



LIFE GROUP NOTES

Studies in Revelation



Ch12-13.

The woman, the dragon and the beasts

Warm Up

Once whilst in a pub, my dad pointed to a man standing at the bar and said to me, "I know that person from somewhere, he's famous. But I can't place him." Have you ever had that experience? Knowing you should know someone, but not being able to figure it out? Share a story.

Background and context

As with most of the chapters in Revelation, these are a real challenge to make sense of. John tells us the woman is a "sign", so she is not a literal person. It is likely she is a combination of two ideas, the faithful believing Israel or Eve, the mother of humanity. Eve's 'seed' will be the serpent crusher (Genesis 3;15). Israel of course, were chosen to be the nation through whom Eve's seed would come. Is it any wonder that Satan, the dragon, wants to destroy her?

John gives us a clue about the ultimate destruction of the dragon. He is finally defeated by God's army of angels in a cosmic battle. Even after defeat, he cannot help his nature and continues to persecute and destroy believers.

The most likely understanding of the two beasts is that they are a symbol of Roman Rule across the world. John has already set out God as the almighty ruler, with a description of His throne room. Here by contrast is the rule of Rome, described as two beasts that seek to make themselves gods in the name of the dragon. John seems to be suggesting that Roman rule was satanic, in direct opposition to the rule of God.

Interestingly, in the year after Emperor Nero's death (AD 69), rumours arose that he had not died of his injuries (suicide. Stabbed in the throat), but had recovered or had been raised from the dead. A small, short lived movement formed with leaders claiming Nero was alive. (A monster with a fatal wound?)


What is John suggesting about people worshipping the dragon? Remember that a succession of Roman emperors declared themselves gods and people were forced to worship them. Other beliefs were pushed out by force, including Christianity.

The final verse of the chapter is famous. The number of the beast. It is most likely to refer to Nero, whose name in Hebrew equalled the number 666. (Hebrew letters also had number value like A=1, B=2). The number is also a parody of the perfect number, 777. The number of wholeness, completeness and spiritual wisdom. Nero and the Roman empire embodied imperfection, corruption and blasphemy.

For Christians, at the time John wrote his letter, a choice had to be made. Worship the Roman emperor and be accepted as a citizen or become socially unacceptable. Research has discovered that in some Roman provinces unless you offered sacrifice to Caesar, you could not enter the market and buy food or trade. Christians faced a stark choice, your livelihood or your integrity.

Was this the 'mark' of the beast John spoke of?

Thinking it through: Main discussion/activity



Read Ch 12-13. *What are the surprising things in the passage? What is new? What don't you really understand? This could be a time to discuss and share reflections and ideas on the passage or watch a Bible project type video that helps explain things.*

1. What clue does John give us in verse 5 about the identity of the woman's child? (see Psalm 2:9)
2. The dragon obviously has significant power. Why does he seek to devour the child?
3. How are the mother and child protected?
4. Is there significance in the imagery of the desert and the time scales described?
5. What event does the image of the child being snatched up to heaven remind us of?
6. **Read v7-12.** Why should these verses encourage us?
7. If the war has taken place in heaven, why are the Lamb's people given credit for the victory instead of Michael and the angels? (v11)
8. What do we learn about the nature of the dragon from v13,15,17?
9. How are God's people under attack today? How can we have hope as we struggle against such evil forces?
10. **Read Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.** What are the similarities and differences?
11. Satan does not want to reveal his true colours, but uses intermediaries to do his dirty work. Who or what are the agents Satan used in the ancient world and today?
12. Why do the people of the world worship the dragon?
13. **Read ch13:5-10.** Why is this a sobering and disturbing passage? Is it true today?
14. The second beast is subordinate to the first one. In what ways do local and national governments perpetuate evil rather than confront it and overcome it?
15. What is the purpose of the "marking" in v16-17?

NB. This is a big study. You might wish to split it into two sessions



Try to leave 15-20 mins to talk about prayer needs of the group and to pray.

We want to encourage the development of prayer, to help everyone grow in confidence in praying. There are many creative ways of praying together: writing prayers, using candles as a focus, reading prayers or praying for each other in pairs.