

12

The Beast of Blasphemy



“Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation’” (Revelation 14:9, 10).



An Amazing Fact: Located in Gujarat, India, the Statue of Unity stands at 597 feet, the world’s tallest. The image is of politician Vallabhbhai Patel, who is famous for uniting the country in the twentieth century. The massive project exceeded \$400 million in costs, required more than 3,000 laborers and 250 engineers to build, and took three and a half years to complete.

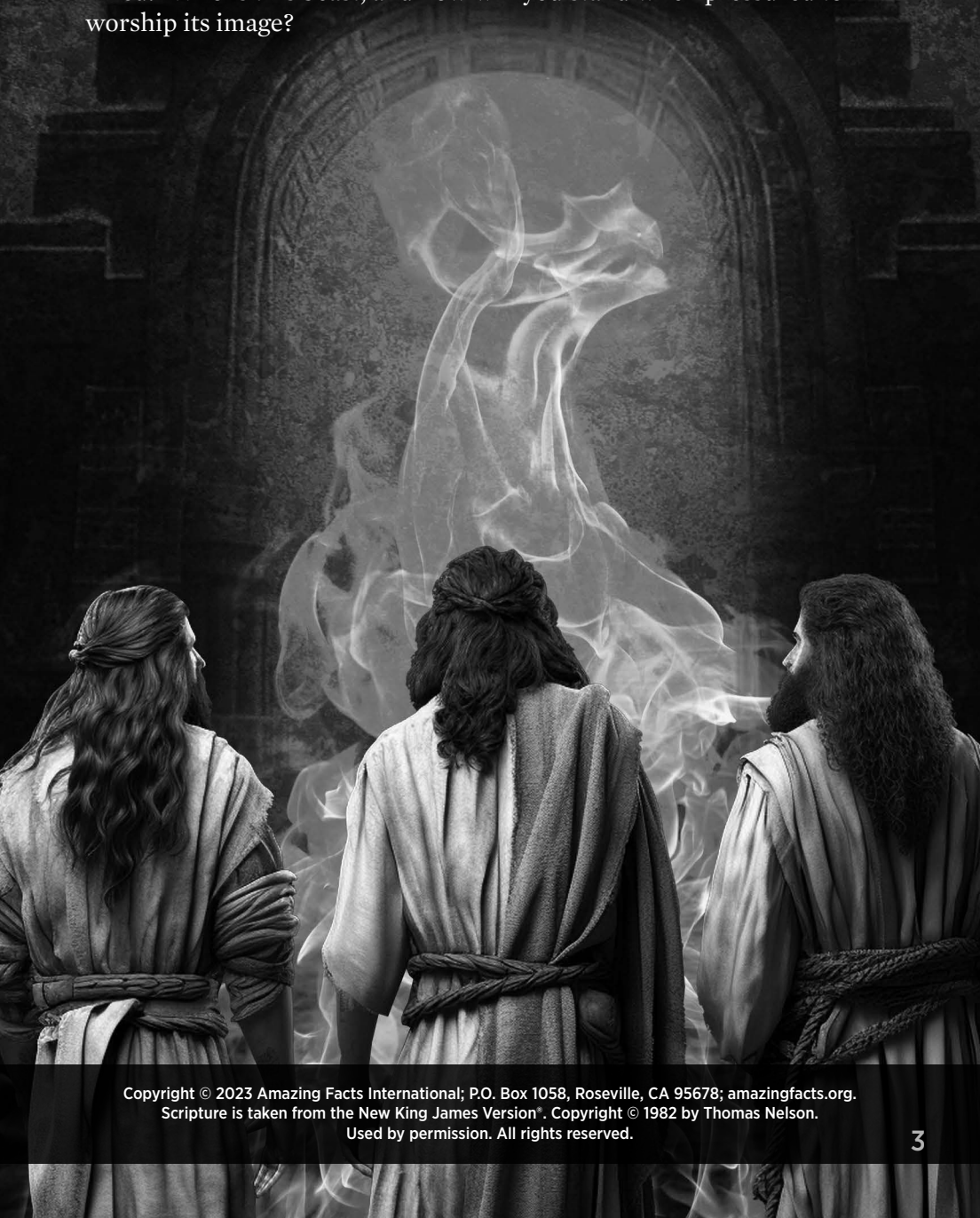
King Nebuchadnezzar II, ruler of Babylon, the most powerful empire in the ancient world, wanted to ensure his absolute reign by uniting his diverse peoples through a common religion. He ordered a gigantic statue of gold to be constructed, an image of himself that stood 90 feet high (Daniel 3:1).

