Jewish and Christian tradition the Antichrist had forerunners like Lamech, Nimrod, Balaam, Achan, Goliath and Judas. He is of Jewish parentage from the tribe of Dan (Gen 49:10-17; Deut 33:22; Jer 8:16; Isa 25:6-8). Note that the tribe of Dan is not listed in Revelation 7.

There were two broad traditions related to the nature of Antichrist. In one tradition the Antichrist would be born naturally from human parents. In the other tradition he would be born from an evil spirit and a whore. He would be a human agent of the devil mentored directly by Satan himself. His place of birth was generally thought to be Babylon. His physical appearance is described in 4 Ezra 4:29-32 (see James Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 568), ApocDan 9:16-27 (see James Charlesworth, *OT Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 767-768) and The Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian (see <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0831.htm>, paragraph 3). Many of the characteristics of his appearance were associated with ancient Greek perceptions of shameless personal behavior. The ancients associated physical characteristics with temperament and character. Antichrist would be physically ugly and out of normal bodily proportions.

Increasing moral decadence, wars, plagues, famines and other disasters would precede the Antichrist's birth. In early Christian tradition, the Antichrist would arise after the fall of the Roman Empire, when the order of the world would collapse. There would also be signs in the day and night skies. He would come as a mighty warrior, proclaiming false doctrines and with

great power to deceive. He would perform miracles, move to the Mount of Olives and proclaim himself the Messiah. In some traditions he would even perform a pseudo resurrection and a pseudo-Pentecost.

The beasts of Revelation 13 were often identified with Antichrist by the early church fathers (Tertullian, Augustine, Jerome, etc.). As the serpent and Satan, the dragon of chapter 12 has characteristics of Antichrist as well. The dragon has affinities with Tiamat, the chaos monster of the ancient world, which raged against the gods. The serpent/Satan/dragon, of course, opposed God at creation and will oppose Him also at the end of time.

The two beasts of Revelation 13 may owe their origin to the two great animals described in Job 40 and 41. There is Leviathan, the male sea monster (Job 41:1-34, see also Job 3:8; 7:12; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Isa 27:1-2), and Behemoth, the female land monster (Job 40:15-24). The sea monster is most frequently identified with Antichrist and our exegesis of Revelation 13 so far strongly affirms the Christ references in the sea beast passage. The sea beast is clearly a predatory beast (lion, bear, leopard), so there is the sense that it is fierce and destructive. There are supernatural qualities to the beast, as he receives his throne and authority from the dragon/Satan.

The second beast also has Antichrist qualities, but as we have seen these fit better under the rubric of the Holy Spirit, who takes on Christ's earthly roles after His ascension (John 14-16).

This post completes our excursus on the theme of Antichrist in the Bible and the ancient world. A couple of spiritual lessons based on this study will follow before we continue with an analysis of verse 5 in Revelation 13.

Rev 13:4– (Spiritual Lessons on Antichrist)

1) According to John 17:3, eternal life is to KNOW Jesus Christ, to make him the very first priority in one's life. But the history of interpretation offers us an interesting paradox. Through the centuries, people have often been much more interested in knowing the Antichrist than in knowing the true Christ. Few other subjects have attracted as much attention and imagination from religious thinkers. So we need to keep this subject in balance if we wish to maintain spiritual health. The subject of Antichrist must be important or it wouldn't be featured so centrally as it is in Revelation. On the other hand, it is not the one topic of supreme importance. That topic is Jesus Christ Himself. Antichrist is important because he seeks to take the place of Christ, to disguise Him from the many who need eternal life. If we know the Antichrist we can better avoid mis-readings of the gospel. Thus alongside the message of Christ, there is a valid place for study of the Antichrist, which we are attempting to do here. But such study needs to be kept in a subordinate place in comparison with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2) We have noticed that the Antichrist figure has worldwide impact and influence, especially at the end (Rev 13:7-8, 14,16). The final spiritual fraud will be global in extent. That means that no one will be excluded from the final test of true versus false worship. There will be no easy escape from the deceptions of the end. So it is important to be prepared; through study, prayer and self-distrust. But the sea beast will not stop with deception. When this does not achieve the desired results, he causes all who refuse to worship the image to be killed (Rev

13:15). He offers the attractive appeal: "Come with me, if you want to live." For those who believe that the persecutions of the Middle Ages are forever gone, the future holds a big surprise. Those who live through those days will be the ones who do not love their lives even unto death (Rev 12:11).

3) When Antichrist seeks to deceive he does not put something bad in place of something good. That would no more be a good deception than attempting to buy things with play money. Instead, Antichrist seeks to replace the very best with something that is good in its proper place. A candle may give light in its proper place, but when lit on a sunny day it only creates a shadow.

For instance, obedience (personal righteousness) is a very good thing in its place. Obedience as a response to what God has done for us is a beautiful thing. Believers should live righteous, sober and godly lives by the Spirit (Titus 2:12; 1 John 3:7). But when our personal obedience is put in the place where God's mighty saving actions should be, that is the theology of Antichrist. The basic error of the medieval church was to make obedience the root rather than the fruit of our salvation. All other errors, such as indulgences, veneration of the saints, and the change of the Sabbath were possible once the gospel itself was forgotten. Antichrist uses the good to undo the best.

In current evangelical thought and practice there are similar core distortions at times. What members of some churches want to know these days is not, "How can I please God?" but "How can God please me?" "How can church membership make my life radiantly happy, filled with success and contentment?" How quickly the words of Jesus are forgotten: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." And "whoever would save his life will lose it" (Mark 8:34-35, ESV). So as it was in John's day, there are still many antichrists among us, and some of them don't even realize it. And perhaps the antichrist that we should most fear is self.

Rev 13:5–

There is an allusion here to the book of Daniel where there are the proud words and blasphemies of another beast from the sea (Dan 7:8, 25). The little horn arises after the fourth beast. That power is related to Rome, arises out of it, and succeeds it. This suggests that the rise of the little horn (Daniel 7) is at the same point in history as the calling of the sea beast (Revelation 13). This places the sea beast in its historical context. The mention of blasphemy (see notes on 13:2) indicates that the sea beast is a religious power as well as a political one. The introduction to the sea beast combines political imagery from Daniel 7 with religious actions. This would represent a time in history when church and state were united in order to achieve common goals.

The sea beast exercises authority for forty-two months, or "time, times and half a time" (Dan 7:25). This period of three and a half years reminds the reader of the ministry of Jesus for a similar period, according to the Gospel of John (assuming that the unnamed feast of John 5:1 is a Passover). This is in harmony with the overall counterfeit of the work of the Jesus Christ in the introduction to the sea beast (Rev 13:1-7). But while the sea beast looks and acts like Jesus, he is clearly opposed to Jesus, blaspheming God's name and oppressing God's people (see also

13:6). See notes on the year-day principle at Revelation 12:14. The sea beast's period of dominance before the End-time is at the same time that the dragon is pursuing the woman into the desert. The designation "42 months" is found only here and in Revelation 11:2 in the whole Bible. All five expressions of this general time period (Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5) refer to the same period in history.

Rev 13:1-5 Summary--

The first two verses are grounded in the general background of Daniel 7's four beasts. This suggests a strong political heritage in the background of the sea beast. These two verses offer a visual description of the sea beast as its various parts rise up out of the sea. Verses 3-4 describe the actions of the sea beast before the time of the vision (Rev 12:17). The beast experiences a death and a resurrection like that of Christ (see 13:8). The death and resurrection of the sea beast results in worldwide adulation, which also occurs before the final battle summarized by 12:17. This is in contrast with 13:8 where the tense of the verbs related to worldwide worship moves from past to future. So the sea beast experiences two periods of worldwide worship and adulation, the first is before the final events, in point of time, and the second is future from the perspective of the introductory verse in 12:17. Verse 5 describes the length of the beast's "ministry," three and a half years. The use of the word "blasphemy" indicates the beast is religious as well as political in nature. The main verbs throughout this passage are in past tense, which indicates that the beast's introduction involves an outline of its actions before the time of the main vision in 13:8-10, and 12-18.

Rev 13:6--

The past tense here ("opened") continues the introduction of past actions on the part of the sea beast from the perspective of the final battle (12:17). The emphasis in this verse is on an elaboration of the blasphemy theme introduced in verses one and five. On blasphemy see the notes on verse two. In the Greek "blasphemy appears in two forms in this verse. First is the noun form, the beast opens his mouth in blasphemy (*blasphêmias*) against God. Next comes the verb form, he "blasphemes" (*blasphêmêsai*) God's name, His dwelling place and those who live in heaven. The three objects of the sentence elaborate on the meaning of the noun blasphemy in the first clause, as we will see.

The Greek word often translated "dwelling place" (*skênên*) in this verse means tent or booth (Matt 17:4; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33; Heb 11:9). As such it was used for the tabernacle, the portable sanctuary the Israelites carried around with them in the wilderness (Exod 25:8-9; 28:43; 29:44; 30:16, etc.). The same Greek word is used when referring to the Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13,16; 31:10; 2 Chr 8:13, etc.). The heavenly sanctuary is also referenced in chapters four and five, Revelation 8:2-6, 11:1-2 and 15:5-8. It is the place where Jesus performs His ongoing work of intercession and judgment in behalf of His people on earth. Since God's tent is here equated with "those who live in heaven" this seems to be a metaphorical use of the heavenly sanctuary.

So in this verse the heavenly sanctuary probably represents the people of God collectively, the church. Sanctuary language is applied to the church at several points in the

New Testament. In 1 Peter 2:4-10, each member of the church is like a stone. Collectively the members of the church are built up into a house for God where “spiritual sacrifices” (*pneumatikas thusias*) are offered. In Ephesians 2:19-22 Jews and Gentiles together are built up into a “holy temple” (*naon hagion*) through the Holy Spirit, building upon Christ who is the chief cornerstone. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 the Corinthian church is called a holy temple which no man would dare to destroy. So applying sanctuary language to the church is a common practice in the New Testament.

Applying sanctuary language to the church probably goes back to a saying of Jesus quoted in Matthew 18:20, KJV: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Jesus’ choice of wording seems to reflect an early rabbinic tradition recording in *Pirke Aboth* 3:2 (*Mishnah*): “For where two or three gather to study *Torah*, the *Shekinah* glory is in the midst.” Notice that the two statements are very similar, except that Jesus substitutes “my name” for *Torah* and the first person “I” for *Shekinah* glory. Studying *Torah* is the mark of a Jewish community and results in God’s temple presence with the community. For the Christian community Jesus plays the role of the *Torah* and those who gather in His name become a temple housing the *Shekinah* glory. Thus, the earthly sanctuary not only represents the temple in heaven, it is also applied to the church on earth. See also several discussions of sanctuary language in the comments on Revelation 11:1-2.

The phrase “those who live in heaven,” therefore, probably represents the people of God. The New Testament speaks of the saints as living in “heavenly places” in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6; see also Col 3:1-3) even though they are not literally in heaven. Their minds and hearts are focused on the larger picture of the universe offered in the Book of Revelation. By way of contrast, the opponents of God and His people are often described by the phrase “those who live on the earth.” The latter phrase is never positive in the book of Revelation (see, for example, Rev 13:8, 12, 14 and 14:6), even though the term “earth” by itself can be used in positive ways.

Rev 13:7–

The passive verb at the beginning of this verse refers back to verse two, where the beast's power was delegated by the dragon. Making war against the saints is likely an allusion to oppressing the saints in Daniel 7:25. Because the past tense is continued in this verse, this war against the saints is earlier than the final battle and sets the stage for the war against the saints that was summarized in 12:17 and is carried out in verses 12-18 of this chapter.

In verse two the sea beast was given the dragon’s authority as well as his power and throne. The divine passive (“power was given him”) in the latter part of the verse echos the one earlier in this verse and also in verse 2. As in verse 2, the beast here is described as having authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. This universal language appears frequently in the book of Revelation and is related to two groups of people, both the followers and opponents of God. Here the sea beast pursues his war against the saints in every geographical and ethnic locality. The sea beast chooses to exercise its authority in the very places where the saints are working.

But in Revelation 14:6 the everlasting gospel is to be presented exactly the same

geographical and ethnic entities. In other words, in the midst of persecution the people of God nevertheless draw believers from the very places where the dragon and sea beast have authority. This end-time outcome of the preaching of the gospel is foreshadowed in the glorious enthronement scene of Revelation 5 (5:9-10).

The past tenses in this verse continue the past tenses throughout verses 1-7. These all function as an introduction to the sea beast, first as a visual description and then in terms of the beast's actions prior to its activity in relation to the vision of chapter 13. Everything in these seven verses occurs prior to the time of 12:17 and the latter part of the chapter, where the move to the end-time context is marked by present and future tenses (13:8-10, 12-18). The sea beast's authority over the earth in verse seven is prior to its authority in verse 12. This is evident from two pieces of evidence. First, is the shift from past tense in this verse to present tenses ("exercises," "makes") in verse 12. Second, the sea beast's authority over the earth is exercised directly in this verse while it is exercised by the land beast in the sea beast's behalf in the final battle of verse 12. The beast is worshiped by all at the end, but it exercises civil power through others.

Rev 13:1-7 (Summary)–

This passage introduces and summarizes the history or pedigree of the sea beast before its actions in relation to the final crisis (summarized in Revelation 12:17). In its history the sea beast is both a religious and a political power. It is worshiped by those who live on the earth, yet it exercises significant civil powers, as is evident from its pedigree in Daniel 7 and its character as a beast in visionary outlines of history. Religious powers often exercise political and economic authority through their influence over the political and military powers of the world (one can see this kind of relationship in the Islamic world today). In the final battle, the sea beast's authority over the earth is exercised through the land beast (Rev 13:12-18), which itself has significant religious inclinations (see comments on 13:11). The combination of religious and political authority in the final battle is further expressed in the image of the woman riding the beast in chapter 17. The exact relationship between the events of chapters 13 and 17 is a major issue when it comes to understanding the book of Revelation.

Rev 13:7 (spiritual lesson)–

In the New Testament many things are true in one sense yet not so true in another. In other words, the New Testament describes the new realities that Jesus brings in terms of the "now" and the "not yet," with both elements operating at the same time. For example, 1) There is true freedom from Satan in relationship with Jesus yet in the course of Christian history God's people are still oppressed by the powers of this world. 2) Satan is cast down and completely defeated yet he still has much power to torment and deceive. 3) Christ has universal authority even over this earth, yet people are still allowed to ignore and even mock that authority until the second coming. As God's people, we are fully under the authority of Christ as the ruler of this world, yet we are also living under the authority of powers who blaspheme the name of Christ. So, the New Testament theme of "now and not yet" is powerfully expressed in the narrative of the sea beast. The beast exercises its authority in the very places where the gospel

is at work (Rev 13:7; 14:6).

The beast is worshiped by others at the end but exercises his civil powers through others in history. In the final battle, the sea beast's authority over the earth is extended to the land beast when the last battle is described (Revelation 16-17).

Rev 13:1-7 (Identity of the Sea Beast)–

Verse seven completes the introduction of the beast from the sea. Is there any corresponding power in history that fits the descriptions and timeline of the sea beast? Let's review what we have learned so far. 1) The allusions to Daniel 7 indicate that the sea beast's heritage is rooted in Babylon through Rome, the empires featured in Daniel 7. It is connected in some way to that history. And compared to other introductions in the book of Revelation (see 11:3-6; 12:1-2 and 12:3-4 as examples) this one is fairly lengthy, suggesting a long heritage in the past. 2) The shift from crowns on the heads of the dragon (Rev 12:4) to crowns on the horns of the sea beast (13:2) means that this power will be later in point of time than the Roman Empire. So the sea beast represents a power that comes on the scene after the fall of the Roman Empire. 3) Numerous allusions to the little horn of Dan 7:8 and 7:24-25 indicate that the sea beast's early history is parallel to that of the little horn in Daniel 7.

4) The death and resurrection of the sea beast not only points to a parody of the Christ event (Rev 13:8; 5:5-6), it also suggests that the world power pointed to in the sea beast imagery would have a period of great ascendancy (of "42 months" in length) followed by a period of obscurity before its "resurrection" in preparation for the final battle. 5) The sea beast's resurrection makes it possible for the beast to play a major role in the final conflict. 6) The sea beast is not just a political power like ancient Babylon and Rome, it is also a religious power that has a lot to say about God, the heavenly temple and the saints. It also acts to marginalize and persecute those who try to be faithful to God during this time. 7) The mention of every nation, tribe, language and people in 13:7 suggests that the sea beast offers a rival "gospel" to the everlasting gospel of 14:6. This religious orientation is also supported by the sea beast's role as a parody of Christ.

8) It is critical to keep in mind that the sea beast is a deliberate counterfeit of Jesus Christ. We have seen this already in verses 1-5. The sea beast looks like the dragon, gets its authority from the dragon (mirroring the relationship of Jesus with His Father), has a death and resurrection like Jesus, mocks the name of Michael, and has a ministry that lasts three and a half years.

This would be evidence enough, but one could cite other parallels between the sea beast and Jesus Christ. Both began their "ministry" by coming up out of the water (13:1; cf. Matt 3:16-17; Luke 3:21-23). Both wear *diadems* (13:2; 19:12). Both of them wield swords (13:10; 1:16). Both are portrayed with horns (13:1-2; 5:6). Both are worshiped after their mortal wound is healed (13:4,8,12; Matt 28:16-17; Rev 5:9-14). Both have followers with inscriptions on their foreheads (13:16; 7:1-3; 14:1). Both exercise global authority over every nation, tribe, language and people (13:7; 14:6).

So from the perspective of John, the sea beast's religious side is not pagan or Jewish, it is clearly Christian. It is something dragon-like that arises out of the very followers of Jesus for

which the Book of Revelation was written. While the beast looks just like the dragon (Satan, the devil, the ancient serpent in 12:9), it has a Christian face! It is an entity that names the name of Jesus as its reason for existence, yet by its actions serves the dragon! And Revelation is not alone in such a prediction, there are numerous other texts in the New Testament that forecast a similar future for the church, though in less dramatic terms (see Acts 20:28-31; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 1 John 2:18-19).

Most scholars today see the sea beast as a symbol of the imperial Rome of John's day. Imperial Rome certainly persecuted the Christians of that time and also set up a system of worship focused on the emperor and the worship of gods that were supportive of the Roman state. So it is very possible that John and many of his original readers might have seen the symbolism of chapter 13 as outworkings of a system that was familiar to them. They may well have seen satanic forces behind the might of imperial Rome. In Romans 13 Paul asserts that the state is ordained by God to keep order in the world and should be obeyed. Understood in its first century context, Revelation 13 portrays state power as an agent of Satan.

