

## Revelation 12: Vision of Woman, Child & Dragon

Revelation 12 is full of images. The images in chapter 12 are not very happy. Revelation 12 is going to tell us about a dragon with ten horns. What I want you to do is to paint your own visual of Revelation 12.

Chapter 11 ends. At last the seven trumpet sounds. “The time has come,” says verse 18 of chapter 11, “the time has come for judging the dead, and for awarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” Chapter 11 comes again to the last day. “The time has come,” just like chapter 6. But in chapter 12, we are going to do just like we did in chapter 7. Chapter 6 talked about the end of time, and in chapter 7, we are going to go to the beginning again. Similarly, chapter 11 talks about the judgment day, and chapter 12 goes back to the beginning. Now you can close your eyes if you want and try to imagine the next scene. The lightning, thunder, earthquake, and hailstorm signify the end of the judgment and the change of scenes. Suddenly, a woman appears in the sky. She is dressed in a sheer garment, woven from the rays of the sun, each thread pulsing with light. Twelve fiery white and red stars form a crown on her head. She is standing on the moon. We are riveted by her beauty, and only now we notice that she is pregnant. This dazzlingly beautiful figure abruptly cries out in the pains of birth. The chorus of those who have called for God’s judgment is still reverberating and it clashes with her cry. Suddenly a dragon comes into view, as hideous and repulsive as the lady is lovely. The dragon is a crimson gash, violating the sky. His muscular tail sweeps a third of the stars, myriads of stars, from sky to earth, but his eyes are fixed elsewhere. With seven crowns on his thorny heads, he crouches, poised to devour the child at the moment of its birth. The child appears, bearing the signs of royalty. The dragon snaps, but misses, in its effort to consume the child. The child is lifted up to God’s throne in heaven. The woman leaves to a secret place. The dragon turns first to the archangel Michael, whose realm he has attempted to spoil, but Michael hurls him to the earth. Undeterred by this humiliation, he hurries off to pursue the woman again. Then the vision ends.

That is sort of a description of what John sees in Revelation 12. If you think that Revelation 1 through 11 is abstract and what is going on behind the visible realm, I would say to you that chapters 12 through 17 go even farther behind the scenes, because now there is virtually no contact with earth. We have had glances at the earth, with letters to seven real churches, and riders depicting scarcity, disease, and famine, and peals of thunder representing various plagues on the earth. There has at least been some contact with the earth in these visions, but now there is virtually none. We are in heaven. We are seeing things as God sees them. Now what did this scene just depict? Who is this child the dragon wants to destroy and who is the dragon and who is the woman? Is there anything that we know for sure? Are any of these symbols identified so that we could not miss them? The dragon is Satan. That is our starting point and that we know. What else may we know for sure from this scene? Who is the child? The child was Jesus. How do we know that? Because the dragon wants to destroy Christ. There is another reason that makes it even more definite. The child is made to rule over the nations. Who rules over the nations? Christ does, Jesus does; we find that in the messianic psalm, Psalm 2. We also know this from other texts, especially in chapter 2:27. This is a symbol that is found here and there throughout the book. We could also notice that chapter 12:10 says that when the child is lifted to the throne, we hear, “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God and of His Christ.” When the child is lifted to heaven, then the reign of God comes, so the child is Christ. The dragon is Satan, the agent of destruction, trying to destroy God’s people and God’s Christ. Who, then, would the woman be? This is a little bit harder. The woman is either Israel or Mary or—there is a third answer—the church. In a sense, all three are one. They are all correct answers. I will put it to you this way: the woman who gives birth is the true church. She is not Israel in the sense of Israel as a nation. She is Israel throughout the nations,

throughout the ages. She is the people of God. Obviously there is a sense in which Christ is born “in the fullness of time, born of a woman,” as it says in Galatians 4, and the woman is Mary. So we could say the woman is Mary, but Mary is also a believer. She is part of the true church, not the church that was founded in Acts 2, but the true church, the people of God, the true Israelites. The true Israelites and the true church are organically one. They are all believers. So the child is Christ, the woman is Mary or the church, and the dragon is Satan.

