

Texts Concerning the Feast of the Assumption (15 August)

Revelation, Chapter Eleven

Vs. 19: Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, loud noises, peals of thunder, and earthquake and heavy hail.

An apt conclusion for Chapter Eleven which has the heavenly *temple* (**naos**) opened in heaven, implying that the one in Jerusalem has been closed or destroyed. The same applies to the *ark* (**kibotos**). **Kibotos** also applies to Noah: "until the day when Noah entered the *ark*" [Mt 24.38]. Consider this verse in light of Lk 23.45: "and the curtain of the *temple* was torn in two." The verse at hand does not specify who or what opens the temple; it is as though a self-actuated motion effects this. The same applies to the ark which remains closed and its contents unseen. King Solomon was the one who brought the ark into the temple which replaced the tent: "Then the priests brought the *ark of the covenant* of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary, underneath the wings of the cherubim" [1 Kg 8.6].

The ark contained "nothing except the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb (cf. Dt 10.2), where the Lord made a covenant with the people of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt" [1 Kg 8.9]. The use of *nothing* (**eyn**) is interesting as if to negate human curiosity. It also serves to focus attention upon the stone tables given at Horeb, also known as Sinai. God descended upon this mountain God, and the opening of the temple to make the ark visible in vs. 19 may be seen as fulfilling this manifestation. "On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled" [Ex 19.16]. The dramatic elements belonging to the heavenly and earthly manifestations of God may be perceived as a barrier: "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself did charge us saying, 'Set bounds about the mountains and consecrate it'" [Ex 19.23]. Such boundary making hearkens back to John at the beginning of Chapter Eleven: "Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff and I was told, 'Rise and measure the altar and those who worship there.'"

Chapter Twelve

Vs. 1: And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Woman or **gune** appears in Revelation a total of nineteen times, this being the first occasion. She seems symbolic of God's people and/or Israel; Catholic tradition often identifies her

with the Virgin Mary. Here **gune** is a *portent* or **semeion**. In light of Jn 4.48, this word can refer to supernatural events: “Jesus therefore said to him, ‘Unless you see *signs* and wonders you will not believe.’” In the verse at hand, **semeion** has a specific location, heaven. Several times earlier it was noted that events unfold in a passive way, this being yet another example: *appeared* or **orao** in the sense of having been seen.

Semeion-as-gune may be outlined with three additional features, all of which connote a certain luminosity attributable to the woman:

1) sun with which she is *clothed* (**periballo**, cf. 7.9) or fully enveloped. “In them he has set a tent for the *sun*” [Ps 19.4].

2) *moon* (**selene**): “Behold...the *moon* and eleven stars were bowing down to me (Joseph, Gen 37.9).” In the verse at hand, the sun is the dominant image; the moon and crown are subordinate.

3) *crown* (**stephanos**): compare with 4.4: ‘twenty-four elders clad in white garments with golden *crowns* upon their heads.’ Note use of **periballo** regarding the woman so clothed with the sun. The “twelve stars” may represent the twelve tribes of Israel and twelve disciples; for the latter, cf. Acts 1.14: “All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brothers.” Here Mary is seated with the disciples just before the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Vs. 2: She was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

Keeping in mind the reference to the Virgin Mary and Pentecost in the last verse, the mother of Jesus may be seen in light of being in “pangs of birth” with respect to the Holy Spirit’s descent. The verse at hand reads “with child” as “having something in (her) *stomach*” (**gaster**).

“Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now you shall go forth from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon” [Mic 4.10]. Here Revelation’s woman clearly parallels Zion about to leave Israel for Babylon, traditional place of exile. This verse is similar to the woman’s *crying out* (**krazo**) and *anguish* (**odino**). For the former: “And Jesus *cried* again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit” [Mt 27.50]. For the latter: “My little children, with whom I am again in *travail* until Christ be formed in you” [Gal 4.19]! Such *forming* or **morphoo** is Paul’s wish for the **morphe** of Christ be present in his listeners. “Though he was in the *form* of God” [Phil 2.6].

Vs. 3: And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads.

Another use of **orao** (*appeared*): note the similar location (heaven, which here as in vs. 2 can

be taken as the sky above) of the “great red dragon” identified in vs. 9 as Satan. **Drakon** (*dragon*) is derived from the verb **derkomai**, *to see clearly*, most likely having in mind the way a reptile stares without blinking as is the case with mammals. This Greek word translates the Hebrew **tannin** as found in Ex 7.10: “Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a *serpent*.” This dragon could also have a connection with the serpent of Gen 3.1: “Now the *serpent* was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made.” With this verse in mind, we have a clue regarding the dragon’s character, *subtle* or **haram**; the verbal root connotes nakedness or an uncovering, most likely to reveal malevolence. “They lay *crafty plans* against your people” [Ps 83.3]. Note that **therion** is the LXX translation for *wild creature* as found in 11.7: “the *beast* that ascends from the bottomless pit.”

