

APOCALYPTICISM, ESCHATOLOGY, AND REVELATION 11:19 -- 12:18:
CONQUERING CHAOS AND EVIL DURING THE APOCALYPSE

by
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(Under the Direction of Wayne Coppins)

ABSTRACT

This thesis largely consists of an exegetical commentary on Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18, the section about the Woman/Virgin Mary/Ark of the Covenant/Israel/the Church in the agony of giving birth to the Messiah/Christ/Anointed and the cosmic war between Michael and the Dragon who also fights against the Woman's seed. It contains a discussion of who the Woman is, who are her faithful seed, and how the text is a non-Christian Jewish original later redacted by a Christian editor, John of Patmos. Apocalyptic literature is described as a popular genre, found also in the Book of the prophet Daniel to which Revelation is related, that John the Divine uses to emphasize that Jesus will usher in the eschaton so that eventually Satan/evil is defeated and God/good triumphs. This passage is the focal point that holds the entire revelation together, and also functions as a transition to the remainder of the text.

INDEX WORDS: Apocalypse, Woman, Virgin Mary, Ark of the Covenant, Israel, the
 Church, Messiah, Christ, Anointed, Daniel, prophet, prophecy, cosmic
 war, Dragon, ancient serpent, Devil, Satan, angels, Archangel Michael,
 Jesus, God, Jewish, Christian, pagan, Revelation.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Messianic Myth in Apocalyptic Literature

We are the music makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams.
World-losers and world-forsakers,
Upon whom the pale moon gleams;
Yet we are the movers and shakers,
Of the world forever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages of lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself with our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

-- Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844 -- 1881)

Sing praise to the LORD for his glorious achievement; let this be known throughout all the earth.

-- Isaiah 12:5

Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; Even upon the servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. And I will work wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke; The sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, At the coming of the Day of the LORD, the great and terrible day. Then everyone shall be rescued who calls on the name of the LORD; For on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant, as the LORD has said, And in Jerusalem survivors whom the LORD shall call. -- Joel 3:1-5

"It will come to pass in the last days," God says, "that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord." -- Acts 2:17-21

This thesis explores the ramifications of the Apocalypse in terms of its impact on not only Christians but also the universe. While the text of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 focuses on the Woman and her seed along with the great cosmic battle between the Dragon and his angels against the Archangel Michael and his angels as well as against the Woman's offspring, the text functions as a transition point between the first half of Revelation, dealing with the birth pangs of the Messiah followed by the temporary defeat of the Dragon, and the second half, dealing with the eschaton, the ultimate defeat of the Dragon, and the restoration of the Kingdom of God. This section of Revelation is a very hopeful passage pointing towards the ultimate triumph of God both politically and spiritually, giving hope to persecuted Christians who yearn for the Day of the Lord when all is set right. Because it contains an apparently material battle that is really a spiritual battle, it assuages the fears of Christians who seek justice against their oppressors and comfort in times of distress. Because it is written in esoteric apocalyptic language, it further functions as underground resistance literature for the weary, enervated by their oppression, so that God may give them the strength to persevere to the end.

This first introductory chapter will explore the nature of apocalyptic literature, how it functions in society, and how its timelessness speaks to us even today. The second chapter will consist of an exegetical running commentary of each verse of the text from Revelation 11:19 to 12:18. The third chapter will focus on how the text functions as a response to social experiences and the dynamics of fluctuations in the status quo that influence civilizations. Finally, the fourth chapter will sum up how and why apocalyptic literature works for social change in various eras in which social upheavals are common including our own.

There is a young woman, different from other young women because she is about to give birth to a son, and this man is different from other men. Ancient prophecies foretell that a young

woman will give birth to him, and she must go through tremendous trials and tribulations to bring him to birth. The young woman's son, after he achieves manhood, will perform miraculous deeds, yet is misunderstood so that, when confronted by his enemies, he must sacrifice his life to save humanity from disaster, but, in a mystery greater than any other in time and greater than his origin, he is raised from the dead for the purpose of reigning in glory over the people and universe he has redeemed. If you tell this story to Christians, they will recognize it instantly as the story of Mary and Jesus. If you tell this story to a science fiction audience, they'll recognize it as the plot of any number of science fiction and fantasy tales in print and on film from *Superman* and *Star Wars* and *Dune* to *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*. For reasons that have a lot to do with human nature and global politics and American culture, some of the best science fiction stories and movies follow a plot that is remarkably similar to the New Testament, prophecies of the parousia, and Revelation 12 in particular. The danger inherent to many characters in such stories is that most people are unwilling or too proud to accept the truth if it does not fit into the narrow confines of the reality with which they are comfortable, i.e., their weltanschauung. This is why many prophecies are rejected and prophets persecuted: their prophecies do not reflect the worldview of those wielding political power. Their mistake is not to recognize the true power of the cross and the true glory of God.

Who is the Woman of Revelation 12? How is she related to Combat Myth figures of antiquity?

Jewish and Christian Eschatology is found in the Bible and other literature including science fiction literature: Who is the Son of Man, the apocalyptic figure, and what are the differences between the first coming of the Son and the second coming or parousia? What is myth and how does it function in the Bible? How are these ideas related to more recent

explorations into the concept of the end of the universe both among theologians and secular authors? Finally, how does eschatological literature evoke in readers the sense of wonder experienced by Christian readers at the grand unfolding of God's ultimate plan? Is apocalyptic/eschatological literature a kind of didactic fiction but with the twist that many believers hold the events described in Revelation and other eschatological texts in the Bible to be true descriptions of the end of the universe? How are Biblical myth and reality related, particularly the myths surrounding the apocalypse?

The twentieth century uniquely marks the period in human history when an apocalypse (a nuclear apocalypse) becomes seriously possible, and, while the novelty may have worn off, like a good dog-eared book, the topic of the end of things is perennially timely because, as Frank Kermode remarks in *The Sense of an Ending*, the eschaton is "infallibly interesting."¹

Berkeley, California, is named after the philosopher George Berkeley, and it seems fitting to say that only in California would residents name their city after a philosopher who contended, like a hippie on drugs, that the material universe isn't real – it's all in your mind. In *The Matrix* we learn that the universe isn't real but is only a computer simulation, and Neo must break free of the bonds of slavery to free his people from the evil aliens who entrap them. In the New Testament, we learn that the spiritual realm is our true destination after our journey through life because "It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail" (John 6:63a), and Jesus must break free the bonds of slavery to sin to free his people from the evil demons, including Satan, who entrap them. In other words, the spiritual realm is the true reality while our fleshly, material existence is not so much unreal as a jumping point to a higher form of reality. The material

¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (USA: Oxford University Press, 2000), 34.

realm will be transformed at the end of time so that it too will be not only more real but a better reality.

Gabriel McKee writes in *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*: “There are inherent messianic qualities in the...concept of the superhero – an individual with exceptional abilities who sacrifices part of his or her life for the greater good.” Revelation 12 is a miniature story, a pericope, that tells the timeless tale of a woman who must give birth to a son to save humanity and what happens afterwards. Joseph Campbell wrote *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* to illustrate his view that there is a “standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero.”² Here’s a typical plot summary, according to Campbell: “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.”³ In the beginning of the hero’s career, however, is often a “protective figure (often a little old crone or an old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.”⁴ Does this make you think of Mary and her Son in Revelation 12 or King Arthur when he first encounters Merlin?

Lord Raglan lists many features that many mythical heroes share: “The hero’s mother is a royal virgin”; “the circumstances of his conception are unusual”; “he is also reputed to be the son of a god”; there are another 19 features. When George Lucas read Campbell’s book, he created Luke and his mentor Obi-wan Kenobi. Recently, with the Atlanta Science Fiction Society I went to see the old silent movie, “Metropolis,” the entire film of which was recently found in Argentina. While I miss the rock&roll score of 30 years ago the last time I saw the

² Joseph Campbell. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

film, I thought the music from the original score was also fine. The theme of the story I think is that all people are brothers and sisters, both the workers and the elite. As the film says many times, the union of hands and the head is the heart. Maria preaches peace to the workers in a room with many white crosses. Freder, the pampered son of the elite Joh Fredersen, whose apparently saintly wife Hel dies in childbirth, finds in Maria a mentor to whom he looks for guidance in becoming the mediator whom the workers so desperately yearn for to release them from their hellish existence. After the terrible destruction of the machines, the "death" of the evil robot in the guise of Maria the saint (created by the mad scientist, Dr. Rotwang), and the salvation of the children by Maria and Freder, the elite Joh Fredersen and the chief foreman of the workers with the aid of the mediator, Freder, shake hands. It's a lovely story. Without reading Campbell's book, the author of *Revelation* came up with a protective royal mother who gives birth to and is destined to raise the Son of God who will restore humanity to its former glory that it was originally designed to possess. The Archangel Michael, along with the messiah's royal mother, performs the function of protecting the Son of God until he comes of age.

Interestingly, mainstream authors as a whole, at least in America, have become more and more religious, feeding a desire and a thirst for religious meaning in a society that many construe as one that is bankrupt of morals, ethical fiber, and faith. America and the rest of the world have all undergone another religious revival of a kind that seems to repeat itself every few generations. Campbell, Raglan, and Rank comprehended that the hero or messiah story is one that, in various incarnations, exerts enormous power over human audiences the world over and in America in particular. Our ancestors told this story again and again, and they told it so often that its origins are lost in the mists of time. People don't get tired of the mysteries. The Apocalypse

will never outlive its usefulness because it is a celebration of Christianity's inexhaustible vitality and is an deeply innovative journey into the varieties of religious experience. Many written authors have developed similar messiah stories based on the Jesus myth including Frank Herbert's *Dune* and Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It is worth mentioning that a large number of critics have acclaimed these novels perhaps precisely because of their universal themes of temporary destruction and ultimate triumph. Revelation 12 tells us that those who believe in the messiah figure are children of his mother and must be eternally vigilant in their efforts to thwart the plans of the evil dragon.

The various forms of apocalyptic literature including the styles the writers adopt and sometimes invent along with their concerns about the human condition are a reflection of the cultures and eras from which the writers grew up and matured, and the boundaries they stretch are often as varied as the types of apocalyptic events they engage. Some apocalyptic literary devices involve telling varieties of stories including intellectual feats of the imagination, gory stories, tales that focus on individuals and small groups (the remnant of Israel, the Chosen People of the New Covenant, for example), and these fabulous adventures and adventurers often take on the whole world in the process of taking it down. Some stories are more fabulous than realistic, many are both religious and political, and some can be classified as horror or satire. Much apocalyptic literature, despite calling it eschatological, defies categorization. Each of these stories addresses eschatological themes in unusual and striking ways and generates excitement in the readers who both anticipate and dread the events depicted. Apocalyptic narratives often contain that fundamental and indescribable pizzazz, zest, vim, vitality, or liveliness always discernable in great works of literature. These are stories that editors select (including the editors of the Bible) not simply because they contain vital information about the spiritual realm but also

because editors often *like* these stories and want to share them with the world. The radical quality of much apocalyptic literature including the Revelation to John captures the essence of both the politics and the religious fervor of the times, so that each generation interprets it as applying to itself including the extremely provocative, important, and reactionary elements of the weltanschauung of post-9/11 America.

The sense of wonder is an important critical theory, derived from the attempt to explain the popularity of wonder tales. It is a theory that explicates not necessarily the content of a poem or work of literature but the effect it has on the reader. Classics become classics precisely because they were popular literature (Mark Twain's assertion to the contrary notwithstanding). As societies change, people's tastes often change, too, but great literature withstands the tests of time. In a very real sense, Revelation 12 is the heart of the Apocalypse because it tells the story of how the mother of the messiah escapes from the clutches of the dragon and how her children, the Chosen People of the New Covenant, continue to defend their faith in her Son and "keep God's commandments" (Revelation 12:18).

The story about Theodore Sturgeon is widely repeated, but I think it stands repeating now. A reporter once said to Sturgeon, "Sir, don't you know that ninety percent of science fiction is crud?" to which Sturgeon replied, "Sir, ninety percent of everything is crud." In English literature classes, many though not all would agree that we don't typically study the crud; rather, we study the cream of the crop, the top ten percent, the stuff that gets anthologized and goes through innumerable printings. Probably, ninety percent of the literature of eschatology is crud, but I will make the valiant attempt to find and theorize about the top ten percent, the stuff that made it into the Bible. Although I am searching for the top ten percent, I think it worth noting that it is possible to experience the sense of wonder even in literature that is basically

crud. For example, despite the popularity of the *Left Behind* series, I was surprised at how badly written they were. When people hunger for religion, they will devour the worst tasting literature because it satisfies a burning desire to understand what they believe and to experience the wonders of their faith and God. Hollywood and publishers have long recognized that science fiction sells, but they are only lately beginning to realize that religious literature and films sell, too, and I am not just talking about the Bible, both in books and on screen. America is a very religious nation, and to ignore religion is to miss an extremely important aspect of American culture and history. Revelation 12 captures the imagination of people who hunger and thirst for religious revelation both by proclaiming how their deliverer is to be born and by encouraging the Chosen People to persevere for the sake of future great rewards. God and the Archangel Michael and the Earth all protect the woman whose children yearn for the days when good will triumph and evil will be punished.

Many apocalyptic writings of the Bible are prose and many are poetry. Biblical poetry in and of itself has many genres and may include such characteristics as “concise and rhythmic expression, specialized diction, parallelism, balance of ideas, concrete imagery, and symbolic language.”⁵ Thus, when the Bible describes God as a rock or covering us with his wings, we are not to understand these images literally or else they would lose their power. Similarly, when Revelation 12:14 tells us “But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half year,” we are not supposed to take this description literally or else they will lose their power. Apocalyptic literature shares many characteristics of poetry whether presented in prosaic form or poetic form. The apocalyptic writer challenges readers by conveying to them

⁵ Laverdiere, Eugene A., S.S.S. *Literary Forms of the Bible in the New American Bible for Catholics with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 1461.

images of the writer's experiences, many of them bizarre, that the writer finds it difficult to express in ordinary language. Moreover, even though the apocalyptic writer uses bizarre imagery as revealing a great deal about God and the universe, the writer makes clear to the reader (that is, the reader should understand) that mere human words lack the capacity to adequately describe the images and events revealed by God.

The writer knows that oftentimes the apocalyptic writer and apocalyptic reader lack a common frame of reference. Therefore, the apocalyptic writer often strains at the margins of intensely passionate experiences, calling forth powerful insights into the divine in a way that makes use of the familiar to describe the ineffable. Apocalyptic literature thus strains at the boundaries of language to produce an effect in the reader of the same religious inspiration that caused the inspired apocalyptic writer to write down what he saw and heard in the first place. It is not surprising that 1/3 of the Old Testament is poetry. While poetry can be found in biblical historical narratives, it is typically in prophetic and wisdom literature as well as apocalyptic literature that one finds the most poetry including narrative poetry but also narrative prose. The Book of Revelation uses narrative to express its powerful ideas. In apocalyptic literature the writer arouses in readers feelings and passions that are crucial to both biblical narrative and divine experience. We live the stories we read as we read them. It doesn't matter that the stories were written long ago; we feel as though we are there, and we both suffer the defeats of characters, rejoice at their successes, and bask in the light of wisdom as we struggle to apply the texts to our daily lives. It is important for the reader to be as equally inspired as the writer. Inspired literature enlivens our faith and deepens our commitment to God. How we respond to the Bible is crucial to our understanding of ourselves as Christians and equally crucial to our salvation. Father Laverdierre writes:

The hope of salvation as bodily resurrection is based on a strong sense of looking forward to the final Day of the Lord. It is rooted in the belief and hope that God's power and ultimate triumph will be made clear to all on the last day. (See KINGDOM.) This looking to the future for ultimate salvation is already strong in the prophetic tradition (Is 35, 4; 56, 1; 62, 1). The prophets affirm that the faithful remnant of Israel will surely be saved (Is 10, 20-21; 28, 5; Am 3, 12; 5, 15). Salvation is not limited to the people of Israel alone, however. Yahweh's saving power can extend to all the ends of the earth (Is 45, 22). (See COVENANT.)

Out of this yearning for God's future salvation comes a kind of writing that looks into the Last Days in highly symbolic language. These ideas appear in some of the later writers of the Old Testament, for example, in Ezekiel and in Daniel, and are well developed in the New Testament. In this dramatic kind of writing the account of how God will come at the Last Day to save is given to the writer in a revelation (Mk 13; Mt 24; Luk 21; Rv 1, 19; 4, 1). The future saving action of God will be accompanied by frightful cosmic signs (Mk 13, 24-25; Mt 24, 29; Lk 21, 11; 21, 25; Rv 6, 8.12-17), but this revelation of what will occur is meant to be the consolation and encouragement of the just while they still live (Mt 10, 22; Luk 21, 28).⁶

Thus, salvation is the ultimate concern of John's Apocalypse along with reward for the just and punishment of the wicked. Nevertheless, the primary focus in Revelation and indeed the New Testament in general is not simply reward for the just but also forgiveness for the penitent who are made just by the merits of Christ. In Revelation, the devil and his angels are cast out of heaven even though they are ultimately subject to God's will. In the New Testament generally,

⁶ Laverdierre, Eugene A., S.S.S. *Literary Forms of the Bible in the New American Bible for Catholics with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 1467.

Jesus's disciples have control over "unclean spirits" or "demons" because of the spiritual power they have been given by Christ. Nevertheless, in Revelation, this spiritual power was given in response to a cosmic battle in which the God and the angels of God defeated the demonic spirits and cast them out of heaven (Jude 6; Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Revelation 12:7-9). That Jesus has power to cast out demons is evidence that God is still in control, but the messiah figure of Revelation 12 must still confront the forces of evil and battle the devil and his angels until the end of time when all is put right.

Apocalyptic literature, like much biblical literature, gives the apocalyptic writer the opportunity to engage readers of later centuries with the narratives of ancient characters. Similarly, science fiction literature gives the science fiction writer the opportunity to engage readers of the modern world with the narratives of fictitious characters who will exist at some time in the future or the past or the present in a way that is not typical of modern life. For apocalyptic writers and biblical writers in general, one of the purposes of religious literature is to make ancient covenants with God recognizable as covenants that must be acted upon in the here and now and not just the distant past. Similarly, one of the purposes of science fiction literature is to comment upon the world of the writer with a different perspective than someone who lives in the here and now. Thus, science fiction and apocalyptic writers both address contemporary communities in ways that are out of the ordinary, giving them leeway to express ideas and feelings that would otherwise be simply inconceivable and ineffable and indeed indescribable.

Some apocalyptic literary stories, like science fiction, use the epistolary formula to convey the ideas of apocalyptic writers who are speaking to communities that revere the ancient figures who purportedly write the letters. Epistles have many characteristics including the name of the writer, the person or group to whom the letter is sent, greetings, and concluding remarks

often with a doxology. The main body of letters may contain prayers, early creeds, early baptismal formulas, hymns, liturgical greetings, and blessings. Mark Twain makes use of the epistolary form in his *Letters from Earth* as does Robert A. Heinlein in *Podkayne of Mars* and C.S. Lewis in *The Screwtape Letters*. Apocalyptic writers made use of the epistolary form including the authors of *I Enoch*, *Testament of Moses*, *Testament of Abraham*, *Revelation to John*, and many others.

Apocalyptic literature is very similar to mythical literature in that both genres speak universal themes addressed to universal audiences. Father Laverdierre writes:

The first eleven chapters of Genesis are much closer to mythical forms of writing. Myth, in this case, must not be understood to mean that the events told were fictional or untrue. A myth is a profoundly true statement which speaks to universal aspects of life and reality. It is a statement whose meaning rises above time and space. Although biblical myths were influenced by other mythical statements of the ancient world, they are used by the biblical writers to express history's relationship to God. They point to history's origins at the moment of the world's creation. They speak of the beginnings where history touches eternity, and, therefore, to moments which cannot be historically described. Myth is thus essential to biblical faith. We do the Scriptures a serious injustice if we read myth as though it were history. Such a tendency must be resisted along with the opposite tendency to read biblical history as though it were mythical. By reading the early chapters of Genesis with sensitivity to poetic symbol and imagery, we can easily avoid such temptations.⁷

⁷ Laverdierre, Eugene A., S.S.S. *Literary Forms of the Bible in the New American Bible for Catholics with Revised New Testament and Revised Psalms*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 1465.

Many science fiction writers make use of the mythical genre to express ideas that are otherwise incommunicable. Examples include J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Simarillion*, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and certain parts of Jack Chalker's *Midnight at the Well of Souls*. Similarly, the Bible tells many mythical tales including the tales of Eden, God's conquering of the great sea monsters (Genesis, Job, Psalms, Isaiah, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), the Tower of Babel (an etiological tale explaining why different peoples speak different languages), Cain's slaying of his brother Abel (another etiological tale explaining why descendants of Cain are nomadic tribes), and the story of Noah's Ark. There are many others.

