

Dr. Dave Mathewson, Revelation, Lecture 19, Revelation 13, The Two Beasts

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This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session number 19 on Revelation chapter 13, The Two Beasts.

After describing the first beast as an agent of Satan in chapter 12 and drawing a number of connections to that, the author now, in verses 3 through 8, begins to see the author describing what the beast does and how the people respond.

If we are to link the beast with the Roman Empire and/or the emperor, we will now see what the emperor did throughout the Roman Empire, and we will see how people responded to that. First of all, note that the beast claims, as we've mentioned a couple of times already, the beast claims universal worship and allegiance. Because of its apparent invincibility, the whole world now follows the beast, and they worship both the dragon and the beast.

It's possible that at least at one level, this is, although, at a broader level, this could just be representative of people's understanding of Rome and their view of Rome and the allegiance they give to Rome. More specifically, this could represent the form that would take the form of the emperor cult. So what is portrayed here is a nation that has absolutized its power and now, acting in arrogance and pride demands the worship and allegiance that only belongs to God and the Lamb.

Note the question intriguingly: the question that verse 4 ends with people responding by saying, who is like the beast, and who can make war against him? This question or this language is not necessarily that any one person literally verbalized this, but simply capturing the attitude towards Rome and the way Rome is portrayed and the way people view Rome; this language comes again right out of the Old Testament. For example, back in Exodus chapter 15, the song of Moses, which we'll see plays, will play a key role a little bit later on in a text in Revelation. In Exodus chapter 15 and verse 11, after the Israelites are rescued from Egypt, they cross the Red Sea, and now they sing the song of Moses.

Verse 11: Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you? Majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders. Isaiah chapter 44 and verse 7 is another interesting one. Sometimes, you might also look up Psalm chapter 89 and verse 10.

But Isaiah chapter 44 and verse 7 and what is significant about Isaiah 44 is one of those texts that has the statement, you are the first and the last. What is important is

that God alone is worthy of worship in the context of idolatry. It's idolatry to render worship or allegiance to anyone or anything other than God alone.

And so in chapter 44 and verse 7 of Isaiah, we read verse 7, who then is like me? God says, let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people. So this theme, who is like me or who is like God, now in a perverted parody again, is attributed to the beast and people saying who is like the beast and who can possibly make war against him.

So, the beast is to be understood in the context of a satanic imitation of God. And I think adding to this idea of an unholy trinity, a perverted parody of the true trinity, and now describing the blasphemy and the idolatry that takes place because of the claims that Rome itself is making. They are like any other empire in the Old Testament that asserted the authority that belongs only to God, that absolutized its power, that claimed absolute power and divinity, and oppressed God's people in a way that was ungodly and idolatrous.

The second thing is that note the beast blasphemes God and slanders his name in his dwelling, probably alluding back to Daniel chapter 7 and verses 6 to 8 where we see the beast doing something similar. This once more may be a reference to the emperor cult. It may also be a view of Rome as a whole, but this may more specifically reflect the emperor cult and even reflect the claims of the deity that Domitian; for example, if this is the empire ruling when Revelation was written, the deity claimed by Domitian himself and the allegiance and acclamations and even worship that were often given to Domitian, particularly in association with the emperor cults at a local level in the seven cities in Asia Minor as well as other cities.

Third, note that the beast has been active for 42 months, and we've already looked at the fact that 40 suggests a time of testing, though also a time of preservation. So, this mention of 42 months links the activity of the beast with what was going on in chapter 11, but also Satan's activity in chapter 12. So, this is another reason for not seeing the events of chapter 13 taking place in chronological sequence after chapter 12.

But if we're to take the three and a half years or time times and half time, the 42 months and 1260 days as different ways of referring to the same period, then the 42 months clearly links this back with the casting out of the outer court back at the beginning of chapter 11, which represented the church in the time of tribulation and testing. Also, the times, time and half a time, the witness of the two witnesses back in chapter 11, the time and half a time of the preservation of Satan's activity and the preservation of the woman and the persecution of her children in chapter 12, all of these events now are further being described with the mention of the 42 months. So, the beast activity of 42 months is to be seen as covering the same period as all those other time references in earlier chapters.

