

# **Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 18, Revelation 12-13, The Dragon and the Two Beasts**

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 18, Revelation chapters 12 and 13, the dragon and the two beasts.

We've looked at chapter 12 of Revelation and I've suggested that the primary function of it overall is to demonstrate or to show the true nature of the church's struggle.

That is behind in true apocalyptic fashion, which lifts the veil or the curtain so that people can see, the readers can see behind empirical reality, to see another reality that is their reality expanded to include a heavenly reality, is now chapter 12 lifts the veil so the people can see behind their earthly conflict with the Roman Empire and to see the true nature of that. Behind their struggle lies Satan's attempt to not only destroy the Messiah but now also to destroy the Messiah's people. But chapter 12 clearly indicates that Satan has already been defeated, and Christ's kingdom has already invaded the kingdom of Satan.

And Satan now only has a short time to flail about and wreak havoc on God's people. So now they are able to see their situation in a new light and in a new perspective and respond accordingly. But what I also want to do with chapter 12, to kind of zoom back out and look at the chapter as a whole, is look at two more important features in understanding Revelation chapter 12.

As far as what John may have, some of the ideas and some of the notions he may have been drawing upon as he recorded this vision of the woman who is pregnant with a son and the son is pursued, the woman is pursued by a dragon, a serpent figure that tries to devour the son and is frustrated or thwarted from doing so. Intriguingly, this story in Revelation chapter 12 seems to reflect a number of common Greek or Roman myths about a woman who is with a child and who is now pursued by a dragon or a serpent-type figure that tries to devour the child. And the child is then usually rescued from the threats of this serpent figure.

Often, in the story, what happens in some versions of these stories, what happens is that the son then grows up and comes back and actually slays the dragon or slays the serpent-type figure. For example, there's one story called Leto and Apollo and Python. It begins with Python, who is described or depicted in the story as a dragon who pursues Leto, who is a goddess, and Python pursues her in order to kill her.

Leto then gives birth to a son which is the God Apollo. And Apollo then later on comes back and defeats Python. There are a number of stories like that and John's

does not seem to resemble precisely any of them, suggesting John may not necessarily be thinking of one specific story that he or his readers would have known about or would have been common in the Greek or Roman world.

John's story is very different in that his imagery indicates or represents something that happened historically, the actual birth of Christ, whereas many of these other stories are stories about the gods and do not necessarily refer to specific historical events. However, John does not appear to be drawing on any particular one of these stories, but he may have simply been aware of this type of story and a number of the versions of the story that his readers would have been familiar with. Now, John seems to draw on these as if to demonstrate the true embodiment of these stories that people recognize, hold to, or know of in the Greco-Roman Empire.

John draws on that to say, let me show you the true version of that and now uses that to depict historically what happened in the person of Jesus Christ and also what is happening with the persecution of the churches that he is addressing. So again, John is not necessarily agreeing with these stories or subscribing to them, just using stories because they're fitting to describe what's going on, but also for him to demonstrate the true version or the true account of these stories that they may have known about. But, in any case, John probably draws on some common motifs or ideas from these stories.

Again, most of them concern a woman who is about to give birth to a son and by a dragon or serpent-type figure. And that certainly fits exactly what John is depicting. But there seems to me to be another important, maybe even more important, background than that that John has drawn upon.

And that is an important Old Testament background. We've already seen that John is aware of Old Testament depictions of a dragon or serpent-type figure, a sea monster, to represent nations or evil rulers that oppress God's people and that oppose God. And that God is depicted as defeating them or slaying these dragon-type figures.

We see that in Psalm 74, Isaiah chapter 51 in verse 9, and there are other texts as well that portray a ruler or kingdom in a dragon-type or serpent-type language. And God slaying and defeating those dragons is symbolic of the defeat of the nation or the oppressive ruler. But a more specific story, I think, lies behind this.

This may be another example of John, this time on a story that resonates with the Greco-Roman background, such as the Lato Apollo Python and other Greco-Roman stories. John is drawing on a story or constructing a story that resembles the Greco-Roman background but also resonates with an Old Testament story or Old Testament text. The primary text that I have in mind goes all the way back to the beginning of the Old Testament, and that is the book of Genesis, primarily Genesis chapter 3 and verses 15 and 16, the so-called Proto-Evangelion, as some have called it.

