



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 30

Text: Revelation 12:1-6

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2. What the text means.

The Birth of the Child

Greek NT

12.1 Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, γυνὴ περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα, 2 καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, καὶ κράζει ὠδίνουσα καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν. 3 καὶ ὤφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἰδοὺ δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, 4 καὶ ἡ οὐρὰ αὐτοῦ σύρει τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν. Καὶ ὁ δράκων ἔστηκεν ἐνώπιον τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς μελλούσης τεκεῖν, ἵνα ὅταν τέκη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη. 5 καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. καὶ ἠρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ. 6 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέφωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἑξήκοντα.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

12.1 Und es erschien ein großes Zeichen am Himmel: eine Frau, mit der Sonne bekleidet, und der Mond unter ihren Füßen und auf ihrem Haupt eine Krone von zwölf Sternen. 2 Und sie war schwanger und schrie in Kindsnöten und hatte große Qual bei der Geburt. 3 Und es erschien ein anderes Zeichen am Himmel, und siehe, ein großer, roter Drache, der hatte sieben Häupter und zehn Hörner und auf seinen Häuptern sieben Kronen, 4 und sein Schwanz fegte den dritten Teil der Sterne des Himmels hinweg und warf sie auf die Erde. Und der Drache trat vor die Frau, die gebären sollte, damit er, wenn sie geboren hätte, ihr Kind fräße. 5 Und sie gebar einen Sohn, einen Knaben, der alle Völker weiden sollte mit eisernem Stabe. Und ihr Kind wurde entrückt zu Gott und seinem Thron. 6 Und die Frau entfloh in die Wüste, wo sie einen Ort hatte, bereitet von Gott, dass sie dort ernährt werde tausendzweihundertundsechzig Tage.

NRSV

12 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 birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. 3 Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

NLT

1 Then I witnessed in heaven an event of great significance. I saw a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant, and she cried out in the pain of labor as she awaited her delivery. 3 Suddenly, I witnessed in heaven another significant event. I saw a large red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail dragged down one-third of the stars, which he threw to the earth. He stood before the woman as she was about to give birth to her child, ready to devour the baby as soon as it was born. 5 She gave birth to a boy who was to rule all nations with an iron rod. And the child was snatched away from the dragon and was caught up to God and to his throne. 6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a place to give her care for 1,260 days.

signal be seven bowls of wrath being poured out, John doesn't move directly to a depiction of the seven bowls. This will come in 15:1-16:21. Instead, John steps back to depict the rise of evil in the world across the span of human history in chapters twelve, thirteen, and fourteen. This then prepares the way for the unleashing of divine wrath at the end of human history. The focus of emphasis begins with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, but is described from a cosmic perspective in apocalyptic visionary terms. The intensification of evil is portrayed until the end in chapters twelve and thirteen, but this picture is concluded with visions of assurance to the people of God in chapter fourteen. What we encounter in chaps.12-14 is a modified 4 + 3 pattern underscoring the evil in its full intensity in the first section but followed by assurances of God's superior power and commitment to take care of His people.

Beyond this one must not overlook the intention of John in this structure to help his readers in Asia to gain a cosmic perspective on the nature of evil and also a cosmic understanding of how God works in a just manner to protect His people and to crush totally the forces of evil in this world. Additionally in the 4 + 3 pattern of the two series of seven seals and seven trumpets, we have been privileged to catch a glimpse into the temporal judgments of God over the span of human history as well as the ways that God takes care of His people in this evil world. But these temporal judgments are moving toward a gigantic climax in the bowls of wrath. Thus re-assurances of God's continued care of His people as this time comes near are needed.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Attention as always will be given to the background issues that help establish a legitimate framework for interpreting the scripture text.

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage up to the middle ages, no variations in the wording of the text appears considered significant enough to impact the translation of the passage in the opinion of the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev ed.). Thus no variations are listed in the Text Apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament for 12:1-6.

But in the larger picture of all the known copies of this passage existing in ancient Greek which the *Novum Testamentum Graece* Text Apparatus covers (N-A 27th rev. ed.) some



twelve places surface with variations in the wording of the passage.¹ But once more these variations do not alter the core meaning of the wording of the passage and mostly represent efforts at stylistic improvements on the wording they were using to copy.

Thus we can exegete the adopted reading of the text in the full confidence that it represents the original wording of the passage.

Internal History. The differences between the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke with this apocalyptic visionary depiction are so dramatic as to hardly seem they are talking about the same event. But what does emerge in a comparison between the two sets of texts is a better understanding of the nature of apocalyptic visionary narrative. Its perspective is profoundly different than a human based historical narrative would be. The narrative angle is seeing an event as a cosmic oriented struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. It looks "behind the scenes" in order to emphasize a larger picture. The details of the historical event are of very secondary importance. Rather, what comes 'center stage' is how God and Satan tangle with one another in God's quest to win over an evil world of people to commitment to Him in redeeming them for their fate ultimately of eternal damnation. When other biblical writers such as Paul speak of the believer's warfare with supernatural evil forces

¹Offenbarung 12,1

* 1 al (The article ἡ before σελήνη is omitted)

Offenbarung 12,2

* (+ και C) ἐκράζεν C (046). 2351 M^K sy^h (καὶ κράζει is replaced)

| κράζει (+ και A) A 051. 1611. 1854. 2329. 2344 M^A

| txt (P⁴⁷) & 1006. 1841. 2053 pc

Offenbarung 12,3

* πυρός μ. C 046. 1611. 1854. 2329. 2344 pm (^s1006. 2351 al sy^{ph}) sy^h (μέγας πυρρός is reversed)

| txt A P 051. 1841 pm lat sa (^sP⁴⁷ & 2053 al)

* αὐτῶν A pc; Tyc Bea (the singular αὐτοῦ is replaced with the plural)

| – P⁴⁷

Offenbarung 12,4

* αστρ– C 2053 pc (ἀστέρων is replaced with alternative spelling)

Offenbarung 12,5

* ἀρσενα (vel αρρ–) P⁴⁷ & 051 M (ἄρσεν is replaced)

| txt A C

* C 051. 1006. 1841. 2053 M^A (ἐν is omitted)

*¹ M^A (πρός is omitted)

Offenbarung 12,6

* C 2329 M^A lat; Tyc Prim (ἐκεῖ is omitted)

* ὑπο 1611. 2351 M^K (ἀπό is replaced)

* εκτρ–M^K (τρέφωσιν is replaced)

| τρεφουσιν & C 051. 2329 pc

* πεντε &² (πέντε is added after ἐξήκοντα)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 654–655.]

it is this cosmic conflict they are plugging into. Here in beginning in chapter twelve we catch a glimpse into the most detailed depiction of this cosmic battle found anywhere in the scripture. To be sure, the depiction of this cosmic battle is presented in apocalyptic tones that go beyond the simple assertion of cosmic dynamics found in passages such as [Ephesians 6:11-13](#).

Literary Aspects:

As we often discovered the literary background aspects play a more important role in setting an interpretive framework than do the historical dimensions. This not surprising given the apocalyptic visionary nature of the text which is describing that which stands beyond human history and mostly reflects dynamics taking place in heaven or from heaven.

Genre: We continue to encounter apocalyptic visionary texts with 12:1-6. Being reminded of this cautions against attempting precise historical, and especially chronological, identification of the events described by John. The depictions gather up sometime the entire sweep of all human history into a single event, at other times a shorter period. Here we are seeing history primarily from the birth of Christ to the very end of human history depicted as a single event, which is presented alternatively in 20:1-3. It is a cosmic battle between God and Satan centered on attempts to kill Christ at his birth.

What we see in the fuller unit of text found in 12:1-17 is a Christian version of an ancient Combat Myth. Such narratives were widely distributed across the ancient world and surface in many different expressions.²

²“The legendary narrative pattern of a combat between a hero and his adversary or the mythic narrative pattern of a primordial cosmic struggle between two divine beings and their allies for sovereignty was widespread throughout the ancient world. In mythical combats the antagonist is often depicted as a monster, serpent, or dragon. The protagonist typically represents order and fertility, while the antagonist represents chaos and sterility. While the names of the combatants, as well as their roles, change from culture to culture, many of the constituent folklore motifs of the combat myth or legend either remain constant or are subject to a limited range of variation (Aarne-Thompson, Types, §§ 300–359, “The Ogre [Giant, Dragon, Devil, Cobold, etc.] is Defeated”). Some scholars have assumed that the common pattern exhibited by many combat myths suggests a unitary origin (Fontenrose, Python, 2–3). This ‘historical-geographical method,’ developed by the Finnish school of folklore, maintains that common patterns when correlated with geographical distribution provide clues in the quest for the archetypal version. More recently there has been a tendency in folklore studies to abandon the quest for the chimerical prototypical version (Brunvand, Folklore, 15–16; cf. C. Lévi-Strauss’ view that a myth consists of all its versions: “The Structural Study of Myth,” in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. T. A. Sebeok [Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1958] 81–106). In Babylon the protagonist and antagonist were Marduk and Tiamat or Gilgamesh and Humbaba; in Canaan, Baal and Yamm (Sea) or Baal and Mot (Death); in Egypt Osiris and Set (or Typhon) or Rê (the Sun), to whom Pharaoh was as-

The Jewish version took on distinctives from the others and we see some of these distinctives in John’s Chris-

simulated, and Apophis (the serpent representing night). The Greek world knew many versions of the combat myth, often narrated as a succession myth: Ouranos and Kronos; Zeus and Kronos; Zeus and the Titans (the Titanomachy; Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 12.29–32); and Zeus and the Giants (the Gigantomachy; they reportedly had serpentine extremities; see Apollodorus 1.6.1–2). Otus and Ephialtes, giant sons of Zeus, tried to ascend to heaven (εις οὐρανὸν ἀναβήσεται) but were repulsed by Artemis (Apollodorus 1.7.4). Other Greek variants included Zeus and Typhoeus (Hesiod *Theog.* 820–68), Bellerophon and the Chimaera (Apollodorus 2.3.1–2), Helios and Phaethon (particularly important for Rev 12), and the Apollo and Python myth (cf. Fontenrose, Python). Satan becomes the chief adversary only in early Jewish apocalyptic literature and in the NT (1 Pet 5:8), though never in the OT (though in 1 Chr 21:1–17 he ceases to be a subordinate of Yahweh and becomes an independent instigator).

