

CHAPTER 12

"Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death'" (12:10, 11).

In 12:1 through 14:20 we have, according to Walvoord¹, the introduction of seven new "actors." They are: (1) the woman, representing Israel; (2) the dragon, representing Satan; (3) the man-child, referring to Christ; (4) Michael, representing the angels; (5) Israel, the remnant of the seed of the woman; (6) the beast out of the sea, the world dictator; and (7) the beast out of the earth, the false prophet and religious leader of the world. The word for sign, σημειον, is used in the book of Revelation here in 12:1 for the first time.²

Verses 1-2 read as follows: *"Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth."* Who is this woman? More information is given in verse 5: *"She bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and His throne."* John records that she and her son flee to a place prepared by God and dwell there 1,260 days. Later, in verse 17, we read, *"And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."* Before offering an identity to this woman, let us look at the dragon.

Looking first at verse 4, we read: *"His [the dragon's] tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth."* Seiss writes that this phrase refers to Satan and the *"angels who kept not their first estate"* (Jude 6). As evidence he mentions that the two verbs are in different tenses. The drawing, συρει, (translated "drew" in the NKJV) is in the present, denoting an action in continuity at the time John wrote. The casting down, εβαλεν, is in the second aorist, denoting an action past. *"Satan's drawing of them along with him began before their expulsion from heaven, and it continues long after, till now, and even under the last trumpet."³*

Turning next to the child, we ask, "Who is he?" The text states that he is to "rule all nations with a rod of iron." There can be no question but that we are speaking here of Jesus Christ, for later in the Revelation we read: *"Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should strike the nations. And he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God"* (19:15).

A working hypothesis for verses 1-6, then, could be as follows. The woman represents the chosen nation of Israel, of which nation Jesus was born. (Although John, in vision, is in the end times, it does not mean that a progression of time, from ages past, is not in view here.) She is in labor to give birth; that is, Israel has suffered persecution from the fallen angel Satan throughout the

1 Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pg. 187.

2 Seiss, *Lectures*, Vol. II, pg. 272.

3 Ibid., Vol. II, see footnote on page 302.

ages, his purpose being to prevent the Messiah from being born. Nevertheless, she gives birth to the Christ child, who ascends to God and is now ruling from heaven. Moving forward now to the time of great tribulation, we find that Israel is preserved during the last 3 1/2 years of persecution. This would seem to indicate that those protected are the 144,000 of the Jewish nation who have been sealed.

In verses 7-12 John sees action in heaven: "*Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.*"

The subject of this conflict between Michael and Satan, according to Seiss, is the resurrection of the saints. We read in Daniel 12:1-2, that during the 70th week Michael shall stand up to watch over Daniel's people. There will be a time of great tribulation, but "*at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.*"⁴ Here in Revelation, Satan appears with all his malignant forces in heaven to bring accusations against the saints and to deny their right to be thus glorified. But John records that they overcame him "*by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*" Seiss says, "To yield here without the most stubborn resistance would be to give up the aim of all his plans and endeavors since he first tempted man in Paradise, to let his whole empire collapse, to permit this chief power of his dominion to go by default."⁵

Having given their word of testimony for the Lord who loved them, and stood firm to it against an adverse world, living martyr lives or dying martyr deaths, cheerfully resigning all that man counts dear for the sake of the truth they confessed, God is not unjust to forget the work and labor of love they have shown towards His name in ministering to His people and His cause. And thus Michael and his angels, standing up for the Lord's saints, conquer the accuser and his hosts by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and the worthiness that appears in what they have done and sacrificed for Him. The means of the victory disclose the nature of the conflict.⁶

4 Tregelles, *Remarks*, pg. 136. The correct translation of this verse is: "And many from among the sleepers of the dust of the earth shall awake; these shall be unto everlasting life; but those [the rest of the sleepers, those who do not awake at this time] shall be unto shame and everlasting contempt." (Brackets original.)