But following the creation of humanity and placing Adam and Eve in a garden and warning them against the consequences of disobeying God's command to them not to eat of the fruit of a certain tree, the tree of knowledge and evil, a serpent deceives Eve and then Adam into eating the fruit of that tree, bringing a curse upon them, just as God promised would happen. Then, God addresses the situation, starting in verse 15. God begins to address the serpent, Satan, first of all, and then God addresses Eve. Beginning in verse 15, God, addressing the serpent, says, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head, and you will strike or bruise his heel. To the woman, he said in verse 16, I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing. With pain, you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. Now, what I want you to notice is how the key features of these two verses in Genesis 3, 15, and 16 emerge in this story back in Revelation chapter 12. In fact, we'll find that going on in several places throughout Revelation, this principle, just as it was in the beginning, will be in the end as well.

And so we'll see John often drawing on motifs from Genesis to show just as was true in the first creation and in the very beginning, that will be repeated again in a sense in the end, just as it was in the beginning, so it will be in the end. So, for example, notice in chapter 12, and especially verses 3 through 9, we find the story of the enmity between the woman and the dragon as we find them both described. Then, the story of how the dragon pursues the woman is told.

Even after that hymn, starting in verse 10 and following, after that hymn, we find the dragon still pursuing the woman, although she has taken off into the desert in Exodus language and is preserved and protected. But the section of Genesis 3, 15 that promises enmity between the dragon and the woman, or the serpent and the woman, now emerges here. And by the way, note that John himself seems to draw us back to Genesis 3, when in Revelation 12, 9, he makes a point.

He makes a rather clear point about identifying this dragon as the ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. Deception or leading astray was exactly what Satan did back in Genesis 3 in relationship to Eve and to Adam. But notice the identification of this dragon as the ancient serpent or the serpent from old, clearly linking back to Genesis chapter 3. So the serpent and the woman, a conflict or enmity between the serpent and the woman from Genesis 15, lies behind the story of the dragon pursuing the woman in Revelation chapter 12.

The serpent bruises his heel. We find again in chapter 12 through 9, the dragon figure, which is Satan, pursues the son and tries to devour him. And later on,

especially in verse 17 of chapter 12, the dragon will go after the woman's offspring, her seed to wreak havoc so that the part where the serpent bruises his head or the head of the woman's offspring is clearly present in Genesis chapter 12.

Notice, too, that in chapter 3, verse 16 of Genesis, it is said that the woman would give birth through birth pangs. It's through pain that she would produce offspring. Notice how the woman is described in chapter 12, verse 2 of Revelation.

She was pregnant, and she cried out with pain. Again, reflecting that motif back in Genesis chapter 3 and 16. The reference to the woman's offspring, we've already noticed, occurs numerous times, not only in the form of the son, but after that hymnic section in verses 10 through 12, starting especially in verse 14, the dragon now pursues the woman into the desert.

He's frustrated from pursuing her. And then, at the end of chapter 12, the dragon goes after the offspring or the seed of the woman. So the promise that her offspring, there would be enmity between his offspring, the dragons or the serpents in Genesis 3, and her offspring is also represented in the dragon going after her offspring at the end of chapter 12 of Revelation.

Now, part of the promise in Genesis 3 was that there would be enmity not only between the serpent or Satan and the woman but also his offspring and her offspring. We've seen clear mentions of the woman's offspring in chapter 12 that the dragon pursues at the end of the chapter and her offspring, the son that he pursued but was thwarted from being able to devour. He was deprived of his prey.

Where does the dragon's offspring or the serpent's offspring from Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 occur? Because again, Genesis 3 promises there will be conflict between his, the dragon's offspring, or the serpent's offspring and her offspring. Where does the serpent's offspring occur? I would suggest that this is where chapter 3 comes in, in the form of two beasts who resemble and are even described as and receive authority from the dragon. In other words, in chapter 13, we will be introduced to two dragon-like figures in the form of two beasts who are described just like the dragon.

Note the first one is described as having seven heads and ten horns, just like the dragon does. And it makes clear that he is given authority. The first beast in chapter 13 is given authority by the dragon.

And so is the second beast in the second part of chapter 13. The second beast is also a beastly dragon-type figure. He even speaks like a dragon in verse 11.