“Various versions of the combat myth were adopted from other cultures and adapted to Israelite-Jewish traditions at various times and places throughout the history of Judaism. Canaanite myths of the struggle between Baal and Yamm or Mot (understood as a Chaoskampf, a struggle against chaos) were causally connected with creation (Pss 74:12–17; 89:9–14[MT 10–15]; Job 26; cf. Ps 104:6–9; Prov 8:29; Job 38:8–11; Day, *Conflict*, 1–61). In Israelite poetry these conflicts were transposed into stories of Yahweh’s conquest of Rahab and Leviathan (Pss 74:13–14; 89:9–10; Job 7:12). While the name ‘Rahab’ has not been found in any extrabiblical text, the Hebrew term לִיָּוְיָתָן *liwyātān*, ‘Leviathan,’ is related to the Ugaritic term for dragon, *ltn* (see Emerton, VT 32 [1982] 327–33). In Isaiah and Ezekiel, language from the cosmic rebellion aspect of the combat myth was used metaphorically to describe Israel’s historical enemies (Isa 14:10b–15; Ezek 28:1–9; cf. Day, *Conflict*, 88–140; Eliade, *Sacred*, 47–50). Egypt or its pharaoh was designated as the primordial dragon Rahab (Isa 30:7; 51:9–10; Ps 87:4) or the dragon Tannin (Ezek 29:3–5; 32:2–8; probably also Isa 27:1). The application of language drawn from the primordial cosmic rebellion myths to the historical enemies of Israel is based on the perception of the paradigmatic character of the original conflict. Israel’s memory of Egypt as an oppressor, coupled with the divine delivery through water that constituted the Exodus (cf. Isa 51:9–11; Exod 15:1–8), provided the link that made it possible to describe the historical conflict in mythical terms. The sea and rivers were used as metaphors for Assyria (Isa 17:12–14; 8:5–8) and Babylon (Hab 3:8–10, 15). Babylon was also designated as a *tannin* or sea monster (Jer 51:34). Further, the cosmic waters are probably a designation of hostile nations in general (Pss 18:5–18; 46:3–4; 144:5–7). God was expected to do to Israel’s current historical enemies what he once did in the distant past to his mythological enemies. In some proto-apocalyptic texts such as Isa 27:1, God is expected to repeat in the future his primordial victories of the past: ‘In that day the Lord with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.’ Such texts show the way in which eschatological combat myths were developed out of protological combat myths. In Dan 7, the four beasts from the sea represent Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece; these beasts are conquered by divine intervention (v 12), with the introduction of an everlasting kingdom represented by the manlike figure in vv 13–14.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 667–668.]

tian account here in 12:1-17. The Jewish apocalyptic literature especially utilizes the typical Jewish conception of a cosmic battle between God and Satan as His adversary.³ Many elements in this body of literature

³Jewish apocalyptic literature, which depicted the end time largely in terms of conflicts and judgments, reflects a renaissance of ancient mythic narratives, of which one of the more important was the combat myth. One of the primary functions of this myth was to ascribe the experience of suffering and evil in the world to an independent cosmic adversary, Satan. Satan is the primary adversary (variously conceived as a rebel, tempter, or tyrant) in early Judaism and early Christianity; his name suggests that his primary role is that of opposition (the Hebrew term *šāṭān* means ‘adversary,’ and the Greek term *diabolos* means ‘slanderer’). He also was known by many other aliases, including Beliar, Beelzebul, Abaddon, Apollyon, Lucifer, Sammael, Semihazeh, Asael, and the devil. The author of Revelation was particularly concerned to list several of Satan’s aliases so there could be no doubt in the reader’s mind that a single familiar cosmic adversary was involved. In Rev 12:9, for example, five aliases are listed: the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, and the deceiver of the whole world.

“In apocalyptic literature, imagery drawn from primordial combat stories is no longer limited to poetic metaphor but is used as a means of describing real events of the past or future. Gen 6:1–4 in particular was reinterpreted as a cosmic rebellion myth in the Enoch literature and thereafter became an essential part of early Jewish apocalyptic tradition. In 1 Enoch 6–11 (perhaps dependent on the parallel myth in Hesiod’s *Eoiae frag.* B.3–34), two hundred ‘Watchers’ (angelic beings [cf. Dan 4:17], who function as a kind of cosmic security force), led by Semihazeh, rebel against God by lusting after mortal women, who conceive giants and bring evil to the earth. Azazel (the name of the fallen angelic chief in an originally independent version; cf. Nickelsburg, JBL 96 [1977] 384–99), who comes to the fore as a leader of the Watchers, is bound hand and foot and thrown into a fissure in the earth where he is to be confined in darkness until the great day of judgment when he will be cast into fire (1 Enoch 10:1–6; similarities with the Prometheus myth reflected in Hesiod *Theog.* 507–616, *Works and Days* 42–105, and Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* suggest dependence on Greek sources; cf. Nickelsburg, JBL 96 [1977] 399–404). The initial binding of Azazel coincides with the judgment of the flood (1 Enoch 10:2). In the parallel story, Semihazeh and the rest of the Watchers are bound and confined under the hills of the earth until the day of judgment, when they will be cast into the abyss of fire (1 Enoch 10:11–14). After this, a period of perpetual righteousness and peace will dawn upon the earth (1 Enoch 10:16–11:2).

“In Jubilees the chief of the fallen angels is called Mastema (formed from the Hebrew stem *šṭm*, ‘animosity,’ etymologically related to *šāṭān*, ‘adversary’). The author, explicitly dependent on the Enoch literature (Jub. 21:10) as well as on Genesis, narrates how God caused the sons of the Watchers to destroy each other, after which the rebellious angels themselves were bound and confined beneath the earth ‘forever,’ i.e., until the day of judgment (Jub. 5:6–11). The judgment of the Watchers apparently serves as a prototype of the coming judgment (Davenport, *Jubilees*, 73), though the phrase ‘until the day of judgment’ (Jub. 4:19; 10:17, 22) is a stereotyped expression emphasizing temporal limits rather than eschatological expectation (Davenport, *Jubilees*, 83–87). The reference to the coming judgment with “fire and sword” (Jub. 9:15) suggests an eschatological combat but provides no details. After the flood the demonic offspring of the giants corrupt humanity (Jub. 10:1–3); nine-tenths are bound until the day of judgment

are picked up by John to help him describe in comprehensible human language what he saw in this part of his heavenly vision. Thus having at least a general understanding of the contours of this Jewish apocalyptic tradition is essential for making legitimate sense of chapter twelve of Revelation.

Literary Setting: The immediate context for 12:1-6 is that it is a part of the events standing between the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) and the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath in 15:1-16:21. Between the sixth and seventh seals (6:12-17 / 8:1) came a pause in 7:1-17. Between the sixth and seventh trumpets (9:13-21 / 11:15-18) came another pause in 10:1-11:13). But uniquely here after the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19) comes an additional interlude of 12:1-14:20). This established pattern is that the seventh seal launched the seven trumpets, and the seventh trumpet launches the seven bowls of wrath.

But because the seven bowls of wrath represent the last expression of God’s temporal judgment prior to the very end of the final day of judgment, John pauses to provide an apocalyptic sweep of human history and its deepening corruption as the basis for these final judgments that are the most intense of all. This plunge into evil has dramatically intensified with the coming of Christ to the earth and has focused itself on attacking both Him and those who follow Him on earth. Right at the very end of this era the evil and persecution take a dramatic turn for the worse.

How does John portray these moments of evil at human history races toward its end? First, the 24 elders celebrate the announcement of God’s ‘activating’ direct control over human affairs (11:15b-18). This is followed by supernatural phenomena affirming the divine action (11:19).

Then in apocalyptic visionary depiction a cosmic battle between God and Satan breaks out in the sky over Satan’s efforts to kill the woman with the Child when she gives birth (12:1-6). Satan is thrown in defeat down upon the earth, while heaven celebrates this first victory over him (12:7-11). Once upon earth Satan re-

with one-tenth active on the earth and subject to Satan, an alias of Mastema (Jub. 10:11), who is also called Beliar (in the phrase ‘sons of Beliar,’ Jub. 1:20; 16:33). In both 1 Enoch 1–36 and Jubilees, the rebellion motif is an integral part of the combat myth. In both, the rebellious angels are conquered and confined by God until the last judgment. The primary function of these myths is to account for the origin of evil in the world. There is no hint that an eschatological conflict will take place between God and his rebellious angels; eschatology, indeed, plays very little role in 1 Enoch 1–36; cf. 1 Enoch 10:12–11:2; 16:1; 19:1; 25:4 (Newsom, CBQ 42 [1980] 311).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 668–669.]

sumes his war against the woman but the earth comes to the rescue of the woman in hiding her from Satan, but taking the Child up to heaven (12:12-17). Faced with defeat again, Satan enlists the help of a beast coming out of the sea (11:18-13:10). With only partial success, the help of a second beast out of the sea is enlisted (13:11-18).

Although under heavy persecution, Christ gathers the 144,000 saints (cf. chap. 7) together on Mt. Zion to celebrate their certain victory over Satan and his agents (14:1-5). Then in a final message to the people of the earth three angels deliver messages of coming doom (14:6-7), prediction of the fall of Babylon (14:8), and warning of God's wrath upon those following Satan and his beasts (14:9-11).

Now positioned on a cloud in the sky, Christ orders the harvesting of the earth (14:14-20). At the urging of an angle Christ harvests the righteous out of the earth (vv. 14-16). But a second angel harvests the evil people out of the earth for the wrath of God (vv. 17-20).

^{12.1} And
363 a great sign was seen
 | in heaven,
 a woman
 clothed with the sun
 and
 the moon
 under her feet
 and
 upon her head
 a crown
 of twelve stars
^{12.2} and
 being pregnant
 and
364 she cries out
 in birth pangs,
 being in agony to give birth.

^{12.3} And
365 was seen another sign
 in heaven |
 | also
 | indeed
 a dragon
 large
 red
 having seven heads
 and
 ten horns
 and
 upon his heads
 seven diadems

^{12.4} And
366 his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven
 and

This sets up the pouring out of the bowls of wrath upon the evil people of the earth in 15:1-8. Remember this is apocalyptic vision, so an angel can harvest out evil people, and seven subsequent angels can pour out bowls of wrath upon evil people still on the earth.

Logical consistency is not on the table here! Rather, vivid scenes of dramatic punishment of evil people living on the earth in a one-two punch pattern. Apocalyptic vision seldom ever follows any kind of logical, and clearly not a chronological, pattern of sequence.

