

America *and* Babylon



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week’s Study: *Rev. 13:1–12; 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4; Jer. 51:6, 7, 53, 57; Rev. 18:1–4.*

Memory Text: “ ‘At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book’ ” (*Daniel 12:1, NKJV*).

Last week we looked at the counterfeit trinity, Satan (the dragon) and two earthly powers that together will bring persecution against God’s people.

One of these powers, the sea beast (*Rev. 13:1–10*), is described as a composite of a leopard, a bear, and a lion (*Rev. 13:2*)—images taken directly from Daniel 7:4–6. We saw in week 6 that in Daniel 7—after the rise of Babylon (lion), Media-Persia (bear), and Greece (leopard)—came the final earthly power, Rome. It started out as pagan Rome and then turned into papal Rome, the little horn power of Daniel 7:7, 8; 19–21; and 23–25 that rose directly out of the fourth beast. We saw, too, that many of the characteristics of papal Rome, as depicted in these verses in Daniel 7, reappear in the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–10. Hence, Bible scholars have seen Rome as one of the key antagonists in the end-time scenario of Revelation 13.

However, Rome is not alone. Another power is depicted. This week we will focus mostly on Revelation 13 and the events and powers portrayed in it, and as always asking the questions: What do these events mean, and how can we be prepared for them?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 9.

Deadly Wound Healed

Read Revelation 13:1–10 and go over the reasons why these texts are referring to the papacy, with regard to its role in the past and in the future. Notice specifically just how prominent a role it is given. What does this mean in terms of last-day events?

Although God has faithful people in all churches, Scripture does point to a specific role that this institution has played in history and will play in last-day events.

Read Revelation 13:3. What is happening here, and what does this teach about Rome’s prominence?

For centuries the Roman church had been the central religion and, in many ways, the political center of the Western world. A telling example of her power is seen in the story of Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV, who, upon angering Pope Gregory VII, came to the pope’s castle to make peace. There, the Roman emperor was made to wait in an outer court for three days in the winter cold before the pope granted him entrance. Gregory VII, elated with his triumph, boasted that it was his duty to pull down the pride of kings.

Nevertheless, by the late eighteenth century through the influence of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution, Rome’s political and religious hegemony had been shattered. One of the popes, Pius VI, actually had been taken captive by the French army in 1798 and died in exile in 1799.

Revelation 13, however, speaks of a resurgence after the healing of its “deadly wound” (*Rev. 13:3*). And although Rome today doesn’t have the kind of political power it wielded in the day of Gregory VII, it is an influential force, both religiously and politically, thanks to the popularity of recent popes (for instance, Pope Francis’ speaking to both houses of the U.S. Congress in 2015 was a historical first). According to prophecy, this influence only will grow.

How can we be faithful to the message that we have been called to preach, but do so in a way that causes as little offense as possible? Why, though, must we not bow down to “political correctness” as we proclaim present truth?

The United States in Prophecy

People have asked, and understandably so: *How could Rome have the kind of influence today, or in the future, that is depicted in Revelation 13?* Long gone are the days when it could command armies such as it did in times past. The answer is found, too, in Revelation 13.

Read Revelation 13:11, 12. Which marks help us to identify who this power is?

The beast that precedes this one—long viewed as Rome by Protestants—was depicted as having been given power for forty-two months (*Rev. 13:5*). The forty-two months are the same as the “time and times and the dividing of time” of Daniel 7:25, or three and a half years (*Rev. 12:14*), or 1,260 prophetic days (*Rev. 12:6*)—the time during which the papal power oppressed its opponents. This prophetic time period (using the day-year principle) began with the supremacy of the papacy, A.D. 38, and terminated in 1798, the year that the pope was taken captive. At this time the papal power received its deadly wound, and the prediction was fulfilled.

About this point in history, near the close of the “forty-two months” (1798), another power appears (*Rev. 13:11*). It arises this time out of the earth—which is in contrast to many of the previous powers, which arose out of water (*see Dan. 7:2, 3*)—a symbol of masses of people. “‘The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues’ ” (*Rev. 17:15, NKJV*).

For these reasons, and others, this power must be the United States of America, which arose in a relatively uninhabited part of the world and didn’t need to overthrow any major empires in order to do so.

“What nation of the New World was in 1798 rising into power, giving promise of strength and greatness, and attracting the attention of the world? The application of the symbol admits of no question. One nation, and only one, meets the specifications of this prophecy; it points unmistakably to the United States of America.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 440.

