

7. War: The Dragon, the Beasts, and the Lamb

Revelation 12–14

In the interlude between the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls we are finally given an explanation for the tribulation of the saints.

I. The Woman and the Dragon

Two signs are seen in heaven: a woman and a dragon (cf. a third sign: 7 angels with 7 plagues 15:1).

A. The Woman

clothed with the sun, moon underfoot, crowned with 12 stars. Based on Joseph's vision (Gen 37:9, where sun, moon, 11 stars = Joseph's parents and brothers) bowing down to Joseph, the 12th. Judaism also interpreted the zodiac as referring to the 12 tribes. So, the woman is Israel.

She is in labor cf. metaphor of birth pangs used to describe Israel's present suffering and imminent deliverance into the new age (e.g. Isa 54:1; Mic 4:9-10; 5:3; Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). Cf. also Gen 3:15-16, where God promised Eve she would in pain bear a child who would crush the serpent's head.

So, the birthing woman is Israel (God's people) birthing the Messiah who will deliver her and her other offspring. This son's rule of all nations with an iron scepter (12:5, quoting Ps 2:9) confirms his identification as the Messiah.

B. The Dragon

1. Names & Titles

1. Dragon (δράκων, *drakōn*): 13× — “the dragon” 12:4, 7, 7, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2; “the great dragon” 12:9; “a great red dragon” 12:3.

LXX translation of לְיָיִתְיִָ֑י Leviathan (Job 41:1 [MT 40:25, LXX 40:20]; Ps 74:14 [LXX 73:14]; Isa 27:1).

Most ANE cultures believed that opposing forces of good and evil were fighting it out for control of the universe. Biblical scholars call this the Combat Myth (*Chaoskampf*). The evil personnel of this myth show up in the OT under various names: Yam (יָם *yām*, Sea), Rahab (רָהַב Isa 51:9), sea monster (תַּנִּינִים *tannîn*, Isa 27:1; 51:9; pl. תַּנִּינִים *tannînim*, Gen 1:21), Leviathan (לְיָיִתְיִָ֑י), serpent (נָחַשׁ *nāhāsh*, Isa 27:1). But the OT authors do not use these myths blindly; they rob them of power, leaving “broken myths”¹ or “disarmed myths.”²

old mythological motifs were not slavishly borrowed; there is no question of uncreative imitation. Sometimes, in fact, these motifs seem to have been deliberately used in order to empty them of their polytheistic content and to fill them with totally new meaning, refined, dynamic and vibrant. At other times, they have been torn out of their life context to become mere literary devices, static and conventionalized. In either case, it is in this sphere that the uniqueness of biblical revelation becomes apparent. The Hebrew cosmology represents a revolutionary break with the contemporary world, a parting of the spiritual ways that involved the undermining of the entire prevailing mythological world-view.³

1. Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament* (Naperville, Ill. Allenson, 1960), 70-71..

2. Helmut Thielecke, *Evangelical Faith* (Grands Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974)..

3. Nahum M Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1966), xvii-xviii..

It is amazing to see how sharply little Israel demarcated herself from an apparently overpowering environment of cosmological and theogonic myths.⁴

Yahweh effortlessly overwhelms these forces, whether they be Pharaoh/Egypt or the powers that lie behind Pharaoh. =

2. Serpent (ὄφις, *ophis*): “the serpent” (12:14, 15); “the ancient serpent” (12:9; 20:2).

3. Devil (διάβολος, *diabolos*) (2:10; 12:9, 10; 20:2, 10), lit. “slanderer.”

4. Satan (Σατανᾶς, *satanas*) (2:9, 13, 13, 24; 3:9; 12:9; 20:2, 7). Heb. שָׂטָן *šāṭān* “accuser”; LXX διάβολος (Job 1, 2; Zech 3: 1-2).

7 heads (authority), 10 horns (power), 7 crowns (diadem=rule); 7/10 indicate that the dragon’s power, authority and rule seems total. The four beasts of Daniel’s vision (Dan 7) had a total of 7 heads, 10 horns. Cf. ANE imagery of 7-headed monster.