Four characteristics of this dragon:

- 1) *red* or **purros** in the sense of being fiery in color. Cf. 6.4: “And out came another horse, *bright red*.” Also cf. Sg 5.10 where this word is used in the LXX: “My beloved is all radiant and *ruddy*.” The Hebrew adjective is ‘**adom**, closely related to ‘**adam** or *man* and referring to the earth’s color from which he had been formed.
- 2) “seven *heads*” or **kephale**. Frequent reference had been made in these **Notes** with regard to the sacred number seven, mostly in connection with the seven churches and as well as with regard to Jericho. **Kephale** can represent the source of authority, and here is the exact opposite of Jesus Christ’s authority over his church (of which seven were noted in Revelation): “He is the *head* of the body, the church” [Col 1.18].
- 3) “ten *horns*” or **keras**. “A fourth beast, terrible and dreadful and exceedingly strong...different from all the beasts that were before it; and it had ten *horns*” [Dan 7.7]. The Chaldean word **qarnayn** closely resembles the Hebrew **qeren** which connotes strength and power. Horns were also used as part of the altar of sacrifice: “And you shall make *horns* for it on its four corners” [Ex 27.2].
- 4) “seven *diadems*” or **diadema**. Another “anti-seven” number to the seven churches of Revelation. Compare with **stephanos** (*crown*) in 3.11: “so that no one may seize your *crown*.” **Diadema** differs from **stephanos** in the sense that it represents royal authority; the latter can apply to derived authority. In the verse at hand, **diadema** may signify that the beast shared his authority in imitation (in the sense of mockery) of the seven churches. That is, this authority is essentially fractured into “seven heads” with one body of a dragon.

Vs. 4: His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth.

This verse reveals the enormous size of the dragon who apparently is positioned on earth by reason of his proximity to the woman. **Oura** or *tail* is the source of its power. “And the

prophet who teaches lies is the *tail*" [Is 9.15], that is, once the Lord has severed head and tail from Israel (cf. vs. 14).

The dragon brings down one third of the stars to earth; **SURO** is the verb used here which implies a dragging. "Saul...dragged off men and women and committed them to prison" [Acts 8.3]. A result of such dragging is a casting of the stars (literally) "*into (eis)* earth," that is, making them fall and impact the earth similar to meteorites. For a comparable reference: The little horn "cast down to the ground some of the host of the *stars* and trampled upon them" [Dan 8.10].

Since the dragon had destroyed part of the firmament, we may assume that this occurred at night. Perhaps this is why he was able to be present when the woman was about to give birth; it was easy for him to sneak up on her. As the verbal root for dragon (**derkomai**) suggests, this beast...with all seven heads...is *staring* at the woman in anticipation of her son's birth. "Before she was in labor she gave birth; before pain came upon her she was delivered of a son" [Is 66.7]. Contrast the dragon and these stars with the Magi and the singular star at Jesus' birth: "For we have seen his *star* in the east and have come to worship him" [Mt 2.2].

Katesthio or *to devour*: the opposite to the Magi's act of worship. "Who *devour* widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation" [Mk 12.40]. King Herod, who inquired about the birth of Jesus Christ from the Magi, is a type of dragon ready to devour him.

Vs. 5: She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

Compare this verse to Christ's birth: "And she gave birth to her *first-born* son" [Lk 2.7]. This verse calls Jesus **prototokos** as in Col 1.15: "He is the image of the invisible God, the *first-born* of all creation." **Prototokos** is closely related to Christ as **eikon** (*image*) of God who remains invisible. Such an image mirrors the activity of the invisible God which in the context of vs. 5 is to *rule* or **poimaino**; this verb fundamentally means to shepherd (cf. Lk 17.7). This sense is lacking in the context of vs. 5 which is partly lifted from Ps 2.9: "You shall break them with a *rod* of iron." Here the LXX uses **poimaino** for *to break* which in Hebrew is **rahaḥ**. In light of this, consider Ps 23.4: "Your *rod* and your *staff*, they comfort me." Here *rod* or **shevet** can mean *tribe*; *staff* or **mishhan** implies a support of any kind.

In the verse at hand, **rabdōs** (*rod*) signifies rule as found in the LXX of Ps 45.6: "Your *royal* scepter is a *scepter* of equity." Its composition of iron shows that such rule is harsh with respect to the *nations* (**ethnos** or **goyim**), traditional foes of Israel.

The verb **arpazo** (*to snatch*) is in the aorist passive, another instance where action is taken with respect to the person or object at hand (here, the male child) to indicate divine intervention. Note the two-fold direction of this snatching: "*to (pros)* God" and "*to (pros)*

the throne;” compare with the ascent of Elijah (2 Kg 2.11) and Enoch (Gen 5.24) as well as Christ’s ascension (Acts 1.9).

Thronos (*throne*) is the place from which this child will wield his “rod of iron.” Cf. Rev 3.21: “He who conquers I will grant him to sit with me on my *throne* as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his *throne*.”

Vs. 6: and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God in which to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The woman’s flight happens after her son was born, the immediacy of this flight signified by “and” which connects this verse with the previous one. Compare her escape with the Holy Family’s descent into Egypt: “And he (Joseph) rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod” [Mt 2.14]. As noted with regard to vs. 4, the action took place at night; the same may apply to the woman which parallels that of the Holy Family.

Eremos or *wilderness* in the sense of an uninhabited region. “I am the voice of one crying in the *wilderness*” [Jn 1.23], that is, I, John the Baptist am a voice in an uninhabited region.

Eremos is comparable to the Hebrew **midbar**: “that they may serve me in the *wilderness*” [Ex 7.16]. In the verse at hand, **eremos** is a special *place (topos)* “*prepared (etoimazo)* by God” or as this word connotes, a place which stands ready waiting to receive the woman. In conjunction with **eremos** and John the Baptist, cf. Mt 3.3: “*Prepare* the way of the Lord.”

This prepared place is also one of *nourishing (trepho)*, a verb commonly associated with infants. “Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father *feeds* them” [Mt 6.26]. Perhaps the woman, like John the Baptist, was nourished in the **midbar**..by the voice which was crying in that spot. Such nourishing has a temporal duration, 1260 days, the same amount of time (in the sense of **kairos**, a special event or occasion) as the two witnesses who prophesied, 11.3. Thus the woman shares in this capacity of prophesying, again hearkening back to John the Baptist.

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Psalm 45 (responsory), vss. 10-12, 16

Vs. 10: Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear; forget your people and your father’s house. Four commands to the daughter or possibly the queen of Ophir:

1) *hear (shamah)* or pay attention. “*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord*” [Dt 6.4].

2) *consider* (**ra'ah**, *to see*), that is, the king's splendor. "But I (queen of Sheba) did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had *seen* it" [1 Kg 10.7].

3) "*incline* your ear" (**natah**) in the sense of extending the just mentioned hearing in a specific direction; also implies a turning away. "*Incline* your ear to me, rescue me speedily" [Ps 31.2]!

4) *forget* (**shakach**) which has two objects related to the daughter's origin: her *people* and *father's house*. "God from your country and your kindred and your *father's house* to the land that I will show you" [Gen 12.1].

Vs. 11: And the king will desire your beauty. Since he is your lord, bow to him. The first sentence culminates from the fourfold commands of the previous verse. The queen's *beauty* or **yephy**, whose root as noted elsewhere in these **Notes** means *to shine, be bright*. Such is the object of the king's *desire*, '**awah**: "You have given him his heart's *desire*" [Ps 21.2].

The second sentence depicts the queen's submission, *bow* or **shachah** which can apply to divine worship. "I (Abraham) and the lad will go yonder and *worship*" [Gen 22.5].

Vs. 12: The people of Tyre will sue your favor with gifts, the richest of the people with all kinds of wealth. The Hebrew reads "*daughter* of Tyre," a city on the seacoast and whose king was Hiram who furnished King David with supplies for building the Jerusalem temple. "And Hiram king of *Tyre* had supplied Solomon with cedar and cypress timber and gold, as much as he desired" [1 Kg 9.11]. Such are the *gifts* given to David.

The second part of vs. 12 continues into vs. 13; "richest of the people" can refer to Tyre as well as other lands acknowledging the construction of the Jerusalem temple. The Hebrew has *face* (**panym**) for "favor," this word signifying the fuller sense of the king's presence.

Vs. 16: Instead of your fathers shall be your sons; you will make them princes in all the earth. Mention of *fathers* implies that the princess has relinquished her inheritance in favor of the king, her husband, a fact emphasized by the possessive pronoun *your*. Apparently the princess has the capacity to appoint rulers worldwide, "in all the earth." While not kings, such sons are *princes*, **sar** (singular), which can also apply to a military leader. For this term as evocative of the spiritual realm, cf. Dan 8.25: "Without warning he shall even rise up against the *Prince* of *princes*; but by no human hand he shall be broken."

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