The Book of Revelation

Zanesville, OH | Wednesday/Sunday Bible Study

**Chapter 12**

* **12:1-6– The Woman, The Dragon and The Male Child**
  + Chapters 12-22 of Revelation paint a more detailed picture of what has already been alluded to or strongly hinted at in the first half of the book. Christians are given a clear understanding of the enemies they fight and the outcome of such a struggle.
  + The devil and his servants (angels) are pictured as persecuting the church not because he has won or has the upper hand, but because he has been defeated by Jesus’ death and resurrection. He, enraged, seeks to harm God’s people in any which way he can with the limited time he has been given.
  + The saints understand that the devil has lost because of their Lord’s conquering death and resurrection and can take courage and hope in the reality that He will return to end all evil and its forces once and for all in the consummation while rewarding them for their testimony and steadfast faith.
  + **Verses 1-2**– As has been most of the case with the book so far, the proper interpretation of this chapter is dependent on its OT counterparts. The woman John sees is best understood as the faithful people of God both before and after Jesus’ first advent.
  + This is concluded based on OT passages that describe God’s people as being associated with the stars, sun, moon and other descriptions of light (Gen. 15:5; 22:17; 37:9). Proof that the woman is representative of both the faithful few of OT Israel and the church (True Israel in Revelation) is seen in passages from both the OT and NT (Zech. 4:2; Matt. 5:14-16; Rev. 1:12, 19-20; 7:4-8).
  + The description of the woman having a crown of twelve stars is not necessarily surprising since 12 was indicative of the tribes of Israel and thus it is a fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that God’s people and The Messiah would come through them.
  + The crown idea has been discussed previously in Revelation as a way of describing God’s people sharing in His reign in the kingdom and a symbol of their victory if they remain steadfast and faithful in Him (cf. 2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 14:14).
  + The woman in v. 2 is said to be with child about to give birth as she cries out in pain. This is drawn from OT passages that speak of Zion as the mother who will give birth to a child that will usher in salvation (Isa. 26:17-18; 54:1-7, 11-17; 66:7-9; Mic. 4:9-10; 5:3). This further illustrates that the woman represents the faithful people of God (cf. Gal. 4:26-27; Heb. 12:22-23).
  + The labor pain or birth pangs is representative of the persecution of God’s people both before and after Jesus’ first advent. Jesus used the woman with child imagery to describe the grief the disciples would go through with respect to His death and subsequent persecution (Jn. 16:19-22).
  + **Verse 3**– John sees another great sign in heaven and this time he sees a red dragon having seven heads and ten horns with seven crowns on his heads. The dragon imagery is not uncommon to OT literature as Israel’s enemies including Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were often portrayed as a dragon (Psa. 74:3-14; 89:10; Isa. 27:1; 30:7; 51:9; Jer. 51:34; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2-3).
  + The dragon imagery is intertwined with the cruel fourth kingdom prophesied in Daniel 7:7-8, 19-25 which is related to the Roman empire in Revelation as will be seen more clearly in chapter 13 and 17. In chapter 13, this fourth kingdom is working in correlation with the dragon.
  + The dragon is later identified by John as the devil himself (12:9; 20:2, 10) who is the driving force behind the evil fourth kingdom (Rome; cf. 13) and all the earthly kingdoms and peoples who have persecuted God’s people in the past even as they do now. So, the image of this dragon here portrays the devil working hand-in-hand with Rome to mercilessly persecute the people of God.
  + The red color is indicative of bloodshed, slaughter and murder (cf. 17:3-6) which is one of the key qualities of Satan himself (cf. Jn. 8:44). The ten horns, seven heads and seven diadems denote a sense of complete oppressive, evil power that is unleashed against the faithful followers of God. Ten horns indicate complete strength, seven heads indicate universal power and seven crowns indicate universal sovereignty.
  + The sea beast in 13:1 is described similarly to the dragon here depicting the reality that Satan uses his power in accordance with earthly kingdoms and peoples to persecute those who hold fast to the testimony of God.
  + The use of ten and seven in this verse and in 13 and 17 is the devil’s way of seeking to persuade the nations that he is sovereign and has complete control and authority. But this false claim is quickly demolished as the true sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords overcomes the dragon and the beast (17:14; 19:12, 16, 20-21).
