

### 13. The Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12)

This episode between the woman and the dragon disposes of the curse upon serpent and the enmity between the woman and the serpent because of the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3:13-16:

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;

with pain you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you."

There are two possible symbolic meanings in the dramatic situation set between woman and the devil. In the literal story, literal man as the seed of woman will step on the serpent and that the serpent will strike the literal heel of man. One symbolic meaning might be that the seed of woman Christ will crush the head of the devil by resisting temptation and overcoming death. It is clear that the devil was unable to strike the heel of Christ, who rose from the dead sin free and ascended into heaven.

Paul revealed the second symbolic meaning to the church at Rome in Romans 16:19-20: "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Therefore, the offspring of the woman is the church under whose feet the God will crush Satan. The story that follows is an extension of the metaphor, taking on the characteristics of an allegory. An allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning, and a [symbolic](#) meaning. The true offspring of woman are those faithful to God across the ages as identified in last verse of the chapter: "17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

#### ***A Great and Wondrous Sign—the Radiant Woman (Revelation 12:1-2)***

*12:1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven” shows that the scene John is viewing is extraordinary, especially as compared to just another sign in verse 3. “A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” describes the radiant woman who has the sun as clothing, the moon under her feet, and a crown with twelve stars. She is radiantly arrayed with all the glory and grandeur of God’s creation. The crown is a victory crown (stephanos). The crowns in verse 3 of the dragon are diadems or ruling crowns (diadema). This word for crown is the same as used for the crown of thorns worn by Christ, for the crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, and, the crown of glory in 1 Peter 5:4. The twelve stars are the saved of spiritual Israel, the New Jerusalem.

This woman is not the Virgin Mary, as some suppose, nor is she just a symbol of all women. A woman so adorned can only be the bride of Christ. The entire revelation is about Christ and his bride. The conflict between the bride and the devil has existed from the fall of man. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Of Christ and the church, Paul wrote:

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ... 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25-32

The woman was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. By their very nature, the redeemed of all ages constitute the offspring of the beautiful woman. Revelation 7:14 describes them as “the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The woman—the bride, the pure virgin, the called out—has struggled to bring forth offspring in every generation. Her offspring are the children of God as opposed to children of the devil. In John 8:43-44, Jesus spoke of this fact as it related to the children of devil, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.”

In our story, the woman is in symbolic travail and anguish. Jeremiah 4:31 captures the sense of the allegory, “31 I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child—the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, ‘Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers.’” Note especially how John and Jeremiah use the words murderer and murderers. The children of God of each generation from Abel to the present suffer travail as they birth the true offspring of God for the next generation.

### **Another Sign—the Red Dragon (Revelation 12:3-6)**

*3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

Another sign appeared—an enormous red dragon. Another sign contrast to the great and wondrous sign. Verse 7 explains the dragon figure clearly—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan. The meaning of the word dragon, unknown in modern times, has its root meaning back in Job. God,

through Job, described the leviathan, in a way consistent with what we now think of as dragons. In Job 41:1-13, the description offers a fit analogy to explain the devil as dragon:

- He is strong and graceful.
- His mouth is ringed with fearsome teeth.
- His back has rows of shields, tightly sealed together.
- His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn.
- Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out.
- Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.
- His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.
- Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him.
- His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone.
- The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin.
- He makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment.
- Nothing on earth is his equal, a creature without fear.

The dragon had seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. The red dragon contrasts to the woman clothed in the sun. The seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns describe his dominion and authority. These physical characteristics convey a spiritual meaning of authority (heads) power (horns) and dominion (crowns). Ephesians 6:12 describes fully the sum of the metaphoric meaning: "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." This is the power and horror of the dragon. In Daniel 7:6, Daniel says his four-headed beast is one given authority to rule. The horns, the heads, and crowns describe the power and authority the devil, and not Rome or Egypt or any other minor force. Seven is the number of fullness and 10 is the number of completeness. The use of both numbers here does not extend beyond the symbolic meaning. The dragon is an entity of full and complete power over his kingdom – the spiritual host of wickedness.

In the next chapter, the dragon gives power and dominion to the beast. While writing of crowns, heads, and horns, John gives the meaning of the symbols, "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." Revelation 13:2. The crowns, heads, and horns will always take this meaning: power, throne, and authority. Crown used here is different from the woman's crown – *stephanos*, a crown of victory. The word used here is *diadema* and is always the symbol of kingly or imperial dignity. Revelation 12:3; 13:1; 19:12 use this meaning of crown of the dragon, of the beast, and of the Word of God.