And he exercises the authority of the dragon and the first beast. So I would propose that the two beasts in chapter 13 are the offspring of the dragon from Revelation

chapter 3, I'm Sorry, Genesis chapter 3, and verse 15, the seed of the dragon. And now we see the dragon's seed in chapter 13 of Revelation.

As we'll demonstrate when we get there, I think it becomes clear that these two beastly figures, the offspring of the dragon, are the means by which the dragon goes after the offspring of the woman. So, chapter 12 ends with the dragon going after the woman's offspring in fulfillment of Genesis 3. But now chapter 13 is going to tell us how he attacks the woman's offspring. How is there enmity between the dragon and the woman's offspring? It's through his offspring in chapter 13, these two beastly figures. There's one more intriguing part of the story encapsulated in Genesis chapter 3. And actually, when one reads the rest of the Old Testament, one can begin to see how Genesis 3, verses 15 and 16 begin to work out through the emphasis on the seed, even through Abraham and into David's line, the emphasis on seed and offspring.

But I think even in the texts that we've seen, like the Psalms and the book of Isaiah and elsewhere, where you have this beast, this sea monster or dragon-type figure lying behind different nations and oppressive rulers, so that ultimately you find this conflict between the dragon in his offspring and the woman's offspring continuing right through the Old Testament. Now, the other feature of this story encapsulated in Genesis 3, verses 15 and 16, is that the son would apparently crush his head. Interestingly, when we ask the question, where do we see that? It is not that John has to pick up every last feature of the story, but where do we see this notion of the crushed head? I would suggest to you again, when you look over at chapter 13, in chapter 13 and verse 3, the first beast, which is the offspring of the dragon, the first beast is described this way.

One of the heads, the seven headed beast, one of the heads seem to have had a fatal wound, but that fatal wound had healed. We'll talk a little bit more about that when we get to chapter 13. But this idea of the head having a fatal wound probably does a couple of things, but also, I think, is linking back to Revelation, or I'm sorry, Genesis chapter 3 and the promise that the serpent's head would be crushed.

Now we find the serpent's head crushed in the form of the beast, one of the heads of the beast being dealt a fatal blow or a fatal wound, but the beast has recovered from that. So I would suggest to you then that John is also drawing on explicitly because in chapter 12 verse 9 of Revelation, John clearly points us back to Genesis 3 by describing the dragon as the ancient serpent of old. John is probably then meaning for us to read this text in light of the story in Genesis chapter 3, and perhaps all the rest of the Old Testament as well, the struggle that goes on in the rest of the Old Testament.

But particularly back in Genesis 3, verses 15 and 16 provide the subtext or the backdrop for reading this struggle as well. So what John has done then is, I think,

constructed in describing what he saw has now constructed his vision in a way that is once again evocative of more than one background. It's evocative of some of the Greco-Roman stories the readers would have been familiar with.

In terms of a struggle between a female goddess giving birth to a son and a dragon-type figure pursuing them, it also clearly resonates with Genesis chapter 3, verses 15 through 19, with Jewish and Old Testament background. So the point of this, then, the point of alluding particularly to the Genesis 3 background, would simply again be to help the readers put their situation in a new perspective. To see their struggle with Rome, the struggle that the church faces in the first century with the Roman Empire, and the struggle they face in any other century until Christ comes back, this struggle is nothing new.

It's simply part of an age-old conflict that goes all the way back to creation, all the way back to Genesis chapter 3. Now, the struggle that began in Genesis 3 simply resurfaces in the form of the physical struggle they faced with the Roman Empire. That struggle had surfaced at numerous points in the Old Testament and now is simply surfacing again in the struggle they faced with Rome. So once more, they can see their situation in a new light.

When they look out and see what's going on in the empire, all they see is what goes on from an empirical perspective. But now, by lifting the curtain, they see, no, this is not new. This is simply part of an age-old struggle that goes all the way back to creation.

It's simply part of the age-old attempt of Satan to destroy the woman's seed and to destroy the woman, but to destroy her offspring as well. But the point of chapter 12 of Revelation, though, is a resolution has already been reached to the struggle. The death blow has been dealt.

The crushing wound has already been administered. Satan has already been defeated because of the death and resurrection of Christ. Satan has already been defeated and cast out of and now knows his time is short.