C. The Dragon wages War

1. Against the child

The dragon first seeks to devour the child (12:4), the promised seed (Gen 3:15), the Messiah. But the child is snatched up to heaven, frustrating Satan’s efforts.

2. Against Michael and his angels

In the “war in heaven,” Michael (the angel over Israel) and his angels defeat the dragon and his angels (12:7-9). They are thrown from heaven to earth, again frustrating Satan’s efforts. This expulsion elicits a song of rejoicing. Satan can no longer accuse God’s people (cf. Job 1-2; Zech 3).

3. Against the woman

The woman is a symbol for God’s people. Prior to the son’s birth this was Israel; following his ascension it is the Church. It is not that the Church has replaced Israel, but that the membership of the God’s people has been transformed from being physical Israel to being Jew and Gentile as one spiritual family in Christ. The woman flies away on divinely-given eagle’s wings (cf. God carrying Israel, Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11) to the desert, the place of preservation. Here she will be divinely nourished for 3½ times.

The dragon tries to overwhelm the woman with a flood, but the earth swallows this challenge.

Again Satan is frustrated. The woman here is the church in its pilgrimage through the wilderness. Satan cannot destroy the church.

4. Against the rest of woman’s offspring

The only ones left to make war against are the remaining offspring of the women, “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17), i.e., the faithful saints. God allows this warfare to proceed.

4. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 49..

II. The Two Beasts (13:1-18)

To help him wage war against the rest of the woman's offspring, the dragon summons two beasts, modeled on OT Leviathan and Behemoth (Job 40:15-41:34).

A. The beast from the sea (13:1-10)

aka "the beast"

- ten horns, seven heads, ten crowns (13:1; 17:3) = Rome; on each head a blasphemous name: divine titles claimed by emperors.
- composite of leopard, bear, lion (13:2): composite of four beasts of Dan 7:3-7 (winged lion = Babylon, bear = Medo-Persia, leopard = Greece, terrifying beast = Seleucid Empire or Rome); they have a total of 7 heads, 10 horns. Composite of all former Satanic tyrannical human kingdoms.
- Recovered from a fatal wound to one head (13:3, cf. "once was, now is not, and will come" 17:8): Nero (r. 54-68), under whose rule Roman Empire degenerated into near chaos; after his suicide, Roman Empire almost fell apart with competing generals (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) laying claim to throne in quick succession. Recovery has double referent:
 - *Vespasian*: a fourth general restored stability, and established a new dynasty (Flavian line: Vespasian, Titus, Domitian); the Roman Empire recovered.
 - *Nero redivivus*: widespread belief that Nero was secretly still alive in the east, and would return at head of a Parthian army.

The beast receives the worship of humanity. "Who is like the beast?" ask his worshipers (cf. Exod 15:11). The earth-dwellers, restricted to physical vision, think "No one." But the saints see into heaven, where they have already seen the enthroned one and the Lamb.

B. The beast from the land (13:11-18)

aka "the false prophet" (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)

Role: to act on behalf of the beast, and to lead the world to worship the beast. In John's time this was the provincial administration of Asia that orchestrated the worship of Rome and its Caesar, "the propaganda machine of the imperial cult."⁵

The triumvirate of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet are a Satanic parody of the Trinity:

1. Dragon usurps God the Father.
2. Beast usurps Christ, being enthroned by the dragon, and receiving worship of humanity.
3. False prophet usurps Holy Spirit, pointing men to worship the beast.

The false prophet forces the earth-dwellers to be branded on their forehead with the mark of the beast. The mark, the name, and the number of the name are equated.

The number of the beast (13:18) has both symbolic and gematric value.

1. Symbolic: 666 is thrice short of perfection (7). Counterfeit of Jesus, who is thrice one more than perfection: Ἰησοῦς *Iēsous* = 888.
2. Gematria: both Hebrew and Greek used alphabetic characters for numbers. Probably Nero:
Heb. קסר נרין *nrwn qsr* = 666 (50+200+6+50; 100+60+200); var. קסר נרו *nrw qsr* = 616 (MSS var.).