If you go to Ephesus today, you will see the temple of Domitian right next to the main road in the center of the city. John himself might have passed that spot every day and pondered the similarities and differences between worship of the emperor and the symbols of his vision (it is believed that after John's experience on Patmos he returned to Ephesus for a time before his death).

From that scholarly viewpoint, the sea beast's mortal wound is thought to be the death of Nero. Many in the first century expected Nero to somehow come back from the dead and renew his tyranny over the empire. This is often called the *Nero redivivus* myth. Some scholars see Domitian as the "resurrected" Nero, the beast reborn.

But while we grant that the first readers of the book may well have applied this chapter to Imperial Rome and its systems of worship, the text itself points us to a later time and a more Christian entity as the true and complete fulfillment of this text.

The early church Fathers understood the fourth beast of Daniel 7 to be the pagan Roman Empire of their day. They understood that the little horn that would follow the ten horns and uproot three of them (Dan 7:8, 20, 24) was the Antichrist. So they concluded that the fall of the Roman Empire would bring about the rise of the Antichrist. Thus they also understood the "restrainer" of 1 Thessalonians 2:6-7 to be the Roman Empire.

In history, therefore, we would look to developments within the church during and after the fall of Imperial Rome, which was pagan until the time of Constantine (325 AD) and after that was more and more affected by the developments within the church until the Empire's demise in the West a century and a half after Constantine.

Adventists understand the four beasts of Daniel 7 to represent Babylon (Dan 7:4), Medo-Persia (7:5), Greece (7:6) and Rome (7:7), along the same lines as a typical interpretation of Daniel 2's four metals (gold, silver, brass, iron— Dan 2:32-33). The ten horns of the fourth beast (Dan 7:8) are understood to be the ten divisions (or barbarian kingdoms) into which Imperial Rome divided after its fall in the late Fifth Century (often dated more specifically as 476 AD). The three uprooted horns are generally identified as the Heruli, Vandals and Ostrogoths (three of the ten barbarian kingdoms that divided up Rome). The little horn (which

uproots three of the ten) is understood as the medieval papacy, the most dominant power in Europe for more than a thousand years (the little horn is a political power of a different kind [Dan 7:24], with a strong religious agenda [Dan 7:25]). In the papacy much of the Roman legacy arises in a new form (for example, the pope's title *pontifex maximus* was a holdover from both Babylon and Rome). The dates for that dominance are usually cited as 538-1798 AD.

Since the sea beast has crowns on its horns, speaks against God, and makes war with the saints, it is best identified with the little horn of Daniel 7. So the sea beast would be a power arising out of the chaos of Post-Empire Western Europe with a strong religious as well as political agenda. The identification of the sea beast with the medieval papacy also fits well with the realities of Christian history.

If read from a historicist perspective (where the symbols of Revelation are predictive of sequences of history from the time of John until the End), the shift in crowns from the heads to the horns (Rev 12:3; 13:2) would signal the shift from Rome as a political empire in opposition to God to Rome as a more religious empire which also finds itself fighting against God. The only historical entity that fits both the timing and the characteristics of this prophecy is the papacy in the Middle Ages. Historians recognize the fall of Rome as beginning with its split into two parts under Constantine (and its gradual "christianization" thereafter) and its eventual dissolution as a political entity in the West around 476 AD. The papacy became the dominant force in the territory of the Western Roman Empire from the middle of the sixth Century (533-553) on.

While many individual popes meant well and may have been godly figures, the system as a whole gradually deviated from biblical truth in multiple areas, including salvation, confession, veneration of the saints, the change of the Sabbath and eventually indulgences and similar abuses. The system also engaged in brutal forms of coercion, such as the Crusades and the Inquisition, seeking to force those it could not persuade. In so doing it had drifted far from the spirit of Jesus, as recognized by such medieval "saints" as Francis of Assisi, Bernard of Clairvoux and Eberhard of Salzburg.

The end-time activity of this sea beast (13:8-10, 12-18) comes after the forty-two months of its war against the saints and the healing of its deadly wound. Everything in verses 1-7 is in the past from the perspective of final battle (Rev 12:17). It is clarifying the identity and history (pedigree) of the sea beast.

In Revelation 17 there is a beast that looks a lot like the sea beast, but has crowns on neither its heads nor its horns. The seven heads of that beast are consecutive, with five being fallen, one in John's day, and one yet to come followed by an eighth (Rev 17:8-11). The two phases of the sea beast in this chapter (13:1-7 and 13:8-10,12-18) likely correspond to the seventh and eighth heads of the beast in chapter 17. The seventh head comes after John but before the very end, while the eighth head is involved in the very final battle of earth's history, a battle announced all the way back in 12:17.

Viewed from the standpoint of history, the mainstream church of Christendom in the Middle Ages bears a great deal of responsibility for the failure of the gospel to truly penetrate the world and transform it into the kingdom of Christ. If this chapter is taken seriously as a genuine prophecy of where things are heading, we should not expect the mainstream churches

of our day to end up on the right side of history. This is a radical view of history, but such a reading is not out of line with the radical teachings of Jesus (see, for example, Matt 5:20-48; Mark 8:35-38). An excellent book on the political implications of Jesus' radical teachings is N. T. Wright's *Simply Jesus*.

While the actions of the Crusades and the Inquisition are poster children for the brutal excesses of medieval Catholicism, the religious oppression and intolerance of Protestant Orthodoxy (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) were disturbingly similar. Bosnia, Rwanda and the Holocaust make it clear that today's version of institutional Christianity is not significantly improved over that of the Middle Ages.

Rev 13:1-7 (spiritual lesson)–

What we have in this passage is the symbolic description of a world power that combines political and religious agendas. Religion is a natural human response to the perception of God's presence and activity in the world. God does something remarkable and people get together to celebrate what God has done and promote the knowledge of it to others. As such, religion is a beautiful thing. But over time religious institutions tend to become less and less focused on the original mission and more and more focused on preserving the institution that they have created. They become more concerned with political and economic benefits in this world than the values of another and better world. Over centuries religious institutions become almost irreformable and an obstacle to the very goals that created the institution in the first place. This process is not necessarily perverse, it tends to operate in spite of the best efforts of its leaders. It is the unintended consequence of well-meaning actions. It must, nevertheless, be identified for what it is. To do this is not the "bashing" of other faiths, but the sober recognition that "there but for the grace of God go I." In the words of Martin Luther, the pope most to be feared is Pope Self. The institution that I am a part of is the one I most need to hold accountable.

Rev 13:8–

While the language here is reminiscent of verse 4, the tenses have shifted from the past to the future. Verses 1-7 function to identify the sea beast by means of its appearance and history. With verse 8 the sea beast's activities move into the future from the perspective of final battle announced in 12:17. While the counterfeit of Christ has been in place for "42 months," it becomes clear in this verse that the counterfeit of Christ will be a crucial part of the final battle. This shift into the future tense makes this verse like an introduction to the very final conflict of earth's history within the chapter. It is stated here that the whole world will follow after the beast. In Revelation 13:12-18 we see a description of the way in which the whole world comes to follow the beast.

For the phrase "those who live on the earth, see the notes on Revelation 11:10. Here the phrase seems to draw a direct contrast to Revelation 14:6, where "those who live on the earth" are the object of the everlasting gospel proclamation. The sea beast and the three angels are direct rivals in the final conflict.

The record of the saved is called the book of life in Revelation and other places (Psa

69:28; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27; 22:19). While not using the phrase “book of life,” two other passages in the Old Testament show a familiarity with the general concept of an eschatological record of the saved (Exod 32:31-33; Dan 12:1). A more earthly version of this book is found in Isaiah 4:3.

In the Old Testament, blotting a name out of the book of life is equivalent to death, in Revelation this is the second or eternal death (see Rev 20:15). But when a name is retained in the book of life, it means the person will have a part in God’s kingdom to come, the new earth (Rev 21:27). This concept represents the fact that God well knows those that belong to Him. Everything about our relationship with God is “written down,” perhaps on some sort of celestial hard drive.

In this verse John is observing things from the perspective of the end-time. With the phrase “foundation of the world” (*kosmos*), it is as if a time switch throws him all the way back to the creation. In some sense the cross had implications for Christ already before the foundation of the world. In the very act of creation God foresaw that the gift of freedom to created beings would eventually result in someone’s choice to rebel against God. The preservation of that freedom would require an overwhelming demonstration of the goodness and self-sacrificing nature of God. This verse suggests that the decision to make such a sacrifice was made in advance of the creation itself. God paid a tremendous price in the cross and throughout history in order to resolve the problems of the universe. The pain of the cross, anticipated from the beginning of creation, has always been carried on God's heart.

Rev 13:9–

This is a universal warning in the present tense. The Greek present is continuous as much as it is present. In other words, the cartoon fantasy of Revelation 13 has universal implications for all times and places. It has implications for every reader of the book.

When reading Revelation from the standpoint of history, characters or things in the book often seem to mean only one thing at one point in time. But the sea beast has a long history appearing in a variety of forms. Just as there was a great religious and political power in the Middle Ages that persecuted the faithful people of God, so there will be an end-time power as well that will persecute the end-time faithful. The basic scenario remains the same but the players can change in the course of history. As noted above (the spiritual lesson attached to 13:7), one should not become so focused on historical referents that one misses the power of the personal lessons that should be drawn from that symbolism and history.

Recalls the repeated refrain from the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). All eight instances are in the present tense. There is one significant difference between the seven usages in the letters and the one in this verse. In all seven instances in the letters, “the one who has an ear” is a present participle, whereas in this verse it is a finite verb in a conditional sentence: “If anyone has an ear.” The present participle is one of the most continuous constructions in biblical Greek. But the difference between the present participle and the regular present is not very significant in these eight passages. The primary point is that the admonition is for every reader of the book in whatever age they read it. The present participles in the letters have a close parallel to Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is the one who reads

and those who hear. . . and keep.” There the blessing is for everyone who reads and hears the book.

The point in this verse is that the message about the sea beast is not just for those who lived in the Middle Ages or at the end of time, the sea beast is an object lesson for all who read the book and seek to understanding its meaning. While the sea beast has particular reference points in history, its composite nature and multiple heads indicate that aspects of the sea beast description will fit all repressive world powers, throughout history, whether they are civil or religious. The decisive point, in God’s eyes, is how each power in world history has related to His covenant and His people. Those that have protected God’s people and provided freedom for the gospel are more positive. Those that oppress God’s people and hinder the gospel should see themselves in the various iterations of the sea beast.

Rev 13:10–

In this verse the text moves from prose to poetry! There is both a present and a future aspect to this song. Each pair of lines begins with a conditional statement, “If anyone is. . .” and ends with a future outcome. The fifth line in the verse, “This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints,” does not exhibit the poetic characteristics of the first four lines. What is less clear is who the author and performer of the song (first four lines) is.

If the beast is singing the song, it is singing the four parts but is not saying or singing the fifth line. That would be the author’s admonition in light of the beast’s song. On the other hand, if the entire verse is the author’s reflection on 13:1-8, it is likely a statement of the inevitability of the events being prophesied.

The patience of the saints is their response of unswerving faithfulness in the context of the beast’s relentless acts of deception and coercion.

This verse contains a major manuscript dilemma. There are numerous different readings all over this verse, indicating that early scribes were very uncertain how the text should read and often tried to fix things with small changes here and there. Looking at the evidence as a whole there are two main readings of this verse (see Stefanovic for specifics). 1) One group of manuscripts (reflected in the KJV, RSV, and NASB) stresses the destiny of the sea beast as a persecutor. “He who leads into captivity will go into captivity, he who kills with the sword will be killed with the sword.” This stresses the dictum “he who lives by the sword, dies by the sword” (see the origin of this dictum in Matt 26:52). The beast’s fate is then introduced before its actions in the final battle to assure the saints that the final outcome is in God’s hands. This reading echoes the readings of Jeremiah 15:2 and 43:11. It would also have a strong parallel in Revelation 18:6-8, where the punishment of Babylon is proportionate to the suffering she caused others.

2) Another group of manuscripts (reflected in the NIV, the NEB, and the ESV) reads: “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed.” This reading emphasizes that God has marked certain people for captivity and death. Even if the saints lose their lives for the faith, God is still in control and will not allow anyone to handle more than he can bear. This reading is favored by most textual scholars as the echos of Jeremiah could be scribal attempts to fix an awkward reading.

A third reading in which is found in highly significant manuscripts simply drops the phrase “into captivity he will go.” This reading is likely a scribal error copied into a number of early manuscripts, so is not considered here.

On the face of it, the second reading seems more plausible, but the parallels with Jeremiah make the first reading attractive, unless they are due to scribal alteration. In the commentary that follows, both possible readings will be considered, so their impact on the larger context can be assessed.

The mention of a sword may be a reminder of the mortal wound in verse three, especially since verse fourteen indicates that the mortal wound was made by a sword (Greek *machaira* in both 13:10 and 13:14).

Here we combine the insights of the two previous posts and attempt to draw conclusions for the verse as a whole. If the first reading of the song is accepted (“He who leads into captivity will go into captivity, he who kills with the sword will be killed with the sword”), the song is written and recited by the book’s divine/human author. The focus of the whole verse, in that case, is to assure the saints that the beast is going to get his reward, just hang in there and trust God’s ultimate control of the outcome.

If the second reading of the song is accepted (“If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed”), it is likely the sea beast which is singing the song. The song would then be a statement of the beast’s intent to kill or capture all those saints with which the beast is at war (13:7). In that case the last line would be the author’s call to the saints for endurance and faithfulness in light of the beast’s intent. The patient endurance would refer to enduring what God allows– if he permits you to be killed, don’t fight it, things will still work out in the end.

Rev 13:3-10–

Kenneth Strand has suggested that there is a chiasmic structure (like a pyramid or an inverted “V”) embedded in verses 3-10:

Head wounded (3)

Worship (4a)

Make war (4b)

Blasphemies (5a)

42 months (5b)

Blasphemies (6)

Make war (7)

Worship (8)

Death by sword (10)

The outline above is quite intriguing and has specific verbal parallels, with the exception of the parallel between the first and the last elements (verses 3 and 10). I would say it is possible John had this in mind, but not certain.

Rev 13:10 (Conclusion)–

If the above chiasm is correct, verse 10 is the chiasmic counterpart of verse 3. Accepting the first of the two possible readings, the “going into captivity” then would parallel the death (or deadly wound) of the sea beast. The poem in verse 10 then would be celebrating the destruction of the sea beast’s power at the close of the 42 months in which it made war on the saints (13:7). This would also set the stage for the rise of the land beast, with its much shorter history (one verse [13:11] instead of seven [13:1-7]). The land beast would arise on the world scene around the time when the sea beast “goes into captivity.” In traditional Adventist understanding, 1798 is the year when the pope was taken captive as one of the consequences of the French Revolution. That Revolution was one of the major turning points in all of history, and set the stage for the eventual decline of Europe as the world’s dominant power and the rise of the United States. If the historical identity of the land beast is the United States of America, this reading of verse 10 makes the most sense.

Rev 13:9-10– (spiritual lesson)

Throughout Christian history, captivity and death are the consequences of those who stay faithful to God. Thanks to the present continuous tenses in these verses, it is not inappropriate to see all the victims of any person or power like the sea beast as being in view here.

The book of Revelation describes these kinds of events in terms of a war. But, the end-time war is more personal than it is corporate and military– the sea beast’s activities are more like Auschwitz than Stalingrad or Normandy. Faithful individuals are seized and placed into captivity (prison) and brutally killed. While this has not been the reality for all peoples in all places, this has certainly been true for most of Christian history.

Rev 13:1-10 Summary–

Verses 1-7 focus on the time before the time of the end (that time is set in Revelation 12:17, which is the summary in advance of both this chapter and the next. These verses provide an identification of the beast, a summary concerning his character and his activities prior to the final conflict.

In verse 8 the focus shifts from the past tense to the future. The main verb of verse eight begins to describe events in the final battle of earth’s history. The dragon here carries out the attack on the remnant that was promised in Revelation 12:17. All the world that does not follow Christ at that time will worship him.

Verses 9-10 function somewhat as an interlude, with liberal use of present continuous tenses. They function as an exhortation to the saints of all ages to endure whatever must come in spite of the severity of the coming threats.

Rev 13:1-10– (spiritual lessons)

1) Christians are caught between two ages– both the Lamb and the forces of the dragon

rule today. Though we acknowledge the rule of Christ, there are times that we experience the consequences of the beast's rule. 2) The cross was in God's heart from the very beginning of the universe. 3) Suffering is inevitable in this world and has to be endured. But the good news is that suffering is not permanent. The powers that cause the suffering will be destroyed one day.

Rev 13:11-18 (introduction)–

The land beast appears on the scene later than the dragon and the sea beast and its identification is shorter. A different power and entity from them, it functions in a different way in the final crisis. It seems quite different from the other beasts of Daniel and Revelation because normally beasts that represent opposition to God and His people come out of the sea or its equivalent, the Abyss (Dan 7:3-7; Rev 9:1; 11:7; 17:8).

In Revelation, the sea, full of wild angry waters, separates loved ones by distance and is something to fear (a negative concept). In Revelation 21:1 John assured his readers that when the new heaven and the new earth comes there will no longer be any sea.

The earth, on the other hand, is a much more ambiguous concept in Revelation.

Rev 13:11–

This beast “comes up out of the earth.” “Earth” is often an agricultural image (Matt 13:7; Mark 4:7-8), and may also be rooted in Genesis 1:24-25, where living creatures came up out of the earth. In Revelation the people who live on the earth are negative (Revelation 11:10; 13:8 and 14; 14:6; etc.) but the earth itself is not necessarily negative as a symbol. It can be the place where people worship the beast (Revelation 13:3-4 and 12) and where the abominations of Babylon take place (Rev 17:5). It can be acted upon in various ways (Revelation 14:3, 15-16, 18-19); but it can also be associated with good. In Revelation 11:4 the two olive trees and the two lampstands stand before the “Lord of the earth.” In Revelation 12:16, toward the close of the 1260 “days,” the earth helps the woman, the primary symbol of the people of God in that chapter. So the fact that the beast is coming up out of the earth may indicate a more positive attitude toward God at first, though in the end it will speak like a dragon. The land beast arises around the time the sea beast goes into captivity (verse 10), which parallels the death of the beast in verse 3.

When “earth” is placed in contrast with “heaven” in the book of Revelation, it has a negative connotation (Rev 13:6, 8) . On the other hand, when “earth” is in contrast with “sea,” it has a positive connotation (12:16). In this verse (13:11) the beast from the earth is in contrast with the beast from the sea (13:1). That puts a more positive spin on “earth” here. And it seems that when this beast takes on the power and authority of the first beast (from the sea) the “earth” is forced to worship the first, at least somewhat against its will. The implication is that the beast from the earth has a positive beginning (from the perspective of Revelation). It is a different kind of power. Yet in the end it serves the beast from the sea and the dragon. In fact, it takes on the leading role in the final conflict.

