

Bible Studies

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THE UNSTOPPABLE PURPOSES OF GOD

In the first book of the Bible, Joseph saw in a dream: ‘the sun and the moon and eleven stars’ bowing down to him. His father Jacob rightly discerned its meaning but had no inkling of God’s future purposes in Joseph.

As contributors have noted, it is remarkable that in the last book of the Bible, John also sees a woman arrayed with sun, moon and twelve stars.

From Genesis to Revelation therefore, we see the clarity of God’s vision as we trace the progressive unfolding of His purposes through Jacob (renamed Israel) and His family, symbolised by ‘the woman’ of Revelation 12, from whom came the Christ.

No matter how, or at what stage, ‘the old Serpent, the Devil and Satan’ (Rev. 12:9 RV), may try to thwart God’s plans—and no matter what tribulation and suffering God’s sanctified ones may endure as a result of Satanic opposition—nothing can prevent the ultimate victory of good over evil and nothing can hold back the impetus of the divine mind towards the fulfilment of ‘the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Eph. 3:11).

This chapter gives us a glimpse of titanic, ongoing spiritual warfare in unseen heavenly realms:

‘Our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Eph. 6:12).

What relief when ‘the accuser of our brethren’ and his angels (12:10) are overpowered by Michael and his angels! What terror is unleashed when the dragon is cast down to earth ‘having great wrath’!

It is clear from verse 6 (1,260 days / 3½ years) that the casting down of the dragon and his persecution of the woman and her seed, (vv.13-17) coincides with the middle of Daniel’s 70th week (Dan. 9:27), ‘the time of Jacob’s trouble’ (Jer. 30:7), and the time of ‘great tribulation’ which the Lord spoke of in Matthew 24:15-25. ‘The testimony of Jesus’ (v.11) will be upheld at devastating cost to both Jewish and Gentile believers. In spite of the apparent triumph of evil, God is in complete control. He protects and provides a place of refuge for a godly remnant of Israel and even ‘shortens’ the time (Mat. 24:22) so that the diabolical intentions of His enemies are brought to nothing.

‘Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world’ (Acts 15:18).

J.J.

From Study Groups . . .

THE WOMAN, THE DRAGON AND WAR IN HEAVEN (Revelation 12)

From Aberkenfig: Chapter 12 opens with a ‘great’ sign, a new aspect, being seen in heaven, a woman gloriously arrayed. Previous chapters refer to John in person, (‘I saw’) seeing the next part of the vision or revelation. We can nearly take the two chapters (12 and 13) together as they deal with linked characters. There is a second sign seen in heaven, a red dragon, which has seven heads and ten horns. Each of the heads has a diadem, as opposed to the woman who has a crown of twelve stars.

What do those great signs mean? It must be remembered that Revelation does not give the events in strict chronological order: this present chapter deals with both past and future. This is frequently found in other prophetic writings, the day of grace being passed over. It was through Israel that the blessed Lord Jesus was born into this world (Rom. 1:3; 9:4-5). Israel is often likened to a woman, particularly in travail (Is. 54:5; 66:7; Mic. 5:2-3). So, we judge firstly that the woman is seen as Israel in her twelve tribes. Thus, the birth of Christ and His glorious ascension after His vicarious death are here symbolised. No other person than the Lord Himself has been caught up to God and to His throne. He will reign (or rule) over the nations with a rod of iron (sceptre). The life and death of the ‘male child’ are not mentioned in the text: but we say with all reverence that what God leaves out is none of our concern. The miraculous birth was the greatest work performed in Israel, that He should be born of Mary, the espoused wife of Joseph: both descended from David, of the tribe of Judah and of the Israeli nation, thus fulfilling the scriptures (Mat. 1; Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-21) and what the Lord Himself said in John 4:22—‘Salvation is from the Jews’. The twelve stars on the crown denote the twelve tribes of Israel, and the crown itself (Gk. *stephanos*) speaks of triumph.