The word, *head*, carries the consistent metaphoric meaning of authority. It is used this way of Christ, husbands, and wives in 1 Corinthians 11:3; of Christ in relation to the church in Ephesians 1:22; and now in relation to the Dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

Similarly, the horns represent strength as used for the Lamb in Revelation 5:6 and the strength of the dragon and the beast in Revelation 12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:3, 7,12,16. Metaphorically, they signify political power and strength. See Psalms 18:2; cf. 1 Samuel 2:10; Lamentations 2:3. The notes on Revelation 9:13-16 discusses further the meaning of horns.

The dragon's tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon's strength and power was such that he could challenge heaven and sweep a third of the stars (angels)

out of the sky and down to earth with his tail. Thus the rebellion and war between God and His angels and the devil and his angels started.

“The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.” The timing of the event is that same as the temptation and fall of man. At the birth of the first children, Cain and Abel, the woman struggled against the dragon, who waited ready to devour the child as soon as he was born.

Verse 5 says that she gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. In lineage, the male child was Christ and all those born again (John 3; 1 Peter 1:22-23). In ancestry, the child was all those true to the Lord from the beginning, bringing Christ to us. The child would rule all nations with an iron scepter. Revelation 2:27 used this phrase of the Lord, as does Revelation 19:15: “15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.” All those of the church will rule with him: “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Luke 22:29-30.

And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne means that the child was taken up by God to his throne, but the woman, the church, stayed. The woman found her refuge as she fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. The 1,260 days is the same time that the holy city was trampled on and the same time that the two witnesses prophesied. Revelation 11:2-3. 42 months and 1260 days are the same. God protected the woman, the bride of Christ, the church, the holy city against the dragon. God sheltered the woman in a prepared place just as he had sheltered the children of Israel:

10:1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The figure does not mean that the woman will not suffer, for she is in the desert; and some individuals will falter, as did the children of Israel. The woman, the holy city, will survive.

### ***War in Heaven (Revelation 12:7-9)***

*7-9 7 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

At the time of Adam and Eve, the devil in the form of the serpent had already turned against God and seeks then and now to turn man and woman against God. He immediately led their son Cain into false worship and murder. The *and* here links the war in heaven to the struggle against the woman and her offspring. These are parallel events, related to one another, but separate. It links to the vision itself and the events in heaven, which consummate in the limiting of the power of the dragon and his place in the revelation. Jude refers to Michael as an archangel (Jude 9).

That the dragon was not strong enough to win shows that God can always control the devil. Jesus was present at the fall and described it: “18 He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” Luke 10:18-19. The influence of the dragon and his angels was restricted to the earth. However, even on earth, he was subject to the power of God. For example, he could not move against Job without God’s explicit approval in Job 1-2. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul wrote, “No temptation has

seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." The dragon does have the power to lead the whole world astray. There is no wondering about who the dragon is. He is the ancient serpent, the devil, or Satan.

### ***A Loud Voice from Heaven (Revelation 12:10-12)***

12:10-12: *10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:*

*"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Christ.*

*For the accuser of our brothers,  
who accuses them before our God day and night,  
has been hurled down.*

*11 They overcame him  
by the blood of the Lamb  
and by the word of their testimony;  
they did not love their lives so much  
as to shrink from death.*

*12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens  
and you who dwell in them!  
But woe to the earth and the sea,  
because the devil has gone down to you!  
He is filled with fury,  
because he knows that his time is short."*

The previous discussion of the fall of the dragon used the past tense *was*. The following words of instruction and praise are in the present tense. One will have to conclude that, with the victory in heaven, salvation and the power and the kingdom of God was complete. God's victory over the dragon forever predicted the outcome for the dragon. What was to be the outcome for each person who was to live is the central unanswered question. There will be no future coming of the kingdom, for it has come. The New Testament always looked back to this point where Christ was raised to sit over his kingdom and forward only to the salvation of the children of God, whenever they might live upon the earth.

There is a three-fold fulfillment to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 1). Salvation has come in the "name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 4:10)." "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12. The power of God has come: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Romans 1:16. And the kingdom of our God has come: "13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Colossians 1:13-14. Whatever arguments one might make about when God consummated his plan, it is clear that at the time of this writing it was fully complete. Nothing that follows will predict any changes or any future events not included in his plan at this point.

The authority of his Christ is certain. At the beginning of the Gospel, the devil held authority of all the kingdoms of the world: "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And he said to him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.'" Luke 4:5-7. By the time of his prayer in John 17, Jesus had authority to give eternal life: "For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him." John 17:3. In Matthew 28:18-19, just before his ascension Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." In 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, Paul speaks to the very end of the matter: "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." An exact description of the authority of Christ places the focal point of this authority at Christ's resurrection from the dead:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:19-23.

