

Bible Study Revelation Chapters 12-13

“12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet...”

This woman is clearly exalted in the heavens. Revelation describes other humans in heaven, such as the four 24 elders with their crowns, and the martyr-saints praying aloud under the altar. But none of these other humans in heaven are described with such celestial glory as this.

“...and on her head a garland of twelve stars.”

Some Orthodox icons of the Theotokos includes this garland of twelve stars.

The exalted woman in this passage fits the following description:

“Greater in honor than the Cherubim, and more glorious beyond compare than the Seraphim...”

“2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.”

Can you think of a woman with celestial glory who gave birth?

“5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”

“... without corruption you gave birth to God the Word. True Theotokos we magnify you.”

The Child born to this exalted women has a throne in heaven.

“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (Revelation 3:21).

The book of Revelation has many symbols, some of which are hard to understand. However, the vision of the exalted woman who gives birth to a male child who rules the nations and ascends to a throne in heaven is obvious. This is the Theotokos who gave birth to Christ.

Many of our Protestant friends pay little attention to Mary. They think she is of little importance. This passage in Revelation is an excellent biblical evidence of how important she is. No other person in the Bible is described as being, *“...clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.”* No other person in the Bible gave birth to a male child who will *“rule all nations with a rod of iron”* and was *“caught up to God and His throne.”* This Bible passage is useful to show our Protestant friends just how important the Theotokos really is.

“³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.”

The “great, fiery red dragon” is clearly Satan. The word “Satan” means “resister” in Hebrew, and he strenuously opposed the birth of Christ and used King Herod to kill the Christ child exactly as the above passage from Revelation describes:

“Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men” (Matthew 2:16).

“⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

This verse may be a reference to Mary and Joseph’s flight to Egypt to escape Herod’s massacre.

“¹³ Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him.”

“⁷ And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with 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.”

These verses summarize the angelic rebellion against God by Lucifer and some of the angels. That catastrophic event is described elsewhere in the Bible.

Christ said, “And He said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18).

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isaiah 14:12-15).

“On the day that you were created they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, till

unrighteousness was found in you. In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned; so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. I cast you to the ground...By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trade you profaned your sanctuaries; so I brought fire out from your midst; it consumed you, and I turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all who saw you (Ezekiel 28:13-18).



Once again in the book of Revelation, the focus abruptly shifts from the rebellion, evil and destruction to God on His throne in heaven:

“¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.”

God is still in charge. *“God is with us, know it you nations and be submissive, For God is with us. Hear it to the ends of the earth. For God is with us. You mighty shall be defeated. For God is with us. Even if you should prevail, again you will be defeated, For God is with us. Whatever plan you conceive, the Lord will destroy, For God is with us” (Compline Hymn).*

The instrument of God’s defeating His enemies are described and unexpected:

“¹¹ And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.”

The passion-bearers and martyrs of the Church, though meek and humble, are the ones who defeat the fallen Satan and his demons. This principle applies to the present Church age, as well as the end times. In his Epistle John wrote, *“I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.”*

“¹² Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

We see the demons’ awareness of “short time” in the Gospel. “...there met Him [Christ] two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. ²⁹ And suddenly they cried out, saying, “What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?” (Matthew 8:28-29).

“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 and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.”

This may be another reference to Mary and Joseph’s flight to Egypt, as in verse 6.

“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.”

The serpent, always trying to do harm, attempted to kill the Theotokos, symbolically here by drowning. Yet she was protected by the earth, which swallowed the flood. “And that the whole narrative might be told, one must know the ending of the words ‘the earth came to help the woman’... that is, it received in itself the Lord, who had been betrayed, and gave him back again. In this way, the earth rendered assistance” (Oecumenius).

“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.”

This verse calls Christians Mary’s “offspring.” This is in keeping with what Christ said from the cross. To Mary, He said, “Woman, behold your son.” To John – the same John who wrote Revelation – Christ said, “Behold your mother” and John took her into his home (John 19:26). John became the “offspring” of the Theotokos, and ever since all other true Christians have become her offspring as well.

Chapter 13 introduces a major character in Revelation. He is called “the Beast” in Revelation, and also called “the Antichrist” elsewhere in the Bible. In this chapter there appear to be two beasts and antichrists. The first is described:

“^{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. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. ³ And 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. ⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ 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. ⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

⁹ If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 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.

Then the second Beast:

“¹¹ Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. ¹² And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. ¹³ He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. ¹⁴ And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. ¹⁵ He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

¹⁶ 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.”

“The Classical Greek word charagma (χάραγμα), translated as mark (of the beast) in Revelation 13:16 can also mean any mark engraved, imprinted, or branded; stamped money, document, or coin...” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Number_of_the_beast



Together, these Beasts are earthly agents of the devil (“*and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.*”) They are signified by

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great power, performance of false miracles, blasphemies, and ability to inspire worship of those, *“...whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”*

Although the Beasts described here are highlighted in the end times, there have been many antichrists since apostolic times. The same John who wrote Revelation also wrote in his first epistle, *“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.”*

For the Christians readers of Revelation in the first three centuries, the Beast/Antichrist would have definitely been identified as the Roman Emperors of that time. They fit all the descriptions. Nero (reigned 54-68 AD) was the first Roman Emperor to persecute Christians. Early Roman sources say he set fire to the city of Rome in order to rebuild it according to his own schemes, and blamed it on the Christians. He is reported to have burned Christians alive to light his garden. John Chrysostom identified Nero as the Antichrist:

“And let us prove this in the examples of two persons, Nero and Paul. The one had the glory of this world, the other the dishonour. How? The first was a tyrant ... Even wise men and potentates and sovereigns trembled at him. For beside all this, he was said to be a cruel and violent man. He even wished to be thought a god, and he despised both all the idols, and the very God Who is over all. He was worshipped as a god.”

The Emperor Vespasian (69-79 AD) was declared a god. Another Roman Emperor who is a candidate of the Antichrist is Domitian (ruled 81-96 AD). Contemporary Roman writers described Domitian in horror for his behavior. For example, Tacitus wrote, *“...many were cut off by ordinary casualties, and the ablest fell victims to the Emperor’s rage, if a few of us survive...”* It was Domitian who exiled John to Patmos.

“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.”

Throughout history, there have been many attempts to decode the meaning of “666” using Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic numerology, where every letter has a numeric value. However, the results of these attempts to connect Nero and others to 666 have been unsuccessful. They only work if one spells “Nero” in creative ways. Perhaps Andrew of Caesarea offers us the best way to approach the meaning of 666:

“Were it necessary, as some teachers say, that such a name be clearly known, the seer would have revealed it. But the divine grace did not consent that the name of the destroyer be noted in the divine book.”