Thus our passage in 12:1-6 comes just after the celebration in heaven and introduces us to the cosmic struggle between God and Satan over the Child (12:1-13:18) who becomes the Lamb on Mt. Zion (14:1-13), and who then becomes the Son of Man sitting on a cloud in the sky (14:14-20).

Literary Structure: The block diagram of the Greek text is place into a highly literal English expression below in order to highlight the internal relationships of ideas.

367 **he threw them**
on to the earth.

And

368 **the dragon stood**
in front of the woman
about to give birth,
so that when she birthed her child he might devour it.

^{12.5} And

369 **she birthed a son**
male
who is going to shepherd all nations
with a rod of iron.

And

370 **snatched away was her child**
to God
and
to His throne.

^{12.6} And

371 **the woman fled**
into the wilderness
where she has there a place
prepared by God,
so that there He nourishes her
one thousand two hundred sixty days.

Analysis of Rhetorical Structure

Careful analysis of the patterns visible in the block diagram above reflect a three fold division of ideas inside vv. 1-6. First is the σημεῖον in #s 363-364 identifying the woman with child. Second, is the other σημεῖον in #s 365-367 identifying the dragon determined to kill the child. Third, in #s. 368-371 is the birth of the Child and how God protected both mother and child from the dragon.

Exegesis of the Text:

This threefold natural division is the appropriate way to exegete the passage. This depiction, of course, differs dramatically from the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke. But the depiction is not intended to be historical. Rather, it is a cosmic battle being fought between God and His adversary Satan. Plus John is describing this from an apocalyptic visionary perspective, which automatically adds highly dramatic elements.

A. First sign, the woman, vv. 1-2

12.1 Καὶ σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, γυνὴ περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα, 2 καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, καὶ κράζει ὠδίνουσα καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν.

12.1 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 birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth.

The apocalyptic proportions of this woman are given in dramatic fashion.

John introduces her in a different manner to other figures that we have seen in his vision thus far. She makes her entrance as a σημεῖον, sign. The word

σημεῖον is used only three times in Revelation with this meaning of “terrifying appearances in the heavens, never before seen, as portents of the last days”:⁴ 12:1, 3; 15:1.⁵ The woman and the dragon in chapter two are introduced this way, and the seven angels with their bowls of wrath in 15:1. The critical importance of the woman being introduced as a σημεῖον μέγα ὥφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, *huge portent in the sky*, is to emphasize that her appearance is highly visible in large part because it takes place in the sky above the earth where large numbers of people can see her. Elsewhere in Revelation the plural form σημεῖον, which is σημεῖα, is used from times, and always in reference to the beast from the earth (13:13-14), by the three frog like demonic spirits (16:14), or be the false prophet (19:20). They possess powers to ‘amaze’ people but it is deceptive and evil that is in mind.

Interestingly in Isaiah 7:14 (LXX) σημεῖον is used in the declaration, ““Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign [σημεῖον]. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” But here the use of σημεῖον goes deeper in affirming a divine action made generally visible.

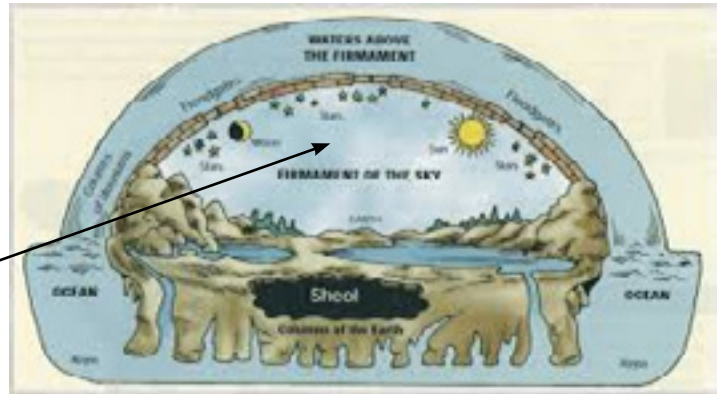
The use of the aorist passive ὥφθη stresses general visibility. It surfaced in Revelation only at 11:19; 12:1, 3. In early Jewish and Christian writings it is often used to introduce theophanies and prophetic visions.⁶

⁴A *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third Edition, p. 921.

Elsewhere with this meaning in the NT is Luke 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19. The idea is that of a miracle, but of an entirely different kind than one performed through the instrumentality of a human servant of God. This is something God does directly and mostly in the sky with high visibility to people on earth.

⁵“The term σημεῖον, ‘sign, portent,’ referring to a significant heavenly sight, occurs just three times in the singular in Revelation (12:1, 3; 15:1); each of these is connected, for 12:3 and 15:1 refer to ἄλλο σημεῖον, ‘another sign,’ referring respectively to 12:1 and 12:3. σημεῖον, regularly used to translate πῖλ .ὄτ in the LXX, means ‘sign’ in a number of specific ways: (1) a characteristic mark by which something is known or recognized (Gen 1:14; Exod 12:13; Josh 2:12; Matt 16:3; 26:48); (2) a monument that is a reminder of a past event (Gen 9:12, 17; 17:11; Exod 13:9; Deut 6:8; 11:18); (3) an omen or indication of something to come (2 Kgs 19:29; Isa 7:14; Ezek 4:3; Matt 24:3; Luke 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19); (4) a miracle, which may be either genuine (Exod 7:3; Josh 24:17; Ps 77:43; Mark 16:20; John 2:11; 4:48; 6:30; 1 Cor 14:22) or a lie (Mark 13:22 = Matt 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9–10; Rev 13:13–14; 16:14); or (5) a constellation, for in Greco-Roman astrological lore the Greek term σημεῖον could mean ‘constellation’ (Euripides *Rhesus* 528–33; Ion 1157 [in context of 1146–58]; Aratus *Phaen.* 10; LSJ, 1593). The corresponding Latin term *signum*, a translation equivalent of σημεῖον, was also used in the sense of ‘constellation’ or ‘sign of the zodiac’ (Manilius *Astron.* 1.34, 109, 215, 255, 295, 506; Cicero *De nat. deor.* 1.22; see OLD, 1760).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 646.]

⁶“In early Jewish and early Christian literature, ὥφθη is often used to introduce theophanies (Gen 12:7; 26:2; Exod 6:3; 16:10;



Here it is underscoring the extraordinary event of the woman’s appearance in the sky.

The phrase ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ does not specify heaven as the dwelling place of God, but rather as that space below the earth’s canopy and the surface of the earth. This σημεῖον was μέγα, *huge*, thus signifying its visibility to large numbers of people.



A depiction of the γυνή, *woman*, follows the introductory statement. First, she is περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον, *clothed with the sun*. Second, the moon is under her feet: καὶ ἡ σελήνη ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν αὐτῆς.

Judg 6:12; 13:3; Jer 38:3), angelophanies (Exod 3:2; Judg 13:3; Tob 12:22; Acts 7:2), and prophetic visions (Ezek 1:4; 2:1; 10:1; Dan 8:1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 645.]

Third, **and upon her head rests a victory crown of twelve stars**: καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς στέφανος ἀστέρων δώδεκα.⁷ Such depictions using the sun, moon, and stars describe a “queen of the cosmos.”⁸ The image is powerful and somewhat similar images circulated in the first century Greco-Roman world in connection to several of the female deities of that world, not the least being Artemis of Ephesus. Additionally the constellation of stars was sometimes understood and signifying a female goddess.⁹ But John’s figure remains unnamed

⁷“The twelve stars probably represent the zodiac, clearly mentioned in 2 Enoch [long rec.] 21:6; 30:4–6 and in Sib. Or. 5.512–31 (Boll, Offenbarung, 100; Bousset [1906] 336, 355; Charles, 1:316; Hedrick, “Imagery,” 44). The zodiac appears on a number of mosaic floors of Jewish synagogues in late antiquity. One important example is the Beth Alpha synagogue in Galilee, in which a depiction of Helios the sun god driving his *quadriga* or chariot is surrounded by the twelve signs of the zodiac, each accompanied by its Hebrew name (NEAEHL 1:190–92): (1) Taleh (Aries or Ram), (2) Shor (Taurus or Bull), (3) Teomim (Gemini or Twins), (4) Sartan (Cancer or Crab), (5) Aryeh (Leo or Lion), (6) Betulah (Virgo or Virgin), (7) Meoznayim (Libra or Scales), (8) Aqrab (Scorpio or Scorpion), (9) Kashat (Sagittarius or Archer), (10) Gedi (Capricorn or Goat), (11) Deli (Aquarius or Water Bearer), and (12) Dagim (Pisces or Fishes). The view that the crown of twelve stars represents the sum total of angels who support the woman and her child (LeFrois, Woman, 120) has no early evidential basis. A late Coptic magical text refers to a similar ‘crown of stars’ on the head of Jesus (Kropp, Koptische Zaubertexte 2:22). Menedemus the Cynic, a very strange character who performed miracles and claimed to be on a mission from Hades, wore a similar crown. According to the report of Diogenes Laertius (6.102; LCL tr.), he wore

a grey tunic reaching to the feet [ποδήρης], about it a crimson girdle [ζώνη φοινικῆ]; an Arcadian hat [πῖλος] on his head with the twelve signs of the zodiac [τὰ δώδεκα στοιχεῖα] inwrought in it.

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 681.]

⁸“This female figure is portrayed as a ‘queen of the cosmos’ through the powerful symbols of the sun, moon, and twelve stars (Boll, Offenbarung, 98–124; Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 71–76). A tessera from Palmyrene depicts an unidentified goddess standing on a crescent moon, with three stars, one over her head and the other two next to her right and left arms (Cumont, *Recherches*, 209).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 680.]

⁹“Boll suggests that a specific astronomical reference to the constellation Virgo should be understood in Rev 12:1 (Offenbarung, 100–108). This constellation, whose Greek name was Παρθένος, ‘virgin,’ the second largest constellation, was well known in antiquity (Aratus Phaen. 96–146; Cicero *De nat. deor.* 2.42; Hyginus *Poetica Astronomica* 2.25; Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 2.655). Virgo was thought to have two wings (see Rev 12:14). Ps.-Eratosthenes *Catasterismi* 9 identified Virgo with various female divinities, such as Atargatis, Isis, Demeter, and Tyche. Several goddesses in the Greco-Roman world were similarly portrayed: Artemis of Ephesus, Atargatis of Syria, Isis, and Hekate. (6) The woman has been identified as Isis, the queen of heaven. Egyptian sources understand Isis as a cosmic queen connected with the sun and stars (Bergman, Isis, 162–63). Her usual headdress is a pair of horns, often stylized as an upturned crescent, and between the horns is a solar disk (Budge, *Gods* 2:202; LIMC 5/2:503 [plate

and thus somewhat mysterious to this point.