Jude 25 offers a fitting conclusion to the subject of the authority of Christ which he had before all ages and now has and will have forevermore: "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

A loud voice from heaven summarizes the status of

- *For the accuser of our brother:* The word devil means accuser (diabolos), although accuser here is from a different word (kategoros).
- *Who accuses them before our God day and night:* Job is the best example of the devil accusing someone before God:

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:6-12

- *Has been hurled down:* The hurling down takes a figurative turn here, as it moves from the result of the struggle in heaven to a struggle of the accused brethren.
- *11 They overcame him:* The *they* has to be the brethren of Jesus, the followers of the Lamb, for it was by his blood that they overcame him.

- *By the blood of the Lamb:* In Revelation 7:14-15, there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. There the elder describes them as “they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”
- *And by the word of their testimony.* The blood of the Lamb is Christ’s part, offered on the cross. The followers’ part is the word of their testimony. The church, the called out, individually and collectively, offer this testimony as their part. In Matthew 10:32-34, Jesus placed the good confession (acknowledgment or testimony) as the basis for acknowledgement before the Father. However, conflict resulted: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. 34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. God’s household or church is the pillar and foundation of truth (1 Timothy 3:15-16). The testimony of the church was to make known the manifold wisdom of God to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 3:10). John himself was exiled to Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 1:9-10).
- *They did not love their lives so much:* We met these brethren before in Revelation 6:9: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” All Christians die to sin in order to live with Christ [See Romans 6].
- *As to shrink from death:* John summarized the brethren’s state in Revelation 2:10, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
- *12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens.* Heaven may rejoice because of this victory of the brethren.
- *And you who dwell in them!* The brethren, past, and the brethren, present, the innumerable multitudes, and all the hosts of heaven are victorious.
- *But woe to the earth and the sea:* With the dragon cast down, the earth and the sea are his domain.
- *Because the devil has gone down to you!* The loud voice calls the dragon the devil (accuser). The dragon and his angels have gone down to the earth and sea.
- *He is filled with fury.* Because he knows that his time is short. Having lost the struggle in heaven, it is only a matter of time until the devil’s finish.

### ***The Enraged Dragon (Revelation 12:13-17)***

12:13-17: 13 *When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

The struggle now is upon the earth, the dragon filled with fury where he turns his wrath toward the woman the bride of Christ. Peter describes the dragon as a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The dragon, who saw

that he had been hurled to the earth, pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The dragon continues the attack on the woman and her offspring from Revelation 12:6.

That the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach reiterates the security of the woman in the desert. Here the figure of the two wings of a great eagle has a direct antecedent in the escape of the children of Israel in Exodus 19:4: "4'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'" The church will always be out of the serpent's reach. Her children may fall but the church will survive all assaults. *A time, times, and half time* is time counted by the lunar calendar as the custom of the Hebrews. *A time* is a year; *two times* is two years, and *half time* is a half year. So far, we have seen *42 months, 1,260 days, and a times, times, and half times*, all of which represent the intermittent time of the church's persecution throughout the ages from the fall of man to the victory of the lamb. The intermittent nature of the persecution and the survival of the woman is in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Daniel wrote of it:

7 The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

8 I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

9 He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. Daniel 12:7-10

*"15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth".* The prophets used water and rivers to speak of impending attacks by troops. In Jeremiah 46:6-7, Jeremiah used the figure to describe the troops of the Babylonians:

6 "The swift cannot flee

nor the strong escape.

In the north by the River Euphrates

they stumble and fall."

7 "Who is this that rises like the Nile,

like rivers of surging waters?"

A similar figure was used in Jeremiah 47:2:

"See how the waters are rising in the north;

they will become an overflowing torrent."

The troops in this case would be the army of over 200 million in Revelation 9:16 with their mouths of fire, smoke, and sulfur and their tails like snakes. The earth thwarted the dragon by opening its



mouth and swallowing the river. The earth has helped the children of God in a similar way in Exodus 15:11-12 when they were fleeing the Egyptians:

11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?

Who is like you –

majestic in holiness,

awesome in glory,

working wonders?

12 You stretched out your right hand

and the earth swallowed them.

In Numbers 16:30-34, the earth responds in testimony to the power of God compared to the sorcerers of Egypt:

"30 But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt."

31 As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. 33 They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. 34 At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"

The result was that the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The enraged dragon left the woman whom he would never defeat because of the power of God and the Lamb and made war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. What follows is the revelation of the nature of the attack on those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The question of who are the offspring of the woman is here settled forever. **They are those who those obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**