

“A Woman, A Dragon, and Two Beasts (Chap. 12 & 13)”

INTRODUCTION

When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, Heaven fell silent, the saints' prayers were offered, and fire was cast on the earth with more thunder & lightning (8:1-5). When the seventh trumpet was blown, not silence but a chorus of celebration erupted in Heaven (11:19).

With the final trumpet, we expect the third and most devastating woe, the return of Christ, and the consummation of the Kingdom. Instead, chapters 12-14 give us a series of visions about conflict and war in Heaven and on earth. This explains why the Christians are suffering, and why the judgements of God in the seals, trumpets and bowls yet to come are necessary.

NOTES ON 12 & 13

1. Most interpreters of the Bible say that much of the images in these two chapters is symbolic, and probably not descriptive of an actual woman, dragon or beasts. This is important to keep in mind as you read these passages.
2. **“A woman”** is a symbol of the faithful nation of Israel, who gave birth to Jesus, the Messiah (the “male child” of. 12:5). Her “other offspring” in 12:17 are the Christian believers who became the Church.
3. The **“Red Dragon”** would have been a familiar image. Many nations of John's day had stories of dragons (in the form of serpents or crocodiles). They came to symbolize evil, and in Jewish writings they are the archenemy of God, or Satan. The seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns suggest the utter perfection of the dragon's evil wisdom and authority.
4. The dragon being hurled to earth does not refer to Satan's first fall, but his being cast out of heaven to inflict evil and oppose believers in the last days. The nature of this opposition will soon be seen in the next chapter.
5. In Old Testament terms, the **desert** isn't a wasteland but a place of spiritual refuge (1 Kings 17:2-6, Hosea 2:14). Israel fled into the desert to escape slavery in Egypt, Mary & Joseph fled there to escape Herod, and Jesus went into the desert to pray and fast. In Revelation, the Church flees into the desert to escape Satan's 3 ½ year onslaught of the earth.
6. In his war on the Church, Satan employs two agents: **the beast from the sea** and the **beast from the earth**. A monster from the sea is a familiar Old Testament image (cf. Psalm 74:13-14, Isaiah 27:1; Amos 9:3; and Ezekiel 29:3-5). John separates the dragon from the sea beast (13:1) to distinguish between demonic power and an earthly manifestation of evil under Satan's control. Some think the sea beast symbolized the Roman Empire of John's day, some think it symbolizes political power of every generation, others think it is a future empire which will claim divinity and attack Christians.
7. **The leopard, bear, and lion** (13:2) is another vision of John that correlates with a

vision given to Daniel in the Old Testament (Daniel 7:4-7), which was interpreted to mean four successive empires which dominated Israel. John's vision brings all the characteristic brutality, power and evil of earlier empires into one.

8. The **fatal wound** of the sea beast emphasizes the ability of the beast to dodge and recover from attacks. This ruler or empire will seem to be destroyed, but will rise again - thus gaining respect from those who do not believe in God.
9. The **"earth beast"** (13:11) is elsewhere in Revelation called a "false prophet" (16:13, 19:20, 20:10), or a religious leader that legitimizes the spiritual authority of the sea beast and gives theological support to opposition to the Church and the Gospel.
10. The **mark of the beast**. The nature of this mark (spiritual, tattoo, visible, or invisible) has been debated, but its purpose is clear: to identify those who isn't loyal to the sea beast so that his enemies can be destroyed. Dozens of attempts have been made to understand the meaning of the number **"666."** The number 7, in Hebrew & Greek, represents perfection. In the Greek, the numbers which correspond to the letters in Jesus' name add up to 8. So some think that "666" symbolizes how the sea beast falls short of perfection and is inferior to salvation in Christ.

QUESTIONS:

1. What do we learn about Satan in chapter 12 (his character, his activities, and destiny)? What does it mean to you that he and his work are overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of believers (12:10-11)?
2. Does Satan really control the entirety of the earth? According to chapters 12-13, what doesn't Satan have control over? Who is protected from Satan's onslaught?
3. The "sea beast," Satan's representative, is often called the "Antichrist" - or the opposite of Christ, who is God's representative. In what ways are they opposite? In what ways, though, does the Antichrist parody Christ?
4. What do believers have to do, and what qualities do they need to exhibit, to endure the reign of the sea beast?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Research marks in the Old Testament. What kinds of marks were good marks and what kind were bad? Read Genesis 17:9-14, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:28, and Ezekiel 9:4).
2. Investigate the numbers 6 and 666 in the Old Testament. Whose income was 666 talents? What does Scripture say about that person?
3. What do 1 John 2:18-23 and 2 John 7 say about Antichrist and antichrists?