The second sign is that of the red dragon. Verse 9 makes it clear that this is none other than Satan, (the Devil, the deceiver, the murderer). The colour red is associated with fire and blood of war (6:4) and as the red dragon it shows his relationship with earthly powers, especially to military ones; the seven stars denoting power and authority. John 8:44 describes him as a murderer. It can be seen (v.4) that he stands before the woman, that when she was delivered, he might devour the child. A conflict began in the garden (Gen. 3:15) between himself and mankind, although we read of the casting down in Isaiah 14:12-14. Throughout the Old Testament we can trace how Satan sought to prevent God’s purposes: by means of Pharaoh—described as ‘dragon’ (Ezek. 29:3), and Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 51:34); then Herod, to destroy the baby Jesus, and Judas

and Pilate, to name but a few. The cross was actually Satan's defeat—'and they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb' (Rev. 12:11 NKJV).

Where the woman fled to, we are not told: verse 6 simply states '... fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared of God.' [See Buckhaven para. 6 and Dan. 11:41—*J.J.*] Then the scripture says, 'that they may nourish her.' Who these people (or beings) are, God withholds. Although we may speculate, God has withheld this for a reason. There is a gap in time between verses 5 and 6: the Church the Body will have already been raptured from this scene of tribulation (1 Thes. 5:9-10).

The casting out (or down) of Satan and his angels after the battle in heaven with Michael and his angels, described in 12:7-10, is yet future. This is not just a dispute as in Jude 9 (about the body of Moses). This is war and the war is in heaven. The outcome is predictable, because here will end the Devil and his angels having any place in heaven. No longer will he be able to gain an audience with God to accuse the brethren. As a consequence, there is rejoicing in heaven, but the Devil's wrath intensifies; he will unleash evil terrors and persecutions upon the earth. He will attempt to erase Israel from the face of the earth. It may be that the 'woe' in verse 12 is part of the third 'woe' of the series described in earlier chapters, i.e. 9:1-21 and referred to in 11:13-14 ff.

Bill Paterson

From Buckhaven: This chapter looks both forward and back. The great sign in heaven of the woman arrayed with the sun (v.1) is Israel, the chosen nation, set apart for the fulfilment of the divine plan.

While Israel is portrayed as a travailing woman in several scriptures (cp. Is. 66:7-8; 26:17-18, Mic. 5:3), the greatest event in all eternity is the divine mystery of the coming into the world of the Son of God. By way of the incarnation, the Son brought holy humanity into His deity with a view to an everlasting participation. Since the promise in Eden about the woman's seed, the Devil has tried to destroy the bloodline from which the Christ would come—through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the royal tribe of Judah and the house of David. In the providence of God this royal line was preserved until His advent. From Genesis to Malachi scripture looks forward to that day.

Through the prophets, God revealed:

- The exact time when the divine purpose would be fulfilled—'70 weeks are determined upon thy people' (Dan. 9:24-26 KJV).
- Where He would be born—'Bethlehem Ephrathah' (Mic. 5:2 ESV)
- How He would come—'Behold, the virgin shall conceive' (Is. 7:14).

- Who He would be—‘Immanuel’ (God with us) (Is. 7:14)
- The King born, ‘the second man’ (1 Cor. 15:47), will rule with ‘all authority’ (Mat. 28:18)—‘Out of thee shall come a Governor who shall rule my people Israel’ (Mat. 2:6; Mic. 5:2 KJV).

The woman is Israel and her child is Christ, the promised One. The ‘enfleshment’ of the Son of God as He enters the human family is the greatest miracle of the divine page.

The Devil, implacable opposer of God’s gracious plans, was cast down from the mountain of God because of pride (Ezek. 28:16). Now the Devil and his angels are cast down from heaven. God will ultimately consign them to the lake of fire. An unnamed voice calls for a song of rejoicing, because the great source of all evil and ‘the accuser of the brethren’ is humbled (cp. Job 1:6-9; 2:1-6).

