

The Book of Revelation

Week #13 – The Dragon Makes War against the Woman's Offspring

I. THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

A. Review of Chap 12:1-12

Chapters 12 -14 of Revelation are an interlude between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls.

This section occupies the centre of the book of Revelation and introduces us to the leading figures in the eschatological fight between God and his adversary, the devil. These figures are:

1. the Woman;
2. the Dragon;
3. the Male Child;
4. Michael the archangel;
5. the Sea Beast;
6. the Land Beast; and
7. The Lamb.

These are the contenders in the battles which mark the final confrontation between God and his adversary, the devil.

John uses three portents to describe the leading figures involved:

- a. The first is the Woman and her offspring, including the Messiah [12:1-2];
- b. the second is the Dragon, who will transfer his power to the beasts [13:3];
- c. the third is the seven angels with the seven bowls [15:1].

Revelation describes three successive confrontations with the dragon, not necessarily in chronological order. The dragon confronts in turn;

1. The Messiah to whom the Woman gives birth [12:1-6].
2. St. Michael and his angels [12:7-12];
3. The Woman and the rest of her offspring [12:13-17].

II. THE DRAGON AND THE WOMAN'S OFFSPRING

A. Overview of Revelation 12:13-17

Read: Revelation 12:13-17

[13] And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child.

[14] But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

[15] The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood.

[16] But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had poured from his mouth.

[17] Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

B. Attack of the Dragon

The dragon, that is, the Devil, on being cast out of heaven and descending to earth, attacks the woman who is the mother of the male child.

But God protects her from the evil intentions of the Devil.

We have seen that the woman stands first of all for the Church in its widest sense as God's Chosen People from the midst of whom comes God's Anointed One.

The woman is also the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of the male child, the Messiah.

C. Flight into the Wilderness

The woman flees into the wilderness for protection. This recalls past events, e.g., the Holy Family's flight into Egypt and Israel's Exodus from Egypt. Both events mark the deliverance of God's people from an evil king [e.g., Herod and Pharaoh].

As historical fulfillment of Revelation, it probably refers to the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem, warned by a prophecy, to Pella on the other side of the Jordan just before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

It may also have its final fulfillment in an eschatological event near the end of time.

These events and images show the Church's continuous struggle against the powers of evil.

D. On Eagle's Wings

The woman escaped on the **“two wings of the great eagle.”** Again and again in the Old Testament the eagle's wings is the symbol of the uplifting arms of God [Ex 19:4; Deut 34:11].

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself [Ex 19:4].

The eagle's wings became a symbol of God's protection of his people.

E. Torrent of Evil . . .

The dragon [serpent] pursues the woman to destroy her by releasing a flood of water from his mouth.

The river of water symbolizes the destructive forces of evil unleashed by the devil.

In the Old Testament tribulation and persecution is likened to an overwhelming flood, and the deliverance of God's people is described in terms of rescue from floodwaters, e.g., Noah and the Exodus [crossing of the Red Sea].

F. Swallowed up by the Earth

Just as in the wilderness of Sinai the earth swallowed up those who rebelled against God [Korah and his rebel supporters - Numbers 16:33], so will the forces of evil be frustrated in their attack on the Church, for, as Jesus promised, “the powers of hell shall not prevail against it [Mt 16:18].

And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol;

G. The Dragon Makes War on the Woman's Offspring

The woman escapes from the Dragon's clutches, so he goes after her offspring.

The word "offspring" in 12:17 is the same word used in Genesis 3:15 for the "seed" of the woman [the New Eve] who would crush the head of the serpent.

Her first offspring is Jesus the Messiah; the rest of her offspring is the Church consisting of Jewish and Gentile Christians.

The Dragon's war on the woman's offspring points to the coming agony of persecution which the whole Church will endure, not only in John's time but throughout history, and especially at the End.

H. And He Stood on the Sand of the Sea

The Dragon then withdraws to his native habitat [the sea], from which he will now call up the beasts to continue the battle.

III. REVELATION 13 – THE DRAGON AND THE BEASTS

A. Overview

Read Revelation 13:1-18

Unsuccessful in his assault on the woman and her son, the Dragon turns to attack her offspring, those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus.

Cast out of heaven, Satan knows that his time is short and is determined to do as much damage as he can. He summons his own seed, two dreadful beasts, and delegates his power to them.