Together, the terms earth and sea in chapter 13 (verses 1 and 11) express the fulfillment

of Revelation 12:12, where the dragon (who had just been thrown down from heaven) turns his full and angry attention to the “earth and sea,” knowing that his time is short.

The contrast between sea and earth provides another possible allusion to Daniel 7. In the vision of Daniel 7:3 the four beasts come up out of the sea. But in the explanation of the vision, the four beasts represent four kingdoms that will arise in the “earth” (Dan 7:17). So the sea, as a symbol in Daniel 7, represents populous places on the earth, out of which great and powerful world powers come. “Earth” in this verse, on the other hand, is a symbol of more positive relation to God and less inhabited parts of the world.

In Greek, the same word (*gê*) is used for both “earth” and “land.” So in the Greek Old Testament, the word for earth (Revelation 12:16) often refers to the land of Canaan (Gen 12:5; 50:5; Lev 14:34; Num 13:17-21; 1 Kings 8:34,36; Psa 105:11; Isa 8:8; Jer 4:20,27; Hos 9:3), or Palestine, as it became known in Roman times (from its history as the land of the Philistines). The dragon sent a flood of water after the woman in the wilderness (Rev 12:15-16). This vision echoed the story of ancient Israel escaping through the waters of the Red Sea into the wilderness and eventually finding refuge in the promised land (Palestine). So, the land beast could be seen as arising out of the land of Israel (spiritual Palestine), which would also put a positive spin on “earth” here. The beast from the earth has something to do with the true Israel, and yet it ends up making the earth worship the sea beast.

A very interesting contrast between the beast from the earth and the beast from the sea is the comparative length of their introductions or pedigrees. The sea beast has one of the longer introductions (13:1-7-- in past tenses) in the Book of Revelation (similar to the length of the “son of man’s” introduction in Revelation 1:12-20). It recalls the lengthy history of all the beasts of Daniel 7. The beast from the earth, on the other hand, has a fairly brief history in comparison. It apparently comes on the scene of history much later than the sea beast, toward the end of the 1260 years/days. And while the sea beast looks and acts a lot like the earlier beasts of Daniel 7, the beast from the earth does not look like any other creature in biblical apocalyptic. There is something about the beast from the earth that is totally different than all the other kingdoms in Bible prophecy.

The beast from the earth and the beast from the sea recall Behemoth (Job 40:15-24) and Leviathan (Job 3:8; 7:12; 41:1-34; Psa 74:12-14; 104:26; Isa 27:1), the two giant creatures of Old Testament and ancient lore, Leviathan the monster from the sea and Behemoth the monster from the earth (see comments on AntiChrist in relation to Revelation 13:4). Leviathan was strongly connected with the AntiChrist concept in the ancient world, Behemoth somewhat less so.

The description of Behemoth in Job 40 has characteristics of both the elephant (Job 40:15-16) and the hippopotamus (hiding in the river under the lotus plant and along the reeds of the riverbank— Job 40:21-23). Outside the Bible, however, Behemoth is always a land animal with prominent horns, like the description here. In 4 Ezra 6:47-52 both Leviathan and Behemoth were pre-creation water monsters that God named on the fifth day of creation. On the third day of creation, however, Behemoth was cast out onto the dry ground because the water that was

left after the creation of dry ground couldn't hold both creatures.

In 1 Enoch 60 we find a similar story, but an additional detail is offered, Behemoth occupies a barren wilderness named Duidain east of the Garden of Eden. While we generally don't use myths today as a source of truth, the ancients enjoyed these kinds of stories as much as Walt Disney did, and even Jesus could make use of a myth to make a point (Luke 16:19-31). The readers of Revelation know about these monsters and the fact that Leviathan came from the populous sea and Behemoth from an uninhabited wilderness. So in their minds, the beast from the earth would arise from a part of the world that is not at the center of civilization and relatively uninhabited.

For more detail see Robert Surridge, "The Beast from the Earth," *Ministry*, (June 1991), 17-19.

The beast from the earth is neither a lamb nor a dragon. It looks "like" a lamb and speaks "like" a dragon. The land beast, therefore, has ambiguous qualities, it can play either role (lamb or dragon). The two roles seem to be somewhat chronological here. During the 1260 days/years, the earth is described in both positive (Rev 11:4; 12:15-16) and negative (Rev 13:4) ways, it's role in the narrative is ambiguous. But during the final battle its associations are solely negative (Rev 13:12; 17:5). So the term "earth" trends toward the negative within the book of Revelation as one moves toward the End.

In order to achieve deception, therefore, the land beast appears on God's side at its initial appearance, then shifts into dragon mode during the final crisis. When new characters are introduced in Revelation, the various items in the introduction are not necessarily chronological (in Revelation 13:3-5 the beast's death precedes its period of initial reign), but in this particular case, it is likely to be so. In the final crisis the land beast becomes the mouthpiece of the dragon just as the Old Testament prophets spoke for God. That is why the land beast is later called the "false prophet" (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10).

The strongest structural parallel to "earth" here is the Exodus scene of Revelation 12:15-16. In chapter 12, it is the earth that rescues the woman toward the end of the 1260 days/years of Christian history. Historicist interpretations have seen the "earth helping the woman" in historical trends like the Reformation, Renaissance, enlightenment and the American Revolution that helped rescue God's faithful people from their 1000-years-plus oppression. In other words, the origin of the beast from the earth recalls all those forces that blunted the medieval persecutions toward the close of the 1260 years. The story of Revelation 12 and 13 connects the beast from the earth with the Exodus scene of 12:15-16. So from a historicist perspective, the land beast arose in the aftermath of the Middle Ages.

Some commentators suggest that the sea represents populous parts of the earth. They cite Revelation 17:15 for that. It is a text that is loosely connected to this one in the use of "many waters" (Rev 17:1) as another way of describing a sea or river. Such commentators further suggest that the earth, in contrast with the sea, represents the opposite of a populous place, an uninhabited wilderness.

By way of contrast, in the Hebrew of Proverbs 21:19, earth and wilderness are

associated, so reading “earth” as an uninhabited wasteland is a possible reading of the Hebrew Old Testament. To apply that meaning here is further supported by the study of Behemoth cited previously.

The beast from the earth has two horns like a lamb. Animals often use their horns to exercise their “authority.” So this beast is more like a lamb than a more aggressive animal. Furthermore, the word “lamb” appears twenty-nine times in Revelation, referring to Jesus a total of twenty-eight times. The twenty-ninth time is in this verse. “Lamb” here is used in relation to the land beast who is allied with the dragon in opposition to Jesus and His people. Clearly, there is something about the land beast that is intended to remind the reader of Jesus—like the sea beast there is a religious aspect to its power and purpose.

The land beast has a relatively short and positive history. It exercises its governing power with a surprising gentleness, at least at first. Some commentators have noted that a lamb is a young animal, so perhaps the world power represented here is relatively “young” in historical terms.

Persecuting powers come in two basic types: 1) religious (an unhealthy bond between church and state) or 2) anti-religious (state hostility toward the church). In history the worst persecution has tended to come from people with a religious bent, powers like ancient Babylon and the medieval Papacy. A religious entity gets control of the state and persecutes all who exercise religion in a different way than those in power do. A friend who writes articles on religious liberty calls it “the tyranny of the righteous.” But history also records prominent instances of anti-religious persecution, such as that which occurred during the French Revolution, and the various anti-religious persecutions under Communism. The land beast seems to offer a blend between the two types of persecution (13:15-17), with an emphasis on favoring the religion of the sea beast over all others.

Rev 13:11— The verse continues in the past tense. The land beast has horns like a lamb but speaks like a dragon and, therefore, has an ambiguous identity. All of these characteristics are part of the land beast’s pedigree and heritage before its role in the service of the dragon at the end of time. While the introductions of new characters in Revelation are not necessarily chronological (see notes on Rev 13:1-7, for example), in this case the focus on positive qualities first followed by service of the dragon makes the most sense chronologically. The dragon calls to his aid a world power that in the past has been associated with the defense of the oppressed and even opposition to the dragon (Rev 12:15-16). But in the final battle of earth’s history (12:17) the land beast is transformed into a power that “speaks like a dragon.” The land beast becomes the prominent world face of both the dragon and the sea beast that came before him.

Rev 13:11— (Identity of the Land Beast)

What power arose in the world at that time (around 1800 A.D.) that could fit all the designations? The common historical interpretation a hundred years ago would still seem to be the best one now. The United States of America was founded by persecuted Christians who came from Europe to America looking for religious freedom. It arose in a part of the world that

was relatively uninhabited, and was unknown before in the Euro-Asian context (it has no background in Daniel 7, for example). It was a young nation, a relatively new power on the world's stage (lamb?). It rose up around the end of the 1260 years (1798). The land beast had no crowns. The United States was a nation without a king and its main churches had no pope. It became a major world power--there is no nation in the world today more dominant than the United States of America.

One could argue that the USA has "spoken like a dragon" from the very beginning of its history, in the subjugation of native Americans and the very early institution of slavery in the southern states. But I think all would agree that the "speaking like a dragon" has accelerated through America's history and has reached a new level in the events since September 11. Perhaps a better way to look at this is the increasing divide between America's ideals of liberty and equality and its military and political actions toward those who differ.

This historical connection between the USA and the beast from the earth does not seem quite as clear or convincing as the connections between the beast from the sea and the medieval papal system. But if there is a historical focus to this text, and I think there is, and if we are anywhere close to the end of history; a connection between this beast and the United States of America is the only one that makes sense. Other major powers have come and gone over the last two hundred years. All of them have arisen from the Eurasian landmass (represented by the sea?), which has been the focus of Bible prophecy all the way until now. The USA has been a significant world power for more than a hundred years, and during that time its relative dominance in the world has only been increasing. And it is the first world power that centers outside the land mass that includes Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean coast of Africa (Egypt was certainly a "world power" in its time and North Africa was a major part of the Roman Empire).

But the strong religious tone of the land beast's actions (Rev 13:12-15) suggest that if the United States is the power intended in these texts, it is its religious character that is particularly in view. In today's world the USA is the center of gravity for world Christianity as much or more than Rome and it is in this role that its actions in the latter part of this chapter are particularly to be seen.

The United States has been admired for its freedom. Americans are willing to tolerate violence and crime as long as their freedom is not jeopardized. In fact, freedom has been emphasized in the USA to the point where it has become abused by certain elements of society. If the main thing you want is to have a low crime rate, you can accomplish that with brute force as occurred in Soviet Russia. When the people of the United States are more concerned with safety and security than they are with freedom, Americans will find tyranny the best of bad options. An American move toward tyranny would be the adoption of the dragon's methods as portrayed in this part of Revelation.

Rev 13:12--

In this verse we turn to the actions of the land beast in the final crisis of earth's history

(parallel to Rev 12:17). The KJV and ESV are correct in translating the opening verb as “exercises” or “exerciseth” (The NIV incorrectly has “exercised”). My attempt to be faithful to the Greek here: “And he [the land beast] EXERCISES all the authority of the first beast in his behalf, and he FORCES the earth and those who live in it to worship the first beast. . .” Both “exercises” and “forces” translate the same Greek word (*poiei*) with English translation nuancing the word to make sense in context. The worship of the sea beast, mentioned at the end of the verse, is a purpose clause, emphasizing a purpose that is future from the perspective of the “exercising.” So in this verse there is a transition from past tenses (13:11) to present and future tenses (13:12-18). We are moving from the land beast’s activity before the end-time (12:17) and its end-time activity in two stages (present and future tenses).

Worldwide worship of the sea beast was part of its history and identification (Rev 13:4), but is also part of its end-time activity (Rev 13:8). So this verse elaborates on the worldwide worship of the sea beast in verse 8. The relatively positive “earth” does not wish to worship the sea beast but is forced to do so by the land beast after the sea beast's fatal wound had been healed (compare with Revelation 13:3). Here it is the whole beast that dies and is resurrected, not just one of the heads, so the death of a head accompanies the death of the whole beast. This confirms 17:10 where the heads are clearly consecutive rather than simultaneous.

At the time of the final battle, the sea beast's resurrection is already a past reality; its fatal wound has already been healed. But in the final battle, the land beast replaces the sea beast in the role of dominating those who live on the earth. Its authority is exercised on behalf of the sea beast. The sea beast does not exercise direct authority in the final crisis. It loses its authority (deadly wound) but is then “resurrected” and joins forces with the land beast, who causes all people to worship the sea beast. So the public face of the unholy trinity in the final crisis is the land beast rather than the sea beast, although the sea beast is very much alive and well behind the scenes.

The land beast’s operation in behalf of the sea beast recalls Jesus’ comments about the Holy Spirit in John 16:13 (ESV): “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” The Holy Spirit did not come to promote himself, but to promote Jesus. Likewise, the land beast, which is the face of the unholy trinity in the final battle, does not assume its authority in its own behalf, but in order to promote the sea beast. So this is an important piece of the Holy Spirit counterfeit that the land beast carries out. Opposition to God and His people at the end of time is represented in terms of a counterfeit trinity.

Rev 13:13-15– (Introduction)

In these verses we learn HOW the land beast forces the earth to worship the first beast (from the sea). The primary method is great and miraculous signs or miracles. More specifically, the land beast brings “fire from heaven” to the earth. Through this and similar actions he deceives those who live on the earth, telling them to make an image of the dead and

resurrected beast from the sea. In verse 15 we see another deceptive and miraculous sign, the land beast gives breath to the image of the beast in order that it might both speak and act. Through these miraculous signs the land beast both deceives those who live on the earth and forces them to do the sea beast's bidding.

Rev 13:13–

In Greek, the "great and miraculous signs" (NIV– simply "great signs" in the Greek [*semeia megala*], but the word "signs" implies the "miraculous") are connected to a verb in the present tense (the same time as Revelation 12:17). These signs are end-time events but they happen before the worship mentioned in the previous verse, which is in the future tense. The purpose of the signs is to deceive the world and get it to worship the beast (Revelation 12:17).

The plural for "signs" (*semeia*) is used frequently in the Gospel of John for the role of miracles in how people related to Jesus (John 2:23; 3:2; 4:48; 6:2; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:37). The miracles of Jesus were intended to build faith in who Jesus is (the One who came down from God– John 1:9-11; 3:12-15) but instead were often distractions (2:23-25; 4:43-45; 6:25-35), causing people to focus on their earthly needs and goals rather than on the spiritual mission Jesus had come to promote (John 20:30; 2:11).

In Acts 2:22 Jesus' entire earthly ministry is summarized in the language of "miracles, signs and wonders." So the signs and wonders of the land beast include counterfeits of Jesus' earthly ministry. According to the New Testament evidence, then, the earthly ministry of Jesus will be counterfeited by a great working of Satan in the days leading up to the Second Coming.

In Jesus' Olivet discourse on the end of the world (Matt 24:24; Mark 13:22) the word "signs" (*semeia*) is used for deceptive miracles which would lead everyone astray in the last days, even the elect if that were possible. Such counterfeit signs will be workings of Satan (2 Thess 2:9-10) that prevent people from genuine preparation for the return of Jesus (2 Thess 2:8). In Luke's version of the discourse (21:11, 25) the "signs" are heavenly and are employed by God in the context of final events.

In the book of Acts, the word "signs" is frequently used for the miracles that accompanied the preaching of the gospel by the apostles (2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6, 13; 14:3; 15:12). These miracles were designed to increase faith in the message of the gospel. They were considered the fulfillment of the prophecies of Joel (Acts 2:14-22; cf. Joel 2:28-32).

So the "signs" that the land beast does in the final crisis of earth's history are part of the counterfeit theme throughout Revelation 13 and beyond. These end-time miracles done by the unholy trinity (see also Revelation 16:13) are designed to convince the people of earth that the satanic counterfeit is the true God (13:14) and worthy of worship (13:8, 12, 15). They offer a counterfeit gospel from three demonic angels (Rev 16:14) to counteract the true gospel of God's three angels (Rev 14:6-12).

The greatest of the signs performed by the land beast is to bring fire down from heaven to earth. This action recalls at least two great past events in the Bible. 1) It recalls the experience of Elijah on Mount Carmel where a great showdown took place to determine whether Yahweh

or Baal was the true God. At Mount Carmel Yahweh answered Elijah's challenge with fire from heaven. In Revelation 13, however, the fire is called down by the land beast. In the final Mount Carmel challenge the fire from heaven will fall on the "wrong altar." In the great final showdown of earth's history, the evidence of the five senses will be on the side of the counterfeit trinity. True faith will have to rely, not on miracles, but on the evidence of faith and the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Much spiritual preparation will be needed for those days (Rev 16:15; 3:17-18; Matt 24:42; 1 Thess 5:1-11).

2) The fire from heaven also recalls the event of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) where the early stages of gospel preaching were supported by miraculous actions of the Holy Spirit. The mission of Jesus and the apostolic preaching of the gospel were challenged by the religious authorities and these challenges were answered by mighty signs from God, such as the apostles speaking in foreign languages that they had no human basis for knowing. The "fire from heaven" suggests that the end-time deceptive miracles will include a counterfeit of Pentecost, with a false spiritual revival confusing people as to where the truth lies.

The end-time Mount Carmel event takes place so that the whole world's attention will be called to consider the challenge of the evil trinity against the True Trinity. There will be a worldwide preaching of the true gospel (Rev 14:6) accompanied by a worldwide preaching of a counterfeit gospel (Rev 16:13-14). The fire confirms the counterfeit god and gospel in the spiritual authority, deception, and worship related to the demonic trinity (Rev 13:13). If the land beast is identified in some way with the United States (see comments on verse 11) the reference is as much on spiritual authority as political or military. The miraculous spiritual signs are as central to its power as tanks, planes, and the FBI. The dominance of the land beast is centered on its religious influence.

Rev 13:14–

In the Greek, the opening verb is in the present tense ("he deceives"– *plana*) even though the NIV translates it into the past tense. This verse continues the outline of the final battle which was introduced in Revelation 12:17. The major sign that causes the deception is the fire coming down from heaven. This verse again affirms that the actions of the land beast are not self-promoting, they are performed in behalf of the sea beast, just as the Holy Spirit promotes Jesus (John 16:13).

Here we begin to gain clarity on the nature of the dragon's attack against the "remnant" introduced in Revelation 12:17. The attack of the dragon against the remnant takes the form of powerful and miraculous signs that cause the people of earth to once-again worship the sea beast (a counterfeit of Jesus Christ), which has regained its prominence through its resurrection after the deadly wound. For the phrase "those who live on the earth, see the notes on Revelation 11:10.

