

The Book of Revelation

Apocalyptic Visions of Evil

Introduction

- How does the heavenly world perceive the Roman Empire?

‘Revelation portrays the Roman Empire as a system of violent oppression, founded on conquest, maintained by violence and oppression’ (R. Bauckham, *The Theology of Revelation*, p. 35).

- Image of the harlot to represent the city of Rome (Rev. 17-18).
- Image of the sea monster who represents the political power of the Roman emperors (Rev. 13, 17).

The Beast from the Sea (Revelation 13)

This vision has been influenced by the vision of the four beasts (Dan. 7:2-8) and the image of Leviathan, the seven-headed serpent (Isa. 27:1).

The beast represents the power of the Roman Empire and is the incarnation of evil. Its authority is derived from the dragon (13:2).

The beast has seven heads; who is the head with the mortal wound that has been healed (13:3), later identified with the beast itself (13:12)?

Nero was a murderer, even a matricide.

Responsible for the mass persecution of Christians in 64 AD.

He was highly respected in the eastern provinces of the Empire, especially among the Parthians.

Nero committed suicide in 68 AD, but rumours grew that he had not died but fled to Parthia (*Nero redivivus*): 'The reports with regard to his death had been varied, and therefore many people imagined and believed that he was still alive' (Tacitus, *Histories* 2:8).

Revelation: Nero will from the dead (*Nero redivivus*) - mortal wound that has been healed (13:3-4) and wounded 'by a sword' (13:14).

The Nero Legend

The Blasphemies of the Beast

Nero is depicted as an Antichrist figure, claiming to be God (see Rev. 13:1, 5: 'is given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words').

Roman emperors applied to themselves numerous titles and designations (god, saviour, lord). Nero claimed to be a divine being (Mithras, Apollo).

The Number of the Beast

- Rev. 13:17: 'the number of the beast' is a human number and is 666.
- Hebrew practice of *gematria* (a numerical value is attributed to each consonant).

- NERÔN QAISAR

N = 50 R = 200 Ô = 6 N = 50 Q = 100 S = 60 R = 200 = 666

- THÊRION

TH = 400 R = 200 I = 10 O = 6 N = 50 = 666

- Same beast as in Revelation 13: seven heads and ten horns, carries blasphemous names, a head is identified with the beast.
- And they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes, he must remain a little while. And the beast which was and is not, he himself is also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction (Revelation 17:9-11).
- 1st: Augustus; 5th: Nero; 6th: Galba, 7th: Otho. 8th: return of Nero ('the one who was, is not and will be').
- The beast destroys the harlot: Nero returns to seek vengeance on the city that rejected him.

The Seven Kings (Revelation 13)

The Beast as a Parody of Christ

Note the following parallels:

1. The beast possesses 'ten horns and seven heads' (13:1); Christ possesses 'seven horns and seven eyes' (5:6).
2. The beast's power, throne and authority come from the dragon (13:2, 4); Christ is given power, throne and authority from God (2:28; 3:21).
3. The beast possesses a mortal wound that has been healed (13:3); this parallels the death and resurrection of Christ (1:18; 2:8).
4. The return of the beast, who is to ascend from the pit (17:8, 11) parallels the awaited return of Christ (2:5, 16; 3:11).
5. The beast 'was and is not and is to come' (17:8); Christ is 'he who was and is and is to come' (1:4, 8; 4:8).
6. The beast is worshipped by human beings (13:4), as is the Lamb (5:8-14).

The beast ultimately has now power; the Lamb will conquer the beast (15:2).