

"The Woman & The Dragon"

Revelation 12:1-17

Interlude #3: Revelation 12:1-14:20

It is at this point that John once again moves into an interlude. Remember that each interlude is parenthetical material in the midst of the outpouring of God's wrath upon the wicked world. It is not necessarily chronological with the breaking of the seven seal judgments, the blowing of the seven trumpet judgments, and the pouring out of the seven bowl judgments. This particular interlude occurs between the seventh trumpet and the pouring out of the first bowl judgment. The purpose of this interlude is to provide explanatory information concerning the major individuals who play the major roles during the second half of the Tribulation Period. We have already been introduced to the two messengers in the previous interlude in Revelation 11. Now, we will be introduced to the woman, the dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the Earth.

The Woman & The Dragon: {12:1-17}

The Hostility of the Dragon: (12:1-6)

The Woman: (vv. 1-2) The interlude is introduced by the announcement of a great sign appearing in heaven. "The basic meaning of *semeion* is a sign (as a rule, visually perceived, but occasionally also heard) by which one recognizes a particular person or thing, a confirmatory, corroborative, authenticating mark or token."³⁶¹ "It is a symbol pointing to something else. This is the first of 7 signs in the last half of Revelation. (Cf. V. 3; 13:13, 14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20)."³⁶² The fact that this image of a woman is spoken of as a great sign emphasizes that this is symbolic language being used here, and it is not referring to a literal woman. The question is, "Who is this woman?" There have been a variety of explanations offered. Some suggest that it is specifically speaking of the virgin Mary. Others have identified the woman as representing either Old Testament or New Testament saints. Most properly identify the woman as being a symbolic reference to **Israel**. Israel is often identified as a woman in the Old Testament and is more specifically called God's wife (cf. Isaiah 54:5,6; Jeremiah 3:6,8; 31:32; Ezekiel 16:32; Hosea 2:16). This woman mentioned here in Revelation 12 is described as being *clothed with the sun*. She is also described as having the *moon under her feet* and a *crown of 12 stars on her head*. The image of the sun, moon and twelve stars most definitely seem to be an allusion to Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-11, where the sun and moon are identified as Joseph's parents and the 12 stars represent the twelve sons of Jacob (ultimately the 12 tribes). This imagery is used as an emphatic way of identifying the woman as Israel. The picture here is of the exalted status of God's chosen nation of Israel. Israel is said to be *with child; and she ^cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth*. "The figure of Israel as a woman travailing in birth is found in several Old Testament passages (Isa. 26:17-18; 66:7-12; Hos. 13:13; Micah 4:10; 5:2-3)."³⁶³ "The term for pain (*basanismos*) in both noun and verb forms in the New Testament describes an acute pain whether physical (Matt. 8:6), or mental (Matt. 8:29), or employed metaphorically (Matt. 14:24; Mark 6:48)."³⁶⁴ "The word means 'to plague' or 'to torture,' and in this passage it is used to refer to the pains felt in labor."³⁶⁵ In a general sense this refers to the sufferings of Israel throughout their history longing for the coming of the Messiah to bring an end to Satan, sin and death.

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"If strictly interpreted, it may signify the travail of Israel at the time of the first coming of Christ."³⁶⁶ "So it may be a picture of Israel's travail in bringing forth Jesus the Messiah, as Satan attempted to thwart the birth through the iron heel of Roman oppression and the insanity of a paranoid Herod (Matthew 2:16-18)."³⁶⁷ This can be supported by the context of verse 4 as the dragon waits to devour the woman's child, which as we will see is a reference to Satan and his attempt to do away with Christ.

The Red Dragon: (vv. 3-4) At this point John sees another sign in heaven. This time he sees, *a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads [were] seven diadems*. The great red dragon is none other than Satan. This conclusion is drawn from the comments in verse 9 and again in Revelation 20:2. Revelation 12:9 says, "*And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.*" Revelation 20:2 says, "*And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan.*" Clearly the great red dragon is Satan. The reference to him as great is a reference to his power and influence in the world. "The term red (*purros*) means "fiery red." It denotes either "flame-colored" to depict destruction or "blood-red" to denote murder."³⁶⁸ David Levy in his commentary gives the most clear and concise explanation of the heads, horns and diadems.

