

Lesson # 38 The Woman, the Dragon & the Child Revelation 12:1-6

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Revelation 12:1-6 (ESV)

¹And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant and^(C) was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his head seven diadems. ⁴His 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 give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. ⁵She gave birth to 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, ⁶and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Introduction to Chapter 12

Revelation 12 begins another parenthetical portion of the book, interrupting the chronological flow of judgments bridging from the 7th Trumpet (finishes at 11:19) to the First Bowl judgment at 16:1. These four parenthetical chapters, difficult to place in a time frame, controversial and the commentaries are fraught with interpretive variations seemingly as diverse as the number of denominations about many of the elements described here in the chapter. ①

We have within the next 4 chapters these things which need to be interpreted:

- A woman
- A dragon
- A baby boy
- A flight into some wilderness
- 1,260 days
- War in heaven
- Satan loses the war
- A beast rises out of the sea / horns and crowns
- It is worshipped
- War on the saints
- A beast rises from the earth / horns
- The first beast is mortally wounded, then is resurrected
- The 2nd Beast does great signs and wonders
- The mark of the beast / 666 etc. etc.

We have a tough and exciting road ahead of us as we get closer and closer to the return of Jesus Christ in chapter 19. However, as we begin, we'll have our work cut out for us in this chapter as we attempt to determine who the woman, the dragon & the baby are; when this is occurring, and where.

I. The Woman

vv. 1-2

Since John says that a great sign appeared in heaven, so we are immediately aware that what follows is symbolism of some sort. This woman represents someone either singularly or plural. As you can imagine, when certain theological scholars can put a spin on passages that can be taken symbolically and make them fit their own theological position, they can have a field day with verses like these 6. Of course, Roman Catholics see this woman as Mary, and the crown of 12 stars prove she must be the Queen of Heaven. Others see the woman as a compendium of the church and Israel; some see the church since the stars in Jesus' hand in Rev. 1:16 symbolize representatives of 7 churches. I believe the biblical evidence shows that the woman represents Israel, out of whom comes the Messiah and who has been Satan's special project of hate throughout the history of the world.

Bible critics and liberals in general see here that John is resorting to ancient mythology, concocting a story to fit Christianity that is derived from other religions. One such story is the birth of the Greek god, Apollo. It is said that when his mother was about to give birth, she was pursued by the dragon, Python, who sought to kill her and her unborn child, but she escaped and 4 days later, Apollo slew the dragon, Pythonⁱ.

At the time John wrote Revelation, the Emperor Domitian's 10 year old son died, and he declared that the boy was a god and his mother, the mother of god. In fact, he had coins made depicting himself as "lord of heaven" & "saviour of the world". But this is not what John is referring to either. If anything, Domitian borrowed from Christianity, not vice versa.ⁱⁱ

This picture of the woman is an allusion to an OT story we are all familiar with – cf. **Gen.37:9-11**. In this dream of Joseph (his 2nd one – cf. vv.5-8), which is prophetic, Joseph sees the sun, moon & 11 stars bowing down to him. Commentators agree that the sun represents Jacob, the moon, Rachel, and the 11 stars are Joseph's brothers – a conclusion drawn from Jacob's response in v. **10b**. We know that this literally came true (with the exception of Rachel who had died by the time the family went to Egypt – Gen. 35: 18-20) when Joseph rose to power in Egypt and his father & brothers were under his authority in order to survive the 7 years of famine.

The 12 brothers (Joseph & the 11) became the nation of Israel that dominates the OT, much of the NT and most of world history, including – amazingly - modern history! There is no other description of a woman like this in all of Scripture. Israel, in the OT was often referred to as God's wife (excellent example – Hosea ; & Isa. 26:17-18; 66:7ff; Jer. 4:31; 13:21; Mic. 4:10; 5:3), hence the symbolism of a woman is used here. The 12 stars obviously stand for the 12 tribes of Israel; the sun and moon, Jacob & Rachel, as they do in Gen. 37 so this is Israel. And just to knit together the context, what did we just observe in heaven? The Jewish Ark of the Covenant!

This sign is called a great sign by John so it is representative of an extremely important event. The referral of Rev. 12:17..."the rest of her offspring" supports the contention that this woman is not a single person like Mary, but must

represent a larger cohesive group like Israel, and only Israel fits the facts that follow. The allusion to Gen. 37 goes a long way towards identifying who is being represented. Rev. 12:17 also helps refute any idea that the woman is symbolic of a merged Israel & the Church. The woman cannot be all of God's people because who would then be "the rest of her offspring", and she cannot be just the church because Christ gave birth to the church, she did not give birth to Him. Gal. 4:4 says He was born under the law – the Jewish Messiah, product of God's OT covenant people – the penultimate purpose for Israel / the reason God chose her, was to bring forth Jesus Christ.

The woman is pregnant (v. 2), crying out with birth pangs, and Israel was under Satanic persecution before Christ arrived, under his deception while Christ was among them, and under full out God-authorized persecution ever since all over the world. What follows in vv. 3-6 describes this attempt to devour the child and to destroy the offspring of the woman.