The statue was inaugurated through a mandated act of worship: On a set date, when signaled by the music, those who had been gathered were to “fall down and worship the gold image” (v. 5). Refusal meant execution in “a burning fiery furnace” (v. 6).

Three young Jewish men, however, refused to bow before the idol (v. 12), having devoted themselves to the worship of God alone (vv. 16–18). Infuriated, Nebuchadnezzar ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter and had the three offenders thrown inside (vv. 19–23).

But something extraordinary happened. The three Hebrews did not die. The fire did not even singe their hair (v. 27), for someone else had appeared beside them, a fourth figure Nebuchadnezzar described as “like the Son of God” (v. 25).

This account foreshadows what God’s people will face in the last days, when, under threat of death, they too will be ordered to worship. As Revelation 13:15 states, “The image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” Who is this beast, and how will you stand when pressured to worship its image?





When you see a blank, look up the passage in your Bible and write in the missing word.

1. What does a beast represent in Bible prophecy?

Daniel 7:17. Those great beasts, which are four, are four _____.

Daniel 7:23. The fourth beast shall be a fourth _____ on earth.

Daniel 8:21. And the male goat is the kingdom of _____.

ANSWER: In Bible prophecy, a beast represents a political power, like a kingdom or a nation. So

the beast receiving worship in Revelation 13 symbolizes a governing authority. But unlike Daniel 8:21, which states the nation's name, Revelation 13 gives only the defining characteristics (vv. 1–8, 17, 18). Let's study them so we can identify this beast.

2. Who gives the beast its power and position?

Revelation 13:2. The _____ gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

ANSWER: The beast obtained its ruling power from “the dragon.” The Bible identifies the dragon as the devil (Revelation 12:9). In Revelation 12:4, 5, we also learn that this dragon tried to kill Jesus at the time of His birth. Matthew 2:13 tells us that it was Herod the Great, king of Judea under the Roman Empire, who “[sought] the young Child to destroy Him.” In a rage to find Christ, the Roman vassal ordered the execution of “all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts” (v. 16). Thus, the dragon also represents pagan Rome as an instrument of Satan. The Ancient Roman Empire held dominion over the then-known world, just like the Babylonian Empire did centuries before it.

History has clearly recorded that pagan Rome passed on its seat of power to a single successor—papal Rome, that is, the Roman Catholic Church. By the fourth century AD, the church held power within the

state, largely through the reign of Emperor Constantine the Great. As the empire split into western and eastern halves and eventually dissolved, it was the church that rose from the ashes. “The Roman Church ... pushed itself into the place of the Roman World-Empire, of which it is the actual continuation; the empire has not perished



but has only undergone a transformation. ... The Pope, who calls himself ‘King’ and ‘Pontifex Maximus,’ is Caesar’s successor.”¹ Today, Vatican City, the “throne” of the papacy, is the smallest country in the world by size, a little kingdom encompassing only 120 acres.²

Scripture seems to identify the beast as papal Rome. Could this really be true? Let’s look at more of the characteristics of this first beast of Revelation 13.