The biblical Book of Revelation differs from other earlier Apocalypses in significant ways, and these differences give us clues as to the author's historical setting. Eschatological literature is a type of prophetic literature concerned with or expressing hope that a future peaceful world will eventually come about, a peace often brought about by a messianic figure who must both conquer and rule. The ancient Near East brought to the world many literary works detailing oracles that predict the coming of such a conquering ruler after a time of troubles and travails and general chaotic disorder. The royal traditions of both the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and the Northern Kingdom (Israel) had prophets utter eschatological prophecies of a future messiah/king of this type who would challenge and conquer and establish order. Isaiah was such a prophet because he seems to have been among the first recorded to introduce to the land eschatological prophecies in a major way. Isaiah's oracles predicted several royal births, described in chapters 7 – 11, and indeed the paradigmatic oracle in chapter 11 predicted a king who would restore Israel to a kind of paradisiacal glory of worldwide peace and prosperity where even predatory animals lived in peace among their prey. The themes of a return to Eden dominated the descriptions of the coming messianic age in the later prophets.

These eschatological prophecies seemed to express history and future in terms of historical cycles so that the end of time will be like the beginning of time when God created the world new. In the messianic age, not only will all the nations of the Earth cease to wage war but will also worship the one true God of Israel at the Temple on Mount Zion in the new Jerusalem. The belief that Jews and Christians are the chosen people of God is symbolized by Jerusalem and the Temple. While both Jews and Christians revere the remains of the Temple in Jerusalem today (the Western Wall or the Wailing Wall), it is also true that Christians believe the body of Jesus is the self-described true Temple of God, and indeed among believers in Jesus the bodies of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, Christians are called “the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16) and “a temple sacred in the Lord” (Ephesians 2:21-22), and 1 Peter 2:5 tells us that we should “like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” Thus, the Catholic Church sees itself as the true Israel, the faithful remnant, the rightful children of Abraham and Sarah (Galatians 4:24-31; 2 Corinthians 3), while still acknowledging that God’s promises to the Jewish people who do not accept Christ are eternal.

At any rate, eschatological predictions were a source of hope for a defeated, exiled, subjected, and demoralized people, accounting for their popularity after the Babylonian Exile. Indeed, many of the prophecies of ancient times were edited by later post-exilic editors with additions detailing these eschatological visions and portents of a restored and powerful nation of Israel. In the midst of this social milieu was a tremendous desire for restoration of Israel, an idea crucial in the development of messianism that was more popular among the lower echelons of society than the priests and upper class who both eschewed it and oppressed visionaries who used these visions and portents as a form of social protest. Revelation 12 contains the vision of

the birth of the messiah by an extraordinary woman who represents Israel but may also be the Virgin Mary, the mother of the messiah who will restore the nation of Israel to its rightful place as a powerful nation protected by God.

In the third and second centuries BC these eschatological prophecies transformed into apocalyptic literature in a way that combined ancient prophets and prophecies with visionaries who, in the name of ancient prophetic figures, described fantastic visions whose purpose, like the eschatological prophecies before them, formed a vehicle of protest that gave hope to both common people and upper class people alike but haunted those with political power who knew the negative ramifications of raising up messianic figures in a land subjected by more powerful political forces. Daniel 7 – 12 is the only Biblical apocalyptic literature before the Christian era, and it was used by non-Christian Jews, Jewish Christians, and non-Jewish Christians alike to support their theologies and social protests.

For apocalypticists, God addresses problems of persecutions of the righteous, the “faithful remnant” who can interpret the strange and bizarre visions and wild imagery, by allowing woes to happen that will trigger God interposing his will on his creation by intervening in the cosmic battle between good and evil both in the world and in heaven so that good prevails. In Revelation 12, the “faithful remnant” are none other than the children of the mother of the messiah because her children “keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus” (12:17b). Still, the battle isn’t over because the dragon “took its position on the sand of the sea” (12:18). Moreover, apocalyptic visionaries typically depict an end of the world scenario in which the wicked are punished eternally and the good rewarded eternally. This is different from many earlier Biblical texts which had no concept of an afterlife directly spelled out. Apocalyptic literature often encourages the faithful to wait for the Day of Judgement when God will set all

things right. Again, in this sense, the Book of Revelation is still a typical apocalyptic document because it has all these features – revelations by an angel to a human being, strange and bizarre visions and wild imagery, descriptions of woes and persecutions, depictions of a cosmic battle between good and evil, and God (in the form of the Messiah/Christ) ultimately causing good to prevail, resulting in a renewal of the world and a return to an Edenic state.

The Revelation to John is different from typical apocalypses in that it conflates three different literary genres: (1) apocalyptic literature; (2) prophetic literature; and (3) epistolary literature. Revelation shares features with such Biblical books as Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel as well as many Jewish apocalyptic literary works, particularly 1 Enoch, from the periods of approximately 300 B.C. to A.D. 200. However, Revelation differs from other earlier Apocalypses in that it is not a pseudepigraphon. In other words, the author does not claim to be a figure from the past such as Enoch, Baruch, Abraham, Daniel, or Ezra, a common practice that tended to lend authenticity to the piece as well as authority, not to mention believability. Rather, the author claims to be a man named John who has been exiled on the island of Patmos where he received a series of visions dutifully recorded in what we now call the Book of Revelation or the Apocalypse (from the Greek *Ἀποκάλυψις*, transliterated *Apokalypsis* and in English Apocalypse and meaning “revelation”). Furthermore, by identifying himself as John, he imitates the Hebrew prophets rather than the assumed personae of other apocalyptic literature. Collins says that the lack of pseudepigraphal authorship is only a minor deviation from standard apocalyptic literature. He also claims that his words are prophetic and hence he is a prophet himself. Moreover, in the epistolary sections, the author uses the expression “thus says,” which is the language of a prophetic oracle. Thus, the epistolary nature of the text is a departure from prior Jewish apocalypses, and John appears to be keenly aware of the epistolary form in that he

expected it to be read aloud in various churches. In other words, there is nothing secret about John's visions. Another departure from the apocalyptic genre is a lack of an *ex eventu* review of history, indicating that John's audience is probably not entirely Jewish. (The Latin *ex eventu* refers to a type of prophecy or historical prophecy in which the author of the prophecy describes events after they have occurred but puts the prophecy on the lips of an earlier or ancient figure long before the days when the event actually occurred.) While attributing authorship to an ancient figure and describing an *ex eventu* history are not always apocalyptic features, their absence is nonetheless noteworthy in the Book of Revelation.

What really distinguishes Revelation from other Jewish apocalypses, however, is its lack of placing itself in a particular time in eschatological history. Jewish apocalypses typically reviewed history by the famous pseudonymous author in order to establish the true author's own time as a period signaled by certain prophesied *ex eventu* events in which the end of things was near. However, for Christians, in some respects the "end of things" had already occurred with the death and resurrection of the Jewish messiah, Jesus. Since a new historical era began with the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Book of Revelation does not describe any history prior to that point in time. Christians began to prophesy with new authority given them by the resurrected Christ. As a result, John didn't need to pretend to be some other ancient prophet from Biblical times but rather presented himself as having authority given him by Jesus through the mediation of his angel to prophesy about the eschaton (from the Greek ὁ ἔσχατος, transliterated *ho eschatos* and meaning "the end" or "the last"). Jesus refers to himself as the *eschatos* (or *eschaton*) and the *telos*, meaning "end" (in the sense of "termination, cessation, conclusion": ἐγὼ τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος. (*Ego to alpha kai to omega, ho protos kai eschatos he arke kai to telos*) (Rev 22:13 BGT): "I am the alpha and the

omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." (It should be noted that other Christian apocalypses, except the *Shepherd of Hermas*, did not dispense with pseudonymous authorship.) In essence, John's Revelation assumes that his then current readers were living in eschatological times.

We will look at each Scripture passage and interpret it to illustrate the importance of the combat myth in the Bible, throughout the Old Testament and throughout the New Testament but particularly in Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18. We will explore how creation myths involving divine combat with ancient sea monsters are inextricably intertwined with apocalyptic myths involving divine combat with the Dragon and the Beasts.

The Book of Revelation used earlier pieces of Jewish Apocalyptic as the basis of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18, including among others Daniel and I Enoch, or earlier pieces of Babylonian myth, particularly involving Marduk, the major Babylonian creator god, and Tiamat, a great sea monster out of whom Marduk created the world.⁸ Since there are variations among authors in the definition of apocalypse, many of these works labeled as apocalyptic, whether non-Christian Jewish or Jewish Christian, draw upon a wide source tradition of apocalyptic literature so that some apocalypses are related like parents and children and others like brothers and sisters or cousins.⁹ Since this introduction is the end of the beginning, let us now turn to the beginning of the end and examine the Apocalypse.

⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, translated by K William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 133.

⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 (verse by verse: An in-depth line-by-line analysis)

Revelation 11:19:

καὶ ἠνοίγη ὁ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ὤφθη ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ ναῷ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταὶ καὶ σεισμός καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη.

(Rev 11:19 GNT)

et apertum est templum Dei in caelo et visa est arca testamenti eius in templo eius et facta sunt fulgora et voces et terraemotus et grando magna

(Rev 11:19 VUO)

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm. (Rev 11:19 NAB)

This verse establishes where the lost Ark of the Covenant is located, but is it the lost Ark or is it the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Ark who contained the Covenant, Jesus Christ, in her womb? "The Ark of the Covenant" is a traditional title for the Blessed Virgin Mary as supported by Scripture: Exodus 40:34-35 and Numbers 9:18 refer to the Holy Spirit "covering" or "overshadowing" the Ark of the Covenant and Luke 1:35 also refers to the Holy Spirit "overshadowing" the Virgin Mary.¹⁰ Revelation also refers to the temple in 3:12; 7:15; 15:5ff; 21:22. Also Irenaeus 4:13:6. All of these refer to the temple or sanctuary in heaven as distinct from its earthly counterpart.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1994), Section 697, page 184.

Revelation 3:12:

The victor I will make into a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it again. On him I will inscribe the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, as well as my new name.

The new Jerusalem is also described in 21:10 -- 22:5. Specifically,

21:22: I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God almighty and the Lamb.

The temple is God, and the Virgin Mary is the Ark of the Covenant within God because God was within her.

Revelation 7:15:

"For this reason they stand before God's throne
and worship him day and night in his temple.

The one who sits on the throne will shelter them.

Revelation 15:5-8:

After this I had another vision. The temple that is the heavenly tent of testimony opened, and the seven angels with the seven plagues came out of the temple. They were dressed in clean white linen, with a gold sash around their chests. One of the four living creatures gave the seven angels seven gold bowls filled with the fury of God, who lives forever and ever. Then the temple became so filled with the smoke from God's glory and

might that no one could enter it until the seven plagues of the seven angels had been accomplished.

Here "the heavenly tent of testimony" is the meeting tent in the Septuagint Exodus 40, and see also 2 Maccabees 2:1-8:

You will find in the records, not only that Jeremiah the prophet ordered the deportees to take some of the aforementioned fire with them,² but also that the prophet, in giving them the law, admonished them not to forget the commandments of the Lord or be led astray in their thoughts, when seeing the gold and silver idols and their ornaments.³ With other similar words he urged them not to let the law depart from their hearts.⁴ The same document also tells how the prophet, following a divine revelation, ordered that the tent and the ark should accompany him and how he went off to the mountain which Moses climbed to see God's inheritance.⁵ When Jeremiah arrived there, he found a room in a cave in which he put the tent, the ark, and the altar of incense; then he blocked up the entrance.⁶ Some of those who followed him came up intending to mark the path, but they could not find it.⁷ When Jeremiah heard of this, he reproved them: "The place is to remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy.⁸ Then the Lord will disclose these things, and the glory of the Lord will be seen in the cloud, just as it appeared in the time of Moses and when Solomon prayed that the Place might be gloriously sanctified."

This passage in 2 Maccabees reveals that the Ark of the Covenant will be hidden until the time of God's choosing. Another reference is 2 Baruch 6:7-9 (sixth or seventh century). Is the Ark of

the Covenant in the temple in heaven, according to Revelation 11:19, the physical Ark that contained the Ten Commandments, the staff of Aaron that had sprouted, and the manna, or is it symbolically the Virgin Mary, or both?

Hebrews 9:1-5:

Now (even) the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary.

² For a tabernacle was constructed, the outer one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of offering; this is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second veil was the tabernacle called the Holy of Holies, ⁴ in which were the gold altar of incense and the ark of the covenant entirely covered with gold. In it were the gold jar containing the manna, the staff of Aaron that had sprouted, and the tablets of the covenant. ⁵ Above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the place of expiation. Now is not the time to speak of these in detail.

Interestingly, no Old Testament text supports this statement that the Ark of the Covenant contains manna and the staff of Aaron, although it does specify that it contains the Ten Commandments:

Exodus 25:16:

In the ark you are to put the commandments which I will give you.

Exodus 25:21:

This propitiatory you shall then place on top of the ark. In the ark itself you are to put the commandments which I will give you.

Nevertheless, Exodus 25:10-22; 26:33-34; and Deuteronomy 10:1-5 specify that the rod of Aaron and the jar of manna were put in front of the Ark. Ford in the Anchor Bible Revelation

claims, "The Ark was the war palladium of Yahweh, the God of hosts (cf. I Sam 4:1-9), but was later regarded as the holy place where Yahweh revealed himself."¹¹ It is an intriguing supposition that Yahweh reveals himself in the Ark by speaking through it in the Old Testament and expressing himself through it in the New Testament as the Virgin Mary whose expression reveals her Son, Jesus Christ.

2 Chronicles 5:7-10:

The priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place beneath the wings of the cherubim in the sanctuary, the holy of holies of the temple. The cherubim had their wings spread out over the place of the ark, sheltering the ark and its poles from above. The poles were long enough so that their ends could be seen from that part of the holy place nearest the sanctuary; however, they could not be seen beyond. The ark has remained there to this day. There was nothing in it but the two tablets of the covenant which the LORD made with the Israelites at their departure from Egypt.

Back to the verse we are contemplating, Revelation 11:19, more interpretation suggests that God will answer those prayers which the angels give him with the temple opened. In every revolution there are people who have a vision, which is crafted in heaven and reflected on the earth, and is God's answer to the prayers of the saints. Revelation, as a book of visions, seeks to inform us and to confirm the prophecies through signs in the heavens and on earth, some of which anyone can see. The passing away of the heavens, the opening of the temple, and the Ark of the Covenant appearing in the temple, all give testimony to the glory of God. The lightning, the thunder, the sounds or rumblings, the earthquake, and the giant hail, seen by the eye and heard

¹¹ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible Series, Volume 38* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 182.

by the ear and felt with the body and absorbed by the soul, testify to the people of the earth and the cosmos that God's judgements are true and good and holy.

On the other hand, Victorinus of Pettau (ca. 275 -- 300) in his Commentary on the Apocalypse, says in reference to Revelation 11:19:

templum apertum manifestatio est Domini nostri (the temple opened is a manifestation of our Lord). [He continues] For the temple of God is the Son, as He Himself says: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." And when the Jews said, "Forty and six years was this temple in building," the evangelist says, "He spoke of the temple of His body."

"And there was seen in His temple the ark of the Lord's testament." The preaching of the Gospel and the forgiveness of sins, and all the gifts whatever that came with Him, he says, appeared therein.¹²

For Victorinus, then, Jesus Christ is the temple of God in heaven, and the Ark of the Covenant is found in the Temple, that is, in Christ himself who is the covenant. Going beyond Victorinus, I think that this may mean that the Ark representing the commandments is found in Christ or that the Virgin Mary, who once carried the Covenant (i.e., Jesus) in her womb, is now found also in Christ.

Swete claims that the Ark of the Covenant, in Hebrew אָרֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה (*aron berith-adonai*) the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD), or as typically in Exodus, τῆς κιβωτοῦ τοῦ μαρτυρίου (*tes kibotou tou marturiou*, the Ark of Testimony), or in Hebrew, אָרֹן הָעֵדוּת (*aron berith*, the Ark of Testimony), is a brief vision because the temple in the heavens appears open yet again

¹² Victorinus of Pettau, *Commentary on the Apocalypse, From the Eleventh Chapter*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0712.htm>.

in Revelation 15:5, but in this verse, 11:19, the seer sees the Ark within the heavenly temple, although originally it was inside the holy veil of the Tabernacle (see Hebrews 9:4 above), and later in the inner chamber of the Temple of Solomon in the first Temple era (1 Kings 8:6). The Ark of the Covenant in Solomon's Temple probably was destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar burned the Temple to the ground (2 Kings 25:9), since Jeremiah refers to the Ark as if it would no longer be remembered (Jeremiah 3:16). Swete also refers to Tacitus (*hist. v. 9*) who "scoffs at the Jewish Sanctuary as 'vacuum sedem et inania arcana.'" ¹³ Swete also remarks, "In Ezekiel's Temple the Ark does not appear, which renders its presence in the heavenly temple of the Apocalypse more remarkable." ¹⁴ Swete continues:

This story [Jeremiah hiding the Ark in a cave, 2 Maccabees 2:5ff)] in its earliest form may have been in the mind of the Seer, but he has his own reason for introducing the Ark at this point. In Christ God has made a new covenant with men (Heb. viii. 6ff., ix. 15ff.), and the appearance of the Ark of the Covenant through the opened doors of the heavenly temple, at the moment when the time has come for the faithful to receive their reward, indicates the restoration of perfect access to God through the Ascension of the Incarnate Son. ¹⁵

Swete claims that Revelation 11:19 ends one section and Revelation 12:1 begins another. ¹⁶

Clearly, 11:19 is a transitional verse leading into the section on the mother of the Messiah, so it makes sense that 11:19 and 12:1 are about both the Ark or chest containing the Ten Commandments and the Ark who is the Blessed Virgin Mary who may also represent the Church in the sense that the Virgin Mary is the mother of the Church. Again, the earthly Ark of the

¹³ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 142.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Covenant was a war palladium carried into battle by the Israelites, accompanied by lightning and thunder, rumblings, earthquakes, and hail, which were the instruments of war for the Israelite God of war, while the Virgin Ark is also carried by the chosen people of the New Covenant into battle among the angels of God with Michael their Captain and the angels of the Dragon or the Devil. When the Holy of Holies in heaven is laid bare, the noises surrounding it envelop God in an amazing act of self-revelation. The messianic Lamb of God, appearing only in heaven up until this point, will appear on the earth in the next section of the Apocalypse beginning with chapter 12 where readers will hear a new series of prophecies and portents of the future.¹⁷ (Ford 182 -- 183).

The woman of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 who gives birth to the male child, the one destined to rule the nations (see Psalm 2:9), probably represents virgin Israel who naturally escapes to the desert, a place of purification and preparation, as in the Exodus. Among scholars, the woman is variously identified as the Virgin Mary (traditional among Catholics) who is also the new Eve (with Jesus the new Adam), as heavenly Jerusalem, personified wisdom, or the Church (for Catholics, the Catholic Church). Historically, this also refers to the Assumption of Mary, and Fr. Paul Haffner in *De Maria Numquam Satis* writes:

St. Hippolytus (172-235) associated the Ark of the Covenant of the Book of Revelation (Rev 11:19) with Mary's incorruptible flesh from which Christ's flesh was taken: "Now the Lord was without sin, being in His human nature from incorruptible wood, that is, from the Virgin, and being sheathed inwardly as it were with the pure gold of the Word and by the Spirit outwardly."

¹⁷ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible Series: Volume 38* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 182 -- 183.

...

Another very rich theological argument was the Trinitarian perspective furnished by Theoteknos: "For, she, the holy one, pleased God the Father. She, the Virgin, pleased the subsistent Word born of the Father from all eternity. She, the Virgin, pleased the life-giving Spirit, the enlightener of all, who fashions all the citizens of heaven."¹⁸

Moreover, in John 2:4, Jesus asks his mother, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." Jesus is responding to the first person in history, his mother, to express humanity's fundamental need: "They have no wine" (John 2:3). Based on her Son's reply, Mary significantly does not turn to tell Jesus what to do; rather, she turns to the *diakonoi*, the servants of the Wedding between the Church and the Lamb (that is, all Christians), and gives her one command in the entire Bible: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). In essence, that is what devotion to Mary is all about: obedience to her one command to do whatever Jesus Christ tells his disciples to do. Kevin M. Clarke in *De Maria Numquam Satis* writes:

Why does he not call her "mother"? This is the question the Pope asks in a 2006 address from his homeland. Because the title "expresses Mary's place in salvation history."

"Woman" points backwards, as it hearkens to the creation account of Eve, Adam's companion. So here in the account of Cana, Mary represents the companion of the Redeemer. It points forward to the Cross, where this "woman" will be made mother in a new way. And it points to the eschaton, to the "woman" clothed with the sun (cf. Rev

¹⁸ Ibid., 79.