II. The Dragon

vv. 3-4

This second person is said to be another sign which appears in heaven – this time, "a great red dragon". It has 7 heads and 10 horns, and on its' heads, 7 diadems. Again, this is called a sign so it is symbolic. In v. 9, we are told for certain that the dragon is Satan, so if there is any interpretation of the dragon being the Roman Empire or Nero, it cannot be right.

The dragon is red – denoting possibly fire or more likely, blood & murder. See **JN 8:44** – "he was a murderer from the beginning". The sign depicts his posture as standing before the woman about to give birth so that he could devour the child she was about to bear. He is also called great, so he is large in significance, not playing a minor role in the history of redemption, but a very large one.

He is 'great' and 'red' , and also has 7 heads & 10 horns. On the heads are 7 diadems. This configuration is an important combination related to the end times. Daniel 'sees' this in **Dan. 7:7-8,20,24** – the Beast rising from the sea in **Rev. 13:1** is described as having similar adornments; and **Rev. 17:9-14** describes the symbolism of these things for us. When we get to 12:1, we will look more closely at the heads, horns & diadems. In general, the vision of these things denotes control, power & authority in the world. Heads are consecutive world empires, the 10 horns are kings in power as these visions play out (yet future to us), and the crowns are diadems, not '*stephanos*' but royal crowns. They do not signify victory but rather royal authority.

As these heads, horns and crowns shift to the Beast in 13:1, we see the source of Antichrist's rise to power – the power behind him is that of Satan, who has long been "the god of this world", and "the prince of the power of the air" – yet he is allowed to have and use this authority under the direct control of God Himself. Satan has been at it since before the fall of Adam & Eve, and has been behind the ebb and flow of history, always looking to squash God's people and to thwart

God's plans. As a result of God's greatness however, Satan's best work (in his own estimation) results in the outcomes that God intended all along. Certainly, the supreme example is the cross, and another well known one is **Gen. 50:20**. John is focused on this sign, and the main theme of the symbolism at first is the attempt of the dragon to devour the child about to be born. We see in **Matt. 2:13-18** that Herod is used by Satan to make the first attempt to kill the child soon after His birth but he failed miserably. Although some children were killed as a result, Christ was spared, and at least 2 prophecies were fulfilled. It was all under God's sovereign control.

Some people see these 'stars of heaven', (v. 4) which are said to comprise 1/3rd of the total of all stars, as persecuted martyrs of John's day, or as the control over political & spiritual forces in some revived Roman Empireⁱⁱⁱ, but these ideas miss the point to focus on the results of the scene rather than the actual force of the scene – the root cause of the persecution and corrupted power of human governments lies in the desires of Satan to dominate & rule the entire world, and Christ stands directly in his path.

These are certainly not actual cosmic stars. There is almost no chance that these are anything but fallen angelic beings who decided to follow Satan rather than God, and the Dragon sweeping them to earth signifies that they have been positioned as demonic beings on earth throughout the ages to influence the unfolding of history and to draw people away from God in various and diverse ways.^{iv} He uses evil, deception, trickery, false promises, half-truths, outright lies^④, religion, war, and anything at his disposal to attempt to bring everything under his control and to wrest it out of God's hand.

The contention that these are fallen angels is supported by **Rev. 12:7-9**; the fact that a star has been used to symbolize an angel in **Rev. 9:1** already; the host of angels are called "morning stars" in **Job 38:7** & in **Dan. 8:9-10** the reference seems to be of angels as well, described as 'stars'.

This reference to 1/3rd of the angelic host being swept to earth is referring to a past event – probably around the time of Adam & Eve and the fall. Certainly Satan was there, already corrupted by sin and since he is not omnipotent, omnipresent or omniscient, like God, he must have the support of an army of demonic beings to carry out his will around the world. That these are said to be 'cast down' signifies that there was an earlier war in heaven other than the one described in **Rev. 12:9-10** in which these beings and Satan were overpowered. However, throughout the OT (**Job 1 & 2; Zech. 3:1-5; I Kings 22:19-23**) and even in the NT (**LK 22:31**), it appears that Satan and some of his demons have some sort of access to heaven. They have had power as well to battle in the spiritual realm for many years, at least since the fall – cf. **Dan. 10:10-14; Jude 9; Eph. 6:10-12**; etc.

Robert Thomas lists a number of ways Satan has attempted throughout the bible to erase Israel from the world before she could bring forth Jesus. I quote here from his commentary:^v

“The dragon’s evil intentions toward the woman’s unborn child evidenced themselves throughout OT history. Instances of his hostility surfaced in Cain’s murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8), the corrupting of the line of Seth (Gen. 6:1-12), attempted rapes of Sarah (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18) and Rebekah (Gen. 26:1-18), Rebekah’s plan to cheat Esau out of his birthright and the subsequent enmity of Esau against Jacob (Gen. 27), the murder of the male children in Egypt (Ex. 1:15-22), attempted murders of David (e.g. I Sam. 18:10-11), Queen Athaliah’s attempt to destroy the royal seed (II Chron. 22:10), Haman’s attempt to slaughter the Jews (Esther 3-9) and consistent attempts of the Israelites to murder their own children for sacrificial purposes (cf. Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3; Ps. 106:37-38; Ezek. 16:20).”

