

Revelation Ch. 12: The Woman, Child, and Dragon

Jeff Randolph
January 2008

We now take step back and look at the spiritual conflict between the devil and the followers of Christ. There is now a shift in perspective to the root cause of the problem, the influence of Satan. This sets up the introduction of the Roman Empire as the beast (Ch. 13), providing us more precise information regarding by what means God is going to pour out His wrath on Jerusalem, and also giving early Christians a glimpse of the persecutions to come.

Verses 1-2

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Like other visions, this one appeared in heaven (4:1; 15:1), a reference to the sky above. The descriptions given of the woman are sufficient to determine her identity.

- 1) Clothed with the sun – She was radiant and glorious (cf. 1:16), a symbol of righteousness (Matt. 5:16; 13:43).
- 2) Moon under her feet – Ties in with the symbol of light (cf. Gen. 1:16), and is perhaps also a symbol of motherhood (Gen. 37:9-11).
- 3) Garland of twelve stars – A symbol of the 12 tribes of Israel (cf. Gen. 37:9-11; Rev. 21:12-14).
- 4) With child, cried out in labor and pain – A symbol of the struggle and persecution endured to bring forth the Child (cf. Isa. 26:17).

The relationship God has with His people is often compared to a husband and wife (Isa. 54:1; Jer. 31:32; Ezek. 16:30-32; Hos. 1:2; Rom. 7:4; 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:23ff.; Rev. 19:7; 21:2, 9), and so it is reasonable to conclude that this woman represents God's faithful servants, enduring struggle for His cause.

The woman strives to do what is right in order to bring forth the Child, later identified as Christ (12:5), and so must represent Israel. It was physical Israel that brought forth the Messiah (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12:3; Gen. 28:14; Deut. 18:18; Isa. 9:6; Matt. 1; Acts 3:25, 26; Gal. 3:16; Rom. 9:4-6), and spiritual Israel that is protected by Him (12:6, 14-17).

This ties in with God's faithful being described as the New Jerusalem (21:2; cf. Isa. 66:7-13), the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26), and contrasts with Babylon the Mother of Harlots (17:5).

Verse 3

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

The dragon represents Satan (12:9), the terrible adversary (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). He is pictured as a great dragon because of the magnitude of his influence, and terrible things he causes to happen (Jn. 13:27; Acts 5:3; 10:38; 1 Thes. 2:18).

He is red because he tempts men to sin (Gen. 3:4, 5; Matt. 4:5-9; 1 Cor. 7:5; 10:13; Eph. 6:10-17; cf. Isa. 1:18), and has been called a murderer from the beginning (Jn. 8:44). He has seven heads with

diadems representing complete power and authority in his realm of influence (sin and darkness, Acts 26:18; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; Heb. 2:14). They also may symbolize his craftiness (Gen. 3:1-5; 2 Cor. 2:11; 11:3, 14; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:7; 2 Tim. 2:26). The ten horns may symbolize the powers he has at his disposal to carry out his purposes (cf. 13:2).

Verse 4

His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

His tail represents his power to seduce world leaders (stars) into submission. He has influenced such men in the past to try to kill future leaders of righteousness (cf. Ex. 1:16; 1 Sam. 19:1; 2 Kings 11:1; Esther 3:13), and is here pictured as attempting the same (Matt. 2:16).

Not only did he seduce earthly rulers, but he appears to have done similar things with heavenly beings (12:7; Matt. 25:41; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).

Verse 5

She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

Despite the attempts of the dragon to destroy Him, the Child was born (Matt. 2:13-15). It is crystal clear now that the Child represents Jesus Christ, born to rule all nations (2:27; 19:15; Ps. 2:9). Both His birth and ascension are pictured here (Mk. 16:19; Acts 1:9-11; Heb. 1:3).

Satan thought he had Him right where he wanted, but his plans backfired. The death of Jesus was supposed to be the end, but it was just the beginning (cf. Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 8:29).

Verse 6

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The woman that labored to bring forth the Child represented the righteous people of the nation of Israel. A transition is now made after His birth, to spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:15-17). It was this Israel (Christians) that was protected during this time of trial and tribulation, the 1260 days (see 7:14-17; 11:3; cf. Matt. 24:15-22; Mk. 13:14-20; Lk. 21:20-36). The wilderness represents the place of refuge, not a paradise (cf. Heb. 3-4), but a safe haven of deliverance (Deut. 2:7; 8:16).

Since the previous verse covers a period of 33 years, there should be no problem understanding that the 40 years between the ascension of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem is here implied.

Though this launches ahead from 30 AD to 70 AD, verses 7-13 go back and describe the events surrounding the ascension of Jesus. This verse, then, is a parallel to 12:14.

Verses 7-9

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

This is probably not an actual war in heaven, but a symbol of the spiritual conflict going on behind the scenes during the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (cf. Eph. 6:10-17). It could more

specifically represent the time Jesus was on the cross and in the tomb, as there was no clear winner until He was resurrected (Acts 2:29-36; Rom. 1:4; cf. Eph. 3:10).

