

Rev 25-10-01b

Let's continue our look at the scripture in Revelation 13 in the light of current events and those who are getting perhaps unduly excited. It's always exciting to look into scripture, and when Paul said, you know, some are preaching Christ out of bad ideas and false motives, but at least Christ is being preached. And even people that are messing up badly, if you're talking about the word of God, it's not all bad.

It's a whole lot better than some of the alternatives. So picking up here and looking at these heads, I gave you just some suggestions on the types of power and the types of influence that are represented in the internet and how, unlike the expectation in previous centuries, and looking at these scriptures and thinking there will be a revived Roman Empire that is going to come up and it'll be a confederation of European powers, and then everybody got to pay close attention to the EU and so on. Well, they've got more than 10 nations now, that spoils it.

But this situation that we observe now is beyond revolutionary. It is like living on a different planet. Those of us that are old enough, it reminds me of so many things.

I have saw California before it went wildly bad, as did some of you. Growing up there in the early 1960s, I loved California. But it changed.

I loved the Naval Academy as it was when I got there, even though it nearly killed me. But I saw it change in many ways, not just a few. I loved the Marine Corps when I first got into it, but it has changed in many ways.

I wouldn't have the same enthusiasm now that I did then. The early days of many things are exciting, but very soon larger forces are at work and you can lose your first love, as it were. But these heady days of dot-com back 15 years ago, resulted in a bubble.

Everybody got overexcited about it. It settled back down and the internet has been leveraged for business and so on. But to look at a current individual and say, is he the Antichrist? Can I work out the number of his name? Let me just say, while we may be hearing the last Trump, he's not the beast.

He's not. We're still here, among other things, and you can try to match up characteristics, go back to the Old Testament prophecies and great swelling words and self-promotion and all the rest of it. You can find parallels in almost any two things if you look hard enough.

But looking at these heads and their description, one of the things you notice is that in verse 3, I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded and his deadly wound was healed and all the world marveled and followed the beast. So what would this signify? You could say that one of these social media entities I named has suffered a near fatal setback. Twitter seemed to be dying.

It had scandals, loss of user trust. Advertisers were fleeing. Elon Musk bought it, rebranded it, and it now continues to command worldwide attention, although there are always people saying it's going to die off.

Facebook in 2018-2019, toward the close of the first Trump administration, it looked mortally wounded. It had privacy scandals. People don't remember Cambridge Analytica and disinformation, and younger users were abandoning it in droves.

It was getting kind of creaky. But they rebranded it as Meta. It has survived scrutiny.

Some of these entities are now suffering because they are admitting that they were manipulated by the previous administration into filtering and suppressing and canceling people that it's illegal to do. But Meta, Facebook still dominates the globe. There's more than 3 billion users a month on Facebook.

That's a pretty healthy chunk of the world population. TikTok, most recently, Mr. Trump was about ready to kill it, but they were trying to either ban it or cripple it. But it has persisted, adapted.

It seems like it's going to survive these near-death moments in recent months. But I think these are examples. I think this is the type of thing.

I don't think any of these are the mortal wound. One, not the whole beast, but one essential component of the beast. And you'll see more about this when we look at the horns.

The horns exist on the heads. They're not on the beast's tail. They're not sticking out of his shoulder or his chest.

These horns are on the heads. So you can look at it in terms of the heads. What are the major entities that make it go, that exert power, that make decisions about who gets canceled, who gets filtered, what algorithms are in use when you ask for search results, when you access materials, who is promoted, who is suppressed? Those are the major players.

And there's about seven of them right now. What are the 10 horns? And this sheds a little bit of light on the head. This head is going to have a horn or two on it when its mortal wound is healed.

Here's what I would suggest. And this is just common sense. It's not anything mysterious.

What is the power? Horns represent power. What is the power exerted and perpetrated by the internet? Number one, surveillance and data collection. Every free app that you use is not free.

You are paying for it with your privacy, with your personal information. If you use Gmail, if you use Google Maps, if you use Google to search, all of that information is trapped. They say that it is depersonalized and aggregated and trends and so on.

If it turns out that they're not, who are you going to go punch in the nose? They can say anything. Of course, they're going to say no personally identifiable information. But if it is personally identifiable, A, how would you know? And B, what remedy would you exercise? You're done.

You're cooked. Your stuff's already out there. Your social security number and other personally identifiable information is all on the dark web as we speak.

The only reason you haven't been hurt by it is none of us are worth troubling with. We're not sitting on millions. We don't have influence in a corporation or a government agency or an administration.