The land beast received its authority to do this and other signs prior to the final crisis (notice the aorist active indicative form "was given" [edothê] in the subordinate clause). Both the land and sea beasts receive delegated authority and are the counterfeits of Christ and the

Holy Spirit respectively (who received their authority from God the Father) on the earth. The actions of the beasts mimic the divine passive (“it was given”) that was so frequent in Judaism and in the sayings of Jesus (see Matt 5:4 and 6 as examples). The land beast creates a counterfeit of Pentecost and the powerful working of what seems to be the Holy Spirit will substantiate the claims of the unholy trinity.

In the public eye, the sea beast is subordinated to the land beast which is the more prominent of the two in the final crisis. It is the one that has persuasive power in the eyes of the people. But the end result of the land beast’s activities is worship of the sea beast and of its image.

The Greek word for “image” (*eikon*) here has a rich history in the rest of the Bible. The first use of the term in the Greek Old Testament (*Septuagint* or LXX) in the creation story (Gen 1:26-27). The first human pair were created in the “image” of God (see also Genesis 9:6). They bore the likeness of their creator. Later on Seth bore the likeness of his father Adam (Gen 5:3). So the term “image” implies a likeness between one person or object and another.

The next major occurrence of “image” in the LXX is a warning against idolatry (Deut 4:16) which makes a false image of God. Other LXX uses of the term for idolatry can be found in 2 Chronicles 33:7, Isaiah 40:19-20 and Hosea 13:2. But the most important Old Testament reference for this passage is found in Daniel 2 and 3. There Nebuchadnezzar sees a great “image” in a dream (Dan 2:31-35) and then sets up his own version of the image for others to worship (Dan 3:1) and show their loyalty to him and his throne.

The reference in this verse is the first hint of a major allusion to Daniel 3 in the verses that follow (15-18).

The last word of this verse in the most ancient Greek manuscripts is “came to life” (*ezêsen*— the Byzantine manuscript tradition adds “by the sword” at the end to indicate how the “deadly wound” was incurred). This word is commonly used throughout the New Testament for physical resurrection from the dead (see comments on Revelation 20:4). This provides overwhelming evidence that the “wounding” of one of the sea beast’s heads (13:3) results in the death of the entire beast for a time. Since the seven heads of the beast are consecutive rather than contemporary with each other (Rev 17:10), the beast is then resurrected with a new head to serve in the context of the end-time crisis. If the sea beast of Revelation 13 is the seventh head of the beast, the resurrected beast of this verse would correspond to the eighth head in chapter 17 (see comments on 17:10).

The spiritual powers of deception and counterfeit are tools to get the attention of the world and cause its inhabitants to worship the sea beast. There is likely an allusion here to the interactions of Moses with Pharaoh’s magicians during the Exodus. Whenever Moses worked a miracle to prove that he was speaking for the true God, Pharaoh's magicians worked a counterfeit miracle to prove the opposite. To an unbiased observer, it might seem that they had the same access to divine power.

A parallel passage within Revelation is 16:13-14. This is part of the seven bowls of wrath, which are strongly based on the plagues of the Exodus (the mighty miracles of Moses designed

to confirm that Moses spoke for God). In 16:13 we encounter the unholy trinity once more, there described as the dragon, the beast (sea beast) and the false prophet (land beast). Each of this trinity produces an unclean spirit like a frog. These frogs recall the plague of frogs during the Exodus (see notes on Rev 16:13).

So the great deception by the land beast is an end-time equivalent of Pharaoh's magicians, a counterfeit Pentecost, and a counterfeit Mount Carmel experience. The land beast will do amazing things to convince the people of the world that the unholy trinity is the true God.

The image to the beast does not seem to be the same as either the sea or the land beast. It is a new player in the drama that looks like the sea beast. But there is little information in the text by way of introduction or identification. This suggests that the image of the beast is something new that comes on the world stage only at the end. It is interesting that the "image" (*eikona*) of the beast is mentioned in every chapter of the entire end-time battle of Revelation 13-20 except in chapters 17 and 18 (Rev 13:14-15; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). And as we will see below, chapters 17 and 18 are the exact place where the image of the beast would seem to play out in the final battle of earth's history. So the very absence of the term "image" in chapters 17 and 18 may be a clue to the reader that this is the place where the image of the beast is not named but is rather seen to act out in the narrative.

The Greek manuscript tradition is consistent. The phrase in this vers is not the image "of" the beast, it is the image "to" the beast. The linking word between image and beast is not genitive ("of," NLT and in verse 15 and beyond) but rather dative ("to," KJV, NEB, NASB: *eikonva tô theriô*). This is an image "to" the beast. What is stressed here is not so much that the image looks like the beast, but that it functions "for" the beast (ESV, NRSV), "in honor of" the beast (NIV). What is stressed here is that, like the land beast, the image is a new entity that acts in behalf of the sea beast.

Rev 13:14– If the concept of the image of the beast is played out later on in the book there are three main possibilities, all of them centered in chapter 17. The most obvious possibility is that the image of the beast may be seen in the scarlet beast of that chapter. That beast looks just like the sea beast with its seven heads and ten horns (Rev 13:1-2; 17:3) but is clearly different: it is not religious in the same sense as the sea beast was or the woman of chapter 17 is (see notes on 17:4-5). In Revelation 17 the beast is associated with an "eighth head" (17:11) which is the end-time union of all political and military power in service to end-time Babylon (the woman who rides the beast– 17:7). If the beast of Revelation 17 is the "image to the beast" the land beast uses its political clout to develop an end-time "united nations" that for a time serves the worldwide union of religious institutions and then destroys it (see notes on Rev 17, particularly verses 8-16).

One other possibility is that the image of the beast is the combination of both Babylon (the woman) and the beast of Revelation 17. It would then be an end-time union of religion and state that mimics the similar union in history represented by the beast from the sea.

There is yet one more possibility. In Revelation 17 there are actually three identifiable

entities that work against God and His people at the end; the woman (Babylon), the beast (the united political and military powers of the world), and the ten horns, which represent a sub-category of those powers). While both Babylon and the beast have a prior history in chapters 13-16, focus on the ten horns as an acting entity is something completely new in the narrative. So the ten horns could be the image of the beast in the sense that they play the kind of unifying role that the sea beast did earlier in history (see notes on Revelation 17:12-13).

Rev 13:14 (Historical Reflections)–

The evidence of Revelation 13:1-7 points to the medieval papacy as the primary fulfillment of the sea beast. I say “primary” because we also noted in comments to 13:4 that the Bible speaks of “many antichrists,” so the imagery associated with the sea beast can echo many counterfeits of Christ throughout history. But the total package of the sea beast, when viewed from the perspective of history, fits only with the medieval papacy (see comments at the conclusion of our thoughts on Revelation 13 for how such an identification can or should be approached in today’s world). While the evidence for an identification of the land beast was somewhat less overwhelming, the best identification is to the United States of America, particularly in its growing religious influence upon today’s world.

Where does the image of the beast fit into all of this historically? Unlike the papacy or the United States, it does not have a history prior to the end. The papacy has a long history going all the way back to the beasts of Daniel 7. The USA has a much shorter history, beginning in the context of the end of the 1260 days. The image of the beast is a new entity that comes into existence only after the fire falls from heaven in the middle of the end-time battle summarized in Revelation 12:17.

Rev 13:11-14 Summary–

Revelation 13 as a whole elaborates the dragon’s side of the final battle between the dragon and the remnant (Rev 12:17). As such it introduces the two main historical characters that will come to assist the dragon in prosecuting that battle, represented by the sea beast and the land beast. Each of these characters has a prior history and brings that history along with it into the final events. The end result is an unholy trinity of dragon, sea beast and “false prophet” (Rev 16:13). While the dragon in Rev 12:3-5 at first glance represented the earthly actions of Rome in its attempts to destroy Jesus, at a deeper level the dragon represents the workings of Satan himself (12:9), both in heaven (12:7-9) and on earth (12:3-6, 14-16). So in a sense, the dragon represents all the earthly powers that Satan has used in the course of Christian history to carry out his plans.

In verse 14 a new power/entity is introduced. It looks or acts just like the sea beast did earlier, but it is distinct from the beast, they are not the same (the two entities are most clearly distinguished elsewhere in 14:9; 16:2; 19:20 and particularly 20:4). This new character is not introduced with a history, it is a new entity in the world that is formed specifically for the final crisis. There are three options as to its deeper identity in Revelation 17: 1) the beast of

Revelation 17, 2) the combination of woman and beast, and 3) the ten horns of the beast. We will explore these possibilities in greater depth after we have had the chance to elaborate on the imagery of Revelation 17 (see notes on Revelation 17: 12-13).

Summing up, Revelation 13 introduces three new characters that operate in support of the dragon in its war with the remnant (Rev 12:17). These characters are 1) the sea beast; 2) the land beast; and 3) an image to the sea beast.

While Ellen White rarely attempts the kind of exegesis that she encourages us to do with Scripture (her mission was a different one), she makes a very intriguing statement in *The Great Controversy* (page 445) that seems to speak to our recent investigations into the image of the beast: “When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result.”

In pages 442-450 she seems to be addressing the very passages we have been looking at, but without the exegetical detail that we have been striving for. So the suggestion that American Protestantism is associated with the image of the beast may seem startling. She does not say here that the image of the beast IS American Protestantism, but only that American Protestantism will have a crucial role in forming that image. So the image of the beast itself remains undefined by Ellen White. She does not settle the exegetical question as to which of the three options noted yesterday is correct. We will explore those options more thoroughly when we get to Revelation 17.

There is one more statement by Ellen White that is often cited in relation to the unholy trinity of Revelation. In the chapter that explores the role of spiritualism in the final crisis (*The Great Controversy*, 551-562), she concludes with a reference to the unholy trinity in Revelation 16:13-14 (on pages 561-562). She connects the “three unclean spirits like frogs” (Rev 16:13, KJV) which are the “spirits of devils, working miracles” (16:14, KJV) with spiritualism. She does not identify any of the three members of the unholy trinity with spiritualism itself, but the three together utilize spiritualism (the three frogs of Revelation 16:13) as the miracle-working power that undergirds their appeal to the “kings of the earth and the whole world” (16:14, KJV). Since the three frogs of Revelation 16:13-14 are not part of the unholy trinity but a product of their work, it is possible that the three frogs and the image to the beast are somehow related (see comments on Revelation 16:13-14 for more detail).

Is the image to the beast, then, the forces of spiritualism which undergird the authority of the unholy trinity in the final crisis (Rev 16:13-14) or is it the union of religion with the state in the final crisis (combination of woman and beast in Revelation 17), or is it something else (the beast of Revelation 17 or the ten horns of that beast)? The study of apocalyptic is never easy nor is it ever boring!

Rev 13:15 Introduction—

We have noted that the primary tools used by Satan throughout history are 1) deception,

persuasion, and counterfeit, and 2) force, threats, and persecution. In verses 12-14 the primary emphasis has been on deception, although in verse 12 there is a hint of force in one phrase. The land beast “makes (*poiei* in the Greek: “causeth” in the KJV) the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast” (ESV). These deceptive miracles will be extremely effective in that it seems that all the world worships the first beast because of the actions of the land beast to deceive. But evidently the remnant (of Revelation 12:17) refuses to go along in this deception so further steps are taken.

It is in verse 15 that the method of force, threats and persecution is brought to the fore. Power is now given to the image of the first (sea) beast to speak and kill. The image is raised up to exercise coercive and persecuting power in behalf of the unholy trinity.

Rev 13:15–

The “was given” at the beginning of this verse recalls verse 12 where the land beast “exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence” (ESV). The authority of the land beast is grounded in that of the sea beast, which received its authority from the dragon (13:2). As noted earlier, “was given” mimics the divine passive (see comments on Revelation 9:1-5). The actions of the dragon and the sea beast are implied in all the land beast does (“If you have seen me you have seen the Father,” John 14:9).

In the Greek, the word for “breath” is the same as the word for “spirit” (*pneuma*). The use of the word here highlights both the counterfeit Holy Spirit role of the land beast and an allusion to the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:7), where God Himself is portrayed as animating the original man (Hebrew: *ha-adam*) with the “breath (related word *pnœ* in LXX) of life.” This allusion extends the counterfeit theme of Revelation 13 to this verse. The dragon (through the land beast) gives breath to the image of the beast in the same way that God gave the breath of life to Adam in the beginning (Genesis 2:7).

There is great spiritual power that will be exercised by the land beast and the image in behalf of the sea beast. In other words, there will be a powerful working of the “spirit” in the final crisis of earth's history. But this “spirit” is exercised in behalf of the counterfeit trinity. So just because there is spiritual power, even miracle-working power, in an earthly movement doesn't mean it is the working of the true Holy Spirit.

When reading this verse in the Greek one notices a startling thing. While in verse 14 the land beast deceives those who live on the earth to make an image “to” or “for” the beast (*eikonva tô theriô*), twice in verse 15 the image is described as an image “of” the beast (*eikoni tou theriou*). The first is in the dative form (an indirect object, point of location or means by which something is done), the latter is in the genitive form (can express relationship or separation). In this context it suggests that the “image” is not only in the service of the beast, but actually looks like the beast. The image functions the way the sea beast functioned at an earlier time. It would be a new entity/world power with both religious and political characteristics that seeks to achieve the goals of the dragon and the beast in the final battle.

It may be significant that “image to the beast” occurs only in 13:14, while “image of the

beast” occurs only in 13:15. In the rest of Revelation “image” is always expressed as “his image,” with reference to the beast (*tê eikoni autou*— 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). In this form the genitive expresses something like possession. The image belongs to the beast or is in close relationship with it. Summing up the three ways of expressing it, the image is made for the beast, looks like the beast and is in close relationship with the beast.

The image to/of the beast is created and put to use at the initiative of the land beast (13:14). Commonly in the Bible images are noted for the lack of breath (Psa 115:17; Jer 10:14; 51:17; Hab 2:19) and inability to speak (Psa 115:5-7; 135:16-17; Isa 46:7; Hab 2:18). But this image is given breath and the ability to speak, so it is no ordinary idol! Not only does the image breathe and speak, it speaks in threatening tones--"worship me or die." This is what some call a "death decree."

There were a number of death decrees in the Old Testament. Nebuchadnezzar set up a great image and commanded everyone to bow down and worship it (Daniel 3:4-6). In the book of Esther, the Persian king was told that because the Jewish laws were different it was not to the king's advantage to tolerate them, thus a date was set on which all the Jews could be killed (Esther 3:8-9). When officials tried to find fault with Daniel, they could only point to his religion, and it was on a religious basis that a death decree was declared against him (Daniel 6:5). If John was intentionally alluding to Esther in this verse it is one of only two places in Revelation with an allusion to Esther (the other would be the gift-giving of 11:10).

The Old Testament passage that most closely resembles this verse is the story of Daniel's three friends and the fiery furnace in the plain of Dura (Dan 3). Nebuchadnezzar sets up a golden image (motivated, no doubt, by the dream recorded in Daniel 2) and commands that all the leaders of the Babylonian Empire worship the image or be thrown into the fiery furnace (killed). The common elements between that story and this one are the setting up of the image, the command to worship it, and the death decree on any who would dare not to worship. In addition, the number of the beast's name (Rev 13:18) is 666. As we will see, the number six is especially associated with ancient Babylon, and the image of Daniel 3 is measured in terms of sixes (Dan 3:1— Nebuchadnezzar's image was sixty cubits high and six cubits wide [a cubit was the distance between a man's fingertips and his elbow]). This is one of the strongest allusions to the Old Testament in all of Revelation. The prophecy forecasts that in the final crisis of earth's history, the story of Daniel's three friends and the golden image will be repeated in principle. Just as the worship of the golden image was enforced by a royal decree, so worship of the image of the beast will be supported by civil power on pain of death. We find here an end-time union between professing Christians and the power of the state.

It is becoming clear in this chapter that the key issue of the final battle is over worship. Seven times in this part of the book of Revelation there is reference to worship of the dragon, the beast or the image of the beast (Rev 13:4 [2x], 8, 12, 15; 14:9, 11). There is one single reference to the worship of the true God and that is in Revelation 14:7. So the key issue of this final crisis is over worship. Will the people of the earth worship the counterfeit trinity and/or the image of the beast or will they worship the true Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit? According

to a close reading of chapters 13 and 14, this is the KEY issue in the final crisis. The last showdown of earth's history will be a showdown over worship with reminiscences of two earlier showdowns, in the plain of Dura and at Mount Carmel (Daniel 3; 1 Kings 18).

One final issue in this verse has to do with which power enforces the death decree, the land beast or the image of the beast. The land beast is not mentioned in this verse, but is implied in the pronoun at the beginning ("HE was given" [NIV]– actually "it was given to him" [Greek: *edothê autô*]). The land beast receives authority (from the dragon and the sea beast) to give breath to the image of the beast so that "it" might speak and might cause those who do not worship the image to be killed. The compound subject ("it might speak. . . and might cause") makes it clear that the death decree is both pronounced and carried out by the image of the beast rather than the land beast. So the force of the sentence structure makes it clear that once the image of the beast receives "life" from the land beast, it becomes an active agent itself, commanding worship and killing those who refuse.

Rev 13:16–

A new element is introduced into the story here. "He" causes everyone to receive a mark on their right hand or on their forehead. The present tense of this verb of action "causes" (Greek: *poiei*) indicates that these actions are at the same time as the summary statement in Revelation 12:17, part of the final battle of earth's history. This is end-time action.

As in verse 15, this verse does not specify the identity of the subject in the lengthy sentence that makes up these two verses. Is it the land beast or the image of the beast that forces the mark? Since the subject of verse 16 is understood (it is not stated in the Greek, the verb form makes it evident only that the subject is third person singular), the implication is "he" (KJV, NIV) or "it" (ESV). This implied pronoun could refer back to either the land beast or the image of the beast, but not both. While the word "beast" (*therion*– it) is neuter and the word "image" (*eikon*– she) is feminine, gender does not help us with the identification here. Since the acting party shifts in verse 15 from the land beast to the image of the beast, the nearer antecedent is the image of the beast, which is the most likely subject of verse 16. Had the author wanted to say that the land beast or the sea beast applied the mark it would have been simple enough to state that. The use of an implied pronoun works best with the continuation of the action of verse 15 on the part of the image of the beast.

The concept of "small and great" occurs five times in Revelation (11:18; 13:16; 19:5, 18; 20:12). The concept expresses the full extent of whatever grouping is being discussed. In 11:18 and 19:5 "small and great" express the full extent of those who "fear" God's name. In 19:18 and 20:12 they express the full extent of those called into judgment. In this passage the phrase expresses the full extent of all those who have not fully committed to the gospel and can thus be coerced or persuaded to side with the unholy trinity.