"The seven heads represent seven consecutive evil world empires controlled by Satan and leading up to the revival of the Roman Empire. The ten horns represent the ten-nation confederacy that comes out of the seventh head, which is the revived Roman Empire controlled by Satan during the Great Tribulation. The seven crowns upon his heads indicate the fullness of Satan's authority and rule over nations, which he will give to the beast (the Antichrist) during the Great Tribulation (13:2)."³⁶⁹

Moving on to verse 4 we are told by John that the dragon's tail *swept away a third of the stars of heaven, and threw them to the earth*. These obviously are not literal stars, since they would incinerate the earth upon impact. "This is really reference to Satan's original rebellion (Isaiah 14:12ff; Ezekiel 28:11ff), which resulted in one-third of the angelic host joining his insurrection and becoming demons."³⁷⁰ This is clearly understood from the following context of an angelic war in heaven and Satan being cast out of heaven down to the earth (Rev. 12:8-9). John goes on to inform us that *the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child*. Remember that the woman is a symbolic picture of Israel. Her child as we find out in verse 5 is a reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Lord. It might be said that throughout Israel's history in fact the history of mankind that Satan has attempted to thwart the birth of the promised Deliverer. Satan is the underlying influence in Cain's murder of Abel, the corrupting of the line of Seth (Genesis 6:1-12), the murder of the male-children in Egypt (Exodus 1), and in Haman's attempt to destroy the Jews (Esther 3-9). Satan obviously was the driving force behind the nations of Egypt and Babylon as they sought to oppress and exile the nation of Israel. As the woman Israel was about to give birth to the promised Messiah, Satan sought to devour the child. The emphasis is upon Satan's hostility toward the child. "As he was unable to prevent the virgin birth of Christ, Satan tried to kill the child in a general massacre of male children commanded by Herod (Matt. 2:13-18)."³⁷¹ Although Satan failed at this point, he surely thought that he was victorious at the crucifixion of Christ. However, Hebrews 2:14 tells us that it was Christ who defeated Satan at the crucifixion.

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The Male-Child: (vs. 5) It is at this point that we are introduced to the male child of the woman. Three aspects of the child are mentioned. First is His birth, second is His rule, and third is His catching up to God. The identity of the child is none other than Jesus Christ. The woman, Israel gave birth to the Messiah. "Jesus Christ in His incarnation was of Jewish descent (Matt. 1:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:8). Despite Satan's efforts to destroy Israel and the messianic line, Jesus' birth took place as predicted by the prophets."³⁷⁸ This male child, Christ is to rule with a rod of iron. This is a reference to the rule of Christ over the nations of the world in the establishment of His millennial kingdom during His second coming (cf. 19:15). The term "caught up" (*harpazo*) means "to suddenly seize or snatch away." The term is used in reference to the rapture in 1 Thess. 4:17, in describing Paul's being caught up to paradise in 2 Cor. 12:2-4, and in reference to the Spirit of God catching up Philip in Acts 8:39. Here it is best understood as a description of Christ's ascension to the right hand of God on His throne. Unable to destroy Christ, Satan turned his attention toward the woman, Israel.

The Flight of the Woman: (vs. 6) The past five verses have been somewhat reflective, however verse 6 is somewhat anticipatory of what will be described in verses 13-17. Here in verse 6 we are told that *the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days*. This is a reference to the second half of the Tribulation period. This destructive time is called the Great Tribulation or the Time of Jacob's Trouble. This flight into the wilderness is predicted by Christ in His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:16ff and takes place immediately after the abomination of desolation mentioned in Matthew 24:15. So the flight takes place at the mid-point of the tribulation and those who flee will be protected by God during the remaining 3 1/2 years. It is unclear exactly what wilderness area that those from Judea will flee to. Most suggest the areas of Moab, Edom or Ammon, which all lie east of Israel and will be spared from Antichrist's attack on Israel (cf. Daniel 11:41).

The Heavenly War with the Dragon: (12:7-9)

The War in Heaven: It is at this point that we are told that *there was war in heaven*. The verb *egeneto* (was) is in the aorist and as it is used here carries the force of "came to be" or "arose."³⁷³ There came to be a war in heaven or there arose a war in heaven. This is best translated as it is in the NKJV, "*And war broke out in heaven*." The emphasis here is that this is a new war that broke out. It is a future war that will take place during the tribulation period. This is further evidenced by the comment in verse 12, where Satan is said to have just a short time left. Who is involved in this war? John informs us that it is a war between Michael and his angels and they are fighting against the dragon and his angels. The dragon as earlier identified is Satan. Satan's angels are his demons who were once part of God's angels, but earlier fell with Satan. The number of these demons as mentioned in verse 4 was 1/3 of the total number of the angelic host. This is clearly a spiritual battle in the realm of heaven. It is unclear exactly how these two forces will battle each other since our human picture of war is strictly material.

