

October 8th: Revelation 12-14

Chapters 1-11 is Act 1 of Revelation, which describes the struggle of God's people in this present time to remain faithful testifiers in the face of intense persecution, while they await God's ultimate vindication of their suffering. Chapter 12-22 is Act 2 of Revelation, which ratchets up the drama of ultimate (real reality) to a mythic scale. What's going on "behind the scenes", on the other side of all of the trappings of imperialism and idolatry and greed is a continuation of the mythic fight between good and evil that's been going on since the beginning of time. This is a retelling of the story of chapters 1-11, but through the lens of myth. What God's people are experiencing on earth is a symptom of the ultimate battle between good and evil that has been raging in heaven since the beginning of time. Of course, in God's time (chairoi), Christ has already won the decisive victory over evil, and God now pulls us forward through history until Christ comes again, when God's time and human time (kairos and chronos times) will collide and God's people (and all of creation!) will at last experience the vindication they've been waiting for.

Chapter 12

A portent is a sign in the stars, so the events depicted could be actual visions, or more like Virgo being followed by Scorpio in the stars. Twelve stars could recall God's people, or the 12 zodiac signs. Revelation 12 is most particularly using elements of the myth of Apollo's birth. The woman named Leto, the antagonist is the mean dragon Python. Zeus gets Leto pregnant, Python feels threatened because it's been written that Zeus' son will kill him. So Python thinks to kill Leto before the son's birth. So Poseidon takes Leto to an island for protection, Apollo and Artemis are born, and when he grows up he kills Python. The Romans took the myth of Leto and Python and inserted Caesar Augustus, Augustus mother was the goddess Roma and Caesar gives victory over cosmic chaos which brings peace to the world, giving heavenly permission to the Roman Rule. John takes basic mythic pattern used by empire and tips it upside down, not to hold up the celebration of empire, but to show that the empire is on the cosmic chaos, ultimate beast side of the equation. In John's radical retelling the woman is imaged with the faithful community and the child will be imaged as Christ. The dragon is going to be Satan and Satan's minions (empire).

The woman in Revelation 12 is clearly the mother of the Messiah –either Eve, Israel, or Mary, or all 3 at once. Birth pangs is a sign of the promise of

a new age. The dragon is imaged as Leviathan, God's primordial enemy in Ancient Near Eastern mythology. The stars that are knocked down refer to the fallen angels knocked out of the sky during the great battle in heaven, according to the Lucifer myth, this may be the same event described in 8:12 when the 4th trumpet was blown and 1/3 of the stars became darkened. The dragon and the woman/woman's child are enemies, for the birth of the Messiah is a decisive win for God's plan of salvation for the world. God anticipated her need and had a plan in mind before the child was born so that the dragon would never devour it. **The snatching up is the victory of the cross. The birth and snatching up is the cross. Death is the means by which God moves the child to the place of power. We are most empowered in our supposed powerlessness. Seeking to empower us to live in light of the real reality.** The wilderness where the woman took refuge was both the place of safety, and the place where salvation was to begin (the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way). The nourishment that she received was the testimony of God's witnesses. This right now is the wilderness time.

Vs. 7-12 describes the war in heaven. Michael is the heavenly counterpart to Israel, thus embodies Israel's spiritual reality. ... Michael in Jewish tradition is one of the 7 arch angels. Michael is the patron and guardian angel of Israel. Here Michael is the field marshal of the angelic army. Michael is the only angel in revelation that's explicitly named. Satan and Satan's minions duke it out in heaven against Michael and the angels. The emphasis is on the outcome of the battle. Satan and company lose and are expelled... this is foreshadowing for the downfall of Rome. In vs. 4 the dragon threw the stars, but now the dragon is thrown from heaven. Here the dragon is fully named "The ancient serpent, The Devil, the Satan" The author is making sure there's no mistaking the identity of this dragon. Vs. 10-12... Satan is being imaged out of Old Testament, out of Job as accuser. Drawing on that image of Satan as the prosecuting attorney, Satan is relentlessly accusing the brothers and sisters. This war establishes God's kingdom, and also unleashes Satan's power on the earth. Satan is defeated by the blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of the Lamb's witnesses.

