

Revelation
Lesson VII
Revelation 12:1-17

A Woman, a Child and a Dragon

Introduction:

1. Chapter 12 begins Part Two of the Apocalypse.
 - a. Part one (chs. 1-11) gives a general overview of the conflict between the church and Rome, assures the church of divine protection, and predicts the overthrow of Rome as punishment from heaven.
 - b. Part Two (chs. 12-22) focuses attention on the sins of the empire and shows how complete its overthrow will be.
2. The section beginning here was anticipated in the episode of the little scroll. Rev. 10:9-11
 - a. The dramatic events of chs. 12-22 constitute the message of severe judgment which John was obliged to preach to the nations.
 - b. The final and complete desolation signified by the seventh trumpet is revealed.
3. The characters are the same as in the first section of the book, although they are represented under new figures.
 - a. The woman, her children and the Lamb are opposed by the dragon and two beasts allied with him.
 - b. When the conflict is brought to a close in Rev. 20, the dragon, his allies, and all evil are judged finally and consigned to hell.
 - c. The final state of the redeemed of God is pictured at the end of the book – safely at home with God.
4. The movement of the action in this part of the book is much more rapid than that of the first part.
5. In this lesson, we will set the stage for the remainder of the Apocalypse by means of an identification of the woman, her child and the dragon who opposes them.

Body of Lesson:

I. A Woman with Child: Rev. 12:1-2

A. The imagery of the woman in this chapter emphasizes the continuity of the Old and New Testaments.

1. The pregnant woman who gives birth in the early part of the chapter is fleshly Israel.
2. The woman who flees from her enemies in the latter part of the chapter is spiritual Israel (i.e. the church).

B. The woman of verses one and two is Old Testament Israel.

1. She is radiant (i.e. arrayed with the sun and moon) with divine revelation.
2. The crown of twelve stars calls attention to Israel's twelve patriarchs and tribes.

C. For imagery of Israel as a woman “with child” one should note Isa. 26:17-18. Cf. Mic. 4:10; 5:3

1. Israel was pregnant with messianic hope.
2. She existed as a chosen people for the sake of bringing the Christ into the world.

II. **A Great Dragon: Rev. 12:3-4**

A. The dragon is a common figure of apocalyptic literature: fierce, evil, destructive.

B. The identification of the dragon is given for us later in the chapter; he is none other than Satan himself. Rev. 12:9

1. That the dragon is “red” likely calls attention to the shedding of martyrs’ blood by him.
2. His “seven heads and ten horns” indicate great vitality and power.
3. His “diadems” signify his power to reign over his own.
4. That the dragon’s tail can sweep stars from the sky lets us know that he is a formidable adversary to be faced.

C. His mission is to destroy the child about to be born.

1. Satan sought to destroy the Messiah from the beginning. Cf. Matt. 1:16
2. Surely he thought he had triumphed at the cross of Jesus of Nazareth.

III. **The Child: Rev. 12:5-6**

A. God would not allow Satan to have the victory he was seeking over the Christ.

1. John gives no detailed account of the birth and ministry of Christ; he has no intention of cataloging all his specific encounters with Satan.
2. Thus he moves immediately from the birth of the anticipated child to the time when he was “caught up” at the ascension.

B. The woman is also given protection from the dragon and his destructive intentions.

1. She was not caught up to heaven but given aid and protection during her struggles on earth. Cf. Rev. 11:3
2. Here the woman is clearly the church (i.e. spiritual Israel) rather than fleshly Israel.
 - a. Fleshly Israel was participating in the persecution of the church. Rev. 2:9; 3:9
 - b. No special promises remain to fleshly Israel after Christ’s appearance and establishment of the church.
3. Christ has promised that the powers of the unseen world will not prevail against the church on earth. Matt. 16:18

C. In a very impressive manner, the total issue at stake in the universe has been summed up in six verses of this chapter!

IV. **War in Heaven: Rev. 12:7-17**

A. The struggle between good and evil involves the entire universe in its scope.

1. Frustrated in his effort to destroy Christ on earth, Satan is represented as following him to heaven at his ascension only to be met and defeated by Michael and his angels.
2. This is no literal recounting of events; it is a symbolic representation of Satan's angry reaction to the escape of the Messiah.
3. Note: This passage does not relate the origin of Satan, for the drama here is not at the beginning of time, but recounts the first-century situation of the church.

B. Turned away from heaven's gates, Satan turns his whole attention to the woman (i.e. the church) back on the earth.

1. Heaven rejoices that Satan has been cast down and proved unable to storm the abode of the redeemed.
2. The persecution of the church on earth is no coincidence, but is due to the opposition of Satan. Rev. 12:13

C. Against the church as a whole, the dragon issued a flood of evil to carry her away; the Lord delivered her from harm. Rev. 12:14-16

D. Unable to destroy the church collectively, Satan turns next to "make war" against individual saints. Rev. 12:17

1. "The rest of her seed" is a reference to the brothers and sisters of the child seen earlier in our drama.
2. These are faithful Christians, those who "keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus".

Conclusion:

1. The action of our book is getting swift as it moves to a close.
2. The dragon will soon be joined by two terrible beasts who will be his allies in the life-or-death struggle in progress.
3. The child of chapter 12 will reappear as the Lamb to conquer.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT LESSON:

Read Rev. 13 carefully and try to identify the two allies who join the dragon.