An Important Note: *This lesson is not an attack on individuals. There are countless godly Roman Catholics; there have been many gracious popes. The Bible here is simply identifying a system that the devil has used for thousands of years to attack both God and humankind. Please prayerfully ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance as you consider this Scriptural evidence.*

3. What does the sea symbolize in Bible prophecy?

Revelation 17:15. *The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are _____, multitudes, nations, and tongues.*

ANSWER: In Bible prophecy, water is a symbol for great numbers of people. Revelation 13:1 states that the beast was “rising up out of the sea.” So, this beast power would emerge amid established nations in the world. Indeed, papal Rome came out of an already established empire in

1 Adolf Harnack, *What Is Christianity?*, 2nd ed., trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1902), 270.

2 *Britannica*, s.v. “Vatican City,” last modified September 12, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vatican-City>.

the densely populated region of Western Europe. Of course, Rome is in Italy, a peninsula surrounded by water.

4. For how long did this beast rule?

Revelation 13:5. He was given authority to continue for _____ months.

ANSWER: Recall that in lesson 7, we learned that one *prophetic* day equals one *literal* year (Ezekiel 4:6). The beast ruled for 42 prophetic months. In the Jewish calendar, one month equals 30 days. So let's do the math:

$$30 \times 42 = 1,260 \text{ prophetic days, or } 1,260 \text{ literal years}$$



Fascinatingly, history shows that in AD 538, at the Siege of Rome, the last power contesting papal authority, the Ostrogoths, suffered a decisive defeat. Their failure made way for Roman Emperor Justinian's earlier decree of AD 533 to take effect, establishing the papacy as an official state power. Papal Rome then reigned supreme for the next 1,260 years until AD 1798, when the pope was captured by Napoleon's general,

Louis-Alexandre Berthier, and effectively dethroned. By these dates, the papacy's 1,260-year reign fits the beast's 1,260-year reign precisely.

5. What did the beast do during its 1,260-year reign?

Revelation 13:5, 6. And he was given a mouth speaking great things and _____, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in _____ against God.

Revelation 13:7. It [power] was granted to him to make _____ with the saints and to _____ them. And authority was given him over _____ tribe, tongue, and nation.

Revelation 13:4. And they _____ the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

ANSWER: The Bible defines blasphemy in two ways. One, humans claiming the power to forgive sins (Luke 5:21), and two, humans claiming to be God (John 10:33). The Catholic Church’s own doctrinal manual explains: “Does the Priest truly forgive the sins, or does he only declare that they are remitted? The Priest does really and truly forgive the sins in virtue of the power given to him by Christ.”³ And Pope Leo XIII said, “We [the popes] hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty.”⁴ According to the biblical definition, the papacy indeed “opened his mouth in blasphemy against God”—and its stance remains unchanged today.

The Bible also says that the beast successfully persecuted God’s people, “the saints.” It is a well-known fact that at the height of its reign, called the Dark Ages, the papacy massacred Christians, branding as heretics whoever believed contrary to its Catholic doctrines. Historians conclude that more than 50 million people, mostly Protestants, died for their faith at the hands of the Catholic Church’s Inquisition. This persecution demonstrated the absolute domination of the papacy.



This brings us to another characteristic of the beast: It commands *worship*, and as such, is defined as a religious power. Papal Rome, obviously a religious power, appropriated worship by its claims to be God and by persecuting those who would not bow to those claims.

6. What happened to the beast after its 1,260-year reign?

Revelation 13:3. *I saw one of his heads as if it had been _____ wounded; and his deadly wound was _____. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.*

3 Joseph Deharbe, S.J., *A Complete Catechism of the Catholic Religion*, trans. John Fander (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin & Fauss, 1912), 279.

4 *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII*, Encyclical Letter (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1903), 304.

ANSWER: According to Bible prophecy, the beast ended its reign in apparent demise—only to rise again later. Indeed, this is exactly what happened with papal Rome. Soon after being taken captive in 1798, Pope Pius VI died in exile. “Half Europe thought ... that without the Pope the Papacy was dead,”⁵ confirmed Joseph Rickaby, a Jesuit priest.