  + Satan’s goal has always been to get the people of God to compromise their faith by offering to them something that seems close to God or similar in nature (Gen. 3:1-7; Jn. 8:44; 1 Pet. 5:8). The devil seeks to offer an alternative that seems close to God but in reality it is nothing more than death and pain.
  + **Verse 4**– The dragon is pictured as hurting a third of the stars and throwing them down to earth. We have already identified stars as the faithful people of God both before and after Christ. This continues here as the imagery is taken from Dan. 8:10 in particular.
  + Daniel pictures the ruthless Antiochus Epiphanes persecuting the people of God who are identified there as stars likely during the intertestamental period (cf. Dan. 11:29-39). The identity of God’s people is rooted in Heaven so it ought not to come as a surprise that they are described as hurled from heaven to earth.
  + Stars are also representative of the angels that stand for the people of God in Daniel 10:20-21; 12:1 and Rev. 1:16, 20. When God’s people hurt, He also hurts since there are spiritual forces representative of His people. This verse and subsequent verses are not depicting Satan’s fall from heaven in conjunction with evil angels.
  + The goal of the devil to hurt God’s people and as much of them as he can (a third). His ultimate goal, however, is to devour the male child which the woman is pictured as ready to birth. His persecution of God’s people is to be climaxed by killing the Messiah (cf. Matt. 2:3-16; 4:1-10; Lk. 4:1-13; 28-30).
  + This picture of a woman giving birth to a male child (Messiah) and the devil wanting to devour Him is taken from Gen. 3:15. The devil knows what the Messiah is coming to do and to prevent it from happening, he seeks to kill Him.
  + **Verse 5**– In one verse Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension are all summed up (cf. Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus comes forth from the woman who is representative of the faithful of OT Israel seen in OT passages and Jesus’ genealogy (cf. Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:1-17).
  + The male child who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron alludes to Psalm 2:7-9 which Jesus clearly fulfills precisely because of His advent, ministry, death, resurrection and subsequent ascension. Psalm 2 does not portray a defeated Messiah but instead a conquering victorious one (cf. Rev. 2:26-27; 19:15
  + The implication of the verse is that Satan devoured the child (Jesus’ death on the cross) which led him to believe he had won only to see that in fact he was defeated and diminished forever because Christ rose from the dead to take His rightful seat at the right hand of God (Acts 1:9-11; Eph. 1:20-21; Phil. 2:5-11).
  + This also fulfills the prophecy of Gen. 3:15. The seed from the woman (male child, Jesus) was bruised on His heel (crucifixion) but He crushed the head of the serpent (devil, resurrection). The devil believed he knew how to win but instead he fell woefully short to his demise. This theme is prevalent in chapters 13-14.
  + **Verse 6**– This verse shows that in contrast to Satan, God is omniscient. In anticipation of the woman giving birth to the male child and fleeing somewhere for protection, God has prepared a place for her. This place is called the wilderness.
  + The use of the word “wilderness” invites our attention to the OT use of it. The wilderness represented God’s protection of His people in the midst of a hostile environment (cf. Isa. 13:20-22; Jer. 9:10-12). Thus, the wilderness here stands for its OT counterpart in which God led and protected Israel through the wilderness ultimately to the promise land.
* Hos. 2:14 speaks of the wilderness the same way it is used here in Revelation. This refers to the period of time in which Israel was entirely dependent on God and a period of spiritual testing/trial after being delivered from bondage. The trial/test ultimately culminated with rest in the promise land.
  + That the use of “wilderness” connotes this idea of trial and testing is also clear because of the time the woman is said to be in it: **1,260 days.** This is the same time period in 11:2-3 which we have seen pertains to tribulation, trial and testing. When these days are over, God will reward His people (Heaven/promise land; cf. 7:9-17; 11:11-13, 19).
  + The idea of God nourishing His people in the wilderness is also tied to the OT wilderness imagery since God gave them manna and other sustenance (Ex. 16:4, 32; Deut. 2:7; 8:14-16; Neh. 9:19). When the heavens were shut up so that it would not rain for 3.5 years, Elijah was sustained by God in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:3-6, 9-16; 19:4-8).
  + The point of the verse is that God will sustain His people spiritually from the evil to come and allow them the ability to maintain their witness in the midst of an incredibly volatile and hostile environment (Psa. 23:4-5; Jn. 6:35, 50-51). They are protected and sealed by Him with the hope of having an eternal reward if they remain faithful.
