

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 13

¹And he stood upon the sand of the sea, and I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. ²And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. ³One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. ⁴And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

⁵And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. ⁷Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

¹¹Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹²It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. ¹⁵And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. ¹⁸This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666. [ESV]

Notes

Revelation 13:1

¹*And he stood upon the sand of the sea, and I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.*

“*And he stood upon the sand of the sea,*” – The best Greek manuscripts have this included, and some translations (like the English Standard Version) have placed it at the end of the previous chapter. It is referring to the dragon. Some manuscripts have this as “and I stood upon ...”

“**sand**” – This is the Greek word *ammon*, which refers to sand that you would find on the beach. Sand is often used as an image of an innumerable multitude, as in the following:

But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.' (**Genesis 32:12**) [ESV]

“**beast**” – This is the Greek word *thērion*, which refers to “a wild, vicious or venomous animal.” In this case it is a description of a person (and his kingdom) having these beastly characteristics.

“**rising out of the sea**” – There is not universal agreement as to what the sea represents. In prophetic literature the sea is often a representation of Gentile nations whereas the land is representative of Israel. For this reason, some claim that this beast arises out of the nations of the world.

Compare the description of this beast with that of the dragon given in the chapter twelve:

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. (**Revelation 12:3**) [ESV]

Both descriptions describe seven heads and ten horns. The current verse describes ten diadems (*diadema* = a crown of royalty) where the vision of the dragon described only seven. But the current verse describes a “beast” not a “dragon.” Though both are descriptions of animals, most conservative commentators regard the dragon in Revelation 12 as a representation of Satan whereas the current description is of the final world leader (the Antichrist) and his kingdom.

Also, compare this with the description given by Daniel the prophet:

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. (**Daniel 7:7, 8**) [ESV]

Later in the same chapter of Daniel, he says:

I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 'These four great

beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.' "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom. "Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. **(Daniel 7:16-25)** [ESV]

Also, notice what Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar as he interpreted the dream that the king had:

"You saw, O king, and behold, a great image. This image, mighty and of exceeding brightness, stood before you, and its appearance was frightening. The head of this image was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its middle and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

"This was the dream. Now we will tell the king its interpretation. You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the might, and the glory, and into whose hand he has given, wherever they dwell, the children of man, the beasts of the field, and the birds of the heavens, making you rule over them all--you are the head of gold. Another kingdom inferior to you shall arise after you, and yet a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth. And there shall be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron, because iron breaks to pieces and shatters all things. And like iron that crushes, it shall break and crush all these. And as you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, it shall be a divided kingdom, but some of the firmness of iron shall be in it, just as you saw iron mixed with the soft clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly iron and partly clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly brittle. As you saw the iron mixed with soft clay, so they will mix with one another in marriage, but they will not hold together, just as iron does not mix with clay. **(Daniel 2:31-43)** [ESV]

The seven heads of this beast are likely a reference to the seven nations that make up this national confederacy after the three kingdoms had been subdued by the "little horn." The ten

horns of this beast indicate the ten kings who made up the original confederacy as evidenced by the ten crowns on the horns.

This beastly image is a vision of the coming world ruler (who John refers to as “antichrist” in his epistles) and of his kingdom. Other references to this person include: **Daniel 7:8** (little horn); **Daniel 7:19-28**; **Daniel 8:23-25** (fierce king); **Daniel 9:26-27** (the prince who is to come); **Daniel 11:36-45**; **2 Thessalonians 2:3-10** (the man of sin and the lawless one); **I John 2:18** (antichrist).

“**blasphemous names on its heads**” – It appears that the name that all these political leaders will rule under is one that takes on the name or position of God. Perhaps it will even be called The Kingdom of God. The Greek syntax indicates that each head has a name. So it is possible that each king will have a different blasphemous name. Compare this to the description of the beast that the harlot sits on in chapter 17:

And he carried me away into a desert by the Spirit. And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet-colored beast, filled with names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.
(**Revelation 17:3**)

This passage indicates many names of blasphemy.

Revelation 13: 2

²And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority.

The three beastly characteristics are the same as Daniel used to describe the first three beasts (the kingdoms of Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece) in the following:

The first was like a lion and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold, another beast, a second one, like a bear. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.' After this I looked, and behold, another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back. And the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it. (**Daniel 7:4-6**) [ESV]

“**like a leopard**” – speed and viciousness – This is a description of the kingdom of Alexander the Great. After the death of Alexander, his kingdom was divided into four regions ruled over by four of Alexander’s generals: Asia, ruled by Antigonus, Egypt, ruled by Ptolemy, Syria, ruled by Seleucus, and Macedonia (Greece), ruled by Cassander.