After the defeat of Satan and his angels by Michael the archangel—‘the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people’ (Dan. 12:1)—Satan turns his fury on the woman and her seed (v.14). She is seen fleeing into the wilderness (a desolate place) for sanctuary. This is a place prepared, where her needs will be met as in former days. The location is uncertain, but a remnant is seen in Southern Jordan at Bozrah (Heb. ‘fortress or sheepfold’—Is. 34:6; Mic. 2:12).

The Devil pursues them (by armies or by supernatural power) but preservation and deliverance is afforded them by the divine hand. There they remain until their day of deliverance. These will be tumultuous days, but the rest of her righteous ‘seed’—believing Jews standing in faithful testimony for Jesus ‘even unto death’ (12:11) [Comment 1], will overcome all the evil inflicted upon them, by the blood of the Lamb.

Martin Notman

From Cromer: *The woman and her child* We all agreed that the woman of 12:1 represents Israel, the twelve stars signifying the twelve tribes. The male child to whom she gave birth can surely be no other than Christ Himself, for He is the one who will rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 2:27; 19:15). Christ, too, is the one who has been ‘caught up to God and to his throne’ (v.5 ESV). The dragon represents Satan, who would want to frustrate the appearance of God’s Saviour. The woman fled ‘into the wilderness’. Where is not specified, and speculation would be bootless, but we can at least say that God provided for His people a place of refuge. This is in keeping with the character of God, who will always make sure that His purposes are carried out, sometimes in spite of people’s will.

The Satan The ancient serpent is called ‘the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’ (v.9). The latter term means ‘the Accuser’ or ‘the Slanderer’. This evil being accuses men before God, even when they are blameless (see Job 1:6-11).

He can accuse us too, and we need to try to make sure that such accusations are groundless.

Satan cast down Verses 7-12 describe the defeat of Satan and his expulsion to earth. We should note that this does not make him any less serious an enemy, because he is with us now, in heightened malevolence 'because he knows his time is short' (v.12).

War in heaven It is difficult to understand what this entails since we can only truly understand physical war, but we can understand its outcome, that there was no place in heaven for Satan and his angels. Even so, this is difficult to reconcile with Job 1:6. Can Editors explain this? [Comment 2]

Peter Hickling

From Greenock: There are two women mentioned in Revelation, here in chapter 12 and another in chapter 17. The broad outline of both gives the contrast—the one is 'for' and the one in the later chapter is 'against'.

There are limitations we should heed when trying to decipher this book:

1. The information given to John is to happen in the future (Rev. 1:1).
2. This is a book of symbols and may have more than one interpretation.
3. Explanations of these are to be found elsewhere in Revelation itself, and in the rest of the Bible (Is. 34:16). To go beyond these sources is to study the fancies of men. [Comment 3]

The symbols used in this passage are: the pregnant woman, the male child, the dragon, and the stars of heaven. Adhering to the above principles, a search for verses/passages to help us decode these symbols—but only from the Bible—has the following 'matches':

1. The red dragon is Satan, and this is confirmed in verse 9. The seven heads have two interpretations—kings and mountains (Rev. 17:19-20).
2. Many think the male child can only be the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone shares the throne of His Father in heaven: 'He raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places' (Eph. 1:20 RV). The 'overcomers', however, will also be seated with the Lord Jesus: 'He that overcometh, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat down with my Father in his throne' (Rev. 3:21). The Church the Body may be in view here [Comment 4].
3. The woman is a 'great sign'. The image is used by Jeremiah, 'I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman' (Jer. 6:2 KJV). Paul likewise, writing to the church at Corinth says, 'I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ' (2 Cor. 11:2). And again, 'Husbands,

love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her' (Eph. 5:25). Many think she is Israel because she is associated with the sun, the moon, and twelve stars. These symbols are drawn from Genesis 37:9-11, in which the patriarch Joseph has a dream of the sun and moon (symbolizing his father and mother) and stars (representing his brothers), which bow down to him. Taken together, the sun, moon, and twelve stars symbolize the people of Israel. Another view is that she represents the Church the Body. The woman is the Church because, as 12:17 tells us, 'the rest of her offspring' are those who bear witness to Jesus, making them Christians [see Comment 3].

