

A Quick Overview of Salvation History

With the end of Revelation 11, came the end of time. Now, Revelation 12-14 takes us back in time. The mix of symbols is daunting and can be over thought as the passage was meant to be heard more than studied. What is evoked is as important as the details revealed on closer scrutiny. Here is an overview of the action:

The dragon's attempt to devour the child is foiled (12:1-6)

The dragon is defeated (12:7-12)

The dragon persecutes the woman on Earth (12:13-16)

The beast from the sea arises and attempts to conquer the saints (12:17-13:10)

The beast from the earth promotes emperor worship (13:11-18)

Real salvation through the lamb and its mark (14:1-5)

Real judgment with God the creator and judge (14:6-20)

In this section of Revelation, we get a very different view of Jesus' birth, this time from a cosmological perspective. There are several clues to symbols in the chapter. John tells us in 12:9 that the dragon is Satan. The child is identified as "the one to rule the nations with a rod of iron." This quotation from Psalm 2:9 was seen as a prophecy of the Messiah by Jews and so identifies the child with Jesus.

Note that this passage also gives the scriptural rationale for artistic depictions of Mary standing on a sliver of the moon with twelve stars around her head. But is this more Roman Catholic understanding of the woman in Revelation as Mary correct? Perhaps, but that might also be too limiting. Historically, the woman giving birth in Revelation has been interpreted as 1) Israel bringing forth the Messiah, 2) Mary giving birth to Jesus, 3) the



Christian Church in which Satan is attacking the church itself. It is also possible that John's vision is intentionally evoking more than one of these responses.

In any case, it is natural for some Christians to see Mary in the woman giving birth. The danger of the child being devoured by Satan has long reminded Christians of Jesus' narrow

escape when Herod ordered the slaughter of the children under two years of age in and around Bethlehem.

After failing to thwart God's plans on Earth, Satan battles the Archangel Michael in the heavens. The dragon's defeat in heaven leaves persecution on Earth as Satan continues to attempt to harm the woman's offspring.

The False Trinity—the Dragon is joined by two demonic agents (one from the sea and one from the land) to complete an unholy Trinity. The beast rising from the sea is given power by the dragon, much as the power of oppressive governments through all time are seen as having their source in Evil itself, Satan. The beast that comes from the Earth is a false prophet (Revelation 16:13) and has two horns like a sheep, but speaks like a dragon.

The Mark of the Beast—For John, it is clear which team one is on. There are no anonymous Christians as they bear the mark of the lamb on their forehead. This was literally true then as now as those being baptized had the sign of the cross made on the foreheads with oil. In contrast to this mark, the beast also had his own mark in the number 666. This number can certainly be seen as a fullness of incompleteness if you will. Six is the penultimate or next to last. As one number short of the completion of seven, it signified a lack of wholeness and three sixes is even more a number of nonfulfillment.

Gematria—Number Codes

To dig deeper, there can also be a number code contained within the number 666. Jews often wrote numbers using the letters of their alphabet, which has 22 letters. (Five of these letters developed distinct forms when used at the ends of words, which gives us 27 letters in all.) If we use the first nine letters for the numbers 1 to 9, the next nine for the numbers 10 to 90, and the last nine for the numbers 100 to 900, we can write anything from 1 to 999 in at most three characters. If we put a tick mark beside a letter to multiply its value by 1000, then with repeated tick marks we can write any positive whole number. The Greeks used a similar system, found in the writings of Archimedes.

This number code is called *gematria* (from the Greek word for "geometry," here understood to mean mathematics in general). Using this code, 666 has long been identified with Nero, whose name in Hebrew "Neron Caesar" totals 666. As the first Roman Emperor to persecute Christians, he may stand for all others who similarly persecute Christ's church.

Additional Numbers of the Beast—Not to take things too seriously, here are few additional numbers of the Beast: \$665.95 is the Retail price of the Beast, \$656.66 is the WalMart price of the Beast, 1010011010 is the Binary of the Beast, 668 is the Next-door neighbor of the Beast and 25.806975 is the Square root of the Beast.