“**feet were like a bear's**” – strength and stability – This is a description of the Medo-Persian kingdom.

“**a lion's mouth**” – frightening, fierce, and devouring – This is a description of the Persian kingdom.

John’s description of the beast here in revelation uses the prominent characteristics of these three kingdoms (given in reverse order to Daniel’s prophecy, perhaps because he was looking back in time) as characteristics of the Beast’s kingdom:

“**to it the dragon gave his power, and his throne, and great authority**”- The source of the Beast’s greatness is Satan, himself.

Revelation 13:3

³**One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast.**

“**one of his heads**” – The head should be interpreted as both the ruler and the nation that he rules. Some have claimed that it refers to the kingdom only, however the following verses make it clear that the head is the beast and he is a person.

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given **it** over every tribe and people and language and nation, (**Revelation 13:7**) [ESV]

It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. (**Rev 13:12**) [ESV]

and by the signs that **it** is allowed to work in the presence of the beast **it** deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. (**Rev 13:14**) [ESV]

they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when **he** does come **he** must remain only a little while. (**Rev 17:10**) [ESV]

The words translated “it” in the above verses, whether pronouns or verbs are not specific as to gender and can be interpreted as either neuter (it) or masculine (he).

“**seemed to have a mortal wound**” – A literal translation of this is “as if it had been wounded unto death” The use of simile, “as if,” seems to indicate that the beast was not really killed. Notice also that **Revelation 13:14** only says he was “wounded” and not killed. Also **Revelation 13:12** and the current verse both refer simply to a “mortal wound.” Additionally, **2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10** indicates that this one is a deceiver like the dragon who empowers him. This deception may include his apparent resurrection.

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. (**2Thessalonians 2:9, 10**) [ESV]

“**the whole earth marveled**” – Would all the world really marvel at the beast if it was simply a revived Roman Empire?

Revelation 13:4

⁴**And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"**

Satanic worship along with worship of the beast will be world-wide. Further evidence of this worship of the beast is given us by the Apostle Paul:

Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that

he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.
(**2Thessalonians 2:3, 4**) [ESV]

“**Who is like the beast**” – This is similar to an expression that is used of God throughout the Old Testament:

Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? (**Exodus 15:11**) [ESV]

Also see **Psalms 35:11; 113:15; Isaiah 40:18, 25; 46:5; Jeremiah 49:19; Micah 7:18.**

Revelation 13:5, 6

⁵And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. ⁶It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

“**and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months.**” – The blasphemous mouth and authority that the beast will possess will be given to him by God to fulfill His purposes. His reign as the one worshipped will be during the second half of Daniel’s seventh week (the Great Tribulation) commencing with his own exaltation (**2 Thessalonians 2:4**). This exaltation of the beast is reminiscent of Satan’s blasphemous claim:

You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'
(**Isaiah 14:13, 14**) [ESV]

Daniel also speaks of the arrogant and blasphemous character of the beast (**Daniel 7:8, 11; 7:25; 11:36**).

“**blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.**” – The beast, as Satan’s mouthpiece, will not be content to simply blaspheme God, but His name (representing all that God is), His tabernacle (God’s abode), and those who “tabernacle” in heaven (God’s people dwelling with Him).

Revelation 13:7

⁷Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation,

“**Also it was allowed to make war**” – Once again, the sovereignty of God is declared. Even with the power of Satan behind him, the Antichrist cannot make war against the saints of God without God’s specific permission

“**the saints**” – This is from the Greek words *tōn hagiōn*, meaning “the holy ones” or “the sanctified ones.” There are some who claim that this means that the church will be present during the tribulation. However, the Greek term refers to anyone whom God has “set apart.”

“**conquer**” – From the Greek *nikaō*, meaning “to be victorious.” Not only will the beast make war against Jews and faithful believers during this terrible time, but he will be victorious over them. This does not mean that he will be able to destroy their faith, but he given authority to kill them. Compare:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (**Revelation 7:9-14**) [ESV]

As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, (**Daniel 7:21**)

He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. (**Daniel 7:25**)

“**authority**” – From the Greek word *exousia*, meaning “permission, “power,” or “authority.” God will also grant the Antichrist to have ruling authority over every tribe, language, and nation. He will be the first true whole-world ruler.

