Group Discussion Questions for 6/5/13
Revelation 13

Read Revelation chapter 13 two times, without referring to notes or commentaries, prior to answering the following questions.

1. Where does the first beast come from? The second beast? In light of 10:1-2, and our discussion of those verses, what can we say about the ability of these beasts to disrupt God’s plan?

2. Consider the first beast. Look at Rev 12:3 and Genesis 3:14-15 as well as Daniel 7, especially verses 1-7, 17, 18, and 23-27. List the characteristics of this beast. What similarities are there between the beasts in Daniel 7 and this beast? What do the beasts in Daniel 7 represent? What, then, might this beast represent?

3. Who worships the first beast? Why? What is the relationship between the beast and the dragon?

4. What does this beast say? What does he do? What impact does this have on the saints? How can you tell that God is in control, even now?

5. Reflect on verse 10, and how it would speak to Christians through the ages.
6. Detail the characteristics of the second beast. What does it mean for the beast to look like a lamb, but to speak like a dragon? What other lambs appear in Revelation? What does this beast represent?

7. What is the relationship between the two beasts? Given your interpretation of the beasts, how do you understand this relationship?

8. The beast requires its subjects to get a mark on their foreheads or right hands. Look again at Rev 7:2-3. What do people have to choose between? What are the only two options? What are the consequences of refusing the sign of the beast? What are the implications for us today?

9. Look at verse 18 carefully. The NIV is particularly accurate here: "This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666." John tells the one with insight to calculate the number of the beast, man's number. Presumably the reader would then pause, waiting for people to do the calculations! Then he gives the answer. How is 7 used in Scripture, particularly in Revelation? How is 3 used? Why might 666 be an appropriate number for the beast, for man's number?
The Beast, 13:1-10

A beast rising out of the sea represents persecuting power, especially the power of a demonized state. The monstrous mixture of features shows the fierceness and the repulsiveness of the Beast. He is hideous. One might be terrorized into submission, but who would genuinely want to worship this mass of ugliness? The rebellious world is fascinated with his power (13:4), but Christians have their eyes opened through this and other biblical revelations.

The Beast combines features from the four beasts of Daniel 7:1-8, 17-27. The beasts of Daniel represent idolatrous kingdoms. This Beast in Revelation must be a worldly kingdom summing all of them up. The state-controlled persecutions against Daniel and his friends thus suggest the nature of the persecution that the seven churches must face from the Roman state—and persecutions of later ages. Interpreters disagree about which particular persecution the Beast most directly represents (see Introduction: Interpretation). Because it expresses a general principle of Satanic opposition, we may expect multiple manifestations. As indicated in the Introduction, these manifestations include the first century, the final crisis, and all times in between.

In Asia Minor local officials threatened to kill Christians if they refused to worship the Roman Emperor. A similar opposition to godly worship will crop up just before the Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:4). Persecutions come sporadically in between these two times (2 Tim. 3:12-13; 1 Pet. 4:12-19; Matt. 24:9). 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 indicates that we are dealing with a repeated pattern of Satanic opposition (“the secret power of lawlessness”). This lawlessness is currently restrained, but will have a final, climactic outbreak (“and then the lawless one will be revealed”). Christians must not be surprised by these pressures. They must face martyrdom, if necessary, knowing that God is in control and that his triumph is certain.

The Beast represents in the first place demonized state power that demands worship. As with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 3), the demonized state threatens to kill Christians unless they bow down. But the symbolism of the Beast applies to more subtle temptations to idolatry. In democratic countries, the state does not insist on literal worship. But citizens are tempted to look to the state as if it were a messiah. It is the greatest concentration of earthly power, and so it must be the remedy for all ills, economic, social, medical, moral, and even spiritual. Moreover, state persecution in its blatant form threatens to overwhelm us through fear. But in subtle ways in our hearts we are tempted to give ultimate commitments to anything that we fear: fear of man (human opinion), fear of death, fear of pain, fear of poverty. So this picture of idolatry has universal application (see discussion in the Introduction: Counterfeiting).

The Beast is a counterfeit of Christ. Note the following parallels:

- The Beast is an image of Satan, whom Satan brought forth (13:1), just as Christ is the exact image of God, begotten by the Father (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3; Ps. 2:7).
- The Beast has ten crowns, while Christ has many crowns (19:12).
- The Beast has blasphemous names written on him, while Christ has worthy names (19:12).
The Dragon gave the Beast his power and his throne and great authority (13:2), just as Christ has power (5:12-13) and throne (3:21) and authority (12:10) from the Father (John 5:21-23).