The other aspect of depiction, unique to John’s depiction, is the pregnancy of the woman: καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, καὶ κράζει ὠδίνουσα καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν, **and she was pregnant, and cries while experiencing birth pangs and being in agony to give birth**. This celestial woman is in the early stages of giving birth to a child. In verse 5 the birth is described and it is obvious that it is Jesus of Nazareth who is born.

But who is this woman? A wide range of identities have been proposed over the centuries.¹⁰ The most

34], 508 [plate 124], 510 [plate 174], 511 [plate 195], 513 [plate 209]). Lucius refers to the moon-goddess as *regina caeli*, ‘queen of heaven’ (cf. ‘lady of heaven,’ a title of Isis in Budge, *Gods* 2:213), along with various other names, and eventually identifies her with Isis (Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 11.2, 4; see Griffiths, *Isis-Book*, 114–15). The Isis aretology from Memphis (line 13) suggests that she is a creator goddess: ‘Εγὼ ἀστρῶν ὁδοὺς ἔδειξα, ‘I showed the paths of the stars’ (Müller, *Isis-Aretalogien*, 39). Similarly, on the next line, her creative powers are associated with the sun and the moon, though Egyptian parallels to this predication are very rare: ‘Εγὼ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης πορείαν συνεταξάμην, ‘I commanded the course of the sun and the moon’ (Müller, *Isis-Aretalogien*, 40). Sarapis and Isis are also identified as Helios (sun) and Selene (moon); see the Isis aretology from Maroneia, line 19 (Danker, *Benefactor*, 181). Female Egyptian deities, including Hathor, Satis, Sothis, and Isis, were given the title ‘mistress of the stars’ (for references, see Müller, *Isis-Aretalogien*, 39). The moon beneath her feet has a parallel in T. Naph. 5:4b (tr. Hollander-de Jonge, *Testaments*), ‘and Judah was bright as the moon, and under his feet were twelve rays.’

“Ancient cities and peoples were frequently personified by female figures. Several aurei and denarii reverses from Rome with the legend IVDAEA, “Judea,” depict a seated Jewess in mourning with the trophies of war displayed behind her (B. V. Head, *BMC, Empire* 2:5–6, nos. 31–42). T. Mos. 10:9–10 (Charlesworth, *OTP* 1:932) depicts eschatological Israel as exalted to the heavens:

And God will raise you to the heights.

Yea, he will fix you firmly in the heaven of the stars, in the place of their habitations.

And you will behold from on high.

Yea, you will see your enemies on the earth.

“The nimbus is reminiscent of Asian Artemis as she is portrayed in many ancient representations. Gems depict Artemis with a nimbus situated between stars and a halfmoon (Hommel, *IM* 5 [1955] 44).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 681.]

¹⁰“There are several opinions regarding the identity of this heavenly woman: (1) Throughout the history of Christian biblical interpretation, particularly in the patristic and medieval periods, the woman in Rev 12 has often, though not exclusively, been interpreted as Mary, the mother of Jesus (Oecumenius *Comm. in Apoc.* 12.1; LeFrois, *Woman*, 38–58). The modern Roman Catholic Marian interpretation still finds representatives (see LeFrois, *Woman*, 232–35). (2) Equally ancient is the view that the woman in Rev 12 represents the Church (LeFrois, *Woman*, 11–38; Hippolytus *de Ant.* 61; Methodius *Symp.* 8.5). (3) The woman is sometimes identified with the bride, the Heavenly Jerusalem of Rev 19:7–8; 21:9–10 (Harrington, 128). (4) From a Jewish perspective the woman can represent the persecuted people of God from whom

logical, and dominant, viewpoint over the centuries has been Mary. But the depiction here seems so different from the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke, that some have gone other directions.

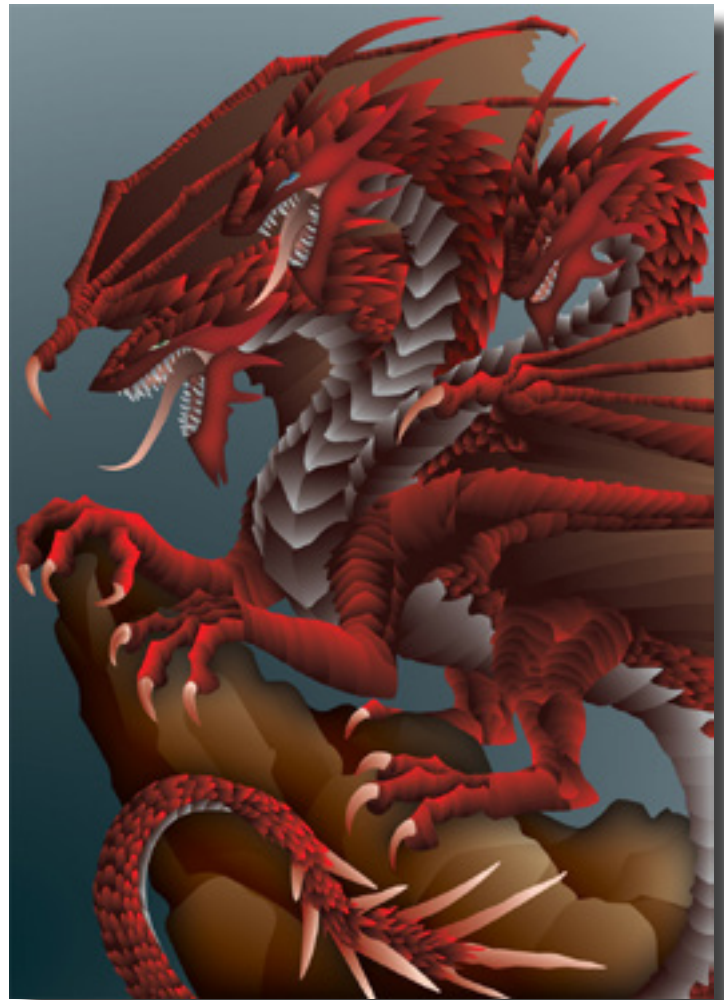
But several aspects must not be overlooked, as have been. First, in light of the wide spread circulation of a ‘celestial woman’ as a supernatural figure in the culture of John’s day, he could very naturally utilize some elements of those traditions in order to present the apocalyptic perspective on the significance of Christ’s birth. This would have been quite natural in the first century world. Second, this is not historical depiction in any shape form or fashion. John is trying to help his initial readers grasp the cosmic dimensions of the struggle taking place between God and Satan. One of those moments Satan sought in order to attack God was through the incarnation of the Son of God on earth. Jesus’ temptation experience in the wilderness described in the synoptic gospels, especially in Matthew and Luke, provide us a glimpse into this cosmic warfare taking place between God and Satan. Here in chapters twelve and thirteen John presents us with a full blown apocalyptic version of this cosmic struggle, with all of its intensity. Third, a cosmic depiction centers on the spiritual struggles and realities of what may seem to be a regular human events. Through this depiction we catch a glimpse into how desperately eager Satan was to destroy Jesus, but also how thoroughly and certainly God protected both the Child and His mother from the grip of Satan. Fourth, with this cosmic efforts to destroy Christ from His birth onward, we are being exposed to the warfare dimensions that will typify the ongoing battle between God and Satan up to the very end when Satan is once for all defeated and thrown into the lake of fire to be tormented for eternity.

Thus with this first σημεῖον we are introduced to a major figure in this cosmic struggle. Mary symbolizes those devoted to God and seeking to follow Him in faithful devotion day by day. Her divine chosen role in giving birth to the Son of Man, however, puts her in the center of this cosmic conflict and makes her a special target of Satan. Although he desires to kill her, he is more focused on killing her Child whom he knows will ultimately lead to his own downfall at the end of time.

B. Second sign, the dragon, vv. 3-4a

3 καὶ ὤφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἰδοὺ δράκων μέγας πυρρὸς ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ καὶ κέρατα

the Messiah comes (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 107). (5) The woman is sometimes considered an astrological figure, perhaps a particular constellation. Boll suggests that a specific astronomical reference to the constellation Virgo should be understood in Rev 12:1 (Offenbarung, 100–108).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 681.]



δέκα καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα, 4 καὶ ἡ οὐρὰ αὐτοῦ σύρει τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν.

3 Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

The second ‘player’ in this cosmic struggle is described in vv. 3-4a.

First, he is introduced in a manner similar to the woman, as ἄλλο σημεῖον, *another sign*. Although difficult to preserve in English translation notice how John ‘de-emphasizes’ Satan in his introduction:

σημεῖον μέγα ὤφθη ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (v. 1)

ὤφθη ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (v. 3)

He is not a σημεῖον μέγα, like the woman. The verb action ὤφθη, *was seen*, is the more important aspect of his depiction. Thus he shows up visible in the sky like the woman and as her adversary.

Second, he is then described with minimum depiction. He is initially labeled as a δράκων, *dragon*. All thirteen instances of δράκων in the entire NT come beginning in 12:3 and the remainder of Revelation. The Greek word is used for several different Hebrew words



Draco Constellation in Greek Mythology

in the OT: לִיְוָיָתָן *liwyātān*, Leviathan (4x) and תַּנִּין or תַּנִּי *tannîn*, serpent, sea-monster (15x).¹¹ Unlike the medieval dragon which is a land oriented animal, this dragon was closely identified with the great sea, the Mediterranean, and with snakes. Additionally a constellation of stars was known as δρᾶκων or Draco as well was well known.¹² In the Greco-Roman background this image was a clear symbol of evil.¹³ Again the location is ἐν τῷ

¹¹“The term δρᾶκων occurs in the NT only in the second half of Revelation, where it is found thirteen times (12:3, 4, 7[2x], 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). ‘Dragon’ is one of many designations of Satan in early Judaism (see 12:9); see 3 Apoc. Bar. 4:3–5. δρᾶκων is used four times in the LXX to translate the Hebrew term לִיְוָיָתָן, ‘Leviathan’ (Job 40:25; Pss 73:14[MT 74:14]; 103:26[MT 104:26]; Isa 27:1), and fifteen times for תַּנִּין or תַּנִּי *tannîn*, ‘serpent, sea-monster’ (e.g., Exod 7:9–12; Job 7:12; Ps 73:13[MT 74:13]; Isa 27:1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 683.]

