

The Whole Earth

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When we think of the king or the kingdom commonly known as "the Beast," our minds bring up various impressions of the final, anti-God and anti-Christ power that will be given authority for 42 months (Revelation 13:5). Perhaps what comes to mind are the artistic depictions used on the old *World Tomorrow* telecast, which portrayed a conglomeration of characteristics and body parts of multiple animals. The most prominent feature was the head of something like a triceratops but which had ten horns instead of three.

Whatever our exact mental image, this end-time king and kingdom will be intensely militaristic, a merciless, crushing force that serves only its own violent interests. It will be empowered by the great dragon, and because of this, it will be particularly focused on God's people—the physical and spiritual Israelites. The Beast is prophesied to be allowed "to make war with the saints and to overcome them" (Revelation 13:7). A fearsome and terrible entity, its violent reign lurks in the background of verses like Matthew 24:21: ". . . then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be."

We often unconsciously insert another description of the Beast: Because of its descriptions in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13, we usually refer to the Beast as a "world-ruling empire." Yet, because of the human nature that remains within us, a potential pitfall for us appears in this: What if a world-ruling empire is not on the horizon? We know that world conditions are bad and getting worse, yet no world-ruling empire seems close to coming in existence. No current nation appears capable of dominating the globe.

The closest nation to a world-ruling empire right now is the United States, yet it is more interested in trade than in demolishing the world's nations—not to mention, as one of the foremost Israelitish nations, it is prophesied to go through Jacob's Trouble (Jeremiah 30:7). Not only is the U.S. in decline, but it also seems to be a perfect manifestation of Babylon the Great, the woman whom the Beast hates and will burn with fire (Revelation 17:5, 16).

We do not yet see a king or kingdom rising up to threaten the whole earth. The danger, then, is that in the absence of an obvious world-ruling empire, we may think that we have more time. However, the parables teach that, if we start thinking that "our Master delays His coming," there is a temptation to let down, become distracted, and drift away.

Just what is the scope or the breadth of the end-time Beast's dominion? Is it truly global? Will every last nation come under its sway before the end? Numerous scriptures contain descriptions of the Beast, but they also allow for something that may be unexpected: The kingdom of the Beast does *not* have to stretch over the entire globe. If we are waiting for a world-ruling empire to arise before we begin to seek God earnestly, we may be taken by surprise.

Defining "the World"

In Daniel 7:23, an angel explains to Daniel the infamous fourth beast in his vision: "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all other kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, trample it and break it in pieces.'"

This fourth beast—the one that struck the most terror in Daniel's heart—is described as devouring *the whole earth*, trampling it, and breaking it into pieces. The Aramaic phrase translated as "the whole earth" is comprised of two words: *kol* (Strong's #3606) and *'ara'* (Strong's #772). Considering the basic meaning of these two Aramaic words, "the whole earth" is a correct literal translation. However, this same word-combination appears in a number of other places, and it does not consistently mean the entirety of the globe or even the entirety of the civilized world.

We can see this in Daniel's explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream: "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours; then another, a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over *all the earth*" (Daniel 2:39, emphasis ours throughout). We understand this third kingdom to be the empire of Greece under Alexander the Great. His empire stretched from the Ionian Sea to the Himalayas, and included Anatolia, Syria, Phoenicia, Judea, Egypt, and Mesopotamia. Some would say that Alexander conquered the "known world," but this is a misnomer. Every part of the world is known to those living in it, and there were peoples living in essentially every part of the world at this time.

During Alexander's time, substantial civilizations existed in the rest of Europe, and in particular, the descendants of Israel had settled there. Unconquered tribes lived throughout Africa, Arabia, Tibet, Mongolia, not to mention the civilizations in the Americas—all were completely untroubled by Alexander. Also, ancient cultures inhabited India, the South Pacific, and the Far East. The third kingdom in Nebuchadnezzar's vision encompassed the Middle East and the Near East, but it did not rule over "all the earth," as most English-speakers would interpret the phrase. It was a "world-ruling" kingdom only for a specifically defined "world."

Therefore, if we are on the lookout for a kingdom that can devour "the whole earth," we have to understand that the scope of that Aramaic phrase can be significantly limited, and in most cases, it is. This phrase is also found in Daniel 4:1, 11, 20, where it describes the scope of Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom (which was also not truly global), and in Daniel 6:25, where King Darius writes "to all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth"—yet Darius did not have a global audience.

The one place where the phrase "the whole earth" actually does imply the entire planet is Daniel 2:35, where "the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled *the whole earth*." This great mountain represents Jesus Christ's rule on earth, which will certainly be a world-ruling Kingdom in the fullest and truest sense of the word (see Revelation 11:15).

There is an equivalent Hebrew phrase to the above Aramaic one, and it can also be used idiomatically. For example, in Daniel 8:5—in the book's Hebrew portion—the prophet writes, "And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of *the whole earth* ." This male goat also refers to Alexander, coming eastward to defeat the Medo-Persian Empire. His impressive empire covered roughly two million square miles, but it is only a fraction of the 57 million square miles of land on planet Earth.

A similar description is found in Ezra 1:2, where the Persian king Cyrus makes a proclamation after God stirred up his spirit. The first thing Cyrus says is, "The Lord God of heaven has given me *all the kingdoms of the earth*. . . ." A map of the nations at the time, however, would show that Cyrus did not rule "all the kingdoms of the earth," as we would generally interpret it. Thus, what Daniel, Cyrus, the interpreting angel, and others considered to be "the whole earth" or "all the earth" or "all the kingdoms of the earth" was often substantially smaller than what those phrases mean to us.