11:19ff.). "The name, which seemed so lacking in affection, actually expresses the grandeur of Mary's enduring mission."¹⁹

Moreover, Judith Marie Gentle in *De Maria Numquam Satis* writes:

The woman's analogously imaging the Divine Son in the Mystery of the relations of the Blessed Trinity also seems to be underscored in the way the Incarnation of God the Son takes place! Could it be because it is precisely the woman who, in the created order, images God the Son in the Mystery of His Divine Nature, analogously, that this same Son can most properly take His own incarnate Reality or visible Image from the Promised Woman who will be His Helpmate or Partner in crushing the head of Satan, namely, the Blessed Virgin Mary? In other words, the Divine Son is able to become incarnate from Mary, virginally, both because as a woman, she is His analogue in creation and because precisely in her virginal conception of God the Son she is the Mother Face of the Father, Who has generated the Divine Son, virginally as it were, from all eternity, as already mentioned. Furthermore, because she alone is the Immaculate Conception, kecharitomene, "full of grace" (Lk 1:28), and consequently the most "blessed among women" (Lk 1:42), the Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect created Icon or analogue of Jesus Christ. St. Louis de Montfort tells us "in the Second coming of Jesus Christ, Mary must be known and openly revealed by the Holy Spirit so that Jesus may be known, loved and served through her."

Because of her perfect conformity with the Divine Will and her consubstantiality with the Son in His human nature, she is revealed in the Book of Revelation to be the

¹⁹ Kevin M. Clarke, "Divinely Given 'Into Our Reality': Mary's Maternal Mediation according to Pope Benedict XVI" in *De Maria Numquam Satis: The Significance of the Catholic Doctrines on the Blessed Virgin Mary for All People* by Rev. Judith Marie Gentle and Robert L. Fastiggi, (New York: University Press of America, 2009), 161.

woman who is "clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1) because she is the woman who "clothes" the Son and makes Him visible to the created order, by the Power of the Holy Spirit. She is, likewise, as St. Louis de Montfort says, the mold into which we must be cast so that we might be formed into the Image of this same Son:

God the Son wishes to form Himself, and, in a manner of speaking, become incarnate every day in His members through His dear Mother....If Jesus Christ, the head of [hu]mankind is born of her, the predestinate, who are members of this head, must also as a necessary consequence be born of her....Moreover, Jesus is still as much as ever the fruit of Mary....It is therefore certain that Jesus is the fruit and gift of Mary for every single man [or woman] who possesses Him....Consequently, if any of the faithful have Jesus formed in their heart they can boldly say, "It is thanks to Mary that what I possess is Jesus, her fruit, and without her I would not have Him."²⁰

Clearly, the notion of her consubstantiality with Jesus refers to Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, taking his human flesh from his mother while taking his divine essence from his Father, so that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit (in terms of his Godness or divinity) but consubstantial with the Virgin Mary only in his human nature. Obviously, Mary is thus only consubstantial with the human nature of Jesus without her being consubstantial with God. John Henry Cardinal Newman, when he was an Anglican, develops the idea that the Virgin Mary is the New Eve because Mary, in saying "Yes" to the angel Gabriel, rocketed in the process of salvation, making Mary a *causa salutis* (the "cause of our salvation") since she is Theotokos and

²⁰ Rev. Judith Marie Gentle, *De Maria Numquam Satis: The Significance of the Catholic Doctrines on the Blessed Virgin Mary for All People* by Rev. Judith Marie Gentle and Robert L. Fastiggi, (New York: University Press of America, 2009), 31 -- 32.

Mother of God the Son who redeems us.²¹ Newman relates Galatians 4:4-6 with Genesis 3:15 (Gregoris 117). In Genesis 3:15 the woman Eve's offspring, who is primarily Christ, is destined to become humanity's Redeemer.²² Gregoris adds:

Newman identifies the unnamed women mentioned in Genesis 3:15 and Galatians 4:4 as Mary. Therefore, Cardinal Newman rightly situates Mary at the center of the *oeconomia salutis* ("economy of salvation"). The sacred author of Genesis speaks of Eve as "woman" -- the title that Jesus subsequently bestowed on His Mother when addressing her at Cana and Calvary, that is, at the beginning and end of His public ministry.

In addition, the title of "woman" appears in relationship to an anonymous feminine figure in the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 12. This anonymous woman can be readily associated with figures that call to mind those mentioned in Genesis 3:15, namely, a child and an evil serpent. According to Revelation 12, however, the evil serpent (tempter) of Genesis is replaced by the symbolic figure of the dragon. Newman concludes that Israel and the Church are symbolically identified with the anonymous woman of Revelation 12, who, in effect, is Mary, the Mother of God and Mother of the Church.²³

Gregoris goes on to suggest that the Bible often depicts Israel as a woman, but the woman is often faithless to the Lord, committing adultery and fornication with foreign gods, whereas the

²¹ Rev. Nicholas L. Gregoris, S.T.D., "The Old Testament Background to John Henry Newman's Mariology: His Explanation of Key Marian Texts, Titles and Typologies in both Anglican and Catholic Doctrine and Devotion" in *De Maria Numquam Satis: The Significance of the Catholic Doctrines on the Blessed Virgin Mary for All People* by Rev. Judith Marie Gentle and Robert L. Fastiggi, (New York: University Press of America, 2009), 117 and 119 -- 120.

²² Ibid., 117.

²³ Ibid., 117.

Virgin Mary represents Virgin Israel who is faithful to God,²⁴ maintaining purity and holiness so that she is a proper vessel, the Ark of the Covenant (Revelation 11:19), to contain God within her womb. Thus, unlike Eve, who allowed herself to be seduced by the serpent, Virgin Israel (Mother Mary) does not allow herself to be seduced but instead tramples the serpent by giving birth to the Messiah (Jesus the Son of God). Mary succeeded where Eve failed.²⁵

Similarly, Mary's faith is greater than Sarah's because, when the angel said that next year she would have a son, even though she "had stopped having her womanly periods" (Genesis 18:11), Sarah laughed (Genesis 18:12) and then lied and denied that she had laughed (Genesis 18:15), whereas, when the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary that she would have a child, even though she had not had sexual relations with a man, she did not laugh but accepted the message, saying, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

In Revelation 11:19-12:18 the woman's child is clearly the messiah, but it is a later Christian idea that the messiah is identified with Jesus, and the woman with Mary, indicating, again, that this chapter is based on Jewish ideas of the messiah and his mother that predate Christianity. Interestingly, Wilfrid Harrington, in *Sacra Pagina*, suggests that the birth of the male child is not a reference to the physical birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary but rather the "birth" of Jesus from the cross, while the original Jewish source may have considered the birth the emergence of Israel from the desert to reclaim its former glory.²⁶ It is also possible that this story is a reference to Isaiah 66:7-13, although in this passage the woman, or Zion, gives birth

²⁴ Ibid., 119.

²⁵ Ibid., 120.

²⁶ Wilfred J. Harrington, O.P., and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., ed. *Revelation: Sacra Pagina Series Volume 16* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 130.

before the pains come upon her, while in the Revelation passage she wails from her birth pangs. However, Hermann Gunkel notes that the fact that the birth of the male child doesn't mention Jesus, either the cradle or the cross, indicates that the story is non-Christian Jewish in origin because it is sort of like a Reader's Digest condensed form of the life and actions of the Jewish messiah without reference to any death.²⁷ Furthermore, the birth pangs of the woman in travail may be a symbolic reference to the eschatological woes that must precede the end of the world, a concept common in non-Christian Jewish apocalypses as well as Christian Jewish apocalypses. Since John of Patmos does not distinguish between Israel and the Church, it is probable that the woman is both virgin Israel and the virgin Church or perhaps the mother of both. Isaiah tells us: "Listen to me, you who pursue justice, who seek the LORD; Look to the rock from which you were hewn, to the pit from which you were quarried; Look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth; When he was but one I called him, I blessed him and made him many" (51:1-2). Since Sarah is the mother of all believers, so the Virgin Mary is the mother of all believers in Christ, so it is probable, again, that the woman is not only the virgin Israel and the virgin Church but also the virgin Mary who, like Sarah, gives birth to those who believe in Jesus. The Babylonian figure may be a divine mother who gives birth to a god, while the Jewish original probably referred only to virgin Israel, but, because the text is redacted by a Christian editor, John of Patmos, it would seem that on a different level the Woman is also seen as the Virgin Mary, mother of the Church whose spiritual mission is to wage war against the Dragon and the forces of evil by the power of the Woman's son.

²⁷ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* with contributions by Heinrich Zimmern. Translated by K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 115 -- 129.

It is also interesting that the word “messiah” is not used in this chapter (in fact, the word Christos, “Anointed,” is used juxtaposed to the word “Jesus” in Revelation 1:1 and 1:2 and mentioned by itself in Revelation 20:4 and next to “God” in Revelation 20:6). Revelation 12:5b, “but her child was snatched up to God and to his throne,” is seen by many Christian exegetes as a reference to the ascension of Jesus, but, since Jesus is not actually mentioned here by name, the earlier Jewish source probably intended this to be a reference to Psalm 2:7-9 in which the Israelite king is made the earthly representative of God. Nevertheless, Christian exegetes see Psalm 2 in a different light, as exemplified in Acts 4:25-27; 13:33; and Hebrews 1:5. If John was drawing on an earlier Jewish source, it was probably easy for him to make the transition here to the messianic character of Jesus in conjunction with his kingship.

Revelation 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, (Rev 12:1 BGT)

et signum magnum paruit in caelo mulier amicta sole et luna sub pedibus eius et in capite eius corona stellarum duodecim (Rev 12:1 VUO)

A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. (Rev 12:1 NAB)

The woman in Revelation 12:1ff is both the Blessed Virgin Mary and a symbol of virgin Israel and the Church. Indeed, the author of Revelation, John of Patmos, sees Israel as the Church and the Church as the true Israel. The woman, Mary, is the Mother of the Messiah and the Mother of all his disciples, as the Gospel of John tells us: "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, 'Woman, behold, your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (19:26-27). I'm particularly interested in the myth of the dragon and the woman giving

birth to the messiah. The New American Bible for Catholics has an interesting note on

Revelation 12:1-6:

The woman adorned with the sun, the moon, and the stars (images taken from Gn 37, 9-10) symbolizes God's people in the Old and the New Testament. The Israel of old gave birth to the Messiah (5) and then became the new Israel, the church, which suffers persecution by the dragon (6.13-17); cf Is 50, 1;66, 7; Jer 50, 12. This corresponds to a widespread myth throughout the ancient world that a goddess pregnant with a savior was pursued by a horrible monster; by miraculous intervention she bore a son who then killed the monster.²⁸

In the ancient myths a monster or leviathan or behemoth or rahab or dragon(s) must be conquered by divine power in order to effect the creation of the universe; such stories are replete in the ancient world including in the Bible, which has many creation myths not just in Genesis but in Job and Isaiah and elsewhere. Ford writes in the Anchor Bible Book of Revelation:

Although the woman may be an individual, a study of the OT background suggests that she is a collective figure, like the two witnesses. In the OT the image of a woman is a classical symbol for Zion, Jerusalem, and Israel, e.g. Zion whose husband is Yahweh (Isa 54:1, 5, 6, Jer 3:20, Ezek 16:8-14, Hosea 2:19-20), who is a mother (Isa 49:21, 50:1, 66:7-11, Hosea 4:5, Bar 4:8-23), and who is in the throes of birth (Micah 4:9-10, cf. Isa 26:16-18, Jer 4:31, 13:21, Sir 48:19 [21]).²⁹

The Talmud, y. Berakot, fol. 5, chap. 1, indicates that the Jewish Messiah will be born on the same day as the destruction of the Temple and that the mother of the Messiah will be swept away

²⁸ *The New American Bible for Catholics* (Iowa: Catholic World Press, 2000), 1384.

²⁹ J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible Series: Volume 38* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 195.

by the winds of a tempest, a text that is remarkably consistent with Revelation 12, so here Jewish tradition identifies the earthly birth of the Messiah, while our text describes the heavenly birth of the Messiah, after which the Dragon, personifying evil, begins his dominion in the material world,³⁰ perhaps until the Messiah comes of age. Swete says: "The ancient expositors in general, beginning with Hippolytus and Methodius, understood the Woman with child to represent the Church, though some identified her with the Blessed Virgin."³¹ Saint Augustine writes on Psalm 142: "haec autem mulier antiqua est civitas Dei" -- meaning "But this woman is the ancient city of God."³² This seems especially likely in view of the Church's belief that Mary is the Mother of the Church. Possibly the author of Revelation had in view that the Woman represents both the Virgin Israel (to be identified with the Virgin Church) and the Virgin Mother of God (see Hosea 1:2; 2:4-5; 2:26-17; Isaiah 50:1; 54:5-8). Since John of Patmos equates the word Jew with the word Christian, it follows that he always does not make a distinction between Israel and the Church.³³

The woman is crowned with a wreath of twelve stars, which is probably a reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, although it may refer to the twelve apostles, or the zodiac, or all three. The author of Revelation may also be alluding to Genesis 37:9 where Joseph relates his dream: "I had another dream," he said, "this time, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." The idea of the stars as a wreath encircling the woman around or above her head recalls Wisdom 13:3: "But either fire, or wind, or the swift air, or the circuit of the stars, or the

³⁰ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Translated by William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 128 -- 129.

³¹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 148.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 146ff.

mighty water, or the luminaries of heaven, the governors of the world, they considered gods."

Contrarily, Gunkel insists that the image of the Woman crowned with twelve stars, etc.,

is not explained by reference to the dream of Joseph (Gen 37:9f.), in which, of course, the sun, the moon, and the twelve stars (i.e., the zodiac) appear as a representation of the family of the patriarch. In point of fact, however, the characteristic feature of our passage, that the stars are the raiment and the adornment of the "woman" ...that characteristic feature is completely missing from Joseph's dream. We, therefore, acknowledge that this theme [i.e., the way the woman looks] can be interpreted neither from the context nor from the tradition of Israel.³⁴

The passage goes on to stress how God is greater than the things of his creation. The Latin interprets "luminaries of heaven" to be the sun and moon. Contrast this wreath of twelve stars with Revelation 1:16: "In his right hand he held seven stars. A sharp two-edged sword came out of his mouth, and his face shone like the sun at its brightest." The seven stars traditionally in the pagan world designated the universal dominion of the sovereign, so Caesar and Mithras are typically portrayed with seven stars in their right hands. The author is obviously depicting Christ as the true sovereign with universal dominion. So, the Woman with a crown of twelve stars indicates her dominion over Israel or the Church inasmuch as she is Mother of the Messiah and thus Mother of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. The Greek word ἀστέρων (*asteron*) is a genitive masculine plural meaning "of stars" or "of constellations," so that here the crown seems to represent the zodiac, depicting the Woman as a powerful queen who rules over the cosmos and determines human destiny because the zodiac is a symbol of fate. Mary Ann Beavis writes:

³⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Translated by William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 168.

"The apparition of the star-crowned, sun-clad, moon-treading woman 'in the heavens' (Rev. 12.1) might also have been associated by the ancients with the constellation Virgo, which, according to Malina, was identified with many goddesses in John's time: 'Aprodite, Isis, Dike, Demeter, Magna Mater, Eileithyia, Tyche, Pax, Atargatis or Dea Syria, Iuno [Venus] coelestis of the Carthaginians', but especially with Isis in Egypt" (135). This explains the many Catholic depictions of the Virgin Mary as Queen of Heaven and Earth.

In Revelation a primary motif is the myth of the end of the universe or the end of the age. There is a theory that the early Christians were astrologers or influenced by astrology in that they were living then and we are living now in the Age of Pisces on the Zodiac, and the next age will be the Age of Aquarius. Pisces means the fish, and an early Christian symbol is the word ICHTHUS, which is a Greek word meaning "fish" but is also an acronym for "Jesus Christ Son of God Savior." Interestingly, fish was part of the original Eucharistic meal or early agape feasts among the early Christians. The age of Moses was the Age of Taurus (the Bull), which explains why the early Israelites worshiped a golden calf along with surrounding cultures. The new age was the Age of Aries (the Ram), which explains why on Rosh Hoshana, the Jewish New Year, Jews blow the Ram's horn, and may explain why Abraham sacrifices a ram instead of his son Isaac.³⁵ Jesus Christ's birth is in the Age of Pisces, which, according to some Christian astrologers including Neil Mann, began A.D. 1 and will end ca. A.D. 2150.³⁶ Each age of the Zodiac lasts 2,160 years, so the Age of Aquarius should start in about 300 years, according to some calculations, or as late as A.D. 2600, according to other calculations (some astrologers even claim the Age of Aquarius began in the 19th century).³⁷ The reason for the vagaries of the

³⁵ Richard Losch, Powerpoint slide sent to the author of this thesis on 24 December 2009.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

calculations is that each age occurs because of the precession of the equinoxes, and, because the stars and constellations have the appearance of rotating slowly around the Earth, it takes about 26,000 years to complete one cycle. Thus, about every 2160 years, the rotation is calibrated for the next astrological age by the location of the sun in each of the twelve constellations of the zodiac at the same time as the vernal equinox in the Northern hemisphere (about 21 March each year), and at that time the sun's position moves into a new zodiacal constellation. Unfortunately, the constellations of the zodiac are not the same size, so astrologers dispute when corresponding ages begin and end. According to the International Astronomical Union, the Age of Aquarius should begin around A.D. 2600, but many astrologers do not agree.³⁸

Note that Pisces is the last age on the Zodiac, and then you proceed backwards again, back to Aquarius. The New Testament may refer to Aquarius (the Water Bearer) in two Gospels: Mark 14:13: "He sent two of his disciples and said to them, 'Go into the city and a man will meet you, carrying a jar of water. Follow him.'" and Luke 22:10-12: "And he answered them, 'When you go into the city, a man will meet you carrying a jar of water. Follow him into the house that he enters and say to the master of the house, "The teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large upper room that is furnished. Make the preparations there.'"

Jesus also makes references to "the age" and "the age to come," and he may be referring to astrological ages (see Matthew 12:32, Mark 10:30, Luke 18:30, Ephesians 1:21, and Hebrews 6:5). The Greek word used in all these passages is AEON. The idea in Mark 14:13 and Luke 22:10 may be that Jesus represents the beginning of the Age of Pisces, and at the end of the Age of Pisces, the Age of Aquarius will begin. Some astrologers think this means the end of the age of Jesus (Pisces) or the Christian era, but I do not think so. The apocalypse may not refer to the

³⁸ Richard Losch, Powerpoint slideshow sent to the author of this thesis on 24 December 2009.

end of the universe but simply the end of the age. Similarly, there's a lot of talk about the Mayan 2012 date, but that's just the end of the Mayan calendar and not necessarily the end of the universe. It's simply a wrap of the calendar like the Zodiac starting over again after Pisces and going backwards into Aquarius. The Dragon of Revelation may be a reference to the constellation Draco.

Clearly, the stories in the Bible make a lot more sense if you understand the astrology behind a lot of the stories, not only in the Old Testament but also in the New Testament, particularly in Revelation. Perhaps the stars of the Constellation Draco will become supernovae so that a third of the stars surrounding them will not be visible from Earth. This may be what the text means when it says "[The Dragon's] tail swept away a third of the stars from the sky and hurled them down to the earth" (Revelation 12:4a). On the other hand, this could be a reference to the Book of Dreams in 1 Enoch 83 -- 90, specifically, the Animal Apocalypse (chapters 85 -- 90) which appears to be a reference to Judas Maccabeus (Maccabeus may mean "the Hammerer") who may be the ram with the horn in 90:9ff. Following the metaphors in the story carefully, one realizes that the patriarchs are the bulls, those in the chosen line are white, while others are black. James C. Vanderkam comments:

The story about the angels who sinned looms large in the text. These celestial beings are called stars, and are distinguished from virtuous angels who are called men. One star fell from heaven first (apparently Azazel) and his arrival among the bulls was accompanied by sexual evils and mixings of different kinds of bulls and cows. He was followed by many others. The stars began mating with the cows and fathered three kinds of giants. Enoch saw seven angels descend to address the problems on the earth. One of them raised Enoch onto a high tower from which he could observe what happened on the

earth. The punishments familiar from 1 Enoch 6-11 were then meted out to the evildoers, and Noah and his family alone survived the flood. His three sons (bulls of three different colors) repopulated the earth after the flood; their children are depicted as various wild or negative animals (e.g., a pig) and birds (e.g., ravens).³⁹

So, the stars swept from the sky are both the angel that is the Dragon (Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:14: "And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light") and his angels are in this chapter thrown down to the earth. Bauckham in the Oxford Biblical Commentary comments: "The stars, as in 1:20, may be angelic representatives of the people of God, so that the dragon's action against them represents inflicting suffering on Israel on earth."⁴⁰ In other words, the twelve stars stand for both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles so that the sufferings the Dragon inflicts on the earth has deleterious effects on the Jewish people who make up the Church (remember, John the Divine makes no distinction between Israel and the Church). The fate of the Woman and her child are inextricably intertwined because in the Jewish tradition the Woman is heavenly Zion who gives birth to the Messiah while in the Christian tradition "the remnant" of Israel (i.e., the Church) consists of the children of God who are the Woman's seed and who are also in flight with their mother from the Dragon whom the Messiah is destined to conquer.⁴¹

The depiction of the Woman in 12:1 is the first of a series of seven visions, each beginning with either "I saw" or "[someone or something] appeared." This first vision is

³⁹ James C. Vanderkam and William Adler, *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Van Gorcum, Assen: Fortress Press, 1996), 105.

⁴⁰ Richard Bauckham, "Revelation" in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* edited by John Barton and John Muddiman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1296.

⁴¹ Cf. Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Translated by William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 178.

depicted like a picture painted on the sky. More visions are depicted similarly, as if the visionary, John of Patmos, is viewing a television image broadcast on the outer veil of heaven, the sky. The first vision shows the Woman in the agony of childbirth, to which we now turn.

Revelation 12:2:

καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα, ἔκραζεν ὠδίνουσα, καὶ βασανιζομένη τεκεῖν.

et in utero habens, clamabat parturiens, et cruciabatur ut pariat.

She was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she labored to give birth.

One school of thought is that the Woman is the Virgin Mary in the agony of giving birth. However, many Catholics believe that the Woman cannot be the Virgin Mary per se because Mary is the Immaculate Conception. In this view, Mary at the instant of her conception in the womb of her mother, Good Saint Anne, was enveloped and penetrated by the Holy Spirit and cleansed of original sin. Genesis 3:16 tells us: "To the woman he said: 'I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master.'" Thus, because pain in childbearing is God's punishment for Eve and her descendants, it follows that the Virgin Mary would not have suffered pain in childbirth since she did not inherit original sin. Therefore, because Revelation 12:2 depicts the woman "in pain as she labored to give birth," it follows that the Woman is not the Virgin Mary, although she may represent the Virgin Mary still in some sense. The birth pangs in this sense are rather, then, the troubles and travails of the early Church as it "wailed aloud in pain" in the throes of giving birth to the Kingdom of Christ. Some of these "pains" were doubtless the persecutions of the Church by both the Jewish Israel and pagan Rome including public floggings, crucifixions, and feeding Christians to the lions in the Roman arena. Evidence

pointing towards a non-Christian Jewish origin of this text is that Jerusalem is depicted in the Old Testament as a woman wailing in the throes of childbirth: Micah 4:9-10:

Now why do you cry out so? Are you without a king?

Or has your counselor perished, that you are seized with pains like a woman in travail?

Writhe in pain, grow faint, O daughter Zion; like a woman in travail;

For now shall you go forth from the city and dwell in the fields;

To Babylon shall you go, there you shall be rescued.

There shall the LORD redeem you from the hand of your enemies.

Jesus uses the same metaphor in describing the apostles in their despair and agony on the evening of our Lord's arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you." (John 16:20-22)

Isaiah describes the birth pangs as the beginning of the days of the resurrection:

As a woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pains,

so were we in your presence, O LORD.

We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth to wind;

Salvation we have not achieved for the earth,

the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth.

But your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise; awake and sing, you who lie in the dust.

For your dew is a dew of light, and the land of shades gives birth. (26:17-19)

It seems clear that the Woman of Revelation will similarly forget the agony she underwent in childbirth and rejoice at the birth of the Messiah and the birth of the Church. Swete writes:

The Woman is with child, and near to her delivery; in sharp contrast with the splendour of her adornment the Seer places her cries of pain and the tortures (βασανιζομένη) of the birth-pangs. He can scarcely have failed to remember Isa. vii.14 δώσει κύριος αὐτὸς ὑμῖν σημεῖον ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος ἐν γαστρὶ λήμψεται καὶ τέξεται υἱόν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Εμμανουήλ [Isa 7:14 BGT] (Mat. i. 23 ἔξει) -- a passage familiar to Christian thought towards the end of the Apostolic age, as its use by Mt., and apparently also by Lc. (i. 31) attests. But if so, he purposely substitutes γυνή for παρθένος, for the Virgin-Birth is not a point on which he wishes to insist; the mystical mother of the Lord, whom he has in view, is not the Virgin, but the Jewish Church (see below).⁴²

Swete is apparently saying that Isaiah 7:14 uses the word λήμψεται (*lempsetai*) while Mat. i. 23 uses ἔξει (*exei*); however, I looked in BibleWorks, and *lempsetai* is nowhere to be found; they all use *exei*. All my versions of the Greek in BibleWorks use the word παρθένος (Mat 1:23 BNT) (*parthenos*); not once is the word γυνή (*gune*) used in Isaiah 7.14 or relevant passages in

⁴² Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 147 -- 148.

Matthew or Luke. Swete appears to be using manuscripts that have been updated since he wrote this in the 1911. Edwin D. Freed claims that LXX B uses the term *lempsetai*.⁴³ Now, I see that the editions of Alfred Rahlfs and Joseph Ziegler have *exei*, but this is not true for Swete's Old Testament in Greek (vol. III), which has *lempsetai* since MS B (Vaticanus) says *lempsetai*. About the substitution of *gune* (woman) for *parthenos* (virgin) I have not yet turned up any information, though Freed writes: "...Matthew chooses the Greek text of Isa. 7.14 ('the virgin') over the Hebrew text ('the young woman') and uses the quotation, along with the angel's statement about the action of the Holy Spirit, in order to justify the behavior of Mary, as with that of the four women" [mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew].⁴⁴ At any rate, it is also possible that the Woman's birth pangs represent the eschatological woes which either preceded the birth of the Messiah and the Church or which will precede the parousia, the Second Coming of Christ, and the end of the universe as well as the resurrection of the dead on Judgement Day. Other passages dealing with a woman in travail include Jeremiah 4:31; 13:21; 22:23; Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; Hosea 13:13.

It is possible that Isaiah 66:7-9ff refers to the Virgin Mary giving birth without pain, although different translations suggest that the text may mean that she gives birth very quickly after briefly suffering birth pangs. The Geneva Bible notes on Isaiah 66:7 says: "Meaning, that the restoration of the church would be so sudden and contrary to all men's opinions as when a woman is delivered before she looked for it, and without pain in travail." The New American Bible note on this passage says: "The absence of labor in Zion's childbearing is a symbol of the joyful begetting of the new people of God." Even the Apostle Paul makes a reference to himself

⁴³ Edwin D. Freed, *The Stories of Jesus' Birth: A Critical Introduction* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press Ltd, 2011), 74.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

in this way: "My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!" (Galatians 4:19). To be in labor does not necessarily mean the mother suffers birth pangs, although it typically does. Even the Holy Spirit gives birth to the baptized: "Jesus answered, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit'" (John 3:5). Even creation groans: "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8:22-23). Even the Spirit groans for us: "In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings" (Romans 8:26). The signs of the eschaton Jesus also describes: "You will hear of wars and reports of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for these things must happen, but it will not yet be the end. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famines and earthquakes from place to place. All these are the beginning of the labor pains" (Matthew 24:6-8 and cf. Mark 13:8). Just as creation and the Spirit groan, Israel or the Church groans as though in labor as she struggles to give birth to the people of God. In this sense Israel or the Church is the celestial spouse of the cosmic Christ.

Revelation 12:3:

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, (Rev 12:3 GNT)

Et visum est aliud signum in caelo et ecce draco magnus rufus habens capita septem et cornua decem et in capitibus suis septem diademata

Then another sign appeared in the sky; it was a huge red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven diadems.

The first question that raises itself immediately is: What or who is the huge red dragon? Why is the dragon red? Is he red for the blood of the saints which he has spilled and will spill again? R.H. Charles says:

The fiery red or scarlet colour, xvii.3, of the dragon may (K.A.T. 503 sq. 512) go back to the musrussu tamtim, the "raging" or "red gleaming" serpent, which was set up in the Temple of Marduk, Esagil, and is to be regarded as the chaos monster since with the Babylonians no monster had a serpent-like form. The Babylonian representations of this musrussu have two horns -- a feature with which we may compare the horns in our text. But the number ten comes most probably from Dan. vii.7, 24. The Babylonian tradition speaks also of the musmahha, the "great serpent" with "seven heads." Zimmern (I.A.T. 507, 512) takes these to be descriptions of one and the same mythological chaos monster. The combined characteristics of these two conceptions serve to account for the colour of the dragon in our text, the number of his heads and the fact that he was horned. The idea, therefore, in our text is composite, and embraces characteristics (i.e. ten horns and seven heads) that cannot be reconciled or at all events understood. If the writer had been creating freely the conception before us, we should naturally have expected the Dragon to have had seven heads and seven and not ten horns. But the number ten has come from tradition, i.e. Dan. vii.7, 24.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 318 -- 319.

The dragon or sea serpent is a mythical beast spawned in the primordial chaos. Babylonian tales reveal the motif of a sea serpent or monster of the deep with seven heads and so do Canaanite texts.⁴⁶

What enemy's ris[en] 'gainst Baal, What foe 'gainst the Rider of Clouds?

Crushed I not El's Belov'd Yamm? Destroy I not El's Flood Rabbim?

Did I not, pray, muzzle the Dragon?

I did crush the crooked serpent, Shalyat the seven-headed.⁴⁷

Note 10 on page 137 says: "His proper name is Lotan = Leviathan (Isa. 27:1); see g, beginning."

If thou smite Lotan, the serpent slant,

Destroy the serpent tortuous, Shalyat of the seven heads,

...

(two couplets very obscure)⁴⁸

Note 2 on page 138 says: "cf. Ps. 74:14 for the last phase; for the rest Isa. 27:1."⁴⁹

This serpent monster of the deep, the primordial chaos, is seen as God's opponent in the Old Testament, but, contrary to many other myths, God does not destroy the monsters of the deep but rather makes them part of the order of creation. One sees this illustrated in the following Old Testament passages:

⁴⁶ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. Third Edition with Supplement (ANET)* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 137 -- 138.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 138.

Isaiah 27:1:

On that day, The LORD will punish with his sword that is cruel, great, and strong,

Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the coiled serpent;

and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

NAB note on Isaiah 27:1: "Leviathan...dragon: symbols of the forces of evil which God vanquishes even as he overcame primeval chaos; cf notes on Jb 3, 8:7, 12."

Isaiah 51:9

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD!

Awake as in the days of old, in ages long ago!

Was it not you who crushed Rahab, you who pierced the dragon?

Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep,

Who made the depths of the sea into a way for the redeemed to pass over?

Psalms 74:13-15:

You stirred up the sea in your might; you smashed the heads of the dragons on the waters.

You crushed the heads of Leviathan, tossed him for food to the sharks.

You opened up springs and torrents, brought dry land out of the primeval waters.

Yours the day and yours the night; you set the moon and sun in place.

You fixed all the limits of the earth; summer and winter you made.

The NAB note on Psalm 74:

A communal lament sung when the enemy invaded the temple; it would be especially appropriate at the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Israel's God is urged to look upon the ruined sanctuary and remember the congregation who worshiped there (1-11). People and sanctuary are bound together; an attack on Zion is an attack on Israel. In the second half of the poem, the community brings before God the story of their origins -- their creation (12-17) --- in order to move God to reenact that deed of creation now. Will God allow a lesser power to destroy the divine project (18-23)?

The NAB note on Psalm 74:12-17:

Comparable Canaanite literature describes the storm-god's victory over all-encompassing Sea and its allies (dragons and Leviathan) and the subsequent peaceful arrangement of the universe, sometimes through the placement of paired cosmic elements (day and night, sun and moon). Cf. Ps 89, 12-13. The psalm apparently equates the enemies attacking the temple with the destructive cosmic forces already tamed by God. Why then are those forces now raging untamed against your own people?

These verses will become even more significant as we delve deeper into the well of how creation is inextricably intertwined with the apocalypse. Moreover, let us also consider Psalm 89:11-13:

You rule the raging sea; you still its swelling waves.

You crushed Rahab with a mortal blow; your strong arm scattered your foes.

Yours are the heavens, yours the earth; you founded the world and everything in it.

Zaphon and Amanus you created; Tabot and Hermon rejoice in your name.

NAB note on Psalm 89:11: "Rahab: a mythological sea monster whose name is used in the Bible mainly as a personification of primeval chaos."

Psalm 104:24-26:

How varied are your works, LORD! In wisdom you have wrought them all;

the earth is full of your creatures. Look at the sea, great and wide!

It teems with countless beings, living things both large and small.

Here ships ply their course; here Leviathan, your creature, plays.

NAB note on Psalm 104:26: "*Leviathan*: a sea monster symbolizing primeval chaos...God does not destroy chaos but makes it part of the created order."

Leviathan: Rahab: Job 26:12-13; 9:13; 3:8; 40:25; Psalm 89:11-13; 74:13ff; 104:26

Job 3:8:

Let them curse it who curse the sea, the appointed disturbers of Leviathan!

NAB note on Job 3:8: "Leviathan: in Jb 40, 25, the crocodile; here the reference is probably to a mythological sea monster symbolizing primeval chaos. Cf. Job 9, 13: 26, 13: Pss 74, 13f; 104, 26; Isaiah 27, 1."

Job 7:12:

Am I the sea, or a monster of the deep, that you place a watch over me?

or why should I be a target for you?

NAB note on Job 7:12: "An allusion in poetic imagery to primeval chaos as a monstrous ocean-vanquished by God at the world's creation."

Job 9:13:

He is God and he does not relent; the helpers of Rahab bow beneath him.

Job 26:10-13:

He has marked out a circle on the surface of the deep

as the boundary of light and darkness.

The pillars of the heavens tremble and are stunned at his thunderous rebuke;

By his power he stirs up the sea, and by his might he crushes Rahab;

With his angry breath he scatters the water,

and he hurls the lightning against it relentlessly;

His hand pierces the fugitive dragon as from his hand it strives to flee.

Job 40:15 -- 41:26:

¹⁵ See, besides you I made Behemoth, that feeds on grass like an ox.

¹⁶ Behold the strength in his loins, and his vigor in the sinews of his belly.

¹⁷ He carries his tail like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are like cables.

¹⁸ His bones are like tubes of bronze; his frame is like iron rods.

¹⁹ He came at the beginning of God's ways, and was made the taskmaster of his fellows;

²⁰ For the produce of the mountains is brought to him,

and of all wild animals he makes sport.

²¹ Under the lotus trees he lies, in coverts of the reedy swamp.

²² The lotus trees cover him with their shade; all about him are the poplars on the bank.

²³ If the river grows violent, he is not disturbed;

he is tranquil though the torrent surges about his mouth.

²⁴ Who can capture him by his eyes, or pierce his nose with a trap?

²⁵ Can you lead about Leviathan with a hook, or curb his tongue with a bit?

²⁶ Can you put a rope into his nose, or pierce through his cheek with a gaff?

²⁷ Will he then plead with you, time after time, or address you with tender words?

²⁸ Will he make an agreement with you that you may have him as a slave forever?

²⁹ Can you play with him, as with a bird? Can you put him in leash for your maidens?

³⁰ Will the traders bargain for him? Will the merchants divide him up?

³¹ Can you fill his hide with barbs, or his head with fish spears?

³² Once you but lay a hand upon him, no need to recall any other conflict!

^{NAB} **Job 41:1** Whoever might vainly hope to do so need only see him to be overthrown.

² Is he not relentless when aroused; who then dares stand before him?

³ Who has assailed him and come off safe-- Who under all the heavens?

⁴ I need hardly mention his limbs, his strength, and the fitness of his armor.

⁵ Who can strip off his outer garment, or penetrate his double corselet?

⁶ Who can force open the doors of his mouth, close to his terrible teeth?

⁷ Rows of scales are on his back, tightly sealed together;

⁸ They are fitted each so close to the next that no space intervenes;

⁹ So joined one to another that they hold fast and cannot be parted.

- ¹⁰ When he sneezes, light flashes forth; his eyes are like those of the dawn.
- ¹¹ Out of his mouth go forth firebrands; sparks of fire leap forth.
- ¹² From his nostrils issues steam, as from a seething pot or bowl.
- ¹³ His breath sets coals afire; a flame pours from his mouth.
- ¹⁴ Strength abides in his neck, and terror leaps before him.
- ¹⁵
- ¹⁶ His heart is hard as stone; his flesh, as the lower millstone.
- ¹⁷ When he rises up, the mighty are afraid; the waves of the sea fall back.
- ¹⁸ Should the sword reach him, it will not avail;
nor will the spear, nor the dart, nor the javelin.
- ¹⁹ He regards iron as straw, and bronze as rotten wood.
- ²⁰ The arrow will not put him to flight; slingstones used against him are but straws.
- ²¹ Clubs he esteems as splinters; he laughs at the crash of the spear.
- ²² His belly is sharp as pottery fragments;
he spreads like a threshing sledge upon the mire.
- ²³ He makes the depths boil like a pot; the sea he churns like perfume in a kettle.
- ²⁴ Behind him he leaves a shining path;
you would think the deep had the hoary head of age.
- ²⁵ Upon the earth there is not his like, intrepid he was made.
- ²⁶ All, however lofty, fear him; he is king over all proud beasts.

Ezekiel 32:2

Son of man, utter a lament over Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, saying to him: Lion of the nations, you are destroyed:

You were like a monster in the sea, spouting in your streams,

Stirring the water with your feet and churning its streams.

R.H. Charles notes:

The sevenheaded Dragon is ultimately derived from Babylonian mythology. The monster appears as the chief enemy of God in the O.T., and is variously designated or hinted at under such titles as Rahab...Leviathan...Behemoth...the dragon in the sea...the Serpent...⁵⁰(317)

Charles continues:

The dragon and the primeval ocean are brought together in Isa. li.9 sq. These were overcome by Yahweh in the prehistoric foretime. And what happened at the beginning of days will be repeated on a greater scale at the end of time. The primeval strife between Yahweh and the powers of chaos is transformed into a final struggle between God and Satan at the world's close, in which the latter will manifest himself as a world-power, hostile first to Judaism and then to the Christian Community. The transformation of cosmological myth into eschatological doctrine is found also in Isa. xi.6-8, lxv. 25, Hos. ii.18-22, which assign to the blessed coming time the peace that reigned in Eden; in Isa. lxv.17, lxvi.22; I Enoch xci.16, where the creation of the foretime is to be succeeded by the creation of a new heavens and a new earth.

⁵⁰ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 318.

The dragon of Revelation 12 is identified as the serpent of Genesis 3, and Revelation 12:9 further identifies him as the devil and Satan. The "ten horns" are a reference to the "fourth beast" of Daniel 7:7:

After this, in the visions of the night I saw the fourth beast, different from all the others, terrifying, horrible, and of extraordinary strength; it had great iron teeth with which it devoured and crushed, and what was left it trampled with its feet. I was considering the ten horns it had, when suddenly another, a little horn, sprang out of their midst, and three of the previous horns were torn away to make room for it. This horn had eyes like a man, and a mouth that spoke arrogantly.

This fourth beast is often identified with Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175 -- 163 B.C.), who the author of Daniel considered to be the most evil of the kings of the Seleucid dynasty because, among other things, he usurped the throne. In Revelation, the dragon is, as noted earlier, personified evil in the being of the devil or Satan. He is crowned with diadems; on other hand, John of Patmos uses the word *stephanos* in verse 1, perhaps referring to 1 Esdras 4:30, Isaiah 62:3, 1 Maccabees 11:13 and 13:32, and compare also Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalia* viii.21.33, "where he describes the basilisk as 'candida in capite macula ut quodam diademate insignem.'"⁵¹ By comparison, the Conquering Lamb of Revelation 19 is crowned with "many diadems," whereas the Dragon's diadems represent his temporary authority over the nations of the Earth.⁵² Faithful Israel is the chaste spouse of God in the Old Testament, whereas in the New Testament the true faithful Israel is the Church that is the bride of Christ.

⁵¹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 149.

⁵² Ibid.

Revelation 12:4

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.

et cauda eius trahebat tertiam partem stellarum caeli et misit eas in terram et draco stetit ante mulierem quae erat paritura ut cum peperisset filium eius devoraret

Its tail swept away a third of the stars in the sky and hurled them down to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth.

Since the Book of Revelation is written in code, it seems likely that John of Patmos was familiar with 1 Enoch and the Animal Apocalypse in particular. Thus, Revelation 12:4 must be understood in relation to Revelation 12:7-9: "Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it." So, the dragon's tail sweeping the "stars" (i.e., angels) and hurling them down to earth is a metaphoric way of saying that, when the dragon was thrown down to the earth, its "stars" or "angels" were thrown down with it. This refers to Daniel 8:10 where the author writes of a "little horn" that spoke arrogantly.⁵³ Swete adds: "A similar incident occurs in the Babylonian myth of the conflict between Tiamat and Marduk (Gunkel, *op. cit.* p. 387), but the Apocalyptist may well have had no other thought than to depict the colossal

⁵³ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 149.

size and vast strength of the monster.⁵⁴ See also Jude 6 for a reference to the fall to Satan's angels being cast down to the earth.⁵⁵ Luke refers to this in his Gospel: "Jesus said, 'I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky'" (10:18). Contrast this with Revelation 11:19 -- 12:1: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant could be seen in the temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, and peals of thunder, an earthquake, and a violent hailstorm. A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." The Woman, whether Virgin Israel or the Virgin Mary or both, is depicted as standing in harmony with the sun, moon, and twelve stars; the twelve stars may symbolize the 12 patriarchs, the 12 apostles, or perhaps the 12 guardian angels of Israel (one for each of the twelve tribes), the 12 guardian angels of the Church (one for each of the twelve apostles), or Michael and the angels who battle against the Dragon (who are "stars" or "angels" rather than jewels in the Virgin's Crown). This signifies that Israel has many protectors sent by God.