We are uninteresting. But all that can be known about you is out there. And if you had a super nice home, yes, somebody could file a single piece of paper, take ownership of your home, and then use it as collateral on loans, abscond with the money, and you are stuck.

Have you seen these? Life lock and mortgage protection and the rest of it. There are people who have stuff that are vulnerable to that. And this is a good reason to pray the prayer that you find, Lord, don't give me more than I need.

Don't provide me less than I need. I just want to sit in the corner of the rooftop, eat my meal, and I don't want too much and I don't want too little. And God has blessed most of us in that realm.

We're going to see in Smyrna that if there's exception to that, there are wonderful potentials involved. But surveillance and data collection, the ability to track your behavior, to personalize advertising based on what you bought on some completely different site, your location, your preferences, your private communications. Think about what happens when you see something unusual in or on your body, and you Google to find out, is this a symptom of something that's trapped and tracked? And now people can say, well, they've probably got X or Y or Z. Look at the internet searches related to this, them or someone close to them.

Did they then go on Amazon or somewhere and buy an over-the-counter remedy for this? Did they go to an herbal site or did they go to Perlmutter or a doctor, whoever, and get something that purports to help? All of that stuff is trapped, synthesized, collated, and to a degree that is amazing. This data becomes a tool of control and influence. That's number one, the first horn in my sort of made up list.

I wouldn't die for this, but I think it's of interest. So surveillance and data collection, that's one of the major powers of the internet. Number two, algorithmic influence, I'll call it.

Algorithms determine what you see. So recommendation systems, whether it's on Amazon, people who bought your item also bought, there's an algorithm for that. Your search results conditioned by algorithms, prioritizing certain things, diminishing and suppressing other things.

Something you might actually want to see is down on page nine of your Google search results, and you've got to wade through the first eight pages and read every heading, and that exerts subconscious influence on you. Wow, everybody thinks this. Notice all of these articles, and this one's from the Mayo Clinic, and this one is from Harvard Business School, and whatever it may be, they give you the headline and they give you the source, and they will prioritize things that are likely to influence you based on your past behavior, which is stored.

They know you. They know what is likely to sway you or capture your interest. So number two, algorithmic influence, recommendation systems that shape what you see, what you believe, and what you buy.

They amplify some points of view and silence or suppress others. It isn't objective. It isn't balanced.

It's not fair, and it's not right, but if you're a naive user, you'll never know that you are being subtly nudged in a certain direction, and for all the world, you think that you're being objective and making your own decisions, and you are not. Number three, economic power. This is e-commerce, finance, online commerce giants control huge portions of global trade.

Think Amazon. Think the Chinese equivalent. I forget the name of it.

They've got their own Amazon over there. Number four, digital payment systems can either allow or deny purchasing. Well, we only sell to people that give us a Visa, a MasterCard, or PayPal, or we only allow Venmo, or we only allow this or that or the other, and you are channeled, and sometimes you really want a thing.

You've got to go sign up for one of those services in order to get the thing you want, and influenced. Think of online banking and the convenience, but also think of the digital footprint that all of that leaves. Economic power, number three.

Number four, social connectivity and identity formation. Young people especially create an online identity. They choose which pictures of themselves they post.

There are any number of fake identities that aren't even real people or are complete fakes. Pseudonym isn't just a fake name now. It's a fake picture, fake biography.

Prowlers who are interested in hooking up with people or even predators for children will impersonate another child and then get them to leave the house, and next thing you know, there's a tragedy. This is related. When I was thinking about the mortal wound that is seemingly healed, I don't know if you've heard of this or not.

It's kind of funny, but there is a thing called the dead internet theory. You can look it up on Wikipedia. Dead internet theory.

It's a conspiracy theory that says the internet basically died in 2016, and most of the entities

and people and voices that you hear online are mainly bots and automatically generated content, and it's all manipulated by algorithmic curation. I'm reading from the Wikipedia article here on dead internet theory. You can peruse this, but there are a lot of fake accounts that AI generates their posts on any number of social media platforms, any number of conversations.

There are participants. There are entire threads that are generated, and the argument goes back and forth, and there's anywhere from 19 to 119 people discussing and generating ideas, and all of these people are AI-generated facsimiles. They're not even real, but people who want to go listen to somebody else discuss a thing, and the conversation ends up being weighted toward one particular point of view, and the people that might be closer to a conservative or Christian point of view are outmaneuvered and end up not having answers for these very pointed reposts and replies.

And, oh, wow, I guess they really don't have an answer for that. It's all fake, and there is some truth behind the dead internet theory. I'll let you read on that on your own time.