4. The stars: In 1:16,20 we are told the stars are the messengers (Gk. *aggelos*) of the churches. It is not universally agreed as to whether these are human or spiritual. As the record of the visions are to be written and sent to the churches, they must be human. [See Comments 7 and 8, *B.S. March 2020 pp.48-49-Eds.*]

Fascinating as these interpretations are, we must focus on the clearer passages of Scripture:

- (a) The next item on the divine timetable is the Rapture—the collection of all saints in the Church the Body, dead or alive—to be with their Lord and Saviour.
- (b) The next events are those we will not experience since we are no longer on earth.
- (c) The many details have been divisive and we should try to avoid conflict with our fellow believers, but rather encourage each other.

Steve Henderson

From Halifax: *Two signs* Obligated by angelic command to 'prophecy again over many peoples' (Rev. 10:11 RV), John tells of something extraordinarily disclosed in the heavens: 'a great sign' (12:1). A woman who was arrayed with the sun had her feet upon the moon and wore a crown of twelve stars. Travailing in birth she cried out being grievously 'pained' (Gk. *basanizomenē*, 'tormented') to be delivered. The woman gave birth to a man-child who would 'rule all the nations with a rod of iron' (12:5; see 19:15-16). Clarence Larkin maintains that 'This "Woman" is neither the Virgin Mary nor the Church; she is Israel' (*Dispensational Truth*, p.136). Reminding his reader of Joseph's dream (Gen. 37:9) he illustrates the great sign's Jewish character. So here we have, as John Miller writes, 'the chosen and honoured nation by whom Messiah was to come into the world' (*Notes on the New Testament Scriptures*, p.678). It was from Israel 'of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh' (Rom. 9:5).

Another sign in heaven—a great seven-headed red dragon (Rev. 12:3), is none other than the old serpent; the one called the Devil and Satan (v. 9), the deceiver of the whole world. Having drawn with his tail a third part of the stars of heaven, Satan warred with Michael and his angels and was cast down to earth (cp. Luke

10:18) [see Comment 2, last para.]. Banished from heaven and unable to attack the man-child who is in heaven, and incapable of accusing the saints because of Christ's victory on the cross, the Devil sought to pursue the woman who, provided with 'wings of the great eagle' (Rev. 12:14; cp. Ex. 19:4) took refuge in the wilderness. Being thwarted, however, he became angry and wreaked revenge upon the believers in that time of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 12:17; see 7:14).

Robert J. Butler

From Mount Forest: *The woman* The dragon signifies the Devil and the male child signifies the Christ. But who the woman signifies raises questions! The multi-dispensational vision precludes the woman being either one historic character, e.g., Mary, or the Church the Body, which is dispensationally excluded from the tribulation of verse 17 and cannot divide into the different outcomes seen for the woman and her children (Rev. 12:14,17).

Does Genesis 37:9-10 support the woman signifying Israel? In Joseph's dream about his supremacy (but see 1 Chr. 28:4), the moon signified Joseph's mother, not Israelites (seen in the 12 stars). In Revelation 12 the woman is crowned in glory over the moon, and the sun (Jacob/Israel in the dream) just provides her attire. The woman bears the Christ. In Romans 9:3-5, we read 'from whom' is Christ according to the flesh; but 'whom', and all the antecedents in that passage, are masculine. Divine wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs 8, and of course the virgin bears the Messiah in texts specific to Mary (Is. 7:14; Mat.1:23; Luke 2:34). Israel collectively, or Jerusalem, appear in the metaphor of 'wife' and 'mother', but often in contexts of unfaithfulness that are opposite to Rev. 12:1 (e.g. Is. 50:1; Ezek. 16; Hos. 2:2; 4:5). In Revelation, 'the Twelve Tribes' is used in preference to 'nation', 'Israel' and 'My people'. If 'the woman' includes unbelieving Israel and her 'offspring' only believing Israel, why are the unbelievers divinely protected and the believers exposed to persecution? [Comment 5]