So what have the people to fear? What do the readers, especially those who are suffering because of their faithful witness, have to fear? Because now they can see their situation in a new light. And those who are tempted to compromise must now realize what is really at stake and whose side of the battle they want to be on. Chapter 12 One other issue relating to chapter 12 might help us to understand what's going on in light of what has just been said.

Revelation chapters 12 and 13 as well, but particularly Revelation 12 could be seen in a sense as, and I'm not saying John intended this, but from our perspective, it may be helpful to draw the connection. But Revelation chapter 12, from our perspective,

could, in a sense, be seen as an expanded commentary on what Paul said back in the book of Ephesians and chapter 6 in verse 12, at the end of the book of Ephesians in that famous spiritual warfare passage where Paul describes the Christian life as a battle against the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

He depicts the Christian response to that in terms of pieces of armor that are identified with certain virtues. There's an interesting phrase in there in chapter 6, verse 12, where Paul says, your battle is not with flesh and blood, but with the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms. First of all, I think that reference to the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms is a reference to demonic spiritual beings.

I think Paul uses that term throughout Ephesians. But second, when Paul says your battle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers and authorities of heavenly realms, I don't think he's talking about two different things. He's demeaning any physical conflict that we face.

So Paul is not saying your battle is not against flesh and blood. That is, don't focus on or don't worry about any physical battles or physical conflicts that you face. Again, especially for Christians trying to live out their life in the context of the Greco-Roman world.

Paul's not demeaning that, saying those are unimportant, and those are insignificant and don't pay attention to them. They're not real; they're not significant battles, but instead, you need to pay attention to a different battle, and that is the battle with the heavenly world. I don't think that's what Paul's saying at all.

Instead, I think Paul is saying something very similar to what John is doing in Revelation 12. When Paul says your battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities, I think Paul is speaking apocalyptically in demonstrating as important and as true as those battles are on the earthly plane, behind them lies a more significant battle that is going on, that influences those battles. So do you see Paul is not saying, ignore those and focus on this.

He's trying to help them in true apocalyptic fashion come to grips with the true conflict and the true nature of the physical conflicts that they face with the Roman Empire. Behind those lies a greater conflict. Your battle is not with flesh and blood.

Your primary battle is not just what you face in the physical realm, as true and as important as those are, but more significant is to help his readers of Ephesians understand the nature of that is to see in true apocalyptic fashion that there is a battle behind that, that is being waged. And that's exactly what Revelation 12 is doing. He's saying your battle is not with flesh and blood.

Your battle is not just with the Roman Empire and Domitian and the Caesar and the Emperor over Rome and all the local authorities and the churches of Asia Minor, the cities of Asia Minor that are putting pressure on you to conform. That's not your true battle. Behind that lies a battle that now John depicts in chapter 12 of Revelation.

That is the battle of Satan, the attempt of Satan to defeat the Messiah, the battle that now has cast Satan out of heaven and his attempt to destroy the woman and her seed. So there's a heavenly spiritual battle, the battle with the forces of evil that lies behind the true conflict that the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 now face. So that makes Revelation 12 again a text that functions to unveil and uncover the true nature of the struggle, to show the churches your battle is not just with flesh and blood, with the Roman government, but your battle is with the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, primarily Satan himself, his attempt that goes all the way back to creation to try to destroy God's people and God's kingdom.

And now with that new knowledge and perspective, the readers are able to see their situation in a new light and to respond accordingly. Now that brings us to chapter 13. Chapter 12 actually ends, or depending on how different the versions divide it, chapter 13 begins or chapter 12 ends.

In the NIV, the paragraph division is actually at chapter 13 in verse 1, but I'm not interested in exactly where we divide chapters 12 and 13. But chapter 13, 1 begins with the dragon standing on the shore of the sea. What is going on here I think is the dragon then stands on the shore of the sea to summons two helpers.

So the dragon is going to summon two persons to help him in pursuing the woman's offspring. So notice chapter 12 ends with the dragon's failed attempt to get at the woman. He's already failed at the son, Jesus Christ.

Now, he goes after the woman. She is preserved. Now, he goes after her offspring.

And we said both the woman and her offspring probably represent the church, and the people of God, from two different perspectives. On the one hand, they're preserved and kept. But on the other hand, they're still subject to suffering and persecution at the hands of Satan in the form of, in the first century at least, the Roman government.