It was at this point that the devil was cast out and rendered powerless (Lk. 10:18; Jn. 12:31; Heb. 2:14). While he can still try to influence men to do evil, his most powerful weapon, the fear of death (Heb. 2:15), can no longer be used to coerce those who practice righteousness (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 4:7). Forgiveness of sins has come, and the reign of sin and death is over (Gen. 3:15; Matt. 28:18; Acts 26:18; Col. 2:15; Rom. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:22; Rev. 1:18).

Michael is an archangel (Jude 9), and is mentioned elsewhere as leading the forces of good to carry out God's purpose (Dan. 10:13; 12:1; cf. Heb. 1:14).

It has been suggested that this vision portrays a literal war in heaven that occurred at the beginning of time; a war in which Satan led a band of angels in rebellion against God, and was cast out. Though the Scriptures do indicate that Satan has a following of angels (Matt. 25:41), that there were angels who sinned (2 Pet. 2:4), and that they had overstepped their bounds (1 Tim. 3:6; Jude 6), the exact details of such a conflict are nowhere given (cf. Deut. 29:29).

Given the context, and the mention of that “serpent of old” referring to his original deception of man (Gen. 3; 2 Cor. 11:3), this passage harmonizes better with the former interpretation (see v. 10).

Verse 10

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.”

Because Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended back to heaven, He has provided us salvation (cf. Jn. 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16; 5; Heb. 1:3). Notice also that in doing so, He has established His kingdom (cf. 1:6) as a present reality (Col. 1:13).

Satan is described here as an accuser (cf. Job 1:9-12; 2:4-6). It is the devil that tempts men to sin so that they might suffer the same fate as him (cf. 20:10), and it is he that would be the first to point out how deserving we are to be punished (cf. Rom. 3:23). The justice of God demands that sin be punished, and so the accusations were heard. However, now that salvation has come, and the punishment has been put upon Jesus (1 Pet. 2:24), the accusations are no longer heard (cf. Rom. 8:31-34).

Perhaps the accusations at this time were specifically targeted at those who had already died and were in Paradise. If Jesus had not died, not even they would have been found worthy of heaven (cf. Heb. 10:4).

Verse 11

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death”

We have here a description of just what it means to be considered “brethren” in the family of God. Only those who overcome sin through the blood of Jesus (7:14; Rom. 5:9; 6:4; 8:37; 1 Pet. 1:18, 19), teach and practice His message (Matt. 28:19, 20; Mk. 16:15, 16; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 5:9), and are willing to give up everything, even their own lives, to be found faithful (2:10; 6:9; Acts 20:24; Phi. 1:21; Heb.

11:13-40; 1 Jn. 2:15), are part of this family.

Verses 12-13

“Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.” Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.

Those who overcome in the ultimate sense, and are faithful unto death (2:10), can rejoice since the devil's accusations are meaningless. However, those who dwell on the earth are faced with persecution, and many times have to endure the trials put on them by Satan as he tries to hinder them from obtaining heaven. The devil has great wrath because he now realizes exactly what it means to have his head bruised (Gen. 3:15; Rev. 12:7-9; cf. Eph. 3:10).

While “short time” could be a general reference to the Christian age, of which no one knows the duration, and which culminates in the return of Christ and final judgment (Heb. 9:28; Acts 17:31), it is more likely a reference to Satan's (diminished) power during these 40 years, as he tries to convince some to take up their old ways (cf. Heb. 2:1-3), ending in the most terrible time in history (cf. Matt. 24:21). Certainly Satan thought that with the destruction of Jerusalem, the Christian religion would die as well. Little did he know he was fulfilling God's purpose (17:17).

The Christians were heavily persecuted by the Jews since the beginning (Acts 8:1-3), and also by the Romans after Nero placed the blame on them for burning Rome (13:7; Tacitus, Annals XV.44). The “woe” is pronounced not only on those who have to endure these trials, but on those who give in to the devil.

Verse 14

But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Though persecuted, God was going to protect His people during the period of the Roman-Jewish War, represented by the time, times, and half a time (12:6; cf. Dan. 12:7). Pictures of God's protection and deliverance often included wings of eagles (Ex. 19:4; Isa. 40:31), symbolic of being able to, with faith in God, rise above the storms of life.

Verse 15

So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

The flood waters are the forces of persecution used by the devil (cf. Ps. 124:2-5; Isa. 59:19; Rev. 13:7), by which he intends to sweep her off the straight and narrow path (Matt. 7:14). Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the time period surrounding the fall of Jerusalem was the worst ever (Matt. 24:21; cf. Rev. 3:11).

Verse 16

But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

This is a picture of God destroying the enemies (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54) and providing a way of escape (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13), reminiscent of when He squashed Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:31-33; Ps. 106:17; cf. Ex.

15:12).

Verse 17

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The woman is clearly spiritual Israel (Gal. 6:15-17), the New Jerusalem, mother of us all (Gal. 4:26). This pictures the persecution fueled by Satan that will continue until the end of time (cf. Eph. 6:10-17). Certainly those who desire to live godly will suffer persecution at one point or another (2 Tim. 3:12). It is clear that the godly are defined by keeping the commandments of God (Jn. 14:15).

Satan was enraged that Roman persecution (13:7) and the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21; Rev. 7:14) during the first century did not hinder the message of Christ and His church (Matt. 16:18).

*All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved.