

REVELATION 12.1-15.4

Act Four: The Drama of History

The Characters (12.1-6)

Johnson: "The conflict between the woman and the dragon dominates Revelation 12, which begins with the dragon wanting to consume the son to whom the woman is giving birth (v 4) and closes with the dragon's frustrated attempts to destroy her and the 'rest of her children' (v 17)."

From Revelation 12.1 through 15.4 John once more "sees" the sweep of history, beginning with the woman giving birth to "the (S)on" and ending the singing of the triumphal "song of the Lamb."

(12.1) And a great sign 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 birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

Who is this woman?

She is a "sign" representing more than a single, particular individual

She is OT Israel

*remember Joseph's second dream in Genesis 37.9-11
his father Jacob understood Joseph's dream to be referring to . . .*

*Jacob, the sun
Joseph's mother Rachel, the moon
Joseph's brothers, eleven stars
Joseph, by implication, the twelfth star - to whom all the others would bow (and
through whom, by his suffering, they would be saved)*

She is "true" Israel (remember - not all Israel is Israel, Romans 9.6)

*true Israel includes all of God's covenant people, OT, NT, and still today
note what is taught and promised in Isaiah 54.1-6*

*the woman's husband is her Maker (v 5)
though she was thought desolate (v 1) she will have many children
her children will be so many her tents cannot house all of them (vs 2-3)
and included among her children will be "the nations" (v 3)*

as we will see . . .

*her Seed (singular) will be caught up to God and to His Throne
she & her seed (plural) still here on earth will continue to be attacked by the "great
red dragon" in vs 13-17*

She is also symbolically Mary, giving birth to Jesus (conceived by her "husband," God the Holy Spirit)

*in Gen 3.16-17 the Lord told Eve, "I will multiply your pain in childbirth"
but, despite her pain - a consequence of the fall - she is blessed to know she will have
children*

*she is also told that her Seed and seed will be continuously at war with the seed of the
serpent*

*her promised seed (Gen 3.15) will be
 the seed of true Israel – who are constantly attacked by the seed of the serpent
 (Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, the “nations” and
 Israel, Saul and David)
 THE SEED, Jesus
 Whom the serpent will strike
 but Who in turn will crush the serpent’s head*

(3) And another sign appeared in heaven:

*behold, a great red dragon, with
 seven heads and
 ten horns, and
 on his heads seven diadems.*

(4) His tail
*swept down a third of the stars of heaven
 and cast them to the earth.*

*A second sign: a great red dragon (identified in v 9 as the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the
 deceiver of the whole world)*

*The great “dragon” represents in the OT the evil kingdoms that oppress Israel
 for example in Psalm 74.12-14 Egypt is called “Leviathan” – which in the Greek translation
 of the OT is described using the same word for “dragon” here in Revelation 12.3
 in Ezekiel 29.3 the Pharaoh is called “the great dragon”
 the Lord’s deliverance of Israel out of Egypt is a “foretaste” of the our deliverance from the
 dominion of darkness (Colossians 1.13-14)
 note the promise of Isaiah 27.1 – “In that day the Lord with his hand and great and
 strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting
 serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.”*

*The “redness” of the dragon perhaps pictures it being wet with the blood of the saints
 It has seven heads*

*perhaps a compilation of the four beasts in Daniel 7
 the first, a lion with eagles’s wings (Babylon)
 the second, a bear (Persia)
 the third a leopard with FOUR heads (Greece)
 the fourth, “terrifying, dreadful, exceedingly strong” (Rome)
 altogether: seven heads*

*in Daniel 7 these are the kingdoms that war against the saints from the time of Babylon
 until the time of John (suffering at the hands of the fourth beast, Rome)
 they represent all the kingdoms throughout history that persecute God’s covenant people
 BUT note in Daniel 7 that they will be defeated, and the dominion will be given to “one like
 a son of Man” (v 13) and to His saints (v 27)
 not simply a defeat of earthly kingdoms, but more specially the defeat of the power behind
 their thrones, the dragon, who, as we shall see, is Satan*

*It has ten horns (how are ten horns distributed among seven head?)
 ten horns are found on the head of the fourth
 beast in Daniel 7.7*

*these horns represent blasphemous claims to earthly kingship by various kingdoms
 (various kingdoms represented by the number 10)*

*Rev 13.1, 17.3 – “blasphemous names” (the Caesar’s claim to be “Lord and Savior”)
 Rev 17.14 – making war on the Lamb; conquered by the Lamb Who is the Lord of lords
 and King of kings*

*note again that Rev 19.12-16 speaks of the true King of kings and Lord of lords
It has seven diadems
which represent the dragon's claim of sovereign, universal (the number of seven) authority
BUT in 19.12 on Jesus's head are "many diadems," and that in 19.19-21, He utterly
defeats the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies*

*Who are the "third of the stars" whom the dragon's tail sweeps from heaven to the earth?
fallen angels? Perhaps (2 Peter 2.4. Jude 6)
but in Revelation 1.20 "stars" are the angels of the seven churches
not fallen angels
but angels who are representative of persecuted saints
furthermore, in Daniel 8.10 the "stars" that Antiochus Epiphanes throws down and
tramples on are the saints of the early 2nd century BC (the Maccabees)
note also that in Daniel 12.3 the "wise" are compared to stars
these falling stars most likely represent the saints and their representative angels (whose
true abode is in heaven, Heb 12.22-24) who suffer at the hands of the kingdoms of
this world*