But notice that this is one of the horns of power. People's identity is formed, and teenagers, and not just a few, have committed suicide because their online identity got crucified by their peers, and some piece of information got leaked out. Some boyfriend posted a picture that this girl should never have let be taken, and so on.

Online identity, but just how people interact, how they connect, how they communicate, how they socialize, is so largely online now. These platforms shape how people connect, how they present themselves, how they build community. And for many, their digital identity is their primary identity, and it won't be long until it's going to be VR goggles, and there's already tens of thousands of people who exist in virtual environments that are 3D, and they walk up to avatars, and they may be some 39-year-old beer gut guy sitting in his mother's basement, but he presents himself as a young, fit collegian, or even as a woman, and he wanders around these virtual environments with this digital identity.

It may or may not have any relationship to reality. So that's number four. Number five, this is a power of the internet.

Again, number one, surveillance and data collection. Number two, algorithmic influence, subtly shaping opinions, voting behavior, support or lack thereof for causes, and so on. Number three, economic power, control over your ability to buy and sell.

Some products now you can only get online. You have to buy online or you can't get it. Number four, social connectivity, identity formation, which we just talked about.

Number five, censorship and deplatforming. This is a tremendous power, and we've seen it exercised over these last few years, the power to silence individuals or groups or movements by disabling their accounts, removing their access, taking down their posts, deleting their presence. Never know they were there.

All of their videos come down, their entire channel evaporates on various platforms. Whoever controls these platforms, go back to those heads, Meta, TikTok, and many of these others, they control speech. Your voice is either heard or not.

Censorship and deplatforming. Number six, propaganda and narrative control. This is another aspect.

You can not only silence the sources, censor them, push them out of sight, but misinformation, state-sponsored messaging, or corporation-sponsored messaging, or heavy wallet brigade messaging, those who have the money to buy influence on these platforms, AI-generated content corrupting and polluting the conversation and can steer entire populations. Think about what's happening in Ukraine or Russia with regard to access to how the war is going. You know that their social media and their access to outside sources, independent sources, is heavily filtered, censored, and manipulated.

Controlling the story, what is the story? That is a form of ruling authority. You're ruling the people when you dictate what they know and what they think about it. Number seven, addiction and psychological grip.

You think especially about young people. Platforms leverage the scientifically measured dopamine hit you get from feeds, from hitting the next thing to click. It is like a drug.

It's addictive. People get on there and can't get off. It's chain smoking.

You go to one thing, and here's a link to, oh, that's interesting. Try this weird old trick to get wrinkles out from under your armpits. There's just endless amounts of things that interest some people.

Again, because they know you, these will be tailored, and they are designed for allure, for seduction. Go back and read Proverbs 2-10 on the crafty harlot. This is the crafty harlot worldwide.

So, leveraging these dopamine loops, I've got your interest. It's similar to binge-watching a series. Oh, they left a cliffhanger.

Let's just watch one more. Without self-control, without discipline, without looking at the clock and saying, I've got to get up in the morning. This is enough TV for one day.

It enslaves your time, and it diverts your focus. Especially for believers, what is our focus? What should be at the heart of our goals, of our values, of our priorities, of our principles, of our moral persuasions? Not what's trending, not what is. Somebody wins a debate, and you think they must be right.

A debate winner seldom, if ever, is the champion of truth. They simply outplayed their opponent. They had one extra chess move that the other guy didn't have.

And many times, the truth gets bum-rushed right out of the room by somebody who talks louder, tosses facts, commits any number of logical fallacies, and impresses the room, but doesn't communicate truth. So, addiction, psychological grip, enslaving your time, maneuvering your focus away from what counts. What is eternity versus what is passing? This world and its forms are passing away.

It's all going to melt with a fervent heat. It's going to roll up like a scroll. But this is a form of power over human will, over human volition, over human choice.

It's rulership. That's number seven. Number eight, global surveillance capitalism.

This is an interesting thought. Tech companies monetize human behavior itself and turn your life into a commodity. And this redefines power in economic terms.

You market to what sells. It used to be the old adage, you know, sex sells, put a pretty girl on your ad, and Chesterfields will sell better as cigarettes. But now it's more subtle.

The internet and AI massaging data from the internet hooks into many human patterns of behavior and manipulates them. And this is on a global scale. Number nine, cyber warfare hacking.

The ability to cripple infrastructure, spread chaos, steal secrets via the internet. Digital warfare has become as big a reality as military warfare. You can lose a war before you ever get to fire a shot or call up the troops.

When your essential national technological and military secrets are stolen. And number 10, cultural domination. Some of these are sort of aspects of the same thing, you know, identity and psychological grip, and some of these overlap, but they have a center that is unique.