From the biblical usage of these Aramaic and Hebrew phrases, we can summarize that the "whole earth" and "all the earth" do not refer to all parts of the inhabited world. Instead, they typically refer to the entire territory of the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa that in any way relates to the land given to Israel—the land where God Himself made a garden, and the land He promised to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 13:14-17; 15:18-19; 17:8; 26:3-4; 28:4, 13-15; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24; Exodus 6:8). This is the region that God and His Word are most focused on.

So, while "the whole earth" or "all the earth" can at times mean the entire globe (such as the scope of the great Flood), they do not have to. The scale of the end-time Beast's rule could be localized to the region around the Promised Land, as were the Gentile powers that preceded it.

Every Tribe, Tongue, and Nation

The book of Revelation contains another well-known depiction of the Beast:

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (Revelation 13:7-8)

In the phrase, "all who dwell on the earth," the Greek word translated as "earth," *ge* (Strong's #1093), is just like the Aramaic and Hebrew words for "earth." It, too, is used for a whole range of geographic areas, thus it is variously translated as "world," "country," "ground," or "land." In some places, it describes the whole globe, but elsewhere it refers to something as small as the land of Judah or the land of Zebulun—not a very big area at all. While it is certainly not wrong for translators to render this as "all who dwell on the earth," it is just as correct to render it as "all who dwell in the land," indicating a specific land—like the Promised Land or perhaps a particular region.

Verse 7 says that the Beast is given authority "over every tribe, tongue, and nation," which would seem to indicate that it will have global authority. However, the Babylonian Empire is described in exactly the same terms:

O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father a kingdom and majesty, glory and honor. And because of the majesty that He gave him, *all peoples, nations, and languages* trembled and feared before him. (Daniel 5:18-19)

In describing Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom, Daniel writes that all *peoples* (meaning *kindreds* or *tribes*), all *nations*, and all *languages* trembled and feared before him. These are the same three groupings given in Revelation 13:7: "every tribe, tongue, and nation." Yet, as with Alexander's realm,

Nebuchadnezzar's did not extend to all ethnic groups, languages, and nations that then existed on earth. The world that he ruled, which trembled before him, was a limited one, yet it included the Promised Land.

In Revelation 13:11-17, John describes "another beast coming up out of the earth." This one has "two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon." He "exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence" (Revelation 13:12), indicating that his authority is the same as the first beast's. If the first beast's authority is global, so is the second beast's; if the first beast's authority is more localized to the environs of the Near East, Middle East, and North Africa, then the second beast's authority is the same.

In the same verse, the second beast "causes *the earth and those who dwell in it* to worship the first beast." The Greek word translated "earth" is the same one used in verse 8. It could mean "the world," "the country," or "the land." So what is the scope of the second beast's authority?

When it comes to imposing the Mark of the Beast, Revelation 13:16 seems to ascribe universal authority to him: "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads." These three pairs of opposing classifications of people seem to include every person on the planet. However, they have to be seen within the context of his authority, rather than as a definition of his authority. That is, he will impose the Mark across all social, economic, and political strata within the realm of the Beast—there will be no exceptions because someone is rich or has high rank in the Beast's government. The Mark will be universal for those over whom the Beast rules.

Small and Great

Acts 26:22 contains another example of this phraseology. Paul says he is "witnessing both to *small and great*." This does not mean that he was witnessing to all people on earth but to the "small and great" who were in his audience. Revelation 19:17-18 uses the same rhetorical device to describe the aftermath of the war between the returning Messiah and the Beast:

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and *the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great*."

Will the birds devour the flesh of every person on the planet? Again, these classifications of people (free and slave, small and great) describe universality *within an already-defined grouping*—in this case, the people who "gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army" (Revelation 19:19).

Will the Mark of the Beast be a truly global phenomenon, imposed on every man, woman, and child on earth? If so, the biblical math does not add up! Consider: The second beast "causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark" (Revelation 13:16). However, in Revelation 14:9-11, an angel proclaims that anyone receiving the mark

shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out *full strength* into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence

of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

If every person (aside from the saints) receives the mark, then every person (aside from the saints) will die at Christ's return! Yet, numerous other prophecies show that not all nations will be destroyed at His coming; instead, all nations will be *ruled* by Him. Hence, a substantial number of people—enough to make up nations—will not "drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out *full strength* into the cup of His indignation" because they did receive the Mark of the Beast. Thus, the Mark is not imposed on every person because the second beast is not given the power to impose it on every person. Rather, he causes all *within the rule of the Beast* to receive it.

A final indicator of the scope of the Beast's kingdom can be found in Daniel 11:21-45, which describes the movements and conquests of the final "king of the north," the figure also represented by the "little horn" (Daniel 8:9, 23-25), whom we understand to be the end-time Beast. This passage shows that the King of the North conquers and rules in the same general region ruled by Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, and Alexander, kings that each ruled "the whole earth." The King of the North arrogantly conquers—but not every nation on the globe. In Daniel 11, he never seems to get very far from the Promised Land. The scope of his empire there seems to be less than what we would consider to be "the whole earth."

In summary, the various descriptions of the end-time Beast's empire have a range in the way they are used. While they can describe a dominion that is truly worldwide in scope, they can also just as easily describe one that is geographically much smaller, though no less fearsome and terrible for those people in its path. We do not need to wait for a leader to arise who can bring the entire globe under his heel. These prophecies can be fulfilled even without global domination. The language that is used allows for a global kingdom as well as a more limited one, but either way, the Beast's focus will be the region around the Promised Land. As we watch the world turn through this present axial period, we should allow for such a range as well.