Birth Pangs of the Messiah

> **Matthew 24:8** "All these *are* the beginning of **sorrows** (ὠδίνων, OdinOn)"

The Greek ὠδῖνες refers to the birth pangs a woman experiences while in labour. Basically, the Jews referred to these by the phrase חבלי דמשיח [1] or חבלו של משיח,[2] literally "the birth pangs of the Messiah." They are not birth pangs that the Messiah himself experiences (a subjective genitive, if you will), but birth pangs that Israel (personified as a woman) experiences which culminate in the "birth" (i.e., coming into the world) of the Messiah (an objective genitive, if you will).

In other words, Israel will experience great distress and tribulation (represented as birth pangs, ὠδῖνες, or חבלים) before the coming of the Messiah into the world. The notion of these birth pangs preceding the Messianic advent originated from the Tanakh.[3] The word for birth-pangs or sorrows occurs in the following places in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version and also in the Greek of Maccabees:

> LXE **2 Kings 19:3** "And they said to him, Thus says Ezekias, This day *is* a day of tribulation, and rebuke, and provocation: for the children are come to the travail-*pangs*, (ὠδίνων) but the mother has no strength".
>
> RSV **4 Maccabees 15:16** "O mother, tried now by more bitter pains than even the birth-pangs (ὠδίνων)you suffered for them!"
>
> LXE **Hosea 9:11** "Ephraim has flown away as a bird; their glories from the birth, and the travail, (ὠδίνων) and the conception".
>
> LXE **Isaiah 66:7** "Before she that travailed brought forth, before the travail-pain (ὠδίνων) came on, she escaped *it* and brought forth a male".
>
> LXE **Ezekiel 7:7** "..the inhabitant of the land: the time is come, the day has drawn nigh, not with tumult, nor with pangs (ὠδίνων)" .

The above references from the LXX demonstrate that the word ὠδίνων is used in connection with national distress or trouble, with the nation depicted as a woman in labour.

A woman in Labour

The woman in labour is Rachel. She is considered one of the matriarchs of Israel (Ruth 4.11) and the Jews regarded her as the mother of all Israel (see Gen. Rab. 71.3). She was the **barren sister** who desired a child and who died in childbirth; with her dying breath[4] she named her child **the son of my sorrow** (Gen 35.18). Rachel is used by Jeremiah to typify the distress of the nation at the time of the looming Babylonian destruction and captivity (removal of her children):

> **Jeremiah 31:15** "Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, *and* bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they *were* not".

Matthew cites this very verse (in Matt 2.18) when he records the events surrounding **the birth of Jesus** and the flight (exile) into Egypt (more on this anon). Moreover, in John 16.20-22, Jesus employs an allusion to Rachel and the "son of my sorrow":

> **John 16:20-22** [20] "Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. [21] A woman when she is in travail **hath sorrow**, (λύπη, lupE) because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world. [22] And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you".

Jesus conflates the **weeping and lamentation** of Jer.31.15 with the **joy** of Isa.51.11, where the same word for sorrow (λύπη, lupE) is employed in the LXX: "For by the help of the Lord they shall return, and come to Sion with joy and everlasting exultation, for praise and joy shall come upon their head: pain, and **grief**, (λύπη, lupE) and groaning, have fled away.

A great wonder in heaven (Rev 12.2)

> "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: [2]And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and **pained** (ὠδίνουσα, Odinousa) to be delivered".

Any first century Jew (or Jewish-Christian) reading these verses would automatically make the association between Rachel, the birth pangs of the messiah and Joseph's dream (Gen 37.9-10). The connections are glaringly obvious to any Jew versed in the Torah. The aspect of the dream that puzzled Joseph's father Jacob was that it included Rachel (who had had died) also bowing down to Joseph. His brethren reacted with extreme hatred and sold him into the bondage of Egypt (a land immersed in a death cult) where Joseph prospered and arranged for the salvation of his family.

We return now to the birth of Jesus and the events that Matthew describes concerning the flight to Egypt, where he cites Jer.31.15 – **Rachel weeping for her children**. This story is known as the "slaughter of the innocents", when Herod the Great attempted to kill the children of Bethlehem to safe guard any claims against his throne. Scholars often treat the story as unhistorical, as a sort of Midrash, but there are grounds for understanding the events as recording actual historical events.

