

Saint Paul's Sunday Morning Bible Class
Book of Revelation, Chapter 12 Notes and Questions

Introductory Comments:

• Chapters 12-14 serve as a pause between the second (8:6-11:19) and the third (15:1-16:21) sevenfold visions of events taking place on earth. Rev. Dr. Lois Brighton states, “*During this pause opposing forces vie to rule. This break between the second and third earthly visions is more than an interlude, such as the interlude that appeared between the sixth and seventh seals in the first sevenfold vision (7:1-17) and the one that transpired between the sixth and seventh trumpet-angels of the second sevenfold vision (10:1-11:14). For in this break between the second and third visions there is a lengthy pause or cessation by which the normal flow of the visionary prophecy in Revelation concerning events on earth is interrupted. The portrayal of events on earth is **suspended** in order to permit John to see a cosmic vision expounding events that **overarch** what he has been seeing happening on earth. What John views in Revelation 12-14 **dominates and controls** the events that he sees taking place on earth. That is, **these chapters visually explain to John why the events on earth are occurring.***”

Rev. 12:1-2

• “A great sign appeared in heaven; a woman . . .” – The language, “a great sign appeared” brings to mind the prophecy of Isaiah, “Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall name Him Immanuel” (Is. 7:14). The OT background for the “sun, moon, 12 stars” is the story of Joseph (Gen. 37). The Woman is faithful Israel, which is the Church. The OT in many places describes the relationship between God and Israel as married; so also the Church is depicted as Christ’s bride. There is no question, then, that the image of the Woman with Child refers to the Church. Of course, it would not be wrong to narrow this interpretation down a little further and see the Woman depicted here as the Holy Mother of our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, for the Blessed Virgin herself symbolizes and represents the Christian Church. Just as Christ dwelt in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, so does He dwell in the womb of Holy Mother Church. Just as the Holy Mother was “full of grace” because “the Lord is with thee,” so is the Church full of grace, for her Lord is with her. Thus, to interpret the Woman here as Mary would not be out of the question as long as we recognize that Mary symbolizes and represents the Church.

• The fact that the Woman “was pregnant and crying out in the pains and the agony of giving birth” refers to the anxious waiting for the Messiah to come. The faithful had waited since the beginning for the Messiah to come; the Israelites waited with great anticipation.

Where does this “*great sign*” appear?

Who or what does the woman represent?

What is significant about “*the sun,*” “*the moon,*” and “*a crown of twelve stars?*”

Why is this woman about to give birth?

Is this literal or figurative? How do you know?

Rev. 12:3-6

- “A great red dragon” – refers to Satan; the fact that he had seven heads and ten horns and upon his heads seven diadems indicates Satan as the great imitator of God. He is described in this way because he presents himself as God and wants to be God. It also indicates his power, for he is given great power on the earth. It is this dragon that is contrasted with the Lamb throughout Revelation. Notice the beast seems and looks more powerful, but it is the slain Lamb who has all the power.
- Satan will further be shown to be the great imitator as the vision continues by the way he tries to mimic the Triune nature of God. He sets up an Anti-Trinity, with the Dragon being a parody of the Father; the first beast a parody of the Son, and the second beast a parody of the Holy Spirit. Satan knows the true nature of the Triune God, and because he wants to be God, he portrays himself in the same way. The Anti-Trinity is a depiction of Satan taking on forms in his attempt to mimic the Trinity. (More on this in the chapter 13)
- The Antichrist – we cannot put all of our eggs in the “papacy basket.” While we continue to identify the papacy as the Antichrist, we have to be vigilant in recognizing the manifestations of the Antichrist in the world in every generation and always be on the lookout for the End-Time Antichrist to come.
- “His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, etc.” – refers to the fall of Satan and the angels who followed him in the beginning. The majority of the angels (the 2/3) saw the futility of Satan’s desires and continued to stay faithful to God.
- “The dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth . . . waiting to devour the Child” – Satan knew the promise God gave humans in Gen. 3:15 and, from that time on, waited so that he might destroy the Child upon His birth. In the meantime, he went about abusing God’s people throughout history.
- Satan’s attempt to devour the Child at birth was futile – Christ was born, saved the world through His death and resurrection, and ascended to heaven to rule forever (all of this is boiled down in these two verses – the emphasis here is on the result of the ministry of Christ).
- Satan, not being able to destroy the Child, focuses his attention on persecuting the Woman (the Church). The 1260 days refer to the little season Satan will be permitted before the End. The Woman is forced into the desert to be protected by God (the place He prepared for her).

Who or what does the “*great red dragon*” represent?