Now, the dragon stands on the seashore, and I think his sole intention is to summon two helpers who will help him in his task of going after the woman's offspring. And I would suggest to you also that probably we should not read chapter 12, or I'm sorry, chapter 13 of Revelation as chronologically following chapter 12. I think chapter 13 is simply a further way of describing in more detail how it is that Satan goes after the woman's offspring. How is it that Satan wreaks havoc on the woman's offspring, even though she is preserved, her offspring then are persecuted, and Satan is allowed to



wreak havoc? How does he do that? He does that through the help of these beastly figures in chapter 13.

So, in chapters 13 and 12, especially the second half of chapter 12, the first half, we said that much of that refers to past events, especially the birth of Jesus Christ. The rest of chapter 12 seems to bring us up until the present. So, chapter 13, I think, is simply another way of describing the exact same events of the rest of chapter 12.

And not something that chapter 12 happens first, and then after that chronologically, chapter 13 happens. Chapter 13 is just describing in more detail how Satan accomplishes what he does in chapters 12, 14, and 17. How is it that he is allowed to persecute the woman's offspring? He accomplishes this through two agents in chapter 13. One of them is a monster or beast that comes out of the sea.

Another is a monster or beast that comes out of the land. And we'll look at that and explain that in just a moment. But before we do, I want to read chapter 13.

First of all, chapter 13, verse 1, and the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. So now he's prepared to summons two other beastly figures, his two offspring from Genesis chapter 3, 15, to help him. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea.

He had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power, throne, and great authority.

One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed after the beast. Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked who was like the beast and who could make war against him. The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies, and to exercise his authority for 42 months.

He opened his mouth to blaspheme God and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given the power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language, and nation.

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast, all whose names have not been written in the Book of Life, belonging to the lamb who was slain from the creation of the world." A reference back to chapter 5. He who has an ear, let him hear. 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 calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.

He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf. And he made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed. When he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth and full view of men, because of the signs he was given the power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666." Now, let me make two observations about this passage before we look a little bit more detail at the two beastly figures.

I'll make two observations relating to the two beasts together, and these two beasts are kind of the focal point of this chapter. First of all, we've already noticed earlier in chapter 12 a reference to the dragon, but also back in chapter 11, where a beast comes out of the abyss and is able to slay the two witnesses, which we said probably symbolizes the entire witnessing church. So, at one level, chapter 12 is going to be chapters 12 and 13; I should say, not just 12, but 12 and 13, especially 13, will be a further unpacking of that brief reference back in chapter 11, where in chapter 11, after the two witnesses, after their time of witness, starting in verse 7, things begin to take a turn and a beast comes out of the abyss and he's able to slay the two witnesses.

Now we have a beast coming out of the sea in chapter 13, and I think there's probably connections between the sea and the abyss as sort of referring to the same place. So that probably this beast coming out of the sea is a reference of the same thing that happened back in chapter 11, only now you have more detail. Now, the author is going to unpack in even more detail the events that took place in chapter 11.

We saw there, and in chapter 12, that a beastly figure or a monster-type figure, especially in association with the sea, usually refers to or evokes the notion of evil and complete chaos and disorder and that which is evil and oppressive. We also saw that throughout the Old Testament, the authors had used a beast-type figure or a

sea monster-type figure to refer to oppressive nations and governments or rulers who oppose God and who were idolatrous and who also oppress God's people. A classic example is Egypt, and how Egypt or Pharaoh is often portrayed as a dragon-type or serpent-type figure, a sea monster figure, emblematic again of chaos and evil and oppressing God's people.

Interestingly though, several apocalypses mention more than one beast. There are several apocalypses that mention two separate beasts or two separate monsters, one that comes out of the earth and one that comes out of the land. Often, the one that comes out, I'm sorry, one that comes out of the sea, and one that comes out of the land.

The one that comes out of the sea is often labeled Leviathan. The one that comes out of the earth or land is often called the Behemoth. For example, to turn back to some of the Jewish apocalyptic texts that John no doubt was familiar with, and we've already seen that some of the images, such as the number of saints that must be put to death and persecuted, must be completed before the end.