> "He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem (2:16). Only 123 men returned to Bethlehem from the Babylonian deportation (Ezra 2:21), and it appears not to have grown beyond a small village of perhaps a thousand people at the birth of Jesus. Herod's forces kill all the infant boys under the age of two years, which would calculate to between ten to thirty boys. Although this number of infant boys massacred would be a huge loss for the village of Bethlehem, it is not an incident that stands out significantly when seen in the light of other horrific events in Herod's infamous career, and historians would have easily bypassed it. "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning" (2:18). Centuries earlier, Nebuchadnezzar's army had gathered the captives from Judah in the town of Ramah before they were taken into exile to Babylon (Jer. 40:1–2). **Jeremiah depicts Rachel, who is the personification of the mothers of Israel**, mourning for her children as they are being carried away. However, there was hope for their future because God would restore Rachel's children to their own land (31:16–17), and messianic joy would come in the future establishment of the new covenant with Israel (31:31–34)".[5]

Peter Richardson remarks, "Given Herod's long-standing concern for the succession (seven wills, intra-family troubles, sibling rivalries, attempts to undercut his hold on power), rumours of a non-Herodian "king of the Jews" would have enraged him—at least that is the view of the sources behind Matthew's birth story".[6] Richardson also refers to early Christian tradition; "Herod's abominable behaviour is described accurately in the *Testament of Moses* 6:2-6: "An insolent king will succeed them. He will slay the old and the young, and he will not spare. And he will execute judgments on them, just as the Egyptians did."[7] This does not prove the historical accuracy of the Christian tradition of the incident, since it makes only a very general comment on Herod, but it shows how Christians shaped their history to conform to prevailing assessments of Herod".[8] Other scholars have noted intertextual links between Revelation 12 and the Exodus account of the slaughter of Hebrew children by Pharaoh, as well as the wilderness journey and the nation caught up to the throne (Mt Sinai).[9]

There is no doubt that Herod the Great (reign 37–4 BCE) the "temple builder" was a despotic character. Augustus is reported as remarking, "l would rather be Herod's pig than his son",[10] emphasizing the revulsion felt at Herod's treatment of his children. Josephus stated that Herod was so concerned that no one would mourn his death, that he commanded a large group of distinguished men to come to Jericho, and he gave an order that they should be killed at the time of his death so that the displays of grief that he craved would take place.[11] Fortunately for them, Herod's son Archelaus and sister Salome did not carry out this wish.[12] Josephus wrote that Herod's final illness—sometimes named "Herod's Evil" -was excruciating. Based on Josephus' descriptions, one medical expert has diagnosed Herod's cause of death as chronic kidney disease complicated by Fournier's gangrene. Similar symptoms accompanied the death of his grandson Agrippa I in 44 CE. Modern scholars agree Herod suffered throughout his lifetime from depression and paranoia.[13]

A great red Dragon (Rev 12.3)

> "And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great **red** (πυρρός, purrhos) dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads".

The **first time** that πυρρός (purrhos) is encountered in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) is in Genesis:

> [LXE] **Genesis 25:30** "And Esau said to Jacob, Let me taste of that **red** (πυρρός, purrhos) pottage, because I am fainting; therefore his name was called **Edom**".

Esau was the progenitor of the Edomites (Gen 36.1) and the Hebrew Edom (אֱדֹם) is associated with Adam (אָדָם) and means red (red clay?). Therefore, the characters that echo in the background [14] of Revelation 12 are the closely related progenitors -- Rachel, Jacob, Esau and Joseph. Jacob deceived his brother Esau concerning the birthright and later in life was frightened of a looming confrontation with his brother Esau – Jeremiah draws parallels with the looming Babylonian invasion, using birth-pang language:

> **Jeremiah 30:6-7** "Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, **as a woman in travail**, and all faces are turned into paleness? [7] Alas! for that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it: it *is* even the time of **Jacob's trouble**; but he shall be saved out of it".

Jeremiah envisions the time of coming distress in terms of Jacob confronting Esau the Edomite. Herod the Great was an Idumean – a descendant of Esau. He was the second son of Antipater the Idumaean, a high-ranked official under ethnarch Hyrcanus II, and Cypros, a Nabatean. Herod's father was by descent an Edomite whose ancestors had converted to Judaism. Herod was raised as a Jew.

The Herodian dynasty and the church

The early church suffered under the Herodian dynasty. Herod the Great (reigned 37-4 BCE) sought to murder the messiah and slaughtered the innocents in Bethlehem. Herod Antipater (reigned 4 BCE-39 CE) was involved in events that led to the executions of John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. Herod Agrippa (reigned 41–44 CE) had James (the brother of John) murdered:

> **Acts 12:1-3 NLT** "About that time King Herod Agrippa began to persecute some believers in the church. He had the apostle James (John's brother) **killed with a sword**. [3] When Herod saw how much this pleased the Jewish people, he also arrested Peter (This took place during the Passover celebration.)".

This is significant because the only other place that Revelation employs the word red (πυρρός, purrhos) is in the second seal:

> **Revelation 6:4** "And there went out another horse *that was* red (πυρρός, purrhos): and *power* was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they **should kill** one another: and there was given unto **him a great sword**".