Although this power is described first as having two horns like a lamb, symbolizing gentleness, it will speak “as a dragon” (*Rev. 13:11*), indicating a time of persecution such as took place under the previous power. Revelation 13:11–17, then, answers the question about how Rome could exert the influence that prophecy predicts. It will have the might of the United States behind it—that’s how.

An Issue of Worship

All through sacred history, the Lord constantly had to deal with those who fell into idolatry and other forms of false worship (*see Matt. 4:8–10*). In the final crisis, as depicted in Revelation 13, the issue of worship will again arise. Here, too, God’s people will have to make a choice about whom they will worship and serve (*see Josh. 24:15*).

In week 2, in the lesson titled “Daniel and the End Time,” we studied the story of three Hebrew boys who were ordered to “worship the golden image” (*Dan. 3:5*). We saw, too, how Revelation 13 uses language from that chapter in depicting the persecution that God’s people will face in the end times. That is, we may see what happened in Daniel 3 as a precursor to what will happen in the last days, as depicted in the immediate context of the beast powers in Revelation 13. All were commanded to worship the golden image, or they would be put to death in a fiery furnace. Similarly, in Revelation 13, whoever “would not worship the image of the beast [is] to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

Read Revelation 14:9–11; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4. What do these verses tell us about how crucial the issue of worship will become?

Babylon always has been the capital of false worship. The Tower of Babel testified to its builders’ desire, like Lucifer, to “ascend above the heights of the clouds” (*Isa. 14:14*), as well as to its builders’ efforts to save themselves in case of another global deluge. Thus, they refused to believe God’s promise never to bring another flood upon the entire earth (*Gen. 9:8–11*).

The Neo-Babylonian Empire likewise exalted the work of human hands. Nebuchadnezzar extolled “this great Babylon, that I have built” (*Dan. 4:30*). Later, King Belshazzar took the golden cups of Solomon’s temple for a feast, and “they drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone” (*Dan. 5:3, 4, NKJV*). Notice that the true vessels of the temple were filled with intoxicating wine, which deadened the sensibility of all who drank from them. As a result, many in the city perished when Babylon fell. Thus, an outward appearance of truth can deceive us by disguising the deadly “wine of Babylon.” False worship and false ideas are the currency of Satan’s kingdom.

How can we make sure we aren’t involved in any false worship now?

“Babylon the Great”

Read the following texts. What do they teach us about Babylon? *Jer. 51:6, 7, 53, 57; Zech. 2:7; Rev. 17:5, 6; 18:2, 3.*

As we saw yesterday, Babylon has a long history as the capital of false worship; so it is a fitting symbol of an end-time power that deceives the nations.

Compare the dragon, the sea beast, and the scarlet beast (*Rev. 12:3, 13:1–3, 17:3*). What are the similarities and differences?

All three beasts have seven heads and ten horns, which represent the sum total of heads and horns of the beasts of Daniel 7. Each successive empire was built upon those that went before. Similarly, the scarlet beast combines elements of the dragon and the sea beast (symbolizing pagan and papal Rome, respectively), as well as of the land beast (*Rev. 13:11–14*), grouping “all three powers—all of God’s enemies—into a real coalition.”—Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: The Apocalypse Through Hebrew Eyes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2002), p. 162. An additional element in Revelation 17 is the woman who rides on the scarlet beast, symbolizing an illicit union of religious and political powers. This woman contrasts sharply with the pure woman of Revelation 12:

Pure Woman (*Rev. 12*)

In heaven
Clothed with the sun
Crown of twelve stars
Attacked by the dragon
Mother of the remnant

Harlot (*Rev. 17*)

On the waters
Clothed in purple and scarlet
Adorned with gold, gems, pearls
Supported by the dragon
Mother of harlots

As “the mother of harlots,” Babylon has been busy reproducing itself. The apostate mother church has many apostate daughters. But God does not take ownership of the errors promulgated and atrocities committed by apostate Christianity. His true people, although attacked by Satan, survive through the centuries.

Revelation 14:8 has already warned people of Babylon’s fall or apostasy from the truth, which eventually leads to the final deception, the mark of the beast (*Rev. 14:9–11*). This warning will be repeated with much greater power, culminating in one last appeal for God’s people still in Babylon to come out of her and unite with God’s end-time, remnant church (*Rev. 18:1–4*).