The fourth thing to note is the fact that the beast makes war with the saints, which also connects us back to earlier chapters. For example, in chapter 11, verse 17, that's exactly what the beast that came out of the abyss did. He made war with the two witnesses.

In chapter 12, verse 17, that's exactly what the dragon does. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring. So, now we see specifically how does the dragon make war with the woman's offspring? Through the beast making war with the people and with the saints.

So, John is again unveiling the true nature of their situation to allow them to see the true source of their struggle and their persecution. Their persecution is at the hands of a demonically inspired beast. Fifth, the beast claims sovereignty over the entire earth.

There are two things about this. Note that we'll return to this, but note the universal language, the almost hyperbolic language of Rome, which has authority over the entire earth. One of the reasons for this is, I think, that one of the dominant themes of Revelation that we've already seen back in the seventh seal of Revelation chapter 11 is how the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God and his Messiah. In other words, how does the kingdom of the earth get transferred from Satan and the beast now to God and the Lamb? So, by emphasizing Rome's dominion over the entire earth, this contributes to this theme of how the transfer of the kingdom of the earth, of the world, Revelation chapter 11, now comes into the hands, how it is transferred to the sovereignty of God and the Lamb, or how does the complete sovereignty of God and the Lamb, recognized and worshipped in chapter 4 and 5, how does it eventually work out on earth? So, for that reason, now, in Rome, we find the beast claiming authority over the entire earth. But I want to make two observations about this.

First of all, and two observations about this section. First of all, Rome's authority being seen as universal is almost hyperbolic. And perhaps that's intentional in apocalyptic type of literature.

This is the author's way of showing the complete domination and the power and authority that Rome wields in the present earth. But there may also be a sense that John is thinking of something more. That is, Rome's rule is simply part of a broader picture.

Rome's rule is simply a harbinger of and part of and anticipation of the rulership of all of the earth that has yet then to be turned over to God and his Messiah. So, that John is drawing on a theme or a principle of the beast ruling over the entire world.

And now, John envisions that as having its application in or manifesting itself in the first century Roman Empire.

So, Rome then is simply the first-century expression of this principle or this worldwide rule and empire that Christ will one day come and defeat. And has already at his first coming defeated, but will one day bring it to an end when the kingdom of God, when the kingdom of this earth will be transferred from Satan and his dominion and now transferred to God and to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. So, the hyperbole may be intentional.

Again, it may reflect that John sees Rome as only the first-century expression. Not that John saw successive empires or a period of time as we do today, but simply that Rome was the first-century manifestation of this empire that would rule over the entire world that one day Christ would come to finally defeat. Second is that note the repeated refrain in chapter 13 was given.

The beast was given authority. The beast was given this. This probably suggests once more God's sovereignty over these events that God is the one who is in control of Satan and the beast's activity.

That he is only permitted to act this way. He is only given the ability to act this way. So, as we've seen elsewhere in Revelation, Revelation does not have a dualism where you have two powers at odds with each other until finally God's power overcomes the power of evil.

But already, God's power is seen as usurping or over anything else. That he has no rivals. Who is like God? He has no rivals.

As powerful as this beast appears, there is no true dualism. God himself still remains sovereign over these events, and Satan is only permitted to do what God allows him to do in his sovereignty. So, to summarize, the point of the first beast then is to demonstrate the true cause of the saints' trouble.

The true source of their persecution and their difficulty was caused by the Roman Empire in the region of Asia Minor. The true source is that it comes from a demonically inspired beast that is the agent of Satan. It comes from the same demonically inspired beastly power that lies behind the beastly empires in Daniel chapter 7 and other rulers and empires that were idolatrous and godless and oppressed God's people and opposed God's rule and set itself up as the absolute power in the world.