5 Seiss, *Lectures*, Vol. II, pp. 355-356. See also Erich Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption*, pp. 32-33. "Satan must have been such a special Prince before his fall. From the position of authority which in the present time he still holds it is to be inferred that, at least before his fall, a mighty region was legally committed to his rule; and the fact that it is on the earth that he is operating suggests that this region was the earth and the surrounding atmosphere. . . . And when in the Revelation, regarding the end-time of the present economy, it is said that 'The authority over the world is come to our Lord and his anointed, and he shall rule as king in all eternity' (Rev. 11:15; comp. 19:6), there likewise lies in these words the testimony that down to that moment the kingdom of this world stands under the domination of another, even the 'prince of the world.' Now we understand also why the archangel Michael, when contending with the Devil concerning the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a railing judgment, but said only, 'The Lord rebuke thee' (Jude 9)."

6 Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 359-360.

Having failed, Satan is cast out of heaven.

In verse 13 John writes, "*Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.*" Note that the dragon does not persecute the child at this time, but only the woman who gave birth to him. As we follow along in the text we learn that the woman is nourished in the wilderness for 3 1/2 years and protected from the dragon. Enraged with the woman, "*he [the dragon] went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*" (vs. 17).

What can we conclude from verses 13-17? Alexander Reese offers some enlightenment:

[In] Rev. 12:12-17, undoubtedly we are transported to the Last Days. Satan, cast down from the heavenly sphere, rushes in his fury on the Israelitish Church of the End-time; she is marvelously spared, escaping to the wilderness (cf. Matt. 24:15-16, which gives the same event), where she is protected during the three and a half years of the Great Tribulation. Foiled in his purpose to destroy Christianity in its original home, Satan turns to the Woman's remaining seed (ver. 17), those who "keep God's commandments and hold the testimony of Jesus."⁷

In Zechariah 13:8-9 we read,

And it shall come to pass in all the land, says Yahweh, that two-thirds in it shall be cut off and die, but one-third shall be left in it: I will bring the one-third through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'This is My people'; and each one will say, 'Yahweh is my God.'

Fruchtenbaum writes, that "in the Holocaust, under Hitler, one-third of the world Jewish population died. Under the fierce persecution of the Antichrist, controlled and energized by Satan, two-thirds of the Jewish population will die. This will be the largest and most intense persecution of the Jews ever known in Jewish history."⁸

But Satan's power to destroy will soon come to an end.

The power thus held in virtue of the sacrifice of Christ, He has not yet put forth *in acts of vengeance*, not even against Satan himself. Towards sinners He has acted in long-suffering mercy and in the ministry of reconciliation; and, as to Satan, He has borne his presence and accusations against the brethren of Christ, even in Heaven. All this God has done, and kept, as it were, silent. But now the time will have come for Him to put forth His power destructively; and he against whom it will be first directed will be Satan, and the first results of its exercise against Satan will be his everlasting exclusion from Heaven, and from all power of accusation there. Angelic power, directed against the Accuser in virtue of Christ's redemption, will dispossess him of the station which righteousness had, till then, permitted, and will cast him out of Heaven with his angels. This will be the first

⁷ Reese, *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, pp. 284-285.

⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Line in Systematic Theology*, pg. 774.

step towards the manifested salvation of Christ's people--the first step in freeing Heaven itself from something that has entered there inconsistent with the perfectness of its joy.⁹

In closing, let us reflect upon verse 11: "*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.*"

Let us reflect thoughtfully upon the three topics now presented. The blood of the Lamb, the word of the testimony, and the devotion of life even unto death. The atonement which is our hope, the word which is our testimony, the self-surrender which is our obedience. May He, in whose hand are the hearts of all men, give meaning within to the sounds heard outwardly! May He quicken in us a wholesome dread of doctrine disjoined from practice; of revelations accepted, not used; of a seed *falling upon stony places or among the thorns, and bringing no fruit to perfection!* Surely of all the terrors of the last great day none will be so appalling to witness, none so agonizing to endure, as that of him who shall say, *I ate and I drank in Christ's presence, but He never knew me: I called Him my Saviour, but He never saved me from my sins: I trusted in the blood of sprinkling, but I treated it all the time as an unholy thing, and did despite day by day to the Spirit of grace!*

As yet the day of grace holds out, and the door of acceptance is not closed. *Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*¹⁰

9 B. W. Newton, *Thoughts on the Apocalypse*, pp. 166-167.

10 Vaughan, *Lectures*, pp. 318-319.