¹²“An astronomical reference is possible here since Δρᾶκων or Draco was the name of a constellation widely known in the Hellenistic period; Draco was understood to possess a long coiling tail and was seen in conjunction with the Kneeler, a constellation thought to depict Herakles (or Theseus, or Prometheus) with his foot on the head of the dragon (Aratus Phaenomena 45–70; Cicero De nat. deor. 2.42; Hyginus Poetica Astronomica 2.3; Nonnos Dionysiaca 2.672–73). In the elaborate retelling of the conflict between Zeus and Typhoeus in Nonnos Dionysiaca 154–218, the wild attack of Typhoeus is narrated in terms of the constellations with which Draco is associated.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 683.]

¹³“Of all beasts, the serpent was regarded as demonic in antiquity, thereby revealing the duality of the ancient conception of demons. It plays a great part in Persian, Babylonian and Assyrian. Egyptian and Greek mythology, and in essence this role is always the same; it is a power of chaos which opposes God either in the beginning or at the end of things, or both. Thus in Parseism there is the serpent Aži-Dahaka (both at the beginning and at the end),⁵ in Babylonia Tiāmat and Labbu with many similar figures,⁶ in Egypt Apophis, the main symbol of the Typhon with many others like the crocodile,⁷ in Greece the Python which Apollo defeats, the serpent which Kadmos slays and many mixed figures like Typhoeus/Typhon.⁸ There seems to have been a similar general estimation of the red colour ascribed to the serpent in Rev. 12:3.⁹ On Greek soil the significance of the fight against the serpent as the original battle of deity against the power of chaos is greatly obscured by the lowering of the stories to the level of sagas.¹⁰ On the other hand, the other aspect of the serpent as a demonic beast emerges more strongly than in Babylon and Egypt, namely, that it is a sacred animal.¹¹ This dual capacity reveals the dual nature of ancient demonology generally.¹²” [Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley,

οὐρανῷ, that is, in the sky above the earth, but not in the dwelling place of God which is located above the sky.

The details of this creature are:

1) μέγας The size of this creature was very large. This was no small creature with limited power or ability. Interestingly with the woman the σημεῖον was μέγα, but here the creature is μέγας. He forms a substantial adversary to the woman in this cosmic scene.

2) πυρρός. His color is red. Only the dragon and the horse in the second seal (6:4) are designated as fiery red in Revelation. This rider took peace from the earth leading people to slaughter one another. It should be noted that the beast in 17:3 is designated as κόκκινον, scarlet, and is a color close in appearance to πυρρός. Here Babylon is presented as a γυναῖκα καθημένην ἐπὶ θηρίον κόκκινον, a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, and as a πόρνης τῆς μεγάλης, large whore.

Probably in the background here is the Egyptian mythology of the god Typhon (= Seth) who was the adversary of Isis and Osiris, and was red and sometimes portrayed as a dragon.¹⁴ Typically the red color in a negative meaning suggested death by bloodshed in war etc.

Even more likely in the background here is Job 26:12-13 (LXX)¹⁵ where at the dawn of human history and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 2:281–282.]

¹⁴“The color red had generally positive associations for the Greeks, who considered it to have protective and apotropaic powers. Elsewhere in Revelation the adjective πυρρός is used only of the red horse in 6:5 (n.b. that the beast in 17:3 is described as κόκκινον, ‘scarlet’). The Egyptians believed that Typhon (the Greek name of the Egyptian god Seth), the mythical opponent of Isis and Osiris, was red (πυρρός; Plutarch De Iside 359E, 363B, 364B; Diodorus 1.88.4), and hence red had negative as well as positive associations (see Hopfner, *Offenbarungszauber*, vol. 1, § 615; A. Hermann, RAC 6:362–71, 405–8 [s.v. Farben]; J. G. Griffiths, “The Symbolism of Red in Egyptian Religion,” in *Ex orbe religion: Studia G. Widengren oblata* [Leiden: Brill, 1972] 1:85–87). In Egyptian mythology, Seth-Typhon took many forms, including the snake, dragon, and crocodile (Apollodorus 1.6.3; see Fontenrose, *Python*, 185–87; Budge, *Gods* 2:245). According to T. Abr. 17:14; 19:6–7, Death sometimes appears as seven fiery red heads of dragons (κεφαλὰς δρακόντων πυρίνους ἑπτὰ), which symbolize the seven ages of the world (19:7). The color red as the color of the dragon has a partial parallel in Hermas Vis. 4.1.10, where the θηρίον, ‘beast,’ seen by Hermas has four colors on its head: black, flame and blood (πυροειδὲς καὶ αἱματῶδες, i.e., red), gold, and white. The flame and blood are later interpreted to mean that the world must be destroyed by blood and fire (Hermas Vis. 4.3.3).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 684.]

¹⁵Job 26:12-14 (LXX). 12 ἰσχύι κατέπαυσεν τὴν θάλασσαν, ἐπιστήμη δὲ ἔτρωσε τὸ κῆτος· † 13 κλείθηρα δὲ οὐρανοῦ δεδοίκασιν αὐτόν, προστάγματι δὲ ἐθανάτωσεν δράκοντα ἄποστάνην. †

12 By his power he stilled the Sea; by his understanding he struck down Rahab. 13 By his wind the heavens were made fair;

God slew a sinister, malevolent force that stands behind Egypt and all other evil kingdoms.¹⁶

3) ἔχων κεφαλὰς ἑπτὰ The dragon has seven heads, rather than one. No explanation is given here for seven heads, but in a parallel depiction in 17:3, where Babylon (= Rome) sits on a θηρίον with seven heads and ten horns.¹⁷ In 17:9-14, the significance of these seven heads is given as collective wisdom from

his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

¹⁶“Dragon’ (δράκων) is another OT word for the evil sea monster that symbolizes evil kingdoms who oppress Israel. Often the wicked kingdom of Egypt is portrayed by this emblem. God is spoken of as defeating the Pharaoh as a sea dragon at the exodus deliverance and at later points in Egypt’s history (Pss. 73(74):13–14; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; 51:9; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2–3; Hab. 3:8–15; Pss. Sol. 2:29–30; see Ps. 87:4, where ‘Rahab’ is a synonym for Egypt, and Jer. 51:34, where Babylon is the subject; cf. Amos 9:3). In Pss. Sol. 2:29–30 the sea monster is identified as Rome (the commander Pompey) lying ‘on the mountains of Egypt.’ Some passages allude in this way to God’s victory, perhaps at the dawn of history, over a more sinister, malevolent force behind Egypt and other evil kingdoms: God ‘slew the whale ... he has slain the apostate dragon’ (Job 26:12–13 LXX; Job 41; cf. Job 7:12; 9:13).” [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 633.]

¹⁷“Since the dragon is described using imagery that is not further exploited or even referred to in the rest of this vision, it appears to be a redactional interpolation drawn from 17:3 (note that this clause can be omitted without disrupting the sequence of thought), for only in that context are the seven heads and the ten horns actually interpreted (17:9–14). Seven heads and ten horns are also attributed to the beast mentioned in 13:1 (here θήριον, ‘beast,’ is anarthrous even though he has already been mentioned in 11:7), but this figure is clearly differentiated from the dragon to whom he is subordinate (13:3). A beast with seven heads and ten horns is again mentioned in 17:3, but since the term θηρίον in 17:3 is anarthrous, it appears clear that either two different beasts are in view or the author did not successfully conceal his use of sources. Here the dragon has seven heads and ten horns, with seven diadems on his heads (i.e., the conclusion is inescapable that each of the diademed heads must, at least originally, have symbolized a ruler), while in 13:1 the beast has ten horns and seven heads with ten diadems on his horns. The reference to ten horns is an allusion to Dan 7:7, 20, 24, where they are interpreted to mean ten kings, by which is meant ten successive rulers of a single world power (cf. Sib. Or. 3.396–400, a Jewish interpolation based on Dan 7:7, 20). The reference to ten horns in Sib. Or. 3.397 (including an eleventh that sprouts from the side) clearly refers to ten kings and then an eleventh but has probably been added to the oracle by a Jewish Sibyllist (J. J. Collins in Charlesworth, OTP 1:359). Boll (Offenbarung, 102) notes that the constellations Corvus, ‘crow,’ and Crater, ‘goblet,’ are located next to Virgo and consist (according to ancient sidereal lore) of seven and ten stars, respectively (though how these are connected with heads and horns is problematic). In T. Abr. 17:12–19, Death reveals himself to Abraham in many terrifying forms, including appearances as seven fiery red heads of dragons (κεφαλὰς δρακόντων πυρίνους ἑπτὰ, 17:14; 19:6–7) and as a frightening three-headed dragon (δράκοντα τρικέφαλον φοβερόν, 17:16).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 683–684.]

the seven mountains on which the city of Rome was built. But the θηρίον in 17:3 and the δράκων in 12:3 are two different creatures, with the beast in 17:3 being parallel to the sea monster in 13:1, who also possessed seven heads and ten horns. The significance of the seven heads of the beasts probably is the same for the dragon, but one cannot be absolutely certain.

4) καὶ κέρατα δέκα Both the beast in 17:3 and the dragon in 12:3 possess ten horns. In 17:12, the ten horns on the beast are “ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast.” Very likely the reference in both Revelation texts to ten horns is an allusion back to [Daniel 7:7, 20, 24](#) which identify ten successive rulers of a single world power.¹⁸

5) καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτοῦ ἑπτὰ διαδήματα. The seven crowns on the seven heads of the dragon are διαδήματα, rather than στέφανοι, as the woman is wearing.¹⁹ She wore a crown of victory, while the dragon had seven crowns of symbolic power and authority. In some of the background literature, multiple crowns often symbolized phony claims to power, rather than legitimate claims to power. That may well be the case here also.

The powerful tail of the dragon is what is his weapon: καὶ ἡ οὐρὰ αὐτοῦ σύρει τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὴν γῆν, and his tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. In the background here is an adaptation of Daniel 8:10 where the little horn grows tall enough to knock down stars out of the sky.²⁰ Such expresses power and arrogance that extends beyond what is capable by human rulers.²¹ Already we have encountered actions

¹⁸Interestingly, Domitian, the [Roman emperor](#) in power at the time of writing of Revelation was the eleventh emperor of the Roman empire. And often the turbulent year of 68 with Galba (7 mos) and Otho (3 mos) are counted as one rather than two.