5. Bauckham, "Theology," 89..

	Hebrew	Greek		Hebrew	Greek		Hebrew	Greek
1	א aleph	α alpha	10	י yod	ι iota	100	ק qof	ρ rho
2	ב bet	β beta	20	כ kaf	κ kappa	200	ר resh	σ sigma
3	ג gimmel	γ gamma	30	ל lamed	λ lamda	300	ש sin/shin	τ tau
4	ד dalet	δ delta	40	מ mem	μ mu	400	ת tav	υ upsilon
5	ה he	ε epsilon	50	נ nun	ν nu	500		φ phi
6	ו vav	Ϝ digamma	60	ס samek	ξ xi	600		χ chi
7	ז zayin	ζ zeta	70	ע ayin	ο omicron	700		ψ psi
8	ח het	η eta	80	פ pe	π pi	800		ω omega
9	ט tet	θ theta	90	צ tsade	φ koppa	900		λ sampi

C. War!

The dragon, the beast, and the false prophet wage war against God's people.

1. How long?

1. 3½ years (a time, times, and half a time, 12:14).
2. 1260 days (12:6) [= 42 months of 30 days]
3. 42 months (13:5) [= 3½ years]

This is the symbolic length of opposition by the dragon and beast to God and his people. It is of limited duration: only half of a full period of time (7 years).

2. Who conquers whom?

Saints conquer the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony (12:11). But this victory prompts Satan to delegate authority to the beast, who wages war against the saints and conquers them (13:7). Many will be killed, but the saints are called to endure (13:10-11).

On earth it seems that all the saints are being killed, that the beast is victorious.

3. Pastoral counsel (3:10, 18)

“This calls for endurance/wisdom” (cf. 14:12; 17:9).

The beast will kill the saints. Response: faithful endurance.

The false prophet deceives the world into worshiping the beast. Response: wisdom: understand that the beast's number is 666; he is only human and therefore not worthy of worship.

The counterpart to the visions of the dragon and the beasts (ch. 12-13) is the vision of the Lamb and His army (14:1-5).

III. The Lamb and Judgment

Three visions (καὶ εἶδον vv 1, 6, 14).

A. The New Song of the Lamb's army (14:1-5)

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John *sees* the Lamb and his army (1), and *hears* the song sung by his people (2-5).

The Lamb: standing on Mt Zion, installed as king, cf. Ps 2:6.

The Lamb's followers:

- 144,000: a symbolic number ($12 \times 12 \times 1000$).
- name written on forehead: contrast the beast's worshipers branded with his mark (13:16).
- undefiled by women: have purified themselves for Holy War (cf. Deut 23:9-10); have not compromised with world.
- "follow the Lamb wherever he goes." cf. Moravian motto: *Vicit agnus noster, eum sequamur*, Our Lamb has conquered, let us follow him.
- first-fruits: martyrs are the firstfruits of many who will follow.
- nothing false ($\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$); the $\psi\epsilon\upsilon\delta\omicron\varsigma$ will not be admitted to the New Jerusalem (21:27; 22:15).
- blameless ($\alpha\mu\omega\mu\omicron\varsigma$, תְּמִיִּם): an unblemished sacrifice, like the Lamb they follow.



The Moravian Seal

They sing a new song ($\psi\acute{\omicron}\delta\eta\ \kappa\alpha\iota\nu\eta$; cf. שִׁיר הַדָּרְדָר). Song must be same as that sung in 7:10; 15:3-4; the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

B. Angelic Announcements of Judgment (14:6-13)

Three angels make proclamations in mid-heaven for all to hear:

1. Proclaims eternal gospel to the earth-dwellers of all nations: final call to acknowledge God, for hour of judgment is come.
2. Pronounces fall of Babylon: she made nations drink her cup of passion ($\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$).
3. Pronounces judgment on the beast's followers: God will make them drink his cup of wrath ($\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$).

Pastoral Counsel (14:12-13)

1. Call to live well. Call to endurance: persevere for judgment is certain (cf. 13:10,18; 17:9).
2. Call to die well. Beatitude (2nd of 7): saints will rest, unlike God's enemies (14:11).

C. Judgment as Harvest (14:14-20)

Judgment is portrayed using two harvest metaphors: grain and grapes.

1. Grain harvest: ingathering of the saints.
2. Grape harvest: judgment on unbelievers.