The beasts are symbols, at the most fundamental level, of sinful humanity, but they are not *just* symbols.

They are real spiritual beings, members of Satan's army, demonic persons who have controlled and corrupted the political destiny of nations, e.g., the Roman Empire in John's time, and in modern times Nazi Germany, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, etc.

The first beast is from the sea and represents, in general, corrupt government and corrupt political authority, i.e., the state. At John's time this would be the Roman Empire.

That Satan has power to grant earthly political authority is clear from Satan's third attempt to tempt Christ:

[8] Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them;

[9] and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

[10] Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve'" [Mt 4:8-10]

The second beast is from the earth or the land, and represents a corrupt religious authority. For those who date Revelation in the 60s it is the religious leadership centered in Jerusalem, or the cult of emperor worship for those who date the book in the 90s.

Thus Satan wants to subvert God's plan by corrupting both kingdom and priesthood – state and Church!

IV. THE BEAST FROM THE SEA

Read: Revelation 13:1-4

[1] And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems upon its horns and a blasphemous name upon its heads.

[2] And 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.

[3] One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder.

[4] Men 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?"

A. Overview

The first beast, the beast from the sea, characterized by the number “666,” is the Roman Empire headed by Nero Caesar. But this does not exhaust the meaning of “666.”

Rome itself is a symbol of any nation throughout history that has turned its back on God. But before we can apply Revelation to our day we must first grasp the original meaning it had for John's first-century readers.

Only then can we see how it relates to us today.

B. Like the Dragon

The beast that comes out of the sea has *seven heads* and *ten horns*, and is very similar to the “dragon” of Revelation 12. The horns symbolize power; the diadems [crowns] kingship.

Both its power and its kingship it receives from the dragon.

The beast is a combination of all four beasts from Daniel 7 which describes four successive empires, all of whom persecuted God's people before the coming of the Messiah.

According to the Church Fathers these empires are: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome

In Daniel the fourth beast was the Greek empire, but by New Testament times Jewish tradition applied it to Rome.

The beast in Revelation therefore symbolizes Rome first of all, and the heads crowned with diadems are Roman emperors.

C. Blasphemous Names upon its Heads

The Beast has blasphemous names written on its heads. These are the titles the emperors took to themselves.

Every emperor was called *divus* or *sebastos*, which means divine.

Frequently the very name *God* or *Son of God* was given to the emperors; and Nero on his coins called himself the *Saviour of the World*.

Domitian [AD 81-96] announced that he wished to be called *Dominus et Deus*, Lord and God.

For any man to call himself divine was a blasphemous insult to God.

D. The Roman Emperors in Revelation

One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth followed the beast with wonder.

Who are these seven heads [emperors or kings], one of whom receives a mortal wound, but is healed?

Ancient historians such as Josephus, Suetonius and others list the first seven Roman emperors as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Julius Caesar | 46-44 BC |
| 2. Augustus | 27 BC – AD 14 |
| 3. Tiberius I | AD 14-37 |
| 4. Gaius Caesar (Caligula) | AD 37-41 |
| 5. Cladius I | AD 41-54 |
| 6. NERO | AD 54-68 |
| 7. Galba | 68-69 |

E. Which King [Head] is Mortally Wounded?

Revelation 17:10 describes the seven heads in terms of seven kings: five who have fallen, one who is reigning, and a future seventh, whose reign will last “only a little while.”

they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he comes he must remain only a little while

Counting from Julius Caesar, the sixth king is Nero Caesar: “*the one who is*” currently reigning [assuming Revelation was written before AD 70].

This also fits the history of the emperors since the future seventh king Galba reigned “only a little while” - six months.

The head that was mortally wounded and yet is healed is a parody of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

To whom does it refer? Nero committed suicide by slashing his own throat, or running himself through with a sword.

This seemed to bring to an end the line of Caesars [Nero was the last of Julius Caesar's dynastic line], and thus the downfall of the Beast [Rome], which it nearly did but the Empire finally recovered with the rise of Vespasian.

F. Men Worshipped the Dragon

The worship of the beast [and through him, Satan] describes the widespread custom whereby Roman emperors were worshipped as gods.

An image of the Beast is set up to be adored [Rev 13:14-15].