*And the dragon stood before the woman
who was about to give birth,
so that
when she bore her child
he might devour it.*

*(5) She gave birth to a male child,
one who is to rule all the nations
with a rod of iron,
but her child was caught up
to God and
to his throne,*

*(6) and the woman fled into the wilderness,
where she has a place prepared by God,
in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

*How many of your manger scenes include a dragon?
But here he is, pictured as standing before the woman as she gives birth so that he might devour
her Child - the Son (Psalm 2.7) who will rule all nations with a rod of iron (Psalm 2.8-9)
But then, the details of the Child's life are not given - instead we proceed immediately to His
ascension to God and to His Throne (such a compressed description of Jesus' earthly
ministry is found elsewhere in the NT: John 3.13, 8.14, 13.3, 16.28, 1 Tim 3.16)*

Whose Throne?

God the Father

*God the Son (3.21 - "I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.")
before which shine brightly God the Holy Spirit (4.5)*

*Now the woman is pictured as fleeing into the wilderness - a place prepared for her by God
as did the Israelites - where the Lord protected and provided for them (Psalm 23.5) despite
their sin; note that in 12.14 the woman is carried into the wilderness on the wings
of an eagle - as was Israel (Exodus 19.4)
as did Elijah - where he was protected and provided for (I Kings 17, 19.3-8)*

*A "place" prepared by God for His saints
both now
and then forever (John 14.2-3)*

In the wilderness she is "nourished" (manna, quail, water) for 1,260 days, that is . . .

11.2, 13.5 - 42 months

11.3, 12.6 - 1,260 days

12.14 - a time, times and half a time (a Hebrew expression equal to 3 ½ years)

note that in Daniel 7.24, the beast persecutes the saints for a time, times and half a time

like other numbers in Revelation, these time references are symbolic

it is not literally the second half of a great tribulation that comes at the end of the ages

the tribulation of the church began with Jesus's rejection and crucifixion, and continues until He comes again

to what do these numbers symbolically refer?

Israel's time in the wilderness?

they WANDERED for 40 years

but how much time passed from their leaving Egypt until their wandering began?

note that Numbers 33.5-49 lists 42 encampments during their wandering

Elijah's ministry of 3 ½ years?

Jesus's earthly ministry of 3 ½ years?

the three and half years of Antiochus Epiphanes' attacks on Israel in the early 2nd century BC? - during which many Jews fled into the wilderness

the three and half years of Rome's siege of Jerusalem in 67-70 AD? - during which once more many Jews fled into the wilderness (many perhaps in response to Jesus' warning in Matthew 24.15-19)

so likewise, the church will face tribulation, during which times they seek shelter in the sanctuary God provides for them, where He will protect and provide for them - they will suffer physically, but they will also gain the VICTORY

Johnson: "The time period symbolized in 1,260 days encompasses the church's ongoing experience of suffering and safety, bold testimony and bitter trial, alienation in the desert but nourishment from God, from the time of Jesus' ascension to heaven until the trauma that precedes his glorious return."

The Plot (12.7-17)

(7) Now war arose in heaven,

Michael and his angels

fighting against the dragon.

And the dragon and his angels fought back,

(8) but he was defeated,

and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

(9) And the great dragon was thrown down,

that ancient serpent,

who is called

the devil and

Satan,

the deceiver of the whole world-

he was thrown down to the earth,

and his angels were thrown down with him.

With the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement of the woman's Child, a brief war rages in heaven resulting in Satan being defeated and thrown down to the earth along with his demonic angels

Now note that the battle described in 7-13 comes between the story told in vs 1-6 and in vs 14-17. What we have in vs 7-13 is a "behind the scene" look of the same story from a different perspective (Beale: "The actions described are the heavenly counterpart of earthly events recorded in vs 1-6 [and vs 14-17].")

We have war in heaven: Michael leading his angels in battle against the dragon and his demonic angels

*Daniel 12.1, "Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people."
in Daniel 10.13, "Michael, one of the great princes" is sent to aid another angel in his battle against the king of Persia*

*They defeat the great dragon
the ancient serpent
the devil ("slanderer")
Satan ("deceiver")
the deceiver of the whole world*

*Satan and his demonic angels are thrown out of heaven to the earth
Satan can no longer be the "accuser of the brethren" - as he accused for example . . .
Job
Joshua the High Priest*

why? Because the woman's Son has defeated him

Beale: "Christ's resurrection and the beginning of his rule are immediately reflected in heaven by Michael's and his angels' defeat of the devil and his hosts."

Beale:

*"In Psalm 2 the Messiah 'smites the nations' with an iron rod, and
in Daniel 2 a stone strikes the whole earth' - four-part statue representing the
kingdoms of man."*

The parallelism of these two OT prophecies supports our view that Rev 12.7-12 depicts a heavenly version of what transpired on earth at the time of Christ's resurrection."

Luke 10.17-20

*Jesus sees Satan fall like lightning from heaven
why? Because he has given His followers authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and
over all the power of the enemy
and Jesus promises that "nothing shall hurt you" - a promise to those about whom He also
spoke about what they would suffer for the sake of His Name
His true followers would be kept from the eternal harm of being overwhelmed by Satan's
lies; but because of their faithful obedience to their true King, they will experience
tribulation as the kings of this world persecute them*

Beale: "The remainder of chapter 12 and of the Apocalypse reveals that Christ's death and resurrection have resulted in drastically curtailing the devil's role of deception and nullifying his role of slanderer [Romans 8.33-39]. . . . Nevertheless, the devil continues his deceptive work through his servants in the midst of the church."