James and John were originally disciples of the Baptist and both James and the Baptist were killed by the Herod family. The Baptist was killed by the sword because he condemned Antipater's adultery[15] and James[16] continued to proclaim the Baptist's message: "Ye lust, and have not: **ye kill**, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not" (James 4.2). Moreover, he says, "**Ye adulterers and adulteresses**, know ye not that the **friendship** of the world is enmity with God?" (James 4.4). The mention of friendship is significant for, "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together". The death of Christ sealed the friendship between the former enemies (Luke 23.12). Note particularly the emphasis on **killed with a sword** (beheaded like the Baptist?) rather than stoned (like Stephen). Also note the time-frame (Passover, the seals are bracketed by Passover). There are no historical sources that describe a "Herodian party" within first century Judaism. Most scholars accept that it was a political rather than a religious party but in first century temple Judaism politics and religion went hand in hand.

Kaufmann Kohler states the following in the Jewish Encyclopedia --- "Priestly party under the reign of King Herod and his successors; called by the Rabbis "Boethusians," as adherents of the family of Boethus, whose daughter Mariamne was one of the wives of King Herod, and whose sons were successively made high priests by him. They followed the Sadducees in their opposition to the Pharisees, and were therefore often identified with the former (see Grätz, "Gesch." 4th ed., iii. 2, 693; Boethusians). According to the Gospels, their plot against the life of Jesus was supported by the Pharisees (Mark iii. 6, xii. 13; Matt. xii. 16); wherefore Jesus warned his disciples, saying "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod" (Mark viii. 15; Matt. xvi. 6 has "Pharisees" and "Sadducees"). "Leaven" is explained in Matt. xvi. 12 to mean "teaching," that is, "bad teaching" (comp. "se'or sheba-'isah" = "the leaven in the dough," corresponding to the "ye̱er ha-ra' "; Ber. 17a). This shows that the Herodians represented a religious party. In Luke xii. 1 the Herodians have been omitted altogether, and the Pharisees alone are represented as the enemies of Jesus; and in Luke xx. 19 the scribes and chief priests are mentioned in place of the Pharisees and the Herodians (see also Mark xii. 13; Matt. xxii. 15-16).[17]

To summarise: It seems that we do have "Herodians" as a subset of the Sadducee Priesthood but they were called "Boethusians" (Herodian is therefore a NT description). The Herod's were involved with killing the Baptist, Jesus and James (the brother of John). They were of Edomite (**red**) heritage. Herod the Great even tried to slaughter the "man child" when he was a baby, causing "Rachel to weep".

Seven Crowns

Luke sets the scene of the cosmic conflict as follows:

> **Luke 3:1** "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, [2] Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness".

Luke enumerates **seven** protagonists:

1. Tiberius Caesar
2. Pontius Pilate
3. Herod being tetrarch of Galilee
4. Philip tetrarch of Ituraea
5. Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene
6. Annas and
7. Caiaphas being the high priests
8.

This is the red dragon of Rev 12.3 "a great **red dragon**, having seven heads and ten horns, and **seven crowns** upon his heads". The beast is always the same in that it always has seven heads and ten horns as it is a composite drawn from Daniel's imagery, but here it is depicted with **seven crowns** denoting the kingly and priestly opposition to Jesus and his church, but particularly in the form of the Herod family (red Edomites), client kings of Rome.

The beast mentioned later in Revelation is no longer red but scarlet (κόκκινος, Kokkinos) and therefore only indirectly related.[18] Interestingly, the prophecy in Num 24.17 concerning the "Star out of Jacob" was probably interpreted by the scribes as a threat to Herod's throne (*And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies* v.18) which is why the Bethlehem star required investigation. Ironically, the same prophecy was employed to justify the false messiah Bar Kochba.

The Olivet Prophecy

The Olivet prophecy is directly linked with Revelation 12. The importance of Matt 24.8 has been already noted above but can be expanded with the following allusions:

Matthew 24 & Luke 21	Revelation 12
Luke 21:25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars	**1**And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:
8All these *are* the beginning of sorrows (birth-pangs).	**2**And she being with child cried, travailing in birth
19And woe unto them…	**12** Woe to the inhabiters of the earth…
19….that are with child	**2**…and pained to be delivered.
Luke 21:23…for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people.	**12**…for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath…
22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.	**12**…because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.
Luke 21:12 …they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute *you*	**13**…he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man *child*.
Luke 21:21 Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.	**14** And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

Luke 21 relates to the Christian flight to Pella which occurred during the first revolt.[19] It is undeniable that Revelation 12 is (in the first instance) concerned with the first century church before and during the first Jewish revolt in 70 CE. However, the chapter has an individual and a corporate dimension. The "child" is both Jesus and his church (body). The chapter looks backwards (slaughter of the innocents, death of the Baptist etc) and forwards (siege of Jerusalem) and even further forwards (more on this anon).

Psalm 2 and Revelation 12

Any doubts that we may have about this interpretive reading can be laid to rest with the subliminal interweaving of the messianic Psalm 2 into the last trump of Rev 11 with allusions breaching the chapter division and continuing into the body of Rev 12:

Psalm 2	Revelation 11-12 (Last Trump)
[1] Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing?	[11.18] And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come
[8] Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth *for* thy possession.	[11.15] The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ (anointed)
[8] Ask of me, and I shall give *thee*	[11.18] that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets
[2] the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed	[11.15] and of his Christ (anointed)
[7] Thou *art* my Son;	[12.2] And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered
[7] this day have I begotten thee	[12.5] And she brought forth a man child
[9] Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron	[12.5] who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron
[11] Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling	[11.18] and to the saints, and them that fear thy name

The man-child is therefore **Christ and his church**, the conquerors were promised (in Rev 2:26-27), "power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron". Moreover, the end of Psalm 2 relates to the apostle Paul[20] who was a judge at Stephens trial and who was a known persecutor of Christians before his conversion, "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9.1); his invective reminiscent of "the serpent casting out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman" (Rev 12.15) until the risen Lord confronted Saul on **the way**[21] to Damascus "and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood" (Rev 12.16) with the risen Christ commissioning Paul to preach to the Gentiles[22] the Gospel of justification by faith (rather than Law)[23]

The complex pattern of interplaying allusions between Ps 2 and Rev 12 **commences in the last trump of Rev 11 and continues into Rev 12.** This would seem to indicate that Rev 11-12 is sequential but that is not the case as the last trump introduces the kingdom and this contradicts Rev 12, which has its (initial) focus on the first century. The woe in Rev 12.12 seemingly corresponds with the last woe of Rev 11.14 indicating parallel events but once again that cannot be the case as the last trump introduces the vial-plagues and the kingdom, whereas the woe in Rev 12.12 relates to the short time remaining for the devil to wreak havoc. The "short time" is likely the forty and two months that the beast of Rev 13.5 is "given power to continue" and this beast receives his authority from the dragon of Rev 12.

Historically we halve the first Jewish war lasting the "short time" of 3½ years and some 60 years later the Bar Kochba revolt lasting another "short time" of 3½ years.[24] Once again this highlights the repetitive nature of the drama and explains the consistency of the symbology – the beast only changes minimally throughout the story. It always has seven heads and ten horns **only the number of crowns fluctuates** from seven crowns (dragon in Rev 12.12) to ten crowns (wounded beast in Rev 13.1) to no crowns (Mystery Babylon in Rev 17.3). The enemy demonstrates consistency throughout the Apocalypse, consistency of character, motivation and action– it blasphemes, persecutes, demands worship and mimics God. Essentially the beasts are different incarnations of the same enemy from the beginning – the *causa sui* project of the serpent.

Hinlicky cites, ". . . the *imago Dei* means for man a relationship with, and dependence upon, the one for whom he is only the representative. To wish to be like God, the temptation suggested by the serpent, is to desire to abandon the role of image . . . in behaving thus man degrades himself and falls to the animal level instead of raising himself: to desire to become an angel **is to prepare to become a beast**"*...and he adds*…."the creature who in unfaith closes the ear to God's command-and-promise, who thereby forfeits divine destiny and wreaks havoc on the earth in falling into a godless *causa sui* project under the curse of divine law".[25]

A cosmic battle is portrayed (war in heaven) with the ejected beast **constantly emerging** from the abyss, trailing the smoke of devastation in its wake. It is **a repetitive pattern**, with the seeming immortality of the beast (wounded to death then recovered) evoking fear (Rev 13.4) and marvel (even from John in Rev 17.7). The war **is not over until the very end**, "...*and*…the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful (Rev 17.14)…*and*…. the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image and these both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone (Rev 19:20)…*and*….cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev 20.3).

It is therefore both presumptuous and premature to limit the witnessing or birth narratives of Rev 11-12 only to the first century, or the second, or…, as this is precluded by the nature of the beast. However, the past does paint a picture of the future.

War in heaven (Rev 12.7-12)

> "And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, [8] And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. [9] And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. [10] And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. [11] And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. [12] Therefore rejoice, *ye* heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiters of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time".

The war "in heaven" is obviously metaphorical. These are not the "political heavens" as some commentators are wont to call them. Heaven is the place where God dwells and therefore war in heaven denotes the crossing of boundaries, either directly challenging God or introducing the profane into a holy space. Examples of this are the building of the tower of Babel to reach heaven in order to make a name (Gen 11.4), or the challenge of the Babylonian king in his attempt to ascend the mount of congregation and aim for the stars (Isa 14.13), or the trampling of the starry host by the little horn (Dan 8.10), or the self-aggrandizing "man of sin" who substitutes himself for God in the temple (2 Thess. 2.4). All these incidents are based on historical realities, the building of a temple ziggurat (by Nimrod?), the Assyrian attacks against Yahweh,[26] and desecration of the temple by Antiochus and finally the self-proclaimed messiah Bar Kochba.