Who are 'The rest of her offspring'? These are characterised by faithfulness and verse 17 aligns well, not with Israel 'according to the flesh' but with the numberless multitude from the Great Tribulation seen in Rev. 7:9,14, who are from every nation, tribe, people and tongue. This suggests they are not merely natural offspring, but a spiritual offspring in which Israelites are subsumed. The Twelve Tribes (first in the flesh, then as to faith: Rom.9) are key players (see Mat. 19:28; Rev. 7:4; 14:3; 21:12). But why must the woman signify them alone? Matthew 12:50 quotes Christ describing '... My mother' (cp. Rom. 9:8), and the offspring of such a mother look like those of Revelation 12:17 [Comment 6].

What then is this great sign of 'the woman'? Are many questions resolved if she signifies the expression through the ages of God's all-wise purpose for 'the woman' of Genesis 3? The woman in the Garden first shares glory above the rest of

creation (Gen. 1:28; Rev.12:1), but the woman after the Fall bears children in pain (Gen.3:16; Rev.12:2). She bears the promised Seed (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:14-15, etc.) and Revelation 12:2 may reflect the final stages envisaged in Galatians 4:4 of travail that began in the Garden. This ‘woman’ is not just a specific person or nation, but a sign of a divine instrument to defeat Satan. Because she bears the triumphant seed, John’s vision highlights the serpent’s inveterate opposition to her, yet emphasises God always ensures no untoward outcome arises for her. The Devil tries, but cannot deprive Him of this sanctified vessel (who may later be reflected in the Bride of ch. 21), and his evil imitation to fulfil his purposes is the contrasting ‘woman’ of ch. 17 [Comment 7].

Geoff Hydon

From Podagatlapalli: The woman in this chapter described as being clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a garland of twelve stars, represents Old Testament Israel, God’s people awaiting the Messiah. The twelve stars on her head represent the twelve tribes of Israel. God set apart the Jews for Himself (Rom. 9:4-5), and that nation gave birth to the Messiah. The boy (12:5) is Jesus born of a devout Jew, Mary (Luke 1:26-33). Throughout the chapter we note that the woman is repeatedly protected by God (vv. 5, 14, 16) especially as the time approached for the ‘kingdom of our God’ to be established on earth (v.10 NKJV).

The New Testament church is called the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16) and linked to ‘Jerusalem above’ which is called the mother of us all (Gal. 4:26; see also Heb. 12:22-23). The members of the church are described as a ‘chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His (God’s) own special people’ (1 Pet. 2:9). [See *B.S.* July issue, p. 111, Comments 4 and 8.]

The red dragon (12:3-4) has seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns, representing the power and kingdoms of the world over which he rules. This dragon is also described as having drawn a third of the stars of heaven and ‘standing before the woman who was ready to give birth to devour her child as soon as it was born.’ A few verses later this dragon is clearly identified as Satan, ‘so the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old called the Devil and Satan who deceives the whole world’ (v.9). As for the dragon drawing ‘a third of the stars of heaven’, this reference apparently represents Satan leading a third part of the angels in a rebellion against God. Other passages also show stars representing angels (Rev. 1:20). [See Comments 7 and 8, *B.S.* March 2020, pp.48-49; Comments 7 and 9 below; and ‘Interpretation Tools—Some Applications’, Section 2 below—*Eds.*]

The Bible also explains that Satan had been involved in a rebellion against God in which he attempted to exalt his ‘throne above the stars of God’ and be like the

Most High (Is. 14:13-14). Satan then began his work as ‘that serpent of old’ (the one who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden) called the Devil and Satan who deceives the whole world (Rev. 12:9).

In 12:4 we read that the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her child as soon as it was born. This appears to be a historical reference to Herod’s effort to destroy Jesus as a young child, by ordering the deaths of all male children from two years old and under who lived in and around Bethlehem. But an angel had warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with his wife and Jesus, to keep the child from being destroyed (Mat. 2:13-18).