John may be drawing on apocalyptic literature for that. But in 1 Enoch chapter 60 and verses 7 through 10, notice the text says, on that day, two monsters will be parted. One monster, a female named Leviathan, in order to dwell in the abyss of the ocean over the fountains of water.

So, notice the connection between the abyss and the water. And another one, a male called Behemoth, which holds his chest in an invisible desert or on the land. So note in this 1 Enoch text the reference to the two monsters, Leviathan and Behemoth, one that has its home in the abyss in the sea, the other that has its home in the desert on the land.

We read something similar in 4 Ezra, another important and common apocalypse. 4 Ezra chapter 6 and beginning with verse 48 in one of Ezra's visions. And Ezra says I'll start reading with verse 49.

Then you kept in existence two living creatures, the name of one you called Behemoth and the name of the other Leviathan. And you separated one from the other, presumably at creation. You separated one from the other for the seventh part where the water had been gathered together and could not hold them both. And you gave Behemoth one part, which had dried up on the third day, referring back to creation, that is, to live on it, where there are a thousand mountains, and Behemoth belongs to the land.

But to Leviathan, you gave the seventh part, the watery part, and you have kept them to be eaten by whom you wish and when you wish. So you have this imagery, and in the context of describing creation, you have this notion that at creation, God

created these two sea creatures or sea monsters, one of them living in the water or the abyss, the other to reside on the land. And this might provide the model for John's own description of these two sea creatures.

In addition to Old Testament texts that he's been drawing on, John may be drawing on these apocalyptic texts and this notion of two sea creatures, I'm sorry, two beastly figures or two monsters, one from the sea and one from the land. Although we're going to see John give them a very specific application. John is not just enslaved to his sources, but he gives them a very specific application.

It's also possible. Let me back up and say the mention of the first beast coming out of the sea, as well as the second beast coming from the land, if they recall apocalyptic texts. But by having the beast come out of the sea, where earlier the beast came out of the abyss, John clearly identifies this as a satanic, demonic type of figure. Another possible connection too with sea and land is by saying that this first beast comes out of the sea.

This next comment presupposes that if you are a Christian reading this living in the first century, I find it impossible that you would identify this beast with anything else but the Roman Empire. And once again, because of the history that this beast has in the Old Testament in identification with or in identifying pagan oppressive rulers and regimes, it's almost impossible to think that a first-century Christian reading this would not identify this with the oppressive regime even the emperor that was in control during the first century, during their own lifetime. And that was the Roman Empire and its emperor.

But the other thing, by having one come from the sea and the other from the land, it's also possible that John had in mind, along with the Old Testament and the apocalyptic background from books like Enoch and Ezra of two beasts, the Leviathan and Behemoth, that the beast coming out of the sea would have recalled something that would have been separated by the sea or come to them from across the sea, that is Rome itself and the emperor. Whereas the beast from the land may have recalled something on their own soil, so to speak, or something in the provinces of Asia Minor. And we'll discuss what possibly the second beast from the land could have indicated.

But I'm convinced the first beast like the figure of a beast coming associated with the sea and the abyss in the Old Testament, now symbolizes an oppressive pagan empire and its ruler, and that is the Roman Empire. Though it's difficult to tell, did John have both in mind? Is it both the emperor and Rome or is it referring only to one or the other? In any case, I think the first beast is meant to identify or be identified with the Roman Empire. The second thing to say about this text is, as many have noted, John may also be constructing an unholy trinity that functions as a parody of the true trinity, though the roles of all three are not neatly separated.

But at the same time, notice in chapter one and chapters four and five of Revelation we were introduced to the trinity. That is, we saw trinitarian references behind John's thinking, even in the very beginning of chapter one, the epistolary introduction, where John brings greetings from both God himself, the one who was and is to come, and from Jesus Christ, who has redeemed all humanity to be a kingdom of priests, and from the Holy Spirit as well. We see in chapters four and five that God is seated on his throne.

We also see the seven spirits, being the sevenfold spirit of God. But we also then are introduced to the lamb who was slain in chapter five. So, Revelation is latent with trinitarian references.

So, is it possible, then, when we get to chapters 12 and 13, we're meant to see an unholy trinity in a sense? We'll see later on in chapter 14, where the three are mentioned together. The dragon, the beast, and the second beast often are also called the false prophet as well in Revelation.