¹⁹“On the many diadems signifying rule over many kingdoms, see Comment on 19:12. In the allegory of kingship in Dio Chrysostom Or. 1.58–84 (see Mussies, Dio, 250), two allegorical female figures (one symbolizing ‘Kingship’ and the other ‘Tyranny’) are enthroned on two mountains. ‘Lady Tyranny’ has many scepters and tiaras as well as diadems (1.79, πολλὰ δὲ τιᾶραι καὶ διαδήματα ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς, ‘many tiaras and diadems on her head’), and the mountain upon which she is seated is called Typhon (1.67), obviously a name appropriate for wicked rule. Dio refers several times to people who, though they might have many scepters, tiaras, and diadems, are not thereby legitimate kings (Dio Or. 1.79; 3.41; 4.25; 14.22; Mussies, Dio, 250). The possession of these many outward symbols of kingship are regarded negatively by Dio.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 684.]

²⁰ καὶ ὑψώθη ἕως τῶν ἀστέρων τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ ἐρράχθη ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀστέρων καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτῶν κατεπατήθη,†

It grew as high as the host of heaven. It threw down to the earth some of the host and some of the stars, and trampled on them.

²¹“This probably alludes to Dan 8:10, where it is said that a

involving the knocking of stars out of the sky. In the opening of the sixth sea (6:13), “the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale” (καὶ οἱ ἀστέρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἔπεσαν εἰς τὴν γῆν, ὡς συκὴ βάλλει τοὺς ὀλύνθους αὐτῆς ὑπὸ ἀνέμου μεγάλου σειομένη). Then in 8:7-9:19, with the first five trumpets blowing, stars etc. are falling to the earth destroying a third of it, i.e., the land, the people, and the waters. In some of the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, the dragon sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky symbolizes Satan sending a third of the demons down to the earth in order to work chaos and havoc on earth, e.g., 1 Enoch 6-11; 18:14; 21:3-6; 86:1-3; 88:3. Here in 12:4 it clearly signals Satan marshaling his forces for killing the new born child the moment it is born.

The vicious picture of the dragon creates a frightening image. Here he is not identified, but upon his final defeat and banishment to the lake of fire he is identified in 20:2 as τὸν δράκοντα, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὃς ἐστὶν Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, *the dragon, the old serpent, who is the Devil and Satan*. The same identification surfaces also in 12:9, ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, *The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world*.

Now the two main ‘characters’ in the cosmic battle to be played out first in the sky and then on earth are in place. Next comes the launching of the warfare of the dragon against the woman with Child.

king, represented by the little horn, ‘grew great, even to the host of heaven; and some of the host of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled upon them’ (metaphors emphasizing the excessive pride of this ruler). The destruction of one-third of the stars corresponds to the destruction of a third of various parts of the cosmos as the result of the plagues unleashed by the seven trumpets (8:7-9:19). It is possible that the description of the dragon sweeping a third of the stars and casting them down to the earth alludes to the story of the descent of Satan and his angels to earth in the traditional story of the Watchers (1 Enoch 6-11). In 1 Enoch, stars can represent evil angels (18:14; 21:3-6; 86:1-3; 88:3); for the stars = angels metaphor, see Comment on 1:20. Isa 24:21-22 says, ‘On that day the Lord will punish the host of heaven in heaven, and the kings of the earth on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished.’ In Apollodorus 1.6.3, the monster Typhon, with a hundred dragon heads (ἑκατὸν κεφαλαὶ δρακόντων), was so gigantic that his head touched the stars (ἡ δὲ κεφαλὴ πολλάκις καὶ τῶν ἄστρων ἔψαυε). In the late mythography of Nonnos, Typhoeus is depicted as attacking and pulling down the various constellations from the heavens (Dionysiaca 1.163-205). In the Mart. Pionius 12 (tr. Musurillo, Acts, 151), Pionius tells his visitors ‘I am tormented anew ... when I see ... the stars of heaven being swept down to earth by the dragon’s tail.’ This is undoubtedly an allusion to Rev 12:4, allegorically interpreted as the physical harm inflicted on Christians by Satan. [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 685-686.]

C. God’s protection of the woman, vv. 4b-6

4b Καὶ ὁ δράκων ἔστηκεν ἐνώπιον τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς μελλούσης τεκεῖν, ἵνα ὅταν τέκη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη. 5 καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. καὶ ἠρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ. 6 καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέψωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα.

4b Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. 5 And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.

The struggle is ready to begin the moment of the birth of the Child. The old dragon is positioned -- so he thinks -- in front of the woman who is in the midst of birthing the Child. From the subsequent narrative, this birthing is taking place in the sky rather than on earth. But this is not clear, and the setting may well be upon the earth.

In either case, Satan positions himself where he is confident he can destroy the child at birth: Καὶ ὁ δράκων ἔστηκεν ἐνώπιον τῆς γυναικὸς τῆς μελλούσης τεκεῖν, *Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child*. His intention is stated as ἵνα ὅταν τέκη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη, *so that as soon as the her child is born he can devour it*.²²

Quite fascinating are somewhat similar myths in circulation in John’s world at the end of the first century, and then later on in early Christianity the motif that

²²“This confrontation takes place in heaven since that is the location of the two great signs that appeared (Boll, Offenbarung, 101, argues that ἔστηκεν, ‘stood,’ is a *terminus technicus* for the location of a constellation in the sky, though the term is certainly used in other connections as well; see Freundorfer, Apokalypse, 132-34). Yet the statement that the child will be caught up to heaven (v 5) indicates that the confrontation between the dragon and the woman takes place on the earth. When the dragon is cast down to the earth (v 13), he pursues the woman, so her location on the earth in v 4b must be presumed. The term κατασθίειν, ‘to devour, swallow,’ is a synonym of καταπίνειν, ‘to devour, swallow,’ used in 12:16 of Earth swallowing the floodwaters spewed out by the dragon. These terms frame the story in the sense that the attempt to ‘swallow’ the child is the dragon’s primary offense in 12:4b, while in 12:16 it is the primary defense of Earth, the champion of the woman. In LXX Jer 28:34(MT 51:34), the Babylonian king Nebuchadrezzar is compared to a dragon: “Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon has swallowed me like a dragon [κατέπιέν με ὡς δράκων].” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 686.]

the Christ child was hidden or disguised so that Satan would not recognize Him.²³ In the cosmic opposition of Satan to God, he stood poised to destroy the very Son of God at birth in order to inflict major injury to God.

John next depicts the birth of Christ in this apocalyptic visionary account: καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, *And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron.* The phrase υἱὸν ἄρσεν is a Hebraism found in texts such as Jeremiah 20:15 et als.²⁴ It is rather unusual for the NT but highlights

23 “The myth in Ignatius Eph. 19:1 is quite different; there the virginity of Mary and her childbearing, together with the death of the Lord, were concealed from the prince of this world. Similarly, in Hippolytus Theoph. 4, Jesus appeared incognito at his baptism ‘that he might elude the wickedness of the dragon.’ Yet the motif of concealment is Rhea’s first line of defense in the Kronos-Zeus succession myth discussed below. The antipathy between the dragon and the offspring of the woman can be seen in the version of the birth of Zeus found in Sib. Or. 3.132–41 (Charlesworth, OTP 1:365):

Whenever Rhea gave birth, the Titans sat by her,
and they tore apart all male children,
but they allowed the females to live and be reared with their mother.
But when Lady Rhea gave birth in the third child-bearing
she brought forth Hera first. When they saw
with their eyes the female species, the Titans, savage men,
went home. Then Rhea bore a male child,
whom she quickly sent away to be reared secretly in private,
to Phrygia, having taken three Cretan men under oath.
Therefore they named him Zeus, because he was sent away.

“Rhea similarly conceals the births of Poseidon and Pluto; the story continues in lines 147–55:

When the Titans heard that children existed
in secret, whom Kronos had begotten with Rhea, his consort,
Titan assembled sixty sons
and held Kronos and Rhea, his consort, in fetters.
He hid them in the earth and guarded them in bonds.
Then indeed the sons of mighty Kronos heard it
and they stirred up great war and din of battle against him.
This is the beginning of war for all mortals
for this is the first beginning of war for mortals.

“This euphemistic version of the Kronos-Zeus succession myth concludes with a list of kingdoms, beginning with the Titans and concluding with that of Rome (Sib. Or. 3.156–61), a tradition that views Rome as playing the same antagonistic role as the Titans. This mythological sequence is developed from Hesiod Theog. 453–91 (summarized in Apollodorus 1.1.5–7), in which Kronos, fearing the birth of a son who would overthrow him, swallowed [καταπίνειν] all his children shortly after Rhea gave birth to them. Upon Rhea’s appeal to Earth and Ouranos, she was sent to Crete where Zeus was hidden in a cave after he was born, and Rhea presented Kronos with a rock wrapped in baby garments, which he promptly swallowed. The ancient world knew a number of terrifying baby-killing or baby-snatching demons (Mormo, Lamia, Gella, Empousa, Lilith, Lamashu), all of which are traditionally understood to be female.”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 686–687.]

²⁴“This is probably an allusion to Isa 66:7, but a major grammatical incongruity is involved, for ἄρσεν, ‘male child,’ a neuter

the gender (ἄρσεν from ἄρσην, εν) of the masculine noun υἱὸν (from υἱός) even more. Standing behind this birth expression is Isaiah 66:7.²⁵ Behind the larger expression are Messianic texts such as Isa. 7:14 et als. The similar terminology used by John to these OT texts points further to Mary as the woman in the visionary scene.