- (10) And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying,
 "Now
 the salvation and
 the power and
 the kingdom of our God and
 the authority of his Christ
 have come, for
 the accuser of our brothers
 has been thrown down,
 who accuses them day and night before our God.
 (11) And they have conquered him
 by the blood of the Lamb and
 by the word of their testimony,
 for they loved not their lives even unto death.
 (12) Therefore, rejoice,
 O heavens and
 you who dwell in them!
 But woe to you,
 O earth and sea,
 for the devil has come down to you in great wrath,
 because he knows that his time is short!"

John hears a great voice in heaven calling upon all who dwell in heaven (which includes you and me - Hebrews 12.22-24) to rejoice!

*for NOW has come salvation, power, the kingdom of God, the authority of Christ
 for NOW the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down
 the one who loves to accuse us day and night
 for NOW the accuser has been conquered
 by the blood of the Lamb
 by the word of their testimony
 note that your testimony, in word and deed, defeats Satan (which is why he
 hates you and attempts to ruin your testimony)
 by the fact that they love the Lord more than they love their physical comforts,
 physical pleasures and earthly existence*

The NOW begins with Jesus' overcoming and defeat of Satan

*But a word of woe, of warning, is given to those who still live on this earth
 for the devil is among us like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us
 and he is desperate, for he knows his time is short*

- (13) And when the dragon saw
 that he had been thrown down to the earth,
 he pursued the woman
 who had given birth to the male child.
 (14) But the woman was given
 the two wings of
 the great eagle
 so that she might fly from the serpent
 into the wilderness,
 to the place where she is to be nourished
 for a time, and times, and half a time.

- (15) The serpent poured water
 like a river
 out of his mouth
 after the woman,
 to sweep her away with a flood.
- (16) But the earth came to the help of the woman,
 and the earth opened its mouth
 and swallowed the river
 that the dragon had poured from his mouth.
- (17) Then the dragon became furious with the woman
 and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those
 who keep the commandments of God and
 hold to the testimony of Jesus.

*Having been thrown out of heaven to earth, the dragon attacks the woman with fury
 the woman represents the covenant people of God, the church
 Satan does what he can to destroy the church
 But the woman, the church, has been flown away on eagle's wings (as was Israel out of Egypt)
 into the wilderness where she is nourished by the Lord for a time, times, and half a time
 So the serpent tries to drown her in lies
 the water comes from his mouth
 in Revelation what proceeds from the mouth symbolizes words and their power
 1.16 - a sharp sword proceeds from the mouth of the Son of Man (2.12, 16)
 19.11, 13, 15, 21 - again, the same sword proceeding from His mouth
 11.5 - from the mouth of the two witnesses fire devours their enemies
 Satan attempts to flood the church with lies, with false teachings
 the Nicolaitans' lies
 Jezebel's promise of deep knowledge
 I John 4.1-6
 note that this attack is directed against the church and not simply the world
 "good theology
 leads to good thinking
 which leads to good living"*

*But the earth opens its mouth and swallows up the dragon's flood waters of lies
 just as it swallowed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16.31-33)
 Isaiah 43.2, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the
 rivers, they shall not overwhelm you."
 Israel crossing the Red Sea into the wilderness (a place of protection and provision), and
 then, her crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land
 v 17 is difficult, but I take it to mean that when Satan is unable to overwhelm the church as an
 institution, he begins to attack individual saints - those who
 keep the commandments of God
 hold to the testimony of Jesus*

Act Four continued: The Drama of History**The First Vision: The Beast from the Sea (13.1-10)**

(12.17) And he stood on the sand of the sea.

At times the uninspired chapter and verse divisions we find in our Bibles sometimes prove unhelpful in following the flow of the "story"

This is clearly the case here at the end of chapter 12. 12.17 both closes the story of chapter 12 and introduces the visions of chapter 13.

The "he" is the dragon of chapter 12 to whom the beast of 13.1-10 is intimately related

The "sand of the sea" often describes the numberless descendants of Abraham

but here it refers to the dragon's followers who battle against the saints (Rev 20.8, "their number is like the sand of the sea")

(Johnson) From "the sand of the sea" . . . will emerge the monster to whom [the dragon] will give his great power and through whom [the beast] will wage war against the church."

(13.1) And I saw a beast
 rising out of the sea, with
 ten horns and
 seven heads, with
 ten diadems on its horns and
 blasphemous names on its heads.

(2) And the beast that I saw was like a leopard;
 its feet were like a bear's, and
 its mouth was like a lion's mouth.

And to it the dragon gave
 his power and
 his throne and
 great authority.

The beast rises "out of the sea"

in Scripture "the sea" often represents the nations and people opposed to the Lord and His people

the beast will prove to be the "god" of those who oppose the Lord and His people

The beast is a near mirror image of the dragon - ten horns, seven heads, ten diadems (the dragon has seven diadems), blasphemous names

ten and seven (numbers of completion) suggest "the severity of [the beast's] power and its world-wide effect . . . the all-encompassing span of time during which [the beast's] powers hold sway" (Beale).

*the dragon gives to the beast his power, throne and great authority
 the dragon is Satan (12.9)*

Scripture refers to him as "the ruler of this world" (John 12.31)

The beast also is a near mirror image of the beasts of Daniel 7

the four beasts of Daniel combined have seven heads

the first beast of Daniel 7 is Babylon represented by a lion (Daniel 7.4)

the second beast is Persia represented by a bear (Daniel 7.5)

the third beast is Greece represented by a leopard (Daniel 7.6)

the fourth beast is Rome described as “terrifying, dreadful, and exceedingly strong” with ten horns (Daniel 7.7) – the dominion of all these beasts continues until in Daniel 7.11 this fourth beast is killed, which suggests that the fourth beast is not only Rome but represents all those kingdoms that war against the Lord and His people

*Some suggest that the beast of Revelation is the antichrist
interestingly, the term “antichrist” does not appear in Revelation
it does appear in 1 and 2 John*

1 John 2.18

the antichrist is coming

but has also now appeared, for this is the “last hour”

1 John 2.22 – the antichrist is anyone denying that Jesus is the Christ

1 John 4.3 and 2 John 7 – anyone denying that Jesus has come in the flesh

in 1 Thessalonians 2.1-12, Paul speaks to believers who are concerned that the “day of the Lord” has already come and they’ve been “left behind”

there is coming a “man of lawlessness”

he will come during the time of the “rebellion” (2.3, 10-12)

his coming will be Satan’s doing (2.9)

his coming is now restrained (2.6, 7) – by what? By Whom?

and yet the mystery of lawlessness is already at work (2.7)

but when “the man of lawlessness” comes he will be killed by the Lord Jesus, whom

He will “bring to nothing” (2.8)

The beasts of Rev 13 will be and are active throughout the ages, but there will be a time just before the Lord’s return when the “man of lawlessness” will appear to have won, but when that day comes the Lord will return and destroy him and judge those he has deceived

Note: the power of the beast is both political-economic, and, in light of 1, 2 John and 2 Thess, his power is also a theological-spiritual deceptive power as we shall see (much like Antiochus Epiphanes in the early 2nd century BC)

(3) One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound,
but its mortal wound was healed,
and the whole earth

marveled as they followed the beast.

(4) And they worshiped the dragon,

for he had given his authority to the beast,

and they worshiped the beast, saying,

“Who is like the beast,

and who can fight against it?”

The beast not only mirrors the dragon, he also attempts to mirror Christ

He seemingly suffered a mortal wound from which he appears to have recovered – seemingly to parallel Jesus having been slain but rising from the dead

Some tied the beast’s death and resurrection to the legend of Nero

he committed suicide in 68 AD

but many believed he was still alive and would return Rome to its past glory

those who suggest this understanding point to Rev 13.18 where they see the number of the beast – 666 – to refer to Nero (more about this later)

Others suggest, which seems to me more reasonable, that it applies to the historical realities of John's day when it appeared that the civil war that rocked Rome between 68-70 AD made it appear that the glory of Rome had passed

68 AD - Nero commits suicide

68-69 AD - Galba, Otho, Vitellius battled from the throne

70 AD - Vespasian finally restored order and established himself as emperor -

(Johnson) "Throughout his decade-long rule and the tenure of his sons Titus (79-81) and Domitian (81-96) it seemed that the glory and power of Rome had come back from the dead."

Beale suggests that the death blow to Satan was Christ's victory at the cross - and yet, though defeated, Satan continues his vicious, though unwinnable war, against the Lord and His people (as Germany continued to fight against the allies following DDay)

I'm quite enamored with Beale's suggestion, but find myself more persuaded by the historical reality of John's day, when the glory of Rome (the immediate beast of John's day) appeared to have been "killed" with Nero's suicide, but then Rome and its glory appeared to be "resurrected"

Nero persecuted the believers in Rome

and the Roman Empire of John's day persecuted the saints

Because of the beast's "resurrection" earth-dwellers judged him worthy of their worship and allegiance, for after all who can fight "city-hall"

Such worship and allegiance to the powers that be has continued to this day - for example: the Lutheran church's support of Hitler

the liberal church's support of our ever changing of opinions of what is moral or immoral (Wilcock) "Even in the residual Christian west it is the value and goodness of the human spirit rather than the One Who created it, which are worshiped, trusted, and adored."

- (5) And the beast was given a mouth uttering
 haughty and
 blasphemous words,
 and it was allowed to exercise authority
 for forty-two months.
- (6) It opened its mouth to utter
 blasphemies against God,
 blaspheming
 his name and
 his dwelling,
 that is, those who dwell in heaven.
- (7) Also it was allowed
 to make war on the saints and
 to conquer them.
- And authority was given it over every
 tribe and
 people and
 language and
 nation,
- (8) and all who dwell on earth
 will worship it,
 everyone whose name has not been written
 before the foundation of the world
 in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

For forty-two months (the symbolic time span between our Lord's first and second coming) the beast acts haughtily and speaks blasphemously, claiming for itself authority and power that belongs only to the King of kings and Lord of lords

it ridicules and mocks not only the Lord but also His followers

it is allowed (by Whom?) to make war on the saints and to conquer them

it exercises authority throughout the world (but remember Daniel 7.14)

it is worshiped by all whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb (3.5, 17.8, 20.12, 15, 21.27)

Note that your name has been in the Lamb's book of life since before the foundation of the world! (Beale) "Genuine believers have assurance that their souls can weather any Satanic storm because of the safety accorded by the Lamb's book. This safety is the pre-creation identification of God's people with the Lamb's death, which means that they also identify with his resurrection life, which protects them from spiritual death and ultimate deception (5.5-13)."

