

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

LESSON EIGHT

One could close the book of Revelation after the first eleven chapters and still be certain of the ending. The major characters have been introduced, and the spiritual battle has been outlined. God's plan has been put in motion, and the victorious saints have been assured of their reward. We have seen Christ as the one walking in the midst of the churches, aware of their works and struggles. He has the power and authority to carry out the plan revealed in the book sealed with seven seals, and He controls the destiny of the world. The scroll or book summarizes God's dealings with the world from the beginning of the preaching of the gospel to the final judgment. The seventh seal, which contains the seven trumpets, reveals greater details about the means God uses to call the unrighteous to repent. A little book finally appears which conveys even more visions and imagery about this judgment on men. Chapter eleven gives a brief summary of the little book, but the full explanation of the details and reasons behind the outcomes of these events is developed in the last eleven chapters of Revelation.

Chapter twelve begins this deeper understanding of the heavenly conflict. There is an interlude in the previous action, providing an explanation of who the specific characters are and the underlying reasons for this conflict. The vision then returns to the seventh trumpet, which contains seven bowls of God's wrath, poured out on those who refuse to repent. The Roman Empire, paganism (backed by imperial power), and worldliness are brought into sharp focus. These three things – imperial force, false religion (including emperor worship), and hedonistic/worldly behavior, are shown to be Satan's allies. On the other hand, God's allies are the righteous and victorious Lamb, the faithful saints, and God's righteous judgments. These are shown to be far more powerful, and the conclusion of the battle is never in question. Satan, Death and Hades, the Beast, the False Prophet, and all with the mark of the Beast will be thrown in the lake of fire that burns forever.

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CHAPTER 12

The interlude begins and is seen in heaven, meaning that it is explained from God's viewpoint. A great sign in heaven appears: we see a woman, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and wearing a crown (*stephanos*, victory crown) of twelve stars. As we learned in Lesson One, twelve was the number of organized religion (the 12 tribes and Judaism; the 12 apostles and Christianity). We can thus see she is in some form representative of God's people. Light is used metaphorically as truth and righteousness throughout scripture, and is the character of God (1 John 1:5-7). She is clothed with the totality of divine light. Some would go so far as to consider these lights as representations of the three dispensations of God's revelation: the Patriarchal, the Mosaic, and the Christian. We cannot be certain of this, but clearly she represents a figure enveloped by God and His protection. Several identities are postulated for the woman: the Jewish nation, the New Testament church, the Virgin Mary, etc. She is most likely meant to convey a more specific idea, that of the spiritual remnant of God's people, who faithfully have remained true to God's covenant. In Micah 4:10, we read: "*Be in pain and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and shalt dwell in the field, and shalt come even to Babylon: there shalt thou be rescued; there will Jehovah redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*" Micah thus identifies the bearer of the child to be the spiritual remnant of Israel, so the child should be the ruler of Israel, the Messiah-King, the One long awaited. This is also the theme of Isaiah 66:7-9. The book of Hebrews, 9:15 and 11:40, clarify that those of both covenants will obtain their inheritance through Christ, and that apart from us, 'they are not made perfect.' Both are made complete and become one in Christ and receive their reward.

The woman cries out in pain of labor. The faithful remnant has been crying for the deliverance of the Messiah since Genesis 3 (see the great promise of 12:3), and He is born (comes to His own) quickly (Mal.3:1). We immediately see another frightening vision: a great red dragon appears, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads, seven crowns (*diadema* – the crown of authority or rule; Satan may possess authority over evil, but never wears a crown of victory). There

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is no doubt that Satan is the identity of the dragon, as it directly says this in verse 9. His red color suggests his murderous character (remember John 8:44). The seven crowns (number of completeness) suggests a fullness of intelligence, deceit, cunning, and evil (John 8:44; II Cor. 11:3). The horn was often a symbol of power and dominion (Deut. 33:17; Dan. 8:5 & 9; Ps. 75:5 & 10), and the dragon has 10 (a human number of complete secular power). He thus has complete power within his realm of operation (Eph. 2:2 and 6:12; Col. 1:13; Jude 6). The dragon sweeps away a third of the stars of heaven and throws them to the earth. Similar wording was used in Daniel to describe the boastful power of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (Daniel 8:10). It can also refer to Satan's evil influence in his rebellion against God, enticing many angels to join him in his sin and suffer his same fate (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6). It certainly reminds us of the great power he exercises in his realm, and the fury with which he pursues God's people (I Peter 5:8).

