

Part 2: Who's the 'Beast' in the Book of Revelation?

NOTE: This is part two in a two-part series. [Click here](#) for part one.

Recently, I shared with you five descriptors we discover in the book of Revelation regarding the Beast and who he is. Today, we will discuss which person best meets those criteria.

Who Is the Beast Of Revelation?

So based on the five indicators I shared above, who is the "beast of Revelation"?

We already mentioned the fact that the beast, in part, represents a "kingdom." While we don't necessarily know the meaning of every metaphor or symbol in this text, we can clearly see that *"The seven heads of the beast represent the seven hills"* (Revelation 17:9).

There is only one kingdom in history that has ever been known for seven hills. That is the Roman Empire. Rome has been symbolized throughout history as the city with seven hills (The seven hills are: the Palatine, Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Viminal, Quirinal, and Capitoline).

The initial persecution of Christians was instituted by Rome in AD 64. This ancient imperial government is unquestionably the beast.

However, we have pointed out that the beast is also a man. John declares:

"Wisdom is needed here. Let the one with understanding solve the meaning of the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is 666" (Revelation 13:18).

In the ancient world, “letters” functioned as phonetic symbols, just as our modern alphabet does. Yet they also functioned as numerals. (Roman numbers we still use today are an example of this).

Due to the duality of ancient alphabets, “letter riddles” that concealed information became common. This phenomenon is now called a “cryptogram.” When John, then, gave a numerical value as a partial concealment of the name of the Beast (Revelation 13:18), he was engaging in a common practice of his day.

So, who fits all of the relevant criteria and has a name that has the sum of 666. There’s only one figure that meets all of the indicators: *The Roman Emperor Nero*.

First of all, let’s look at the numerical value of his name. While the Greek spelling of Nero’s name has the value of 1005, the Hebrew spelling of Nero’s name provides us with precisely the value of 666. The Book of Revelation is arguably the most Hebraic Book in the New Testament, so it is no surprise that John would “hide” the name of the “beast” this way.

What’s interesting is that if you consult a Bible with marginal references, you will notice that some Greek manuscripts actually read 616 instead of 666. Why?

John, a Jew, used a Hebrew spelling of Nero’s name to arrive at the figure 666. But when Revelation began circulating among those less acquainted with Hebrew, a well-meaning copyist changed the text to ensure everyone knew it was Nero. 616 is the numerical value of Nero in Latin, the more common language of the people.

Some insist this is just conjecture, but renowned Evangelical scholar Bruce Metzger believes that it reinforces the fact that Nero is the beast of Revelation. He says:

“Perhaps the change was intentional, seeing that the Greek form Neron Caesar written in Hebrew characters is equivalent

to 666, whereas the Latin form Nero Caesar is equivalent to 616.”[1]

There's a lot more to this, but it's clear that Nero was the one John warned the believers in Asia Minor about. We don't exactly know why, but perhaps he turned Nero into a cryptogram to protect the Christians who would be receiving his epistle.

Why Would Nero Be Associated with the “Beast”?

Somebody might ask, “What is the great significance of Nero? Why would he be referred to as the Beast?” Well, we are going to find, as historian Philip Schaff affirmed, Nero was “*a demon in human shape.*”[2]

The man known as Nero was born on December 15th, A.D. 37. Nero's conniving mother got him adopted by the Roman emperor and in position to later step into the same position of power. Everyone in history agrees that Nero was a particularly vicious and vile man.

Nero not only enjoyed homosexual practices, he practiced rape and torture. On one occasion Nero castrated a boy named Sporus and tried to make him into a woman. He married him in an elaborate ceremony; treating him like a wife.

He also liked to dress up in the skins of wild animals and leap from a cage to attack people. He would gouge and strike the genitals of bound men and women in these vicious “sporting” attacks.

Nero divorced his first wife Octavia to marry his mistress, Poppaea. Octavia was banished to an island and was beheaded (A.D. 62). Three years later Poppaea, while pregnant and ill, was kicked to death by Nero. It wasn't just his wives that he murdered, Nero ultimately slaughtered multitudes of innocent people in Rome including his mother, brother, and aunt.

Nero was quite maniacal and insisted that people continue to

“worship” him through the “Emperor cult” that originated with Julius Caesar. We find Nero’s portrait on coins as the god Apollo playing the lyre. He appears with his head radiating the light of the sun on copper coins struck in Rome and at Lugdunum.

That Nero actually was worshiped is evident from inscriptions found in Ephesus in which he is called “Almighty God” and “Savior.” Reference to Nero as “*God and Savior*” is found in an inscription at Salamis, Cyprus. Indeed, as his megalomania increased, the tendency to worship him as ruler of the world became stronger, and in Rome his features appeared on the colossus of the Sun near the Golden House, while his head was represented on the coinage with a radiate crown.