The pair "rich and poor" occurs only in this verse and expresses the full range of economic classes that are subject to the mark of the beast.

The pair "free and slave" occurs also in 6:15 and 19:18 in the context of those who are

destroyed at the Second Coming of Jesus. It expresses the full range of social classes that are subject to the mark or the beast.

Collectively the trio of pairings in this passage expresses the intent of “the image of the beast” to mark every person on earth with the beast’s mark. In practice, however, the unholy trinity’s reach is limited to those who do not have the seal of God. Those who have an end-time commitment to God can neither be forced or persuaded to worship the beast or its image.

The word “mark” in this text translates the Greek word *charagma*. Such a mark can be imprinted or engraved on a surface. It can also represent a stamp such as one might affix to a letter. The term was used in New Testament times for the imperial stamp on official documents and also the royal impression on Roman coins. *Charagma* could also be used for branding animals, but there is no record outside of the Bible for its use in marking a person. This is a bit strange, since slaves could be branded or pierced (see Exodus 21:1-6 for piercing a slave), but the mark placed on a slave was called a *stigmata* in the Roman world, rather than a *charagma* (see Galatians 6:17 for a New Testament example). So the *charagma* in this verse does not have the implication of slavery, but rather something else.

It may be relevant here that in Acts 17:29 the word *charagmati* is used in relation to graven images in gold, silver or stone rather than *eikon*, the more typical Greek word for “image.” *Eikon* is used in verse 15 for the “image of the beast.” So the expanded meaning of *charagma* in relation to idolatry likely explains the use of *charagma* in verse 16 instead of *stigma* or *stigmata*. The mark of the beast in this verse signifies allegiance to the sea and land beasts expressed in worship to the image of the beast. Receiving the mark of the beast means that one identifies with the unholy trinity of chapter 13. Thus a clear contrast is drawn between those who oppose God and those who have God’s seal on their foreheads (Rev 7:1-4; 14:1), those who keep his commandments (12:17; 14:12).

There may be a thematic parallel to Cain’s mark in Genesis 4:15. Both that mark and this one are marks of protection against the judgments of other human beings. But in the Greek OT, Cain’s mark is a *sêmeion* (“sign”) rather than one of the above words. The same word appears in Rev 12:1, 3 and 15:1. The verb form appears in 1:1 (*esêmanen*), meaning that the images of Revelation are to be read as symbols related to the future (on the lines of Daniel 2, see comments on Rev 1:1). There are further parallels to the seal of God in 7:1-3 and Ezek 9:1-7 (see comments on Rev 7:1-3).

The mark of the beast does not affect every person in the same way. It can be received either on the right hand or on the forehead. These two options are related to the devil’s two main methods of persuasion; deception and force. Those who are marked on the forehead are truly deceived, they are committed to the beast in mind and heart. They truly believe that the unholy trinity is the true God and that they are serving the true God when they persecute the saints. On the other hand, there are many who are not persuaded but receive the mark on the hand, either because they fear for their lives (13:15), or in order to gain economic advantages or avoid economic pain (13:17). The latter may not believe in the unholy trinity at all but join in the movement for economic reasons (to buy and sell) or fear of death. In either case those who

receive the mark have their eyes on this life and this world. They are not focused on the things of God and the ultimate outcome of history.

In a sense there are three types of people in the world, those who love the truth, those who hate the truth and those who don't much care either way. The essence of the final crisis is the two alternatives (the truth and its counterfeit) being offered to world, with the indifferent being forced or persuaded to join the camp of the beast. Those who do not receive the seal of God end up with the mark of the beast.

The mark of the beast is not described in detail in this passage (Rev 13:16-18), but needs to be seen in parallel to a number of other concepts in the Bible. The major parallel within Revelation is to the seal of God. The concept of the seal of God is introduced in Revelation 7:1-8, in connection with the 144,000 (see comments on that passage). In the New Testament generally sealing represents the action of the Holy Spirit upon believers (Eph 1:13; 4:30), providing the assurance that they are right with God (1 Tim 2:19). In Revelation 7 it refers to an end-time experience of believers who stay loyal to God as the "winds of the earth" do their harm (7:1-3). While the concept of "seal" is not repeated in Revelation 14:1-3, the 144,000 are once more in view and they have the name of the Lamb and of His Father written on their foreheads. Since in Hebrew thinking a person's name is associated with their character (see comments on 14:1), the end-time seal of God has something to do with the character of God's people at that time. The mark of the beast needs to be understood as a counterpart of the seal of God in some way. When the people of the earth are forced to accept the mark, either in mind or practice, they are taking on the character of the sea beast in contrast to the character of Christ.

Rev 13:16— A second major parallel to the mark of the beast is the visionary scene of Ezekiel 9. There Jerusalem as a whole is abandoning its obedience to God and is coming under judgment. That judgment is expressed in seven men who come to the city to judge and to execute. The six executioners come with destroying weapons in their hands (Ezek 9:1). The seventh carries a writing case. All take their position in the outer court of the temple (Ezek 9:2-4). The man with the writing case goes out into the city and places a mark on the forehead of every man who is distressed by the disobedience of the city (Ezek 9:4). The six executioners follow the first and strike down only those who do NOT have the mark on their foreheads (Ezek 9:5-6).

As in Revelation 7:1-3 (and 9:4) the mark on the forehead is a mark of protection against the judgments that are beings executed. This important parallel indicates that the seal of God is a mark of protection for God's end-time people similar to the one in the vision of Ezekiel 9. Similarly, the mark of the beast protects God's opponents from the death decree and economic sanctions that the image has put in place. The mark of the beast is the way that Satan and the powers that serve him in the final crisis identify those who belong to them.

But the matter goes even deeper. While the seal of God is a mark of protection from God's judgments, the mark of the beast exposes people to those same judgments. In the final crisis the people of earth have to choose between following the beast and losing eternal life, on

the one hand, and following God which could cost them their earthly life, on the other. The stakes in the final battle could not be higher.

A third major parallel to the mark of the beast involves ancient covenant concepts. In ancient times, covenants were sealed with the name, authority and territory of the one offering the covenant. The Ten Commandments are written up in an ancient covenant style. The seal of the ten commandments would be in the fourth, the Sabbath command (Exod 20:8-11). The fourth commandment gives the name of the covenant maker (The Lord [Yahweh]– 20:10-11), the basis for His authority (creation– 20:11) and the territory over which that authority is exercised (heaven and earth, the sea, and everything that is in them– 20:11). Keeping the Sabbath is a way to express God’s absolute sovereignty over the humans He has created. The Sabbath is His seal of ownership and authority. For scholarly support on this concept see Meredith Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*, pages 18, 19, 114 and 297.

Similarly, then, the mark of the beast functions as the “seal” of the unholy trinity’s covenant with those who live on the earth. This terminology here suggests some counterfeit of the Sabbath as the mark of one’s submission to the unholy trinity in the final crisis of earth’s history. More on this in the excursus on the concept of an end-time Sunday law below.

Rev 13:16-17 (Introduction)–

In a related parallel Deuteronomy 6 invites people to keep the commandments of God on their foreheads and hands (Deut 6:8). These commandments are to be the subject of constant meditation and teaching (Deut 6:6-8). They are to be practiced with the hands. So the language of the mark of the beast recalls the ten commandments, with special emphasis on the fourth, as we have seen above. The end-time battle is over worship (Rev 13:4, 8, 12, 15, etc.). The first four commandments are particularly concerned with worship (they are focused on our relationship with God). All four are alluded to in chapter 13 (see notes on Revelation 14:7), but there is particular focus on the fourth commandment. The beast puts his own commandments, including a counterfeit of Sabbath, in place of God’s commandments.

Rev 13:17–

This verse clarifies the purpose of the mark of the beast in the final crisis. While it no doubt was a mark of protection against the death decree (13:15), a further incentive is added here. Those who refuse the mark of the beast will not be allowed to buy or sell. Many scholars call this an “economic boycott” of the remnant (called 144,000 and saints in Rev 14:1-12) in the final battle. The joys and comforts of modern life are dependent on the ability to share each other’s skills and expertise through the medium of monetary exchange. At the End, like Elijah by the brook Cherith, the saints will be thrown back on their own resources and God’s for survival. They will not be able to do business or to benefit from the exchange of resources. The beasts exert every means possible to persuade or force the people of the world to worship the unholy trinity rather than the true God. The economic motivations of end-time Babylon are summed up in Revelation 18:11-19.

What exactly is the mark? Is it some kind of tattoo or microchip embedded in the skin? Is it a license or identity card that people must present in order to buy or sell? Is it something of a more spiritual nature? Many commentators have speculated on these questions for many centuries. All we know from this verse is that the mark is "the name of the beast or the number of his name" (NIV). In the Greek, it is an "either/or" proposition, perhaps in parallel with the forehead and the hand as the sites of the mark.

The mark of the beast can be "the name of the beast," which in Hebraic thought would represent the character of the beast and of the person receiving the mark. This mark would be given in the forehead to people who believe in the religious system and serve it with their minds and hearts. Others may just receive "the number of his name" in the hand for the practical purpose of identification. But whether this marking is intended to be taken literally is not clear in the text. Since the default position for Revelation is to take things symbolically unless the literal reading is the only compelling one (see comments on Revelation 1:1), it is more likely that a spiritual meaning is intended.

"The beast" in this verse and the next is clearly the sea beast, since after its introduction the sea beast is always referred to as either "the first beast" in 13:12 or simply "the beast" in the rest of the book (see especially 16:13, and also 13:14; 14: 9, 11; 19:19-20; 20:4, 10).

Rev 13:16-17– (Excursus on the Concept of a Sunday Law)

One of the major emphases of Seventh-day Adventists has been the concept of a national Sunday law in the United States as part of the end-time crisis. The next several posts form an excursus that will explore the evidence for that assertion.

The main source for this insight is in the writings of Ellen White (*The Great Controversy*, 573, 579, 592). The biblical evidence in Revelation 13:15-17 and parallels has been reviewed in previous posts. In summary, the unholy trinity of Revelation 13 offers a counterfeit god and a counterfeit gospel to the world (Rev 16:13-14). In relation to these events, the mark of the beast is a counterfeit of the seal of God (Rev 7:1-3; 14:1). The numerous allusions to the first table of the law and the Sabbath in the larger context indicate that the mark of the beast is in some way a counterfeit of the Sabbath command.

While the text of Revelation does not indicate directly what the counterfeit of the Sabbath might be, there are three general possibilities. First, offering a different day in place of the one God commanded (Sunday or Friday in place of Sabbath, for example). The second option is treating every day as a Sabbath. The third option is to believe that the Sabbath is completely abolished and that no day has the character of a Sabbath any more. In the United States all three alternatives have had major play, although the first of the three is now much more in the background than it was in Ellen White's day.

I will now share the key statements of Ellen White in which she describes her view of an end-time Sunday law in the United States, with a few comments in each case.

"In the movements now in progress in the United States to secure for the institutions and usages of the church the support of the state, Protestants are following in the steps of papists.

Nay, more, they are opening the door for the papacy to regain in Protestant America the supremacy which she has lost in the Old World. And that which gives greater significance to this movement is the fact that the principal object contemplated is the enforcement of Sunday observance--a custom which originated with Rome, and which she claims as the sign of her authority. It is the spirit of the papacy--the spirit of conformity to worldly customs, the veneration for human traditions above the commandments of God--that is permeating the Protestant churches and leading them on to do the same work of Sunday exaltation which the papacy has done before them." *The Great Controversy*, 573.

Note that she saw the end-time scenario of Sunday law legislation as a direct outgrowth of a situation in her day: "In the movements now in progress in the United States. . ." So an exact fulfillment today would presume a direct connection to movements taking place in the 1880s.

"It has been shown that the United States is the power represented by the beast with lamblike horns, and that this prophecy will be fulfilled when the United States shall enforce Sunday observance, which Rome claims as the special acknowledgment of her supremacy. But in this homage to the papacy the United States will not be alone. The influence of Rome in the countries that once acknowledged her dominion is still far from being destroyed. And prophecy foretells a restoration of her power. . . . In both the Old and the New World, the papacy will receive homage in the honor paid to the Sunday institution, that rests solely upon the authority of the Roman Church.

"Since the middle of the nineteenth century, students of prophecy in the United States have presented this testimony to the world. In the events now taking place is seen a rapid advance toward the fulfillment of the prediction." *The Great Controversy*, 579.

Note here a repeat of the assertion that events taking place in her day (1880s) would lead directly to the Sunday-law legislation. In addition is the prediction that Europe (the Old World) would join the United States in this action.

"The dignitaries of church and state will unite to bribe, persuade, or compel all classes to honor the Sunday. The lack of divine authority will be supplied by oppressive enactments. Political corruption is destroying love of justice and regard for truth; and even in free America, rulers and legislators, in order to secure public favor, will yield to the popular demand for a law enforcing Sunday observance. Liberty of conscience, which has cost so great a sacrifice, will no longer be respected. In the soon-coming conflict we shall see exemplified the prophet's words: 'The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.' Revelation 12:17." *The Great Controversy*, 592.

In addition to *The Great Controversy*, there is one addition statement elsewhere that adds a feature to the three reference in GC: "The decree enforcing the worship of this day is to go forth to all the world. In a limited degree, it has already gone forth. In several places the civil power is speaking with the voice of a dragon, just as the heathen king spoke to the Hebrew captives." {7BC 976.8} Here she seems to indicate that the Sunday law she envisions would eventually affect the entire world, not just the United States and parts of Europe.

In these four postings we have noted Ellen White's comments regarding future legislation of Sunday observance in the United States and the rest of the world. The events she foresaw would be a natural outgrowth of movements already occurring in her time and place, the 1880s. In some ways these statements are clear, yet in other ways they leave us wishing we knew more. In future posts related to this topic I will explore how study of Revelation 13:15-17 is related to these comments and how we might or might not expect such a prediction to be fulfilled in our day or beyond.

The book of Revelation does not spell out explicitly which direction the counterfeit Sabbath will take. Even if we assume option one (a replacement day), as many Seventh-day Adventists do, it does not spell out which day the beast would choose (whether Sunday, Friday or some other day). The fact that the papacy considers the historical change from worship on Saturday to worship on Sunday a mark of its authority, and the fact that so many Christians currently worship on that day, makes Sunday an obvious candidate for the end-time counterfeit. But the actual working out of this prophecy (from the perspective of Revelation itself) will only be fully understood when the very events predicted take place. In today's world the idea of a national Sunday law is increasingly hard to imagine (in light of the secularization and de-Christianization of America), so a certain amount of caution in projecting the exact details of how these events will work out seems warranted. (For a careful analysis of fulfilled prophecy as a guide to unfulfilled prophecy see chapter two of my book *The Deep Things of God*).

For Seventh-day Adventists, certainty about the end-time Sunday law is grounded in the clear and direct statements of Ellen White (*The Great Controversy*, 573, 579, 592) rather than exegesis of the text of Revelation. And for me, this is very strong evidence indeed, as I believe that God worked with her in ways he does not work with me (theologians call it "inspiration"). But a couple of considerations cause me to be a bit more cautious on the exact shape of final events than many of my Adventist colleagues. I invite you to consider the evidence for yourself in the next six postings.

When it comes to interpreting an unfulfilled prophecy it is helpful, first of all, to remember that all Bible prophecies are grounded in the time and place of the prophet. God meets people where they are and prophecies are given in the time, place and circumstances of the prophet at the time of the vision. That means each prophet's view of the End is a natural extension of the time and place in which the prophet receives the vision. My evidence for this? The comprehensive biblical study offered in my book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time* (Review and Herald, 1994— download available at the Armageddon web site). The way God chooses to describe the End shifts from age to age, beginning with Noah and ending with the Book of Revelation.

In light of this, it should not surprise readers of Ellen White if the visions of *Great Controversy* bear a strong resemblance to the time and place in which they were given, 19th Century America. To give just one example, the police forces at the end of time attempt to destroy God's people with swords (*The Great Controversy*, 656), an idea that made sense in the Civil War era when the *Great Controversy* vision was first given (1858) but does not seem nearly

so likely to be part of any fulfillment today.

When I wrote *What the Bible Says About the End-time*, it was not with the purpose of demonstrating the principle that “God meets people where they are.” I was just interested in taking the various biblical views of the End chronologically and seeing how the End was envisioned in each era. It was people reading the book later on that pointed out to me how the picture of the End in the Bible shifted from age to age and how the Bible’s view of the End was a natural extension of each prophet’s time and place. From age to age God met people where they were, articulating an End that made sense from their time and place. This was particularly true of the classical prophets like Isaiah (see Isa 11:15-16 as an example of a prophecy fulfilled quite differently than the language would lead one to expect), but was also true to some degree of the apocalyptic prophets like Daniel.

More change has occurred in the world over the last hundred fifty years than in the previous 6000. Why would this be the one age of history where the prophetic scenario doesn’t shift to some degree, at least? For example, the entire world was “Christian” in the 19th Century and Sunday was taken very seriously as a “Sabbath.” Government enforcement of Sunday laws in the United States and around the world was an active option. Today, the only major part of the world that can be considered truly “Christian” in the 19th Century way is the southern half of Africa. Corollary to this massive change is the worldwide shift to secular post-modernism that has completely changed the way people address issues of truth. These two shifts are as significant as any others in recorded history.

When it comes to considering the unfulfilled prophecy of this passage it is helpful, secondly, to remember that Ellen White herself seems to have been quite open to adjusting the scenario of the End within her lifetime. The Great Controversy vision occurred in 1858. It was written and re-written six or seven times (*Early Writings*, *Spiritual Gifts*, *Spirit of Prophecy*, *Story of Redemption* (I think it is largely a reprint of *Spirit of Prophecy*), and three versions of *The Great Controversy* (1884, 1888, and 1911). What is interesting is that the first three or four versions of the story make no mention of a Sunday law at the end of time. So Ellen White herself was quite capable of writing the story of the end without the Sunday law component.

Why was this concept introduced in the 1884 version of *The Great Controversy*? Probably because national Sunday legislation was a live option in the US in the 1880s. National Sunday worship was thought by some to be a basis for healing the nation in the aftermath of the Civil War. The climax of the debate was the introduction of a Sunday Rest bill (S.2983) in the US Senate by H. W. Blair in 1888. Unlike earlier, more local, Sunday laws, this was not an ordinance written by communities of like-minded people, it was a bold attempt to mold the national culture. Had the events of the End all been fulfilled within her lifetime, I think Ellen White would have been spot on in what she said about the Sunday law legislation.

