

Star Wars and Apocalypticism:

A New Hope and Revelation

Perfect for religious studies classes, in this activity students read selected chapters from the Book of Revelation and search for similar apocalyptic imagery in *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*. To contextualize this assignment, teachers can give students background on the Jesus Movement of the 1970s and lurid Rapture movies such as *A Thief in The Night* (1972), whose sequels were actually released at a pace with the original Star Wars films.

Below are some passages from Revelation and possible points of comparison with *A New Hope* that teachers and students can discuss:

Revelation 6:12-14: “Then, in my vision, he broke the sixth seal; and with that there was a great earthquake, and the sun grew dark as sackcloth, and the whole moon blood-red; the stars of heaven fell to earth, like unripe fruit shaken from a fig-tree, when a high wind rocks it; the sky folded up like a scroll, and disappeared; no mountain, no island, but was removed from its place.”

This passage brings to mind the destruction of Alderaan in the film and Obi-Wan’s “vision” of this apocalyptic event while he’s training Luke aboard the Millennium Falcon.

Revelation 8:10-11 (Wormwood, an evil star): “And when the third angel sounded, a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, fell upon a third part of the rivers, and on the springs of water. The name of this star is Wormwood; and it changed a third of the water into wormwood, till many died of drinking the water, so bitter had it become.”

Students might find in the evil star Wormwood a counterpart to the Death Star. The Death Star doesn’t fall like a burning torch, but it’s Super Laser does prove similarly destructive.

Revelation 9:7-9 (The Army of Locusts): “The semblance of these locusts was that of horses caparisoned for war; on their heads they wore a kind of circlet that shone like gold, and their faces were like human faces; they had hair like women’s hair, and teeth like lions’ teeth. They wore breastplates that might have been of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of chariots, drawn at full speed by many horses into battle.”

The swarm of locusts in Revelation can be compared to the Stormtroopers and their TIE Fighters, which make a similarly ominous noise during flight. Although the Stormtroopers do not look like the locusts from Revelation, their armor is equally striking, and there is even something bug-like about their helmets, which appear to have insectoid mandibles.

Revelation 11 (The Two Witnesses)

The Two Witnesses who are killed for their prophecies and are then resurrected can be usefully compared to Obi-Wan and Yoda, the last two Jedi who, though they die like the Witnesses, similarly rise to a new life.

Revelation 12:1-4 (The Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Dragon): “And now, in heaven, a great portent appeared; a woman that wore the sun for her mantle, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head. She had a child in her womb, and was crying out as she travailed, in great pain of her delivery. Then a second portent appeared in heaven; a great dragon was there, fiery-red, with seven heads and ten horns, and on each of the seven heads a royal diadem. His tail dragged down a third part of the stars in heaven, and flung them to earth. And he stood fronting the woman who was in childbirth, ready to swallow up the child as soon as she bore it.”

The Woman Clothed with the Sun resembles Leia in some ways (with the pursuing Darth Vader playing the part of the Dragon). However, perhaps the best parallel is from the Prequels, where Padme bears Luke and Leia in great travail. In this context, the Emperor plays the part of the Dragon, in that he sees any offspring of Anakin as a threat to him, as Obi-Wan explains in Return of the Jedi.

Revelation 13:1-4 (The Wounded Beast from the Sea): “And out of the sea, in my vision, a beast came up to land, with ten horns and seven heads, and on each of its ten horns a royal diadem; and the names it bore on its heads were names of blasphemy. This beast which I saw was like a leopard, but it had bear’s feet and a lion’s mouth. To it the dragon gave the strength that was his, and great dominion. One of its heads, it seemed, had been mortally wounded, but this deadly wound had been healed. And now the whole world went after the beast in admiration, falling down and praising the dragon for giving the beast all this dominion; praising the beast too. Who is a match for the beast? they asked; Who is fit to make war upon him?”

The Beast from the Sea, or Anti-Christ, suggests Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker. Once thought to be the Chosen One (Messiah), Anakin betrayed and slaughtered the Jedi, acting very much like an Anti-Christ figure. Moreover, like the Beast from the Sea, Anakin was mortally wounded but survived, albeit in a robotic suit rather than through actually being healed. Finally, Vader inspires fear and loyalty similar to the Beast.

Revelation 13:11-13 (The Beast from the Land): “Then, from the land itself, I saw another beast come up; it had two horns like a lamb’s horns, but it roared like a dragon. And it stood in the presence of the former beast, to carry out all that it was empowered to do, bidding the world and all its inhabitants worship the former beast, that beast whose deadly wound was healed. Such wonders could it accomplish, that it brought down fire, before men’s eyes, from heaven to earth.”

Revelation supplies an Unholy Trinity of Dragon, Beast from the Sea, and Beast from the Land to oppose the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Similarly, in a New Hope we are met with another trio of villains: the Emperor (off-screen), Vader, and Grand Moff Tarkin. Like the Beast from the Land, Tarkin is able to call down fire from the heavens through the Death Star he commands.

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