

## REVELATION 12-13

1) Revelation 12: 1-6 and 7-14 refer to the same span of time, only in a different place. 1-6 takes place on earth while 7-14 takes place in heaven.

- A woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet. Use of imagery like the sun or the moon convey something from God rather than something evil. The woman represents Israel, or the new Israel of the church (Jewish Christians). The clue is the crown of '12' stars, referring to the 12 tribes.

- She was pregnant with whom? The Messiah who is Jesus. Vs. 5 tells us that she gave birth to him and his destiny was to rule the nations. Isaiah 66:7 refers to a woman in great travail, ready to give birth to a child of hope, the future messiah.

- But there is also a great red dragon with a huge tail, causing natural catastrophe. It is interesting how evil always causes harm to the earth, a movement toward a return to the chaos that existed before God created the world. God brought order out of the chaos. Revelation seems to imply that at the end of this world order there will be a new creation, a new world, and it will be preceded by a push toward chaos and disorder by the forces of evil.

- The red dragon wants to destroy the child, but the child is whisked to heaven (from birth to ascension), and the woman flees to the wilderness (wilderness being that place of testing, testing of faith, a time to strengthen faith when it is weakened and shaken). Israel, Moses, Jesus - all of them passed through severe wilderness experiences. The church - the spiritual Israel - which is currently suffering persecution is also experiencing the wilderness.

- Like the prophet Elijah in the wilderness, like the people of Israel and like Jesus, the woman is nourished and cared for. And this will last 3.5 years, the time allotted for the fury of Satan and his forces to do their worst.

- 7-14 views the same span of time (the 1<sup>st</sup> 3.5 yrs up to the mid-point) from the perspective of heaven. There a battle takes place between Michael along with the good angels on the one hand, and the dragon along with his evil angels on the other. The dragon and his angels are defeated and banished from heaven. But they end up on earth, there to attempt one last defeat of good by attacking the weak and vulnerable children of God on earth. This may also be a larger explanation for how serious evil came into a world created by a good and loving God.

2) The dragon makes another effort to destroy the woman (the church) and fails. Angry about this he goes off to attack her children. Several points need to be made here.

A) The woman probably represents the Jewish Christians and Jewish Israel out of which the church has sprung. Her children, therefore, must be the gentile Christians who have more recently come into the fold to complete the growing number of the elect from the four winds, from every tribe, nation, language, and culture.

B) They are identified as her children because they keep the commandments (faithfulness to God, justice, and compassion in relation to other life on earth) and they hold to the witness of Jesus (who died in faithfulness to God as a witness (martyr) to divine love in the flesh). Those who die for their faith lived out as love are especially dear to God.

C) The dragon is identified as the Devil (chaos and disorder) or Satan (the adversary, accuser, and deceiver of the whole world vs.9).

3) Chapter 13 introduces two new characters called beasts. The dragon passes on his mantle and being to a beast who is then supported by a second beast. All the descriptive imagery of the beast has parallels in Daniel, particularly Daniel 7. The reference to one of the heads of the beast having received a deathblow is a give-away clue that this beast is an image of the emperor Nero. Nero was not only a particularly vicious persecutor of Christians, especially after the great fire in Rome that was blamed on Christians (64 AD), but he had also killed himself by sinking a dagger into his neck. Legend had it that Nero hadn't really died, or else, he would come back in the future to exact vengeance toward all his enemies. Well, this beast, identified with Satan, who speaks arrogantly and blasphemously against God, who will persecute Christians for 3.5 years, is a revived Nero.

Those who truly belong to God, however, will not cave in. God believes in them (their name has been written in the book of life) and this gives them strength and encouragement to endure. Also, they are not to use evil tactics to defeat evil (they are not to take up the sword or kill). The endurance of love is the testimony of Jesus.

4) The 2<sup>nd</sup> beast represents a priestly support of the emperor worship and one that will be imposed ferociously on all the inhabitants of the known world. Emperor Cult priests were known to perform all kinds of magic and ventriloquism to elicit devotion to the emperor religion. If the 2<sup>nd</sup> beast is not a reference to them, it would be to those false Christians who teach compromise with emperor religion (Chapters 2-3).

The mark on hand and forehead represents a further intensification of control on all inhabitants. Being excluded and cut out of the system could have disastrous results (as persecuted Christians were discovering). Sadly, some fundamentalist-influenced folk associate this mark with vaccine mandates, and that those who refuse to be so marked/vaccinated are persecuted for resisting.

The numbers 666 or 616 is an important clue. Hebrew letters were each assigned a number. Adding up the numbers comes up with the title 'Neron Caesar'. The extra n is also found in

Dead Sea Scroll references to Nero. Without the extra n, the numbers add up to 616 (as found in other ancient manuscripts of Revelation).

7 was the number of perfection - 3 represents heaven and 4 represents the earth and together they represent all reality in a perfect way. 6 as number implies a missing of the mark or of imperfection. 3 sixes together represents a perfect or absolute imperfection. Hence the beast with the number 666 is the anti-Christ, the opposite of Christ or the lamb who represents purity, goodness, and love in perfect degree.

So, what are these chapters saying? They're repeating some of the same ground, while introducing new characters. There is a total of 7 years (more figurative than literal) of suffering before the end and new beginning. The first 3.5 years has begun and perhaps already reached its destructive point in the abomination of desolation (destruction of the holy of holies of the temple). Now Christians are moving into a more severe time of suffering and persecution. But this has a limited time span. The defeat of evil (the dragon and the beasts) has already been accomplished in heaven and will soon be accomplished on earth. But meanwhile, the woman (Christians and the church) will be attacked in one final effort to destroy God's vision of a new creation with evil banished forever.

But believers are already being told that God's vision will triumph. Christians just have to hang in there, faithful to their Lord Jesus who was also slain, and yet reigns forever as the slain lamb. Christians bring their wounds with them but will also experience a healing, renewal, vindication, and joy like nothing they've known before. This should give them strength, courage, and resilience to face the ordeal ahead without losing their souls which belong to God. Their names are already written in the book of life.

Satan and his earthly representation in the Roman empire with its emperor, will be defeated forever. God's people will reign under the sovereignty of the lamb who will establish a new kingdom of peace and love. In the meantime, Christians must live this peace and love in a violent and brutal world, until the end comes, whether in their death, or the new creation.

The question for many of us living at peace within a larger society is: have we compromised with evil and injustice to be living so peacefully? Are there commitments to justice, truth and right we need to make? Are there relationships we need to let go and influences we need to turn our backs on? Who are those in our society who are persecuted, marginalized, and discarded? How can we as followers of the slain lamb serve those most in need and advocate prayerfully on their behalf as victims of the system?