We must keep in mind, however, that if Ellen White herself was capable of writing up the scenario of the End without a national Sunday law in the United States, we should probably not be so married to such a detail that we miss the real thing when it happens. As the relentless march of history continues, we must allow that God might adjust events to fit the prophecy in an unexpected way.

When it comes to considering the unfulfilled prophecy of this passage it is important, thirdly, to keep in mind that there is more than one way to get unfulfilled prophecies wrong. 1) The more obvious way is to completely ignore prophecy as if it were totally irrelevant to our future. To ignore prophecy is to be surprised when the End-time events occur. And some Adventists are taking that route these days. But they are probably not the majority of the people visiting this web site. 2) The second way to undermine prophecy is to be more specific than the prophecy actually is. It is to undo by overdoing. To over-specify the details of an unfulfilled prophecy is to miss the reality when it occurs. The classic example of this is the Pharisees of Jesus day. They had created elaborate scenarios of the End in books like *1 Enoch*, *2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*, which can be read in English translation today. They had created detailed charts, at least in their minds, specifying exactly how the Old Testament prophecies would be fulfilled. And when the Messiah actually came, they rejected him in part because He didn't fit the scenario they had built out of the prophecies. Such an outcome could easily be repeated in the case of Seventh-day Adventist speculation on unfulfilled prophecy.

In conclusion, I am convinced that the Sabbath as the crucial issue in the final crisis is absolutely consistent with the best exegesis of Rev 14:7 (see comments on that verse). It has a clear context in the ancient world and is clearly referenced in the text. That specific laws enforcing Sunday worship will be the counterfeit of Sabbath keeping is a plausible application of the Mark of the Beast, but is not a specific requirement of the biblical text. It, therefore, falls more into the realm of application than exegesis. While Ellen White is clearer than the Bible is regarding this scenario, the previous postings suggest caution regarding her application of this biblical prophecy to a very different time in history than the one we are living in.

I do not believe that Ellen White was wrong in what she wrote about Sunday laws at the End. The scenario was extremely appropriate to the time in which she wrote and may yet be fulfilled in exactly the way she said. It also has in its favor the long history of how Sunday came to replace the Sabbath. But I believe it would be unwise to teach people that the end-time scenario in Great Controversy must be fulfilled in every detail, including specific laws in specific countries. Should actual events turn out in ways we don't expect, Adventist believers would be unprepared for what God is doing, with potentially devastating consequences. To over-specify prophetic fulfillment in advance is to leave people unprepared for the real thing when it comes.

There is a further point in the writings of Ellen White that I think is relevant to this issue and all other issues of interpretation of Revelation 13. It is possible that all things written in *The Great Controversy* will be fulfilled in exactly the way described there. Yet Ellen White herself offers a different principle that could be applied here. "Circumstances alter cases (or "conditions"). Circumstances change the relation of things" (3 SM 217, 6T 339, CM 42 and many other examples in a variety of circumstances). While such a statement can be misused (see RH Sept 14, 1905 for example), it is important to keep in mind in this instance.

19th Century America WAS a Protestant nation, as Ellen White describes. But is that still truly the case today? Or is America a much more pluralistic and secular nation than anyone in the 19th Century would have dreamed? And if America is no longer a Protestant nation, then can

we expect Revelation 13 to be fulfilled in exactly the same way as it might have 150 years ago? My study of fulfilled prophecy (Deep Things of God, chapter 2, Patterns of Prophecy at the Armageddon web site) suggests a flexibility in fulfillment that in Bible times almost always led to surprise among the very ones studying the prophecy (example: Hos 2:1-9). Could the same thing happen again in relation to Ellen White's interpretation of Revelation 13?

Let me finish this excursus with the conclusion of chapter 2 of *Deep Things of God*, where I reflect on the lessons learned from the study of fulfilled prophecy.

"1) I think Christians in general and Adventists in particular tend to be a little too certain that we understand exactly what God intends to do before He does it. Perhaps it arises out of the human temptation to play God, Who alone knows the future. But the history of people's interpretations of Revelation ought to be a warning to us. Time and again, interpretations that made perfect sense at one point in time proved to be dead wrong when the actual fulfillment came. We should not expect point by point correspondence in all details between prophecy and fulfillment. Fulfillments are best recognized when they occur and not before.

"2) The primary purpose of prophecy is not to satisfy our curiosity about the future, but to teach us how to live today. God uses a vision of the future to encourage and motivate real people in the real circumstances of everyday life. Although prophecy is often predictive, its primary purpose is to teach us something about God and change the way we live long before the fulfillment comes.

"3) We tend to read Revelation as though it was written to our own time, place and circumstances. We bring to our reading associations and concepts that would never have occurred to John or His contemporaries. Such readings almost inevitably lead to a distortion of the text and of its original intention. The language of Revelation is the language of John's past not ours."

For those not familiar with the Seventh-day Adventist tradition, I want to conclude this excursus with a brief summary of the big picture in relatively plain language. I am pursuing a Facebook commentary on the book of Revelation. Verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph. We are now toward the end of Revelation 13, talking about the mark of the beast (13:16-17). An "excursus" is a digression that moves out from the verse by verse approach to address an issue of history, philosophy or religion that goes beyond the details of the text. We'll continue with Revelation 13:18 tomorrow.

Within Rev 13-14 there is a strong emphasis on the 10 commandments (Rev 12:17; 14:12) with a strong allusion to the Sabbath command in Revelation 14:7 (see Exodus 20:11 and notes on 14:7). Within the final battle of earth's history (summarized in Revelation 12:17 and addressed throughout chapters 13 and 14) there will be a special focus on obedience (or disobedience) to the Sabbath command. It will become the deciding issue between those who follow the "dragon/Satan" (Rev 12:9, 17) and those who follow Jesus (Rev 14:1-3). The mark of the beast (Rev 13:15-17) is some sort of human counterfeit of the Sabbath. Within Seventh-day Adventist tradition that counterfeit is identified with the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday many centuries ago in Christian Europe. Historically, that is the most dramatic shift in the

way people relate to the Sabbath command throughout recorded human history.

This excursus explored the Adventist view that the USA and perhaps the whole world will some day pass a law requiring Sunday worship of all citizens, including Jews, Muslims and Adventists. To obey such a law would be to receive the mark of the beast. According to the Adventist view (expressed in general terms by one of the founders, Ellen White, this “Sunday law” will bring all the true faithful of all religions to a crisis of conscience. In the process they will be drawn to each other in a final "remnant" (Rev 12:17). Whether or not every detail of this nineteenth-century predication will be fulfilled was the purpose of the excursus. You may find it helpful to re-read the earlier posts with this conclusion in mind.

Rev 13:18— The verse begins with a call for wisdom. The Greek word for wisdom is a common female name in English, *sophia*. The expression here is very simple, as translated in the KJV, “Here is wisdom.” The statement is repeated in 17:9 with an addition, “Here is the mind which has wisdom” (Rev 17:9, NASB). In this verse “here is wisdom” is a call to correctly interpret the number 666. In Revelation 17:9 the phrase is a call to understand correctly the seven heads of the beast. It is interesting that a statement like this occurs in connection with two of the most challenging concepts in the entire book. But the phrase ties these concepts together in some way. The 666 has something to do with the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 17.

In Revelation 5:12 wisdom is ascribed to the Lamb, and in Revelation 7:12 wisdom is ascribed to God. So there is a direct contrast in these four texts that mention wisdom. Two are speaking about God’s wisdom (Rev 5:12; 7:12) and two are speaking of a wisdom that readers of Revelation need to exercise (13:18; 17:9). In the Gospels, the same word for wisdom is applied several times to Jesus (Matt 13:54; Mark 6:2; Luke 2:40, 52).

The concept of wisdom (Greek *sophia*) has a rich background in the book of Daniel. There is a strong clustering of the expression in the image story of Daniel 2 (see note on Rev 1:1). Daniel speaks to the commander of the king’s guard with “wisdom and tact” (Dan 2:14, NIV). When Daniel is given access to the king’s dream and its interpretation he exalts God as the one who gives “wisdom to the wise” (Dan 2:21, ESV, see also verses 20 and 23). He then goes before the king and explains that the wisdom that interprets the dream is not ordinary human wisdom (Dan 2:30), rather it comes from the “God in heaven who reveals mysteries” (2:28). Daniel then goes on to remind the king of the details of his dream and offer the interpretation. Daniel’s ability to tell the king what he dreamed in his private chamber was evidence that the interpretation was also wise and true. Elsewhere in the book, Daniel is recognized by the Babylonians as being possessed of exceptional intelligence and wisdom (Dan 1:20; 5:11, 14).

The Greek noun for wisdom (*sophia*) appears also in adjective form (*sophos*— a “wise” person) in Daniel. It is used for the “wise” men of Babylon, who are intelligent in the knowledge of the world but fail to demonstrate access to the divine wisdom (Dan 2:10-12) which is later revealed to Daniel (Dan 2:20-23). So a strong contrast is drawn between those whose wisdom is gained by human effort and those whose wisdom is grounded in revelation from God (2:27-28). The adjective “wise” reappears toward the end of the book of Daniel as a characteristic of God’s

end-time people (Dan 11:33, 35; 12:3, 10, see also Daniel 11:40; 12:13).

The interpretational challenges of Revelation 13:18 and 17:9, therefore, are not to be minimized. The Daniel background suggests that their interpretation will resist human wisdom and interpretation. Whatever we make of these texts, we need to take a humble approach toward our own understanding of them.

The number of the beast is to be calculated by “the one who has a mind” (Rev 13:18, my translation). While different from the expression in 17:9, this addition completes the parallel between the two texts.

The number of the beast is “man’s number” (NIV), “the number of a man” (KJV, ESV), “stands for a person” (NAB), “the number of a human being” (NJB), “the number of a person” (NRSV), and “a human number” (RSV). It is clear from these attempts at translation that the simple Greek expression (*arithmos anthrôpou estin*—literally: “it is a number of a man”) is very difficult to translate in a way that clarifies its meaning. Is it the number of a specific human being (male or female, *anthropou* is generic)? Is it a “human number,” representative of the human wisdom that falls short of God’s wisdom? Is it some combination of the two?

The fact that the text goes on to say “his number (*ho arithmos autou*) is 666,” steers the reader somewhat in the direction of the number being related to a specific person, rather than just an abstract concept. The form of “his” in the Greek can be either masculine or neuter, in this case neuter is preferred (“it”) because in the Greek word for “beast” is neuter. The decisions one makes in interpreting such a text tends to control the outcome, yet the very ambiguity of the text can call such outcomes into question.

Rev 13:18– (Excursis on 666)

It is important to note that the Greek does not express the 666 in arabic style numbers, the expression is written out, literally six hundred (*hexakosioi*) sixty (*hexêkonta*) six (*hex*). This is true of the other large numbers in the book as well (Rev 7:4; 11:3; 12:6), so it is the normal way to express such numbers in Revelation, it is not a special feature of the calculation. As in arabic numerals, there are three units in the Greek expression of the number, one for the hundred level, one for the tens level and one for the single digit. In the early Greek manuscripts, however, a short form was used with one Greek letter for each number (*chi* [600], *xi* [60], *digamma* [6]), highlighting the threeness of the expression and the importance of the full number. The *digamma* is an ancient Greek letter (the modern term is *stigma*) that lost its place in the alphabet and was used in New Testament times only for the number six.

But while the three sixes embedded in the expression is worthy of note (and will be explored a bit later), it is important to remind ourselves that the number is to be calculated as a whole. The entire number, six hundred sixty six, is the number to be figured out. This will become important when we explore the historical and end-time meanings of the number.

Since all readers of the book (“anyone who has a mind”— my translation) are invited to figure out the number 666, it must have been relevant in some way to the original readers of the book. After all, the words of the book of Revelation were not to be sealed up because the time

of fulfillment was at hand (Rev 1:3). So while the full understanding of the number would be in relation to the period after the fall of the Roman Empire and particularly at the time of the end, the number should also have had meaning to those who received it in the first place. Before exploring what 666 might mean in the Middle Ages or today, we need to explore what the number could possibly have meant to the original readers (this is always an important safeguard against speculation). For this we will need to explore parallels in the Bible and also in ancient times.

In common numbering today there are two main systems that impact our lives, numbering in terms of tens and numbering in terms of sixes. We count money in ones, tens and hundreds. Most of the world follows the metric system for weights and measures, and the metric system is based on the number ten and its derivatives. Using arabic numerals the so-called decimal system (based on the Latin word for “ten” – *decem*) functions very efficiently in calculations and in the comparison of numbers. While different from arabic numerals, and not nearly as efficient mathematically, Roman numerals were also based on a system of ten. The decimal system seems to have been used as far back as ancient Egypt well before the time of Moses.

Numbering based on sixes (the sexagesimal system) goes all the way back to Mesopotamia before the time of Abraham. It was handed down from the ancient Sumerians to the ancient Babylonians and from there to Rome and beyond. It is also an efficient system as the number 60 can be evenly divided by 30, 20, 15, 12, 10, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1. This system is still in use today for time (hours, minutes and seconds), in geometry (particularly in the calculation of angles), and in geographical coordinates (latitude and longitude). So the number 666 in this context connects with ancient Babylon (note also the allusion to Daniel 3 in verse 15) and may, in fact, be the first hint to the reader that Babylon will be an important symbol for end-time opposition to God in the rest of the book (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21).

In Revelation numbers are recognized to have symbolic value along with most other concepts in the book (see comments on Revelation 1:1). Many of these are grounded in the Hebraic mindset of the Old Testament. The number three represents the godhead (Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8, etc.). The number four represents the earth in its full geographic extent (7:1-3). The number seven (three plus four) represents perfection or completeness (used dozens of times throughout the book). Since most human beings have ten fingers and ten toes, the number ten is another way to express completeness (2:10; 5:11). The number twelve represents spiritual Israel, the people of God in all ages (7:4-8; 21:12-16).

In light of the above, the number six not only represents Babylon, it falls short of seven, the number of perfection and completeness, the number of the Lamb (“Lamb” appears 28 times with reference to Jesus – 4 x 7). Six is also one-half of twelve, the number of Israel and of the church. It also doubles three, the number of the godhead, so may relate to the “counterfeit trinity” motif in its own right. The number six, therefore, is short of perfection and also an imperfect replica of the true God and His people. The relative value of these numbers goes back to creation (Genesis 1 and 2). It is on the sixth day that both human beings and the serpent were

created, the combination that led to all the sin and suffering of this world. On the other hand, on the seventh day God rested and blessed the day for the benefit of the human beings He created (Mark 2:27-28).

The number six, therefore, would call a number of things to mind for the original readers. These concepts do not represent the full historical meaning of the 666, but they do give further insight into how the original readers would have interpreted the mandate “whoever has a mind, let him calculate. . .”

As one explores the number six in the larger context of this verse other possibilities come to mind. For one thing, the powers of evil at the End are represented as three, the dragon, the (sea) beast and the land beast (false prophet– Rev 16:13). So the three-fold nature of six hundred, sixty, and six connects with the three-fold reality of the end-time deception in this chapter.

In addition, the allusion to Daniel 3 in 13:15 suggests an even deeper connection in these sixes to the golden image that all people in Babylon were commanded to worship on pain of death. The size of the image was 60 cubits tall and six cubits wide (either the depth was not relevant or the image was built into a wall as in a relief-type sculpture). So the number 666 seems closely related to the image of the beast and also the dramatic story of Daniel 3. The number is part of a structural parallel between Revelation 13 and Daniel 3. In the final crisis of earth’s history the story of Daniel 3 will be replayed. There will be a worldwide showdown over worship. Every person on earth will have to decide whether to worship the unholy trinity (13:15; 14:9) or to worship God (14:7). And this decision will be enforced by a death decree (13:15) and an economic boycott (13:17).

The number 666, therefore, is closely associated with the character of the sea beast (the name and the number are parallel). It stands in direct contrast with the next passage (Rev 14:1) where the sealed saints have the name of God and the Lamb on their foreheads. The beast’s name/number are in direct contrast to the seal of God (7:1-4; 14:1). The beast is the Antichrist, who seeks to counterfeit the role and character of the true God in the final battle of earth’s history. But as the number six falls short of seven, his character falls short of the divine character he seeks to emulate. Such a reading of Revelation was available in the first century and still has meaning today, even though it does not enclose the fulness of the text’s intention.

The use of sixes here, therefore, likely called to the original readers’ minds general concepts such as Babylon, sin, and deception. It also connects this passage with the worship showdown at the Plain of Dura (Daniel 3). But the text explicitly says to “calculate the number of the beast” and the number is six hundred sixty six, not six, six, six. So we can’t limit our interpretation to the symbolism of sixes and sevens. The entire number, therefore, should have had some significance to those who originally read this text. What ideas would the whole number 666 trigger in the original readers’ minds?

If you look up the number 666 in a concordance you will discover that it appears a total of three times in the Old Testament (the Hebrew mind may well have considered the three-fold use of the number significant). In Ezra 2:13 the number refers to the descendants of Adonikam.

This was a clan grouping, one of a number of “mini-tribes” that returned to Palestine with Zerubbabel in response to the decree of Cyrus (as recorded in Ezra 1 and 2). Since the number appears without comment in an extensive list, it may simply be random and of no interest to us. But one possible meaning of Adonikam is “Lord of the enemy” (literally “the lord has risen up” with rising up often used as language of attack— Jdg 9:18; 2 Sam 7:14; Psa 54:3; Mic 2:8). So the Hebrew mind reading Revelation 13:18 may have made a connection to Ezra 2:13. In Nehemiah 7:18 the sons of Adonikam are 667, probably including Adonikam himself.

More relevant for our purpose than Ezra 2:13 is the use of 666 in 1 Kings 10:14 and its parallel in 2 Chronicles 9:13. In both passages the weight of the gold that came to Solomon in a single year was 666 “talents.” A Hebrew “talent” was approximate to the weight of water in an amphora, roughly a one-foot cube. In modern terms the various ancient measurements would total anywhere from 25-60 kilograms (55-130 pounds). In terms of gold, this is an enormous amount. The reference to 666 talents of gold is sandwiched in 1 Kings 10 by two important events in Solomon's life: 1) the visit by the Queen of Sheba when he was the most faithful to God (1 Kings 10:1-10); and 2) his marriage to an Egyptian princess (1 Kings 11:1-4-- which was the first of many marriages with foreign women), which led him away from his faithfulness to the true God.

As noted by C. H. Dodd in *According to the Scriptures*, New Testament writers did not quote or allude to the Old Testament for proof texts. Rather they used Old Testament phrases and quotations as pointers to the larger context in which the originals could be found. So if this verse is alluding to 1 Kings 10:14, the purpose of the allusion was to point to the larger context of the number, Solomon’s apostasy from the faithfulness exhibited with the Queen of Sheba to the unfaithfulness that resulted from the many foreign marriages. The number 666, then, would represent apostasy from the true faith, very appropriate to the sea beast, as described in Revelation 13:1-7.