  + An additional thought here is that Christ along with his earthly parents fled to Egypt to avoid Herod’s murderous plans (devil’s initial try to kill Jesus) and God took care of them there (Matt. 2:13-15) They returned to Nazareth where Jesus flourished and was ultimately able to execute His mission (Matt. 2:19-21).
  + Like Jesus, God will ensure that His faithful people are looked after so that they can execute their mission with respect to His word and their testimony. This is what was described in 11:3-14 and it is being described more so in detail in this chapter with respect to the devil’s onslaught.
* **12:7-12– War in Heaven**
  + **Verse 7**– The events that occur here in vv. 7-12 are to be considered as the heavenly counterpart to the events in vv. 1-6 that took place on earth. In Dan. 10:13, 20-21 and 12:1, Michael is said to represent the Israelites and he is fighting against the spiritual forces of evil.
  + Therefore, the understanding is that Michael is here representative of the faithful people of God and he is fighting for them against the devil and his evil forces (cf. Eph. 6:12). Passages like this one in Revelation and the Danielic passages above demonstrate that events on earth have heavenly counterparts where the forces of good engage against the forces of evil.
  + Michael is not working alone here just as he did not work alone in Daniel. In Daniel, Michael was associated with the “son of man” figure representative of God or Christ (cf. Dan. 7:13; 10:5-6, 16; Rev. 1:13-18). Therefore, Michael is acting on behalf of God and Jesus.
  + This war reflects what has happened on earth. Jesus has lived, died and risen from the dead to take His rightful seat in Heaven and Satan has been defeated forever (cf. Col. 2:15). These verses portray that very image from the standpoint of the spiritual realm.
  + **Verse 8**– Michael and his angels acting on behalf of God and His people are too much for the devil and his angels and thus he is defeated leaving him no longer *“a place in heaven.”* The meaning of this phrase is often used as an argument for the origin of Satan but the context is dealing with his defeat because of Christ’s resurrection.
  + The idea is that Satan’s power, rule and dominion has forever been diminished and destroyed because of what Jesus accomplished. Before the cross, one could say Satan held sway over death and evil but Jesus has universal control and sovereignty over all those things (cf. 1:17-18) and therefore Satan has no place and no power whatsoever.
  + Additionally it is likely that the idea of Satan’s accusations being unfounded is here meant by “no longer a place in heaven.” Prior to Jesus’ sacrifice, the devil could accuse God’s people of sin and have a basis for that since man did in fact sin. But because Christ has taken away sin and its power over man, he no longer has that “place” to accuse unlawfully and unjustly (cf. Rom. 8:33-34).
  + **Verse 9**– In v. 4, the dragon cast a third of the stars from heaven to earth (persecution of God’s people) and now in an ironic turn of events, Christ’s death and resurrection results in Satan being thrown down to the earth (he has been defeated; Jn. 12:31). What Jesus pictured in Lk. 18:10 has come to pass.
  + It is not until this verse that we are told outright who this dragon is. He is the ancient serpent (cf. Gen. 3) called the devil (slanderer/accuser) and Satan (adversary) who deceives the whole world. Satan’s character is described here with respect to what took place in the garden of Eden.
  + This verse serves to show us that Christ has defeated Satan. There is no scenario in which Satan can and will ever win. This is great encouragement to the saints as they understand the devil ultimately has no power over them unless they allow it.
  + **Verse 10**– The defeat of Satan and his followers/representatives prompts a hymn of praise to God and Christ like that which occurred in 11:15. Christ’s death and resurrection has guaranteed the presence of salvation, power, sovereign authority and the establishment of the kingdom now and forever (cf. Psa. 2:6-12; 145:11-13; Dan. 2:44; Matt. 28:18).
  + Christ has done according to Gen. 3:15 and the accuser (cf. Job 1:6-12; 2:1-5) of the brethren has been crushed. Although the devil is pictured as vanquished, he is yet a powerful foe that the saints must be aware of. This will be seen in the proceeding verses.
  + Although his power is limited and his days are numbered, Satan seeks to devour the people of God any which way he can. Saints must rely and take hope in the resurrected Christ since He has won the battle and it is only through Him we will be able to overcome.
  + **Verse 11**– This verse continues the very idea of the victory Christ has won. The brethren can and will overcome the devil because of Christ’s blood and what He did at the cross. It is Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection that has led to the triumph of His people and the defeat of the devil and his evil forces. Christ’s shedding of His blood is the primary basis for which the saints before and after Christ have overcome.