Revelation 13:8

⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

“**All who dwell on the earth**” – This does not include the saints who are on the earth. The expression “**who dwell**” is from the Greek *katoikountes*, meaning “those who reside in a permanent dwelling place.” In contrast to this, saints are said to be *skēnountas*, meaning “tenting” or “encamping” on the earth. All saints, whether Old Testament, church age, tribulation, or millennial, are said to be “strangers and sojourners on the earth.” As the words of the Hymn say, “This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through.”

“**whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life**” – All of the permanent earth dwellers will worship the beast. They are again distinguished from the saved saints by the fact that their names are not written in the Lamb’s Book of Life.

“**foundation**” – From the Greek *katabolēs*, meaning “to throw down,” as a foundation is laid down before the rest of a building is constructed on top of it. This refers to the beginning of time when God created the earth.

Revelation 13:9, 10

⁹If anyone has an ear, let him hear: ¹⁰If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

“**let him hear**” – From the Greek *akousatō*, which is in the imperative mood meaning “listen!” In other words, “Anyone willing to hear, listen!”

“**If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes**” – This is another phrase that is slightly different based on which Greek text it is translated from. It is probably a proverbial expression meaning that whoever is destined for captivity will go into captivity and whoever fights against captivity will be killed. Based on verse nine, this may be a message to the end-time saints who will understand it at that time. It may turn out, in fact, that those who are taken captive will survive this time of tribulation while those who fight it will die.

“**Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.**” – The word translated “endurance” is *hupomonē*, which literally means “to remain under.” By interpretation it means “perseverance.” This is another indication that this proverbial expression is telling the saints at the end of the tribulation not to fight captivity for therein will they be able to persevere. This may be what our Lord was referring to in Matthew 24 as he talked about the tribulation period, where he said:

But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (**Matthew 24:13**) [ESV]

Revelation 13:11

¹¹Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

“**another beast**” – The word “another” is *allos*, meaning “another of the same kind” so this second beast also represents a person like the first beast did. Also note that in **Revelation 19:20** both the first beast and “**the false prophet**” are thrown alive into the lake of fire. It is evident from this chapter and **Revelation 19:20** that this second beast is the “**false prophet**.”

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. (**Revelation 19:20**) [ESV]

“**rising out of the earth**” – The symbol of the earth has been much debated for years. If the symbolism of the first beast coming out of the sea indicated that he will arise from the Gentile nations, then it is thought by some that the second beast will come from the Jewish nation which is often associated with the earth in Biblical writing. This, however, is educated speculation and we don’t really know the significance of the beasts rising up out of the sea and out of the earth.

“**It had two horns like a lamb**” – Literally “it had two horns the same as a little lambkin” Much has been made of this second beast being like a lamb, hence gentler than the first beast. However the text does not say that he appears like a lamb simply that he has two horns “**the same as a little lambkin.**” Here, as in previous references to a lamb in the book of Revelation it is a reference to a “**little lambkin.**” When a male lamb is born the horn buds are present and visible but merely appearing as bumps. Since horns are a symbol of power and authority, this second beast has little power or authority of his own.

“**and it spoke like a dragon.**” – Though this second beast has little power of his own he speaks with great power and ferocity like a dragon.

Revelation 13:12

¹²**It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed.**

“**exercises all the authority of the first beast**” – Since this beast has very little authority and power of his own he uses the power of the first beast to accomplish his means. In fact, in the Greek, the emphasis is on “the authority of the first beast.”

“**makes ... worship the first beast**” – The main purpose of the false prophet is to promote the first beast and to cause the entire world to worship the first beast. He will apparently be a supreme marketer and spinmeister, whose sole responsibility is to cause praise and worship to be given to the first beast.

“**whose mortal wound was healed.**” – Literally “whose wound of death was healed.” Whether or not this is a reference to a resurrection is debatable. Notice, however, that this verse does not say that the second beast is the one who heals the wound of the first beast.

Revelation 13:13, 14

¹³**It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,** ¹⁴**and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.**

“**performs great signs**” – He will be able to perform great signs including making fire come down from heaven to the earth. The verb “performs” is in the present tense implying current continuous action. The word translated “makes” is also present tense. Apparently, the performing of great signs, including bringing fire down from heaven, is something that the false prophet does repeatedly. This is the method which he uses to deceive the people.