The great dragon hovers over the woman as she gives birth, eagerly awaiting the child so he might devour him (see again I Peter 5:8). Ever since the beginning (Genesis 3:15), Satan has continued to try to destroy God's people and ruin His plans to save mankind. From the Old Testament to New, most of scripture is ultimately devoted to this struggle. If Satan is able to destroy Jesus, that would be the final death-blow to God's reconciliation with man. Tragically, this belief is the major fatal flaw with Premillennialism. This philosophy teaches that Jesus DID fail in His mission of converting the Jews as He was crucified, so the church was instituted as an interim organization on earth until the time He could come back and set up His true kingdom on earth for a 1000 year reign before the end of time. This belief flies in the face of everything scripture teaches about the church/kingdom of God.

The woman gives birth, and the child is described as one who will "...rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (absolute authority – Eph. 1:20-23). This is a clear reference to Psalm 2:6-9, where He is identified as the Son of Jehovah, a king to sit on the holy hill of Zion and receive the nations as an inheritance. After His introduction, we see the child caught up into heaven and to His throne. This brief description in verse 5 encompasses the entire period of Jesus' birth, ministry, crucifixion, and ascension to heaven to once again rule with God. Jesus successfully accomplishes His mission, and all from the Old Law and new covenant

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have become one in Christ. As Satan no longer has opportunity to destroy Jesus on earth following Jesus' resurrection, he turns his wrath and fury on the woman. Now we see the identity of the woman in her changing role as only the church, who must be defended by the Father. The woman flees into the wilderness to a place of protection prepared by God (remember the reference to Micah 4:10). She is "nourished" or spiritually protected for 1260 days (again, the 'broken 7'). Scripture is filled with God's people having to flee from evil men directed by Satan: Moses from Pharaoh, Israel from Pharaoh, Elijah from Ahab & Jezebel, Mary and Joseph from Herod, Paul from several foes. Unfortunately, this will continue as long as the world stands.

The scene John beholds now changes back to heaven. A great battle is being waged between Michael and his angels and the dragon (Satan) and his angels. The archangel Michael ("Who is like God") is mentioned 3 times in the book of Daniel (10:13; 10:21; 12:1) and also in Jude 9 and possibly I Thes. 4:16. A few commentators feel this scene is a background explanation for the original fall of Satan and reason for his hatred and anger toward God. This cannot be, as Satan was opposing God long before Jesus' human birth, and Satan was here defeated by "the blood of the Lamb," which was not present in the beginning. Others feel this is a real spiritual attack on heaven by "the prince of this world" to overthrow God, following his defeat at the cross. This also cannot be true, as Satan was already cast out of heaven in the beginning and had no power to challenge God's authority. Even at the time Jesus was on the earth, hell had long ago been prepared for Satan and his angels (II Peter 2:4). What we are seeing is a metaphor for a great spiritual battle between righteousness and evil, and righteousness has decisively won through Christ. The plan of God through Christ was fully accomplished when Satan was defeated (verse 10, and Eph. 3:10-11). Satan, in his depiction as a dragon, has been completely defeated *spiritually*, or "thrown down to earth." This battle is really a visual depiction of the victory of Jesus over sin. Even though Satan will continue to accuse men before God (*diabolos* – slanderer or accuser), he no longer has power to hold men in the bondage of spiritual death (Heb. 2:14-15) after the cross. Men could now be justified before God and made holy by the blood of Jesus. The same blood that defeats Satan in chapter 12 now and forever saves mankind and brings righteousness. Verse 11 also states the powerful word or testimony of the persecuted and martyred faithful also helped

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defeat Satan. They were willing to follow the truth even unto death, (not just *until* their death). This should cause every Christian to consider their commitment and realize the great strength that a Godly testimony will have on a sinful world.

The rage of Satan is compounded by his knowledge that he has only a short time before the predetermined day of his destruction (short compared to eternity). Some commentators take this as a reference to the time before he is bound and thrown into the abyss while the martyrs sit on thrones and reign with Jesus for 1000 years. Either way, Satan cannot avoid his fate. As he can no longer thwart God's plan, he focuses this rage on the woman (who no longer includes the Jews, but only spiritual Zion, the church). Yet, God still protects His remnant spiritually, and gives the woman the two wings of the eagle. This reminds us of the words of God in Exodus 19:4: "I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself" (see also Deut. 32:11). She flies away into the wilderness to a place prepared by God (see Ex. 23:20) for her nourishment or protection, similar to the Israelites from Egypt. The wilderness stands in contrast to "the great city," which is also "Sodom and Egypt" (11:8). She remain for "a time, times, and half a time", which is 3 ½ years (or 1260 days or 42 months, the broken 7; see Daniel's reference in Dan. 7:25). Even today, when we are persecuted or distressed, God sits with us in heavenly places (Eph. 2:6) and our life "is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3). We can resist the devil (James 4:7) and be more than conquerors with His help (Rom. 8:35-39).

Ever persistent, the dragon pours water "like a river" out of his mouth in order to sweep the woman away to destruction. The idea of ungodly people overwhelming and consuming God's people like a flood appears frequently in the Old Testament (Isa. 8:5-8; Ps. 18:4). This 'flood of water' consists of Satan's weapons of false religion, worldly philosophies, slander against Christians, fear, temptations of lust, and a continual barrage of lies. The flood also stands for relentless persecution of Christians. Still, God can dry up the river to protect His people (Isa. 42:15 & 43:2). The earth helps the woman by drinking in the flood. The earth here stands for the unrighteous, who gladly accept the flood of evil and lies. This helps keep the church as a distinct beacon of saving light in a dark world, and serves to remind us of the tragedy of compromise. The world also somewhat helped divert Rome's attention from persecution of the saints by causing Rome to

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fight endless wars and political uprisings. Despite his efforts, Satan fails to destroy the kingdom or church. The dragon leaves to make war with the woman's other offspring. These are the individual saints, who remain faithful and who are continually added to the church even today. (Acts 2:47; Rom. 8:29-30)

CHAPTER 13

Two main characters in the drama of the Revelation are introduced in detail in chapter 13. The vision begins with John (or "I", although some manuscripts also say "he", as in the dragon) observing the seashore. The sea was often compared to human societies and nations with their restlessness and upheavals. David wrote of, "the roaring of the seas" and "the tumult of the peoples/ nations" (Ps. 65:7), and Isaiah wrote "the uproar of many peoples, that roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of many nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters!" (Isa. 17:12). Suddenly, a terrible beast arises out of the waves to come ashore. It has seven heads on which blasphemous names are written, and ten horns bearing ten crowns (*diadema* – the crown of authority or rule, not victory). Its form was like a leopard, with feet resembling those of a bear, and mouths resembling those of a lion. It had great power and authority. However, his power, authority, and throne were all given to him by the dragon.

This scene is taken in large part from Daniel's vision in chapter 7 of his book. There we see the 4 winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, and 4 beasts arise: one like a lion with wings and a human mind, one like a bear, one like a leopard with wings and 4 heads, and finally a dreadful and terrifying beast with iron teeth and 10 horns (as Rev. 13:1). These correspond to 4 great kingdoms: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Roman Empire (the terrifying beast, unlike any before it). Thus, the beast of Rev. 13 seems to be a compilation of the power and strengths of these previous empires. This beast has 10 horns (fullness of power) and seven heads (full intelligence and wisdom). The seven crowns (*diadema* or *diademata*) indicate political rule and authority. Blasphemous names are written of all 7 heads, showing complete disregard and disdain for God and His will, even to the point of claiming deity for the emperor. Although the beast has no power of his own, the dragon gives him full authority and power to

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operate as his ally or puppet, even unwittingly. Note that even the description of the dragon and beast are very similar (7 heads and 10 horns). The only difference given is that the dragon wears crowns on his heads and not on the horns, as the beast. Perhaps this is another way of saying that Satan's uses his power of evil intelligence and cunning to control Rome's power of military and governmental control.

Verse 5 of chapter 13 tells us that the beast was given a mouth to speak arrogant words and blasphemies, and given a period of 42 months to "act" to oppose God and persecute the saints. This parallels the seventh chapter of Daniel. Daniel adds to the account of the fourth beast (Roman Empire) that an eleventh horn sprouts on this beast, larger than the rest and uprooting 3 others. Unlike the others, it had eyes and a mouth that uttered great boasts. It also waged war with the saints, overpowering them. In further detail, verse 24 of Daniel 7 states that out of this kingdom 10 kings will arise, followed by another one (11th) which will be different from the others and "subdue three kings." He will speak against the Most High and "wear down the saints of the Highest One", even intending to change "times" and the "law." The saints will be given into his hands for "a time, times, and half a time" (the broken 7). This section may seem confusing, but we will have more to say about this later in Lesson 10. Regardless, it is clear that this is describing a time during this fourth kingdom when a ruler is trying to usurp God's title and authority (place himself before God, or try to assume His position) and destroy the saints. As we shall later see, this perfectly describes Domitian. After his brief period of persecution, however, it is he who is judged by God and destroyed, not the saints.

