

Revelation Chapter 12

The Woman, the Child and the Dragon

The woman and the dragon (Revelation 12 v 1 to 6)

This is one of the most important chapters in the Bible: an overview of the enigma of the nation Israel, without which the Bible cannot be fully understood.

A “great sign appeared” (verse 1) – this is the first of seven signs described in Revelation 12 and 13:

1. The woman (verse 1), representing Israel
2. The dragon (verse 3), representing Satan
3. The male child (verse 5), referring to Jesus
4. Michael (verse 7) as head of the angelic host
5. The offspring of the woman (verse 17), representing believers during the great tribulation
6. The beast out of the sea (Chapter 13 v 1), representing the antichrist
7. The beast out of the earth (Chapter 13 v 11) as the false prophet who promotes the antichrist.

Four women represent religious systems in the Book of Revelation:

1. Jezebel, associated with false teaching (Revelation 2 v 20)
2. The woman in this chapter, associated with the nation Israel
3. The great prostitute, associated with false religion (Revelation 17 v 2)
4. The bride, associated with the true Church (Revelation 19 v 7, 8).

The description of the woman in verse 1 can be linked to Joseph’s dream (Genesis 37 v 9 to 11), in which the sun represents Jacob, the moon represents Rachel, and the eleven stars are the sons of Israel who bow down to Joseph. In this sign with twelve stars, Joseph is now ‘among’ the other tribes of Israel. In several Old Testament passages, Israel is represented as a woman (see Isaiah 54 v 5, 6; Jeremiah 3 v 20; Hosea 2 v 19, 20). The ‘birth pains’ described in verse 2 may refer to the Roman oppression of Israel at the time of Jesus’ birth.

“Another sign appeared in heaven” (verse 3) – again, we are reminded that this is a sign. The creature here is not literally a great red dragon, but it represents Satan’s nature and character. From the similar description given in Revelation 13 v 1 and Daniel 7 v 7, 8 it is likely that the ‘revived Roman Empire’ is in view. The seven heads and ten horns refer to the original ten kingdoms of which three were subdued by the ‘little horn’ of Daniel 7 v 8, who can be identified as the coming world ruler (i.e. the antichrist). Many believe that the “third of the stars of heaven” (verse 4) describes one third of the angelic host in league with Satan (“his angels”, verse 9), making up the world of demonic spirits...

- How do the gospel records of Jesus’ birth and life ‘validate’ the picture of the dragon waiting to devour the child (verse 4)? See Matthew 2 v 16; Mark 1 v 12, 13; Mark 4 v 37 to 39; John 8 v 58, 59.
- Who will “rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (verse 5)? See Psalm 2 v 9; Revelation 2 v 26, 27; 19 v 15.

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Persecuted by the dragon, the woman is protected by God in a special prepared place for 1,260 days (verses 6, 14). This reference to a three-and-a-half-year period connects these events with the final half of the ‘seventieth week’ of the Daniel 9 v 24 to 27 prophecy.

The traditional view is that verse 5 describes the ascension of Jesus, and as verse 6 describes future events, between these two verses there are hundreds of years (our current period) – and this break in time is typical of prophecy. However, an alternative view is that “her child” (in verse 5) refers not to the person of Jesus Christ, but rather to the Body of Christ, and being “*caught up*” (verse 5), refers to the ‘*harpazo*’ described in 1 Thessalonians 4 v 17, where “we who are alive, who are left, will be *caught up* together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” – the same Greek word *ἁρπάζω* (*harpázō*) is used in both verses. With this interpretation, verse 5 links seamlessly with the last half of the ‘seventieth week’ of Daniel (1,260 days), as described in verse 6.

Satan thrown down to earth (Revelation 12 v 7 to 12)

- According to verse 11, what is the key to victory over Satan? Heaven’s gain is earth’s loss (verse 12) – why?

Verse 9 uses many different titles for Satan: dragon, ancient serpent, devil, deceiver of the whole world. ‘Devil’ is from the Greek word *διάβολος* (*diabolos*), which means ‘slanderer’ or ‘accuser’.

“He was thrown down to the earth” (verse 9) – the Bible describes *four* different falls of Satan:

1. From anointed to profane (Ezekiel 28 v 14 to 16, before Genesis 3)
2. From access to heaven (Job 1 v 12, Zechariah 3 v 1) to restriction to the earth (either at the time described by this verse, or at some time in the past)
3. From the earth to bondage in the pit (Revelation 20 v 2, 3, at the start of the millennium)
4. From the pit to the lake of fire (Revelation 20 v 10, at the end of the millennium).

In Luke 10 v 18 Jesus said “I saw Satan fall like lightning...” – Jesus may be referring here to the imminent decisive victory over Satan at the Cross; or this may be a prophetic look at the second fall described here.

- How does the “blood of the Lamb” conquer Satan?

The work of Jesus on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of God’s love for us (Romans 5 v 8), and assures us that every fear Satan whispers is a lie.

“They loved not their lives” – if we believe “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1 v 21), then how can Satan’s violence against us be effective? Will physical life be most precious to us, or will we find life by losing it for Jesus (Mark 8 v 35)?

Israel’s respite (Revelation 12 v 13 to 17)

“The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle” (verse 14) – eagle’s wings are an emblem of God’s deliverance of the nation of Israel, out of Egypt (Exodus 19 v 4) and through the wilderness (Deuteronomy 32 v 11, 12).

“The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river” (verse 16) – this passage describes God’s ultimate protection of Israel from the fury of Satan and the antichrist during the great tribulation. See Isaiah 59 v 19 and Numbers 16 v 31 to 33.