That same demonically inspired power now lies behind the claims of Rome and its emperor and the attempts of Rome to oppress and destroy God's people in the first century. But for those who are tempted to compromise, this chapter will

demonstrate what is at stake and what it is they are compromising with. Compromising with Roman rule is not a neutral thing, but compromising with Roman rule is now to be seen as ultimately giving allegiance to Satan himself.

Chapters 12 and 13 are to be read together. The beast representing Rome is nothing less than the agent of Satan. So for those Christians who are tempted to compromise and become complacent in their lifestyle within the Roman Empire, Revelation is a wake-up call to see exactly what it is they are doing and exactly who it is they are giving allegiance to.

Behind their allegiance to Rome and even explicit involvement in the emperor cult, behind that lies the worship and allegiance that they are actually giving to the dragon, to Satan himself, from chapter 10. So behind all of this lies chapter 12. That is Satan's attempt to destroy the person of Jesus Christ and to destroy his people.

But the kicker is Satan has already been defeated. But reminding the Christians your battle is not against flesh and blood, but it is against the rulers and authorities of the heavenly realms. And now with that new perspective and knowledge, they are able to face their situation in perseverance, but also in maintaining their faithful witness and refusing to compromise and refusing to conform to the claims of the pagan Roman Empire.

Now, very, very briefly, verses 10, 9, and 10 are of a different character. They are sort of an insertion between the first beast and the second beast. And although breaking the narrative, if you took these verses out, the narrative would flow very naturally from the first beast to the second beast.

But in breaking the narrative, actually, what these texts are is a call for discernment and obedience. Notice it begins, for the one who has an ear, let him hear. In other words, this is not meant primarily, as we've already seen; John is not primarily saying these things just to satisfy the curiosity of his readers as to what's going to happen in the future or what's going on now.

This is not meant to fuel our obsession with end-time events and figuring out when things happen in our relationship with each other. This little insertion reminds us that John is calling on his churches in light of this to respond in obedience and to respond in perseverance. The one who has ears repeated is actually repeated from chapters two and three.

Another indication is that this is meant to describe the church's situation in chapters two and three. There, they are told that the one who has ears should let that person hear. Now, that same language is repeated here as well.

This language of, if anyone is to go into activity, into captivity, into captivity, they will go. If they are to be killed with a sword, they will be killed with a sword, reflects language out of the Old Testament. Again, Jeremiah chapter 15 and verse two, and Jeremiah 43 and verse 11.

And the point of all this, though, is that God, to say God's people will indeed suffer persecution at the hands of the Roman Empire, but the response should be one of endurance. In other words, in view of the fact that chapters 13, verses one through eight, and the rest of 13 have now provided an apocalyptic perspective on the situation. This now embodies the response of God's people.

It is one of endurance and persecution. Now that they have gained insight into the spiritual insight into the situation. So, chapter 13, much like Jesus' parables, which were meant as symbolic ways or metaphorical ways of describing the situation of his readers, and much like Jesus called on them to have ears to hear, that, chapter 13 for those who have ears to hear, chapter 13 provides the spiritual insight into the situation necessary so that God's people can respond in unhindered obedience and endurance and perseverance.

But they can only do that because now they have discerned the true nature of Rome and the true nature of their struggle. That brings us to beast number two. I would once more suggest to you that beast number two in verses 11 through 17 is not describing a series of events that temporarily happen after one through eight in beast number one.

But Beast number two refers to and covers the same period and the same events as the events surrounding Beast number one in verses one through eight. So that is how does the activity of beast number one get carried out? It's through beast number two. So to put all this together, chapter 13 seems to be describing the same events as the end of chapter 12 with the dragon going after the woman and her offspring.

How does he do that? Through beast number one. But how does Beast Number One carry out his activity through Beast Number Two? Notice all the connections: The first beast now apparently gives beast number two the authority to speak on his behalf.

In verse 12, he exercises the authority of the first beast on his behalf. So how does the first beast exercise authority over all the earth through beast number two? And so we'll talk a little bit about what, who might this be? Who is Beast Number Two? How does he carry out his idolatrous persecuting authority through this beast? Two important features of this beast

: number one, note that he speaks like a dragon, clearly connecting him back to the dragon in chapter one. And he's also been, as we have seen, connected with the beast because the second point to note is that he exercises the authority of the first

beast on his behalf. Now the question is, who is beast number two? If beast number one, if we say that it is the Roman empire and perhaps the emperor himself represented in the first beast who rules over all the earth and who makes war on the saints, then who is beast number two? I would suggest to you that beast number two is the specific means by which the readers of Revelation living in the provinces of Rome, living in Asia Minor, the beast number two is the specific means by which they will experience the authority and the persecution of beast number one of Rome or the emperor.

That is, how do readers living in Asia minor and the seven cities introduced to you in chapters two and three experience the persecuting authority of Satan and the first beast? It is through beast number two. So I would suggest to you that beast number two may represent, without being too specific, beast number two probably represents the leaders and the official officials in the provinces of Asia Minor who are responsible for enforcing things like emperor worship. The emperor called and enforcing allegiance to Rome and to the emperor and for administering the consequences for failing to do so. Actually, one of the intriguing things in this text, those of you who know Greek or read Greek, is in this section in verses 11, and following, we find the author choosing a tense form of verbs that you don't find in the first part of chapter 13.

He chooses a tense form, a present tense, that is meant to be highly descriptive or foregrounding. And the reason he does that, I think, is because this is where chapters 12 and 13 will impact and influence the readers living in Asia Minor. This is how the authority of Satan, this is how the authority of the first beast will reach the readers in Asia Minor through those the leaders and the officials and those in the provinces of Asia Minor and the cities which are responsible for enforcing allegiance and worship of Rome and the emperor.

And again, doling out the consequences for failing to do so without necessarily linking them to any one specific people or group of people. Elsewhere, this person is going to be called the false prophet. For example, later on in chapter 14, in chapter 20 in verse 12, this second beast, the third member of the unholy trinity will be called the false prophet.

I want to return to that. But what is intriguing here is there's little by way of description. He simply said to talk like a dragon and have two horns like a lamb.

But what is more important is what this beast does. So for example, he gets people to worship the first beast, which, as we said, may be an indication of the emperor worship in the cities of Asia Minor; most of them had images, or most of them had temples, not only to foreign gods, but most of them had temples in honor of the emperor. In these imperial temples, emperor worship took place. Many of them had

people and wardens over the temple who were responsible for ensuring that temple worship was observed and maintained.

But another important feature is that in verses 13 through 15, this beast is able to deceive people to worship the first beast through various means that we'll look at. This beast is able to deceive people into worshipping the beast. Number one, for example, fire comes down from heaven, and to back it up, notice this language of deceiving people and getting people to worship the beast.

Number one goes back not only to the first part of chapter 13 but back to chapter 12. Note that Satan was described in verse nine of chapter 12 as the ancient serpent, the devil Satan, who leads the whole world astray or who deceives the entire world. Now his deceptive activity, Satan's deceptive activity is carried out by beast number one, but now specifically among the readers by beast number two, who is able to deceive people to follow and worship the first beast, Rome, and perhaps its emperor as well.

There are two interesting signs that he performs. One is fire coming down from heaven. The other is he's able to give life to an image that is created.

I'm a little bit reticent to try to specifically and literally identify certain events that this will resemble. For example, is this a reference to magicians in first-century Rome who could actually do something like this? Is this an example of ventriloquism that some have suggested the ability to make an image appear as if it could speak? It's possible that that lies behind it, but I think these two images of fire coming down from heaven and giving the image the ability to speak are once more just ways of emphasizing the deceptive power of the Roman Empire, and they probably draw on two Old Testament texts. For example, the fire coming down from heaven might call Elijah calling down fire from heaven in his conflict with the prophets of Baal.

Is it possible that this refers to actual signs in the Roman Empire? That's conceivable. If you remember, in Exodus, the magicians were able to replicate most of the signs and miraculous plagues that Moses had poured out on Egypt. But other than that, I think it's primarily drawing on Old Testament language of fire coming down from heaven, which is simply meant to symbolize the ability of the Roman Empire to deceive through its power.

