

## INTRODUCTION

In our journey through Revelation, our goal is to develop an approach in understanding the strange imagery. The next segment takes us on a wild ride from chapter 12 to chapter 19. We don't have near enough time, so this morning we'll cover just a snippet, and the study manuscript available in the Narthex will cover a great deal more. The scene opens with a beautiful woman...

- THE WOMAN

### Revelation 12

- 1. Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.**
- 2. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.**

We can learn a great deal on the thinking behind Revelation, by identifying this woman. Start with this: As a Christian, who is the first person that comes to mind when we talk about a woman bearing a child of heaven? [*Mary, mother of Jesus*]

John, as a Jewish Christian would go back another, seven hundred years earlier:

### Isaiah 7

- 14. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.**

These words were spoken when Israel was about to fall the first time to Babylon. The life of Mary happens when Israel is about to fall the second time to Rome. They both deal with the Messiah but in different layers of time. And even though both are implied; neither can be the meaning of this passage:

### Rev 4

- 1. ... I will show you things which must take place after this."**

Everything in chapter four onward; deals with the future. So it has to be something else. ...When the church is referred to, by gender, it is always female. ***The church is the woman.*** A drama unfolds as the woman is chased by a dragon.

### Rev 12

- 13. Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.**
- 14. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time ...**

Again, this fits in two layers of time. The word for "wilderness" also means solitary or desert place. Mary and Joseph were warned by God in Bethlehem. Herod was coming to kill her "male child" and they fled to Egypt. Three hundred years after John's writing Alexandria, Egypt became the center of Christian learning. There is a lot of desert wilderness in Egypt.

We can see what God is doing through John, he is using history to evoke a strong image of what is to come. And the image deals with layers of time- *past, present, and future*. The more we can understand it from the view of the original readers, the more sense it makes.

### **QUESTIONS:**

**IF YOU LOOK AT THE WOMAN FROM THE POINT OF OTHER SCRIPTURE AND HISTORY; WHAT IS THE MEANING OF “CLOTHED WITH THE SUN” “GARLAND OF TWELVE STARS”?**

**WHAT WOULD BE THE PURPOSE OF HAVING A SYMBOL APPLYING TO DIFFERENT POINTS IN TIME?**

### **Rev 12**

**15. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.**

**16. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.**

**17. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

The woman, who is the church, has many offspring. Who are they? -Those “*who keep the commandments of God.*” And they “*have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*”

What does that mean, “testimony”? The original Greek was “*marturia*” (mar-too-ree'-ah) *meaning evidence given, record, or report.*

***There are two things to realize here:***

1. We are not the offspring of this “woman” unless we are practicing what God has commanded, and there is evidence He is actually in our *being*.
2. And *if* we are, we are by default; **at war**. We are at war with the dragon. So who is the dragon?

### **Rev 12**

**7. And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,**

**8. but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.**

**9. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.**

Here is a subtly we Christians tend to miss. ***This isn't information from the distant past.*** Consider this from the oldest book of the Old Testament:

### **Job 1**

**6. Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.**

**7. And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."**

The Old Testament situation of Satan was not an entity separated from God, but one with free access to God. He was the great accuser of mankind. The outcast, raging embodiment of evil, comes with the New Testament.

One last bit of symbolism here. *There is a flood* which tries to carry the woman away. What is this flood? In short, when Scripture speaks of a flood it refers to a torrent or movement of people.

...And that sets up the next chapter.

- THE BEAST

**Revelation 13**

**1. Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name.**

**2. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.**

**3. I saw one of his heads *as if it had been mortally wounded*, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast.**

**4. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"**

**5. And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months.**

**QUESTIONS:**

**HOW DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE HISTORY OF SATAN (TO THIS POINT IN TIME)?**

**HOW MUCH DO YOU THINK "WAR WITH THE DRAGON" PLACE A PART IN OUR CHRISTIAN THINKING TODAY?**

**WHAT ARE SOME IMPLICATIONS OF THIS WAR ON CHRISTIAN LIFE?**

**WHAT ARE SOME PRACTICAL WAYS GENUINE CHRISTIANS HAVE "THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS"?**

To identify the beast, we have to apply the things we now know:

We must put ourselves in the place of a *Jewish-Christian of the first century*.

We must see it in the *context of those times, and symbols*.

In John's day, *who was a superpower* with the agility of a leopard, the power to crush like a bear, and the teeth to devour any enemy? *Rome* had built a network of roads and sea lanes unlike anything that ever existed before. They could send soldiers quickly to any place in the empire. And when that military power got there, it could crush the enemy. It had the fangs to back up any threat or warning.

