

UP FROM SEA AND EARTH: REVELATION 13:1, 11 IN CONTEXT

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Date completed: February 2015

Problem and Method

The wide spectrum of usually unreconcilable ways sea and earth have been interpreted in Revelation 13: 1 and 11, as chapter 2 exposes, prompts questions such as What did John mean in Rev 13:1, 11 by coming up from the sea and the earth or land? What could his original addressees have understood when they heard it for the first time? These are the basic questions this dissertation aims to answer through a reconstruction of the original context shared by John and his first-century Asian audience, and, in that light, of the sources he most probably used to paint his literary fresco. The analysis of these sources, both canonical and non-canonical, in chapter 3 made manifest the singular way in which John uses the sea and earth/land motifs in comparison to the ways they were used in his milieu. The linkage with the Old Testament is more connected than any of the non biblical groups of literature analyzed.

Results

At the outcome of exegesis, chapter 4 made evident a complex array of evocations, drawn basically from the history of OT Israel, concurring in the images John piled up in Rev 13, sea and earth/land. It is precisely in virtue of such an inherent multivalence of his chosen terms that he could address a variety of circumstances with one and the same set of words and images. Thus, in regard to Rev 13: 1, 11, it would be more proper to speak of “meanings,” rather than of only “meaning.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, both sea and earth in Rev 13:1, 11 are multivalent, evocatively pointing to several paramount moments and events in the OT history of salvation, with Israel as its foremost protagonist. God’s creation, the Exodus, the Babylonian exile, the postexilic restoration, as well as Jesus’ victory over-death are among those hallmarks, contrasted by John with their counterfeit by Satan. The ancient Near Eastern treaties which first served as God’s chosen sociocultural, historical, and literary framework for those events are also a clue for their interpretation in the spiritualized, Christ-centered re-application John makes of them in his Revelation to the seven churches of Asia. A Christian Israel is treading the same wrong path its ancestors trod in the past during their spiritual journey. The same dangers and consequences are ahead, according to the covenantal dynamics still in place: Deceit in the form of false prophetism springing from the church itself as a spiritual land, in tandem with a flooding tide of spiritual slavery through paganism seducing

the wayward many while threatening, hand in hand with hostile local Judaism, a remnant of faithful witnesses to the Lamb.

Thus, a new God-sent prophet, in the fashion and the lineage of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel, again calls many to repentance, and the faithful few to endurance. John's familiar and carefully chosen words and images are intended to be more evocative than referential for his primary public. The same principles—good and evil—are at work in the first-century Asian scenario, although with different institutional customs and disguises. Thus, John's Revelation is aimed at showing who's who behind the apparel, at warning against the consequences of flirting with evil, and at helping people to take the right side in the conflict between the Lamb and the Dragon by letting them know in advance who the victor will be in the end.