

## Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Revelation Chapter 12: Some Notes

In some ways, John's Revelation terminology is like Baseball terminology to an ordinary British person, or cricket terminology to an ordinary American. If you are familiar with the terminology, there aren't any problems. Much of the picture language in Chapter 12 has its roots in Old Testament, Babylonian, Greek, Persian and Egyptian myths: The woman whose child is a threat to the monster/evil god who therefore tries to get at the child or the woman. The big red dragon. The sea monster. The sort of trinity of evil, fighting the Trinity. This does raise the issue of how far Jews and Christians can safely dabble in paganism for their narrative. You can understand why Jehovah's witnesses reject Christmas, because it is a Christianised pagan festival. John doesn't say he believes in the pagan myth, but he finds them convenient for reference – as did the Old Testament writers.

The Woman has been claimed as the whole body of faithful believers, (Jew and Christian), as the Christian Church, and – since she gives birth to Jesus, Mary. Her crown etc were drawn from the familiar mythology. The Jesus story was, of course absolutely familiar to John's audience, so the Birth, Death, Resurrection and Ascension are captured in just a few words. The Satan part of the story is interesting. In the Bible, Satan started as the heavenly being with the role of reminding God of people's sins, and developed, especially in the New Testament, into the evil being who tried (tries) to separate us from God. Heaven is the spiritual realm rather than where we go when we die. Again, we have to think whether we believe in a fight between good and evil in the "Heavenly" places, or just in individual and collective human badness. Greek philosophy and the older pagan religions generally sided with John (and much of the Bible including the Gospels) in believing that evil was not just a human issue.

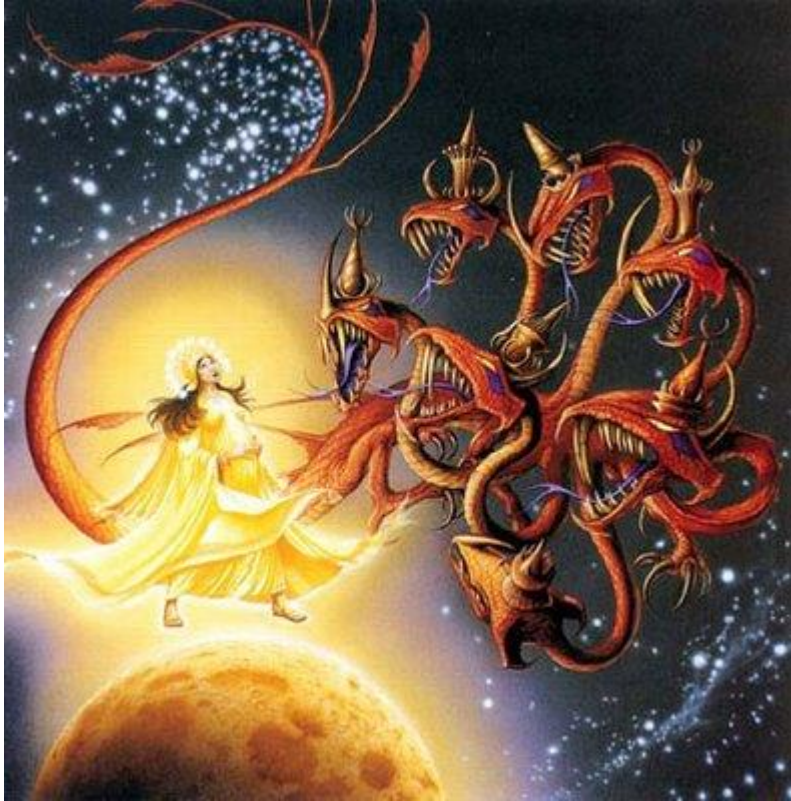
John writes at multiple levels, and the Beast looks suspiciously like the Roman Empire (the bad side of that Empire). Again, we have noted before that Paul benefits from Roman justice and Roman peace, but that by the time of John Emperors were demanding to be recognised as gods, and that was a rule too far for Jews and Christians – for whom there was only One God. (For a pagan, adding one more "god" to the collection was no great deal: you tried to keep on the right side of all the gods, just in case they turned out to be real.

Escaping to the wilderness is a familiar Bible habit, and a regular Jewish experience. It had happened when Antiochus was the threat. It happened when the Romans threatened Jerusalem. Jesus Himself had withdrawn to the wilderness – with Satan in hot pursuit. The flood that pursued "Mary" was a reminder of the old god of water chaos that the true god overcame (see Genesis, see e.g. the Babylonian myths. Eagle wings come into the Psalms and elsewhere; and Tolkein fans will recognise the picture.

Michael v Devil: see Daniel. Note that the Victory is actually Christ. If you have been to Coventry Cathedral (St Michael's ) you will recall the Epstein sculpture. (If you haven't a

Group train trip might be possible?) The Chapter finishes with the threat/promise of persecution, but the assurance of ultimate victory.





### **Revelation 12:1-6**



*1 A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*

*2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birthpangs, in the agony of giving birth.*

## **LET'S UNLOCK THE SYMBOLS**

- 1. A Woman**
- 2. Clothed with the Sun**
- 3. The Moon under her feet**
- 4. Upon her head a crown**
- 5. Twelve stars**