What about the image that can speak? More than likely, the image, as we saw, the image probably goes back to another Old Testament text to Daniel chapter three, where Nebuchadnezzar sets up an image of himself. The image was meant to represent Nebuchadnezzar and his rule and authority over the entire kingdom. And so the image here may represent the images and statues and temples that you would find in most of these cities in Asia Minor as representing and reflecting the rule of Rome and the empire and the emperor throughout the empire, such as in the cities of Asia Minor.

But being able to give the image power to speak, maybe should not be taken too literally, but once more a symbol of the power of Rome to deceive, the power of Rome to deceive its citizens, its inhabitants into giving allegiance and worship to Rome itself. One other thing to note about the deceptive activity of the beast is we've already noted the fact that the beast, number two, is able to deceive, recalls Satan's deceptive activity, going all the way back to creation, chapter three of Genesis, where he deceives Adam and Eve. And now, in chapter 12 and verse nine of Revelation, he leads the whole world astray or deceives the entire world.

So the beast is clearly the way that Satan continues his and acts out his deceptive activity in his offspring, beast number two. However, I wonder if another important feature of the deceptive activity of the beast is that this may also be one of the reasons why he is called a false prophet. When you go back to chapters two and three of Revelation, the messages to the seven churches, you note that there are false teachers in a number of the churches or false prophets, prophetic figures with whom John seems to be in conflict and disagreement, prophetic figures or false teachers whose task seems to be to deceive Christians into compromising with the Roman empire, with ungodly, oppressive, idolatrous Rome.

For example, back in chapter two and verse 14, in the message to the church at Pergamum, he says, nevertheless, I have a few things against you. You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites or to deceive the Israelites to sin by eating food, offering sacrifice to idols, and committing sexual immorality. Then 15, he says, likewise, you have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which probably are also teaching people to compromise with pagan rule.

Chapter two and verse 20, the message to the church at Thyatira, nevertheless, I have this against you. You tolerate that woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophet; interesting connection to the false prophet now, calls herself a prophet. And here's what she does.

By her teaching, she misleads or deceives my servants into sexual immorality. So, I wonder if this is a further factor in identifying the beast number two. Not only is this the source of deception behind the Roman empire and the emperor cult and things like this, and notice it's important to understand the beast is able to deceive the entire world, not just Christians.

The entire world is deceived. But on the other hand, I wonder if there is not some connection here between the beast and those in the churches, such as this woman that he calls Jezebel and the Nicolaitans and those who hold the teaching of Balaam, who are deceiving the church and Jezebel the prophet, who are now deceiving the church in the compromising with pagan Rome and giving Rome allegiance and

worship. So the false teacher, the false prophet, then is going to affect the readers of chapters two and three in a different way, depending on whether they are resisting or whether they are in danger of giving in and following these false teachers.

John now is showing us the true source behind this deceptive teaching and prophecy and false teaching in the church, as well as in the deceptive activity in the broader world. Now, the last thing that the beast does is in verses 16 and 17, the beast is able to level economic sanctions on, especially on God's people, but on the entire world for refusal to give allegiance to and worship to the beast that is Rome and its emperor in order to engage in commerce. Apparently, according to these verses, it requires that they receive a mark.

Now, within the broader context of Revelation, the mark here that they receive on their forehead is clearly a parody of the mark or seal that the 144,000 symbolizing the entire church, the people of God mark that they receive on their forehead as well. And so, the mark is probably meant to represent identity and belonging, which is the mark you have. For example, the mark could have literally in the first century could have represented a brand or mark on a slave showing identity and belonging.

In Revelation four, I'm sorry, Revelation seven, the mark also seems to indicate preservation or protection as well, but identity and belonging. So that rather than this being a literal mark that these people must actually have or some kind of literal brand that could have happened, I don't know, but at least in revelations discourse, rather than taking this too literally, it's probably a symbol of identity and belonging. Those who associate with Rome, those who demonstrate their allegiance to Rome and to the emperor, are now the ones permitted to engage in commerce, permitted to buy and sell, which we saw back in chapter six.

It was not necessarily a good thing that we saw a picture of the commercial and economic life of Rome, which kind of turned upside down and in chaos, unbalanced, oppressive, and unjust as part of God's judgment on them. But here, their belonging to Rome, through demonstrating their allegiance to Rome, perhaps through being involved in the emperor cult, now is the mark that they receive, allowing them to participate in commerce. What this may have in mind in the first century would have been those who, remember, in connection with a couple of the churches we talked about in Revelation chapters two and three, there were those who would have been, as part of their work, would have been required to be involved in trade guilds.

Often, those trade guilds had patron deities but also would belong to them; in order to ensure success in your business, you would have belonged to these trade guilds. Part of belonging to them would have meant that, on certain occasions, you would have been required to be involved in activities that would demonstrate worship and allegiance and gratitude not only to the gods but also to the emperor. That is, the

trade guilds and commerce would have been closely intertwined with the emperor cult.

And we've said numerous times that in first-century Rome, it was impossible to to unravel the connection between commerce and politics and religion as well. So that part of commerce, part of belonging to the trade guilds, part of engaging in commerce and trade and work in the first-century Roman empire and in the churches and cities in Asia Minor would have meant being involved in the worship of pagan gods and also in the idolatrous emperor cult as well. So the picture here would be pressure to conform or suffer the economic consequences.

That's probably why Smyrna is described as poor, and Laodicea is described as wealthy. Smyrna refused to compromise and refused to compromise with the pagan Roman empire through their religious system of emperor worship. They refused to compromise and now are suffering the consequences.

So they are described as poor and of little reputation, whereas Laodicea is a very wealthy city, probably indicating their willingness to compromise. Because of that, they've become complacent as a result of that. So the point being so far is that John is unveiling the true struggle that the churches in Asia Minor face, and that is Satan's, the satanic-inspired attempt of Rome to deceive God's people by getting them to compromise, by worshiping and giving allegiance to the beast and even being compromised within the context of commerce and carrying out their business and in connection with the trade guilds now being tempted to compromise by being involved in opportunities and being forced to conform to opportunities and times to show allegiance to Rome and to the beast, to the Roman empire.

And now John reminds them that behind all of this, all the way back to chapter 12, lies Satan's attempt to oppress and destroy God's people. Chapter 13 provides them with spiritual insight into the situation so that they have the strength necessary to persevere and to endure and to resist compromising with the pagan Roman empire. Now, we can't leave Revelation 13 without saying something about the mark of the beast at the very end.

The point in especially verse 18 is that this calls for wisdom. If anyone has an insight, let him calculate the number of the beast. The beast number is 666, 666.

But the important point, first of all, is to put this in this broader context, is verse 18: chapter 13 ends with verse 18, which is another call for discernment and insight. So this is not a call primarily for trying to calculate who the beast might be or who the end time Antichrist might be or how close we are to the end. That's not the point.

This language of having wisdom is in the context of the one who has an ear, let that person hear. That is, it's a call for wisdom so that they can have true discernment

and insight into their situation. And here they are called to have wisdom as to the number of this beast, which apparently is connected with his name.

That's interesting. In verse 17, the mark is the name of the beast or the number of his name. And now the human, it's in verse 18, it's called a number of man or a human number that they're to calculate, which is the number 666.

But first of all, we need to understand it's a call for discernment and wisdom into their situation so that they can respond so that can resist the idolatrous system of worship that they are being forced to conform to. First of all, again, to recognize that this reference to the name by saying that this mark that they are going to receive is the name of the beast. This is meant intentionally to contrast with the mention of the name of God or the name that is to be written on Christians elsewhere in the book of Revelation.