Come Out of Her, My People

Over the years, students of Bible prophecy have been following world events with great interest, particularly as they seem to relate to the end time. Think, for instance, about the role of the United States. As far back as 1851, some Adventists were identifying America as the second beast power (*Rev. 13:11–15*), which was a very remarkable identification given the status of the United States then. In the mid-1800s, the big powers were still the Old World ones: Prussia, France, Austria-Hungary, and England. At that time America had a peacetime army of about twenty thousand men, about one-tenth the number of combatants at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) alone. In 1814, just forty years earlier, the British invaded and burned Washington, D.C. In 1876, Sitting Bull's braves wiped out General Custer's Seventh U.S. Cavalry Regiment. Thus, even after some commentators identified the United States as the power that would one day enforce the "mark of the beast" on the world, the nation was still fighting Native Americans on its own soil, and not always winning either!

No question, world events are following as we have believed they would. But still more things need to happen before we reach the end. That's why, for instance, when discussing the "mark of the beast," it's very important to emphasize that right now no one has it, regardless of whether or not they are keeping the fourth commandment.

Besides, more needs to unfold.

Read Revelation 18:1–4. What is happening here, and why is this important for us to remember now? What do these verses teach us about our mission to the world?

These verses paint a bleak political, moral, and spiritual picture of the world. They show the malevolent influence of false religious teaching in the world. At the same time, though, they offer great hope, because another angel from heaven lights the world with his glory. Further, God's faithful people, the ones who haven't learned yet what they need to know, are called out of Babylon. This means, then, that right up to the end, God's people who are already out of Babylon have a work to do for those who are still in it.

What should it mean to us that the Lord calls some of those still in Babylon "My people"? Why is this an important point for us to remember as we relate to others?

Further Thought: Satan's attack on God's law is an attack on God Himself, both on His authority and on His government. So in the last days, in the climactic events of the final crisis, Satan will be attacking those who keep "the commandments of God" (*Rev. 12:17, 14:12*), for they alone will be refusing to pay him homage through his proxies here on earth. The battle that he waged against God in heaven long ago will be continued here on earth, and just as he was defeated in heaven, he will be defeated here on earth. "From the very beginning of the great controversy in heaven it has been Satan's purpose to overthrow the law of God. It was to accomplish this that he entered upon his rebellion against the Creator, and though he was cast out of heaven he has continued the same warfare upon the earth. To deceive men, and thus lead them to transgress God's law, is the object which he has steadfastly pursued. Whether this be accomplished by casting aside the law altogether, or by rejecting one of its precepts, the result will be ultimately the same. He that offends 'in one point,' manifests contempt for the whole law; his influence and example are on the side of transgression; he becomes 'guilty of all.' James 2:10." —Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 582.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about world events. In what ways are they pointing to what we believe needs to happen in the last days? What events still need to unfold? How can we learn to keep vigilant about the signs of the times while avoiding fanaticism, date setting, and making bold predictions about things that the Bible and Ellen White's writings have not explicitly taught?
- 2 Dwell more on the question of worship. What does it mean to worship something? How do we worship whatever it is we do worship?
- 3 Dwell more on the idea that God still has people in Babylon. What do we understand as the meaning of the term "Babylon" (which is obviously a symbol and not literal)? What does this teach us about our obligation to continue preaching our message to others, regardless of their political and/or religious beliefs?

“Trust Jesus” Hats

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Tony Pouesi, imprisoned for nine months after the death of a man in a bar fight, began a closer walk with God following his surprise release from jail in the U.S. state of Alaska.

With nowhere to go, he moved into a Seventh-day Adventist home for former inmates, the Greater Works Christian Living Center, in Anchorage. He began to have morning devotions. He attended prayer meetings on Wednesday and Friday evenings. He kept the Sabbath.

“It was the first time that I got to experience a real Christian family,” he said.

A desire swelled in his heart to share his newfound love for Jesus, and he decided to establish Alaska Street Ministry. Five days a week, he distributes GLOW tracts, Bible promise books, food, and clothing. He prays with strangers and talks about Jesus.

Tony has found that wearing a custom-made hat or shirt stamped with the words, “Trust Jesus,” is an excellent conversation starter.

“It is a great tool for witnessing,” he said. “A lot of people come up to me and just start talking about God. If they are responsive, I tell them how God changed my life.”

Tony’s biggest burden, however, is his own family. He called his single mother in Shelton, Washington, shortly after being freed from jail.

“There is only one thing in this world that I will ask of you,” he told her. “I want you to do these Discover Bible studies.”

As a result of the *Voice of Prophecy* studies, his mother has quit smoking and lost 30 pounds (14 kilograms). She keeps the Sabbath.

“I knew that she would never be the same after the Bible studies,” Tony said. “This is the power of God.”

Tony is now looking for new ways to share Jesus. One Sabbath as he left church, he encountered a man carrying a large white cross. The man explained that he had been carrying the cross around the world for six years and, after hearing Tony’s story, presented it to him.