In verse 3 of Revelation 13, it is stated that one of the beast's heads appeared to be slain and the fatal wound was healed. This amazed the earth, causing many to follow him. There are many theories as to the meaning of this cryptic message. The two most likely are as follows:

- 1). The *Nero redivivus myth* – the earliest and most popular explanation, which referred to the resurrection of the persecutor Caesar Nero. When he committed suicide in AD 68, it seemed like a parallel to one of the beast's heads having received a fatal wound. An early church historian, Victorinus (see the Lesson 1 outline), commented: "Now that one of the heads was, as it were, slain to

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death...he speaks of Nero” (ANF, VII, 358). Subsequent secular historians often wrote of rumors that Nero would return some day, appearing in resurrected form (*redivivus*). This would account for the healed mortal wound and still- living beast. Although his physical resurrection never happened, his spirit of persecution of Christians was certainly revived in Domitian and continued intermittently until AD 313, the time of Constantine.

2). A ‘resurrecting beast’ theory - another suggestion is that the ‘fatal wound’ would kill just one head but not the entire beast. The wound was inflicted on the entire beast, not just one emperor. However, a beast such as this cannot be killed by a single death-stroke. Each head represents a different empire; when one head (empire) received a mortal wound, it would be defeated and disappear, but the entire beast could never be destroyed – it would simply continue with a new head as a new and succeeding empire. Thus, the wound that killed one empire would ‘heal’, and the beast continued in power as another. This suggests that the beast is not just the Roman Empire, but Rome is just the most recent embodiment of an evil world power.

Just as Satan can entice men to sin, he can also entice men to follow the beast, as they become intoxicated with Rome’s offer of pleasure, wealth, and power. Four things are given to the beast: 1). A mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; 2). Authority to act for 42 months (3 ½ years, or a broken seven); 3). Authority to make war with the saints and overcome them; 4). Authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. Although it would seem that this empowerment comes from the will of Satan, in reality it is being allowed by God. We must remember that every government power serves as a minister of God (Rom. 13:1 & 4), and no one has power except that given by God (John 19:11). In the end, all leaders and authorities will ultimately be used by God to work His purposes, and all will be judged by the discharge of their duties before God’s truth.

We see that everyone “*whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain*” (13:8) will worship the beast. Some translations instead state this as “*whose name has not been written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*” The first speaks of **names** written in the book from the foundation of the

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world, and the second states that the **Lamb** was slain from the foundation of the world. Both are true, but they are different thoughts. The second reading is clearly true, as Christ's death was by "*the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*" (Acts 2:23). Also, salvation through the blood of Christ was "*fore-ordained before the foundation of the world*" (I Peter 1:20). However, the first reading is repeated in 17:8 (without using "of the Lamb"), suggesting this is the main idea in 13:8. Some object to this statement, fearing it can be used along with Rom. 8:29-30 to justify the false doctrine of predestination of the soul. With God's foreknowledge, history can be told before it occurs, since "He calleth those things which be not as though they were (Rom. 4:17, after Isa. 41:21-24 and 42:8-9 and 44:7 and 46:10). God can foresee our choices even before we make them, but this does not suggest the Calvinist doctrine that God *causes* the choices we make. The names of saints can also be written in the book of life "from the foundation of the world" by God's foreknowledge. This is *not* a claim that certain individuals were selected before the world was created to be 'saved' or 'unsaved.' Neither is this a claim that individuals worshiped the beast by God's will apart from their own free will. The only thing preordained was that Christ would be the means by which salvation could be obtained. Ephesians 1:4-11 fully explains the significance of verse 8.

