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Title of extract: **The Beast From the Sea**

Name of Author: **Sweet, J.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Revelation. Sweet, J.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **SCM Press**

Pages scanned: **206 - 213**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **The Bible: Texts and Transmission TRDL7071**

Name of Designated Person
authorising scanning:

E. L. Harris

Date authorised: 12.04.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

13 *And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads. ²And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder. ⁴Men worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?'*

⁵And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months; ⁶it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation, ⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, every one whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.*

⁹If any one has an ear, let him hear:

*¹⁰If any one is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if any one slays with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.*

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

* Other ancient authorities omit this sentence.

We are now shown the nature both of Satan's attack on the woman's offspring (12¹⁷) and of the *third woe* (12¹²), the climactic disaster for the earth and its inhabitants. This is not genuine vision but a predictive allegory woven from a variety of threads; the *beast* itself is a composite of the four beasts and 'little horn' of Dan. 7, as artificial as the scorpion-locusts of the *first woe* (9¹⁻¹¹) and the lion-cavalry of the *second* (9¹⁶⁻¹⁹).

The allegory is usually decoded as the Roman empire, personified in its *heads*, blasphemously demanding worship and persecuting those who stand by the true God; the *beast* from the *earth* then represents the emperor cult's local propagandists. The linked allegory in 17⁹⁻¹⁷ seems to confirm it. But these verses may be a later interpolation, giving a political interpretation of what was originally spiritual (Rissi, *Time and History*, pp. 75-83), and both chapters in any case admit of an entirely spiritual understanding (Lohmeyer; Minear, pp. 113-27, 235-60):

(i) Though the 'little horn' of Dan. 7 referred originally to Antiochus IV, the historical references of Daniel have here been ironed out. Likewise the 'desolating sacrilege' (Dan. 8^{12f.}, 11³⁰⁻³⁶), which is at the centre of the Lord's Apocalypse and provides the climax of the trumpets section in John's, is related to the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the synoptic gospels but is spiritualized in the Johannine writings: the true temple, the church, is desecrated by false teaching and schism within (I John 2^{18ff.}, 4³, II John⁷); and the trampling of Jerusalem has been transferred by our John to the church (11^{1f.}). And in II Thess. 2³⁻⁷ the Antichrist is a demonic figure of lawlessness (remarkably like the *beast*) whose appearance from beyond history is restrained for the time by (as most commentators take it) the Roman empire itself.

(ii) In the Lord's Apocalypse the 'sacrilege' and 'tribulation' are linked with the appearance of 'false Christs and false prophets' (Matt. 24²⁴). 'False prophet' is the designation of the second *beast* (v. 11) in later chapters; the first *beast*, then, is a parody of the true Christ, and all the supposed references to Rome and the emperor cult can be taken as part of this parody, which dominates the chapter and the rest of the book.

The *beast's* most striking feature, the *head healed* from its *mortal wound* (vv. 3, 12, 14), is a test case. On the 'Roman' view this refers to the myth of *Nero redivivus* ('come back to life'). He stabbed himself in the throat in AD 68, but at once there were rumours that he was not really dead, and later it was believed that he would return from the dead with a demonic army of vengeance. But is not this too trivial? *Beast* and *head* are at one with the *dragon* (v. 2): how could Nero's suicide be a death-blow to him? Only Christ's life and death could

qualify, as ch. 12 has already told us, and the wounded head must, in the light of 12¹⁷, refer primarily to God's words to the serpent 'her seed shall bruise your head' (Gen. 3¹⁵). The *beast*, like the *great city* (11⁸), personifies all opposition to God and his people from the beginning, and apes the true Man's death and resurrection.

But as the commentary will show, references to Rome and the emperor cult are plausible and pervasive. In ancient thought political institutions and the spiritual powers behind them were inseparable.¹ Pergamum was an example, as the letter to it confirms (see on 2¹²⁻¹⁷). Pergamum is *Satan's throne* (2¹³, 13²), both as provincial capital and as centre of pagan religion. There the faithful witness, Antipas, was killed, presumably by Caesar's sword (cf. 13^{7, 15}), and there Balak, the heathen king, and Balaam, the false prophet, trip Christians into idolatry and immorality (and thus into the camp of the earth-dwellers), just as they tripped Israel in the wilderness (see p. 89 above).

