

## **Revelation 12.1-13.18**

### **Demonic Trinity: Dragon, 1<sup>st</sup> beast, 2<sup>nd</sup> beast**

#### **Cf. 17.7-16**

Chs 10 - 11.13, the interlude between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpets, “established the call of the Church to proclamation and suffering, and this section demonstrates how this calling is part of the larger conflict between the people of God and the forces of evil, namely Satan and the world.”  
(Osborne)

Not difficult to understand if accept

1. Historical meaning – understood by 7 churches in 90s
2. Idealistic meaning

Chronologically, a great step back from 11.15ff, to birth of Christ.

BUT note 11.18 the time has come to “destroy those who destroy the earth”/”destroying the destroyers of the earth”.

= ominous signal of what about to unfold: the destruction of the forces of evil. Koester: the sinister presence of the dragon and the other powers (represented by the two beasts and the harlot [ch 17]) needs to be brought to an end.

Koester: The story of the triumph of God over evil unfolds on a cosmic scale. Ordinary limitations of time and space do not apply, for the warring parties traverse a battlefield that stretches from the heights of heaven to the abyss beneath the earth (NB, the woman is first in heaven, then suddenly giving birth on earth!)

**12.1-6** A *great* portent/sign appears: resplendent woman giving birth to a son.

She outshines in splendour the Dragon and beasts.

BUT It is the latter that is the ‘great sign’ – from Isa 7.14 “Therefore the LORD himself will give you a sign, Behold the virgin/young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

- Sun = connotes majesty
- Moon = signifies beauty (Song 6.10) and glory (Isa 24.23)
- 12 stars = the whole people of God

She gives birth to a son “who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron” (= Ps 2.9)

- Woman = starts as Israel, from whom the Messiah will come (12 stars in crown), but perhaps also Mary (as an Israelite). Quite possible to be both at once.
- Child = Jesus/Messiah
- Allusions to Gen 3.16 – pain in childbirth as result of serpent’s deception

Another portent/sign appears (NB. Not a great portent/sign): great red dragon (great because his power is great) with 7 crowned heads and 10 horns.

- Crowned heads = symbols of faux wisdom and authority
- 10 horns = symbols of power
- 1/3 of stars = other rebellious angels/heavenly beings who sided with Satan

Stands before the woman to devour her child.

- Allusions to Herod’s slaughter of the innocents and flight into Egypt, but all opposition to Jesus

Child snatched away and taken to God and his throne.

- Echoes of a number of passages which mention only Jesus’ birth and resurrection/ascension, e.g. Rom 1.3-4 “...concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.”

Woman fled into wilderness prepared by God so that can be nourished 1260 days.

- The woman is now the Church, as she is in ch.21 (if same woman)
- the Jewish religious leaders unsuccessfully pursued the Jerusalem church into the wilderness of Transjordan in the mid-60s.

**7-9** “Christ’s enthronement does not usher in a period of peace and tranquility, but becomes the catalyst for an epic battle in heaven.” (Koester)

War broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels v’s dragon and his angels.

Dragon (= devil and satan) and angels defeated and thrown down to earth

- Barnett: the snatching up to heaven of the Messiah, in virtue of his redemptive death, coincides with the hurling down to earth of the great dragon, Satan, cf. John 12,31-32 “Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth [in crucifixion/ascension] will draw all men to myself.”
- This is not the primeval casting of Satan out of heaven. This comes as a result of Satan’s rebellion against Christ’s resurrection and enthronement. He is now permanently cast out of heaven.
- He’s deceived the whole earth as long as humans have been on it. But now his domain is restricted to earth, so he can no longer accuse the saints before God (12.10), because they have been cleansed by Christ’s blood (12.11, cf. Rom 8.33f.), hence his fury.
- Koester: “Satan now rages on earth because he has already lost heaven and is now desperate.”

**10-12** Loud voice in heaven proclaims victory for God and Messiah, and for “our comrades (who) have conquered by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony/martyrdom.

- The dragon is already a defeated foe (by the blood of the Lamb, which has set them free from their sins, by which Satan bound them to himself), he is not invincible. He is overcome by the testimony of the martyrs.
- Pliny wrote of Christians: “obstinate... perverse... unbending” because of their refusal (preferring to die than) to worship the Emperor.

Heaven = rejoicing

Earth = woe... the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.

**13-17** The dragon pursues the woman, who is given the two wings of the great eagle and flies to the wilderness to be nourished for a time, times and ½ a time.

She is now not just Israel, but the mother of all believers.

Repeat of v.6

Echoes though of Exodus:

- deliverance from Pharaoh and Egyptians,
- delivered through the Red Sea,
- carried on eagles' wings (Exod 19.4) and
- fed manna in the wilderness (Deut 8.3).

The *serpent* (cf. v.9) pours water from his mouth to sweep her away with the flood

The earth comes to the woman's rescue swallowing up the river.

The dragon is angry and goes off to make war on the woman's other children – those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

- The church in Asia Minor (the 7 churches addressed here?)

**12.19-13.4** The dragon stands on sand of seashore and a beast rises out of the sea – with 10 horns, 7 heads, 10 diadems on horns...

The dragon gives the beast his throne, power and great authority.