"Time, times and half a time" (Daniel 7.23-28)

the same three and a half years during which God's city and the outer court of his temple are trodden underfoot by the nations, which the church nevertheless survives despite attacks on her members and continues to preach (11.3)

the three and a half years the woman in the desert survives (12.6, 14)

remember, the numbers in Revelation are symbolic and are not meant to be taken literally note that it is the Lord Who allows the beast to exercise authority - (Beale) "God is the ultimate source of the beast's authority. . . . Only God, not the devil, sets times and seasons. The devil would never want to limit his work against God's kingdom to a mere 'three and a half years.'"

(9) If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

(10) If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;

if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

In light of what the Lord tells us, we must be ready to endure in faithful submission to the Lord For some will be taken captive and some will be slain (1 Peter 4.19)

(Johnson) "This dire prediction that captivity and death are unavoidable by those for whom these woes have been ordained is the Spirit's word to the churches. The beast will wage ongoing war against the saints, and as far as the world can see, it will overcome them by killing them. Imprisonment and martyrdom are part of God's plan for his church in this age. Because suffering is the church's inevitable path to glory, the saints must demonstrate enduring faith. . . . Since our pilgrimage to kingdom joy passes through the desert of affliction, our present responsibility is endurance (1.9). Persistence in the word of our testimony to the Lamb is the means of our victory over the dragon who empowers and authorizes the beast (12.11)."

Act Four – The Second Vision: The Beast from the Earth (13.11-18)

- (11) Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth.
It had two horns like a lamb and
it spoke like a dragon.
- (12) It exercises all the authority
of the first beast
in its presence,
and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast,
whose mortal wound was healed.
- (13) It performs great signs,
even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people,
(14) and by the signs
that it is allowed to work
in the presence of the beast
it deceives those who dwell on earth,
telling them to make an image for the beast
that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.
- (15) And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast,
so that the image of the beast
might even speak and
might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

*The beast rising out of the earth**has two horns like a lamb – a parody of The Lamb**speaks like a dragon**exercising the authority of the first beast**-serving as its spokesman – a parody of John the Baptist preparing the way for
Jesus**“deceiving those who dwell on earth” (v 14)**Daniel 8.25 (referring to Antiochus Epiphanes)**Daniel 11.32 (again, referring to Antiochus Epiphanes)**having them make an image of the beast for them to worship (as did
Nebuchadnezzar)**in Rev 16.13 and 19.20 this second beast is referred to as a false prophet (Matt 7.15, 24.5,
11)**could it be that this “false prophet” appears to be a member of the church?**(Beale) “When purported Christian teachers take their primary cues from the
surrounding culture instead of from God’s word, they corrupt the covenant
community by encouraging it to live by norms and a faith that ultimately oppose
the reign of God and Christ.” – 2 Cor 11.12-15**This second beast also appear to be a parody of John the Baptist, the Elijah who was to come
the beast performs great signs (as did the magicians in Egypt)**making fire come down from heaven (like Elijah)**the two witnesses in Rev 11 called down fire to devour their enemies**now the second beast calls down fire to kill those who will not worship the
first beast (people like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah)**appearing to make the image of the first beast to speak (Psalm 115.5, 7)**(Beale) “Its ability to give ‘breath’ and power to speak . . . recall various pseudo-
magical tricks, including ventriloquism, false lightning, and other such
phenomena, that were effectively used in temples in John’s time and even
at the courts of Romans emperors and governors . . . demonstrating that
the image of the first beast (e.g., of Caesar) represented the true deity. . . .*

[But] because of the trans-temporal nature [of the beast] in chapter 13 . . . the 'image' transcends narrow references only to an idol of Caesar and includes any substitute for the truth of God in any age."

*Those who refuse to "worship" the beast were killed
 many Christians were martyred in the first three centuries for their refusal to
 acknowledge that Caesar was god, or for refusing to worship the accepted gods of
 Rome
 many Christians since have been martyred or suffered severe persecution for their refusal
 to obey the powers that be when required to live in a manner contrary to God's
 revealed will*

(16) Also it causes all,
 both small and great,
 both rich and poor,
 both free and slave,
 to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,
 (17) so that no one can buy or sell
 unless he has the mark, that is,
 the name of the beast
 or the number of its name.

(18) This calls for wisdom:
 let the one who has understanding calculate
 the number of the beast,
 for it is the number of a man,
 and his number is 666.

*The second beast, the false prophet, also persecute economically those who refuse to receive the
 mark of the beast (loss of jobs, an inability to buy or sell)
 The mark of the beast is no more literal then is the seal written on the foreheads of believers (7.3)
 The mark of the beast, as with the seal of God, symbolically represents one's ultimate commitment
 The mark of the beast is the number of his name - 666*

Here we go . . .

