

## A Study of the Book of Revelation

Source Material: *Come, Lord Jesus* by Mark Braaten

Week 9: November 15, 2009

“A good question to ask while reading these chapters is, are there evils in our world that need to be unmasked, evils that we too often accept but which need to be revealed as contrary to the will of God?” (Braaten, pg. 87)

### Read Revelation 12:1-6

#### *Symbolism in Chapter 12*

“John works in chapter 12 with an ancient myth, a myth which he claims and reworks to proclaim a Christian message. There was an ancient Greek myth in which the dragon Python attempted to kill the newborn son of the god Zeus. The mother, Leto, fled to the island of Delos. There a son, Apollo, is born. Apollo goes on to kill the dragon. . . .

In Roman usage, the mother was identified as Roma, the goddess of Rome. The son was the Roman Emperor. (Remember that Domitian, the emperor at the time of the writing of Revelation, claimed to be a descendant of Apollo.) What the myth then proclaimed was that it was the Roman Emperor who subdued evil and established a great period of peace and prosperity.

John now claims this story and reworks it to proclaim his Christian message. . . . The story becomes a Christian proclamation, with powerful symbolism and associations. In John’s writing, the woman symbolizes the people of God. . . . The dragon is Satan. . . . The dragon is seeking the power that is meant for God alone. The child is Christ. . . .

In John’s version of the story, Jesus is born of the people of God. Satan sought to stop Jesus, but Satan failed. Notice how John moves immediately from Jesus’ birth to his enthronement in heaven. . . . He simply tells us that Satan attempted to stop Jesus. Satan failed, and now Jesus is enthroned in heaven. With Jesus’ enthronement, the woman, the people of God, flee into the wilderness for 1260 days. Remember that this is a symbol for a period of persecution. The people of God flee into the wilderness in the face of persecution to come.”(Braaten, pg. 89-90).

### Read Revelation 12:7-17

“This story proclaims that because of the victory of Jesus, Satan’s sphere of activity is limited. Satan has been kicked out of heaven. But for the time being, he is still active on the earth.” (Braaten, pg. 91) *In what ways do you see Satan active on earth today?*

“We are warned to live with eyes open, as Satan will attack God’s people in a variety of ways. . . . But we are also assured that the ultimate victory lies with God who time and again has delivered his people.” (Braaten, pg. 92) *What signs of God’s ultimate victory do you see and how do you see God continuing to care for God’s people?*

“What John is doing in Chapter 12 is using a common myth in the ancient world to help the Christians understand their situation.”(Braaten, pg. 92) *Can you think of examples of who Jesus uses a similar technique when he is teaching the people?*

## Read Revelation 12:18-13:10

### The Roman Beast

1. Rome is a composite of all the ancient evils, specifically those referred to in Daniel 7 where “four ancient empires are described in terms of a leopard, a bear, a lion and as having ten horns.” (Braaten, pg. 93)
2. The beast comes from the sea which is a symbol fo chaos and evil and also is how the Romans arrived in Asia Minor.
3. The dragon’s power is given to the beast. Satan’s power is given to Rome.
4. By healing the wounded head, John is reminding readers of the common belief that Nero, who persecuted Christians, was actually alive and preparing to return.
5. The whole world follows the beast, just as it seemed the whole world followed Roman.
6. Rome sees itself as the center of the world, but as John sees it, Rome is not a deliverer, but a “hideous beast that blasphemes God and kills Christians.” (Braaten, pg. 95)

*If the Roman beast draws its power from Satan, what does it mean for Christian’s of John’s time to accommodate themselves to Rome?*

## Read Revelation 13:11 - 18

The second beast “is best understood as local officials who supported Rome. . . . These local officials not only collaborated with Rome, but also supported and lifted up Roman ideology. In fact the practice of emperor worship in Asia came not from the Romans but form the local officials.” (Braaten, pg. 96)

“Koester points out that we should read this as political satire. What John is doing in these verses is making fun of the whole political system. . . . John’s point is that Christians must not be swayed by this foolishness and deception.” (Braaten, pg. 97)

### Mark of the Beast

1. Parody of good - God seals the saints, so Satan marks his followers
2. Just as seal is invisible, so too is this mark
3. Mark raises the question - Whose side will you be on?
4. 666
  - a. multi-level symbol
  - b. Just short of 777 which would be perfection
  - c. John’s invitation to calculate the number refers to the practice of gematria, a system of assigning numbers to letters
  - c. Neron Kaiser (Hebrew for Nero Ceasar) equals 666

Braaten closes this discussion by asking, “Would the beast in our day look like evil governments in the world, or our materialism or consumerism, or perhaps our media fixation on violence and sex? The church is continually called to unmask that which is opposed to the will of God. As Adela Yarbro Collins so powerfully put it, the church of every age mus name the beast.” (Braaten, pg. 99) If part of John’s purpose was to unmask the Roman beast for his fellow Christians, what does the beast look like today?