Cultural domination, the internet spreads language, memes, ideologies, and values worldwide. It crosses borders, it crosses group boundaries, crosses politics, language, memes, ideologies, and values spread across borders. It standardizes an internet culture beyond Christian culture or family culture or national culture.

And it eats away at distinctiveness and creates sort of a one world sense of belonging. And that's dangerous because love not the world or the things that are in the world, the internet exists to make you do that exact thing. So each of these horns, you can think of as a channel of power that will be used by this beast to dominate, to exert ruling authority over peoples and nations, tribes, and tongues.

And there are both visible and invisible components here. Social and economic control, that's pretty obvious, you get to the mark and the name and so on. And others are psychological, cultural, they're invisible because you can't see the algorithm that is conditioning what you see, what you hear, and ultimately what you believe.

When you're dependent on these systems for your truth, you worship at the altar of what comes across the phone. So if you want to think about detail here, notice that there are 10 horns, but three of them get displaced. And when we get to this point in Revelation, we'll see it.

But there's a horn that comes up and displaces three of the other horns. And we'll look at that when the time comes. But three of these notions that I just mentioned out of the 10 have pre-existed.

And when this little horn comes up and displaces the three horns, what are the three things that could be displaced? Economic power used to be exercised through markets, banks, and brick-and-mortar retail. And gatekeeping in the economic realm was in the hands of governments, local stores, and financial institutions, your local bank, your family bank, your state bank. Now the internet dominates commerce.

You got Amazon, Alibaba is the one I couldn't think of, PayPal, digital banking systems mediate a huge share of buying, selling, and even employment. We got a Googleplex over here in Pryor. Without internet access, economic participation can be woefully limited, and it's only going to get worse or better depending on your point of view.

Secondly, this would be a horn that could be uprooted and displaced. Propaganda and narrative control. Who tells the story? Formerly, governments, newspapers, radio, TV controlled mass messaging, even books.

People would write nonfiction books about the coming world crisis, late great planet earth, Satan is alive and well, things like that. The political power often depended on how well you mastered these traditional broadcast media. It's well known that Kennedy appears to have won the 1960 presidential election because Richard Nixon looked bad on TV.

He was sweaty and pale, John Kennedy was calm and collected, and wide swaths of people were impressed. But now the internet is the central battlefield of ideas. Social media, things go viral, memes, tropes, videos, and content creators are now a thing.

Who's this person that's being interviewed on streaming TV? Well, they're a content creator. What is that? That means they sit in front of a microphone on a webcam and talk and interview others and express ideas. Well, that used to be the province of journalists and authors and people that had some credentials for being able to think and express valid truths about what's going on.

Now, any old body can do so. That's the chief vehicle for ideas and propaganda. Not just top-down, but bottom-up influencers, bots, and fake news networks exist now in plethora, droves, cornucopia, heaps, and mounds, and great dead seas.

It's not ink anymore. It's video. It's media.

It's posts on social media. Number three, what has happened traditionally in the past that

would be uprooted by the new little horn? Some of these still have traction. Mainstream media is still a thing, as you know.

There are still brick-and-mortar stores and local economies. But look how easily when the little horn appears, you can say, no more mom and pop, no more locally-owned gas stations, or whatever else. No more newspapers and radio and TV.

It's all internet. It's all going to happen in a way that we can monitor and control. Economics and propaganda, it's internet or nothing.

You have a digital ID, or you don't exist. You're online, or you can't sell. You're online, or you can't buy.

It's just a step away. You can see the convergence. We're not there yet.

The Antichrist, quote-unquote, has not arrived. But you can see, in the same way that Israel became a nation in 1948, was a critical step forward in the alignment you see in end-time prophecy. These things, as never before, unprecedented hockey-stick graph of conformity with what the Bible says about end times.

And Jesus said, you will see all these things, but the end is not yet. That applies to what we're talking about tonight. We see these things happening, but the end is not yet.

There are still some things to come. But the third of these horns that I think will be displaced, surveillance and data collection. Surveillance used to be physical.

You had wiretaps. You had photos. You had surveillance by flat-footed policemen and FBI agents and CIA guys going and putting a stethoscope to the door and so on.

They would go through files. They would go through tax records. They would process mounds of paperwork.

It was very labor-intensive, limited in scope. You had to have a warrant before you could do this, that, and the other. What warrant do you need to get on the internet and hack into accounts? This is the stuff of TV and movies today.

You've got some nerd and as a deus ex machina to move the plot forward, they're able to get into anything and everything. They hack government. They hack NASA.