The core of the challenge is found in the meaning of the angel Michael's name, "Who is like God?" which is mirrored by the beast-worshippers - - - "who is like the beast?" (Rev 13.4). It is a rhetorical question – no one is like the beast. The formula is changed into a negative when the question is posed to the Lord's anointed (Hezekiah) by Rabshakeh, "Who *are* they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand" (2 Kings 18:35) and the charge is repeated in Psalms 79.10, "Where *is* their God?" [27] the question is no longer who is comparable with God, but where is he?

The interrogative context is that of "holy war" as in Joel 2.7 (YLT) "sanctify a war" (compare Jihad) ---wherefore should they say among the people, Where *is* their God? (Joel 2.17). The formula "Who is like God?" is therefore in its positive and negative formulations either an affirmation of, or a challenge to divine authority and thus associated with both physical war and spiritual warfare (more on this anon). However, in ancient times physical war had a spiritual dimension – a contest between the "gods" and their earthly representatives (e.g., Pharaoh against Moses or Sennacherib against Hezekiah). Even in modern times the concept of holy war has at its root the idea of the victory of Allah and his followers over the infidels and their false Christian God. The victory song (Song of the Sea) is found throughout the Apocalypse and forms a subtext to Revelation 12 along with other "Egyptian" associations (slaughter of male children, Passover Lamb etc):

Exodus 15	**Revelation 12**
2 The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation.	**10** Now is come salvation, and strength and the kingdom of our God
4 Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea	**10** The accuser of our brethren is cast down
11 Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?	**7** Michael = Who is like God? **13.4** Who is like the beast?
3 The Lord is a man of war	**13.4** Who is able to make war with him (beast)?
13 Thou has guided them in they strength unto thy holy habitation.	**6** She hath a place prepared of God
Ex 19.4 I bare you on eagles wings (the cherubim) and brought you unto myself	**14** And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle.
12 Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, The earth swallowed them.	**15** And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed…
26 Give ear to his commandments and keep all his statutes	**17** Her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ

The "Great dragon" is given all his aliases --- (1) the accuser (2) the old (ancient) serpent (3) the devil (4) Satan. The enemy manifests through deception, slander, blasphemy and persecution. This is the spiritual dimension of the enemy with the imagery regressing to the deception of Eve in Paradise (cf. the seed of the woman in Rev 12.17). The apostle Paul employs similar language in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 11	**Revelation 12**
○ Eve[3]	○ A woman[1]
○ The serpent [3]	○ Old serpent[9]
○ Devour you [20]	○ Devour her child[4]
○ Satan fashioned into an angel of light[14]	○ Satan deceives the whole world[4]

Paul has a particular individual in mind: "Satan who fashioned himself into an angel of light" (a messenger of the Gospel). This opponent had become "a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me" (2 Cor.12:7). His ministers were false apostles, deceitful workers (v.13) who preached another Jesus (v.4) and another gospel (v.4). The purpose of this Satan was to devour the new-born ecclesia, to take them captive (v.20) back to **the bondage of the law.** Paul reminds the church that in contrast with the (as yet unrevealed) man of sin, who "exalts himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess.2:4) Paul had "abased himself in order that the ecclesia might be exalted" (v.7).

Appropriately, the war in heaven also echoes the slander brought against Joshua (Jesus LXX) the high priest in Zech 3.1-10. It was deemed that the captivity had made Joshua unclean and therefore unfit to serve as a priest and his case was prosecuted in the heavenly court, where the charge was thrown out. Yahweh presides as judge over the heavenly court with Michael[28] acting as the angel for the defence and Satan acting as the prosecutor.

Zechariah-Jude -Revelation

The following matrix of connections exits between Zechariah---Revelation---Jude and although different wording is sometimes employed they convey the same ideas.

Zechariah 3.1-7 LXX	**Revelation 12.7-11**	**Jude 9**
resist antikeisthai	war + fought polemos + epolemEsen	contending diakrinomenos
angel aggelou	Michael michaEl	Michael the archangel michaEl ho archaggelos
devil diabolos	devil diabolos	devil diabolO
resist antikeisthai	accuser katEgOrs	disputed dielegeto
my house oikon mou	place topos	the body of Moses tou mOuseOs sOmatos
The Lord rebuke thee epitimEsai en kurios soi	prevailed not ouk ischusen	The Lord rebuke thee epitimEsai soi kurios

None of these visions is concerned with fallen or rebellious angels. The combative and belligerent language used in these narratives is not meant to reflect an actual "war" occurring in heaven but rather judicial proceedings ---very hostile litigation. However, the court case that is prosecuted "in heaven" has consequences on earth and these do include war and persecution. When the case is dismissed and the charges thrown out of the heavenly court the dragon is depicted as reacting with great wrath on earth – he throws a tantrum!

Conservative scholars date the Epistle of Jude between 70 and 90, J.A.T Robinson between 61-2 and Revelation in late 68.It is however possible to push the dating of Revelation even earlier in ca.65/66 and to understand Jude and Revelation as contemporaneous. In that case Jude would be paraphrasing Revelation, which is in turn paraphrasing Zechariah.