The unquestionable Messianic identification given this child is ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. The image of a shepherd using an iron rod to ‘ride herd’ over all the nations comes out of Psalm 2:9²⁶ and was early on given a Messianic interpretation

accusative adjective, is in apposition to υἱόν, ‘son,’ a masculine accusative noun. The phrase ‘a son, a male’ can be construed as a Hebraism like that found in Jer 20:15, ‘A son, a male [בֶּן זָכָר] is born to you’ (the LXX renders this ἐτέχθη σοι ἄρσεν, ‘a male is born to you’). More commonly, such idiomatic phrases as παῖς ἄρσην (Ant. 1.52, 304; 7.146; 20.92), παιδίον ἄρσην (Ant. 3.271; 7.158; 9.65), and τέκνον ἄρσην (Ant. 7.243) are used to mean ‘son.’ There is some evidence to suggest that υἱός in popular speech could mean ‘child,’ making it necessary to specify that the child was a male; see B. Olsson, “υἱός ἄρσην,” *Glotta* 23 (1935) 112. Note that in the parallel noun cluster υἱός ἄρσην in Tob 6:12 (Codex x), ἄρσην is a masculine accusative adjective, so the phrase simply means ‘male son’ and is redundant though not grammatically problematic like υἱόν, ἄρσεν in Rev 12:5 (see Isa 66:7; Jer 20:15). Vanni, who implies that this strange construction is intentional and conveys certain theological perspectives, suggests that ἄρσεν enlarges the conception of υἱός and, by virtue of its neuter gender, universalizes the notion and suggests such ideas as strength, domination, and importance (Vanni, *L’Apocalypse*, 245–47, esp. 245). The messianic interpretation of Isa 66:7 in Judaism is suggested by Gen. Rab. 38:1; Lev. Rab. 12:2; Tg. Isa. 66:7 (Aus, ZNW 67 [1976] 256–62) and is also reflected in a few early Christian texts (Justin Dial. 85.8–9; Ps.-Epiphanius Test. 11; Methodius Sym. et Ann. 3; Symp. 7). The Hebrew term הֵבֶל *hēbel*, ‘birth pang,’ is associated with the conception of the מְשִׁיחַ הַבְּלוּ שֶׁל מַאֲשִׁיחַ, ‘birth pang(s) of the Messiah,’ a well-known eschatological motif for the trials and tribulations that are expected to precede the time of the end (Aus, ZNW 67 [1976] 260–62). LXX Isa 7:14 is another passage in which the child born is the Messiah (Swete, 148; Lohmeyer, 99; Hedrick, “Imagery,” 31): ‘Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign [σημεῖον; see 12:1]. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son [ἐν γαστρὶ ἔξει καὶ τέξεται υἱόν], and shall call his name Immanuel.’ If the woman of 12:1 represents Israel, the problem is that there is no OT passage that personifies Israel as a mother and also speaks of her bearing a child Messiah; according to Hedrick (“Imagery,” 31), ‘there is no precedent for John’s description of a personified Israel as giving birth to the Messiah.’”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 687–688.]

²⁵Isa. 66:7. πρὶν ἢ τὴν ὠδίνουσαν τεκεῖν, πρὶν ἔλθειν τὸν πόνον τῶν ὠδίνων, ἐξέφυγεν καὶ ἔτεκεν ἄρσεν. †

Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.

²⁶Psalm 2:8–9. 8 αἴτησαι παρ’ ἐμοῦ, καὶ δώσω σοι ἔθνη τὴν κληρονομίαν σου καὶ τὴν κατάσχεσίν σου τὰ πέρατα τῆς γῆς. † 9 ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, ὡς σκευὸς κεραμέως συντρίψεις αὐτούς.

in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition in texts such as the [Psalms of Solomon](#) 17:23-24.²⁷ One of the translation issues relates to the best rendering of ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.²⁸ Literally, ποιμαίνειν means ‘to shepherd’ and ἐν ῥάβδῳ, ‘with the crooked ended rod.’ Psalm 2:7 is

8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 **You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.**”

²⁷**Psalms of Solomon 17:23-24.** 23 ἐν σοφίᾳ δικαιοσύνης ἐξῶσαι ἁμαρτωλοὺς ἀπὸ κληρονομίας, ἐκτρίψαι ὑπερηφανίαν ἁμαρτωλοῦ ὡς σκευὴ κεραμέως,† 24 ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ συντρίψαι πᾶσαν ὑπόστασιν αὐτῶν, ὀλεθρεῦσαι ἔθνη παράνομα ἐν λόγῳ στόματος αὐτοῦ,†

(23) Wisely, righteously 26 he shall thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance, He shall destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter’s vessel. (24) **With a rod of iron he shall break in pieces all their substance.** [Charles, Robert Henry, ed. *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004.]

²⁸“Here the masculine relative pronoun ὅς, ‘who,’ refers back to υἱόν, ‘son,’ rather than to ἄρσεν, ‘male child’ (see Comment on v 5a and Note 5.a.*). This is an allusion to Ps 2:9, a passage that was interpreted messianically in Pss. Sol. 17:23–24. Here the judicial authority of the Messiah is emphasized. This is one of three allusions to Ps 2:9 in the NT, all of which occur in Revelation; both 2:27 and 19:15 have ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, ‘he will shepherd [or ‘drive’] them with an iron crook.’ Only in 12:5 do μέλλει, ‘is about to,’ and πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ‘all the nations,’ occur, which suggests that the author derived this allusion through different traditional channels. LXX Ps 2:9 reads ποιμανεῖς αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ, ‘you will shepherd [or ‘drive’] them with an iron crook’ (αὐτούς, ‘them’ refers to the ἔθνη, ‘nations,’ in Ps 2:8). The author has just replaced the pronoun αὐτούς with the fuller expression πάντα τὰ ἔθνη and altered the phraseology from second person to the third person singular. This allusion is probably an explanatory gloss added by John to the Greek source he was revising (Charles, 1:clviii n. 2, 301). The gloss is intended to identify the male child as the Messiah of Jewish eschatological expectation and to place that rule in the future. The absence of any clear Christian features in this description of the woman and the child Messiah has led scholars since Vischer to propose that the author has incorporated a Jewish source into his composition, but one to which he assigns a Christian interpretation (J. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 82–84). A. Yarbro Collins (*Combat Myth*, 105) thinks that this description of the Messiah and his role cannot be Christian but must be Jewish. Yet it must be admitted that there is no Jewish tradition that the Messiah would be persecuted by the dragon after his birth and then miraculously rescued by God (Bousset [1906] 349).

“The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, ‘all the nations,’ is a fixed phrase that occurs five times in Revelation (12:5; 14:8; 15:4; 18:3, 23) and frequently elsewhere in the NT and early Christian literature (Matt 24:9, 14 [= Mark 13:10]; 25:32; 28:19; Mark 11:17 [Isa 56:7]; Luke 21:24; 24:47; Acts 14:16; 15:17; Rom 1:5; 15:11 [Ps 117:1]; Gal 3:8; 2 Tim 4:17; Barn. 9:5 [Jer 9:25–26]; 1 Clem. 59:4; 2 Clem. 13:2 [Isa 52:5]; 17:4; Hermas Sim. 9.17.4). The phrase occurs often in early Jewish literature (T. Sim. 7:2; T. Levi 4:4; 8:14; 14:1, 4; 15:1; T. Jude 22:2; T. Zeb. 9:8; T. Asher 7:3; T. Jos. 19:6; T. Benj. 9:2; Pss. Sol. 9:9; 17:34; Vit. Proph. 2.10; 4.21B; 10.8; Ant. 11.215; Ag. Ap. 1.172). The phrase occurs about sixty times in the OT (e.g., Gen 22:18; Deut 17:14; Josh 23:3; 1 Sam 8:5, 20; 1 Chr 14:7; Isa 2:2; Jer 25:9; Joel 3:2; Amos 9:9).”

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 688–689.]

also quoted in Rev. 2:27.²⁹ Plus it surfaces again in Rev. 19:15.³⁰ In chapter 19, it depicts Christ on the white horse inflicting divine judgment upon Satan, his agents, and the evil people of the earth by tossing them into the lake of fire. But in 2:7 it symbolizes the participation in the reign of the Son of Man by those who overcomes in faithful commitment to Christ. Thus the judicial role is the same point here in 12:5. Recognizing this the old dragon determined to kill the Child before the Child could execute judgment upon him and all his agents and followers on earth.

But God had a different plan: καὶ ἠρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ, **But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne.** Before the dragon could swallow the child, it was taken immediately to heaven and the protection of God Himself. Traditionally, this event is assumed to be the ascension of Jesus to heaven at the end of His earthly life, but this is highly questionable. The child is snatched away to heaven immediately upon its birth, some some 30 years later. Amazingly, interpreters seem constantly to forget that they are dealing with an apocalyptic vision here, and the depiction of a cosmic struggle between God and Satan. The snatching away to heaven affirms God’s protective hand upon His Son immediately from birth on. The image of being carried up to heaven is in no way historical, nor linked to any single historical event during the earthly life of Jesus.³¹

²⁹**Rev. 2:26-28a.** 26 Καὶ ὁ νικῶν καὶ ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου, δώσω αὐτῷ ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν 27 **καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ ὡς τὰ σκευὴ τὰ κεραμικὰ συντρίβεται,** 28 ὡς κἀγὼ εἴληφα παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου,

26 To everyone who conquers and continues to do my works to the end, I will give authority over the nations; 27 **to rule them with an iron rod, as when clay pots are shattered** — 28 even as I also received authority from my Father.

³⁰**Rev. 19:15.** 15 καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ἐκπορεύεται ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῇ πατάξῃ τὰ ἔθνη, **καὶ αὐτὸς ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ,** καὶ αὐτὸς πατεῖ τὴν ληνὸν τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ παντοκράτορος,

15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, **and he will rule them with a rod of iron;** he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

³¹“The child is separated immediately from his mother, but he then joins his hitherto absent ‘father,’ i.e., God (in an enthronement context, the term ‘Father’ is used of God in Revelation only in 3:21; on God as Father in Revelation, see Comment on 1:6). In its present context this statement probably refers to the ascension of Jesus, and that is clearly how Christian interpreters have traditionally understood the passage (Prigent, *Apocalypse* 12, 8, 136). There are convincing reasons, however, for maintaining that this is a secondary application: (1) Unlike the ascension narrative in Luke 24 and Acts 1, the snatching of the child here occurs immediately after birth (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 105). (2) The ascension of Jesus is never presented as a supernatural “rescue” from Satan (Gollinger, *Apokalypse* 12, 151–57). (3) References to the cross

Many of the Greek myths of supernatural birth of some deity contain a 'seizure motif' somewhat similar to what John is presenting.³² God's Son is nurtured in

and the resurrection are strikingly absent from the narrative. Joachim Jeremias suggests that in the ancient Near East there was a tendency to focus on both the beginning and the end of a story, while omitting what happens in between (Parables, 148). Rissi (Zeit, 44) applies this tendency specifically to Rev 12:5. Swete (151) notes that ἀρπάζειν, 'snatch away,' and ἀναλαμβάνειν, 'take up,' overlap in meaning and that the latter is used of the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:2, 11, 23; 1 Tim 3:16). The ascension of Jesus is narrated only in Luke 24 and Acts 1 and also in the longer ending of Mark (16:9–20). It is alluded to in a credal context in 1 Tim 3:16. Otherwise, the ascension is presupposed by the use of Ps 110:1 to assert that Christ is seated at the right hand of God, the *sessio ad dextram dei* (Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; 2:6; Col 3:1–3; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:20; 1 Clem. 36:5; Pol. Phil. 2:1; Barn. 12:10; Apoc. Peter 6; Sib. Or. 2.243; Ap. Jas. 14.30; see Lindars, *Apologetic*, 45–51; Hay, Psalm 110).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 689.]