So the *beast* is (at this moment) the Roman empire, but its real threat to the church is not its sword, but its divine pretensions supported from within the church, which may lead Christians to take the wrong side when the final attack on the saints comes (v. 7), and thus expose them to a more deadly sword (2^{12, 16}). See on 13^{11ff.} for the Nicolaitan position – cf. Dan. 11³⁰⁻³⁶. Likewise the supreme disaster for the earth-dwellers is the Roman empire which, as the inscriptions show, they take to be their supreme blessing. For it involves them in a love of darkness and hatred of the light which must bring a recoil worse than the scorpion's sting (9^{5f.}, 14⁹⁻¹¹).

It is usually assumed that the 'earth-dwellers' are the non-Christians, who lack God's *seal* (9⁴). But they must also include those who compromise it (cf. 2¹⁶ and 19²¹): thus the call to discernment (v. 9) and fidelity (v. 10). The challenge, *If any one has an ear . . .*, as on the lips of Jesus and in the letters to the churches, indicates not inability to understand but unwillingness to listen and act. Christians must accept what lies ahead, as Jesus accepted his 'cup', without recourse to the earthly sword (cf. John 18¹¹, Matt. 26⁵²; but see note *r* on 13¹⁰ on the reading of v. 10b). This gives a final clue to John's stance. He is 'demythologizing' the Antichrist myth and referring it back to the

¹ See C. D. Morrison, *The Powers that Be*, SCM Press and Allenson 1960.

Roman state – not now as desecrating the outward temple at Jerusalem but as threatening and corrupting the true temple, the church, in unholy alliance with false Christians. But in attacking those who compromise with the state and mocking its pretensions he is careful not to align himself with the advocates of violent resistance. There is a formal parallel in the stance of the 'Confessing Church' over against the 'German Christians' who supported Hitler in the 1930s, and of von Moltke over against those who plotted to assassinate Hitler in the 1940s.^m



1f.

A beast rising out of the sea: Daniel saw four beasts rising out of the *sea* (7^{2ff.} = the primeval waters = the *abyss*, Rev. 11⁷). They represented empires, and the fourth and worst (Alexander's) had *ten horns*, among which sprouted a 'little horn' – the Seleucid king Antiochus IV who in 167 BC savagely attacked the Jews, their temple and their law – with help from within Judaism (Dan. 11³⁰⁻³⁶). John's beast acts like the 'little horn' (vv. 5ff.) but has attributes of Daniel's first three – *lion*, *bear* and four-headed *leopard*. As a composite of all four it has a total of *seven heads*, and it is signalled by the number of its *heads* and *horns* as being the 'incarnation' of the dragon (12³). The heads wear a *blasphemous name* because they represent emperors (17^{9ff.}) who assumed titles of divinity – Son of God, Lord and God, Saviour etc. (see Introduction, p. 25 above).

to it the dragon gave his power and his throne: it is at one with the *dragon*, as Jesus is at one with his Father and shares his *throne* (3²¹; note also *Satan's throne* at Pergamum, 2¹³).

3

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound: the parody of Jesus continues; literally *one* (or *the first*) of its heads was as though it had been *slaughtered* (*esphagmenên*) to death – cf. 5⁶. A false Nero appeared in AD 69 soon after his death (Tacitus, *Hist.* II.8), and another about ten years later was welcomed by the Parthians. For the myth of Nero's return from the dead to punish Rome's crimes against the East, see *Sibylline Oracles* IV and V, which can be dated to the end of the first

^m See M. L. G. Balfour and J. Frisby, *Helmuth von Moltke: a Leader against Hitler*, Macmillan 1972.

century.ⁿ John is certainly referring to Nero, who had claimed divine honours, and had savaged the church in Rome (AD 65; Tacitus, *Annals*, XV.44, quoted in Introduction, pp. 22f.), setting a deadly precedent for the future. But in the light of ch. 12 the primary reference for the Christian reader must be to Gen. 3¹⁵, as it was for Irenaeus c. 180.