The Beast has a fatal wound, counterfeiting Christ’s resurrection (13:3). The Beast’s healing is one of the principal features that attracts followers, just as the resurrection of Christ is one of the principal points of evangelistic proclamation.

Worship is directed both to the Dragon and the Beast, just as Christians worship both the Father and the Son (John 5:23).

The Beast attracts the worship of the whole world (13:3), just as Christ is to be worshipped universally.

The Beast utters blasphemies, while Christ utters the praises of God (Heb. 2:12).

The Beast makes war against the saints, while Christ makes war against the Beast (19:11-21). The song of praise to the Beast in 13:4 counterfeits the song to God the warrior in Exod. 15:11. The striking juxtaposition of Christ and the Beast in 19:11-21 shows that these two are the two main warriors in the battle. Christ is the divine warrior, fulfilling the imagery of Exod. 15:3; Isa. 59:16-18; 63:1-6; Hab. 3:3-15; Zech. 9:13-15; 14:1-5. The Beast is the unholy, counterfeit warrior, fulfilling the imagery of Dan. 7:1-8.

Satan himself attempts to counterfeit God the Father. He engages in a mock creation, in which he brings forth his image out of chaotic waters (13:1; parallel to Gen. 1:2). Similarly, the False Prophet, or beast from the earth (13:11-18), counterfeits the work of the Holy Spirit. He desires that people worship not himself, but the Beast, just as the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (John 16:14). He works miraculous signs, counterfeiting the miracles of the Holy Spirit (13:13-14). He forces a mark on his subjects (13:16), just as Christians are sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13).

Together, Satan, the Beast, and the False Prophet form an unholy trio (16:13). They counterfeit the Holy Trinity (see Introduction: Counterfeiting). Satan as a deceiver is always trying to make his ways look attractive (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Our danger lies in the fact that his counterfeits are always close to the real thing, and we may mistake the one for the other. But when Revelation opens our eyes, there is a world of difference between his horrors and God’s beauties. We can be confident because he is only a counterfeiter, an imitator, not a creator. And his productions are always bestial and degenerate like himself. Beasts must give way before Christ the king (19:11-21).

One final counterfeit figure exists, namely Babylon the prostitute, the counterfeit of the bride of Christ. See 17:1-19:10.

The Beast’s ten horns imitate the ten horns of the Dragon (12:3). They represent his power. 17:12 indicates that they take particular form in “ten kings” who help execute his purpose. The horns correspond to the ten horns of the fourth beast in Daniel 7:7, 20. The seven heads represent multiple manifestations, as in 17:10, again imitating the Dragon (12:3). The Beast combines features of leopard, bear, and lion (v. 2). He sums up the beasts in Daniel 7:2-7, and is more fierce and hideous than any of them.

Behind the Beast, as an earthly institution, a perversion of state power, stands the Dragon who energies and endorses him (v. 2). Christians are to be alert to Satanic influence not only with individuals but with institutions and whole societies. The mass of people in the Roman Empire were attracted to emperor worship, but the number of people seduced did not lessen the seriousness of their error. Likewise communism and fascism and Hinduism and materialism and
New Age spirituality may be mass movements today, but Christians must resist these mass seductions.

The Beast’s **mortal wound** and recovery counterfeit Christ’s resurrection. Revelation may be alluding to a myth that grew up after Nero’s death (68 A.D.). A rumor spread that he had not really died, and that he would soon return at the head of the Parthians to wreak vengeance. But the symbolism has broader application. The revival of a powerful movement or an institution after serious trouble seems to indicate to the followers that it is invincible. The Empire seemed to survive all threats, thereby showing that it was eternal and attracting more worship than ever. But all such hopes are mistaken. Only Christ brings eternal life, and only his kingdom will last forever.

The Beast’s counterfeit character comes out clearly in his blasphemies (v. 5). Even these are ultimately under God’s control, as is hinted by the phrase **was given**. God gives people even the strength and breath through which they blaspheme him. The continued dependence on God underlines the security of the saints and the ultimate futility of all opposition to God.

In addition, we find that the Beast’s power has a definite limit. He exercises **his authority for forty-two months**. This period is the same period of distress and persecution mentioned in 11:2-3; 12:6, 14. (See discussion under 11:2.)