Continuing with the 1 Kings reference, Solomon was the most illustrious physical son of David. But Jesus is the most illustrious Son of David in the larger sense. So connecting the 666 with 1 Kings 10 indicates that the sea beast is a counterfeit son of David, a counterfeit of Jesus Christ. The name Solomon is based on the Hebrew word for “peace.” Jesus is the Prince of Peace. In this reading the 666 would have been one of many symbols showing that the work of Jesus will be counterfeited at the end-time.

For those interested in going deeper into the Old Testament uses of 666 there is an excellent scholarly article by M. G. Michael, “Observations on 666 in the Old Testament,” *Bulletin of Biblical Studies* 18 (January to June 1999): 33-39. It can be found online at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1677&context=infopapers>.

Would the original readers have connected the number 666 with anything in their day? Three possibilities seem more likely than most. 1) Babylonian priests are thought to have worn amulets with a configuration of numbers that add up to 666. The configuration was as follows:

1	32	34	3	35	6
30	8	27	28	11	7

20	24	25	26	13	23
19	17	21	22	18	14
10	26	12	9	29	25
31	4	2	33	5	36

Each vertical and horizontal line adds up to 111. And all six vertical or horizontal lines add up to 666. The evidence for such amulets in ancient Babylon is, however, very late (17th Century) and may be more related to medieval Kabbala (Jewish mysticism) than ancient Babylon.

2) The number 666 is the sum total of all the numbers expressed in Roman numerals: DCLXVI. D is 500, C is 100, L is 50, X is 10, V is 5 and I is 1. Add them up and you get 666.

3) The greatest persecutor of Christians in the First Century was Emperor Nero. When you transliterate the Latin phrase Emperor Nero (*Neron Kaisar*) into Hebrew (*nrwn qsr*) the numerical equivalent of the respective Hebrew consonants is 666. In the late First Century a “Nero redivivus” myth was circulating around the Empire. It took various forms, but the most popular version had Nero rise from the dead and return at the head of the Parthian armies (from the territory of ancient Persia) to resume control of Rome. For Christians this would have been a devastating development. It is quite likely that at least some early readers of Revelation would have made a connection between this verse and the *Nero Redivivus* myth.

(4) According to David Aune, the Hebrew word *trywn* (“beast”) tallies up to 666 in Hebrew numbering. But if this is what ancient readers calculated, it does not offer any additional insights into John’s spiritual or historical meaning.

All of these insights from Scripture and ancient times, however, do not lead to us to the more specific meaning of the number 666. Connected to the Antichrist after the fall of the Roman Empire, this number would have to take on a specific meaning in relation to that entity. We will explore further.

The most compelling connection of the number 666 to the Papacy in the Middle Ages and beyond is in the papal title “Vicar of the Son of God.” In Latin this phrase reads *Vicarius Filii Dei*. The phrase contains a single D (500), a single C (100), a single L (50), a pair of V’s (10– the Latin U and V are the same), and six I’s (6). These numerical values add up to 666. If we conclude that the sea beast of Revelation 13 represents the Medieval papacy and its rebirth at the end of time, applying the 666 to *Vicarius Filii Dei* is pretty compelling.

There are a couple of challenges to this identification, however. First of all, the title is not associated with church leadership until the Eighth Century, sometime around 750 AD. So the title was not a living reality for those who first read Revelation. It could have meant nothing to them, as far as we know. Second, if you go to the English-language Vatican web site today, you will not find *Vicarius Filii Dei* listed among the titles of the Pope. You will find Vicar of Christ (*Vicarius Christi*), which is a strong equivalent, but not Vicar of the Son of God, the exact phrasing that is needed to connect the phrase with Revelation 13:18. The phrase Vicar of the Son of God seems to have come into papal use around 750 AD, become a preferred title for about a thousand years, and then fallen into disuse sometime after 1800. So the connection of VFD with either the first century or the twenty-first is problematic. I will address a possible

solutions to this problem in the following post.

The most thorough research into the meaning and history of *Vicarius Filii Dei* that I am aware of is the book by Edwin de Kock, *The Truth About 666 and the Story of the Great Apostasy*.

The book can be obtained at the author's web site:

<http://amazingdiscoveries.org/webstore/us/p/kock-the-truth-about-666-and-the-story-of-the-great-apostasy-book>.

Based on the exegetical work I have done on earlier parts of this chapter, the sea beast is seen in two phases of its lifespan. The latter part of the chapter (13:12-18) describes its actions in connection with the final crisis summarized in Revelation 12:17, and these are written in present and future Greek tenses. The early part of the chapter (13:1-7), written in Greek past tenses, represents the earlier career of the sea beast, arising out of the Roman Empire and becoming a dominant religio-political power for 1260 years. The purpose of this earlier material is to introduce and identify the sea beast in terms of its history prior to the final battle. The same entity that dominated the world during the 1260 years (mostly the Middle Ages) would again come into prominence in the final battle (after a "resurrection"). So the focus of the identification is on the characteristics and actions of the sea beast during the "forty months" or 1260 years (Rev 13:5).

While the number 666 is given in the context of the final battle, it is placed at the end of the chapter as another piece of evidence for the identity of the sea beast. The sea beast is best identified for the end-time through its role during the 1260 years. The number 666, therefore, would be characteristic of its identity during that period. And that is, in fact, the case historically. It can be historically demonstrated that the title *Vicarius Filii Dei* was used as a papal title throughout the period from 750-1800, roughly contiguous with the 1260 years (538-1798— see excursus on the year-day principle in relation to comments on 12:14). Not only so, the title is directly associated with the fictitious *Donation of Constantine*, purportedly giving the papacy religious authority over the entire church and also secular, political authority over Rome and its environs. So it was the most significant papal title during the years marked out by the "42 months" of Revelation 13:1-5. The fact that *Vicarius Filii Dei* was not in use during John's day or ours is not as relevant to the issue as it might at first appear. It is the self-identification of the papacy with VFD during the 1260 years that is the key to the prophetic explanation.

Such a reading of Revelation 13, of course, assumes that the book of Revelation is more than just a spiritual book authored by a pious man on the Island of Patmos. It assumes that Revelation is what it claims, a revelation from God through Jesus Christ. As such, it can be expected to contain information not obtainable by John apart from revelation, such as specifics of the far future. I offer no apology for taking this position, as the validity of Bible prophecy is strongly attested through the centuries.

Rev 13:12-18 (Conclusion)–

Since the events in this passage are in the future from our own point of view, it is wise to exercise a certain amount of sanctified caution in laying out the details of this prophecy.

Prophecy is not given to satisfy our curiosity about the future, it is given to teach us how to live today, and how to be spiritually ready for the events that are coming. While the broad outline of the events are reasonably clear, the exact form in which events will unfold is less clear.

In the broadest sense, the passage predicts an end-time alliance between the papacy and the religious side of the United States, dominated by Protestant Christianity through most of its history, although that dominance seems to be waning today. In that alliance the papacy will take more of a back seat, so its role may not be as obvious as some expect when the time comes. The USA will use spectacular events in a false Mount Carmel/Pentecost to persuade most of the world to set up an image to the beast and give worshipful allegiance to it. Is that image the revived papacy itself, or is it a uniquely American version of the church/state power in the Middle Ages? The mark of the beast involves some kind of counterfeit of the Sabbath, probably Sunday, and includes economic sanctions on those who are not persuaded by the false Pentecost engineered by the land beast.

When concluding the study of this passage further questions arise and can only be resolved by the actual events when they occur. Will the American role in these events be dominated by more of a civil religion or by the end-time dominance of a “moral majority” of conservative Christians? Will the Protestant nature of America shine through as strongly as Ellen White expected more than a hundred years ago or will American Protestantism continue to be diluted by the inroads of secularism, evolution, Islam and eastern religions? If the latter proves to be the case, the American “religion” of the end-time may be quite different than what Ellen White anticipated in the late 19th Century. Will the expectation of a national Sunday law be fulfilled or will the counterfeit take a new and surprising form? Will the role of the papacy be central to world affairs at that time, or be obscured more in the back channels of diplomacy? Exactly what will the mark of the beast prove to be? Lessons learned from fulfilled prophecy in the Bible encourage us to exercise a certain tentativeness about unfulfilled prophecies. Let God be God and be watchful as events unfold. You can undo prophecy not just by ignoring it but also by over-specifying the outcome in advance, as the Pharisees once did.

Rev 13 (Conclusion)–

Chapter 13 elaborates on the dragon’s side of the great final battle between the dragon and the remnant (Rev 12:17). The dragon gathers allies to assist him in the final battle against God and against His people. Together with the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth, the dragon forms an unholy trinity to dispute the true God’s claim to the allegiance of those who live on the earth. Using both deception and force, the evil powers cause a mark to be placed on the forehead or the hand of all who do not resist in the name of the true God. The dragon/Satan is the great power standing behind all the powers of the world.

While many interpretations of Revelation focus on political, military and economic events, the symbols of this chapter incline me to believe that the essence of the final battle is not military or political, it is rather a battle for the mind. It is a battle between the true and the false trinity for the allegiance of earth’s inhabitants. As such, chapter 13 has set the table for the

spiritual nature of the great Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16-18). The Battle of Armageddon is not a struggle between rival nations and their militaries (although nations and battles are always a part of such things). Revelation focuses, rather, on the battle between two competing gospels, the gospel of the three angels of Revelation 14 and the gospel of the three frogs of Revelation 16. The religious nature of the two beasts of Revelation 13 is consistent with a spiritual understanding of Armageddon later on.

Rev 13 (Spiritual lessons)–

1) In this chapter the powers that oppose God and His people are coercive and deceptive. They seek to frustrate people's search for truth with attractive ideas that veer off the path of Scripture. Where that fails to work, they use force and economic incentives to gain adherents who will not be persuaded in mind. The methods of the beast stand in contrast to the ways of God exhibited at the cross.

God's government, on the other hand, is open, seeking the approval of human beings on the basis of evidence, reason and love. God respects the freedom of all to make their own decisions and He does not generally intervene to mitigate the consequences of human decisions. The methods of God and of the beast could not be more in contrast with each other. What is shocking and disappointing is that the beast arises from within the church. The very institutions that were established to promote the ways of God often end up exhibiting the character of Satan. History tells us that the church often becomes an oppressor modeling on the ways of Satan rather than the ways of God.

2)– Religion is a human response to the perception that God has been present and active in the human situation. Religious institutions arise to honor what God has done and to promote the knowledge of God and His ways in the world. As such religions and religious institutions are beautiful things. But over time, religious institutions tend to be more and more focused on self-preservation and less and less focused on the original mission. A corporate selfishness arises that takes people's eyes off of God and focuses them on gaining political and economic advantage within the systems of this world. This decline into apostasy is rarely perverse, promoted by evil people, but is often the unintentional consequence of many reasonable decisions. But when those decisions are motivated more by self-preservation than the original mission the decline, though gradual, is real and can result in a "beast" over time, maintaining a surface adherence to the mission while corporately focused on self. The very origin and profession of institutional religion makes it much more deceptive than open opposition and force tends to be.

3)– Relying on the things of this world is foolishness in the end-time. If we rely on money and the things it can buy, we will be in real trouble. The book of Revelation offers a serious warning about our relationship with our possessions. True life is not found in the abundance of possessions. For one thing, possessions may enhance life in the here and now, but they do not last. They rot, rust, crash and burn. They quickly become obsolete, replaced by something "bigger and better." And those who have a great abundance of the things of this world discover that the more you have the less any possession is worth. No child can appreciate a toy the way a

child with only one toy can. But the ultimate problem with possessions is two-fold; 1) you can't take them with you when you die, and 2) they will become a strong temptation at the end of time, when the faithful will be deprived of the comforts they had before.

Those who rely on the things of this world will face a choice, abandon the things of this world or abandon faithfulness to God. The more attached we are to the things of this world, the greater the challenge the end-time will be to the people of God.

4)– At the core of the end-time deception is evidence based on the five senses. The counterfeit trinity will do “great signs” within the physical world that will reveal the presence of supernatural power (Rev 13:13-14). Those who trust in the five senses (what we can see, hear, taste, touch and smell) will experience convincing evidence that the counterfeit trinity is the true God. The secular trend in today's world is a perfect setup for the end-time deception. At the end-time Mount Carmel the “fire” will fall on the wrong “altar,” whatever that turns out to be in reality. Those who trust in their five senses alone (science, reason, observation) will have no barrier against spiritual deception at the end.

The best safeguards against the end-time deception are careful attention to the Scriptures and to a living relationship with God. Prophecies like Revelation 13 lay out the major players in the final conflict and the character of the deception they will present. Those who know the Word of God and obey it (Rev 12:17; 14:12) will discern the subtleties of the deception. Those who have a living relationship with God will discern the evil character behind that which appears both spectacular and divine.

Rev 13 (Excursus on the Papacy)

As Seventh-day Adventists understand it, Revelation 13 covers two main eras of history. The first is the broad sweep of history beginning with the Middle Ages and ending in modern times. The second is the final era of earth's history, summarized in Revelation 12:17 and climaxing with the mark of the beast and the final battle over worship. Our exegesis confirms (see ongoing Facebook Commentary on Revelation) that the parts of Revelation 13 that Adventists have understood to refer to the earlier period are all in past tenses (Rev 13:1-7, 11). The end-time portions of Revelation 13 (verses 8-10 and 12-18), on the other hand, are in present and future tenses.

Revelation 12:17 sets chapter 13 in the final crisis. The dragon goes to the “sand of the sea” to call up allies for the final conflict. But each of those allies has a history, the one (land beast: 13:11) much shorter than the other's (sea beast: 13:1-7). So while the primary focus of Revelation 13 is on the time of 12:17 (the final battle), the history and identification of the two beasts means that nearly half of the chapter deals with the earlier of the two periods.

As Adventists interpret this chapter, the Papacy dominated, persecuted and deceived “the world” from around 538 AD through 1798 AD. It then received a “deadly wound,” including the loss of civil power (the Papal States) that began to be healed when Mussolini returned Vatican City to the political control of the Papacy in 1929. From that time on Adventists anticipate that the power and influence of the papacy will increase until its end-time alliance

with the United States produces a dominance similar to what it had in the Middle Ages. In other words, the sea beast of Revelation 13 is the end-time reincarnation of the Papacy of the Middle Ages.

The land beast, on the other hand, is something relatively new, a world power that arises outside of the traditional locus of world power, the super-continent of Eurasia. Adventists understand the land beast to be the United States of America. Together, the Papacy and the US will support the dragon/Satan in his final attempt to defeat Christ and His people. In Adventist understanding, that final battle is further elaborated in chapters 14-18.

As Adventists understand the prophecy in this chapter, the United States of America will eventually dominate the world in a way similar to the Papacy's dominance of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The events surrounding September 11 have certainly enhanced the plausibility of such a scenario. America has become a "reluctant empire." But reluctant or not, it is the most powerful empire in the history of the world. Even the minor decisions it makes must be accounted for by every nation on earth. The great irony in this scenario is that the enemies of God and the gospel in the final crisis of earth's history are identified as the United States and the Papacy, the very entities most closely identified with Christianity in today's world. In the end, "Babylon" will have a Christian face. The final events will be a surprise to all (except perhaps some Muslims) but those who have most carefully attended to the prophecies of Scripture.

The big question that confronts those who discover the negative role of the papacy as portrayed in this chapter is: If this is true, what do we do with such information in today's world? Many Seventh-day Adventists not only feel compelled to share it, they often make it the very center and focus of the whole Adventist message in its contact with the outside world. Such motivations have led to the infamous papacy billboard campaign which aroused more anger than curiosity in the communities where these were featured. Others, particularly Adventists in countries that are predominantly Catholic, have chosen not to place this understanding at the forefront of public proclamation. They have instead focused on the attractiveness of Jesus with considerable success, saving the more condemnatory aspects of Adventist teaching for private settings where the reaction can be carefully monitored.

If you are going to share negative information about the papacy, just make sure that you are presenting the evidence fairly. Many criticize Catholicism on the basis of things said in catechisms or Catholic journals. But these are not official sources. The official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church are based on two things and two things only: 1) official decisions of the great councils (like Vatican II), and 2) *ex cathedra* statements from the Pope himself (*ex cathedra* is Latin for "from the chair," statements made with the full teaching authority of the position). If you want to know what the Catholic Church teaches, there is one source. In English the official collection of the relevant documents drawn from the above sources can be found in the book by Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Before one criticizes Catholic teaching, it would be wise to know what official Catholic teaching actually is. I do not appreciate it when people criticize the Adventist Church falsely or on the basis of what they have heard from a radical fringe. We ought to extend the same courtesy to our Catholic neighbors.

To the Seventh-day Adventists who are reading, here is a small bit of perspective: While the negative messages of Revelation 13 have had central play in much Adventist evangelism over the last century, they are not in the 28 fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church. Their function is not at the core of what it means to be an Adventist Christian, rather they serve two potential purposes. 1) They serve as boundary markers at the edges of the faith for those who need them. Many people can deal with a little theological ambiguity in their lives, but for those who need clarity, Revelation 13 can provide that clarity. 2) It is an important part of an evangelistic strategy that is more useful in some contexts than in others.

Some counsel from Ellen White on the topic of a confrontive approach to Catholicism and Catholics. “Be cautious in your labors, brethren, not to assail the prejudices of the people too strongly. There should be no going out of the way to attack other denominations; for it only creates a combative spirit and closes ears and hearts to the entrance of the truth. We have our work to do, which is not to tear down but to build up. . . . There is danger that our ministers will say too much against the Catholics and provoke against themselves the strongest prejudices of that church.”—Letter 39, 1887.

“Preach the truth, but restrain the words which show a harsh spirit; for such words cannot help or enlighten anyone.”—*Counsels to Editors*, p. 45.

“There is need of a much closer study of the Word of God; especially should Daniel and the Revelation have attention as never before in the history of our work. We may have less to say in some lines, in regard to the Roman power and the Papacy, but we should call attention to what the prophets and apostles have written under the inspiration of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has so shaped matters, both in the giving of the prophecy, and in the events portrayed, as to teach that the human agent is to be kept out of sight, hid in Christ, and the Lord God of heaven and His law are to be exalted.”—*Counsels to Editors*, pp. 45, 46.

Please note that she herself predicts that a time might come when it would be wise to have “less to say” about “the Roman power and the Papacy.” I think we need to take these kinds of comments as seriously as we take the other kind.