*Romans were religious consumers*; they adopted everybody's gods. Early Rome was the *pinnacle of paganism*. And Rome was built on seven hills. And Rome had seven emperors who were advocates of *Caesar worship*. As for the ten crowns, there were these seven emperors and three other kings who reigned only a short while in a time of chaos.

*What about the head that was mortally wounded?* There was an idea in that day called "*Nero redivivus*", that is; Nero would live again in the form of some other ruler.

Nero has essentially gone down in history as a very cruel "nut case." The third emperor to come after Nero was a fellow named *Domitian*, and Domitian was known as the "bald Nero." He brought a whole new meaning to the idea of weirdly cruel. For example he was known to retire for hours to his table where he would spend time stabbing flies with a sharp stylus. He was more Nero than Nero!

There is little doubt that *the beast is the Roman Empire of John's era*, especially the Rome that would shortly follow.

### Rev 13

**7. And it was granted to him to *make war with the saints and to overcome them*. And authority was given him *over every tribe, tongue, and nation*.**

Scripture tells us that the Roman Empire was considered the entire world. For example:

### Luke 2

**1. And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that *all the world should be registered*.**

That is exactly what came to pass. *Emperor worship* reached its zenith under Domitian, so not surprisingly, so did the *persecution of the saints*. Domitian would not accept any god before himself. He insisted on being addressed as Lord.

In previous centuries, the belief of the Jews had been tolerated. But Domitian pressed to have his image in the Temple. His obsession led to the total destruction of Israel and the darkest hours of Christianity.

Once again, put this in the context of John's time. The premise of the revelation was for what would shortly come; Emperor Domitian fits the very definition of "Anti-Christ."

- THE MARK OF THE BEAST

**Rev 13**

**16. And he causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads,**

**17. and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.**

**18. Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.**

Once again, the imagery here, would have been very clear to the original readers of the time. At least four times in Exodus and Deuteronomy, the Jewish people were given this command:

**Deut 6**

**6. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart;**

...

**8. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.**

The Hebrews were very literal people so when they prayed they wore *phylacteries* on their left arm and forehead. The first image that would come to the Jewish-Christian was the *exact opposite of Godly worship*.

From the beginning of Scripture, there is another consistent symbolism: The *right hand is a symbol of honor, authority, and one's achievements*. The *forehead is the symbol of one's mind-what is foremost in our thoughts, our reason, and our values*. Combine that with the use of another word...

There was more than one Greek word for *mark or seal*. The word we might expect here is "*stigma*" which was a branding given to a run-away or disobedient slave. But the word used instead is "*charagma*." It is not the mark of a slave, but the *mark of a willing transaction*.

Charagma was also, a seal on which the *emperor's image was stamped*. So it represents an *acceptance of his authority*. This seal was on *every contract* of buying or selling. It was also the stamp on the currency.

But more importantly, when a man *burned a pinch of incense to Caesar*, he was given a certificate that said he had done so. This certificate was necessary to carry out business in the Empire. And of course, how could a Christian burn incense to the God-Caesar without denying the real God?

**QUESTIONS:**

**WHAT DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE MARK OF THE BEAST TO BE?**

**WHAT DOES 666 MEAN?**

**Rev 13**

**10. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the *patience and the faith of the saints*.**

What exactly did the writer mean by “patience” of the saints? The original word was hupomone (hoop-om-on-ay') meaning *cheerful or hopeful endurance, constancy, to continue*.

***What does that look like under persecution?*** Let me give you a modern day example that you might have read in last week’s church prayer letter: Despite the situation in the Middle East, many Filipinos go there in search of work. A Filipino nurse reports that after a few months, employers give an ultimatum, become Muslim or lose your job, *or worse*. Forced conversions are part of the system.

A recent case involves a woman who was raped at work, and then indicted by the Saudi authorities for unlawful extramarital sex. So she was put in prison. Worse yet, she became pregnant from the attack and in the harsh prison conditions, she miscarried. She is scheduled to appear in court where she could very likely be sentenced to 100 lashes. ***There is nothing fair or honest in persecution.*** That is the type of darkness in which *the saints must have patience*. It makes me wonder, ***do we have that kind of metal in our faith?***

In the scope of our investigation, there are more symbols than we have time to address, but we have uncovered these key principles of understanding:

1. This revelation wasn’t written in a vacuum. ***It is rooted in real events and times.***
2. The revelation makes big use of imagery, and that imagery is in ***layers of time***. Events that have taken place are often a *foreshadow* of the same type of event or person yet to come. For example: There was a ***literal Babylon***. Scripturally, it becomes the symbol of ***deeply indulged sin***. When Rev 14:8 talks about fallen Babylon, it isn’t talking about a *Babylon-type place*; Rome. It is anti-God in another wrapping. ***Rome is simply the first archetype of the beast.*** Another power with *Rome-like qualities* will rise in a different version for its time.
3. The thread throughout all of this is; ***the victorious in all this darkness are those who endure*** in the righteousness of God.