Verses 7-9 explain that war broke out in heaven between Satan and his angels and Michael and his angels. As a result of this, John, in a vision saw that a place for Satan and his angels was ‘not found for them in heaven any longer’, and they were cast to the earth. This battle is different from Satan’s original rebellion which is described in 12:4 before the birth of Christ. The battle described in verses 7-9 is followed by a loud voice in heaven announcing: ‘the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ have come’ (v.10).

B.V. Prasada Rao

From Ravulapalem: *War in heaven* Michael and his angels battled with the dragon. Some people say that the war will be in the ‘air’ as Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Eph. 2:2). However, according to Job 2:1 and Zechariah 3:1 it is only in the presence of God who is in heaven [see Comment 2]. As a dramatic development in bringing the sacred mystery of God to a finish, Satan is ejected out of heaven and his demons are cast down to the earth with him. The one who has misled the entire inhabited earth, to the extent of becoming its god (2 Cor. 4:3-4), is finally restricted to the vicinity of the planet where his rebellion first began. Michael and his angels accomplished this great victory. The name Michael transliterated from Hebrew means, ‘Who is like God?’ Michael vindicates God’s sovereignty by proving that no one is to be compared to Him.

In Jude verse 9, he is called Michael the archangel. Though an archangel, he refrained from judging Satan when disputing about the body of Moses but said ‘The Lord rebuke you’. Interestingly the title ‘archangel’ is used elsewhere in connection with only one person—Jesus Christ. Paul says of Him, ‘For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God’ (1 Thes. 4:16 BSB) [Comment 10]. The title ‘archangel’ means ‘a chief angel’. So it is not surprising that Revelation speaks of ‘Michael and his angels’. Paul speaks of the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven ‘with his powerful angels’ (2 Thes. 1:7 NIV; cp. Mat. 24:30-31).

It is written about Michael, ‘one of the chief princes came to help Daniel in trouble and strengthened him’ (Dan. 10:13). He is referred to as ‘great prince’

standing as protector for the children of God's people (Dan. 10:13). He is helper, healer and protector while Gabriel is a messenger, revealer and carrier of good news [Comment 11]. Satan too has his (fallen) angels, operating in opposition to God's angels. There are angels who are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). Angels served Jesus after temptation by Satan in the desert (Mark 1:13). On the Mount of Olives an angel from heaven strengthened Jesus when His sweat was like drops of blood (Luke 22:43-44). The conflict of Eph. 6 and the battle of Revelation 12 harmonize with this view.

S.J.M. Edward

From Surulere: *The woman and her child* A gripping reality that surges through the Revelation is the divine prerogative of the Almighty God in the unfolding narratives, and this fascinating spectacle: '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 labour and in pain to give birth' (12:1-2 NKJV).

A majority of Bible scholars hold the view that she represents the Christian Church, in her historical travails [Cp. Comment 3, para. 3]. It is not uncommon for Christian scholars in commenting on characters and events in the Revelation to relate them to historical events of a terrifying nature. In the days of the cold war, there was a rash of books declaring the fulfilment of Bible prophecies, particularly in the Book of Revelation.

The present global pandemic has emboldened some into most alarming assertions regarding the end times. 'But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets...' (Dan. 2:28). And those secrets which God has revealed to men (Deut. 29:29), are on the pages of Scripture. It can be gleaned by comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13).

The thrust of the Book of Revelation, after the poignant messages to the churches of God in Chapters 2-3, is an opening of events which deals with God's ancient people Israel, whom He has loved with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3). Everything else pales in significance, as God resumes His love tale with Israel with the fullness of the Gentiles having come in (Rom. 11:25), after the rapture of the Church, the Body of Christ.

The dazzling vision of a woman clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet is a fitting description of the nation of Israel, who not being the largest of nations or most powerful, derive their glory and beauty from their God and King: 'The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you' (Deut. 7:7-8). The Psalmist develops this theme in his words:

‘For the LORD God is a sun and a shield; the LORD will give grace and glory’ (Ps. 84:11).

The beloved of the Lord, Israel, is the nation from whom the dayspring from on high arose (Luke 1:78). Paul wrote regarding the Israelites: ‘Of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God, Amen’ (Rom. 9:5). No other nation on earth can lay claim to this glorious privilege of being the earthly progenitor of the Messiah.