The Expulsion of the Dragon: The battle will surely be intense for *the dragon and his angels waged war*. Yet they were not capable of defeating God's holy angels for the text says, *and they were not strong enough*. The powers of good will overcome the powers of evil. Michael and his angels will utterly defeat Satan and his demons. Not only will Satan and his demonic forces lose the battle, but *there was no longer a place found for them in heaven*. While Satan and his demons shortly after

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creation fell and were cast out of heaven, Satan still had access to heaven to accuse the brethren (cf. Job 1:9-11). Satan today still has access to heaven where he functions as the accuser of believers. However in this future time, when Satan and his demons lose this heavenly battle he will no longer be permitted access to heaven to bring forth those accusations. In fact as verse 9 goes on to say, *the great dragon was thrown down*. The verb *ekballo* (thrown down) is a strong verb denoting a powerful throwing or propelling. It emphasizes that Satan is cast down out of heaven once and for all.³⁷⁴ Not only Satan, but his entire demonic force is permanently limited to the realm of the earth from this point on. Most commentators see this battle as taking place during the tribulation period and coming to completion just prior to the mid-point. In the midst of John's description of this expulsion of Satan and his demons, he gives four descriptive phrases to identify the dragon:

the serpent of old: "The identification of Satan as a serpent occurs 5 times in the New Testament. 4 times in the book of Revelation and 3 times in this passage (cf. 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2). The word *ophis* symbolizes the origin of sin in the Garden of Eden. The characteristics of the serpent in the Bible are mainly evil, emphasizing its treachery, its venom, its skulking, and its murderous proclivities."³⁷⁵ John is bringing to remembrance the first accusation of Satan as the serpent in the Garden of Eden in his temptation of Eve.

who is called the devil: "Devil comes from a Greek verb (*diabolos*) meaning "to slander" or "to falsely accuse."³⁷⁶ "Satan acts as somewhat of a prosecutor in the law court of God. His tasks are to arraign men before the bar of the divine justice."³⁷⁷ This is best evidenced in the book of Job as Satan acts as Job's accuser before God (cf. Job 1:9-11; 2:1).

and Satan: This word is from the Hebrew, a transliteration meaning "adversary."³⁷⁸ The Aramaic corresponding to *Satanas* originally meant "one lying in ambush for."³⁷⁹ This proper name depicts Satan as the enemy or opponent of God and His people.

who deceives the whole world: The word *planon* (deceives) means "a wandering, leading astray, or deceiving."³⁸⁰ Who is said to be deceived? The whole world. "This is a term that refers to the whole inhabited earth and emphasizes the inhabitants."³⁸¹

The Hymn of Overcoming the Dragon: (12:10-12)

"As John beholds Satan and his angels being cast from heaven, he hears a loud voice described as saying in heaven, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come." It is important to note that the loud voice is not identified and probably cannot be with certainty."³⁸² It does however seem best to identify it as the voice of the martyred tribulation saints for they also cried out with a loud voice (cf. Rev. 6:10). This is further supported by the mention of Satan as *the accuser of our brethren*. This would seem to eliminate the rest of the heavenly host.³⁸³ The exclamation of the loud voice in heaven is often identified as a hymn of rejoicing and praise. This hymn is frequently referred to as having 3 stanzas: (1) The arrival of God's kingdom, (2) The earthly victory of the saints, (3) The celebration of the martyrs victory.³⁸⁴

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Stanza 1 The Arrival of God's Kingdom:

Praise is given to celebrate the completion of God's program. "*Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.*" "The term *arti* (now) is an adverb of coincidence, denoting strictly present time, as contrasted with past or future. It introduces here a proleptic picture showing the anticipated results of Satan's being cast out of heaven. The result of this expulsion is a proleptic announcement of the coming Messianic kingdom."³⁸⁵ "The *salvation* mentioned here refers not to salvation from the guilt of sin but to salvation in the sense of deliverance and completion of the divine program. The reference to *power* (*dynamis*) implies that now God is going to strengthen His own and manifest His own strength. The declaration that the *kingdom* of our God is now impending refers to the millennial kingdom when Christ will reign on earth with all authority."³⁸⁶

Stanza 2 The earthly victory of the saints:

Praise is offered for the victory of the saints. "*And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.*" "The saints overcame Satan because of the blood of the Lamb. Christ's shed blood provided salvation and standing for the saints before God and protected them from Satan's accusations. They also overcame Satan by the word of their testimony, that is, confession of faith in Jesus Christ and His Word before the world. The strength of their commitment is seen in the statement, "*they did not love their life even to death.*" These believers were willing to give up their lives for what they believed, even if it meant suffering the violent death of a martyr."³⁸⁷ "They follow the instruction given to the church in Smyrna (2:10) of being faithful unto death as well as the example of the Savior who laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15; cf. Matt. 16:25)."³⁸⁸

Stanza 3 The Celebration of the martyrs victory:

"Those in heaven are encouraged to "rejoice" (v. 12) over Satan's expulsion and exile to the realm of the earth, but the earth is given a warning: "*For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has [only] a short time.*" The world, already under the wrath of God, must now face the uncontrollable anger of Satan as he pours out the most irrational hatred possible upon humanity. Why such intense wrath? Satan knows "that he has only a short time" to accomplish his objectives before being cast into the bottomless pit."³⁸⁹ "Because Satan knows his time is short, he will intensify his efforts against God and mankind, and specifically target Israel (cf. vv. 13-17)."³⁹⁰ How short of a time does Satan have at this point? Likely, just the remaining 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation Period. This is the period in which the Antichrist is motivated to oppress Israel (cf. Rev. 11:2), persecuting the woman Israel and making war with her offspring (cf. 12:13-17).

The Harmful Pursuit by the Dragon: (12:13-17)

Now that Satan has been beaten in the heavenly battle, he turns his attention toward the woman Israel in order to persecute her and make war with her offspring. David Levy in his commentary on Revelation gives a good explanation on these verses:

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"Once Satan is cast out of heaven, he will give his full attention to "persecuting the woman who brought forth the male child" (v. 13). His intense hatred of Israel will reach its climax during the Great Tribulation, as he tries to do everything in his power to destroy them. Satan knows that if he can destroy Israel, he can thwart God's program, keeping it from coming to ultimate fruition.

But the miraculous hand of God will be upon Israel in the midst of Satan's plot to destroy them, providing a way for them to escape: "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent" (v. 14). Some scholars believe that this refers to a massive airlift to safety, similar to the May 1991 Operation Solomon, when 14,400 Ethiopian Jews were flown to safety in Israel within 24 hours on El Al Airlines. However, the term "eagles' wings" (Exodus 19:4) was used to describe Israel's flight from Egypt without the assistance of an airlift. The phrase simply indicates that Israel's flight to safety will be swift and supernatural.

Scripture does not identify the location of "the wilderness" (v. 14) where God will protect and nourish this remnant of Jewish people. Many believe it will be in the area of Edom because this country will escape the wrathful destruction of the Antichrist during the Tribulation (Daniel 11:41). This could well be the place because Christ will come to Edom upon His return to take vengeance on the people of Bozrah and possibly to deliver a remnant of Jewish believers (Isaiah 63:1-6).

Satan, in one last effort to exterminate Israel, will send "water like a flood after the woman" (v. 15) to destroy her. Israel will be spared from Satan's tactic when God sends an earthquake to swallow up the flood (v. 16). The text indicates that the water is *like* a flood, making it difficult to tell if the flood should be interpreted literally or figuratively. Israel has been spared from water twice—at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:13-31) and at the Jordan River (Joshua 3). This flood most likely figuratively refers to Satan's dispatching a huge army to destroy the fleeing Israelites near the midpoint of the Tribulation (see Ezekiel 38-39).

Being unable to destroy Israel will intensify Satan's anger, causing him "to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (v. 17). These are the 144,000 Jewish people who will become believers during the Tribulation (7:4-8) and will be scattered worldwide to testify of their faith in Jesus Christ. They will be victorious over Satan's attempt to destroy them (14:1-5). Although the Devil will be unable to totally exterminate Israel, two-thirds of the Jewish population will be killed during the Tribulation (Zechariah 13:8)."³⁹¹

Most commentators agree, Satan will pursue and persecute Israel during this last half of the Tribulation Period. God will intervene and protect a remnant of Israel and nourish her in the wilderness for 3 ½ years. Satan will be so enraged that he will also pursue and make war with the offspring of the woman, which includes at least the 144,000 Jewish believers but may be a reference to believers in general whether Jew or Gentile. It will be a terrible time of persecution upon the earth. Not only will God's divine wrath be poured out upon the world during this time, but believers will also have to face the uncontrollable anger of Satan manifested through the evil world leader, Antichrist.