They hack anything they want to. They get in and information. There is a grain of truth in that.

There are people, and they hired some of them, to go up to DOGE, the Department of Government Efficiency, and get into things that they needed to get into to uncover and expose waste, fraud, and abuse. One of them got beat up on the street not too long ago. Surveillance and data collection used to be really physical.

They even had little audio things where they could aim it at a pane of glass. People talking inside, the vibrations would be picked up in the glass, and their dish would pick that up. They could listen at great distances to what was being said in a room because of picking up those vibrations of panes of glass.

Now, the internet enables surveillance at an unimaginable scale. It's automated. Think drones flying around, looking here, recording there.

You don't need a person. Drones communicate how? Over Wi-Fi, over the internet. That information is sent elsewhere and processed.

Every click, every search, every location ping, every message that is exchanged can be tracked, stored, analyzed, monetized by states, corporations, interested parties of all stripes, including hackers and nefarious types. So, this is all in place. I'm just suggesting that nothing wrong with having accounts, using the internet, buying from Amazon.

It's all fine. Just be aware. There is a turning point.

When it turns to compulsory participation, compulsory agreement to use this and only this, that's worship. There is one and only one God that we worship. And if someone says, no, there is another God, you can no longer worship that God.

You've got to worship this one. And no Christians allowed. If that were to happen, and our tribulational timing is off, which it's not, but if it were, and somebody said, you have to disavow your Christianity to use this system, and you must use this system, or you're going to starve, and you'll be unemployed, and you'll be persona non grata.

You have no privileges, no rights. You can't buy anything. You can't get gas.

You can't drive. You can't get a license. You can't work.

People were getting excited because they have just mandated Kier, I can't think of his last name, the Prime Minister of Britain, just announced that digital ID is required in Britain to work. And everybody said, mark of the beast. It's not the mark of the beast, but it is the kind of thing that will be used when the beast arrives.

And it will be compulsory, and it will be an either or choice. This is why God distinguishes between those who take the mark and those who don't in terms of whether you are delivered or you are destroyed by God. We don't have to choose between our Christianity and our use of these things now.

There will come a day when the saints will have to choose. And that's a day we'll be looking at as we continue our study next time of the church at Smyrna. But the conclusion, the application of tonight's foray into Revelation 13 is relax, chillax, nothing wrong with the internet.

In the same way, there's nothing wrong with a you misuse it for nefarious purposes. You break

the law with it. You take someone's life with it.

You use it in a wrongful way. It's not the implement's fault. It isn't that we have an internet or that we have artificial intelligence.

It is going to be the intentional, targeted misuse of those things to deprive people of their liberty, of their opportunity to worship God, of their life as believers during the tribulation. When it becomes compulsory and you don't have a choice, that's the time to watch out. When it requires fealty loyalty worship to the exclusion of worshiping God, watch out.

When it has a death penalty for noncompliance, watch out. We're nowhere near that at this point, but isn't it exciting to see the infrastructure falling into place, to see the environment and the opportunity and early test cases. Can we really use it to do this? Satan is behind it.

Doesn't mean every use is wrong. AI's got a lot of positive potential. The internet has a lot of positive potential.

Again, we worship together thanks to the internet. It can be used for good. It can be used for ill, but there will come a time when things change.

Not to worry now. They had the same kind of kerfuffle when credit cards came out. It's got a magnetic stripe.

It's got my information. That was a false alarm. Many false alarms.

Keep an eye on the sky. Keep an eye on Turkey. Keep an eye on Mr. Erdogan.

Keep an eye on this situation unfolding in the Middle East. It's exciting and it's fun. We don't worry.

We praise God for his grace in holding us in his hands and ensuring that we are going to have a ringside seat to the power and the glory of God. This is why the book of Revelation leads with, after the letters to the churches, what do you have in chapter four and chapter five? It is the glorious throne and presence of God. It is unnumbered throngs singing his praises.

That's our opportunity. That's our identity. That's our certainty.

That's what we have in Christ. Not to worry. Fun to watch.

We'll pick up our studies in the book of Revelation again this coming Sunday. Let's go to the Lord in our closing prayer. Father, thank you for the salvation that we enjoy even in this present evil age, the security we have in Christ, the confidence we have, your power in our midst through your spirit and through your word.

And as we have those words and keep them, we enjoy the presence not only of your spirit, but of the Lord Jesus, our Savior, and your own enormously comforting and encouraging presence.

We thank you for that as our Heavenly Father. We thank you for the revelation of these truths in your word.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will minister them to our hearts. May we shine as those who draw others to you through the Lord Jesus by our confidence and our hope. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.