

Revelation: A Call to Faithful Witness

Class 5, "War in Heaven, War on Earth"

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Introduction to Revelation 12–20

- **Spiritual conflict**
 - Revelation 1–11
 - Temptation to compromise
 - Trials to refine the church's faith and commence the judgment of their oppressors
 - Revelation 12–20
 - Cosmic warfare
 - Beasts interfering in the affairs of men

- **Concentric narrative of the defeat of the enemies of God**

Introduction of the Devil (12:1–17)

Introduction of the Beast (13:1–10)

Introduction of another Beast (13:11–18)

Introduction of the Harlot/City (17:1–18)

Fall of Babylon (18:1–24)

[Defeat of the False Prophet (19:11–21)]

Defeat of the Beast (19:11–21)

Defeat of the Devil (20:7–10)

- **Major interlude between trumpets and bowls**

(1) The Serpent and the Woman (12:1–17)

(2) Persecution by the First Beast (13:1–10)

(3) Persecution by the Second Beast (13:11–18)

(4) The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1–5)

(5) Proclamation of Gospel and Judgment (14:6–13)

(6) The Harvest of the Earth (14:14–20)

Introduction to Seven Bowls (15:1)

(7) The Saints' Victory Song (15:2–4)

An Apocalyptic Christmas Story (12:1–6)

- **Cosmic view of the players in the drama**

- Woman

- Israel giving birth to the Messiah
- Also the people of God, found on earth after the Messiah's birth

- Male Child

- Obviously Jesus with the Psalm 2:7–9 destiny
- Entire life of Christ collapsed into birth and ascension
- As in Daniel 7, the kingdom of God is both individual and corporate (the one like a son of man and the saints), so the child is connected to the offspring (v. 17) – both are hunted down by Satan, destined to reign, called overcomers

- Though, the woman and her offspring both represent the people of God on earth, paradoxically, one is protected and one is persecuted. The ideal church (the woman) is protected while individual Christians (the offspring) are subject to persecution and martyrdom.
 - Dragon
 - Gk. δράκων is used in the LXX to translate “Leviathan” or “sea monster” – a mythical enemy of God’s people. Especially noteworthy:
 - “Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like a **monster**; he has filled his stomach with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out.” (Jeremiah 51:34)
 - “speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: ‘Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great **dragon** that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, “My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.”’” (Ezekiel 29:3)
 - “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish **Leviathan** the fleeing serpent, **Leviathan** the twisting serpent, and he will slay the **dragon** that is in the sea.” (Isaiah 27:1)
 - ANE lit. often depicted Leviathan as a seven-headed beast.
 - Add to that the fourth best of Daniel 7 with its political power (ten horns)
- **Time-frame of the vision**
 - Cosmic fall of Satan? Probably more current (woman *about to give birth*)
 - Stars swept from heaven background in Daniel 8:10 – “It [the little horn] grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.” Describes Satanic power exercised against the people of God.
 - Stars elsewhere in Rev describe angels representing churches (1:16, 20ff.). The image could represent apostasy in the Old Covenant.
- **1,260 Days**
 - “Of all of John’s references to this time period, Rev. 12:6 is the clearest in identifying the temporal boundaries of the period (cf. 11:2–3; 13:5). Undoubtedly, here the limited age extends from the resurrection of Christ (v. 5) until his final appearance (14:14–20)” (Beale, 646).
 - 1,260 days = 42 months = 3½ years = time, times, and half a time
 - Time of the woman’s preservation in the wilderness
 - Second Exodus motif (42 years in desert)
 - Flight of Judeans during Antiochene persecution (3½ years of Daniel’s prophecy)
 - Flight of the Jewish church during the 3½ year Roman siege (Matt 24:15–24 // Mark 13:14–20)
 - **Describes the spiritual protection of the church beginning with Christ’s ascension.**

The Defeat of the Dragon (12:7–17)

- **Vv. 7–9 interpreted by vv. 10–12**
 - Appears to describe not the primordial fall of Satan but Christ’s victory over Satan in his death and resurrection.
 - Paradoxically, the saints have a part in Satan’s fall: “And they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (v. 11).
 - The “short time” of Satan’s wrath is to be identified with the 1,260 days.