“Decided proclamations are to be made. But in regard to this line of work, I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message, make no personal thrusts at other churches, not even the Roman Catholic Church. Angels of God see in the different denominations many who can be reached only by the greatest caution. Therefore let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the “mysteries of iniquity.” Upon these themes silence is eloquence. Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ Jesus be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving someone a thrust. That thrust may do much harm and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. Let the Word of God, which is the truth, tell the story of the inconsistency of those in error. People cannot be expected to see at once the advantage of the truth over the error they have cherished. The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present the evidences of truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting

on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness.” — Ellen White, Manuscript 6, 1902.

One of the last statements Ellen White wrote: “Let not those who write for our papers make unkind thrusts and allusions that will certainly do harm, and that will hedge up the way and hinder us from doing the work that we should do in order to reach all classes, the Catholics included. It is our work to speak the truth in love, and not to mix in with the truth the unsanctified elements of the natural heart, and speak things that savor of the same spirit possessed by our enemies.”

It is true that we are commanded to “cry aloud, spare not, lift up the voice like a trumpet, and show My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” Isaiah 58:1. This message must be given, but while it must be given, we should be careful not to thrust and crowd and condemn those who have not the light that we have. We should not go out of our way to make hard thrusts at the Catholics. Among the Catholics there are many who are most conscientious Christians, and who walk in all the light that shines upon them, and God will work in their behalf.” — *Testimonies For The Church* 9:241-244

As we wrestle with the usefulness of presenting Revelation 13 in today’s world, a few aspects of American history may be instructive. At the time of its independence, the United States of America was a country made up essentially of people from northern and western Europe (Great Britain, Scandinavia, Holland, Germany), with a minority being slaves of African origin. The vast majority of non-native Americans were Protestant in faith; Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Lutherans, etc (the one exception to the rule was the state of Maryland). These Protestants were a hard-working, strict, relatively sober crowd. During the Irish potato famine of the 1840s and 1850s there was a strong influx of Catholics, particularly on the eastern seaboard. But the numbers of Catholics in the country were still relatively small.

Toward the end of the century, and through the early part of the 20th Century, the bulk of American immigration shifted to southern and eastern Europe. Italians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Bavarians and many other ethnic groups from predominantly Catholic areas began to arrive in massive numbers (the Catholic portion of the US population was 5% in 1850 and 17% in 1920). And their numbers were very much noticed by the mainstream. Working-class Catholics brought with them a love for bars, carnivals and other “pagan” excesses, in the minds of the majority of Americans. This led to a strong anti-immigration and anti-Catholic movement in the United States. These immigrants were described in newspapers as “Catholic hordes.” For these immigrants, the local Catholic Church was not just another church, it was the focal point of the whole community, it was a way of life at odds with the mainstream. A memorable example of this negative press was a political cartoon in the New York Times. The cartoon depicted a beach scene with Uncle Sam wielding a large broom to sweep back the ocean. Out in the ocean were dozens of bobbing heads with a large label “Catholics.” Not very subtle was it?

The Protestant super-majority in the USA around 1900 was extremely concerned about the encroachment of Catholicism on America’s relatively Puritan culture. Many Adventists do

not know that in the 1880s most of the mainline Protestant denominations (including Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians) were strict enough to forbid the wearing of wedding rings, thinking that they had pagan connotations (that Protestant ethos began to change in the 1890s). The Protestant majority felt that the very fiber of American culture and faith was under threat.

Around the turn of the century an Adventist evangelist named Simpson was one of the first to come up with a brilliant evangelistic strategy to take advantage of the situation. If Protestants were so concerned about the encroachment of Catholicism on “the American way,” why were they themselves following the papacy in worshiping on Sunday, instead of on the Biblical Sabbath? If American Protestants were so concerned about the dangers of Catholicism, they should go all the way and complete the Reformation, abandoning all Catholic practices and restoring biblical values. Adventist evangelists held the key, not just to a more biblical faith, but to restoring America’s greatness as a country. This was a powerful appeal that hit home to the mainstream culture in a way that Adventism has struggled to rekindle ever since.

In today’s America, the evangelistic strategy of pointing out the sins of the papacy often backfires. Not only are Catholics offended by this “bashing” of the faith of others, Protestants, seculars and “post-moderns” (who will soon be the majority) are offended at the strategy, finding it inappropriate in today’s world. (If you want to have a better idea of what “post-modernism” is all about see my book *Everlasting Gospel, Everchanging World*) This outcome raises the legitimate question of when, where and how to share this aspect of biblical truth. Jesus Himself said, “I have many things to tell you, but you can’t handle them now” (John 16:12, my translation). When it comes to outreach and evangelism one must use wisdom, discernment and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15) in deciding which aspect of truth to share and when.

What do we do with Revelation 13 in a post-modern world? Post-modern culture (most Westerners under 40 years of age and many in other parts of the world) supremely values inclusiveness and tolerance. Differences in religion are seen not so much as problems, but as opportunities to learn and grow. To express a cold and intolerant attitude toward people who differ with you gives the impression that you are not open to learning yourself and thus not worthy to teach. Thus cuts off your ability to persuade and influence others. “We should not, upon entering a place, build up unnecessary barriers between us and other denominations, especially the Catholics, so that they shall think we are their avowed enemies. We should not create a prejudice in their minds unnecessarily, by making a raid upon them.”—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 14, 1887.

On top of that, Christianity as a whole is coming under increasingly heavy criticism in media and academia for its behavior over the centuries. In such an atmosphere, Christians expressing intolerance of Muslims and Catholics are playing into the negative stereotypes of Christianity as a whole. In today’s world, evangelism must be attentive to public perceptions, even when they come from atheists or non-Christians. The western world is much more diverse than it was a century or two ago. Being “all things to all people” (1Cor 9:22) is becoming harder even as it is becoming more necessary.

Young Adventists today are painfully aware of the contrast between how they are raised and taught to view Catholicism and their experiences with actual Catholics in real life. There are all kinds of Catholics, just as there are all kinds of Adventists. But on the whole Roman Catholics are at least as kind and caring as most other people. In my own experience that has definitely been confirmed in my encounters with Catholic priests, who have generally been among the kindest, most caring individuals I have known. This experiential contrast underlines the question of what to do with Revelation 13 in a diverse, multi-religious context. I am not questioning what the Bible teaches but how and when to use it at a practical level.

Just because the papacy as an institution is the poster child for clever opposition to God in Revelation 13 doesn't justify abrasive and ham-fisted prophecy presentations that seem more concerned with causing shock and awe than in wooing people to Christ. There are contexts in today's world where prophecy is NOT the all-purpose entering wedge that it once was. It may at times do more to offend people than to save them. It is not the primary mission of the SDA church to identify the Catholic Church as the antichrist/beast power of Daniel and Revelation. Our primary mission instead is to proclaim the same good news about Jesus and God that the apostles did, although now in the context of the three angel's messages of Revelation 14. The goal is to make fully devoted followers of Christ (Matt 29:18-20) who are so grounded biblically that they can withstand the final deception, where the line between God's truth and Satan's counterfeit is blurred. In accomplishing that mission, it will be necessary at times to share startling and uncomfortable truths with friends or strangers who have a desire to know more about God's will for their lives.

Though potentially negative, the message of Revelation 13 can be quite freeing for Roman Catholics and many others. Whenever a religious body puts the focus on human beings or human institutions rather than God it tends to be based on a distorted picture of God. Indulgences, the intercession of Mary and other saints, confession to human priests, the church as a means of salvation (all these are supported by official Catholic doctrine) send the message that God needs to be bribed or interceded with in order to be favorable to us. God is not really on our side.

On the other hand, the change of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday sends the message that God and His Word don't have to be taken seriously. The church has the authority to shape God into whatever image it wants. Furthermore, horrific campaigns like the Inquisition, the Crusades and the systematic persecutions throughout the Middle Ages imply that God approves of force in order to "convert" people to His cause. All these paint a picture of a God who is arbitrary, judgmental, legalistic and severe. Since these are the characteristics of Satan, the medieval actions of the papacy portray the true God with the character of Satan. At the right time, the right place and in the right way, the message of Revelation 13 can help us to speak well about God.

In addition to speaking well about God (in the face of papal distortions), the message of Revelation 13 is important simply because it is the truth. One doesn't avoid the truth because it is unpleasant or makes us uncomfortable. If the Bible teaches us that the same power that

caused so much mischief in the name of Christ during the Middle Ages will somehow attain a sequel at the end of time, this is very important information. For example, if we knew from Bible prophecy that Naziism would make a comeback in Germany or the US and a future Hitler was just around the corner, would we hide such a truth from the world? If we had some really nice Nazis for neighbors would we have less to say about the system? There will be a great deception at the end of time, and the biggest piece of that deception is that people of faith, doing what they genuinely (in most cases) believe, will be fighting against the true God. And the greatest safeguard against that deception is the fact that we know ahead that such a deception was coming. It would be dangerous NOT to share such a truth. The deception will be so severe that even the “elect” (Matt 24:24) will find it challenging.

A third reason to share the disturbing truths of Revelation 13 at the right time and in the right way is that it is liberating to many people. The truth about the papacy can bring tremendous freedom to people who have assumed the papacy was God’s vicar on earth and thus followed every teaching in detail, even those that are disturbing and questionable on the very face of it. Think of the Scala Santa, the holy stairs in Rome. The faithful ascend the stairs on their knees saying an Our Father on every step. Why? Because, as the plaque on the wall says in several languages: “The following indulgences may be received, in accord with the usual conditions: PLENARY INDULGENCE– on all Fridays of Lent, and once more each year on an occasion of one’s choice. PARTIAL INDULGENCE– on all other days of the year, as long as one is sincerely repentant of one’s sins.” This is the very thing that Martin Luther and so many others sought to overthrow 500 years ago. For some this leads to a slavery of righteousness by works. To others it paves the way for a do whatever you like permissiveness. What kind of monstrous picture of God requires sinners to evaluate their salvation by the depth of the callouses on their knees? And these specific indulgences were ordered by the direct authority of various popes, some as recently as a hundred years ago. And to my knowledge they are still posted and taken seriously today. I’ve been there.

To me it is shocking that in the name of Christ a system that governs the actions of a billion people reduces the gift of the cross to something that can be earned by actions or money. The people ascending those stairs (the Scala Santa) are probably some of the nicest and kindest people on earth. Yet the core teachings of the system they adhere to are seriously flawed. The public face of Catholicism has softened since the Second Vatican Council of 1962-1965, but it has never changed its fundamental teachings on salvation. Notice the following Papal actions in the last fifteen years: 1) expansion of the ways in which believers can earn indulgences, 2) elaboration on the punishments to be meted out to apostates and heretics (those words could well include you and me), 3) exhortation to believers to make sure that civil legislation respects the duty to keep Sunday, and 4) reaffirmation that priests have the power to forgive sin and to re-create their Creator in the mass. This doesn’t sound all that different from the church of the Middle Ages.

It remains official papal teaching that salvation comes only through the Catholic Church and believers can only receive salvation by participating in the sacraments of the church. Those

who refuse these sacraments will suffer eternal damnation, no exceptions. It can be such a relief to Catholics to learn for the first time that Jesus died for them personally, that they can go directly to Him without a human intermediary, that they don't have to earn the love of the Father. As Jesus Himself said, "I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you." (John 16:26-27) If people are being freed by a message, we cannot let embarrassment prevent us from this sacred work. Pope Benedict XVI made it clear that Vatican II did not make any changes to the historic Catholic doctrine concerning salvation. Ironically, a sizable and growing segment of Catholics now believes that the end-time antichrist will arise from within the Catholic Church, probably a pope.

Finally, a good reason to share even unpleasant truth is the fact that Jesus is coming. Oddly enough, since September 11, 2001 many Seventh-day Adventists have lost a sense of the nearness of Christ's coming. They are losing confidence in prophecy at exactly the time when prophetic events seem closer to fulfillment than ever before. If you want detail on this read my book *Armageddon at the Door* for a detailed picture of the intersection between Bible prophecy and the kind of events that went down in the context of September 11. What an irony. Losing confidence in prophecy at the very time end-time like events are happening. More and more Adventists today see prophecy as antagonistic rather than liberating. They reason that people have enough fear in their lives already. Why burden them with more by studying scary prophetic beasts?

The best answer I can think of is this: Being prepared for the end of time is better than not being prepared. Jesus is coming back whether we are calm or nervous. The heart of the end-time gospel is Revelation 14, and it includes a warning against counterfeits. Adventists must present Jesus clearly. That is the heart of our mission. And many people won't see Jesus clearly or be ready for His return unless the truth about counterfeit forms of salvation and other real issues of the end-time are presented in some detail. So that is a fourth reason for sharing this message even though it might not be popular to do so.

Is there a better way than some of the traditional ones to share the message of Revelation 13 in today's world? The key perhaps isn't so much what you share but how you share it. When the mark of the beast message comes across as "We're better than you," there is a prideful aspect to the message that can seem downright wrong to honest, heartfelt followers of Jesus. And in the process we may leave the impression we think God hates Catholics and anyone else that doesn't toe the line. The reality is that God loves all the creatures He has made and His warnings are designed to redeem not to condemn. The mere fact that the final judgments have been delayed for nearly 2000 years shows God's love and patience for sinners of all kinds, including Adventist kinds. Perhaps the best way to share the mark of the beast is with the kind of humility that acknowledges how easy it is to lose one's way. Given enough time, what religious institution has ever avoided putting the institution ahead of the mission? The papacy is the poster child for a problem that has affected all religious institutions to one degree or another.

Christians come in many stripes, but they are on a shared journey of discovering and

recovering truth. Adventists have certainly taken the lead in the recovering of many truths, but the task is not done and our witness is not perfect. While we must remain true to Scripture, we also have much to learn about kindness, grace and mercy. And other Christians have sometimes been our best teachers in those areas. When it comes to the mark of the beast the key is not so much what we say but how we say it that counts.

Christianity as a whole is coming under heavy criticism in media and academia and I'd have to say that as a group we've earned it in many ways. Many Christians ignore this criticism or seek to minimize it because much of it comes from post-moderns, atheists and non-Christians. While the best way to clean a house is from inside not the outside, our comfortable familiarity with the inside of the house may blind us to things that are obvious to those who visit us from the outside. People with indoor pets or hygiene issues may be used to certain unpleasant odors that hit strangers the moment they enter. When outsiders think of Christians as arrogant, self-important and over-confident, we are unwise to simply ignore the charges or respond in defensive ways. We have many things to learn and many, many to unlearn.

In light of this I am intrigued by the approach to Revelation 13 of the Voice of Prophecy evangelist, Shawn Boonstra. He shared his approach in an recent article: "Ten Years After the Sky Fell," *Adventist Review*, September 8, 2011, 16-21. I will try to do justice to his position in the next few posts.

Of all Christians, Seventh-day Adventists are the one significant Christian body (there are other individual voices out there, like Tony Campolo and N. T. Wright, with a similar message) that is willing to admit publicly that something is wrong with modern Christianity. God couldn't have prepared our outreach to the final generation better. We live in a world that distrusts organized religion, that continually seeks to dismantle Christianity and the culture it has created. We have a message that answers the general sense that it is a mistake to lay all of the blame for the world's current woes at the feet of Islam, for example. The world's biggest problems arise from within Christianity itself. Instinctively, many of the secular people around us know it. Such people are desperate for Christians who will honestly admit that Christianity as it has been practiced is rife with problems. We should be like Daniel and accept corporate responsibility for the sins of Christianity (Dan 9:5).

When we describe the sins of the Middle Ages, we can say, "Do you know who this is? This is us. This is how the church behaved in the Dark Ages. These are the crimes of the Christian church and it is about time that we admit it." This approach does not ignore the truth, but it wipes away the sins of Christianity as an excuse for people to avoid the Bible. It also takes the blame off God for our horrific behavior and puts the blame where it belongs, on us. It takes away the "we/they" mentality and opens the door to honest examination.

One thing we've learned from the war on terror is how ready people are to trade liberty for a little security. The whole conspiracy mentality feeds on the sense that there is something clearly wrong with government. The public is increasingly slow to trust in any form of government at all. Our world seems to be spiraling out of control. We can't control the economy, we can't control the terrorists, we can't control the climate, we don't trust in religion

and we don't trust government. Sounds like the table is being set for the biggest religio-political tyranny of all time. The world will cry for solutions and Satan has waited for thousands of years to provide them.

We have the ability to show them why they have been soured on both Christian faith and worldly government and show them that the character of God is not at all like they have been told. At the right time, in the right place and in the right way, the message of Revelation 13 is exactly what this world needs right now. September 11, 2001 seems to have set the table for *something*. Human beings, particularly in the Christian west, have broken the planet and denied the way of Christ by our words and actions. We have broken our own hearts. We have spawned the evil that besets us. But there is good news. Jesus is still the answer.

Those following this commentary on Revelation 13 day by day know that I agree with the larger picture of Revelation 13 as taught by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This may not be a popular picture in today's world, but it does provide a penetrating analysis of many of the ills of the western world and also of the source of much conflict between nations and religions. So although that message is problematic in a post-modern world, it is a message that cannot simply be discarded, but needs to be shared at the right time, in the right place, and in the right way. The message about a broken Christian system did not come to Adventists out of pride, arrogance or self-importance. It originated in careful study of Scripture. And as such it cannot be ignored.

But any message that offers a criticism of others, however true, can easily draw out the worst aspects of the human condition in those who proclaim it. The message that in some way those who proclaim are better or wiser than those being proclaimed about plays to our inner drive toward pride and self-importance. In whatever setting such a message is proclaimed, it is critical that the proclaimers be drenched in the spirit of Jesus first or the message can bring out the worst in us. Preaching the Papacy is dangerous for human beings, when it happens it must be driven by the Spirit of God and not by our own passions and prejudices. Consider this quotation from Ellen White: "Those who have had great privileges and opportunities, and who have failed to improve their physical, mental, and moral powers, but who have lived to please themselves, and have refused to bear their responsibility, are in greater danger and in greater condemnation before God than those who are in error upon doctrinal points, yet who seek to live to do good to others. Do not censure others; do not condemn them." *Testimonies for the Church*, 9: 243. I have pondered this statement a lot while writing these posts.

Not only so, unless the message is shared as part of a larger biblical balance, it can have an unhealthy impact on those who hear it. When it is shared in a disproportionate way, as if this teaching were the primary message of the Bible, it produces unbalanced people who then go out and damage others as well. Unless bathed in prayer and self-sacrificing love, a message of confrontation can be cruel and abusive and even confusing to those who hear it. Like Jesus, the message of judgment must be delivered with "tears in the voice." I know from painful experience how difficult this can be. It's time that Adventists talk more openly about this issue and its impact on us as a people and on others.