What is significant about the “*seven heads,*” “*ten horns,*” and “*seven diadems?*”

Who or what do the “*third of the stars of heaven*” represent?

Why did the dragon throw them to the earth?

Why did the dragon seek to “*devour*” the woman’s child? What does that remind you of?

Who does this “*male child*” seem to represent?

Who will “*rule all the nations with a rod of iron*” and be “*caught up to God and to His throne?*”

Why did the woman flee “*into the wilderness*”?

What is significant about the period of 1260 days?

Rev. 12:7-12

- “War in heaven” – Michael completely shuts Satan out from entering the heavenly throne room at Christ’s crucifixion. The fact that the text says “Michael and his angels” has led some to identify Michael as Christ. This holds no water at all. Michael is a frequently named angel, along with Gabriel. He is the warrior, protector angel. The meaning “and his angels” just refers to Michael being a commander over other angels. This does not mean that Michael has full charge over the angels. He is under the command of Christ, who alone rules over all angels. But, Michael has been appointed as a leader over angels. He is an archangel who commands the army of angels under God’s direction.
- “The great dragon was thrown down to the earth” – Prior to this, Satan was permitted to come into the heavenly throne room to accuse people before God. A good example of this is shown in Job (cf. chapters 1-2). But, once Christ’s sacrifice was accomplished, Satan is no longer permitted to come in. He can no longer accuse sinners before God. This is the “binding of Satan” referred to in Rev. 20. Christ’s universal atonement made it impossible for Satan to accuse anyone any longer.
- The “loud voice” of the saints in heaven rejoice at this event, for the “accuser of our brothers has been thrown down” – It was Satan’s activity day and night to accuse sinners before God and he is no longer permitted to do so.
- “Ancient serpent” – Revelation is the only place where the serpent of Gen. 3 is explicitly identified with Satan, though it is made known throughout the bible.
- “The authority of His Christ” – provides the reason why Michael and the angels can cast Satan out, for it is the work accomplished by Christ that forever brought an end to the accusations of Satan. Christ has conquered Satan and the saints have conquered Satan through Christ’s blood and their faith (“by the word of their witness”) in His blood. Just as Michael and the angels were able to overcome Satan’s power, so all the saints can now overcome his power through the “blood of the Lamb.”
- “Woe to the earth . . . devil’s great wrath” – Satan is very angry that he has been banned from the throne room and he will vent his anger on those inhabiting the earth. However, he is bound from deceiving the nations any longer (he cannot stop the Gospel, nor accuse anyone before God). But, he will have a “short time” before the End to go about deceiving the nations again. Satan still has great power within his own realm, but he cannot stop the Gospel or accuse sinners until that time when he is unbound and released.

How can there be “*war in heaven*”? Do you think the outcome of this war was ever really in question, or was it like a war game with the outcome determined and orchestrated before it began?

Who is Michael? What encouragement do you find in reading that the dragon and his angels “*were not strong enough*” to overcome Michael and his angels ?

What does the following phrase suggest: “*and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven?*”

When did the events of 12:9 occur? Why is the great dragon called “*the serpent of old?*”

Why does John refer to the dragon as both “*the devil*” and “*Satan*?” How does Satan “*deceive[s] the whole world*?”

What is Satan’s “bread and butter” skill? How has he adversely affected you and your family in this regard?

How is the devil described in verse 10? Have you found this to be true of him?

Who are the “*they*” who “*overcame*” Satan? How did they do this? What can you learn from this?

How is the devil’s “*great wrath*” revealed on earth? Why does Satan know that he only has “*a short time*?”

Rev. 12:13-17

- Satan’s efforts are aimed at persecuting the Woman (the Church). But the Woman is given wings to fly into the wilderness to be protected by God for “a time and times and half a time” (3 ½ years – the time of escalated persecution of Satan’s little season).
- Vv. 15-16 – image of the extent of Satan’s persecution and God’s protection of the church.
- “The dragon grew furious with the Woman” - Satan’s frustration is seen throughout these verses – he gets angrier and angrier at his failure to put down the Church, but keeps on trying to do so. The Good News for believers is that they are kept safe through faith in Christ (“keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus”).
- “And he stood on the sand of the sea” (in the Greek text, this verse is numbered verse 18; in the ESV, it is part of v. 17; in the NIV, it is contained in verse 1 of chapter 13, which is probably the best place to locate it) – As we will see, Satan, who here stands on the seashore, will bring forth a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth to mimic the Holy Trinity.

How and why did the dragon persecute the woman who gave birth to the male child?

Why does the woman need to “*fly into the wilderness to her place*?”

What is significant about the period “*a time and times and half a time*?”

Why did the dragon become so “enraged with the woman”?

Who are “the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus?”