So, for example, back in chapter 2 and verse 17 and chapter 3 and verse 12, part of the promise to the overcomers in those texts is that they will have the name, the name of the father, or the name of the new Jerusalem written on them. Chapter 14 in verse 1, then I looked, and there before me was the lamb standing on Mount Zion, with the 144,000 who had his name and the father's name written on their foreheads. And chapter 22, verse 4, in the final section of the new Jerusalem vision, at the very end of the book, in verse 4, describing God's people, they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

So the name of the beast written on those who are allowed to engage in commerce is meant as a direct contrast to other places in Revelation where a name, the name of Christ, or the name of the Father, is written on the foreheads of God's people. So, probably, this should be taken symbolically again and indicate identity and belonging or allegiance and association, depending on whose name one bears. But what is this 666 that the name is identified with? And part of the difficulty of, I wonder part of the reason why they are called to discern this situation, I wonder if it doesn't have to do with, because the beast acts deceptively, because of the deceptive nature of the beast activity, it calls for insight and discernment on the part of the readers.

And so now they are called upon to have wisdom that because of the deceptive nature of idolatry, because of what is at stake, it requires that they have wisdom and insight and discernment into the situation in order to resist it and in order not to be sucked into it and to conform. But what is this number 666? There are a number of things we could say about this text, but I want to focus on what seems to occupy most people's attention. And that is the number 666.

Probably, according to most people, this reflects the common notion in the first century of what is called Gematria. That was an ancient practice that associated the letters of the alphabet with numbers. And what would happen is you would take a

person's name or the name of something, take the numerical value of each of the letters that would have been understood and assumed, and add all of them up to come up with the number.

And therefore, the number would be sort of a code or an indication of the name. And there are plenty of examples of this. For example, the name Jesus in Greek, Iesous in Greek, if you take the assumed numerical values of each of the letters of Jesus, Iesous in Greek, it adds up to 888 or 888.

Some have even said that it provides information about what's going on here. The B666 is meant to be sort of a parody of Jesus' name, 888. That's possible.

But it's intriguing that the author's call for wisdom has usually been ignored here. And so 666 has been subject to all kinds of speculation. And sometimes the number 666 has been associated with historical individuals.

For example, in the United States of America, the number 666 has often been associated with presidents themselves. Outside of the United States, the number 666 has been associated with other evil rulers, such as Saddam Hussein, Adolf Hitler, or even the Pope at times in the Reformation. 666 has been used to associate with certain popes in the Roman Catholic Church.

Other attempts have been made to associate 666 with modern day technology. I've seen, personally, since I've been paying attention to it, and there could be other examples, but personally I've seen 666 go from indicating barcodes on items that you purchase to credit cards to computer chips that people think will one day be embedded in our forearms or our skulls to keep track of us and things like that. Also, you frequently see the number 666 motivating the way people act, almost sometimes rashly.

For example, I know of people who have intentionally returned license plates even though it's cost them more money. They've returned license plates because they had the number 666 in them. Or they've had their phone number changed because it had 666.

I know of one person who refused to pay a bill because it came back as \$6.66. So, the number 666 influences and plays a role in the way we look at things and how we even interpret reality. But I want you to remember two important principles. First of all, from our discussion of the literary genre of Revelation and the hermeneutical principles that flowed from that, first of all is John's readers would have been able to make sense of this.

I'm convinced that for John's readers, this was not a mystery. It was a call for wisdom, and this call to calculate the number is something they could have done. So,

the problem is that 2,000 years later, we're the ones in the dark, and we try to scramble to make sense of this.

But first of all, John's readers would have and could have made sense of this. Second, related to that is one of the most important hermeneutical principles that we saw that any interpretation of Revelation to be plausible and compelling must be something that John could have understood and that his readers could have understood or John could have intended and his readers living in the first century Greco-Roman Empire in a pre-technological, pre-consumer age, pre-modern day warfare age, pre-nuclear age, something that they could have understood and would have made sense of. In my mind, that rules out a lot of the possible explanations for 666 that have been proposed down through the century, especially today, particularly those that are associated with modern technological features of our day or modern methods of warfare and things like barcodes and computers and things like that, is that that principle rules those type of explanations out immediately.

It's interesting that this is described as the number of a man. There's a little bit of difficulty here. Does this mean a human number, or even then, I'm not sure what that would mean?