Revelation 12:5

καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, ὃς μέλλει ποιμαίνειν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ. καὶ ἡρπάσθη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ πρὸς τὸν θρόνον αὐτοῦ.

et peperit filium masculum qui recturus erit omnes gentes in virga ferrea et raptus est filius eius ad Deum et ad thronum eius

She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and his throne.

⁵⁴ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 150.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

A primary purpose of John is to describe the oppressive sovereignty of Rome and the crisis it ensues for Christians as only a blip on God's radar because John's interest is to utterly disclaim, deny, and discard as worthless the supposed power and authority of the Roman Empire. Hence, Revelation can be read in any era as a prophecy that the power of God is always greater than any temporal power. Nevertheless, in terms of the original readership, Revelation can be dated historically as written during a time in which the Romans were still not only occupying Israel but also oppressing Christians, even if only sporadically. Thus, Revelation 12 gives hope to these readers who believe that they are the faithful remnant whose purpose is to "keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus" who is the messiah of the passage. The hope the passage gives is that God is in control and will ultimately triumph, defeating the Dragon and elevating the messiah to a position of power in the divine realm, so the readers should continue to endure and persevere, for those who endure and persevere to the end will be saved.

The final and most important distinction between Revelation and other apocalypses is its central figure, Jesus Christ, who not only reveals mysteries to John but also acts as warrior-king and judge of souls. In short, Revelation shows that Jesus, the divine man, has divine power and divine authority to both predict and be directly and intimately involved in the events he causes John to prophesy. The concept of the Son of Man appears in Apocalypses from many historical periods, both Jewish and Christian Apocalypses, biblical and non-biblical. What's different about this divine figure, the Son of Man, who is the slain Lamb and the glorious Lion, is that he has been on earth as a mortal human being, suffered as the people of God have suffered, and is therefore one with whom the people of God can identify as one of their own yet who is glorified. Moreover, the very idea that the messiah comes twice is uniquely Christian in that it is the only way to explain the death of the man Christians believed to be the Jewish messiah. A professor of

Jewish studies at Emory University, Rabbi David Blumenthal, in a class on Jewish Mysticism once told me that the Christian religion in and of itself largely consists of the followers of Jesus of Nazareth successfully explaining the death of the man they believed to be the Jewish messiah to an audience larger than originally conceived by his original disciples. The battle between the woman and the red dragon is an *ex eventu* prophecy of how God will accomplish his purpose by giving power to the woman, her son, and ultimately her children as described in Revelation 12 to defeat the dragon and evil generally.

Gabel, Wheeler, and York write on page 157:

To think of Revelation in this way – as a piece of literature in which the religious and mythic materials are shaped in the form of a conventional apocalypse, for the conventional apocalyptic purpose of providing comfort to the suffering faithful – is to cut through much of the mysteriousness of the book. (Not all the mysteriousness, of course, for symbol and myth by their very nature cannot have firm walls set about them to confine their meaning.) Most of the images in Revelation had had a long previous history of religious and literary use before this particular author employed them; inevitably a multiplicity of meaning had become attached to them. Consider the rich effect of designating the personification of evil as “the great dragon, the primeval serpent, known as the devil or Satan” (Revelation 12:9). This would have brought to the mind of a contemporary reader the complementary images of the serpent that misled Adam and Eve, the “adversary” who brought about the terrible suffering of Job, the sea creature Leviathan described in the book of Job, and perhaps the fabled sea monster Tiamat who (in Babylonian legend) was destroyed by the deity at the time of the Creation but must be destroyed once more at the end of time. Or again, any one of the several victories over

the Devil – whether at the birth of Christ or the fall of Rome or before or after the millennium – is in a sense the same as every other one of the victories. That is why in Revelation we so often find an instance of the destruction of evil followed by rejoicing in heaven, only to be followed in short order by the return of what seems to be the same evil in different guise. Layer is placed upon similar layer, and it is not always evident just where we are in the continuing story at any given moment. But there will come an end to that story, the author of the book assures his readers, when the great instigator of evil and his entire domain will be flung into the fiery lake; and then the warfare of the saints will cease forever.⁵⁶

At this point, history really does come to an end, because the woman of Revelation 12 did give birth to her Son who did conquer death and destroy evil and lead the Chosen People to heaven.

R.H. Charles says:

The peculiar phrase, υἱὸν, ἄρσεν, is found also in Tob. vi.12... καὶ υἱὸς ἄρσιν οὐδὲ θυγάτηρ ὑπάρχει αὐτῷ, and the corresponding Hebrew in Jer. xx. 15, בֶּן זָכָר, where the LXX gives only ἄρσιν, (B, ἄρσεν), but the Vulgate Peshitto and Targum of Jonathan support the text. Notwithstanding the text is peculiar. The neuter is also peculiar. Yet we find it in the LXX, Isa. lxvi.7, ἐξέφυγεν καὶ ἔτεκεν ἄρσεν: Jer. xxxvii. (xxx.) 6.⁵⁷

Failure to recognize God's interaction in Earth's history in terms of protecting the Woman of Revelation 12 in preparation for the coming reign of her Son who triumphs over evil is to

⁵⁶ John B. Gabel and Charles B. Wheeler and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 157.

⁵⁷ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 320.

trivialize the Gospel and mock the cross. The center of history, indeed of all of space and time, is found in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, as opposed to the beginning (described in Genesis) and the end (described in Daniel and Revelation et al.). Many scholars have traditionally viewed Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, and Revelation reveals the role of Jesus as both the triumphantly slain Lamb and the triumphantly returning apocalyptic prophet who fulfills his own apocalyptic prophecies. However, in this verse, John of Patmos makes a direct path to the Ascension of the Messiah, bypassing the nativity (the passage depicts a spiritual birth here), the Passion, and the resurrection. The Dragon has basically failed in his task to devour the child, and then he lost the child to God when the spiritually born Messiah was taken up to God's throne.

Why is the Child separated from his Mother? The explanation lies in the necessity of the Messiah leaving the Earth to reign with God in heaven and the Church Triumphant and the Church Militant remaining in the world to continue the fight with the Dragon. The Greek ἡρπάσθη (*herpasthe*) (in the Vulgate *raptus est*) shows that a rapture has taken place in which the Messiah is seized in a violent way to be taken to God and his throne. This language is reminiscent of Acts 8:39: "...the Spirit of the Lord seized Philip..."; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4: "I know someone in Christ who, fourteen years ago, (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows), was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter"; 1 Thessalonians 4:17: "then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord"; compare also 2 Kings 2:11: "As they walked on conversing, a flaming chariot and flaming horses came between them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind"; Acts 1:2: "...until the day he [Jesus] was taken up, after giving instructions through

the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen"; Acts 1:11: "...This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven"; Acts 1:22: "...beginning from the baptism of John until the day on which he was taken up from us, become with us a witness to his resurrection"; and 1 Timothy 3:16: "Undeniably great is the mystery of devotion, Who was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed to the Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory." All these must be interpreted in terms of Mark 16:19: "So then the Lord Jesus, after he spoke to them, was taken up into heaven and took his seat at the right hand of God." Thus, the Ascension of Jesus is depicted as a rapture that is oddly prophetic of the later rapture to take place at the Parousia or Second Coming of Jesus in which, according to Brent Kinman in terms of the definition of the Greek "parousia," disciples of Jesus will rise in the air to greet Jesus and escort him to the Earth like a visiting dignitary (which I suppose he is but more likely visiting royalty).⁵⁸

Revelation 12:6

καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέφωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα.

et mulier fugit in solitudinem ubi habet locum paratum a Deo ut ibi pascant illam diebus mille ducentis sexaginta

The woman herself fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God, that there she might be taken care of for twelve hundred and sixty days.

⁵⁸ Brent Kinman, "Parousia, Jesus' 'A-Triumphal' Entry, and the Fate of Jerusalem (Luke 19:28-44)," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 118, No.s 2, Summer, 1999), 1.

The entire section of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 is best understood as a reflection or description of the eternal conflict of good versus evil on the stage of the cosmos rather than the stage of the world per se, while 12:6 brings to mind the Earthly sojourn of the Israelites in the desert or wilderness for 40 years and also the very human Christ's temptation in the desert or wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights. This spiritual insight into the past gives us a glimpse of spiritual insight into the birth of the church, in the midst of the crowning evil of the dragon, fleeing from the Serpent or the Devil or Satan into the desert to a location "prepared by God." The Seer's vision goes back to a time before the birth of Christ to the point in time when the woman gave birth to Christ after which she flees from the Dragon, demonstrating the future of the church of whom the Woman is his mother. The Dragon is demonstrated as having a continuous enmity with the Woman and her offspring (the people of the church), but out of the midst of this enmity Christ rises to his heavenly throne while his mother, the Woman who is alike the Virgin Mary, the Virgin Church, and the Virgin Israel, flees into the protection of God from the assault of the Dragon.

Once again, we see that the Woman represents or actually is the Israel or the Church of the Old Covenant, the Mother which produced the Jewish Messiah, identified with Jesus. There is no clear demarcation line between the people of Israel of the Old Covenant and the people of Israel (or the Church) of the New Covenant; the latter is viewed primarily as the completion of the prophecies and purpose of the Old Covenant. The Woman or Israel/Church suffers for her faith in her Son, the Messiah (cf. 12:13) because she is not only Mother of the Messiah but also Mother of all those who have faith in Christ (see 12:17 and Galatians 4:27).⁵⁹ She flees to this place of protection only after the Ascension of Christ, described earlier. John of Patmos may

⁵⁹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 149.

have in mind here the flight of the Israelites into the wilderness, Elijah escaping from Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 17:2ff, 19), the other escape of Israelites from Antiochus (1 Maccabees 2:29), or the Holy Family's escape into Egypt (Matthew 2:13).⁶⁰ If this is indeed the flight of the Israelites into the wilderness, then the manna that fed the children of Israel in the Sinai desert is for the Church "the spiritual food of the word of God" (Matthew 4:4) "and the flesh and blood of the Lord" (John 6:48ff), according to Swete.⁶¹ The manna or spiritual food lasts for 1260 days or "a time, times, and a half" or "a year, two years, and a half-year" (12:14).⁶² Yet R.H. Charles says: "The 1260 days is an interpretation of the corresponding but less definite phrase in 14. It denotes the period of the Anti-christ's reign."⁶³ After this will be a new world order beyond the time of the travails of the Church. When the Two Witnesses utter their prophecies coincides with the Woman being taken care of in the wilderness so that the Woman and the Two Witnesses function as two different appearances of the Church or Israel.⁶⁴ (Swete 152).

Revelation 12:7-9

Καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ Μιχαὴλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ τοῦ πολεμῆσαι μετὰ τοῦ δράκοντος. καὶ ὁ δράκων ἐπολέμησεν καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ, (Rev 12:7 GNT) καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν οὐδὲ τόπος εὐρέθη αὐτῶν ἐτι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. (Rev 12:8 GNT) καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν. (Rev 12:9 GNT)

⁶⁰ Ibid., 151 -- 152.

⁶¹ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 152.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 321.

⁶⁴ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 152.

et factum est proelium in caelo Michahel et angeli eius proeliabantur cum dracone et draco pugnabat et angeli eius (Rev 12:7 VUO) et non valuerunt neque locus inventus est eorum amplius in caelo (Rev 12:8 VUO) et proiectus est draco ille magnus serpens antiquus qui vocatur Diabolus et Satanas qui seducit universum orbem proiectus est in terram et angeli eius cum illo missi sunt (Rev 12:9 VUO)

Then war broke out in heaven; Michael and his angels battled against the dragon. The dragon and its angels fought back, but they did not prevail and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth, and its angels were thrown down with it.

There are several Scripture passages in which references are made to the creation myths about subduing the Leviathan, the Behemoth, Rahab, and the Dragon(s) (or the Great Monsters of the Deep) and interpreting them in light of the necessity of subduing the Dragon of the Revelation to John, particularly Revelation 11:19 -- 13:18, and also the Beasts. The Dragon for John of Patmos represents a return to chaos, whereas the Woman clothed with the Sun gives birth to the Messiah who defeats the Dragon to bring back order, resulting in a new heaven and a new earth. The Archangel Michael warred with the Dragon in heaven, but since the Dragon and his angels were cast down to earth, it is the Messiah who must now defeat the serpent, the devil, or Satan, and his servants the Beasts of the Apocalypse. The idea seems to be that the Dragon and his angels are attempting to storm the heavens for the apparent goal of wresting the Child to whom the Woman has given birth from the very throne of God, but Michael and his angels battle against them, they lose and are then hurled down to the Earth. Perhaps the Child to whom the Woman or Israel or the Church has given birth is the adult Jesus, ready to battle the Dragon and his angels with the authority that is his by birthright as the Son of God.

Let's take a look at Daniel 7 -- 12:

The Archangel Michael is called "prince" because he is the angel who defends Israel.

BGT uses *archon* in Daniel 10:13 whereas Daniel (TH) uses *strategos*. The Hebrew word

translated "prince" or "archangel" is *sar* and the Greek is either *ho strategos* ("the general" in classical Greek but in the Septuagint "the chief" or "the chief magistrate") or *ho arche* ("the ruler, the chief"), and the latter seems to be the origin of the Greek translation of *sar* in Greek lexicons *ho archangelos* or "archangel." The archangel Michael is the patron-angel or lord-protector of Israel or the chosen people of God. Al Pietersman, in a message to the Internet mailing list CLASSICS-L@LSV.UKY.EDU in a response to the author, writes: "The word 'arxwn' is very popular in the LXX because of its wide semantic range and is used to gloss more than thirty Hebrew terms. In Dan[iel] 10:13, neither Greek version is more correct or incorrect than the other, since both *strategos* and *arxwn* have considerable semantic overlap with Hebrew *sar*" (22 January 2010). In Daniel, Michael fights with the "prince" of Persia, a celestial battle that has either repercussions or is repeated on Earth in either the defeat or victory of the patron nation. In other words, if Michael wins in heaven, Israel wins against Persia on Earth, but, if Michael is defeated in heaven, Israel is defeated on Earth. This idea of national guardian angels is an ancient one that may serve among the Israelites to account for supernatural protectors of other nations who were originally thought of by the henotheistic Israelites as gods and by the later monotheistic Israelites as angels who ultimately served the one God. This is kind of a reverse theurgic system in which the celestial battles of angels directly affect terrestrial battles of nations. Note, however, that Daniel's fast lasted three weeks or 21 days (Daniel 10:2) and the celestial battle with the prince of Persia, waged originally by the speaker/angel of Daniel's vision (probably Gabriel), lasted 21 days also (Daniel 10:13) until Michael came to help and was left battling the prince of the kings of Persia.

The Book of Daniel contains the earliest mention of celestial battles among angels, but later apocalyptic literature seems fascinated with the idea. The passage may be a reflection of

the cosmic myths of other nations like the Canaanites and the Mesopotamians such as the Enuma Elish (The Creation Epic), found in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*,⁶⁵ and the *Ugaritic Baal Epics*.⁶⁶ I think the passage may also reflect the cosmic myths found in the Scripture passages enumerated above. In place of the Masoretic text's "Michael, your prince," Papyrus 967 of the Septuagint reads: "Michael ho aggelos ho strategos ho dynatos ho hestos epi ton huion tou laou," that is, "Michael the angel the powerful general standing over the sons of the people."⁶⁷ The Book of Daniel refers to an angel, probably Gabriel (Daniel 10:5), who refers to Michael in 10:13, 21. For perspective let's take a look at Daniel 10:12-21, 11:1:

"Fear not, Daniel," he [the angel, probably Gabriel] continued; "from the first day you made up your mind to acquire understanding and humble yourself before God, your prayer was heard. Because of it I started out, but the prince of the kingdom of Persia stood in my way for twenty-one days, until finally Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me. I left him there with the prince of the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what shall happen to your people in the days to come; for there is yet a vision concerning those days."

While he was speaking thus to me, I fell forward and kept silent. Then something like a man's hand touched my lips; I opened my mouth and said to the one facing me, "My lord, I was seized with pangs at the vision and I was powerless. How can my lord's servant speak with you, my lord? For now no strength or even breath is left in me." The

⁶⁵ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. Third Edition with Supplement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60 -- 72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 129 -- 142 and John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel. Hermeneia Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 283 -- 284).

⁶⁷ See J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary. The Anchor Bible Series: Volume 38* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 285 AND John J. Collins, *A Commentary on the Book of Daniel. Hermeneia Series* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 362 note 51G.

one who looked like a man touched me again and strengthened me, saying, "Fear not, beloved, you are safe; take courage and be strong." When he spoke to me, I grew strong and said, "Speak, my lord, for you have strengthened me." "Do you know," he asked, "why I have come to you? Soon I must fight the prince of Persia again. When I leave, the prince of Greece will come; but I shall tell you what is written in the truthful book. No one supports me against all these except Michael, your prince, standing as a reinforcement and a bulwark for me.

While the battles with the tutelary angels (guardian angels) of Persia and Greece (the kingdoms of Alexander the Great, the Ptolemies, and the Seleucids leading to the reign of terror of Antiochus IV Epiphanes) form the *ex eventu* historical backdrop of Daniel's visions, who is still theoretically in Babylon, many later interpreters see these chapters and verses as predictions of the ultimate celestial battles between good and evil that will take place also on Earth.

Evidence of a pre-Christian Jewish redactor is that the narrative of the Messiah shows no knowledge of the person, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, describing instead his birth and rapture with nothing in-between.⁶⁸ Generally, a Jewish document sees Israel as the spouse of God, but in the New Testament the true Israel is the spouse of the Messiah.⁶⁹ Charles notes that the idea of the birth and rapture and sudden disappearance of the Messiah is well known to Judaism but not to Christianity.⁷⁰ I think that the text is probably a pagan myth redacted by a

⁶⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*. Translated by K. William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 116 -- 117 AND R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 309.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 308 n. 1.

Jewish editor and then later redacted by a Christian editor. Generally, my view agrees with Charles's conclusion that, while no particular pagan myth can be determined to be the precise origin of the Revelation 12 myth, it seems obvious that the author(s) and/or redactor(s) (whether pre-Christian Jewish or Jewish Christian) drew upon their general knowledge of the various pagan mythic traditions to create a myth of the Messiah, his Mother, and a dragon or serpent and other malevolent figures, the evil angels, who must be defeated by the Messiah so that evil forces do not destroy the community of the myth-maker.

Again, John of Patmos adheres to the idea that the Archangel Michael is the patron of or guardian angel of Israel, and he battles the guardian angels of the Gentile nations, according to, among other passages, Daniel 10-12. However, in I Enoch 20:5 Michael is depicted not as the guardian angel of Israel but rather as the guardian angel of the saints of Israel.⁷¹ Moreover, Michael is specifically depicted as distinctly different from the seventy guardian angels of the Gentiles (Deuteronomy 302:8-9; Ecclus/Sira 17:17; Jubilees 15:31-32), and the reason for this distinction seems to be that Israel is unique among the nations in that it has no specific guardian angel but has the Lord God as its patron because Israel is depicted as under the special protection of Yahweh on the basis of the many Scriptural references to Israel as the Lord's own portion.⁷²

Other passages in Daniel deal with sacrifice in the temple and the sanctuary's defiling and later purification.

⁷¹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Intorduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 323.

⁷² Ibid.

Daniel 8:13-14:

I heard a holy one speaking, and another said to whichever one it was that spoke, "How long shall the events of this vision last concerning the daily sacrifice, the desolating sin which is placed there, the sanctuary, and the trampled host?" He answered him, "For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary shall be purified."

Daniel 9:26-27:

After the sixty-two weeks an anointed shall be cut down
 when he does not possess the city
 and the people of a leader who will come shall destroy the sanctuary.
 Then the end shall come like a torrent;
 until the end there shall be war, the desolation that is decreed.
 For one week he shall make a firm compact with the many;
 Half the week he shall abolish sacrifice and oblation;
 On the temple wing shall be the horrible abomination
 until the ruin that is decreed is poured out upon the horror.

Daniel 11:31:

Armed forces shall move at his command and defile the sanctuary stronghold, abolishing the daily sacrifice and setting up the horrible abomination.

Daniel 12:11:

From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the horrible abomination is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days.

The Old Testament prophecy taken at face value probably refers to the statue with which Antiochus desecrated the Temple in Jerusalem. This is described in 2 Maccabees 6:1-5:

Not long after this the king sent an Athenian senator to force the Jews to abandon the customs of their ancestors and live no longer by the laws of God; also to profane the temple in Jerusalem and dedicate it to Olympian Zeus, and that on Mount Gerizim to Zeus the Hospitable, as the inhabitants of the place requested. This intensified the evil in an intolerable and utterly disgusting way. The Gentiles filled the temple with debauchery and revelry; they amused themselves with prostitutes and had intercourse with women even in the sacred court. They also brought into the temple things that were forbidden, so that the altar was covered with abominable offerings prohibited by the laws.

It is also described in 1 Maccabees 1:54:

On the fifteenth day of the month Chislev, in the year one hundred and forty-five, the king erected the horrible abomination upon the altar of holocausts, and in the surrounding cities of Judah they built pagan altars.

