



# *Revelation*

## *Cracking the Code*

or

## *Why you won't be left behind!*

Week 5

Scene 4 – The Drama of History

(Revelation 12:1 – 15:4)

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## *Looking back to Act 1*

- ❖ John is given a commission that is later renewed. These visions are to be given to all people.
- ❖ Large repetitious cycles of visions
  - Throne room to earth and then back to the throne . . . And so on
  - Alternating visions of terror and hope; terror and worship
  - Seven churches; then seven seals; then seven trumpets
- ❖ Several times it has seemed that the story must be at its end, but the visions have continued
- ❖ Some themes
  - God's purposes are worked out through the sufferings of his people. The blood of the martyrs will not have been spilled for nothing.
  - God directly challenges our complacency, comfort, and lukewarmness, stripping away all our pretensions to self-sufficiency.

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## *Looking ahead – Scene 4 (Act II begins)*

- ❖ The time has come to “destroy those who destroy the earth” (11:18).
- ❖ Scene 4 begins the story we might title “The Defeat of Satan”
  - Satan is thrown from heaven to earth (Chapter 12)
  - The beast and the false prophet conquer (Chapter 13)
  - After these messianic wars, Christ returns (14:14-20)
    - We live in the time of the struggle, as we await Jesus’ return. Will we follow the way of the Beast or the way of God?
- ❖ This story will unfold on a cosmic scale. The battle will rage across the heavens and the earth. Imagine this as a special-effects movie, where the good guys and the bad guys crisscross the galaxies fighting for control!

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## *The Woman, Michael, & the Dragon*

- ❖ The popular legend of Leto
  - When Leto became pregnant by Zeus, a dragon named Python pursued her across the heavens to kill her. The North Wind carried her off to safety, to the island of Delos, where she gave birth to Apollo and Artemis. Four days later(!), Apollo chased down and destroyed the dragon.
- ❖ Caesar’s use of the legend
  - Roma, the queen of heaven becomes the woman. Caesar becomes Apollo, ushering a new golden age. Nero had coins minted that had sunbeams around his head – the symbol of Apollo!
- ❖ John’s recasting of the woman and the dragon
  - The woman becomes the people of God. The child is Christ, not Caesar. The dragon becomes the force that opposes Jesus and his church.

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## *The dragon threatens the woman and child*

- ❖ The woman wears a crown of victory and rule. She prepares to give birth to “one who will rule the nations.” This is from Psalm 2 and points toward the Messiah.
- ❖ A horrifying dragon appears whose twitching tail is able to cast stars down from heaven. The dragon wears a crown, aspiring to rule. But his attack on the woman backfires!
- ❖ The child is enthroned with God and the woman is taken to a place of refuge, to wait out the limited period of affliction

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## *The dragon struggles on*

- ❖ The dragon and its forces are confronted by Michael and God’s angels. Michael defeats the dragon, who we now know is Satan, the great Accuser. Satan is cast out of the heavens and is hemmed in on earth, where all his rage and evil will be concentrated.
  - How has Satan been defeated? By the blood of the Lamb, the testimony of the faithful, and their complete trust in God, even in the face of death (see 12:10-11).
- ❖ In his rage, Satan, the dragon, pursues the woman. But she is sped off on the wings of an eagle. Even the earth protects her as it swallows up Satan’s flood.
- ❖ So the dragon takes off to wreak his anger on her children: those who keep the commandments of God and hold on to Jesus.

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## *The beast from the sea*

- ❖ Now, having been defeated in heaven, Satan will rage across the earth. He brings forth his minion – an abomination from the sea.
- ❖ Satan empowers this beast, whom all the earth worships in their amazement at his powers. After all, who could fight against this beast (13:4)?
  - This beast rages across the earth, bringing all of it under his authority and making war on God's people.
- ❖ The beast is the counterpart to the Lamb.
  - The Lamb reveals Christ's self-giving sacrifice
  - The beast reveals the destructive power of evil

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## *The beast from the land – the false prophet*

- ❖ This beast completes our demonic trinity!
  - The Lamb brings people to the worship of God. The beast from the sea forces all people to worship Satan
  - God's Spirit speaks through the prophets. The beast from the land will function as a false prophet.
- ❖ The false prophet is the great deceiver, making the beast seem most real! See similar satire in Isaiah 44:9-20.
- ❖ Who will bear the mark of the beast? Who will take on the mark for the sake of commerce? It seems that all except God's people will bear the mark.
  - Everybody belongs to someone! Do we bear God's seal or the beast's mark? There can be no neutrality.
- ❖ Who or what is the beast??!

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## *The number of the beast*

- ❖ The symbols are meant to reveal, not conceal. What do we do with this “human number,” 666.
- ❖ For some, 666 is the number of Christ’s opponent because it falls short of perfection: 777.
- ❖ But Roman numerals point us in another direction!
  - Grafitti in Pompeii – “I love her whose number is 545”
  - We all learned to count in Roman numerals, where each letter represents a number – v=5; i=1; c=100; l=50; x=10 and so on. Though not very helpful for arithmetic, this was common to all ancient languages.
  - Nero Caesar = *nron qsr* in Hebrew characters and it sums to 666. Using the Latin pronunciation, we get *nro qsr*. This sums to 616, which is found in some early manuscripts! Our oldest (by about 100 years) manuscript of this text from Revelation has 616.

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## *Judgment, blessing, and endurance*

- ❖ Now we return to the Lamb and God’s people, who bear God’s name, not the beast’s mark.
  - These blameless people are God’s first-fruits; not the only, but the first.
- ❖ An angel announces the Good News to all the earth – just like the Herald angels at Christmas! But also . . . judgment is at hand.
- ❖ A second angel announces the fall of Babylon. Not even Babylon can stand before God.
- ❖ A third angel warns against succumbing to the beast and urges the faithful to endurance.
- ❖ Like a great harvest, the judgment commences. Here we see where the grapes of wrath are stored!

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## *Lord of the nations*

- ❖ John is amazed to now see seven angels bearing seven bowls of wrath – but this will be the last of it.
- ❖ God's faithful – those who have conquered the beast – stand before a fiery sea of glass, singing the song of Moses (see Exodus 15) and the song of the Lamb.
  - Imagery of Moses and the Exodus have been prominent throughout these chapters.
  - Notice that in this song, they do not praise God for wreaking vengeance upon their enemies.

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Closing thoughts from Scene 4: What do we make of these depictions of Satan, judgment, and punishment?

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## *Looking ahead to Scenes 5 & 6*

- ❖ Attacks on the Beast are renewed
  - Seven plagues in seven bowls of wrath, emptied by seven angels
  - We will hear of Armageddon!
- ❖ We will meet the Great Whore of Babylon, who rides upon the beast.
  - She will be in stark contrast to the woman in Chapter 12 who gave birth to the Messiah!
  - There won't be any real mystery about who she is! The whole thing is heavy on the satire. Like all of Revelation, John draws upon a wealth of OT images and references in his depiction of the Whore.
- ❖ Babylon falls and is mourned!
- ❖ We will come to the passage that Handel set to music in the Hallelujah Chorus.

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