*First note: there are three steps taken by commentators to attempt to make any desired name
 equal 666 (Salmon and Beale)*

- (1) if the proper name by itself will not yield it, add a title*
- (2) if the sum cannot be found in Greek, try Hebrew, or even Latin*
- (3) do not be too particular about the spelling*

two observations:

*we cannot infer much from the fact that a key fits the lock if it is a lock in
 which almost any key will turn
 if the number was to be identified with some ruler by means of a literal
 calculation, it would be a rare exception from the way numbers are
 employed elsewhere in the Apocalypse (e.g., the 144,000)*

Some have suggested 666 refers to Nero, by translating the Greek Neron Kaisar into the Hebrew nron qsr - where

*n = 50,
r = 200,
o = 6,
n = 50,
q = 100,
s = 60, and
r = 200,
totaling 666*

But . . .

*where does John tell us to translate his Greek into Hebrew?
this Hebrew spelling is incorrect, leaving out a letter after the q
using the title Neron Kaisar seems too convenient, since Caesar had many titles
the church fathers were unaware of a Nero identification*

*Throughout history many individuals have been pointed to as being the 666 of which John speaks
including, in our day, Ronald Wilson Reagan (6, 6, 6)*

*So what is the wisdom John is calling for when he calls upon his readers to calculate the number
of the beast?*

*I would suggest he's not calling upon them to make a mathematical calculation
the wisdom he's calling upon them to exercise is that of moral discernment*

John tells us what the number of the beast is - it is the number of man

Man's number is 666

*not 777, the perfect number seven repeated three times for emphasis
but 666, repeated three times to emphasize that mankind, the earth dwellers, represented
by the beast, are not, and is not, God - "close, but no cigar!"*

so be wise

don't be fooled by the beast or the false prophet

*don't compromise with their false religion (note: all of life is religious; the question
is what is true, and Who or who are you going to serve)*

We are at war

But the victory has been won

And yet there are still many battles to be fought, still much blood to be shed

The classic illustration: D-Day has guaranteed victory, but VE Day has not yet arrived

Act Four – The Third Vision: The Lamb and His Followers (14.1-5)

We have suggested that 12.1-15.4 form a unit, what we have called “Act Four”

Note:

*it began with the conflict of the serpent and the woman (12)
 next came the persecution of the beast from the sea (13.1-10)
 followed by the persecution of the beast from the land (13.11-18)
 now we come to the Lamb and 144,000 standing atop Mt Zion (14.1-5)
 this will be followed by the proclamation of the Gospel and of judgment (14.6-13)
 then comes the harvesting of the earth (14.14-20)
 concluding with the introduction of seven last plagues and the saints' victory and the
 triumphal Song of the Lamb (15.1-4)*

In other words: a sweeping view of history from the birth of Christ until His triumphal return

(14.1) Then I looked, and behold,
 on Mount Zion stood the Lamb,
 and with him 144,000
 who had
 his name and
 his Father's name
 written on their foreheads.

(2) And I heard a voice from heaven
 like the roar of many waters and
 like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was
 like the sound of harpists playing on their harps,
 (3) and they were singing a new song
 before the throne and
 before the four living creatures and
 before the elders.

No one could learn that song except the 144,000
 who had been redeemed from the earth.

(4) It is these who have not defiled themselves with women,
 for they are virgins.

It is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes.

These have been redeemed from mankind
 as firstfruits for

 God and
 the Lamb,
 and in their mouth no lie was found,
 for they are blameless.

On Mt Zion stand the Lamb and the 144,000

Mt Zion in the OT is the symbolic place of God's abode upon the earth

note Psalm 2.6 – “I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill”

here it represents heaven, as is made clear by the context, for the 144,000 . . .

are standing before the Lamb (“standing” – resurrected?)

are singing before the Throne

Clearly this scene contrasts sharply with what we just read in Revelation 13

The 144,000, the church militant in Revelation 7 are now viewed as having joined the church triumphant (the great multitude in Revelation 7 that no man can number)

*they are those who have the Name
of the Lamb
of the Father's Name
written on their forehead (7.3, 22.4)
they do not bear the mark of the beast*

John hears a voice from heaven

*like the roar of many waters
like the sound of loud thunder (19.6)
it is the voice of the Lord's "army-choir" (Johnson)
the sound is like the music of harpists (5.8-9)*

They sing before the Throne, the four living creatures (angelic representative of creation) and the twenty-four elders (angelic representative of the church)

They sing a new song - a song of victory (for example: Psalm 40.1-3, 98.1)

*it is a song that only the 144,000 can sing
those who have been redeemed
those who have defiled themselves with women!
they have not worshiped the likes of Jezebel
they have not participated in heathen rituals (note 14.8)
those who have followed the Lamb "wherever he goes"
they have waged a holy war on behalf of their King
those who are the firstfruits
that portion of the harvest that was set apart as a "living sacrifice" to the
Lord
note that the "full harvest" will be seen in 14.14ff
those in whose mouth no lie is found
those who are blameless (BLAMELESS!)*

Act Four – The Fourth Vision: The Angels of Grace, Doom and Warning (14.6-13)

- (6) Then I saw another angel
 flying directly overhead,
 with an eternal gospel to proclaim
 to those who dwell on earth,
 to every
 nation and
 tribe and
 language and
 people.
- (7) And he said with a loud voice,
 "Fear God
 and give him glory,
 because the hour of his judgment has come,
 and worship him who made
 heaven and
 earth,
 the sea and
 the springs of water."