It is evident today, however, that the Holy See has been resuscitated. In 2015, prominent journalist Charlie Rose called Pope Francis “the most famous, the most desirable, ... the main man.”⁶ And while it is

not presently dominating world affairs as it once did by coercion, the papacy is nonetheless one of the most influential powers on Earth today. Who, besides the pope, is recognized or revered by nearly the entire world?

Interestingly, the word “catholic” means “universal.” As the prophecy foretells, this beast will one day regain its worldwide command. (See “A Timeline of the Healing of the Deadly Wound” at the end of this lesson.)



7. What is the beast’s mysterious number?

Revelation 13:18. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a _____: His number is _____

ANSWER: The beast’s number is the infamous “666.” The verse also tells us that this number is associated with a man. The previous verse holds another clue: The beast’s number is also his name (Revelation 13:17). To understand what all this means, the text calls us to do some calculations.

5 Joseph Rickaby, “The Modern Papacy,” in *Lectures on the History of Religions*, vol. 3 (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1910), 1.

6 “Cardinal Dolan on pope visit: ‘I feel like the father of the bride,’” *CBS News*, September 22, 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cardinal-dolan-pope-francis-visit-i-feel-like-the-father-of-the-bride/>.

But how do you calculate a name? Interestingly, the Roman numeric system is comprised of symbols that also double as letters in the Roman, or Latin, alphabet. In other words, a Roman name can be counted. The Roman numerals are as follows:

I = 1
 V = 5
 X = 10
 L = 50
 C = 100
 D = 500
 M = 1,000



But what name is to be counted? Scripture says that the beast’s number is a man’s number. “The main man” of the papacy is the pope. The pope’s official title is “Vicar of the Son of God,” which means “Representative of the Son of God,” or God on Earth. In Latin, the official language of the church, the title is *Vicarius Filii Dei*. Let’s count this name:

VICARIUS	FILII	DEI	
V = 5	F = 0	D = 500	
I = 1	I = 1	E = 0	
C = 100	L = 50	I = 1	
A = 0	I = 1		
R = 0	I = 1		
I = 1			
U = 5			
S = 0			
=====	=====	=====	
112	53	501	= 666

(Notice that the letter “U” in “Vicarius” is counted as a “V.” The Roman alphabet did not originally include the letter “U.” When the vowel was introduced into the language, it was initially written as the letter “V.”)



So it is that the pope's name adds up to the beast's number. Does this extraordinary cipher alone determine the identity of the beast? No. A number of names could add up to 666, perhaps even your own. But that doesn't make you the beast. The Bible included this last characteristic for a reason. Every other characteristic listed in Revelation 13 is a defining mark of the Roman Catholic Church—the number of its name is simply the clincher cementing the beast's identity.

Let's review all the characteristics. The beast:

1. Receives its power to reign from the dragon (v. 2)
2. Rises up out of the sea (v. 1)
3. Rules for 42 prophetic months (v. 5)
4. Blasphemes (vv. 1, 5, 6)
5. Persecutes God's people (v. 7)
6. Becomes a worldwide power (vv. 3, 7)
7. Is a religious power receiving worship (vv. 4, 8)
8. Receives a deadly wound that heals (v. 3)
9. Has the mysterious number 666 (v. 18)
10. Is led by a man whose name equals this number (v. 18)

Cumulatively, papal Rome fits the Bible's description of the beast perfectly.

8. What does this beast power want from you?

Revelation 13:8. *All who dwell on the earth will _____ him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

ANSWER: The beast wants you to worship it. Scripture prophesies that in the end times, the beast, with its deadly wound healed, will resort to its methods of threats, brutality, and persecution in order to once again mandate worship from the entire world (Revelation 13:12, 15).