its mortal wound was healed: *its* in the Greek refers not to the *head* but the *beast* (cf. vv. 12, 14). This *first head* expresses the beast's whole character. The *healing* is on a superficial level Nero's return, but again 12¹⁷ and Gen. 3¹⁵ (in the Targum version – see p. 40) must be primary: the *obedience* and *testimony* of Jesus and his saints wound the beast's *head* (*wound* is *plēgē* = *plague* as at 11⁶); immorality and idolatry (as at Pergamum), and lack of witness (as at Laodicea) restore its power to wound their heel, and *the whole earth follows it with wonder* (contrast John 12¹⁹). Worship of that which is 'not God' releases demonic powers – see on 9²⁰. Failure to maintain the *testimony of Jesus* is deadly not only to the church but to the world it is meant to save, by its testimony, from the dragon's deceit.

4

'Who is like the beast?': a parody of Ex. 15¹¹, 'Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods?'; cf. Ps. 89⁶ and many other passages, and Leviathan (Job 41³³). The provincials' worship of Rome and emperor arose out of genuine gratitude for the 'salvation' they brought.

'who can fight against it?': the feeling no doubt of many Christians – see 14^{1ff.}, 17¹⁴, 19^{11ff.} for the answer.

5f.

the beast was given a mouth: like the 'little horn' (Dan. 7⁸, 11, 20, 25).

it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months: but not by the dragon. He *gave* (vv. 2, 4), but *allowed* is the same word as *was given* (*edothē*) – the 'passive of divine action' (vv. 7, 14f.; cf. 9^{1, 3, 5}). *Forty-two months* reinforces the sense of divine control (see pp. 182f.). The witnesses' *authority* was for the equivalent 1260 days, ended by the beast's appearance (11³⁻⁷), and its *forty-two months* (= three and a half years) links

ⁿ Bo Reicke, 'Die jüdische Apokalyptik und die johanneische Tiervision', *Recherches de science religieuse* 60, 1972, pp. 181–8, gives full references. Charles, AP II, gives the text of the *Sibylline Oracles*.

with the time of the witnesses' defeat (11⁹, 13⁷). But it also corresponds with the *trampling* of the outward church (11²), which is co-terminous with the witnesses' work. That is, John sees the time from the cross onwards as one both of being trampled and of giving witness, but foresees a final recapitulation of this pattern which will be total and sharp, before Christ comes (14^{14ff.}; cf. II Thess. 2⁸⁻¹²).

to exercise authority: lit. 'it was given authority to act (*poiesai*)'; *poiein* (= 'make', 'do') occurs ten times in this chapter. Frantic activity is characteristic of the *beasts*, as of the 'little horn' (Dan. 8¹²; cf. 11^{30, 36}) and the men of Babel (Gen. 11³⁻⁵).

6

blaspheming his name: the assumption of divine names in documents and inscriptions and on coins?

and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven: 12¹² suggests that the heaven-dwellers are the angels (cf. Dan. 8⁹⁻¹², Jude 8^{ff.}), but as in Daniel the 'host of heaven' is the analogue of the army of *saints* on whom the beast is *allowed to make war* (v. 7). God's dwelling, like his temple (11^{1f.}), is people, not a place; cf. 18²⁰. Though the beast can hurt their bodies on earth, its blasphemies have no effect in *heaven*, because of the Lord's victory (12⁷⁻¹²).

7

and to conquer: by killing (v. 15). The Lamb and his followers *conquer* by dying (5^{5f.}, 12¹¹).^o

7-8

The extent of the beast's *authority* and of its *worship* is world-wide, as was the witnesses' prophesying and the relief of their victims (11⁶⁻¹⁰). But *earth-dweller* and *written in the Lamb's book of life* (i.e. 'of the living') are not hard and fast categories. Names can be expunged from the latter – those who deny Christ (cf. 3⁵) – and the *nations* and *kings of the earth* find a place in the City reserved for those *written in the Lamb's book* (21²⁴⁻²⁷).