In time, Nero began to kill members of the Roman senate who did not worship him and revere his musical abilities. Dio Cassius notes the fate of one senator who did not appreciate Nero’s “divine” musical abilities. He writes,

“Thrasaea was executed because he failed to appear regularly in the senate, . . . and because he never would listen to the emperor’s singing and lyre-playing, nor sacrifice to Nero’s Divine Voice as did the rest.”[3]

Nero Persecutes The Church

On July 19, 64 AD, a great fire engulfed most of the city of Rome. Although Nero was out of town, suspicion was cast upon him. Many were convinced, that since he bemoaned the “ugliness of Rome,” he leveled the city to launch his own building projects. Feeling the pressure, he placed the blame on the Christians and began to severely persecute them. This tyranny, which was initiated by Nero in November of 64, became the first Roman assault on Christianity.

Earlier, at around 62, Paul had safely appealed to Rome and was acquitted. Christianity was obviously not being persecuted

at that time. It enjoyed its favored status as a "sect" of Judaism. However, after the fire, Christianity lost its legal standing and began to be violently opposed by the emperor. The noted historian Eusebius (A.D. 260-340) affirms that *"Nero was the first of the emperors who showed himself an enemy of the divine religion."*[4]

Many Christian leaders acknowledged how appalling Nero's actions were. Clement of Rome (A.D. 30-100), for example, speaks of Nero's persecution as actions that claimed *"a vast multitude of the elect . . . through many indignities and tortures."*[5] In Book 8 of the Christian *Sibylline Oracles* (A.D. 175) Nero is frighteningly designated as a "great beast." [6]

In similar manner, Eusebius echoes a revulsion of Nero when he speaks of his *"depravity," "the coarseness of the man's extraordinary madness, under the influence of which . . . [he] accomplished the destruction of so many myriads without any reason."*[7] Historian Philip Schaff comments that the Neronian persecution was *"the most cruel that ever occurred."*[8]

We must never forget that it was the sword of Nero that beheaded Paul. He was also the governing force that brutally hung Peter upside down on a cross. This unbending emperor was also the one who exiled John on the isle of Patmos.

If all of that was not enough, he was the one who personally ordered the city of Jerusalem to be sacked and the Temple burned to the ground. He didn't live to see it happen, but he did set it into motion. If Nero doesn't fit the characterization of the *"beast of Revelation,"* I'm not sure who would.

Nero was a vicious and vile figure who was demonically motivated. Though he demanded to be an object of worship through the "emperor cult," many privately reviled him. Those that didn't fear him hated him and wanted him removed from

power. In 68 their wish finally became true. Nero's greed and brutality ultimately did him in. A great revolt started against him in Rome. Feeling he had no other choice, he committed suicide on June 9, 68 at only 31 years of age.

As already stated, in November of 64, (months after Rome burned), Nero began to severely persecute Christians. This continued until his suicide in 68 – which means his severe persecution lasted a total of 42 months. This was a fulfillment of what John wrote in Revelation 13:5:

“Then the beast was allowed to speak great blasphemies against God. And he was given authority to do whatever he wanted for forty-two months.”

Although Nero viciously died in 68, his edict to destroy Jerusalem and the Temple was ultimately carried out by Titus in 70 AD.

In more ways than one, we see that Nero was the Beast of Revelation John was warning the churches in Asia Minor about. For a time, the Beast and his successors impeded the work of Christianity. Yet, the “antichrist” was ultimately overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony.

Conclusion

So many Christians are filled with anxiousness and fear. We're waiting on darkness and destruction to take over the earth. We sincerely believe in an emerging “antichrist” or “beast” that will tear down everything. With all due respect, this is foolish.

We're not looking for another evil figure to rise and cause great difficulty for the Church. There will be no future Antichrist. He already came.

Although the “*spirit of antichrist*” might raise its ugly head in one form or other, there will never again be a figure like

Nero. Some will certainly rise against the “*anointing*,” but they aren’t the one spoken of in the Bible – and they will not prevail.

Jesus is Lord and He is actively releasing His Kingdom here on earth. Christians should be looking for greater breakthrough and glory, not darkness and destruction. Jesus is truly bringing the good news of His Kingdom and we need to come into alignment with that!

If the church keeps expecting the rise of evil, we will be hindered in our mission. We don’t want to be impeded by ideas that don’t stand up to a sound reading of scripture. Our faith is not built on what is popular. It is built on what is true.

[1] Bruce Metzger. Textual Criticism. 752.

[2] Phillip Schaff. Church History 1:379.

[3] Dio Cassius. Roman History 625:2.

[4] Eusebius Ecclesiastical History. 2:25:3

[5] 1 Clement 6:1.

[6] Christian Sibylline Oracles 8:157 (A.D. 175).

[7] Eusebius Ecclesiastical History. 2:25:2, 3.

[8] Philip Schaff. History of the Christian Church, 3rd. edition. (Grand Rapid, Eerdmans., 1910) 1:386.

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