

Revelation 12:1–13

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

The Place of Chapter 12 in the Book

Chapter 11 brought the action of the seals forward to the middle of the week and introduced the trumpet judgments, culminating in the seventh trumpet whose reverberations carry all the way to the great white throne. Chapter 12 now steps back to give us something different: not the sequence of judgments but the persons involved. Without understanding who these persons are, the judgments of Revelation remain a sequence of events without a moral framework. Chapter 12 gives us the woman, the man-child, and the great red dragon — and with them

the key to understanding what the conflict is about and why history is moving where it is moving.

The Woman — Israel in the Purpose of God

The woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head, is Israel — not as she appeared at the birth of Christ or as she appears at the middle of the week, but Israel as God purposes to make her. This is Israel in the divine view, seen from above.

The image reaches back to Joseph's dream: the sun was his father Jacob, the moon his mother, and the twelve stars his brothers. The sun speaks of supreme authority; the moon of derivative, reflected glory; the twelve stars of the perfect administration of government — twelve being the number of governmental completeness. Clothed with the sun means Israel will be clothed with supreme authority in the earth. The moon under her feet means all derivative authority will be subject to her. The twelve stars on her head speak of the glory of God's perfect administration of government expressed through her.

This is how Balaam saw Israel from the mountain top: *God hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob*. Looking down from God's heavenly viewpoint, what he saw was God's own purpose and what God himself would do in that people — not what was visible in the valley below. The song of Solomon's bride says, *I am black but comely*. Both are true from different perspectives. The woman of Revelation 12 is Israel as God will manifest her: *they shall all be righteous* (Isaiah 60). He will bring Israel into the bond of the covenant, put His law in their hearts and minds, turn away ungodliness from Jacob. These are sovereign undertakings — and this great sign is their symbolic expression.

Before She Travailed She Brought Forth — Isaiah 66:7

Verse 2 speaks of the woman travailing and pained to be delivered. The travail is the long history of Israel's sufferings — and the worst of it is still future: the time of Jacob's trouble, the great tribulation. And yet the man-child was born before the worst of the pain. Isaiah 66:7 observes exactly this: *Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man-child.* The usual order is pain first, then birth. Here the child came into the world before the greatest sorrows of Israel. That is one of the most remarkable things about Israel's history — the Deliverer came before the great deliverance was needed.

The Great Red Dragon — Satan in His End-Time Character

The great red dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns is described as he will appear in the last days, not as he was at the birth of the Lord Jesus. Just as the woman is depicted according to the purpose of God and not as she was at that time, the dragon is depicted in the character he will manifest at the final crisis — the seven heads representing the succession of world powers, the ten horns the ten-kingdom confederacy of the revived Roman Empire, the seven crowns a completeness of despotic power. Yet the narrative connects this dragon with Herod, who as an Edomite acting for Rome stood before the woman seeking to devour the child as soon as he was born.

Herod ordered the slaughter of all the male children in Bethlehem two years and under — the dragon's ancient hatred working through a human instrument. The enmity of Esau toward Jacob, of the Edomite toward Israel, finds its ultimate source in the enmity declared in Genesis 3: *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.* History is not random. These things have a continuity. The dragon was in the garden; he was at Bethlehem; he will be at the middle of the week when he is cast down — and all of it is part of the same story.

The Man-Child — Caught Up to God and to His Throne

There is no ambiguity about the man-child: he is to shepherd all nations with a rod of iron, and he was caught up to God and to His throne. Darby's translation renders the great commission as shepherding — not ruling in the sense of lording it over, but the care of a shepherd. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples: *those of the nations lord it over them — it shall not be so among you*. He will shepherd the nations with a rod of iron — that rod being used against the wolf, the enemy of the sheep, not against the sheep themselves.

The expression *caught up* is significant. There are three places in Scripture where this word is used: the man-child caught up here, the Apostle Paul caught up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2), and the saints who will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Christ was caught up; the model Christian was caught up; and we shall be caught up. As He went, so shall we go.

He was caught up to God and to His throne — not to His own throne. Revelation 3:21 confirms this: *I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne*. He promises the overcomer to sit with Him in His throne as He sat down in His Father's throne. The idea that Christ is currently on His own Davidic throne lacks scriptural support — expressed scriptures say He is on His Father's throne, and He will take His own throne in His millennial reign. And we shall reign with Him.

Satan Cast Down — the Crisis at the Middle of the Week

The war in heaven follows the catching up of the man-child. Michael and his angels fight against the dragon and his angels, and the dragon is cast down to the earth — no longer finding any place in heaven. From that point on, every movement of Satan is downward. Cast to earth at the middle of the week, he comes down in great wrath, knowing he has but a short time — three and a half years. He energises the beast, empowers the Antichrist, persecutes the woman,

and drives the apostasy. In Revelation 20 he is cast into the abyss. After the millennium he is cast into the lake of fire. Down, down, down — that word characterises Satan's trajectory from this point to the end.

The woman — Israel — flees into the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her, and is nourished there for the time, times, and half a time. God preserves the corporate entity even as individuals are martyred. The gates of hell will not prevail against what God purposes to preserve. And the dragon, frustrated in his pursuit of the woman, turns to make war against the remnant of her seed — those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. That is the scene of the last half of the week: Israel sheltered in the wilderness, the remnant under persecution, the beast in power, and the dragon behind it all, spending his last short season in furious wrath.

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