What would be a human number as opposed to an angelic number or something like that? Or when he says it's the number, or we could take it as the number of a man, that is in reference to a person. Verse 17 could certainly lend itself to that when he says no one can buy and sell unless he received the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. So verse 17 almost suggests or requires that the number have some reference or relationship to the beast itself.

And that simply raises the question, what person might that be? Because of this, by far, the most common explanation is that the beast number is associated with the name of Nero. That's the most common explanation. And this would certainly make sense.

This does not suggest that Revelation then was written back during the time of Nero. It may simply be that given the nature of Nero's reign and the evil that is often associated with him, even outside of Christians' attitudes toward him in the first century, Nero would have become almost a model for or almost a type of an evil emperor to come or any other emperor. So that Nero here, by using 666 as a reference to Nero, the idea is not that the author is referring literally to Nero, but that almost the spirit of Nero, the evil of Nero, is now once again embodied in the Roman emperor that now the first century Christians face at the time John is writing.

So the same godless evil spirit that embodied Nero and his emperor, Nero being a model for evil, now is resident in and surfaces in the present emperor, which would be Domitian if the most common view of the date of Revelation is accepted. The

problem, though, comes with linking Nero's name exactly with 666. And as most realize, it really can't be done with Greek.

But so that most have attempted to associate Nero's name with the way it would have been spelled in Hebrew. But even there, there's a problem because Nero's name, even in Hebrew, can only add up to 666 if it is spelled in a rather rare way if it's not spelled in a common way. That is, again, do you see where I'm going? The only way to connect Nero in Greek with 666 is to assume that it's reflecting the spelling of Nero and not just Nero, Nero Caesar in Hebrew, and then a rather rare spelling of that.

So the problem is, you'd have to assume, and that's the only way to get to 666 then. So the problem is, you'd have to assume two things. Number one, the readers would have, and many of them would have understood Hebrew.

Number two, they would have been familiar with a rather rare spelling of the name of Nero Caesar in Hebrew. Because of that, many have looked for other explanations, but I would suggest it's still possible, particularly because of the link between the mark and the number and the name of the emperor in verse 17. So it is possible that John is alluding to Nero's name, again, as a model of evil that is now surfacing again in the Roman Empire's ruling as he writes.

Another possibility is to see the number 666. Another common view is to see it as the number of a human, that is, a human number or one short of the perfect number seven. So 666 would be one short of the perfect number 777.

So this would be the number of sinful, fallen, godless, idolatrous humanity now embodied in the human ruler Domitian, who is now portrayed as an imperfect, evil, idolatrous, and deceptive human being that falls short of the perfect number seven. And so that then this is the author's way of trying to get the readers to discern the true nature of Rome and its emperor by seeing it as a godless, idolatrous, another way of emphasizing the godless, idolatrous nature of the Roman Empire and its emperor perhaps linking him with Nero but now portraying him as his name falls short of the perfect number seven. He instead embodies imperfection and evil and idolatry, and by discerning who it is that embodies this, now Christians will be better able to resist and to not be deceived by the godless, idolatrous practices of the Roman Empire.

And so 12 and 13 bring us to the end of a very important section that, in true apocalyptic fashion, is unveiling not only the true nature of Rome, Rome is this hideous beast that is satanically inspired and embodies evil and idolatry and oppression and godlessness from previous generations and empires now all resident in Rome, but it also spells out for Christians the true source of their struggle. In Pauline language, their struggle is not just with flesh and blood, but their struggle is

with the authority and ruler of the heavenly realms with satan himself. And now armed with this new perspective and knowledge, God's people are now able to perceive and see their situation in a new light.

To get those Christians who are compromising to wake up and resist, to realize what it is they are in danger of doing, but to get those Christians who are suffering and even being persecuted to get them to persevere and to endure and to remain and to retain their faithful witness, no matter what the consequences.

This is Dr. Dave Mathewson in his course on the book of Revelation. This is session number 19 on Revelation chapter 13, The Two Beasts.