^o The omission of this sentence by some ancient authorities is probably due to a copyist's eye having jumped from *was allowed* (*kai edothē*) to *was given* (*kai edothē*).

everyone^p whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world: rsv has changed the order of the Greek (which runs 'whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world'), because of 17⁸ where the same words are found, with 'the Lamb that was slain' omitted. *Before the foundation of the world* certainly can be taken with *written*, but it goes so closely with *slain* that it is wrong to expunge the clear implication here that the Lamb's atoning death has its place in God's plan from the beginning (cf. I Peter 1²⁰), in contrast with the death of 'the beast that was slain' in v. 3. If we may take a hint from the other Johannine writings (John 1²⁹, 3¹⁶, I John 2² – for their relationship to Rev. see p. 40), the Lamb's death is *for* those who are not *written* in his *book*, excluded by their worship of the beast like Israel by its worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32⁸, 32^{f.}).

In any case, 'not written' does not mean that they have no chance. The language of 'predestination' occurs in Jewish and Christian writings alongside clear statements of human free-will and responsibility. It serves to express both God's control over a seemingly chaotic world – nothing that happens is in fact unforeseen or accidental – and the unvarying quality of his intention: his discountenancing of sin and his provision for salvation (cf. Matt. 25³⁴, 4¹, Rom. 8²⁸⁻³⁰). 'Not written from the foundation of the world' expresses the constitutional and eternal incapacity for *life* of those whose treasure is on earth. For the *book of life* see on 3⁵, 20¹².

9

If anyone has an ear: the reference to the present Israel is brought sharply home by the closing formula of the letters (cf. Ps. 95^{7ff.}); see on 27.

10

If anyone is to be taken captive: text and interpretation are uncertain. rsv is probably right, but can be taken in two ways. (i) John is alluding to Gethsemane, and to Jer. 15², 43¹¹ (but with a significant shift of meaning). Peter said he was willing to go to *prison* and *death* with Jesus (Luke 22³³), but when the time came, *denied* him; and in the garden the

p *Everyone* is supplied by rsv. The Greek could mean 'all the earth-dwellers whose names have not been written . . .', paraphrased by NEB 'all on earth except those whose names the Lamb keeps in his roll of the living'. But the 'earth-dwellers' in Revelation are one inclusive category of those whose horizons are bounded by this earth, in contrast to the 'heaven-dwellers' (v. 6), those whose treasure is in heaven (see above, pp. 15f. and on 3¹⁰).

disciples took to the *sword*, but then fled – in both ways avoiding what the scriptures required (Matt. 26⁵¹⁻⁵⁶). Jeremiah speaks of the irrevocability of the doom God has laid down for the sinful – which is to be borne now, as at Calvary, not by the sinful but by the faithful.⁹ See also Matt. 26³⁹, John 18¹¹, and below on *cup* (14¹⁰). Christians are not to save their earthly skins (cf. 2¹⁰) by compromise, like the Nicolaitans, or by the earthly *sword* like Jewish Zealots or Roman conspirators. *Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints*. (ii) But this last sentence literally translated runs, 'Here is the endurance . . .' (so too at 14¹²), and v. 10 could be taken (as by some early copyists) as promise of retribution on the 'earth-dwellers': 'this is the vindication for which the saints have trustfully waited' (cf. 6⁹⁻¹¹; 14¹² could be taken the same way). Then *if anyone has an ear* would introduce a threat in contrast with the promises to the faithful in the letters, and the allusion to Jeremiah would be in line with the original meaning.¹

If the chapter is primarily a *warning* to the church, then (i) is preferable. But John's Greek is oracular enough for him to mean both!

13¹¹⁻¹⁸

THE BEAST FROM THE EARTH

¹¹ *Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.* ¹² *It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.* ¹³ *It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men;* ¹⁴ *and by*

q For the idea of vicarious suffering, see above, p. 126.

r Some MSS read 'if anyone *takes* captive, to captivity he goes', but this looks like an attempt to make sense of a difficult saying by introducing the idea of retaliation from v. 10b.

It is possible that retaliation was introduced by copyists in v. 10b also from passages like Matt. 26⁵². One good MS (Codex Alexandrinus) reads, 'If anyone [is] to be slain with the sword, [he is] to be slain with the sword': this is not Greek, but is the literal translation of a distinctive Hebrew idiom (Charles II, p. 355). The sense would then be that of Jer. 15², as in v. 10a: acceptance of the divine sentence. This difficult reading could have given rise to the other variants, but equally it could have arisen from a copyist aligning v. 10b with v. 10a in the light of Jer. 15².