The Beast compels worship (13:8), and when the saints refuse to submit, they are martyred. But despite their apparent defeat, martyrs enjoy victory with Christ both immediately (6:9-11) and when their prayers for the final defeat of the Beast are answered (19:11-21). The Beast aspires to universal control and allegiance from every **tribe, people, language and nation** (v. 7). But ultimately all nations belong to Christ (5:9). The necessity for decision is set out in black and white. One must give ultimate allegiance to either Christ or the Beast. One cannot be neutral. All except the saints go after the Beast, underlining the fact that apart from Christ people remain in the power of Satan and darkness (Col. 1:13; Eph. 2:1-3; Gal. 1:4; Acts 4:12).

The **book of life** (v. 8) is the heavenly roster of names of those destined to new life through the purchase of Christ’s blood (5:9; see 3:5). As in 17:8, the phrase “from the creation of the world” modifies not “slain” but “written.” Thus we read, “written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.” In the midst of persecution and the immense power of the Beast, the saints may find security in God’s guarantee of their heavenly citizenship. Similar guarantees are found in 7:1-17; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.

The exhortation to hear (v. 9) picks up on earlier exhortation in 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; and in the Gospels, Jesus’ exhortations: Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; 8:18; Luke 8:8; 14:35; Matt. 7:24, 26. Saints must take to heart the warning of Revelation, and be on the alert against the deceptions of the Beast as well as giving way out of fear.

**Patient endurance** (v. 10), believing in God’s faithfulness and his triumph through Christ, enables the saints to pass through all distresses. God never promises that we will be free from suffering in this world; on the contrary, he repeatedly announces that it will come. But he promises sustenance. “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). (See 1:9.)

**The False Prophet, 13:11-18**
The beast from the earth, also called the False Prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10), functions as a propagandist for the Beast. His actions counterfeit the witness of the Holy Spirit (see Introduction: Counterfeiting).

In first-century Asia Minor, the main propagandists would have been priests of the emperor cult and the “Commune of Asia,” a council of distinguished city representatives promoting loyalty to the emperor. In our day as well totalitarianism enlists propagandists. Just before the Second Coming counterfeit miracles will accompany the appearance of the lawless one (2 Thess. 2:9). The False Prophet embodies a repeatable pattern (see Introduction: Interpretation). Satan uses deceit as his main weapon (Rev. 12:9; 20:3). He uses human instruments and institutions to magnify and propagate his deceits.

We may then ask what are the principal means of deceit around us now. In an industrialized society, mass media, educational institutions, advertising, the whole of the “knowledge industry” offer the principal channels through which people learn and confirm their view of themselves and their world. In principle technologically enhanced communication and social organizations can support both truth and error, righteousness and wickedness. But in societies affected by the fall, all too often distortions of the truth invite people to pursue idols and simultaneously blind them to the realities of their idolatry. For example, the media may become filled with the presuppositions of a materialist worldview. What message results? God need not be mentioned except in expletives, since he is nonexistent, absent, or irrelevant. Humanity invents its own meanings. We are part of an evolutionary whole. Progress comes by freeing ourselves from a primitive past. Money, health, intelligence, beauty, and sexual pleasure give us the good life. And so Herbert Schlossberg (Idols for Destruction) finds himself attacking modern idols called “history,” “humanity,” “mammon,” “nature,” “power,” even “religion” inhabiting our knowledge industry and floating through its channels of communication.

These ideas pervade the atmosphere. They are all the more insidious because they are “atmospheric.” They tend to be assumed rather than overtly disputed. One receives the subtle impression that it is all obvious. Everyone who is informed, everyone who is “with it,” has gone past the stage of questioning. In reality there never was a fundamental questioning, because the ideas seem so natural and inevitable. The average person is no more aware of them than the fish is aware of the water in which it has swum ever since birth. The few who are aware can still take comfort. They may say to themselves, “How could we possibly be wrong, when the miracles of modern science and technology show our superiority to the ideas of the past?”

Technology, then, becomes the worker of miraculous signs (13:14). The signs tells us that true power resides in the modern view of the world. Worship the power of the beast, the power of technocratic state organization, the power of the expert, because technology can work wonders like no one else.

The second beast is from the earth (v. 11), whereas the first is from the sea (v. 1). Together, then, they hint at the attempt to master the whole earth: sea and dry land. Interestingly, these two beasts are modeled after the two monsters in Job 40:15-41:34. Behemoth exercises power on land (Job 40:15-24) and leviathan on water (Job 41:1-34). The Ancient Near East produced multiple speculations about a land-monster and a sea-monster. Some Jews thought that the two monsters were now hidden, but would appear in the last days and be destroyed. Job is probably referring to the hippopotamus and the crocodile, but with incredibly charged, hyperbolic poetic imagery. Readers are invited to use these physical creatures as windows onto the nameless terrors of nightmares and the spiritual reality of the preternatural realm of demons. In Job, God
is creator and therefore master of them all. So is he also in Revelation. In Revelation the pairing of the two beasts in this way increases the sense of their power and terror: they are superhuman, cosmic, ageless monsters. But simultaneously it proclaims their bounds: God has bounded them from the beginning, as Job indicates.