- **The paradox of the church age**
 - Protection (woman given flight, nourishment, aid)
 - Persecution (woman is pursued, dragon makes war against her offspring)
- **Encouragement for the saints**
 - **Devil is not autonomous**
 - Persecution within prescribed time periods (12:6, 14; 13:5)
 - **Devil is already defeated**
 - Christ's death and resurrection won the decisive victory (12:5, 7–12)
 - Saints are persecuted not because the devil has too much power and influence but because he has been decisively overthrown – rattling the bars of his cage
- **Warning for the saints**
 - Compromise with the world is dealing with Satan himself.
 - You neglect the divine resources at your own peril.
 - Nourishment (12:6, 14)
 - Blood of the Lamb (12:11)
 - Seal of God (7:1–8)

The Beasts from Sea and Land (ch. 13)

- Prevented from harming the church *directly*, Satan employs political agents in his war against heaven.
- **Amalgamation of Daniel 7 beasts**
 - Satanic power represented politically in its most beastly form
 - “it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them” (13:7)
 - Like Christ, the people of God are victorious in the midst of their apparent defeat.
 - The reality of life in the church age is one of captivity, sword, endurance, and faith.
 - Personal antichrist or impersonal political/religious entity?
 - Yes:

“There has been debate since the earliest fathers about the identification of the Antichrist figure in ch. 13. Some saw an individual Antichrist to come at the last stage of world history. This view is supported by the logical understanding of the Antichrist as a personal counterpart to the personal Christ. But others from the time of the NT itself have seen the Antichrist as an evil spirit repeatedly inspiring false teaching throughout the church age. At the time of the Reformation, Luther, Calvin and other reformers saw the Catholic Church as the incarnation of the Antichrist.

“The two interpretations are not incompatible. The context of Revelation and of the NT (especially 1–2 John) indicates that the Antichrist has manifested himself as a corporate spirit inspiring false teaching and persecution since the first century but will also manifest himself individually as the leader of opposition to God's people at a future time before the end.” (Beale, *NIGTC*, 681)

- Pharaoh + Nebuchadnezzar + Antiochus IV + Nero + Domitian + . . .
- Numbers are figurative rather than representative – It's a fool's errand to identify ten kingdoms, seven rulers, etc. Everyone will find some “other” that is meant here, while it's just as likely to describe the power of evil working in our own context.
- **Counterfeit miracles**
 - Parody of Christ's resurrection (13:3) – temporary resuscitation while still condemned
 - Possible connection to the civil war following Nero's suicide in AD 68. Nero himself was rumored to be alive, hiding among the Parthians.
 - Fire from heaven (13:13) parodies the witness of the church (11:5).

- The “living” image of the beast (13:15) may relate to contemporary tricks to make statues sweat or tremble, used to promote imperial cult.
- **The mark of the beast**
 - Recall ch. 7 – the mark on the forehead is a SYMBOL of belonging to God
 - Commitment to the empire/emperor/imperial worship is the mark on the forehead.
 - Participation in the imperial economic system is the mark on the hand.
 - *Submitting to the world system of idolatry and greed is to take the mark of the beast.*
- **666 a reference to Nero?**

נ	ר	ו	נ	ק	ס	ר
Ne	R	O	N	Kai	Sa	R
50	200	6	50	100	60	200

- “Caesar Nero” (Hebrew., *Neron Kaisar*) adds up to 666 via Hebrew gematria.
- Titles, languages, spellings make things messy.
- 666 = man’s sinful imperfection to the max while appearing to mimic divine perfection

Bestial Parody of God’s Reign

- The “Satanic Trinity”
 - Dragon/Serpent (ch. 12) . . . source of power/rule of:
 - Beast from the sea (13:1–10) . . . source of power/rule of:
 - Beast from the land (13:11–18), who promotes and speaks for the other two (who are worshiped and resemble figures from Daniel 7)
- “Universal consent”
 - “[T]he whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. . . and they worshiped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’” (13:3–4)
 - Lamb: “‘Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God’ (5:9).
- Worship
 - “Who is like the beast?” (13:4)
 - “Who is like you, among the gods, LORD?” (Exod 15:11; cf. Ps 35:10; 71:19)
 - Michael (12:7) = Heb., “who is like God?”
- International unity
 - Beast exercises authority “over every tribe and people and language and nation” (13:7).
 - “[B]y your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (5:9).

Dismantling and Bestializing the Roman Public Story

- **Four beasts of Daniel 7 → One composite monstrosity**
 - Geography
 - Power
 - Corruption

- Origins
 - Rome: Benevolent Providence seeking to order human life
 - Revelation: The rebellion of Satan, the source of all chaos and disorder (deSilva, 43)
- Emperors
 - Rome: mediators of divine favor, themselves divine
 - Revelation: mouths spewing blasphemy
- Legitimacy of rule
 - Rome: “universal consent” of the people in response to Augustus’s beneficence and pursuit of the public good
 - Revelation: everyone forced to join empire or cut off economically