If you ever get tired of preaching the same devotionals at Christmas season, if you get tired of Luke 2 and Matthew 2 and you want to do something a little bit different, this is another description of the birth of Christ. Who was doing the work of the dragon at that time? Herod was doing the work of the dragon. Furthermore, although this passage is primarily about Satan’s desire to destroy Christ, the Lord’s anointed, and destroy His people, there is also a truth in this that applies to all time. Is it not true that Satan is always trying to destroy the people of God? You could go through the entire story of the world as told in the Bible, beginning with Adam and Eve. Satan was trying to destroy them by tempting them. The same thing is taking place in the conflict between Cain and Abel or between Jacob and Esau. We could certainly look at the book of Exodus where when all the male children of Israel were to be killed, the goal was to exterminate the people. The women would still live, but they would be assimilated. It would be the end of the people. Goliath tried to kill the Lord’s anointed David. Athaliah tried to kill every son of the line of David. We could think somewhat, at least, of the book of Esther, with its account of the attempt to exterminate all of the Israelites in that region of the world. We could think of Assyria wiping out the 10 northern kings. We could think of Babylon taking the leaders of Israel captive to decapitate the nation. We could think of Herod. We could think of the Pharisees and chief priests and scribes trying to destroy Jesus. We could think the seven churches in the Roman Empire as Domitian and others contemplated those who would not bow to him. We could think of persecutions in other lands. It is always a desire of Satan to destroy God’s people, but he will do it in different ways.

If you look at the technique that Satan uses, what is the instrument that he uses over and over again? Someone might say, “deception,” and that is a good answer, but what part of the body does the dragon use? He uses his mouth. Look through chapter 12. The first thing he tries to do, in verse 4, is to devour the Christ child at the moment of birth. You devour things with your mouth, but you also speak with your mouth. Chapter 12:10 says “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ, for the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” How do you accuse? With your mouth, of course, and this is another thing that Satan does. Satan is identified here in chapter 12; his names are given. He is called “Satan” in verse 9, which means “the adversary,” or “the accuser.” It is a legal term. He is also called “the devil” in verse 9. The word “devil” means “the deceiver.” So he deceives, he lies, he accuses, he slanders. He tries to devour by force, but he also tries to accuse. Now what would his accusation be before the throne of God? He says, “These people have no right to be with you in your holy heaven. They are dirty. They are defiled. They are sinful. What gives them the right to enjoy your salvation? Nothing. So judge them.” He accuses and the accusation has an aspect of truth to it, but they overcame that accusation by the blood of the Lamb. God says, “Are they guilty? They certainly are, but do you know what? They have been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. Are they deserving of condemnation? Are they spoiled, filthy, and unworthy of My heaven? Yes, but I have cleansed them.” Thus, the accusation is obliterated. This is taken from Zechariah 3, where there is a priest who appears before God in filthy garments. The priest is supposed to have the purest of garments, but he is clothed in garments which are—to translate literally from the Hebrew—filth-covered, excretion-covered. He is as filthy as he can be. He has no right to stand before God, but God takes away those filthy garments and gives him new garments, so that he can stand before God.

Satan also uses another instrument. In verse 15 he belches “from his mouth water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of its mouth.” So Satan loses. He loses again and again. He loses his bid to devour Christ. He loses in his bid to accuse. He loses in his bid to drown the woman with this river of water. (I am not speaking sequentially here.) He loses in his battle against Michael. Notice that in 12:6 when the woman flees away to her desert place, there is a war in heaven. Satan goes to war against heaven, and who does he fight? Michael.

Think about this. Here is a little theology. Some people think of Satan as having power that is almost equal or virtually equal to God’s. They think of Satan as kind of being like God, as if Satan were matched up against God. That is certainly the way Satan would like to have us think. But it is not true. Who has to fight against Satan in this scene? Michael, who is just an angel, and do you know what? He wins. God does not even have to send his best player to fight Satan; he just has to send an angel. God Himself does not even have to get involved. Now, of course, God empowers Michael. God designed Michael. God gave Michael his place. It is not as though Michael defeats Satan on his own strength, but we have to remember that the battle is between two angels and God’s great angel Michael wins. Now there is great harm done. A third of the stars are struck from the sky. The stars, I believe, symbolize angels, meaning that Satan takes many angels with him. I would look especially at 2 Peter 2:4 for the indication that the angels are represented by the stars. The overall picture, however, is that Christ is not destroyed. The church is not destroyed. Heaven is not destroyed. Satan is defeated over and over again, and God is victorious.

What shall we make of the dragon? He is our adversary. He is frightening; he is a dragon. He accuses. He is angry. He will talk about our sin, and he will try to destroy us. He will try to get God to judge us, and he will try to devour us. There is reason to pause. We laughed a little at Satan, but we do not want to laugh too much. We are not laughing at him in our strength, because he is powerful, but our protector is more powerful still. Satan’s defeat is sure—by the end of chapter 12, he has been defeated five times. However, he does give up that quickly. It says in 12:17, “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.” He has lost five times, but he is not going to quit. He still has wrath. He still wants to do damage, and from the sea, he will bring forth new allies: a beast from the sea, mocking and imitating Christ, and alongside this beast, a beast from the earth, mocking and imitating the Holy Spirit, showing signs, trying to lead all the nations astray, and offering the mark of the beast. We will speak of all these things next time.