9. What will happen to those who worship the beast?

Revelation 14:9, 10. *Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the _____ of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with _____ and _____ in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”*



ANSWER: While the beast may act like a god, God does not want you to be deceived. Remember that the dragon is the power behind the beast. Those who worship the beast will actually be bowing down to Satan, serving him instead of Christ. Having rejected the everlasting gospel, they will receive the sentence of hellfire in the final judgment.

This is the last of God’s three-part final warning at the heart of Revelation 14—the three angels’ messages. God wants you to know that in these last days, your

decision to follow either the beast or the Lamb is a crucial factor in determining your eternal destiny.

10. Will everyone worship the beast at the end of time?

Revelation 14:7. *Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and _____ Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.*

ANSWER: No! Every person has the God-given free will to “choose for [themselves] ... whom [they] will serve” (Joshua 24:15)—the beast or the Lamb. The first and third of the three angels’ messages clearly distinguish these two end-time choices. Revelation goes on to tell us that those who remain faithful to God will receive everlasting salvation (15:2; 20:4). But no one can stand against the beast except in the strength of Jesus, who proclaimed, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matthew 4:10).



11. Are you, like the three Hebrews in Babylon, willing to follow Jesus wherever He leads—regardless of the cost?

Answer: _____





Lesson 12 Supplemental Material

A Timeline of the Healing of the Deadly Wound

- **1929:** The Lateran Treaty instituted Vatican City as an independent state with the pope in executive command.
- **1962–1965:** The Second Vatican Council initiated its goal of ecumenism under the decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, or *Restoration of Unity*.
- **1967:** The Catholic Church launched the annual World Day of Peace.
- In the **20th century** alone, the Vatican established diplomatic relations with 147 countries.⁷ As of 2022, it has only 13 countries left to go.⁸
- **2010:** The U.S. Supreme Court consisted of a majority of Catholics and no Protestants for the first time ever. As of this writing, there have been only 12 sitting Catholics since the Court's inception in 1790.⁹
- **2017:** To mark the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation, an unprecedented joint statement was issued by Catholics and Lutherans promoting Christian unity.¹⁰

7 "Foreign relations of the Holy See," Wikipedia, accessed August 27, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_relations_of_the_Holy_See.

8 "Vatican diplomacy by the numbers: 5 key stats," *Aleteia*, January 10, 2022, <https://aleteia.org/2022/01/10/vatican-diplomacy-by-the-numbers-5-key-stats/>.

9 Matthew Bunson, "Catholics and the Supreme Court," *National Catholic Register*, March 20, 2017, <https://www.ncregister.com/commentaries/catholics-and-the-supreme-court>.

10 "Catholics and Lutherans mark 500th anniversary of Reformation," *Vatican News*, October 31, 2017, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2017-10/catholics-and-lutherans-mark-500th-anniversary-of-reformation.html>.

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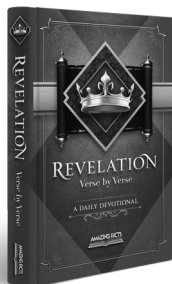
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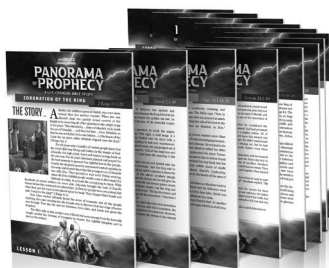


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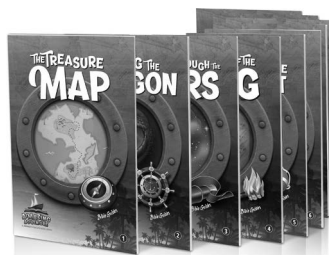
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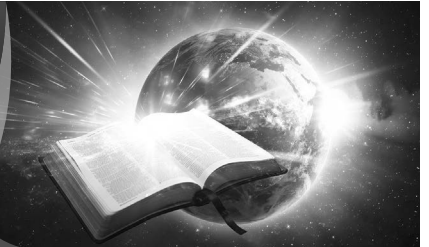
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Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:6–12

