

Revelation as Trilogy
The Two Powers
Chapter 12: The Hero is Born

Introduction: This chapter is based on an ancient story with which the original listeners would be familiar. The story has three characters and three scenes. The three characters are a woman, a child and a dragon. The storyline is that the dragon will attempt to overthrow the true king but is doomed to be killed by the child messiah whose birth the dragon tries to prevent. The child messiah will miraculously escape until he is able to defeat the dragon. This is the story of Apollo whose mother, Leto, who when ready to give birth is pursued by the dragon, Python who sought to kill her. Only on the island of Delos is the mother welcomed where she gives birth to her child. Apollo finally kills Python. In Egyptian myth we have Isis, the pregnant mother of Horus, who is pursued by Set the red dragon. Ultimately Isis kills the dragon. This story is retold with Christ as the child, the people of God playing the woman, and Satan playing the dragon.

The Story: much discussion has been given to the identity of the woman. The Catholic church has wanted to associate her with Mary; however, it appears that she is symbolic of a larger community; perhaps all the people of God including both Israel and the church. The images of sun and moon let the readers know that this woman is intimately connected with God and the Lamb because she shares in the very light of creation. The twelve stars connect her to the Twelve Tribes/Apostles. Her birth pangs are a sign that the deliverer is about to be born.

The great red dragon now appears upon the scene. The dragon is powerful and to be feared. Its intent is to destroy the child before he can even be born, in order to draw all power to itself. Though the story will tell us that the dragon is Satan, the first readers would also have probably associated the dragon with Satan's earthly allies (Greece/Rome) because of its heads and crowns (a series of ten kings) and horns (power). These two empires had attempted to crush and destroy the people of God; first the Jews and then the church. An Biblical example would be the story of Herod killing the children while looking for the messiah.

The story continues with the dragon unable to stop the birth of the messiah, who will rightly rule all the nations. The child will rule because he is the true King and heir to the throne, which he is given in verse five. The woman, on the other hand, escapes to the wilderness where she is protected. This image draws upon the wilderness wanderings of the people of God during the Exodus, Jesus' wilderness struggle after his baptism and the present moment in which the people of God are surviving persecution because of God's protection. The scene now shifts to heaven itself where the angel Michael defeats the dragon/Satan and his angelic allies. This battle is a reminder that the persecution of God's people is conducted in both the physical and spiritual realms.

At this juncture we once again hear from heaven that the "accuser" (meaning Satan) has lost because of the blood of the Lamb and the faithfulness of the people; who, even in the face of death refused to recant their testimony, meaning their belief in Jesus the Messiah. The result however is that Satan is on the loose and is coming to destroy the church (the dragon pursuing the woman with water/chaos). Even so, God and God's creation (the wings and the earth swallowing of the water) will protect the people even as Satan stands with the chaos that has been unleashed (Satan standing on the shore, representing the waters of chaos).

Reflection: This story draws upon mythic imagery in order to retell the story of the work of Jesus. It does so in order to give the people hope amid persecution. We might imagine how this same mythic story, offered in the Star Wars saga (among many others) offers people hope again and again that there is a savior who will set the people free from the Evil Empire. For the early church, this story would have worked in the same way, offering them hope because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Questions:

1. What stories/movies give you hope?
2. Where do you see people today attempting to portray themselves as the savior in this story?
3. Why is it important that we focus on Jesus alone as messiah?