  + Satan’s accusations no longer have any power or basis since Christ has taken our guilt and shame away by taking removing our sin (cf. Heb. 2:14-15, 17; 2 Cor. 5:21). Secondarily, the saints overcome because of the word of their testimony. That they execute the role to which they were called (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:9; 11:3-7), plays a role in the overcoming of the devil.
  + They overcome as well because they love Christ more than their physical lives (cf. Matt. 10:26-39; 16:24-26; Acts 20:24; 21:13; Heb. 11:35-38). These saints who overcome are not afraid to die physically because it is the soul’s eternal destiny that matters the most and Satan cannot harm their souls (cf. Rom. 8:31-39)
  + **Verse 12**– The heavens (cf. Isa. 44:23; 45:8; 49:13) and its inhabitants are called to rejoice because of the salvation, redemption and establishment of the kingdom that has come because of the work of Jesus. They are to rejoice as well because the devil has been defeated.
  + The devil, recognizing he has little time (1,260 days; cf. 6:9-11) will now turn his wrath to the inhabitants of the earth. Because he has lost the battle to Christ, he will now try to harm those whom he can and as best as he can (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8).
* **12:13-17– War on Earth**
  + **Verse 13**– Attention now turns to the persecution of the woman who would here represent the church or the saints. The devil understands that Christ had defeated him and in a fit of rage he seeks to harm His servants (cf. Matt. 5:11; 10:22; Jn. 15:18-21; 1 Pet. 4:14).
  + The devil tries to bully God’s people (and hurt God?) by going to war with them. He battles the body because he lost the battle against the soul (cf. Matt. 10:28). Suffering, in Revelation, is a sign that Satan has lost because of Jesus’ triumph on the cross.
  + **Verse 14**– Verse 6 is essentially restated here with an additional detail. The devil turns to unleash his murderous, persecuting power to the saints but they will be cared for by God in the wilderness for 1,260 days (cf. 11:1-2). The picture here is one of spiritual protection (cf. 7:1-8).
  + The picture of eagle here alludes to a couple OT passages where God is described as an eagle protecting His people in the wilderness (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 1:30-33; 32:10-12 cf. Psa. 36:7). Isa. 40:29-31 speaks of future Israel as taking up wings like eagles in relation to God giving them strength and guidance.
  + **Verse 15**– This verse paints a metaphorical picture of Satan seeking to harm the woman with persecution that is likened to the power and overwhelming nature of a great flood (cf. 2 Sam. 22:5; Psa. 18:4, 16; 66:12; 69:1-2, 14-15; 124:4-5; Isa. 8:5-8). The idea of the flood here may include aspects of deception and false teaching (cf. Psa. 124:7-8, 11).
  + **Verse 16**– The devil’s attempt to conquer and defeat God’s people by a “flood” is thwarted as the earth opened up to swallow the water. This reminds of two incidents in the scriptures where God’s people faced situations where their enemies sought to overthrow them and His power but He protected them and defeated their foes (cf. Ex. 14:23-28; 15:12; Num. 16:20-34; Deut. 11:4-7).
  + The water/flood idea was seen as a barrier to Israel’s freedom and safety (cf. Ex. 14:10-13) but God proved time and time again that He would deliver them from it often leading them through those very waters (cf. Ex. 15:13; Josh. 3:7-17). Peter revisits this very idea with respect to Noah and the flood in 1 Pet. 3:20-21.
  + **Verse 17**– This verse is essentially a summation of the entire chapter and an outlook to what lies ahead in chapters 13-14. The “woman and her seed” are terms describing the same thing: **The church/saints**. That God’s people are referred to as the woman would indicate the church in its entirety (a plurality).
  + The use of the term “rest of her seed” emphasizes the individual Christians themselves. The point is that, for the devil, it is extremely personal. He takes the loss that Christ dealt him very personal and he intends to persecute each and every single individual saint to the best of his ability.
  + Satan doesn’t simply cast his net on the universal church, per se, hoping to persecute some of God’s people by chance. He is pictured here and elsewhere as devoting his attention and time to each and every individual faithful follower (cf. Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Pet. 5:8).
  + These saints are at war with the devil because of the testimony they hold (cf. Jn. 18:37; Rev. 1:2, 9; 12:11). The devil doesn’t need to fight those who don’t know Jesus. He fights those who faithfully follow Jesus and apply effort daily in His kingdom.