So, is it possible that John is constructing a parody of the true trinity in the form now of an unholy trinity? So, Satan then clearly representing God himself. Satan is the one who has the primary authority over the world, and over the other two beasts. Then beast number one would be the one who, because he appeared to be slain, and have a crushing wound, just like the Messiah did, just like Jesus Christ who was slain back in chapter five.

Now, beast number one is meant to be a parody of Jesus Christ. And then beast number two, a parody of the Holy Spirit, and his main job, we'll see in the second part of chapter 13, is to get people to worship the first beast. So, it's possible that we have an unholy trinity, a perverted parody of the true trinity, who now perverts their power and illegitimately claims the worship and authority that belongs only to God and his Messiah and the Holy Spirit.

So, what I want to do now is begin to examine the two beasts in a little bit more detail, including some of the language that lies behind them and how they might be functioning. We've already noted that the first beast comes out of the sea, which is just another name for the abyss. Back in chapter 11, verse 7, the beast comes out of the abyss.

Later on in chapter 17, verse 8, the beast will come out of the abyss again. So, I don't think this is a different beast, nor that we should make too much out of the sea in distinction to the abyss, but unless we want to take the sea again as also suggesting distance between the readers in Asia Minor and across the sea where they would find Rome. But other than that, the sea here symbolizes the notion of evil.

It's the home of the sea monster that we saw in Psalm 74 and Isaiah chapter 51, both of those in the context of describing Pharaoh and the situation of the Exodus. We've also seen too that in Revelation chapter 9, the locusts come out of the abyss. But also Daniel chapter 7, where the beasts come out of the sea Daniel 7 is also playing an influence here in chapter 13.

What you're beginning to see is John likes to juggle several Old Testament texts at the same time. Often texts that have some kind of connection, verbally or thematically or contextually, John constructs sort of a mosaic where he takes a number of Old Testament texts and a little bit like a juggler trying to keep several balls going at the same time, or someone who is trying to, a circus performer trying to keep several plates spinning at once. John is juggling or trying to keep spinning several Old Testament texts at the same time, which brings with them meaning that helps say something, explain, reveal, and interpret what it was that John saw.

Daniel chapter 7, as well as a number of other Old Testament texts, is part of that mosaic that John now constructs. The fact that this first beast also has blasphemous names clearly indicates that this beast is usurping the authority and the worship that only belongs to God and the Lamb in Revelation chapter 4 and 5. In other words, the emphasis here is on the idolatrous nature of this beast and the Roman Empire. It may even more specifically reflect some of the claims of deity by emperors.

Domitian, for example, was known as accepting claims of deity and worship and honor that now John perhaps is drawing upon to demonstrate the idolatrous claims, the perverted claims of Rome, and in contrast to what is only true or what should only be true of God and the Lamb in Revelation chapter 4 and 5. We've already noted too, but I want to draw your attention again to the fact that this beast is described just like the dragon in chapter 12. He has seven heads and ten horns, both of them suggesting great power, great authority, and great strength. But what I want to draw your attention to is one unique thing that John does with this beast. John is clearly drawing on Daniel chapter 7, as we've already mentioned.

When you go back to Daniel chapter 7 in the Son of Man vision, before the Son of Man emerges, John actually sees four beastly figures, all symbolizing and representing four empires or four emperors or rulers that lead up to and whose kingdom is eclipsed by the Son of Man who now receives authority and receives a kingdom. But in Daniel chapter 7, well, let me back up and turn back to chapter 13 of Revelation. Notice that the beast is described not only as his beastly character in verse 2 but also as the beast I saw.

So John sees a beast, but then he describes him as resembling a leopard, a bear, and also a lion. That roughly corresponds to the four images or to the four beastly figures, the four animal figures from Daniel's vision in Daniel 7. The difference is Daniel saw four separate beasts representing four separate kingdoms leading up to

the son of man, where now John combines all four of them into one beastly figure. So all the beasts of the past, it's as if all the beasts of the past and all the kingdoms of the past have now been combined and wrapped up into this final expression that has now emerged in the form of the first-century Roman Empire.

So it's as if what John now sees happening, in a sense, gathers up and even eclipses all the kingdoms and rulers of the past. So what Christians face now, what God's people face now, is something more evil, something more oppressive. But what John then is doing is simply suggesting Rome is not all it appears to be.