- The beast from the sea is clearly an incarnation of the dragon. Probably allusion to Rome, whose navy ruled the Mediterranean. A proconsul, the embodiment of Roman might and authority, landing at Ephesus?
- This beast combines features of all 4 beasts (representing empires) – lion, bear, leopard, beast with 10 horns - in Daniel 7.1-8. In Daniel, the beast with 10 horns spoke arrogantly and made war on the saints for 3.5 years (Dan 7.21, 25) until the ancient of Days came (Dan 7.22).
- The mortal wound = surely nothing other than a parody of Messiah

In amazement the whole earth follows the beast and worships it: "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

**5-10** The beast blasphemes and utters haughty words against God and those who dwell in heaven, and is allowed to exercise authority for 42 months.

- Blasphemy = claiming the title god (as Domitian did)

It is also allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It is given authority over all the earth and all will worship it except those whose names had been written in the book of life of the Lamb that was slaughtered.

A call for the endurance and faith and faith of the saints: prepare to be taken captive... if you kill by the sword, you must be killed by the sword.

**11-18** A second beast arises from the earth: 2 horns like a lamb (imitating Christ), spoke like a dragon (its true master).

Functions as a false prophet, directing people to worship the first beast. Anti-type to the 2 true prophets in ch.11.

3<sup>rd</sup> member of this demonic trinity.

Exercised all the authority of the first beast, on its behalf.

- Barnett claims this beast symbolises the High Priest of proconsular Asia. He presided over the General Assembly of the cities of Asia and officiated in the ceremonies of the Emperor cult. Only 2 horns (v's 10) = signifies limitations of his power relative to Rome.
- Osborne: "While the first beast has a more military function (conquering the saints and taking over the world) , this one has a more religious function, deceiving the world into worshipping the Antichrist."

Performs great signs, even fire from heaven to earth, and deceives by its signs, telling people to make an image for the 1<sup>st</sup> beast which he then breathe life into. Those who wouldn't worship the image he caused to be killed.

- Signs = probably some kind of magic tricks. The head of an estimated 5m high statue of Domitian was found adjacent to the temple ruins (pf the temple built to him)

It causes all to be marked on the right hand or forehead in order to buy or sell. NB. Cannot assume it is visible to the eye.

*Everyone* (great stress on all – v.16) must choose one side or the other. Either marked or not, Dragon's or God's.

Seal of ownership and of ability to buy or sell. NB. Believers already sealed by the angel as God's – Rev 7.3-4; 22.4.

Mark = 666/616, the number of a name, of a man. A call for wisdom.

- NB don't know if name = to be counted in Greek or Hebrew. *N-r-v-n* *q-s-r* works in Hebrew for 666, *N-r-v* *q-s-r* for 616 (as variant manuscripts read). Most likely first century interpretation therefore = Nero, but he already dead. Therefore suggests Nero = a type of all oppressive rulers.
- 7 = God's number. 6 = man's. 666 = the evil trinity of the dragon and 2 beasts?

<b>Holy Trinity</b>	<b>Demonic Trinity</b>
<b>Father</b>	<b>Satan/Devil (Dragon/Serpent)</b>
Enthroned in heaven	Thrown down from heaven
Saviour	Deceiver
Power and rule	Accuser
Gives authority to his Messiah/Christ	Angry with the woman; pursued her child and warred on her other children
<b>Son</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Beast (from the sea)</b>
Power and authority given him by the Father (5.12f.)	Power and throne and great authority given it by the Dragon
Crucified but risen	Mortally wounded but healed
Believed in by more than 500 eye witnesses to the resurrection	Followed by the whole earth, in amazement at his healed wound
Worshipped (5.6,12-13)	Worshipped: “Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?”
Gentle and lowly in heart.. perfectly obedient to the Father	Haughty and blasphemous
Making intercession for the saints	Allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them
Ransomed people “of every tribe, people, language and nation” (5.9-10)	Oppressed people “of every tribe, people, language and nation” (13.7-8)
<b>Holy Spirit</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Beast (from the earth)</b>
Glorifies the Father and the Son	Makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast
Gives gifts, incl. prophecy, signs and wonders	Performs great signs which deceive
Descended as tongues of fire in sight of all at Pentecost	Sends fire down to earth in sight of all
Places his seal on believers – Eph 1.13	Seals with a mark (human number)

## Message

1. The persecution/suffering of the 7 churches is of Satanic origin. A spiritual battle, not merely “flesh and blood” (Eph 6.12).
2. That battle has its origins in both the Fall (Satan’s deception and the woman’s offspring bruising Satan’s head) and the attacks on Jesus (from his birth to his death).  
Progression = war against God -> war against Christ -> war against Christians
3. The devil’s time is short.
4. A call for believers patiently to endure their sufferings. The way to victory is not superior power, but that gained by the blood of the Lamb, held onto through endurance and faith (12.11; 13.10). Satan can kill the body but not the soul Matt 10.28.

## Suggested discussion questions

1. Try to hear these chapters as an imprisoned Christian, waiting to be torn apart in the Colosseum by wild animals. What comfort, encouragement or strength might you take from them?
2. How do these chapters help as an explanation of why there is so much suffering in the world, in spite of God being in control and being good and just?
3. The dragon and the two beasts form a satanic trinity which in many ways is a parody of the Holy Trinity. In what ways does Satan masquerade as an angel of light in the world today? In what ways do godless rulers make the claims of Christ (e.g. to be a saviour)?
4. Of all verses in the Bible, 13.16-18 have probably attracted the most speculation as to their meaning. How important though is this second beast in God’s great purposes, and how important – therefore – is it that we can identify *who* he is?
5. You might like to devote some time to praying specifically for suffering Christians. You could use the Barnabas Aid monthly prayer update <https://www.barnabasaid.org/gb/pray/prayer-focus-update/>