There is a play on words in Hebrew here: Baal shomem means "lord of the heavens" while Shiqqus shomem means "horrible abomination." Hooker writes about the desolating abomination described in Mark 24:15-22; Luke 21:20-24 regarding why Mark uses the expression "Let the reader understand!":

...Mark intends us to understand that what Jesus says is to take place in the temple is both the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy, and also the sign of the arrival of the last things. The person who desecrates the temple is at one level a human being, but he is also the embodiment of evil, who came later to be known as Antichrist. This figure appears in different forms in Jewish and early Christian literature (e.g. the beast in Revelation 13.11ff. and the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2.3) and symbolizes the forces of evil that are to be let loose in the world before the End, in a re-enactment of the myth of creation in which chaos is finally defeated by God and all things set in order.⁷³

Just as the temple prostitutes of Israel's neighbors engaged in sexual intercourse as an abominable imitation of the creation of the universe, so God will defeat the chaotic monsters of sexual impurity at the end of time (Judgement Day).

Revelation 12, for many scholars, is an earlier piece of Jewish literature inserted into the Christian Apocalypse, particularly the part about the war between the Dragon and Michael. What makes some scholars believe that this is earlier Jewish source material is that the Archangel Michael rather than Jesus is battling the dragon. R. H. Charles says:

Battles in the sky are referred to in 2 Macc. v. 2 sq.; Joseph. B.J. vi. 5.3; Sibyll. iii.796-808...but our text refers not to a mere spectacle in the sky but to an actual war. Many of the features in this account we can find in pre-Christian Judaism. i. Thus Michael, who was earlier conceived as the patron angel of Israel as opposed to the patron angels of the Gentiles, came later to be regarded as the guardian of the righteous of all nations -- a conception which set Michael in direct antagonism to Satan, the protagonist of evil. ii.

⁷³ Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: Black's New Testament Commentaries* (London: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 315.

Michael's greatest struggle was to take place in the last days on behalf of Israel. If this expectation is combined with the preceding, the conflict of Michael and Satan is to come to a climax in the last days. iii. According to Jewish tradition Satan was cast down from heaven in the beginning of time, but according to a widely attested belief he had still access to heaven. The fusion of these two beliefs could readily issue in the eschatological expectation that Satan was to be cast down from heaven in the last times, and, if we take the evidence of i. and ii. into account, his great angelic opponent was to be Michael.⁷⁴

While Gunkel suggests that Revelation 4 – 11 is originally a Jewish composition, the same author also claims that 12-22 is also a stand-alone example of Jewish apocalyptic literature written after A.D. 60.⁷⁵ The general consensus among scholars is that Revelation is composed entirely by John of Patmos who nevertheless used other oral sources as well as written sources and that John may have redacted the text himself more than once, as many authors often do later in life. The complete text of Revelation is, I believe from reading Gunkel's book, based on the style of older Jewish writings such as Ezekiel in which chapters 25 – 32 depict a series of woes against Israel followed by woes against the nations opposed to Israel;⁷⁶ however, Yarbrow Collins denies that the first woes of Revelation are necessarily directed against Israel, although she concedes woes are directed against Babylon/Rome.⁷⁷ Revelation 12 is an abrupt transition from the trumpets to scrolls and a battle between a woman and a dragon, another indication that it is an insertion or an interpolation from an earlier Jewish source. Furthermore, the battle between

⁷⁴ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 323.

⁷⁵ Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, translated by K William Whitney Jr. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 115 -- 180.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Adela Yarbrow Collins, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary edited by Raymond Brown et al.* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1008.

Michael and the Dragon describes the casting of Satan to earth, probably based on Isaiah 14 and later developed in 2 *Enoch* and the *Life of Adam and Eve*. Moreover, the battle describes Michael as a heavenly warrior in a way reminiscent of Daniel 10 and his fight with the Prince of Greece and in the Qumran *War Scroll* and his fight with Belial. Thus, it seems that Jewish mythical depictions of Michael are the source of this passage. Indeed, in reference in Revelation 12:4 R.H. Charles says:

These words refer to a war in heaven between the good angels and Satan and his angels, and it is implied that the latter were cast down to earth, where already the woman is supposed to be, and that it was not till then that the woman brought forth her child. Then in xii.7 sqq. a second war in heaven is recounted. This second was intended by our author to be understood as Satan storming heaven in pursuit of the child. Thus xii.4 would refer to the primeval war in heaven when Satan was hurled down from his first abode to earth, and xii.7 sqq. to Satan's final attempt to storm heaven, and his final overthrow after the birth of the child. The story is told in symbolic language. The birth of the child marks the end of Satan's power in heaven. With this idea we might compare our Lord's language, Luke x.18,...But originally xii.4 and xii. 7 sqq. were doublets, and referred to one and the same war in heaven. xii.7-9 had originally no reference whatever to the child, nor were Michael and his angels in the least conscious that they were fighting on His behalf, nor is it anywhere stated that the dragon was overthrown because of his enmity to the child.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Intorduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 319 -- 320.

Behind this casting down of the stars Gunkel (*Schopfung*, 387) would discover an astrological myth, which accounted for the gap in the starry heaven. In the present context this subject of a war in heaven is rehandled in xii.7-10, 12.⁷⁹

So, is this passage the original rebellion of Satan or the first century rebellion of Satan in which he attempts to destroy his enemy, the Messiah, holy offspring of the Woman Israel or the Woman Church? R.H. Charles suggests that Michael intervenes in the course of events when Israel is in greatest need of rescue from its enemies, and this idea is reflected in Daniel 12:1, I Enoch 90:14, and later in the Assumption of Moses 10:2. Charles writes:

Once more we find in 2 Enoch xxix.4-5 and in the Book of Adam and Eve i.6. (Malan's transl.) the statement that Satan once attempted to set his throne on an equality with that of God, and was thereupon hurled down from heaven. But alongside this tradition there existed the belief that Satan had still his place in heaven: cf. Job i.6, 7; Zech. iii.1 sqq.; I Enoch xl. 7 (Eph. i.3, 10, ii.6, iii.10, vi.12; Asc. Isa. vii.9 sqq.; 2 Enoch vii.1). The existence of these two views in Judaism naturally led to their fusion in an eschatological expectation, such as we find in our text, according to which Satan is to be cast down from heaven by Michael in the first of the last great final struggles between the Kingdom of God and Satan. With this conception we might compare the spiritual form given to it by our Lord in Luke x.18,...[NAB translation: "Jesus said, 'I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power "to tread upon serpents" and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you.'"...]...and John

⁷⁹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 319 -- 320.

xii.31,...[NAB translation: "Now is the time of judgment on this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out."].⁸⁰

The idea seems to be that evil as a force has been stripped of its power when the Dragon is hurled to the earth and its angels along with it. Satan will be conquered because his power and expanse of power have been limited to the mundane so that his former glory as an angel of light serving God has been stripped from him so that he appears in the world as naked evil. Satan may be attempting to restore himself to his former glory at God's side, but he is ultimately thwarted by the rightful heir to the throne, the Woman's Son. In fact, the Woman's Son is launching a counterattack on God's enemy, Satan, and the forces of his angels, so that the battle is now moved to the celestial sphere. In this celestial battle of the good angels versus the bad angels in which the Captain of the good angels is Michael and the Captain of the bad angels is the Dragon. Unfortunately for the Dragon, his scheme unraveled when he and his bad angels were hurled out of heaven down to the earth. This would be the Dragon's last gasp before he was permanently cast out of heaven. The Dragon would be trapped on earth until the day when he would descend even further down into the depths of the earth. Charles continues:

To the cosmological myth referred to above there are parallels in the Persian mythology where Ahriman in the beginning of the world's history storms heaven and is hurled down, Bund. iii.II, 26; and in those of the Manichaeans, Mandaeans, and Greeks.

But in the Persian religion we find not only the cosmological myth but also this eschatological expectation. In the last days there was to be war in heaven, Ahuramazda and the Amshaspands were to contend with Angra Mainyu and his followers and

⁸⁰ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 321 -- 323.

overcome and destroy both him and the serpent Gikihar (see Boklen, *Verwandschaft d. jud. -- Christlichen mit d. Parsischen Eschatologie*, 125 sqq.).⁸¹

Interestingly, the Greek LXX translates the Hebrew word Satan with the word *diabolos*, where we get the word devil, so the two words are synonymous in Revelation. Now let's consider the word Satanas and the phrase *ho ophis ho archaios* (the ancient serpent) because the two concepts are actually very different from each other.⁸² The Satan and the ancient serpent are clearly a reference to Genesis 3:1 who tempted Eve to eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Charles says:

The serpent in this passage was distinct from the rest of the animal creation. It stood upright apparently (see note in my edition on *Jub. iii. 23*): it possessed supernatural knowledge - the secret of the tree - which none but God besides knew: it was opposed to God and calumniated Him. These facts point to a mythological element in the background, and that the serpent was originally a demon of a serpentlike form and hostile to God and man.

That supernatural beings had such a form was believed among the Semites, Egyptians, Greeks, Indians, and others. (See Gunkel on Gen. iii. 1-5.)

The word Satan,...,is of purely Semitic origin. Satan appears as a distinct superhuman personality only in three passages in the O.T., Zech. iii.; Job i.6; I Chron. xxi.I. In the earlier he is completely subject to Yahweh, and appears among "the sons of God" in Job, though he is regarded as distinct from them, Job i.6. (325)

⁸¹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Intorduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 324.

⁸² Ibid., 325.

Since the word diabolos is the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew satan,⁸³ let's take a look at these passages. First, Zechariah 3:1-2:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, while Satan stood at his right hand to accuse him. And the angel of the LORD said to Satan, "May the LORD rebuke you, Satan; may the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand snatched from the fire?"

This scene depicts the high priest supernaturally present at the divine court where the Satan, the Adversary, the one who accuses human beings before God, stood at the high priest's right hand side to accuse him, while the angel of the LORD is apparently there to defend the high priest by asking the LORD to rebuke the Satan.⁸⁴ Next, Job 1:6-7:

One day, when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, Satan also came among them. And the LORD said to Satan, "Whence do you come?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "From roaming the earth and patrolling it."

Satan goes on to make a bet with God about Job, and God accepts the bet. Here the Satan is not seen as evil per se but as asking a fundamentally important question: Do human beings serve God for the sake of love for God or for our own selfish interests and wrongful desires? The scene in heaven depicts Yahweh anthropomorphically as if he were an Asian king holding court while sitting on his throne and while his servants present him with news of the people of his kingdom. The king asks his servant the Adversary or prosecuting attorney what he thinks about

⁸³ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 325.

⁸⁴ Aelred Cody, O.S.B., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* edited by Raymond E. Brown, S.S. and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J. and Rold E. Murphy, O. Carm., (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 354 -- 355.

his servant Job who is a *yashar*, a righteous man, and the Satan replies that the only reason Job is righteous is because the king has granted him practically everything he desires. Take the rewards of devotion away from Job, and the Satan predicts that Job will curse his king to his face. Again, God accepts the bet, and the story moves on from there. Finally, we have 1 Chronicles 21:1:

A satan rose up against Israel, and he enticed David into taking a census of Israel. David therefore said to Joab and to the other generals of the arm, "Go, find out the number of the Israelites from Beer-sheba to Dan, and report back to me that I may know their number."

Here a satan, still not a proper name, is depicted as an evil spirit or an evil angel or demon whose purpose is to tempt human beings into committing evil acts or sinning against God. Thus, this particular satan tempts David to conduct a census of the people, which in this passage is described as an act against the will of God. This reflects a change in the postexilic Jewish community's attitude towards God: God is no longer the cause of all things (including evil) but instead is the cause only of good things. Compare Wisdom 2:23-24: "For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it." Here the text depicts the devil as causing the evil of death since the devil tempts human beings to do evil, sin, or commit wrongdoing. If there were no adversary, human beings perhaps would not have sinned, since God tempts no one: "Immense is the wisdom of the LORD; he is mighty in power, and all-seeing. The eyes of God see all he has made; he understands man's every deed. No man does he command to sin, to none does he give strength for lies" (Ecclus/Sira 15:18-20). This is echoed in James: "No one experiencing temptation should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God is not

subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one. Rather, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire conceives and brings forth sin, and when sin reaches maturity it gives birth to death" (1:13-15). In Revelation 12 Satan or the Devil or the ancient serpent or the Dragon is definitely evil and seen as waging war against God and de facto against the people of God, the Woman or Israel or the Church and her offspring.

Revelation 12:10-12

καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγουσαν, Ἄρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, ὅτι ἐβλήθη ὁ κατήγορ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν, ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτοὺς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός. (Rev 12:10 GNT) καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου. (Rev 12:11 GNT) διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, [οἱ] οὐρανοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες. οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν, εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει. (Rev 12:12 GNT)

et audiavi vocem magnam in caelo dicentem nunc facta est salus et virtus et regnum Dei nostri et potestas Christi eius quia proiectus est accusator fratrum nostrorum qui accusabat illos ante conspectum Dei nostri die ac nocte (Rev 12:10 VUO) et ipsi vicerunt illum propter sanguinem agni et propter verbum testimonii sui et non dilexerunt animam suam usque ad mortem (Rev 12:11 VUO) propterea laetamini caeli et qui habitatis in eis vae terrae et mari quia descendit diabolus ad vos habens iram magnam sciens quod modicum tempus habet (Rev 12:12 VUO)

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:
 "Now have salvation and power come,
 and the kingdom of our God
 and the authority of his Anointed.
 For the accuser of our brothers is cast out,
 who accuses them before our God day and night.
 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb
 and by the word of their testimony;
 love for life did not deter them from death.
 Therefore, rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them.

But woe to you, earth and sea,
 for the Devil has come down to you in great fury,
 for he knows he has but a short time."

After Satan is doomed to an existence below the sky he so strongly desired and aspired towards recovering in his own wicked way, the Exalted Christ demonstrates the power and sovereignty of the Lord who has defeated the Dragon through the authority of the Anointed and the blood of the Lamb, which alone robs the Dragon of his power in his ostensible battle with Michael. In other words, Michael has no power except what is granted him by God and his Messiah. Satan moves boldly from being the accuser of Job to being the accuser and primary adversary of the Catholic Church, which must stand as a pillar of truth and a bulwark against evil.

When death is swallowed up in victory, which is an older translation of salvation, the word of the testimony of the witnesses and their love for life that did not deter them from death grant to the Church the eternal vigilance of the saints empowered by the Spirit. In the Church Militant, however, Satan is now an even bigger problem than ever. The very Cross of Christ is the main reason for the triumph of the martyrs. Indeed, the blood of Christ is instrumental in effecting his defeat of the Dragon and his minions; and this blood reconciles humanity with God, unlike the blood of Abel which cried out from the soil to God for vengeance.⁸⁵ Christians must mix their own sufferings with the sufferings of Christ so that the Body of Christ becomes strong, speaking more eloquently of the unity of the Church with true victory or salvation found in the individual work and martyrdom of those who yet cry out to God not for vengeance but for justice. Those who cannot give up their lives for Christ demonstrate their lack of faith. Now that

⁸⁵ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Note and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 156.

the earth is the battlefield of Satan, God and his Messiah now tabernacle in heaven as they prepare for the continuing war. While the earth is now the domain of the Dragon, the text makes clear that the abyss is Satan's second-to-last destination while the lake of fire or pool of fire will be his ultimate destination along with the Beasts and false prophet of the Apocalypse:

The Devil who had led them astray was thrown into the pool of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were. Next I saw a large white throne and the one who was sitting on it. The earth and the sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. I saw the dead, the great and the lowly, standing before the throne, and scrolls were opened. Then another scroll was opened, the book of life. The dead were judged according to their deeds, by what was written in the scrolls. The sea gave up its dead; then Death and Hades gave up their dead. All the dead were judged according to their deeds. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the pool of fire. (This pool of fire is the second death.) Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the pool of fire. (Revelation 20:10-15)

The point of the passage is that evil will be conquered and destroyed and be no more a threat to human beings. Neither Satan nor any of his angels will ever torment human beings again or tempt them to disobey God and sin. Humanity will be one with God in a way that God planned from the beginning of creation. The Devil is thus in hurry because he knows he does not have much time before the eschaton. Does the Dragon really think he can win? Does he think he can really defeat the Lord? Or does he know that only by God's allowance can he thwart God's will and wreak havoc on earth? We do not know the mind of the Devil, "but we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16b). The earth is only the *skene*, the scene in which Satan has wrought

his evil and will continue to do so until the end of time. Humans are only actors playing on the stage of the universe, while Satan has vastly increased his zeal for spreading his evil that spans the cosmos because, rather than wallow in self pity, the Dragon sees his exile from heaven as a great opportunity to do on earth what he could not accomplish in the divine realm. Moreover, he knows he has a limited opportunity because his time is limited, so he plans to do as much damage to the human psyche as he can before his ultimate demise. This is why humans are encouraged to be vigilant and awake and test the spirits, for the time of our resistance to the forces of evil are just as limited as the Dragon's, but God is on our side.

Revelation 12:13-14

Καὶ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενά.

(Rev 12:13 GNT) Καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπως τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρόν, καὶ καιροὺς, καὶ ἥμισυ καιροῦ, ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφεως. (Rev 12:14 BYZ)

et postquam vidit draco quod proiectus est in terram persecutus est mulierem quae peperit masculum (Rev 12:13 VUO) et datae sunt mulieri duae alae aquilae magnae ut volaret in desertum in locum suum ubi alitur per tempus et tempora et dimidium temporis a facie serpentis (Rev 12:14 VUO)

When the dragon saw that it had been thrown down to the earth, it pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly to her place in the desert, where, far from the serpent, she was taken care of for a year, two years, and a half-year.

The story of the Dragon's fall is continued from 12:9, and the ancient serpent flaunts his reputation as "the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made" (Genesis 3:1) by demonstrating that, despite his evil disposition, bad-tempered, vicious, and fierce mind, he is what might be called an evil genius because he shrewdly recognizes that his expulsion from the divine realm is permanent yet looks upon his exile as an opportunity, not to attack the Son who is now safely ensconced in heaven at the right hand of God, but to harm the Son indirectly by pursuing the Woman who had give him birth for the purpose of destroying her and thus thwarting the Son's plans to bring the Church into harmony with the will of God so that the children of the Woman who is Mother of the Church may eat of the Tree of Life and live forever.⁸⁶ The serpent obviously thought he had thwarted God's plan for human beings when he tempted Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, thus denying human beings their birthright as children of God to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life and hence live forever. A Jewish legend is that Satan loved God too much and that the ancient serpent hated human beings because God ordered the Devil to serve human beings when he really wanted to serve God, although he was really full of pride and wanted Adam, the image of God, to worship him, Satan, because, according to "Life of Adam and Eve," Satan said to the Archangel Michael: "I am prior to him in creation; before he was made, I was already made. He ought to worship me."⁸⁷ James H. Charlesworth notes in "Life of Adam and Eve":

Satan's fall is a widely known legend...which may have arisen as a Midrash on Isa 14:12-15. It is reflected in 2En 29:4f.; 31:3; GBart 4.51-55, vol. 1, p. 500; numerous rabbinic writings; the NT...Tertullian, *de Patientia* 5; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.40.3;

⁸⁶ Cf. Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Note and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 157.

⁸⁷ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 2* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 262.

Augustine, *de Genesi ad Literam* XI.18; and the Koran, suras 2, 7, 15, 17, 18, 20, and 38.

The account in the *Vita* could well be among the earliest witnesses to this legend.⁸⁸

Thus, the ancient serpent wanted human beings to fall from grace as vengeance for his own fall from grace.

The reference to "a year, two years, and a half-year" seems to be simply repeating in slightly different language the number "twelve hundred and sixty days" in Revelation 12:6. Charles suggests that John of Patmos has mistranslated Daniel 7:25 and 12:7 because he translates a dual as though it were a plural. The reason the woman must be protected in the wilderness for a year, two years, and a half-year is that the Dragon will be allowed to exercise sovereignty over the Earth for that period of time.⁸⁹ That the Woman is given "the two wings of the great eagle" refers to Exodus 19:2b-4: "While Israel was encamped here in front of the mountain, Moses went up the mountain to God. Then the LORD called to him and said, 'Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob; tell the Israelites: You have seen for yourselves how I treated the Egyptians and how I bore you up on eagle wings and brought you here to myself.'" Also, Deuteronomy 32:10-11 speaks of the eagle's wings and the desert or wilderness: "He found them in the wilderness, a wasteland of howling desert. He shielded them and cared for them, guarding them as the apple of his eye. As an eagle incites its nestlings forth by hovering over its brood, So he spread his wings to receive them and bore them up on his pinions." Thus, Israel is always under the special protection of God who is likened to an eagle caring for her young.

⁸⁸ James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume 2* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 262.

⁸⁹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 330.

Revelation 12:15-16

καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ὄφις ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὀπίσω τῆς γυναικὸς ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ. (Rev 12:15 BGT) καὶ ἐβοήθησεν ἡ γῆ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἤνοιξεν ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ κατέπιεν τὸν ποταμὸν ὃν ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ. (Rev 12:16 BGT)

et misit serpens ex ore suo post mulierem aquam tamquam flumen ut eam faceret trahi a flumine (Rev 12:15 VUO) et adiuvit terra mulierem et aperuit terra os suum et absorbit flumen quod misit draco de ore suo (Rev 12:16 VUO)

The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current. But the earth helped the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the flood that the dragon spewed out of its mouth.