The second beast has **two horns like a lamb** (v. 11). He also, like the first, offers counterfeiting. The exercise of the authority of the first beast (v. 12) is the counterfeit analogue of the fact that Jesus sends the Holy Spirit as “another Counselor” with his authority (John 16:13-15). He promotes worship of the Beast, just as the Holy Spirit promotes worship of Christ (Rev. 13:12). He performs miraculous signs (v. 13), analogous to the Spirit-worked signs in the Book of Acts. Priests in the first century were not above working a little fakery to encourage people to come and patronize their temples. In the first century, the image (v. 14) is the image of the emperor set up in the local temple dedicated to the imperial cult. Now, it is the concrete thing through which the godlike power and presence is mediated and adored. For some people, the TV set!

**All who refused to worship the image were to be killed** (v. 15). Nebuchadnezzar threatened death to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for not bowing down to his image (Dan. 3). Christians in the Roman Empire might be killed for treason, or disloyalty to the emperor, if they refused to participate in the imperial cult. Totalitarian governments of our time are seldom so crude. But the local government official, as an image of government power, requires total allegiance such as a Christian cannot give.

Successful modern democratic governments are not killing people literally. They do not need to, as long as their idol programs are so successful! They travel not toward paternal severity, but toward maternal smothering. The state undertakes to help you by stuffing you with what is good for you—according to its wonderfully “enlightened,” beneficent judgment. But if you do not agree, you are socially unfit and maladapted. The old “you” must be “killed,” socially speaking, by social engineering, in order that the new “you” may function as a upstanding, healthy citizen of the state. To this end, the state uses education, financial penalties, financial inducements, endless regulations, and bureaucrats overseeing and directing your decisions. No, we Christians in such a country do not feel the immediate threat of the sword. But untangling ourselves from the clinging web of idolatry is like death. For the web exists inside us as well as outside, in the ways in which we have already, as members of our society, absorbed its godless assumptions. As verse 16 indicates, participation in the society is hardly possible without idolatry. The society regards the Christian as a misfit, a misanthrope, a victim of insanity. He does not share knowledge of the “obvious verities,” and so cannot be trusted. Thus a consistent Christian will find it difficult to fit in and mix with pagan society. The difficulties may be subtle, as in “tolerant” modern democratic societies, or they may be blatant and harsh, as in the Roman Empire or modern totalitarian countries, where Christians may suffer literal confiscation of property.

What is **the mark** (vv. 16-17)? The mark of the Beast is a counterfeit for the seal of God’s name on the saints (7:2-8; 14:1; cf. Ezek. 9; Deut. 6:8). The Beast owns those who are marked and they are his slaves (14:9; 19:20; 20:4). The mark denotes spiritual allegiance and ownership, both in the case of God’s mark and in the case of the counterfeit by the Beast. In both cases the mark is at root spiritual rather than visible. The multitude of speculations about a visible mark are beside the point.
What about the number 666? The number 666 falls short of the divine completeness of seven. When we expect 777, we get a consistent falling short in 666. Thus 666 has an obvious symbolic value. But there may be a further association. We need first to understand that in both Hebrew and Greek a numerical value was associated with each letter of the alphabet. In Greek, A had value 1, B 2, I 10, K 20, and so on. The letters were sometimes used as a shorthand for numbers. Both Jews and pagans sometimes played arithmetical games with the numerical value of whole words. Christians found that the name Jesus had numerical value 888 in Greek. Hence, the number 666 also makes a contrast with the name of Jesus (cf. 14:1). Jesus is the Christ, who brings in the new creation on the eighth day. The Beast is the Antichrist, who counterfeits Christ but falls short.

Many have attempted to connect 666 with the numerical value of someone's name. But there are far too many possibilities. People may resort to transliterating or translating names into Hebrew or Greek as well as putting them in a Roman alphabet; people may use different forms of names, adding or deleting titles and abbreviations of titles and names. By such means people have succeeded in correlating the number with each of the main Roman emperors of the time: Nero, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian. The speculations about modern antichrists also continue to multiply. But such speculations miss the point. Revelation calls not for cleverness but for spiritual discernment.