***There is a heavy implication here, and a very hard concept to get across. So please listen closely:*** People belong to local churches and call themselves Christians for all kinds of reasons. They like the sense of family and belonging that develops there. *–And there’s nothing wrong with that.* There are those who hang in there, in the hope they’ll get on the right side of God and He’ll grant them some mercy in their lives; perhaps even prosperity! Hope in God’s mercy is a good thing.

But if the foundational reason that you or I follow Christ is ***anything other than for what He is; we will not be able to endure***. We worship God because, He alone is worthy. We follow God because He alone is sovereign. We hope in God because He alone is the beginning and the end. Especially in the end of times; prosperity, mercy, security, happy situations, even physical life itself; can all be stripped away. ***The only thing that remains unmovable is the worthiness of God.***

**QUESTIONS:**

**IN YOUR WORDS WHAT IS "PATIENCE AND FAITH OF THE SAINTS"?**

**HOW DO WE DEVELOP THESE QUALITIES?**

**IF YOU WERE THAT FILIPINO WORKER, HOW WOULD YOU HAVE THESE QUALITIES AND NOT TURN BITTER?**

- **THE JUDGMENT**

**Rev 14**

**14. And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a *sharp sickle*.**

**15. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe."**

Here is another symbol that would be readily understandable to the Jewish-Christian. The term "Son of Man" was used by Jesus. And He borrowed it from the book of Daniel which was talking about this very thing. A sickle was a symbol used over and over; meaning the *judgment of God come to humankind*.

The plagues sound like a variation of the seven seals we read earlier. But they are the last and most severe. ***The seals centered on the darkness of human nature. These are the direct wrath of God.*** God brings His wrath through nature. Again, the imagery of past events is used. They sound very much like the plagues on Egypt in the time of Moses. And it is essentially the same thing; judgment on the unrighteous for the liberation of God's people.

***Here's a quick summary of the plagues:***

- (i) The coming of the ulcerous sores upon men (Rev.16:2).
- (ii) The sea becoming like the blood of a dead man (Rev.16:3).
- (iii) The rivers and fountains becoming blood (Rev.16:4).
- (iv) The sun becoming scorchingly hot (Rev.16:8).
- (v) The darkness over the kingdom of the beast, and its agony (Rev.6:10).
- (vi) The drying up of the Euphrates to open a way for the hordes of the kings of the east (Rev.16:12).
- (vii) The pollution of the air and the accompanying terrors in nature, the thunder, the earthquake, the lightning and the hail (Rev.16:17-21).

Like the section of the revelation before it; evil is defeated, not merely by *goodness*, but by *holiness*.

**Rev 19**

**9. Then he said to me, "Write: `Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."**

**10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."**

It brings us back to imagery we understand to this day- the Lamb, and the supper- even today we celebrate that in communion. And it ends with an interesting vignette. There is an angel so impressive, John bows to worship him. But the angel is aghast! *Don't do that! There is only One worthy of worship- God.*

***"For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*** In other words, "The proof of Jesus is in the reality that these things happen." And in the time of John; it had happened. After Rome came the dark ages and the black plague; tribulation like the world had never known before or since. We see events unfolding in our time.

And reality tells us ***there is more to come***. Martyrdom didn't stop after the fall of Rome. In fact, some statistics say that the 20<sup>th</sup> century suffered more martyrs than any other time in history. If you follow the trends, nearly all of this persecution comes from two sources; Communism... and far more from Islam. Isn't it interesting how that brings us full circle; right back to the original Babylon.

Considering the explosion of knowledge, transportation, and weapons of mass destruction in just the past 50 years, it could well be the *near future*.

Revelation illustrates something else as well: the ***purity and endurance of faith that will be required***. That leaves us with a question to take with us: ***Judging by that standard; where will you and I find ourselves? ...The time to start striving for that standard IS NOW!***

**QUESTIONS:**

**IN YOUR WORDS, WHAT'S THE MEANING OF "THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY?"**

**WHY DOES THE VISION MAKE A POINT OF MENTIONING THE ANGEL REFUSING TO BE WORSHIPED?**

**WHAT IS THE KEY (BESIDES THE SPIRIT OF GOD) TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT JESUS IS SAYING?**