This section of Revelation is saturated with OT allusions and combines them freely. For example, the unnamed angel of Zechariah becomes Michael in Revelation because the seer is using Daniel 12.1 where Michael is depicted as one who , "…stands *watch* over the sons of your people….there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation". [29]

A cosmic struggle is depicted which commences with the Lord's ministry and crucifixion and continues with the birth of the church. All the forces of the world, dynastic, imperial and religious[30] are aligned against the **man child**.

If we examine the various word choices the allusions will become clearer. In order to compare the testaments we need to employ the Greek LXX OT with the Greek NT so that we have a level playing field. For Example, the victory is introduced with the words (Rev 12.10 YLT); "Now did come the salvation, and the **power** (**dunamis**), and the reign, of our God, and the authority of His Christ". The LXX employs the same word for **the first time** in Exod.12.41, which the English (LXE) translation renders thus, "And it came to pass after the four hundred and thirty years, all the **forces** (**dunamis**) of the Lord came forth out of the land of Egypt by night". This was the Passover night.[31] (MS self same day [which began at sunset]). The very next verse (Rev 12.11) commences with, "And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb".

The same word is used of Stephen in Acts 6.8, "And Stephen, full of faith and power (**dunamis**)" when he spoke against (Acts 6.14) "this place" (**ton topon**), which in Rev 12.8 becomes "nor was a place" (**oude topos**) found", which in turn is linked with the prophecy of Caiaphas in John 11.48-52; "the Romans shall come and take away both our place (**ton topon**) and nation" ….compare…but they did not prevail, nor was a place (**oude topos**) found for them in heaven any longer" (Rev.12.8). They **falsely accused** Stephen (and Jesus) in a rigged **court** before the Sanhedrin with the focus being the temple (our place, this place) and the traditions of Moses (Acts 6.14) but Jesus says, "Do not think that I will accuse(**katEgorEsO**) you to the Father: there is *one* that accuseth (**katEgorOn**) you, **even Moses**, in whom ye trust" (John 5:45). The tables have been turned on the accuser (**katEgOrs**) of Rev 12.10 as the witness for the prosecution (Moses) becomes a witness for the defence of Christ and his apostles.

Moreover Jesus has prepared his own place for his church (John 14.2); "I go to prepare a place (**topon**) for you" ……where she hath a place (**topon**) prepared of God (Rev.12.6). The LXE of Deut 1:31 relates how in the wilderness God will, "bear thee as a nursling, as if any man should nurse **his child**, through all the way which ye have gone until ye came to this place (**ton topon**)" and "I took you up as upon eagles' wings" (Exod 19.4 cf. Rev 12.14) that, she might fly into the wilderness to her place (**ton topon**)". The charge given to **Jesus** (LXX) in Zech 3.7 is, "And if you will keep My command, Then you shall also judge My house"(**oikon mou**).[32] The "house" in Zechariah was the nation under the Law of Moses. Hebrews says that "Moses was faithful in all his house, as a **servant** but Christ as a **son** over his own house (Heb 3.5-6).

Jude paraphrases the "house of Moses" as "the body of Moses" (in contrast to the body of Christ) which is appropriate as Moses was refused entry into the land because he did not **sanctify God.** Similarly, the Enochic heresy that Jude countered (v.8) also "rejected authority and slandered celestial beings" in other words **they did not sanctify God or his angels** and use of Enochic literature was probably a deliberate ploy by a Judaist (Law-of-Moses) party to subvert Christianity by presenting Echonic literature as authoritative. The purpose of such a strategy was to justify and promote lewd behaviour which would alienate Jews and confuse newly converted Gentiles.[33] Jude represents the law as a dead corpse (Moses) that could not enter the kingdom, the Law only wrought death in its outworking in contrasted with the risen Lord and his **living body** (the church) who were able to enter the kingdom under grace, wrought by the blood of the Lamb.

The devil (dragon/Satan/serpent etc) **"prevailed not"** (**ouk ischusen**) against the early church (Rev 12.8) – Contrast Acts 19.20, "So mightily grew the word of God and **prevailed**" (**ischusen**) in fact the same chapter (v.16) recounts how a man with an evil spirit prevailed (**ischusen**) against the seven sons of a **Jewish chief priest** (depicting the seven high priests of the first century temple Judaism) fleeing the house naked and wounded (Acts 19.16). This was the Lords' rebuke against the nation.

The cross and the devil

At an individual level, the casting out of the devil began during Jesus' ministry and was completed with his death on the cross but the pattern was repeated with his church (his corporate body) and with the death of his martyrs, for the servant is not above his master and victory over the devil is a pattern constantly repeated until the end. The devil or accuser takes many forms:

> "And when he was **accused** of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing" (Matt 27.12).
>
> "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently **accused** him" (Lk 23.10).