As the section on the beast from the sea closes, there is another cryptic statement in verse 10 that "*if anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and faith of the saints.*" There are two possible explanations for this statement. **First**, it could mean that those who persecute and imprison saints would themselves ultimately be taken captive and condemned by their sin. Those who executed the saints would one day also face their own execution spiritually. **Second**, this could be stating that those saints who are taken captive and killed should not resist, but yield to their fate and not retaliate (Rom. 13:2, I Peter 2:13). The saints would be spiritually protected and were to fight with spiritual weapons only (II Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18). They were not to fear those who could only destroy the physical body. The saints were encouraged to stand fast and remember that the beast would one day be destroyed, whereas they would live forever.

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The final vision of chapter 13 involve the emergence of another grotesque beast, one coming up out of the land or earth. He is also called “the false prophet” (16:13, 19:20, and 20:10), indicating his true function. The significance of his origin from the land is not to suggest he is less important than the beast from the sea, but of different origin. It is more accurate to think of the two creatures as encompassing all parts of the world and serving the dragon directly, one at his right side and one at his left. The earth-beast represents false religion, or more specifically that which supported emperor worship. We see four characteristics of this evil creature. He has two horns like a lamb, which would suggest the idea of a sacrificial animal, giving the appearance of religion. He speaks with the voice of a dragon, revealing he is fully controlled by the dragon and speaks whatever Satan directs him to say. He exercises all the power of the first beast, showing he is supported by the full political power of the emperor (and Satan or course). Finally, he causes all in the world (without the seal of God) to worship the first beast. Thus, he is placed in full control of the paganistic worship of the emperor, including its dissemination and compliance. Again, the mention of the fatal wound which was healed reminds us that the first beast has ‘resurrected’ Nero’s policy of persecution against Christians, this time to those who refuse to comply with the false worship of the emperor.

The land beast entices men to follow the sea beast (worship Rome, specifically the emperor Domitian) by deceiving the world with great false signs and wonders. He is even able to call down fire from out of heaven. This should not surprise or concern us. Jesus reminded his disciples in Matt. 24:24: *“For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.”* Satan has great power to deceive (II Thess. 2:9-12, II Tim. 3:13, II Cor.11:14-15). Of course, men could not perform the true miracles of God, and God would not allow man to do so and compromise His own divine signs and works. The land beast directs men to erect an image of the beast. We see here the many temples dedicated to the emperor. The image (temples) is given life and caused to speak: the spirit of worship of Caesar comes ‘alive’ and ‘speaks’ to the people through daily priestly activity and the regular sacrifices of the people to show their allegiance to Domitian. The threat of death and deprivation to those who would not so worship was very real.

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The land beast causes all the unrighteous (not those marked by God) to receive his mark on the right hand or forehead so that they can buy and sell goods. This mark must be either the name of the beast or his number. Speculations run rampant as to what this might mean. Some suggest this was a real skin insignia, such as a brand or tattoo, which was actually fairly common in the ancient world. Others believe this was a written loyalty statement or certificate to prove that sacrifice to Domitian had occurred, much like a license or passport. Most likely, this is a figurative spiritual insignia, and certifies in the hearts of the unrighteous their faithful loyalty or at least indifferent acquiescence to Rome and the emperor. This stands in stark contrast to the righteous seal placed by God on the foreheads of His faithful children.

Chapter 13 concludes with one of the most puzzling statements found in the Revelation. The one with wisdom and understanding is told to count the number of the beast, which is 666. One of the most common suggestions of those who feel the Revelation was written in the mid-60s at the time of Nero (and before Jerusalem's destruction) is that this number refers to Nero. Using Hebrew and early Christian **gematria** (assigning each Hebrew or Greek letter a number and then expressing the additive value of these numbers as a name or idea), it is possible to reduce the number 666 to the name of a man, Nero Caesar (or Neron Kaiser in the Greek). Unfortunately, this method only gives this particular identity if the Hebrew is used and not the Greek (it is 1005 in the Greek), a very unlikely switch for a letter written entirely in Greek. Similarly, many different names throughout history can also be derived from 666 using this same method (including Latinus, various popes, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and even Adolf Hitler). As we stated in Lesson 1, we should let the symbolic meaning of the number speak for itself and not always look for an application to a specific person, place, or thing. The number 6 is a number short of perfection and is usually applied to mankind, as he is imperfect and falls short of the perfect spiritual number 7 (things of God). We see that 666 is the number 'of man', not 'of a man.' Although 666 *can* stand for Nero (and thus also Domitian, the "resurrected Nero"), it is most likely suggesting the beast (Roman Empire) and its authority. The use of 6 repeated three times simply stresses the three-fold incompleteness, imperfection, and failure of this evil empire.