The serpent or the Dragon is seen as a creature of chaos, a monster from the depths of the primordial ocean that is capable of spewing forth the waters of chaos that are swirling above the vault of the sky. Even though God promised in Genesis that the world would never again be destroyed by flood waters, the serpent is nevertheless able to cause mayhem in a local flood designed to drown the escaping Woman. Many Scripture passages refer to this ability of the watery serpent to cause destruction with a flood including, as mentioned earlier, Psalm 74:13-15;

Genesis 1:21-22:

God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth."

Psalms 148:7

Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deep waters;

Ezekiel 29:3:

Say this to him: Thus says the Lord GOD: See! I am coming at you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, Great crouching monster amidst your Niles: Who Say, "The Niles are mine; it is I who made them!" I will put hooks in your jaws and make the fish of your Niles stick to your scales, then draw you up from the midst of your Niles along with all the fish of your Niles sticking to your scales.

Ecclesiasticus/Sirach 43:24-26:

His is the plan that calms the deep, and plants the islands in the sea.

Those who go down to the sea tell part of its story,

and when we hear them we are thunderstruck;

In it are his creatures, stupendous, amazing, all kinds of life,

and the monsters of the deep.

Isaiah 30:6-7:

Through the distressed and troubled land of the lioness and roaring lion,

of the viper and flying saraph,

They carry their riches on the backs of asses and their treasures on the humps of camels

To a people good for nothing, to Egypt whose help is futile and vain.

Therefore I call her 'Rahab quelled.'"

NAB note on Isaiah 30:7: "Rahab: Egypt, here as elsewhere (cf Ps 87, 4), is compared to the stormy, impetuous sea monster (cf Is 51, 9; Jb 26, 12; Ps 89, 11), which yet, when asked for aid by Judah, becomes silent, quelled."

Other references to dragon(s) in the Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 32:33:

Their wine is the venom of dragons and the cruel poison of cobras.

Nehemiah 2:13:

"I rode out at night by the Valley Gate, passed by the Dragon Spring, and came to the Dung Gate, observing how the walls of Jerusalem lay in ruins and its gates had been eaten out by fire."

Esther 1:1 (A:4-11):

"This was his dream. There was noise and tumult, thunder and earthquake-confusion upon the earth. Two great dragons came on, both poised for combat. They uttered a mighty cry, and at their cry every nation prepared for war, to fight against the race of the just. It was a dark and gloomy day. Tribulation and distress, evil and great confusion, lay upon the earth. The whole race of the just were dismayed with fear of the evils to come upon them, and were at the point of destruction. Then they cried out to God, and as they cried, there appeared to come forth a great river, a flood of water from a little

spring. The light of the sun broke forth; the lowly were exalted and they devoured the nobles. Having seen this dream and what God intended to do, Mordecai awoke. He kept it in mind, and tried in every way, until night, to understand its meaning."

Esther 10:3 (F:4):

"The two dragons are myself and Haman.

Psalms 91:13

"You shall tread upon the asp and the viper,
trample the lion and the dragon."

Jeremiah 51:34:

"He has consumed me, routed me, (Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon,) he has left me as an empty vessel; He has swallowed me like a dragon: filled his belly with my delights, and cast me out."

Daniel 14:23-28:

"There was a great dragon which the Babylonians worshiped. 'Look!' said the king to Daniel, 'you cannot deny that this is a living god, so adore it.' But Daniel answered, 'I adore the Lord, my God, for he is the living God. Give me permission, O king, and I will kill this dragon without sword or club.' 'I give you permission,' the king said. Then Daniel took some pitch, fat, and hair; these he boiled together and made into cakes. He put them into the mouth of the dragon, and when the dragon ate them, he burst asunder. 'This,' he said, 'is what you worshiped.' When the Babylonians heard this, they

were angry and turned against the king. 'The king has become a Jew,' they said; 'he has destroyed Bel, killed the dragon, and put the priests to death.'"

Ecclus/Sira 25:15:

With a dragon or a lion I would rather dwell than live with an evil woman.

Revelation 16:13:

"I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come from the mouth of the dragon,
from the mouth of the beast, and from the mouth of the false prophet."

Revelation 20:2-3:

"He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil or Satan,
and tied it up for a thousand years and threw it into the abyss, which he
locked over it and sealed, so that it could no longer lead the nations astray
until the thousand years are completed. After this, it is to be released for
a short time."

Revelation 12 is probably based on two sources: one, a conflict between a pregnant woman and a dragon (verses 1 – 6 and 13 – 17), and two, a battle in heaven between Michael and the dragon (verses 7 – 12) who is the serpent of Genesis identified with Satan (Adela Yarbro Collins, in the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, suggests that verses 10 – 12 were composed as a hymn by John of Patmos himself).⁹⁰ This is reminiscent of Mark's style of interrupting one story with another and then concluding the original story, like the meat between two pieces of bread in a sandwich. Originally, the relationship between Michael and the Dragon was adversarial in the

⁹⁰ Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* edited by Raymond Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1008.

heavenly court: Satan functions as the prosecuting attorney who accuses human beings before God, while Michael functions as the defense attorney who defends human beings, particularly the people of Israel, before God.⁹¹ That Michael and the Dragon or Satan engage in a celestial battle appears to be a later development, perhaps after the Babylonian Exile. Harrington and Yarbro Collins also suggest that the story is reminiscent of the travails associated with the birth of the god Apollo and his slaying of the dragon (or Python), but this may be due to common myths of the Middle East, such as the Flood epic in Gilgamesh and Genesis.⁹² Many myths speak of the birth of a child who is destined to rule the world, and Judaism is no exception. The text could also be a reference to Micah 4:10: "Writhe in pain, grow faint, O daughter Zion, like a woman in travail" and Micah 5:1-4:

And you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times. (Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, And the rest of his brethren shall return to the children of Israel.) He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the LORD, in the majestic name of the LORD, his God; And they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

Rabbinic literature often frequently speaks of the "birth pangs of the messiah" as well, another indication of the text's non-Christian Jewish origin. Indeed, R.H. Charles writes in favor of the two source theory for Revelation 12: Either there are two independent visions or two different

⁹¹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 327.

⁹² Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Apocalypse (Revelation)" in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* edited by Raymond Brown et al. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 1008 AND Wilfrid J. Harrington, O.P., and Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., eds., *Revelation. Sacra Pagina Series Volume 16* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 229.

sources, and Charles favors the latter.⁹³ He claims that the first editor took 12:6 and 12:7-16, which are parallel stories, concluding the first story with 12:6 and then following this conclusion with the war in heaven et al. Here is Charles's description of the former view of Gunkel (Schopfung, 274 sqq.), the two independent visions, of how the text was redacted:

The first writer had concluded the section with xii. 6. He was acquainted with xii.7-16, but owing to his aversion to the mythological element he not only abbreviated the account of the flight of the woman but he also left out wholly the narrative of the overthrow of the Dragon. A reviser subsequently added the origin account, xii.7-16. But why then, it may be asked, did he not excise the disturbing xii.6? Wellhausen (*Anal. d. Offenb. John.* 18 sqq.) finds that xii.1-6 and xii.7-14 are parallel accounts, which terminate in a common conclusion 12.15-17. Both are incomplete, and they must both be used to supplement each other. xii.10-12 and certain clauses in xii.3, 5, 9, 17 are added by the redactor, with a view to giving a Christian character to the whole. The rest is purely Jewish. From a combination of xii.1-6 and xii.7-9, 13-14 he recovers the original contents of the narrative. The Dragon warred in heaven and was overcome and cast down to the earth. There he assails the woman who had borne the male child. The child was thereupon rapt into heaven and the woman, i.e., the elite of the community, fled into the wilderness, where she stayed for 3 1/2 years. The Dragon then attacks the rest of her seed in Jerusalem which had not fled into the wilderness. The conclusion of the

⁹³ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 306.

Apocalypse which dealt with the returning Messiah is lost. We have, therefore, in xii. a Pharisaic counterblast to the Zelotic oracle in xi. 1-2.⁹⁴

Charles goes on to conclude that this scenario is unlikely since an attempt to reconstruct the two parallel accounts is specious because he is trying to make the text into a circumlocution of the Marduk myth, which Gunkel also reconstructs with deleterious results as the work of reconstruction is also specious as it is based on no authoritative tradition.⁹⁵ Then Charles evaluates the two different sources theory thus:

J. Weiss (87 sq.) is of the opinion that we have here two distinct sources. The first dealt with the birth of the Messiah, His persecution by the Dragon, the flight and persecution of the woman, and the persecution of the remaining children of the woman. The second dealt with the strife of Michael with the Dragon on heaven: the casting down of the Dragon and his reign on earth.

In support of this hypothesis (88 sq.) Weiss urges that the war with the Dragon has no connection of any kind with the persecution of the Child. The angels are not conscious of contending on behalf of the Messiah, and it is nowhere said that the Dragon is overthrown as an enemy of the Messiah. If the war with the Dragon and the enmity between the Dragon and the messiah had been conceived in relation with each other, then the final strife between the Messiah and the Dragon must have been recounted at the

⁹⁴ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 306.

⁹⁵ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 307.

close. And the fact that this is not so is a proof that the war with the Dragon had originally nothing to do with the Messiah, His birth and persecution.⁹⁶

Charles goes on to say that Weiss's theory seems to be flawed since the evidence that 12:7-12 was originally part of a Christian Apocalypse suggests that the text itself contradicts the theory because the verses in question "in form and idiom" signify "a Semitic origin...and in matter to a Jewish."⁹⁷ In my opinion Charles does not seem to take into consideration in this specific passage that the authors of all the books of the New Testament except Luke-Acts were Jewish, so it is unsurprising that the Jewish Christian John of Patmos would tend to use Jewish language and idioms when writing in Greek. Charles suggests that Revelation 12:7-10, 12 is originally Jewish (in the sense of being pre-Christian Jewish) and 12:1-5, 13-17 Jewish Christian in origin. He relates several pagan narratives that may be the source for the Jewish and Jewish Christian authors or redactors.⁹⁸ He claims that a religion known as Zend may be the origin of the Babylonian Marduk myth because the Zend story of Ahriman, the evil spirit, waged war on heaven with his demons until they were ultimately thrown down to the earth and ultimately into hell.⁹⁹ In the Babylonian tale, the god Marduk overcomes Tiamat of the primeval chaos, but this story in turn is similar to the Greek tales of the battles among the Titans.¹⁰⁰ Thus, Charles concludes that the original source was neither pre-Christian Jewish nor Christian but was redacted by either a Jewish editor or a Christian editor or both, though he thinks a pre-Christian Jew is more likely because 12:1-5, 13-17 shows distinct signs of Hebraisms indicating either a Hebrew source or an Aramaic source or perhaps both. However, it could also be a Jewish

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 307.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 307 -- 308.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 308.

Christian original, but he thinks this unlikely.¹⁰¹ Charles concludes that we are "wholly in the dark" about the "original meaning of this verse."¹⁰² He claims that "In the war between land and water mythological features are discoverable which have no longer any significance in their present connection."¹⁰³ (331). He suggests that, if the source of this passage is Christian, then it may refer to early Christians fleeing from Jerusalem after the destruction of the Temple, but, if the source is Jewish, then it may refer to the upper class of Yavneh where the classification of the books of the Hebrew Bible as canonized Scripture took place.¹⁰⁴ At any rate, depicting evil as making valiant attempts to sweep away the righteous in a flood of chaos waters is an idea familiar to the writers of the Psalms.¹⁰⁵ However, though designed to sweep the Woman away in the evil flood, it relates well in the eyes of the first century audience who were suffering persecution at the hands of Nero and Domitian as well as Decius and Diocletian.¹⁰⁶ Since God separated the earth from water, it seems to follow in the eyes of the Seer that the earth is supernaturally capable of swallowing the waters of chaos so that the Woman can escape destruction (i.e., the Christians can escape persecution of the authorities).

Revelation 12:17-18

καὶ ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ. (Rev 12:17 BGT) Καὶ ἐστάθην ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης (Rev 13:1 BYZ)

¹⁰¹ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Intorduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 308.

¹⁰² Ibid., 331.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 331.

¹⁰⁴ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Intorduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 331.

¹⁰⁵ Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Note and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 159.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 159.

et iratus est draco in mulierem et abiit facere proelium cum reliquis de semine eius qui custodiunt mandata Dei et habent testimonium Iesu (Rev 12:17 VUO) et stetit super harenam maris (Rev 12:18 or 13:1 VUO)

Then the dragon became angry with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and bear witness to Jesus. It took its position on the sand of the sea.

Now the Dragon is furious with the Woman because she has escaped his immediate attempt to destroy her, so, rather than continue to fight her specifically, he goes on to wage war with her seed, that is, her children. In other words, if the Woman is both Mary and the Church, and the Church is the Body of Christ, then Mary is the Mother of the Church, and Mary's children are now continually at war with the evil Dragon until the return of Christ at the parousia. While the Dragon cannot destroy the Church, he can still make life uncomfortable for Christians and indeed make them martyrs. Waging war on the Woman's seed is doubtless a reference to Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel." Later Christian theology saw in this verse a prophetic oracle concerning Christ so that her offspring, who is primarily Jesus, will strike at the serpent's head, presumably to kill him or subdue him. That the serpent is the devil is attested in Wisdom 2:24: "But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it." Also, John 8:44: "You belong to your father the devil and you willingly carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks in character, because he is a liar and the father of lies." Finally, of course, Revelation 12:9 and 20:2-3: "He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, which is the Devil or Satan, and tied it up for a thousand

years and threw it into the abyss, which he locked over it and sealed, so that it could no longer lead the nations astray until the thousand years are completed. After this, it is to be released for a short time." This may also be a reference to 1 John 3:8: "Whoever sins belongs to the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. Indeed, the Son of God was revealed to destroy the works of the devil." So, at the end of time, God will finally destroy the Devil by casting him into the pool of fire along with "the beast and the false prophet" and "cowards, the unfaithful, the depraved, murderers, the unchaste, sorcerers, idol-worshipers, and deceivers of every sort" (see Revelation 20:10-15 and 21:8).

Christians are both brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ and children of his Mother (Mary and the Church) as in Romans 8:29: "For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers." The seed of the Woman is not restricted to Christ but rather encompasses all those who belong to Christ as in Galatians 3:18: "For if the inheritance comes from the law, it is no longer from a promise; but God bestowed it on Abraham through a promise" and Galatians 3:29: "And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise." These passages refute the notion that God confers his blessings and the fruit of his promises only upon those who obey the commandments as a reward for their obedience. Salvation in Christ is not a reward for obedience but rather a gift bestowed by grace.

The children of Mary, then, are primarily the children of God because they are those who "keep the commandments of God" (14:12) and "bear witness to Jesus" (Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 19:10; 20:4). In essence, if one does not keep the commandments, one's faith is dead, and grace does not operate through dead faith, so that keepers of the commandments and witnesses to Jesus are children of Mary (and the Church) and children of God because grace operates through their

faith. The spiritual warriors who fight against the Dragon are the valiant who keep the commandments and bear witness to Jesus in the face of persecution by the non-Christian Jews and by the pagan Romans. Obedience to the law is null with faith in the Son of God, demonstrated through obedience to the commandments and witness to Jesus, and the Dragon is battling those who are distinguished by both, as Saint Bede points out: "mandata Dei in fide Jesu Christi custodire, hoc est pugnare cum diabolo, et ipsum provocare in praelium."¹⁰⁷ The expression "the rest of the Woman's seed" or "the rest of her offspring" means both Gentile Christians and Jewish Christians or the general Church who persevere in the fight against the Dragon. Yes, Gentile Christians too are children of Israel, and they are counted in the Church.

As for the final verse, Revelation 12:18, "It took its position on the sand of the sea," we should remember that Patmos is an island and that John is doubtless looking at the sea so that God inspires him to see the world in the stark terms of sea (chaos) and land (the Promised Land spiritualized as the Kingdom of God). The Dragon stands on the seashore, ready to make use of chaos water to torment the people of the Land or the Kingdom of God. This passage forms a transition point to chapter 13 in which the beast of the Apocalypse rises up from the watery chaos of the abyss. However, it is the Dragon of chaos which controls the beast against whom the Church, the children of Mary and the children of God, must fight. Christians will not be spared the tribulations but must face trials including severe persecution, captivity, public floggings, exile (as John is exiled on Patmos), and martyrdom. Charles writes: "Martyrdom...is inevitable for those who keep God's commandments and the faith of Jesus."¹⁰⁸ The strange

¹⁰⁷ Qtd. in Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of Saint John: The Greek Text with Introduction Note and Indices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 160.

¹⁰⁸ R.H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Revelation of Saint John with Introduction, Notes, and Indices also The Greek Text and English Translation. The International Critical Commentary. Volumes I and II* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1920), 334.

notion, alien to the Bible, that Christians will be raptured before the tribulations violates the Scriptural insistence that the Church must suffer. In the last days, Christians will not be spared suffering but rather will be strengthened by it. The Church's sufferings on Earth are but a reflection of the supernatural struggle among celestial powers.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Cf. T.F. Glasson, *The Revelation of Saint John: the Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1965), 77.

CHAPTER 3

General Comments on Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18

Is it possible to imagine an apocalypse that is not centered on human beings who inhabit the Earth? Are all visions of TEOTWAWKI (the end of the world as we know it) necessarily the end of the material realm or the end of the spiritual realm as well? Or is the end of things, material and spiritual, simply a restructuring of existence to a different and hopefully better reality? What is reality? What is real? Is the material real and the spiritual unreal or is the material unreal and the spiritual real? Berkeley, a philosopher, maintains that only the spiritual realm is real and the material universe as we know it is merely a shadowy reflection of the real spiritual realm. Is it possible to imagine an apocalypse that is, rather than human-centered, a destruction and restructuring of a universe that is indifferent to human survival? To what extent are ideas about how TEOTWAWKI will occur biased in favor of one religious view rather than focused on the survival of human beings of a variety of religious views? In what ways might the apocalyptic end of the universe entail the destruction and extinction of humanity so that the universe benefits from the restructuring in favor of less aggressive and violent species? What does the apocalypse say about what it means to be human and children of God? What are the ethical, philosophical, and moral implications of God's restructuring of the universe in a way that destroys everything followed by a new matrix?

Apocalyptic literature often explores alternative social-political structures but structures extrapolated from visions of divine utopias based on power controlled by God that reflects contemporary concerns about social interaction and personal development. Apocalyptic

literature portrays war and human conflict in ways that reflect humanity's continuous struggle with evil and continuous powerful desire to control our own destiny on not only our own terms but on God's terms. Michael's struggle with the evil dragon is a reflection of Israel's struggle with Babylon or Rome and perhaps is also a reflection of the Church's struggle to maintain its authority in a world that tends to reject divine authority in favor of a matrix of evil devoid of moral power and the ethical dimensions of civilization. Let us consider the various futures these apocalyptic visions suggest that will be better than the "real" world that produced them. What do the characteristics of these various futures tell us about the historical contexts that produced them? The imaginative representations of future utopias function to define humanity in terms of good people slated for salvation and evil people slated for damnation.

The various worlds or universes of apocalyptic literature intersect with the "real" world or universe in at least two very different ways: through extrapolation and through metaphor. Just as we are to extrapolate truths from the parables of Jesus, so we are to extrapolate truths from the apocalyptic literature of the Bible and other sources. Indeed, the first chapters of Genesis and other sections of the Bible may be regarded as a restructuring of the universe after a previous apocalypse. Evidence for this idea is that the very first line of Genesis 1 begins *in medias res* (in the middle of things). The narrative worlds and structures of these texts sometimes estrange readers from conventional ideas about human nature and appropriate moral behavior. Remember that a text can be about both human nature and divine nature in the sense that it is the nature of God to create and the nature of human beings to both create and destroy and then rebuild. Perhaps this desire to rebuild is a reflection of the nature of God who restructures and rebuilds the universe at the Apocalypse.

In discussing the stories in the Bible we must be aware that these texts often construct, support, critique, question, and subvert various ideas about God's nature and behavior in response to human nature and behavior. Another view of this idea is that a text can be about human behavior as obedience or disobedience to divine power with God as the ruler who does not simply command but also guides, supports, spiritually enhances, and refreshes our souls. Keep in mind that apocalyptic stories are a form of religious literature distinct from history, collections of moral precepts, laws, and rules of ceremonies, but can easily be construed as didactic fiction. In studying these texts, we cannot divorce ourselves from their historical context nor confine ourselves only to content, plot and character analysis, and laws, ethical rules, and cultic methods of worship. We must analyze these texts with consideration of how each type of literature, whether gospel, law, history, poetry, or didactic fiction including perhaps apocalyptic literature, work to effect their purpose. The representations of various characters function in many stories to raise questions about how to define humanity and human behavior in stark terms of good and evil or function as considerations of the effects of divine intervention on human life.