The same form of the word (**katEgoreisthai**) is used here as in Rev 12 and the accusation comes from the very beginning, the *causa sui* project of self-divinization to "become like the elohim" proposed by the serpent. God gave the Jews a law to demonstrate the impossibility of the task ---they could not keep it ---with **the exception of Jesus**, who nevertheless refused to grasp at divinity and voluntarily chose death thereby ensuring that the accuser could never again achieve a victory against mankind because the very nature that was alienated from God was now destroyed. Although, the war has been decisively won by Christ, the battles are still ongoing but mankind now has a choice to identify with the "second Adam" and share the victory through him.

John 12	**Revelation 12**
28 Then came a voice from heaven, saying, I have glorified it and will glorify it again	**10** And I heard a loud voice in heaven, Now is the salvation, and the power and the kingdom, become our God's
31 Now is the judgement of this world: now shall the **prince of this world** be cast out	**9** And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the devil
32 And I, If I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me.	**16** The earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth

Lifting up from the earth refers to both the crucifixion and the resurrection. All men (both Jew and Gentile, without distinction) were drawn to Christ and when the risen Christ appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus he stopped the flood of persecution, at the same time commissioning Saul to preach to the Gentiles.

The "prince of this world" (the destroyer on Passover night?) is an interesting expression as it indicates the cosmic nature of the victory. According to Paul the Law was "ordained by angels" (Gal 3.19) and Jesus nailed the Law (ordinances) to the cross thereby "triumphing over them (the angels) in it" and in "spoiling principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly" (see Col 2.14-23). This is why Paul warns (v.18) against "a voluntary humility (self-abasement) and worshipping of angels" which in the context of the previous verses (a holy day or feast day see v.16) refers to the self-abasement (RSV) practiced on the Day of Atonement. The "worship of angels" literally translates as "and-ritual-of-the-messengers" (ISA)[34] as the Greek (**thrEskeia**) can mean ritual, religion or worship.

Paul is arguing that the Law (even *Yom Kippur*, their holiest day of self-abasement) becomes a mere "ritual of the messengers" unless it is observed in faith, because the law and its rituals "are a shadow of things to come" (v.17), after all, Jesus had "triumphed" over the Law and its administrators/messengers (both of the earthly and heavenly variety).

Unlike God, the angels are not omniscient or all knowing. Angels are often sent to test men as with the sacrifice of Isaac –"for now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen 22.12) and "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?" (Job 1.9) Of course, God already knows the answer to both those questions but the testing is undertaken as much for angelic edification as it is for human refinement.

When he was tested in the wilderness Jesus refused to worship Satan. He would not misuse his status as the messiah or the power of the Spirit for personal ambition. He refused to grasp at divinity. He refused to be crowned as king of the Jews (John 6.15) instead choosing the path of obedience and suffering. Ironically, King of the Jews became his epitaph on the cross.

Jesus triumphed over earthly and heavenly principalities and powers not only at his death, but also during his ministry:

Matthew 4	**Revelation 13**
8 Satan…shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them…all these things will I give you	**2** The dragon (Satan) gave him his power and his seat (throne RV) and great authority
8….if you will fall down and worship me (Satan)	**8**…all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (beast/Satan)

Finally, the angels had an answer to their questions; "Now I know that Jesus fears God" and "Does Jesus fear God for nought?" These were things that even "angels desire to look into" (1 Pet 1.12). At last, here was a man who lived the Law (he was the word made flesh) and who worshipped God in spirit and truth, out of love, not for personal gain. Neither did Jesus keep the Law as an act of self-divinization. Even Satan, who **had the authority** to gift him the "kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" could not tempt him. Jesus delivered a total victory, over **men, angels and Law.** None could accuse him. Satan was cast out --- "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14.30).

> "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, **this day have I begotten thee**? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"
> (Heb 1.4-5)