Now Satan’s fight on earth is against God’s people and to keep anyone else from becoming God’s people. In vv. 9-10, we’ll see his one last ditch effort to storm heaven itself, the result of which will eliminate access to heaven for Satan and his minions forever.

III. The Child

v. 5

John now refers back to the woman, and she gave birth to a male child, and what follows this leaves no doubt as to who this child is – it can be none other than Jesus Christ. Mary specifically gave birth to Him, but something much larger than Mary is in sight here. Whereas the genealogical trail finally makes its way down to Mary to be Jesus’ human mother, a directed and focused Israelite history throughout the OT presents us with a sweeping saga of epic proportions to demonstrate how God protected the life of Christ before He was born, and how history was shaped and reshaped to accommodate the socio-political landscape described in Gal. 4:4 – “the fullness of time.” The event first hinted at in Gen. 3 (animals slain to cover sin), then prophesied in Gen. 3:15, in Isa. 7:14, etc. finally arrived, and Christ the Messiah was born. ⑤

Satan failed in every attempt to kill those he thought would be this Messiah, and when the real child was born, he was thwarted by the vision given to the Wise Men, and in the wilderness, Satan failed to cause Jesus to sin (MT 4:1-17), and thinking he had finally succeeded at the cross, he instead suffered a complete and utter defeat and lost his most effective weapon, the sting of death. I Cor. 2:6-8 tells us that if Satan and those under his influence had known the completeness of God’s plan, they would never have crucified Jesus.

Look at the end of v. 5 in our text. He is the One who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (cf. Matt. 2:6; Ps. 2:7-9), and who was ‘caught up to God & to His throne’, speaking of His resurrection & ascension (Heb. 12:2). So Satan’s attention, since about AD 29, has been to go after those he can get at with success. It is too late to defeat the Son, who is now glorified and victorious – it is only a matter of time – but Satan can still affect the world’s future as he plays right into the prophetic plans of a sovereign God (unwittingly) and brings about

the very seeds of his own doom in so doing, even as he kills, persecutes and turns God's people against Him wherever he can.

In vv. 7-9, he makes one final, futile attempt, while he still has access to heaven, to battle the holy angels in heaven because by that time, he knows his time is very short and he is losing – cf. **Rev. 12:12** – and he is aware that his access to heaven is about to come to a stunning and final end. How does Satan know this? Satan knows the Bible better than you or I do, he just doesn't love God, and the knowledge he has about the Bible is not effective in changing him.

IV. The Wilderness

v. 6

With Jesus out of Satan's reach in heaven, he now redirects his efforts at dealing with the woman (Israel). She flees into the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her to be nourished for 1,260 days (3 ½ years). There is a more detailed description of this scene in 12:13-17, but we'll flesh it out a bit here.

The heavenly defeat of Satan and his host takes place at the halfway point of the Tribulation, leaving the 3 ½ years of protection for Israel noted here as the last ½ of the Tribulation – the last ½ of Daniel's 70th week. The blasphemy in the Temple is likely a direct result of this defeat of Satan and it ends the false peace that had been manufactured by the Antichrist on earth (1st Seal), and is instrumental in the killing of the Two Witnesses in Jerusalem.

This is not the flight of Israel after the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem or anywhere else – the scope of this is eschatological and immense. Jesus said there'd be oppression on the Jews and a flight away from Jerusalem after the Abomination that Causes Desolation – cf. **Matt. 24:15-28**. Israel as a people will be divinely protected during those last 3 ½ years – especially the 144,000. Some may die, but most will be saved – Rom. 11:26 – so that death will merely usher them into the presence of the Lord. Ultimately, Satan can control only physical life and death of God's saints, and that only with God's allowance.

The wilderness is not defined here. It could simply mean the world at large & they are divinely cared for and protected wherever they end up. (note Matt. 25:21-40) This is how "the brothers" will be cared for – by the benevolence and love of God demonstrated through His people. His people will demonstrate the reality of their justification by their obedient love for God's children even under Holocaust-like conditions, where the laws of Antichrist will surely look to capital punishment as the just punishment for assisting the enemy – Christians. The "place prepared by God" in this sense is in the hearts of God's already saved or even elect saints.

ⁱ Robert Thomas, Revelation 8-22; pp. 117-118

ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 118

ⁱⁱⁱ IBID, p. 124 – quoting R.C.H. Lenski & A.T. Robertson

^{iv} I would highly recommend here that anyone who has never read “The Screwtape Letters” by CS Lewis get hold of a copy and read it.

^v IBID; p. 125