Notice that Christ told His disciples about false christs and false prophets who would come during the end times:

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (**Matthew 24:24**) [ESV]

Also, notice what Paul taught in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, (**2 Thessalonians 2:9**) [ESV]

“**telling them to make an image for the beast**” – The “permanent earth dwellers” will be ordered to make an image of the beast.

“**that was wounded**” – The word translated “that” is *hos*, which is a masculine pronoun. So, this should read, “**who was wounded.**” This is another indication that the beast is a person, not a nation or political organization.

“**that was wounded by the sword and yet lived**” – Literally this reads, “**him having (present tense) the wound of the sword and lived.**” This is another indication that the head of the beast which was wounded with a deadly wound is actually a person since he still has the deadly wound.

Revelation 13:15

¹⁵And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

The false prophet will be able to give breath (spirit) to the idol so that it will also talk. Back in verse 12 we were told that the false prophet causes the entire world to worship the beast. Now he will cause them to also worship this image or be put to death.

Revelation 13:16, 17

¹⁶Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, ¹⁷so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.

As part of the beast and beast image worship, the false prophet will cause all the earth dwellers to receive a mark. The word “mark” is *charagma*, which according to *The Complete Word Study Dictionary* is “an engraving, something graven or sculptured, an impression, mark or symbol.” This mark is to be “upon” the right hand or the forehead. “forehead” is *metōpōn*, from *meta*, meaning “between or among” and *ōps*, meaning “eyes.” The Greek word for doing a carving is *charactēr*.

Notice that the prohibition against buying or selling is to those who do not have “the mark” **or** “the name of the beast” **or** “the number of his name.”

This “mark” (*charagma*) is different than the “seal” (*sphragis*) that marked the 144,000 in **Revelation 7:3**. Apparently, this is Satan’s attempt to mark anyone not having the seal of God, thus claiming them as his own, not God’s. There is nothing to indicate that the seal of God is visible to any but spirit beings whereas the mark of the beast is apparently visible to all who look.

Revelation 13:18

¹⁸This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

This seems to be a message to those who are believers during the time of the tribulation informing them what the number of the beast is. The one with understanding is supposed to “calculate” the number. The word “calculate” is a form of *psēphidzō*, which is from *psēphos*, meaning “a small stone or pebble used primarily by Greeks and Egyptians in their calculations.” Hence, it appears that calculating means to add up the number of the beast. There has been much speculation over the years as to what this means. Apparently, those who live during this time will understand how to calculate the number and will recognize who this person is.

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Supplementary Information

The Greek Numbering system

Starting in the 4th century BC, a quasi-decimal alphabetic numbering system was developed, sometimes called the Ionic numeral system. Each unit (1, 2, ..., 9) was assigned a separate letter, each tens (10, 20, ..., 90) a separate letter, and each hundreds (100, 200, ..., 900) a separate letter. This requires 27 letters, so the 24-letter Greek alphabet was extended by using three obsolete letters: digamma *F*, (also used are stigma ζ or, in modern Greek, στ) for 6, qoppa (Ϟ) for 90, and sampi (Ϸ) for 900. To distinguish numerals from letters they are followed by the keraia, from the Greek word *κεραία* meaning “a yard,” a symbol similar to an acute sign (').

This alphabetic system operates on the additive principle in which the numeric values of the letters are added together to form the total. For example, 241 is represented as *σμα'* (200 + 40 + 1).

To represent numbers from 1,000 to 999,999 the same letters are reused to serve as thousands, tens of thousands, and hundreds of thousands. A "left keraia" (Ϟ) is put in front of thousands to distinguish them from the standard use. For example, 2006 is represented as *Ϟβζ'* (2000 + 6).

Here is a table showing numerical values of Koinē Greek

Letter (upper and lower case)	Value	Letter (upper and lower case)	Value	Letter (upper and lower case)	Value
A α	1	I ι	10	P ρ	100
B β	2	K κ	20	Σ σ	200
Γ γ	3	Λ λ	30	T τ	300
Δ δ	4	M μ	40	Υ υ	400
E ε	5	N ν	50	Φ φ	500
<i>F</i> or ζ or στ	6	Ξ ξ	60	X χ	600
Z ζ	7	O ο	70	Ψ ψ	700
H η	8	Π π	80	Ω ω	800
Θ θ	9	Ϟ Ϟ'	90	Ϸ Ϸ'	900