Vs. 13-17 describes the war on earth. The wings of the eagle is what God said to God's people in Exodus 19:4 "I will carry you on the wings of an eagle", it's a sign of heavenly protection from danger and evil. The flood is used as a weapon by the ancient sea monster. The earth is meant to be a feminine image, thus one woman is rescued by another in this passage. 12:17 Satan goes after the son and couldn't get the son, then he goes after

the woman and couldn't get the woman, then the dragon goes after US! We are put in the middle of this mythic war... keeping commands of God means keeping the testimony of Jesus. To preach the gospel of Jesus is to testify to the truths of God's reality over and against Satan's reality. Evangelism is the weapon in the earthly battle against Satan!

Chapter 13

The word "AntiChrist" never occurs in Revelation, but the two beasts described in Chapter 13 are supposed to play that role as "anti-itty bitty lambs". The dragon, the two beasts who draw their power from the dragon, and their worshippers all form the axis of evil. The first beast symbolizes Rome, with its many heads with many blasphemous names representing the emperors and their blasphemous royal titles. The sea beast receives power from the dragon. The sea beast rules over tribes and nations. The sea beast is worshipped with songs of praise. One of its heads had been slaughtered (in the perfect passive) –Julius Caesar. The emperor's power comes not through the goddess Roma who protects, but through Satan. Evil has been institutionalized in the form of empire and its multiple imperial expressions. The empire and emperor comes out of the vortex of chaos, not out of pax romana.

13:11-18 The focus of the land beast is on its function. The beast emerging from the earth is drawn from apocalyptic literature, functions in a prophetic and a priestly role. It's portrayed as behemoth. It works deceptions to get all the earth to worship that first beast. This is not a historical character, but rather various imperial agents (such as the priests and priestesses of the imperial cult, and local puppet kings and queens). It gives breath and speech to the image of itself for people to worship. The beast animates that which is inanimate just as God did at creation. Giving voice to the beast... it was not unusual for ancient temples to put a megaphone in the image of the god or goddess and talk behind a screen to the visitor (ala the great Oz).

The earth beast functions to foster and reinforce this massive imperial economic system. It imprints its ethos on people's lives and bodies. (direct counter to God branding God's people in ch 7). The right hand represents human work and activity, and the forehead represents human spirit and worship. Anyone who wants to do business must do it through the beast's imprint and name. The image of the emperor was on everything – particularly on every piece of money. The emperor's image permeates every aspect of reality. This is a culture of intense peer pressure. The economy is

steeped in imperial control. One did not consciously choose to participate in this reality, one just did it because that was reality. You can't operate economically except by the economics that the beast has set up. The number of the beast is 666- this has become MUCH more important in pop culture than it actually is important to the story of Revelation. Scholars believe that the numerical value of Nero's name/title is what's intended by 666 as a symbol for complete imperial evil (6 being 1 less than 7).

Chapter 14

This chapter describes a kind of imagined holy war on earth, with the Lamb going to battle with the faithful remnant of God's people on earth (the 144,000) who have been sealed on the forehead (counterpoint to the mark of the beast). "Virgin" picks up on the idea that holy war demands ceremonial purity, without spot or blemish, like a sacrificial animal. The angel first proclaims an opportunity to repent, urging the people to give God glory and worship instead of the beast, but then another angel proclaims God's judgment on all who are part of the imperial system (symbolically, Babylon, the great enemy of God's people). Those who have received the mark of the beast –who have participated in this unjust system- will be pressed into God's divine winepress. This is an image of judgment straight out of Isaiah (and the Battle Hymn of the Republic). The Son of Man now comes to judge the nations with a sickle in his hand for reaping the harvest of the unrighteous.