Again, in true apocalyptic fashion, he's unveiling the true nature and true character of Rome. Rome is not all it's cracked up to be. Rome is not all it claims to be.

It claims to be this wonderful colossal empire that has brought peace, prosperity, and security to the people. But now John wants to demonstrate, but behind that, that's just a facade for the demonic, satanic, beastly character of an empire that is idolatrous, that opposes God, that opposes and oppresses God's people, and that maintains its empire through violence and bloodshed. So now John is unveiling the true nature of the Roman empire.

It is a hideous beast, and behind this beast lies Satan himself. In chapter 12, he's described as just like Satan, with seven heads and ten horns. This is Satan's offspring from Genesis chapter 3, verse 15.

So Rome is a hideous beast. Chapter 13 and verse 2 act with the authority of the dragon. It's allowed to carry, it's appointed by the dragon to carry out his authority on earth.

And though defeated, we saw Satan had already been defeated. This is the way that he will now because his time was short; he now acts in fury and anger, and now this is how he does it, through oppressive, deceptive authority through the Roman empire. We also saw that one of the features of this beast is one of his head appearing to be wounded, and this gets repeated twice more in chapter 13.

If you notice, the beast's head appears to be wounded. We've already mentioned that this goes back to Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15. But a couple of other texts, for example, in Isaiah chapter 27 and verse 1, a text we've read before, in that day, the Lord will punish with his sword, his fierce, great, and powerful sword, he will punish Leviathan, the gliding serpent, Leviathan, the coiling serpent.

He will slay the monster of the sea. It's interesting later on, in chapter 13, the beast is described as one who received a wound by a sword. This may reflect texts like Isaiah 27 and Psalm 74, which we've read a couple of times, the idea of God slaying or piercing the monster.

But Isaiah 27.1, where clearly he slays the monster with a sword that might lie behind, as well as Genesis chapter 3. John may be thinking of this motif of slaying the monster, and now the monster's head appears to be slain in Revelation chapter 13, but also going back to chapter 3. What is important, too, is to demonstrate and understand how John sees this wound or blow taking place. I think within the context, especially in light of chapter 5, and particularly in light of what we've said in chapter 12, as far as what is the historical context for Satan being defeated in heaven and cast down. It was the blood of Christ or the death of Jesus Christ.

Christ's death and resurrection were the means by which Satan was defeated in chapter 12. I take it that here, then, the context suggests once more that it's at the death and resurrection that the beast received this death blow in fulfillment of Genesis 3, Isaiah 27, etc. The death and resurrection of Christ is what administered the death blow.

The wound was fatal, but now the beast apparently has recovered from that wound. This is what causes all of creation now to worship him. We'll talk a little bit more about that, but before we do, one other thing to recognize is some have seen, in addition to this Old Testament notion of God piercing the dragon with a sword and the defeat of Satan at the death and resurrection of Christ, now that is responsible for the fatal wound of the beast, beast head, and Genesis chapter 3 as a possible background.

In addition to that, some have suggested that this notion of the beast appearing to be dead but now appearing to have recovered is a reflection of Nero's death in 68 A.D. As tradition has it, in 68 A.D., Nero fled and apparently committed suicide, and that actually plunged the Roman Empire into civil war. It plunged it into conflict and chaos, but Rome apparently recovered from that and was apparently restored. Some have suggested that because of that, the empire appeared to be invincible.

It appeared to recover from a so-called death blow, and now the empire appears to be invincible. That may be the case, and we'll look at a couple of other examples where John may be aware of this tradition surrounding Nero, especially the tradition surrounding his own death and suicide. We'll look at a couple of examples where that might come into play.

I want to be clear: although John may be drawing on that as a fear and an understanding on the part of a connection with his readers, it's important to understand that that story does not dominate John's presentation. It appears to me that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the controlling features that deal with the death blow. But John may be drawing on not only the Old Testament but again the story surrounding Nero to portray the Roman Empire as something that



has been dealt a death blow but now has apparently recovered and is invincible, therefore causing the rest of the world to go after the beast, to worship the beast.

In the next session, then, we'll look at a little bit more detail in terms of how that works out, particularly in relationship to the second beast. What does John think, or how might this relate to the specific situation of the first century readers from Revelation chapters 2 and 3?

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session 18, Revelation chapters 12 and 13, the dragon and the two beasts.