*Now the scene shifts back to the earth
 An angel proclaims the "eternal gospel" to all who dwell on the earth
 It is a call to*

*fear God
 servile fear
 familial fear
 give Him glory
 and worship Him, for by Him and for Him all was created
 The call is ultimate, for the "hour of his judgment has come"*

- (8) Another angel, a second, followed, saying,
 "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great,
 she who made
 all nations drink
 the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."

*A second angel announces the fall of Babylon the great
 the fall of Babylon will be disclosed in greater detail in Revelation 17-19
 (Johnson): "The well-known role of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon in the exile of ancient Judah
 would signal first-century Christians that 'Babylon' is code for the pagan power
 now oppressing them, Rome and the world-system it embodies (1 Peter 5.13)."
 there is a close affinity between Babylon and the first beast of Revelation 13
 she represents all the political-economic powers arraigned against the Lord and
 His people
 "Babylon" has caused the nations to drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality
 she has deceived the people by her allurements of physical ease and pleasure
 she has deceived the people into worship her "truth" instead of "true Truth"
 The fall of Babylon indicates that the Day of final judgment is at hand
 which is clearly part of the "good news" of the "eternal gospel"*

- (9) And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice,
 "If anyone
 worships
 the beast and
 its image and
 receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,
 (10) he also will drink the wine of God's wrath,
 poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and
 he will be tormented with fire and sulfur
 in the presence of the holy angels and
 in the presence of the Lamb.
 (11) And the smoke of their torment
 goes up forever and ever,
 and they have no rest, day or night,
 these worshipers
 of the beast and
 its image, and
 whoever receives the mark of its name."

A third angel announces that not only the beast and its image (Babylon and the false prophet who is closely aligned with the second beast of Revelation 13) will be judged, but also anyone who worship the beast and its image receive the mark of the beast on his forehead and hand Those who do - who have drunk from the cup of Babylon's lies will now drink from the cup of God's wrath the full, undiluted strength of His anger will be tormented with fire and sulfur (like Sodom) Their judgment will be executed before the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb And their smoke of their torment will go up forever and ever they will never again know rest for they worshiped the beast and its image for they received the mark of its name

- (12) Here is a call for the endurance of the saints,
 those who keep
 the commandments of God and
 their faith in Jesus.
- (13) And I heard a voice from heaven saying,
 "Write this:
 Blessed are the dead
 who die in the Lord from now on."
 "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit,
 "that they may rest from their labors,
 for their deeds follow them!"

Knowing that this Day of final reckoning will come, the saints will endure in the midst of persecution by keeping the commandments of God their faith in Jesus They will endure knowing that "though the beast seems so strong [they will] keep on believing that [their] champion is stronger" (Johnson).

Verse 13 is a word of benediction (the second of seven benedictions: 1.3, 14.13, 16.15, 19.9, 20.6, 22.7, 14)

Those who die in the Lord (from John's day on)

*will rest from their labors - they will enjoy an eternal Sabbath
and their deeds performed in obedience to and in honor of their Lord will not be forgotten.*

Therefore: endure! Keep on keeping on! For your labors are not in vain

Galations 6.9, "Let us not grow weary in doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

1 Corinthians 15.58, "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Act Four - The Fifth Vision: The Final Reapings (14.14-20)

(14) Then I looked, and behold,
a white cloud,
and seated on the cloud

one like a son of man, with
a golden crown on his head, and
a sharp sickle in his hand.

(15) And another angel came out of the temple,
calling with a loud voice

to him who sat on the cloud,
"Put in your sickle, and reap,
for the hour to reap has come,
for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."

(16) So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth,
and the earth was reaped.

(17) Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven,
and he too had a sharp sickle.

(18) And another angel came out from the altar,
the angel who has authority over the fire,
and he called with a loud voice

to the one who had the sharp sickle,
"Put in your sickle
and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth,
for its grapes are ripe."

(19) So the angel swung his sickle across the earth
and gathered the grape harvest of the earth
and threw it into the great winepress
of the wrath of God.

(20) And the winepress was trodden outside the city,
and blood flowed from the winepress,
as high as a horse's bridle,
for 1,600 stadia.

The final TWO harvests

*one of the "dry" wheat ready for harvest
the word "ripe" in v 15 is a Greek word referring to the yellowed stalks bearing
heads of mature grain
one of grapes*

The issue:

do the grain and grapes symbolize the same group, both harvest scenes showing the judgment of the wicked? (Joel 3.12-13)

does the harvest of grain symbolize the gathering of the church for salvation, and the grape harvest portrays the gathering of the wicked for destruction?

I believe the second suggestion is correct

Joel speaks of one harvest

but John speaks of two harvests

furthermore, John's second harvests has two parts

harvesting

treading

A second issue:

it seems clear that the "Son of Man"

seated on a white cloud

with a golden crown on His Head

is Jesus (Daniel 7.13-14, Rev 1.7, 13)

if it is indeed Jesus, how could Jesus be instructed by the angel in v 15 to reap?

I would suggest (along with Johnson) that this is a further demonstration of Jesus' submission to the Father's will

note the angel who tells Him to reap comes out of the Temple, where "dwells" the Father

Mark 13.32 - "Concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Acts 1.7 - "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority."

So Jesus reaps the earth of the ripened grain (and, I would suggest, though it is not stated, gathers that wheat into his barns)

Then an angel is commanded by another angel - the angel who has authority over the fire (the fire of judgment?) to . . .

gather the grapes

throw them into a great winepress of God's wrath

the grapes are then trodden until blood flows everywhere

Isaiah 63.1-3, 6

Revelation 19.13-15

(Johnson): "The pagan persecutors who now tread the holy city underfoot (Rev 11.2) will be trodden underfoot by the church's mighty avenger (14.20)."