End Notes Chapter 12 Pages 243-263

[1] Babylonian Talmud, Ktubot 111a
[2] Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b
[3] cp. Isa 13:8, 26:17, 66:7-8; Jer. 30:5-7
[4] She had "hard labour" (Gen 35.16)
[5] Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (4 vols). Clinton Arnold (ed). Zondervan:2002 (in loc)
[6] Peter Richardson, Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans,(Univ of South Carolina Press, 1996),296
[7] On the date, see J. Priest, in Charlesworth, *Pseudepigrapha*, 1:920—21 and literature cited there, especially G. W. E. Nicklesburg chaps. 6 and 7 belong to the early Christian period.
[8] *Ibid*, p., 298
[9] On this see H.A. Whittaker, Revelation, A biblical Approach: Chapter 27 - The Woman and The Dragon (ch. 12): Echoes of the Exodus **Access here**
[10]Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 2.4.1
[11] Josephus, Antiquities, 17.6.174–175.
[12] Josephus, Antiquities, 17.8.193.
[13] Herod the Great. (2017, April 3). In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 01:34, April 4, 2017, from **Access here** (See there for further references)
[14] We also detect echoes of Adam, Eve and the serpent in Rev 12
[15] The Herod family was notorious for inter-marriage, intrigue and adultery. See, Ingrid Johanne Moen, Marriage and Divorce in the Herodian Family: A Case Study of Diversity in Late Second Temple Judaism (Diss., Duke University,2009) **Access here**
[16] The epistle of James was written by **James the brother of John** not by James the brother of the Lord. See, P. Wyns, The First Century Background of James,***CEJBI,*** Vol. 10, No. 3, Jul 2016, pp.,36-54 **Access here**
[17] Entry by Kaufmann Kohler from The unedited full-text of the 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia, electronic version (See there for Bibliography)
[18] In a previous exposition of Revelation the suggestion of some scholars was accepted that Rev 17.9-10 was an interpolation, originally dislocated from below Rev 12.3 and transferred to Rev 17. This no longer seems possible or even probable. Beside the fact that we have no manuscript evidence of such a variant the beast in Rev 17 is a different (yet similar) beast to that of Rev 12. That said, the similarities between the beasts of Rev 12 and 17 is striking and we are perhaps dealing with analepsis or parenthetical explanations, with similar patterns repeated and similar phrases used (e.g. short time 12.12 and short space 17.10). This will be examined in depth in Rev 17.
[19] See the flight to Pella in the historical chapter: **Jewish-Christians in the period 70 CE-135 CE**
[20] **Psalm 2:10** be instructed, ye judges of the earth [Saul]
[21] **Psalm 2:12** Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish *from* the way [to Damascus]
[22] **Psalm 2:8** Ask of me, and I shall give *thee* the heathen *for* thine inheritance [preaching to Gentiles]
[23] **Psalm 2:12** Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him. [justification by faith]
[24] Some scholars believe that another flight to Pella occurred during this period see Jewish-Christians in the period 70 CE - 135 CE
[25] Paul R. Hinlicky, Beloved Community: Critical Dogmatics after Christendom, (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2015), *ad loc.* for sources
[26] The Assyrian kings took the honorific title "king of Babylon" when they conquered the city. A number of invasions against Israel occurred in the 8 th century BCE, the best recorded that of Sennacherib against Judah during the reign of Hezekiah. It was known for its direct challenge against Yahweh (holy war) and characterized by blasphemy and arrogance. **Isaiah 37:3** And they said unto him, Thus saith Hezekiah, This day *is* a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and *there is* not strength to bring forth.
[27] Psalm 79 is intertextually linked with Rev 11. **Chapter 11 page 208**
[28] **Jude 9:** Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring a railing accusation against him, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. See the digression: **Jude and the body of Moses**
[29] Of course, in Daniel the resurrection is anticipated at the end of this 3½ year period – but that only happened for Christ after his 3½ year ministry (hour of tribulation) but not for the faithful after the 3½ year Roman war.
[30] The dragon represents the powers hostile to Christ and his first century church –the Herodian Dynasty, Imperial Rome and Judaism. The religious power is represented in Luke's enumeration (Luke 1.3) of the seven powers (heads of Daniel's beast) in the mentioning of two high priests --it is difficult to know how to define this "religious power" (as it was not homogenous) and the term Judaism has been employed rather than Sadducees because the Pharisees also participated in the Sanhedrin. Moreover, the Pharisees were the embryonic form of rabbinical Judaism. At the basis of this all was the Law of Moses which had been wrested by elite hierophants.
[31] This was exactly 430 years after Abraham received the (Passover- night) vision-promise of Genesis 15

[32] Compare; "...her offspring, **who keep the commandments of God** and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev12.17).

[33] Interestingly, the book of Enoch was not canonised by the rabbis at Yavne (Jamina) where the Sanhedrin met in ca 80 CE. Therefore the book of Enoch and other *pseudographic* literature never formed part of the Old Testament, supposedly, because references to a pre-existing "Son of Man" looked very much like the New Testament Jesus. Enochic material obviously relies on Daniel and uses familiar terms such as the "Son of Man" designation and terms like "watchers" etc. Neither was Enochic literature included in the New Testament cannon as it was not inspired and contained heresy. Enochic literature was widespread in first century temple Judaism and it was probably the ideal vehicle for some sort of Judaist Law-of-Moses party to deliberately promote the idea of "loose living" and confuse newly converted Gentiles in an attempt to subvert Christianity. Perhaps the example of rebellious angels from Enochic literature was combined with a wresting of Paul's gospel of grace; "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just" (Rom 3.8). It is difficult to reverse engineer the arguments that Jude's opponents used but as Jude points out even in their own Enoch story the wrong doers were punished. See the digression: **Jude and the body of Moses**

[34] Interlinear Scripture Analyzer 3 (ISA basic 3.0_2) **Access here**