In apocalyptic literature we must examine the function of estrangement in which we explain the results of the pursuit of goals by characters who are estranged from their communities because of their unique relationship to God. Remember that estrangement of characters in a narrative ultimately has a profound effect on the readers who may see themselves in a similar light. In other words, readers may see themselves as estranged from society like the characters because of their faith in God and the visions God has sent them. The way in which a story is related -- as an apocalyptic vision, for example -- often helps to develop the meaning of the narrative from the point of view of believers. We may conclude that apocalyptic literature is

often written for believers, not unbelievers or outsiders, so that the faithful experience comfort and a sense of fulfillment in their chosen status. The choice of point of view in these narratives contributes heartily to the readers' experience and comprehension of the events occurring in the tales. For example, in the Revelation to John, John receives divine visions which we experience with him even while knowing that we are the hearers in a way that is remarkably similar to the original hearers in early Christian churches. Similarly, Daniel's visions are described so that we the intended hearers experience these visions with the prophet so that the reader/hearer is an important component of what is said and how it is said. It is significant in an experiential way that we are the intended audience of these descriptions of apocalyptic visions because the narrative would probably be very different if outsiders were the intended recipient of these visionary experiences.

In terms of the writer-reader relationship, the text often embraces enthusiastically the emotional and political complexity of interpersonal relationships, the fascination with fantastic apocalyptic imagery, and the art of alternate states of consciousness resulting from otherworldly visions of inexplicable horror and unspeakable beauty. The divergent stylistic norms and literary values of apocalyptic literature reflect not only the historical context in which these texts were written but also reflect the views of the God of these apocalyptic visions so that every generation has something new to learn from them.

Apocalyptic literature portrays the cultural fallout of societal restructuring resulting from wars, whether civil wars, revolutionary wars, domestic insurrections, or invasions, not to mention divine wars in the spiritual realm and their impact on the material realm. The extreme polarization of good and evil in these tales leads the readers to believe that the complex intersection between expressions of divine power and expressions of human power including

military might results in transcendental or transhumanist philosophies the effects of which transform the social landscapes of every culture experiencing these texts. These apocalyptic restructured worlds transmogrify the cultures of every generation so that the readers in every generation intersect with the visionary and the vision with a profound impact on the complex relationship between writer and reader.

Every story needs a hero, and apocalyptic literature is no exception to this rule, although the nature of the role of the hero in apocalyptic tales is different from other hero narratives in that the apocalyptic hero's destiny is to reveal information, although like the typical adventure hero the apocalyptic hero also overcomes obstacles to rescue the oppressed, defeat evil, restore honor, and be instrumental in establishing the true and pure kingdom of God. Michael is the hero who defeats the evil dragon, although it is the Woman of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 who is protected so that she can not only give birth to the messiah-hero but also so that she can nurture her offspring who serve to continue to oppose the evil dragon. The Woman is thus a symbol not only of the Church but also the Mother of God, although she is more than just a symbol but a reflection of the reality of God and his power expressed in her divine Son. In a real sense the symbol of the Woman is the reality of the Woman as Mother of God and Mother of the children of God.

All literary texts can be construed as cultural artifacts that are reflections and products of their cultural milieu and their socio-historical origins, whether of the original writers or of later editors. Many apocalyptic texts are more inward looking or introverted than outward looking or extraverted in the sense that they cause readers to look outside themselves at their universe and how to improve it or aid in God's restructuring of it, or they cause readers to look inside themselves at their inner universe and how to improve it or aid in God's restructuring of it. In

some restricted ways apocalyptic literature can be construed as a kind of social satire in which the oppressive figures (like the Babylonians or Romans) are derided and the true believers (the Chosen People, the Church, the People of God) are extolled. Reading apocalyptic literature involves certain protocols with respect to narrative structure, characterization, plot, conflict, resolution, and narrative purpose. The narrative structure of Revelation 11:19 -- 13:18 reflects the passions and desires of the early Christian communities suffering oppression but also experiencing feelings of exhilaration in the belief in God's ultimate triumph and the resurrection of the dead and restoration of honor to the martyrs and faithful departed. Readers experience the apocalyptic texts as if we are the visionaries seeing the disturbing yet exhilarating visions of the triumph of God over evil. This is exemplified in not only Michael's triumph over Satan but also in the Woman's triumph over Satan and hence the Messiah's triumph over Satan in which the Messiah empowers the Church to also triumph over Satan, defeat of the Beast and the second Beast, and effect the restoration of the Kingdom of God.

Apocalyptic literature often explores systems of belief that are religious, philosophical, and political all in one. The Apocalypse of John is no exception to this rule. The Book of Revelation has had an impact on the ideologies of various people in various historical contexts and in various cultures around the world. Our opinions and beliefs are often hooked up to historical social systems no longer extant in other eras including today's era. When opposing ideologies impact the ideologies of a specific society, such as Rome's ideologies on the ideologies of the Jews of first century Israel or the ideologies of the Jews of first century Israel later on the ideologies of the Roman Empire, social structures often change along with various belief structures including religious, philosophical, and political beliefs. Every society has "conservatives" who wish to maintain the status quo or salvage or recuperate prior beliefs and

"radicals" or "revolutionaries" who wish not simply to subvert or supersede previous beliefs but to improve society either with new ideas or new interpretations of old ideas. In some ways, most of us are a little bit conservative and a little bit radical or revolutionary. Every teenager knows this, and every parent of teenagers knows this. The trick with apocalyptic literature is not necessarily to preserve the old at the expense of the new but rather to comprehend what the text is trying to say in a way that is innovative without denigrating or disparaging traditional values. Another major trick is to experience from the apocalyptic texts an understanding of ourselves within the context of social connections, social values, and social behavior in ways that define and constrain the values of our various cultures (and America is certainly a composite of many cultures, although some maintain it is possible to speak of certain aspects of culture that are uniquely American, and the same might be said of Western culture).

Apocalyptic literature imagines people who are social constructs yet estranged from the culture in which they were raised because the characters in apocalyptic literature, whether the Woman of Revelation 11:19 -- 12:18 or Michael or the Dragon or the Messiah or God, are reflections of the culture of the writer. The Revelation to John in these sections expresses concerns of the time and place in which they were written -- the late first century A.D. on the island of Patmos, a prison island where the writer is in exile. John the Divine's concerns about the continuation of the chosen people of God in their various communities of the first century are reflected in his work, which is a kind of underground resistance literature designed both to comfort Christians and rouse the chosen people to action against the forces of evil. One might argue that significant differences from the "real world" are present in the text including bizarre imagery that some would argue should not be interpreted literally because the thematic importance of those images has repercussions for the readers of not only John's era but also for

the readers of every era. The text might lead us to conclude that our battles against the evil Dragon and evil in general are spiritual in the sense perhaps intended by Ephesians 6:12-17:

For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens.

Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all (the) flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

One might say that apocalyptic literature is a literature in conversation with itself because each text reflects back to either apocalypses or other religious literature written in earlier eras. So we must be in conversation with apocalyptic literature in our generation in order to determine what such literature means to us and how it affects us and our modern literature. Apocalyptic literature does not limit but rather enhances and empowers our conceptions of the nature of the realms it depicts and incorporates ideas about the future into the very fabric of the texts. The representation of the future demands interpretation in ways that reflect our own visions of the future. Each work of apocalyptic literature is similar in that it depicts often bizarre imagery and contains a warning to the reader against evil and for good, but is different in things such as word choice, literary style, chronological ordering of the text, and often information about the future in the fabric of the textual worlds it describes. John the Divine, for example, has bizarre imagery like the Woman clothed with the Sun, standing on the moon, and surrounded by a crown of twelve stars, an archangel battling a Dragon at the dawn of time, a strange pursuit of the Woman

by the Dragon, a Beast and a second Beast controlling the world but ultimately defeated, and a war at the end of time to end all wars. The readers are warned to shun evil and to persist in good works because in the end the readers and hearers will be rewarded with eternal life. The word choices the author of Revelation makes include the usage of common words to depict strange and fantastic visions, a literary style featuring then current events in fantastic imagery that the first readers/hearers would have understood perhaps better than we do today, and an ordering of the chronology of the text in terms of an oppressive-now and a liberated-future which is woven in the fabric of first century Israel with future threads on a loom of triumph of the chosen people of God. The second Beast will be defeated, the Beast will be defeated, the Dragon will be defeated, and good will triumph over evil.

A perennial theme of apocalyptic literature is the encounter between human beings and God or divine beings like angels or saints. An encounter with God or angels or saints reveals not only the inner quality of the human soul but also a human being's cultural upbringing and expectations and values so that the confrontation produces within the human being is a change in that inner quality of the soul, a challenge to that human being's cultural upbringing and expectations, and a revaluing of that human being's religious beliefs and ethical behavior. When Abraham encounters God in the Old Testament, he learns to value obedience to God over his valuation of his son, Isaac. When disciples encounter Jesus, they learn to value his teachings and their relationship to God as more important than their relationships with their families and other people in their culture and society so that the inner quality of their soul changes positively. When John the Divine encounters Jesus, he learns to value the visions he receives in ways that alter his consciousness and his understanding of the nature of reality and his status as one of the chosen people of God. While we the readers are supposed to learn the importance of the

transformative quality of our relationship with God, we also learn that discipleship often comes at a cost, sometimes the cost of our own lives. Radical discipleship reveals unlimited goals of ultimate sacrifice coupled with ultimate salvation and eternal life: "But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:13 and Mark 13:13b). The message of Jesus throughout the New Testament and particularly Revelation is to persevere because the ultimate reward of eternal life is great and God will not compromise his principles.

One of the triumphs of Christianity is to transform our encounters with alien cultures (in theory if not in practice) into an embracing of people as children of God and not with a xenophobic reaction resulting in rejection of other cultures and their destruction in favor of the new Christian matrix. Have we succeeded? Often, no. Often we have radically altered other cultures by conquering them and destroying them, but this isn't necessarily the way of Christianity, even though some Christians have engaged in this practice. The cultures we encounter may develop from their Christianization the idea that their culture is just as valuable as the culture that brought them Christianity. For example, black slaves in the Old South gleaned from the Exodus the idea of escaping to freedom as an action that is God's will. Indeed, many people of many different cultures have gleaned from Scriptures the idea that we are all free and valuable in the eyes of God and do not deserve to be oppressed because God wants us to be free and autonomous: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendant, heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:28-29). This idea is also exemplified in the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life,

liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

America as a people united in the cause of freedom openly acknowledges in the very Declaration which explains our freedom and unalienable rights in terms of the God who grants us those rights in the belief that only God has the authority to take those rights away from us while also believing that God's promises are eternal so that the Lord never takes those rights away from us. Our rights are an intrinsic part of our being as children of God. Thomas Jefferson offered the opinion that in every generation the tree of liberty must be watered with the blood of patriots, and this sentiment is a reflection of the Apocalypse in which John's visions affirm that God's plans for us will entail struggles to maintain our faith in Jesus and our autonomy on the world stage and indeed in the universe.

CHAPTER 4

Conclusion: The Revelation to John as Underground Resistance Literature

The Revelation to John is underground resistance literature. Lewis writes:

Apocalyptic theology has often been accused of being otherworldly and contemptuous of human concerns. At its core, however, apocalyptic eschatology is a theology of hope in the face of persecution, oppression, and alienation. As such, it makes immediate and absolute demands on the individual: The world as we know it is transitory and ephemeral, the time is short, and one must begin living as if the renewed world has already been born.”¹¹⁰

Apocalyptic eschatology is the major source of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, his theology about himself and his self-fulfilling prophecies. The stories and visions of apocalyptic literature in general are hopeful about the possibilities of communication across boundaries of differences that are cultural, racial, sexual, and creedal. What makes someone a child of God is not race, culture, or sex, but the Creed in which we affirm our faith in the Trinitarian God. It's our job to promote the Creed to effect the positive transformation of people and not the negative destruction of people. Apocalyptic literature contains statements of what it means to be human and not animal, believer and not unbeliever, created by God and not artificial constructs, intelligent creatures with souls and not machines of flesh. Paul tells us:

¹¹⁰ Scott M. Lewis, *What Are They Saying about New Testament Apocalyptic?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 6.

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some do, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by all, shown to be a letter of Christ administered by us, written not in ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets that are hearts of flesh. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. (2 Corinthians 3:1-4)

The purpose of the Book of Revelation to transform our minds and spirits to conform to the Spirit of God by revealing to us the nature of God, our salvation in Christ, and the desires of our hearts for liberation and the peace that comes only from the Lord Jesus. Indeed, it can be argued that all the books of the Bible exemplify apocalyptic literature inasmuch as the ultimate goal is to achieve an eternal relationship with God.

Apocalypticism is the literature of change, and each work treats change as either evil (when Satan triumphs) or good (when God triumphs). Among the types of changes that apocalyptic literature not simply describes but causes are evolutionary changes (positive changes of which God approves), devolutionary changes (negative changes of which God disapproves), educational changes (those not only positively indoctrinated in the Christian faith but also those positively exposed to many ideas of many cultures that cause appreciation of the reader's own culture and society), and innovative changes (those that transform us into new creations and the universe as well). For example, Isaiah 65:17-19a tells us:

Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create; for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight; I will rejoice in Jerusalem and exult in my people.

Also, 2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us:

So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

Also, Galatians 6:15:

For neither does circumcision mean anything, nor does uncircumcision, but only a new creation.

Finally, Colossians 3:9:

Stop lying to one another, since you have taken off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed, for knowledge, in the image of its creator.

Indeed, the Lord wishes us to be transformed not only by becoming new creations but also by singing new songs as in Revelation 4:3a:

They were singing (what seemed to be) a new hymn before the throne, before the four living creatures and the elders.

Also, Judith 16:1:

Strike up the instruments, a song to my God with timbrels, chant to the Lord with cymbals; Sing to him a new song, exalt and acclaim his name.

Also, Psalm 33:3:

Sing to God a new song; skillfully play with joyful chant.

Also, Psalm 40:4:

And put a new song in my mouth, a hymn to our God. Many shall look on in awe and they shall trust in the LORD.

Also, Psalm 96:1:

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

Also, Psalm 98:1:

I sing a new song to the LORD, who has done marvelous deeds, Whose right hand and holy arm have won the victory.

Also, 144:9:

O God, a new song I will sing to you; on a ten-stringed lyre I will play for you.

Also, Psalm 149:1:

Hallelujah! Sing to the LORD a new song, a hymn in the assembly of the faithful.

Finally, Isaiah 42:10:

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise from the end of the earth: Let the sea and what fills it resound, the coastlands, and those who dwell in them.

Change is inevitable. Change is the only constant. Nature is depicted as being in a continuous state of change in the Scriptures and in apocalyptic literature in general. Because the roles of Christian believers and their identities as the chosen people of God are transformed by God, their roles are in some sense dependent on historical and social contexts, yet apocalyptic literature

achieves remarkable temporally universal appeal by manipulating and rearranging these contexts so that God not only transforms the universe but every aspect of it including the souls of human beings.

There are many different ways to conceive of the spacetime continuum and our individual journeys through it, and the ramifications of each journey are that the universe is independently affected and changed by it. We continuously travel forward in time, so we are all time travelers. The universe may be eternal in a temporal sense yet finite in a physical sense, so that the end may not mean the end of time so much as the end of the universe as we know it because God will transform it by his illimitable power according to his goodness. The end of time does not mean the end of eternity. Or will there simply be no end to time but only our perception of time? That we perceive time differently than God does serve to resolve many of the paradoxes and chronological conundrums associated with God's omniscience in the sense that he sees all of time in one ever-present now.

The future evolution of the human race will doubtless occur with deference to the power of God so that future social structures will enhance our relationship with God and our relationships to our fellow human beings in terms of personal spiritual development. What are found in eschatological tales are narratives of survival and of life in the denouement that explore not only the scientific and physiological changes but also the psychological, sociological, theological, and spiritual ramifications and sometimes unexpected repercussions of the end of the universe and the echoes and aftershocks in the afterglow of the apocalypse.¹¹¹ John of Patmos answers the question: What will happen to human beings after the end of the universe? Apocalyptic literature portrays war and human conflict in ways that are similar to mainstream

¹¹¹ John Joseph Adams, ed., *Wastelands: Stories of the Apocalypse* (San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2008), 2.

literature in that humans in war stories are fraught with internal conflict as well as external conflict, fraught with foibles as well as spiritual courage, and fraught with desires for an end to conflict and the triumph of good over evil. Apocalyptic literature may be construed as being more about spiritual conflict and spiritual resolution of conflict in the inward minds of spiritual warriors. Thus, the apocalypse may be not simply a story about the material conflict at the end of the universe but the spiritual conflict at the end of the universe. One may ask if there is a difference, and the answer might be that God alone knows how to resolve both material conflict and spiritual conflict because every material conflict entails spiritual conflict in the minds of material warriors and spiritual warriors -- and all material warriors have spiritual conflict as well. The story of Jesus in the Book of Revelation is one of material warfare in terms of spiritual warfare. That is what makes it underground resistance literature.

Appendix

The Star of Bethlehem

In an article recently about the Star of Bethlehem by Richard Losch, the author claims that the Star of Bethlehem is really an astrological configuration portending the birth of a king. We know that Jesus was definitely not born on 25 December because that was simply a convenient date to replace the Roman feast of the Saturnalia and the Norse celebration of Yule, both of which occur at the winter solstice in December. The article claims that Jesus was actually born sometime around 6 B.C. The Scriptures attest that Jesus was born in the spring time when the ewes were lambing. In Palestine sheep were kept indoors during winter and summer because grass didn't grow in winter and dried up in the hot summer. Thus, because the Bible says that the sheep were in the fields ("the shepherds were abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night") the birth of Jesus took place in the spring or fall. Astronomers like Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, and Johannes Kepler all tried to account for the Star of Bethlehem, but none of them succeeded. It was not a comet because in ancient times comets were considered very important signs and were recorded carefully, but there are no records of a comet being seen at the time Jesus was born. It was not a planet because the ancients knew of all the planets except Neptune and Pluto (even though Pluto has lately been sent to the little planets table), so the ancients would not have been surprised to see any planet. It was not likely a conjunction of planets either nor a nova or supernova because novas were also considered important omens and were carefully observed and recorded and no one that we know of recorded a nova around the time Jesus was born. Many scholars used to think that the Jews held astrology in contempt, at least until the Kabbalah movement in the middle ages, but recent archaeological

discoveries disclose horoscopes of important persons among the Jewish people that go back many years before the birth of Christ. If you look for the Star of Bethlehem in astrology rather than astronomy, the answer is obvious, according to Losch. Even though Christians reject astrology as a pagan superstitious system, that does not mean that God did not use astrology for his own reasons and purposes. God probably used the astrology of the pagan Gentiles to effect the manifestation of Christ to both the Jews and the Gentiles, so that the Magi came to worship the newborn King of Kings, and the Magi were probably Zoroastrian astrologers who may have been sent by the King of Persia.

In 6 B.C. the Magi would have observed a sign in the heavens that we now know as the Star of Bethlehem. Aries (the Ram) is the first sign of the Zodiac, representing the time between 21 March and 19 April, and was the birth sign of Herod the Great. The planet Jupiter astrologically represents kings, and in April of 6 B.C., Jupiter entered Aries, portending an important royal birth in Herod's kingdom. Saturn and the Sun also both portend a royal birth. On 17 April of 6 B.C. Saturn and the Sun both entered Aries as well. Either Jupiter entering Aries or Saturn and the Sun entering Aries would have portended an important royal birth, but all three together indicated the birth of an extremely powerful prince who would eventually rule not only peoples but also other kings (the King of Kings). On the night of 17 April occurred an eclipse of the moon visible in Persia, which is significant because it portended the end of a kingdom and beginning of a new kingdom. Moreover, the following day Jupiter (the planet of kings) rose as the morning star. Such a configuration would have been extremely unusual and would have doubtless excited the Persian astrologers greatly. So, the author Losch concludes that Jesus Christ was born on the night of 17 April in 6 B.C. In other words, the king of Persia

sent the Magi to go to Judaea to offer King Herod greetings and gifts, although they did not actually follow a star per se; rather, they followed what the "star" meant.

The gift of gold from the Magi symbolized the reign of the newborn King of Kings; frankincense, burned in the Temple, stood for his divine nature; and myrrh, an embalming spice, symbolized his eventual death. In more ordinary terms, however, the gifts were normally given to newborn royalty or wealthy babies -- for example, a silver rattle or a golden baby spoon, while the frankincense was burned in the nurseries of the wealthy to mask the smell from swaddling clothes (diapers), and myrrh, which was used as an antiseptic and antibiotic and as an ointment to treat diaper-rash, and was also dissolved in wine to produce a medicinal solution for the common infant ailments of croup and colic. Because frankincense and myrrh were very expensive and extremely rare in Persia (they came from the resins of trees growing only in the southern portions of Arabia and had to be imported) the gifts probably came from an ancient Arab kingdom called Nabatea the capital of which was Petra, a place mentioned in the Bible. Interestingly, one of Herod's wives, Areta, was the sister of Aretas IV, the King of Nabatea. Petra was a major shipping point for frankincense and myrrh, so the Magi probably simply bought the spices along the way and brought them to the newborn king.¹¹²

¹¹² Richard Losch, Powerpoint slideshow sent to the author of this thesis on 24 December 2009.

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