³²“There are many Greek myths that deal with the popular theme of *apotheosis* or deification in which the seizure motif is central (verbs such as ἀρπάζειν and ἀνερπίεσθαι, both meaning 'to seize,' figure prominently; see Betz, *Lukian von Samosata*, 169 n. 3, for further references). In *Iliad* 20.234, it is said of Ganymede, τὸν καὶ ἀνηρεΐσαντο θεὸς Διὶ οἰνοχοεῦειν, 'him the gods snatched up to serve wine to Zeus' (see W. Dindorf, *Scholias Graeca in Homeri Iliadem* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1875] 2:202; Lucian *Dial. deorum* 8.1–2; Pausanias 5.24.5; Achilles Tatius 2.36.4; 2.37.2; Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 10.311). Pindar substitutes the story of how Pelops was seized (ἀρπάζειν) and carried up to Olympus by Poseidon in place of the traditional account of murder and cannibalism (*Olympian Odes* 1.40). *Odyssey* 15.250–51 mentions that Cleitus was seized (ἤρπασεν) by Dawn so that he might live with the gods. The motif of a child being carried off to heaven is found in Pausanias 73.18.11, where the child (παῖς) Dionysus is reported to have been carried off to heaven (εἰς οὐρανόν) by Hermes. One version of the legend of Europa speaks of her being seized (ἤρπασεν) by Zeus and transported to Crete (Lucian *De dea Syr.* 4; see Apollodorus 73.1.1), and Dawn seized (ἤρπασε) Orion and carried him off to Delos (Apollodorus 1.4.4). Artemis caught up Iphigeneia and made her immortal (Apollodorus *Epitome* 3.22), much as Philip was 'seized' (ἤρπασεν) by the Spirit of the Lord from the side of the Ethiopian eunuch and transported to Caesarea (Acts 8:39), and Hermas is seized (here the term is αἶρει) by the Spirit and transported to a place of revelation (Hermas *Vis.* 2.1.1). This imagery is based on Greek abduction stories, which frequently pair the verbs ἀρπάζειν, 'to snatch,' and κομίζειν, 'to carry away' (e.g., Theseus abducted Helen in Apollodorus 3.10.7; Dawn abducted Tithonius and carried him off to Ethiopia [Apollodorus 3.12.4]; Poseidon rescued his son Eumolpus by carrying him off to Ethiopia [Apollodorus 3.15.4]; Dionysus fell in love with Ariadne and carried her off to Lemnos [Apollodorus *Epitome* 1.9]). In another seizure story, Enoch was taken by angels and resettled in the Garden of Eden (Jub. 4:23). Other Greco-Roman seizure and removal stories include the following: Pluto seized Persephone and carried her off to Hades (Apollodorus 1.5.1); Phrixus and Helle were caught up (ἀνήρπασε) on a ram provided by their mother Nephele ("cloud") and transported across the Aegean (Apollodorus 1.9.1); a cloud was the vehicle that raised Herakles to heaven (εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀναπέμνει) and immortality (Apollodorus 2.7.7); Aph-

heaven and then returns to Mt. Zion triumphantly as the Lamb in 14:1. This is contextually John's point in seeing the new born Child snatched away to heaven and placed under God's protective care.

It may be possible that the image here plays off Psalm 110:1.³³ This is the assumption behind the ascension presented in Mt. 22:44 and Acts 2:34–35 is a quote of this Psalm. But substantial caution should be exercised about this psalm standing behind Rev. 12:5, since no mention of what happened to the child in heaven is given until He re-appears in 14:1 as fully grown and as the sacrificial Lamb, which plays off chapter five very clearly.

Not only is the child protected from the dragon, but the woman is as well: καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God. Nothing is said about where she fled from -- either the sky or some different place on earth -- so we can't be certain whether the birth took place in the sky or on earth. The latter does seem somewhat more likely from this statement.

In imagery reflective of Hagar in the OT, the mother finds safety hidden from the dragon in the wilderness. The significance of the wilderness as a place of refuge was substantial in ancient Jewish and early Christian thinking.³⁴ Here no historical 'wilderness' is rodite carried off (ἀρπάσσα) Butes (Apollodorus 1.9.23); Dionysus, after liberating his mother Semele from Hades, ascended with her to heaven (Apollodorus 3.5.3); Zeus carried (εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀνάγει) Pollux up to heaven (Apollodorus 3.11.2); Zeus caught up (ἀναρπάσας) Ganymede to heaven on an eagle (Apollodorus 3.12.2; Lucian *Dial. deorum* 10.1).

“Paul uses the aorist passive verb ἤρπάγη, 'caught up' (here the passive functions as a circumlocution for divine activity), to describe a visionary ascent (of himself or someone else) to the third heaven, to Paradise (2 Cor 12:2, 4), and he uses the same term in the future passive (ἀρπαγησόμεθα) to refer to the collective ascent of Christians at the Parousia of Jesus (1 Thess 4:17).

“In Gk Ap. Ezra 5:7, after a guided tour of Hades, Ezra says 'While I was saying this a cloud came and seized me [ἤρπασέν με] and carried me [ἀπήνεγκέν με to the heavens.' Earlier in 1:7 the author refers to his original heavenly ascent: 'Therefore I was taken up [ἀνελήφθην] to heaven' (for a revelatory experience). In T. Job 39.9–40.5, Job claims that the bodies of his children will not be found in the house that collapsed on them, for 'they were taken up [ἀνελήφθησαν] into the heavens by the creator.' When his hearers express doubt, they are permitted to see Job's children, wearing crowns, in heaven beside the Heavenly One.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 689–690.]

³³**Psalm 109:1 (LXX).** Εἶπεν ὁ κύριος τῷ κυρίῳ μου Κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου.

(MT 110:1). The Lord says to my lord, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.”

³⁴“The flight of the people of God for refuge into the wilderness (Mark 13:14–20 = Matt 24:15–22 = Luke 21:20–24) or 'from

specified and not probably intended. The woman took refuge in a place of safety, momentarily hidden from the dragon. In that place of safety, prepared by God for her (ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ), she found temporary nourishment for the symbolical 1,260 days (ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέφωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα). This would be until Satan was defeated by Michael, the archangel, in their battle in the sky and thus banished to the earth, where he resumes his pursuit of the woman again (12:14-15). This time the earth rescues the woman by swallowing up the river of water the dragon spits out intending to drown her (12:16).

Wow! What we have here is the opening scene of a huge apocalyptic drama depicting the determined but futile efforts of Satan, the old dragon, to destroy the people of God. It begins with failure to harm the Child born to Mary, and will move to failure to harm the woman, and then will refocus on efforts to harm the other children -- the people of God. In a broad, dramatic sweep John depicts the deeper spiritual reality of the eternal conflict between God and Satan. The nice part of the story is that God's victory is guaranteed before the struggle even begins. And the final, decisive defeat of Satan at the end of the apocalyptic text ushers in the eternal order upon the completion of the final day of judgment.

Although Satan is unable to harm either the mother or the child, he will inflict considerable harm on the 'other children' before being finally defeated. He has no ability to jeopardize their eternal destiny, but short of this he causes immense pain and suffering. Plus he succeeds in leading into eternal damnation the vast majority of the people of the earth through his deception and powerful skills.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

How should this text speak to us today? For one thing, it thunderously shouts to us that we are caught up in a spiritual battle with far deeper implications than we would recognize on the surface. Our conflict with

desert to desert' (Asc. Isa. 4:13; Hippolytus de Ant. 61.9) occurs in a variety of apocalyptic contexts, though in 12:17 nothing is said of the people of God fleeing into the wilderness or anywhere else. The motif of the wilderness was extremely important in Israelite and early Jewish literature. For the Qumran community, the desert retreat was a prelude to the final eschatological battle; see 1QM 1:1-3 (P. von der Osten-Saken, Gott und Belial, 30-41). The desert was traditionally regarded as a place of refuge in times of trouble (1 Kgs 17:2-3; 19:3-4) and had a variety of theological associations in early Judaism (Yarbro Collins, *Combat Myth*, 120-22; Hengel, *Zealots*, 249-53). The flight of Mattathias and his sons into the desert is a historical application of these themes (1 Macc 2:28-29; 2 Macc 5:27; Pss. Sol. 17:16-17)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 691.]

the great Tempter represents a continuation of a profound cosmic effort by Satan to do injury to God and to those related to Him. It took on these gigantic proportions with the coming of Christ as the Messianic Savior and concentrates now on deceiving and destroying the people of God seeking to serve the Lord on this earth. Every temptation we face in day to day living possesses this deeper spiritual dimension as an expression of the cosmic war taking place.

The other aspect of the opening scene in 12:1-6 of this cosmic struggle reminds us also of the guaranteed victory of God over Satan in this war. God has protected both His Son and the mother thus enabling them to complete their divine assignments. To be sure much suffering comes and is coming to the people of God while on this earth. But ultimate victory is guaranteed and as we will see in the next study of 12:7-12 will be declared by God Himself from heaven. In that we can and should rejoice.

One implication of this cosmic scene in 12:1-6 is a reminder that evil in our world is real. Hollywood trivializes the Devil and creates the dangerous impression that he is nothing but fantasy. In such delusion even a religious cult of [devil worshipers](#) has sprung up in western culture, even with their own web site, "Official Church of Satan Website" at [churchofsatan.com](#). But the reality is that Satan's death grip is on the throats of far more than this cultic group. And as the cosmic scenes in Revelation twelve through fourteen reveal that grip will expand to include all people on earth except the authentic people of God.

Folks, Satan is real and influential in our world. That we must never overlook.