The might of Rome is arrayed to crush the Christian faith; and Rome has become the agent of the devil

V. THE BEAST IS GIVEN AUTHORITY

Read: Revelation 13:5-10.

[5] And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months;

[6] it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

[7] 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 tongue and nation,

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

[9] If any one has an ear, let him hear:

[10] If any one is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes;

if any one slays with the sword, with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

A. Time of Tribulation is Limited

Rome's time of persecution of the Church is limited to that symbolic number "forty-two months" derived from Daniel's "a time, two times, and a half a time."

It appears that Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome actually lasted about forty-two months. This may also refer to the time of persecution under the emperor Domitian.

Rome's blasphemies are directed not only against God and his dwelling, but also to "those who dwell in heaven." This could refer to the heavenly host or more likely the Church on earth.

B. Christians Conquer through Martyrdom

Also (the Beast) was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and tongue and nation,

Like the Lamb, Christians will win by being conquered. Many will have to undergo captivity or martyrdom. But to the mortally wounded beast [Nero] that has returned, God's answer is the Risen Lamb that was slain.

- Christians who are destined for captivity or martyrdom should not expect to escape it.
- On the other hand, the Roman persecutor who has taken the sword will perish by the sword.

The section ends with a call to endurance, either:

- Assuring believers that God will bring judgment on their persecutors, or
- Calling them to remain faithful in spite of imprisonment [captivity] or martyrdom [sword].

VI. THE SECOND BEAST

Read: Revelation 13:11-15

[11] Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth; it had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon.

[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.

[13] It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men;

[14] and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth, bidding them make an image for the beast which was wounded by the sword and yet lived;

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

A. Parody of the Lamb

Like the first beast, this second beast is a parody of the Lamb. Though it looks “like a Lamb,” it speaks “like a dragon” and is really another agent of Satan.

The danger of the second beast is its seduction, like that of the serpent who seduced Eve in the Garden. It is like the wolf that comes in sheep’s clothing; it resembles Christ the lamb, but its message is demonic.

The beast seduces by working “great signs” or miracles, mimicking the works of prophets like Elijah who made fire come down from heaven [13:13], and causing images of the Beast to speak.

B. The False Prophet

The second beast is also identified by John as the “false prophet” [Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10].

This beast is subordinate to the first beast; the false religious authority to the secular state.

As a false prophet and religious leader, the second beast causes the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first beast instead of God.

The second beast represents:

- the corrupt religious leaders in Jerusalem who incited the people to shout, “We have no king but Caesar [Jn 19:15], and/or
- Those who impose the cult of emperor worship.

VII. THE MARK OF THE BEAST

Read: Revelation 13:16-18

[16] Also 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,

[17] so 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.

[18] This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

A. Apostasy

Like the sealing of the saints in Revelation 7, the sealing of those who worship the beast is an image of allegiance. It is the mark or sign of apostasy.

Those who are sealed by the mark of the beast are those who have given themselves to Satan. They are marked for plagues [16:2] and eternal punishment [14:9-11].

Here again we see how the devil mimics God's dealings with men.

Similarly, the Antichrist will mimic Jesus Christ.

B. "666" - The Number of the Beast

[18] This calls for wisdom: let him who has understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is a human number, its number is six hundred and sixty-six.

Various attempts have been to explain the number of the beast.

If seven is the perfect biblical number, then the number 666 signifies the height of imperfection or evil.

The text says that is it the name of a person that is directly linked with the name of the beast, but who or what does it mean?

John uses a method [called *gematria* in Greek] to reveal the name of the beast in a numerical form.

In both Hebrew and Latin letters of the alphabet were also used to represent numbers. The number 666 fits with the name Nero Caesar in Hebrew.

C. Nero Caesar

For example, in the Hebrew alphabet, the letter which we represent by the letter N = 50; R = 200; O = 6; Q = 100; S = 60. Hebrew has no vowels, so the Nero Caesar is represented as N(e)RON Q(ae)S(a)R = Nero Caesar = 666.

In addition to equaling Nero, 666 is also the numeric value of the word "beast" in Hebrew.

There is little doubt that the number 666 stands for Nero; and that John is forecasting the coming of the Antichrist in the form of Nero, the incarnation of all evil, returning to this world according to the Nero *redivivus* legend.