So what do we do with blood flowing as high as a horse's bridle and for a distance of 1600 stadia?

The first expression is a Hebrew hyperbole which speaks of a severe defeat of one's enemy for example: "The horse will walk up to the breast in the blood of sinners, and the chariot will be submerged to its height."

In reference to the second descriptive phrase . . .

from where does the blood flow? From the city

outside the city are the nations

the distance from the city is approximately the extent of the lands outside of Jerusalem

the true Jerusalem is attacked, and the blood of its attackers flood the land outside

Jerusalem (symbolically representing the nations and people who oppose the Lord)

But bottom line: I'm confident about the first explanation, but not quite sure about the second

Act Four – The Sixth Vision: An Introduction (15.1)

(15.1) Then I saw another sign in heaven,
 great and amazing,
 seven angels
 with seven plagues,
 which are the last,
 for with them the wrath of God is finished.

*“Another sign” would seem to tie this vision to what John saw in 12.1ff
 These seven plagues will be described with the pouring out of the bowls in 15.5-16.21
 There is significant debate about these seven “last” plagues*

*(1) do they parallel the opening of the seals and the sounding of the trumpets?
 in other words – are these bowls poured out during the time between Christ’s first
 and second coming?*

*are they described as “last” because they are final of John’s three visions of the
 seals, trumpets, and bowls?*

*(2) or are they described as “last” because they are a further description of the judgement
 depicted by the sixth trumpet (9.13-21) and the triumph depicted by the seventh trumpet
 (11.15-19)?*

*note that the focus of these seven plagues is primarily on “the wrath of God”
 and when the seven plagues have been poured out God’s wrath is finished*

Beale favors the first interpretation

Johnson favors the second interpretation

*I favor Beale’s interpretation because it is most consistent with the idea of progressive parallelism
 But . . . I find Johnson’s arguments challenging*

*Whichever the case – either these seven last plagues are the last of John three visions (seals,
 trumpets, and bowls), or they are a deeper description of the judgment of the sixth trumpet and
 the triumph of the seventh trumpet – these seven plagues (bowls) reveal to us God’s wrath and
 mercy*

*I include “mercy” because the outpouring of God’s wrath is merciful, for it delivers the
 saints from the hands of the Lord’s and their enemies*

*remember, the outpouring of God’s wrath is the answer to the prayers of the martyrs in
 Revelation 6.9-11 asking that He avenge their blood by judging those who dwell
 upon the earth*

*The seven last plagues remind us of God’s judgment of Egypt which preceded His deliverance of
 them from the land of slavery*

Act Four – The Seventh Vision: The Song of Victory (15.2-4)

(2) And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—
 and also those who had conquered
 the beast and
 its image and
 the number of its name,
 standing beside the sea of glass
 with harps of God in their hands.

(3) And they sing
 the song of Moses,
 the servant of God, and
 the song of the Lamb, saying,
 "Great and amazing are your deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
 Just and true are your ways,
 O King of the nations!

(4) Who will not fear, O Lord,
 and glorify your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come and worship you,
 for your righteous acts have been revealed."

But before the seven last plagues are poured out upon the earth dwellers, John sees those who had conquered the beast, its image, and the number of its name, standing beside a sea of glass, with harps in their hands (5.8, 14.2), singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb these are the 144,000 (14.1ff), the saints whom the Lord has harvested (14.15-16) from the earth

*Israel sang beside the congealed sea (Exodus 15.8), having been delivered out of Egypt and lead safely across the Red Sea
 now the saints sing standing (resurrected?) beside a sea of glass mingled with fire
 the sea most often depicts the enemies of God and His people
 as Israel was delivered out of the hands of their enemies, now the saints have been delivered out of the hands of the beast
 the fire speaks of God's judgment (Daniel 7.9-12)*

So once more, we come to a "final" scene (Rev 7.9-17, 11.15-19, 14.1-5)

They sing the song of Moses (Exodus 15 and Deut 32) and of the Lamb

Moses led them across the Red Sea having delivered them out of Egypt

*now it is the Lamb Who leads them out of the dominion of darkness and into His Kingdom
 now both "the servant of God" and the Lamb sing!*

Deut 32.43, "Rejoice with him, O heavens, bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his enemies. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."

The song reflects the consistent picture of God throughout Scripture

His deeds are great and amazing (Ps 111.2-4)

He is the Lord God Almighty (sovereignly rules over His people)

He is just and true (Deut 32.4)

He is the King of the nations (sovereignly rules over all peoples)

Who is King?

Rev 1.5 – "Jesus Christ . . . the ruler of the kings on earth"

Rev 17.14 – "the Lamb [Who is] Lord of lords and King of kings"

Rev 19.13, 16 – "The Word of God . . . King of kings and Lord of lords"

He alone is holy

(Beale) - "Holy' in the OT emphasizes typically not merely moral purity but the sum of divine attributes distinguishing God from his creation."

Therefore

all will fear Him

servile fear

familial fear

all will glorify Him

all nations will worship Him

not all without distinction, but all without exception

Ps 86.9-10, Philippians 2.9-11, Isaiah 45.22-23

why? Because His righteous acts have been revealed