It took Tony some time to gather the courage to drag the cross around the city block. But when he did, the reaction was astounding.

“People were honking their horns, and waving, and saying, ‘Praise the Lord!’ ” Tony said. “It was awesome.”

Tony isn’t convinced that the cross is the best way to witness. But he is confident that his “Trust Jesus” clothing is effective. He is looking to support his street ministry by selling the hats and shirts online.

“God gave me this fire to spread the gospel, and I still have that fire,” he said.



Read more about TONY POUESI, left, last week.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Texts:** *Revelation 13:1–18*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Identify the historical powers represented by the two beasts, and recognize the events associated with them.

Feel: Evaluate the gravity of the issues at stake, and control his or her feelings in the worship experience.

Do: Document the evidence supporting the fulfilment of prophecy, and find more reasons to trust the God who controls history.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Babylon and America

A What clues suggest that the beast of the sea is the Roman Catholic Church?

B What clues suggest that the beast of the land is the United States of America?

II. Feel: Emotional Control

A Why is the experience of feeling good not a trustworthy indication of having God's presence?

B How can you make sure that your worship feelings are in tune with the true God?

C Why should you love people despite the fact that they may belong to the camp of the beast?

III. Do: Stick to Your God.

A What is the most common temptation of false worship?

B How do you come out of Babylon?

C Why is coming out of Babylon not enough to avoid its influence?

► **Summary:** The ambition of Babylon is to be worshipped by the whole world.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Revelation 13:10*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Spiritual life is not self-centered but implies a God-centered worship experience and a life founded on trust in God. True worship is not just fellowship and spending good times together. Nor is belonging to the right camp of believers enough to constitute true worship. Rather, true worship must lead to heartfelt devotion to God.

Just for Teachers: The identification of the powers represented by the two beasts of Revelation 13 should help us to situate the prophetic period in which we live, and instruct us to conduct our lives accordingly. Examine the historical evidence supporting the identification of the beasts. As much as possible, select well-known sources, even historical textbooks, to ensure objectivity and credibility. The main goal of this lesson is to inspire commitment to, and worship of, the true God.

Opening Discussion: There have never been so many religions and denominations that claim to be God's true church. Discuss how the response to this proliferation of sects is to take refuge in the traditional church in which we grew up because of its historical legitimacy.

Questions for Discussion:

- ❶ How can we explain this proliferation of sects?
- ❷ Consider further the fallacy of taking refuge in traditional churches simply because they have historical legitimacy. How can we denounce this fallacy without falling into the trap of pride and self-sufficiency that characterizes the Laodicean church (*Rev. 3:17*)?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: It is important to be as sensitive as possible in your presentation of this lesson's material. First, unveil the identity of the two beasts in light of contemporary events. Second, identify the main issue at stake, and discuss why denouncing the fallacy of falling back on a traditional church is important for our spiritual lives. Be creative and relevant in your presentation. Strengthen the foundation of your approach; use the best evidence and arguments to present this lesson.

Bible Commentary

I. Babylon and Her Allies (*Review Revelation 13:12 with your class.*)

The features of the beast of the sea evoke the four animals of Daniel 7—the first three being the lion, the bear, and the leopard (*Rev. 13:2; compare with Dan. 7:2–6*). But the focus here is particularly on the fourth beast (*Rev. 13:1; compare with Dan. 7:7*). The characteristic element of this fourth animal that rivets the attention of John is the little horn. Like the little horn, the beast of the sea usurps God’s power, and it claims to be worshiped. The phrase “‘Who is like the beast’” that is pronounced by her worshipers (*Rev. 13:4, NKJV*) is modeled on the traditional phrase that characterizes the worship of God in ancient Israel: “‘Who is like You, O LORD?’” (*Exod. 15:11, NKJV; Ps. 35:10*). In addition, like the little horn, this beast persecutes God’s people for the same length of time, 42 months, which corresponds to the time, times, and half a time of the little horn (*Rev. 13:5, Dan. 7:25*), beginning in A.D. 538 and ending in A.D. 1798. The beast of the sea represents, then, the same power as the little horn: that is, the Roman Catholic Church as an institution.

The vision of the book of Revelation adds one more identifying mark to our understanding of the little horn: the beast of the sea (little horn) will be wounded and will lose for a while its prestige, after which it will recover and will receive praise again (*Rev. 13:3, 8*). The wound refers to the pressure of the French Revolution and, more specifically, to Napoleon’s blow against the church when he captured the pope in 1798 and imprisoned him. The healing of the wound refers to the recovery of the church, starting in the nineteenth century, when, among many other things, the dogma of the infallibility of the pope was pronounced (1870). The popularity and the political influence of the papacy have never been greater in modern times than they are now.

Consider This: According to Revelation, what are the characteristics that make the fourth beast a persecuting power?

II. Worship Is at Stake (*Review Revelation 13:16, 17 with your class.*)

After the vision of the beast of the sea, John sees a beast rise up from the land. This beast of the land will support the beast of the sea and will even encourage people to worship it (*Rev. 13:12*), just as the dragon had already promoted the worship of the beast (*Rev. 13:4*).

Now, with the coming of the beast of the land, this claim of the beast

of the sea to be worshiped is reaffirmed. The beast of the land does everything within its political power to foster the worship of the beast of the sea. The language of the vision of John recalls the story of Daniel 3, in which Nebuchadnezzar erected a statue that was the replica of the one in his dream, in Daniel 2, and then he ordered all peoples to worship this image. Those who refused would be killed (*Dan. 3:4, 7*). Likewise, the beast of the land will “cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed” (*Rev. 13:15, NKJV*).

The biblical text of Revelation specifies how this worship of the beast of the sea will manifest itself: the worshiper of the beast receives the mark on the hand and the forehead (*Rev. 13:16*). For the faithful Jew, this language evokes the old custom (*Deut. 6:8*) of binding the *tefillin* on the hand and the forehead to symbolize one’s total submission to God’s commandments (see *Prov. 3:3, 6:21, 7:3*), involving both one’s actions (the hand) and one’s thinking (the forehead). The same symbol appears in Revelation 14:9, where it was associated with Creation, thus suggesting a more specific reference to the Sabbath (see lesson 6). A number of clues suggest that the beast of the land refers to the United States of America. This prophecy has not yet been fulfilled completely. The following clues will help to confirm the identity of the beast of the land:

1. This power is different from the beast of the sea: it is not religious; it is not worshiped (*Rev. 13:12, 15*). It is only political; it can kill (*Rev. 13:15*) and functions as an economic power; it determines who can buy or sell (*Rev. 13:17*).

2. This power comes into prominence after the beast of the sea, and it begins to act immediately after the beast of the sea receives its wound (*Rev. 13:12*); hence, by the end of the eighteenth century.

3. This power has a reassuring character. It looks like the lamb (*Rev. 13:11*) that is the symbol of Jesus Christ in His vulnerability. Yet, it speaks like a dragon; it has tremendous power. Also, it comes from the “land”—a sparsely populated part of the earth, unlike the beast from the sea (see *Rev. 17:15*).

4. This power exercises an important political and cultural influence on the world; it is a superpower.

The biblical prophet does not just accuse the evil powers. The spiritual intention behind the revelation of the motions of history is not to play the judge and point the finger against people.

Instead, the intention is to urge us to come out of Babylon (*Rev. 18:2*) and strengthen our faith and hope (*Rev. 13:10*). It is to build trust in God’s Word and control of history and to exhort us to worship the only true God.

Discussion Questions: What features of the beast of the land match the characteristics of the United States of America? What contemporary events point in the direction of America fulfilling its prophetic role as outlined in

Revelation? What makes the Sabbath the ideal test of worship? What does it mean to come out of Babylon? What is the effect of the fulfillment of prophecy on your spiritual life? How does the paradoxical association of the lamb and the dragon fit the character of the United States in prophecy? How does this paradoxical association recall the little horn with human features?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: The Internet is full of lessons about prophecy. Paradoxically, people do not believe in God, because they think it is a naïve faith; but they dig into horoscopes and avidly consult fortune-tellers. Why?

Application Questions:

❶ How can we protect ourselves from far-fetched interpretations of the book of Revelation?

❷ Why do we have so many diverse and even contradictory interpretations of the book of Revelation nowadays?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Discuss the following document reporting Pope Francis' trip to the United States:

“He came as a shepherd and was everywhere tending his flock, with the human touch that has enthralled even skeptics. . . . We’ve seen elements of this pageant before: Paul VI was the first Pope to visit the U.S., back in 1965, when Vatican II had just begun. . . . John Paul II made seven U.S. visits during his 27-year tenure. . . . But none of that occurred in the age of Instagram, when every one of the millions who came out to see him could share the experience with millions more. . . . He’s the first Pope to do a Google Hangout and the first to amass over 20 million Twitter followers.”—*Time*, Oct. 5, 2015, pp. 36, 40.

Activities: Collect from popular magazines recent documents that support the prophecy of Revelation 13.