John was privileged, prior to the description of the travails that his nation and people will face in the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7) to be reminded of their divine endorsement. He had to be taken back to the greatest of all events in Jewish history, the birth of Christ and the futile effort of the Devil to destroy Him, and His eventual ascension to heaven (which John was privileged to behold, as in Acts 1:9) as it were to reassure him it would all turn out well for the ‘apple of God’s eye’ (Zech. 2:8).

Frederick F. Ntido

From Victoria B.C.: Chapter 12 seems to span a wide period of time in just a few verses, from Genesis to the Tribulation, a time spoken of in John’s Revelation. It relates some figures in symbolic visions, and these figures have critical roles to play for the conclusion of the day of grace leading into the Tribulation.

We start off with finding a woman in heaven, described as a wonder, clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars. It is reminiscent of the dream of Joseph in Gen. 37: 9-10 regarding him and his family. We see in those verses Joseph’s brothers described as stars bowing down to him, along with the sun and moon representing his father and mother. In the Revelation we see the brothers all united in the crown for this woman. The narrative of Scripture supports the idea that this woman is Israel, who brought forth a man-child that would rule all nations.

Next, we see the woman fleeing after the birth of the child, and ascension to His throne in heaven, but before He has started to rule the nations. Verses 13-17 seem briefly to expound what this dragon does in response to his inability to get control of this woman and man-child, touched on in verses 5 and 6. He is unable to realize his goal.

The angel Michael is chief among the heavenly realm, and guards Israel. Nations seem to have spiritual beings set over them. During the study of this chapter, it was brought strongly to mind that we are in a spiritual war against forces in heavenly places. Jesus has secured the victory.

In verse 6 we see the dragon using his tail to cast a third of the stars (angels) to the earth [see Comment 9 and ‘Interpretation Tools ...’, Section 2]. We also see

that he, in turn, is cast to earth himself. We were left with the impression that he no longer prosecutes saints at the bench of God, since he was cast down by Michael. Some felt that he still has access to accuse [see Comment 2]. We do know he goes about as a roaring lion to devour people's lives. We then find the Devil persecuting the woman. She is carried to safety by two wings of an eagle, we suggest, reminiscent of Deuteronomy 32:11-12 and Exodus 19:4, where God uses this metaphor to describe His shepherding hand on Israel leading them out of Egypt and in the wilderness journey. The Devil makes attempts to attack the woman (Israel) but she is aided by the earth, so the Devil's attacks are nullified.

The chapter ends with the Devil (or dragon) making war on the remnant of her seed, which have the testimony of Jesus. These could be the Tribulation saints (Rev. 7:9,14) [most likely—*Eds.*] Down through history Christianity has experienced persecution, but it is a comfort to realise that since Jesus settled the sin question for us, the dragon's plans are moot [in the sense of 'having no more relevance' rather than being 'open to debate'—*Eds.*].

Rodger Lefevre; Micah Lefevre

COMMENTS

1. (Buckhaven): As well as believing Jews, there will also be believing Gentiles, (Mat. 25:31-40), who suffer persecution and even martyrdom.

2. (Cromer and others): We assume when in your penultimate paragraph, you say Satan 'is with us now', you are not referring to the moment in the future recorded in verses 7-12, when Satan will finally be cast down to earth.

From Job 1:6 and other scriptures (e.g., the temptation of the Lord Jesus), we know that Satan is not confined to the heavenly realms but 'goes up and down in the earth' prowling about like a lion 'seeking whom he may devour' (1 Pet. 5:8 RV). We also understand from Job 1:6, 2:1, 1 Kin. 22:19, Eph. 6:12 and Rev. 12:10, that, including his angels, Satan has had, and continues to have a measure of access to the presence of God in the unseen heavenly realm and that the limited audience God has granted him until this point, is terminated in 12:10. From 2 Corinthians 12:2 we know there are at least three 'heavens', each of which is hidden from our natural eyesight and only becomes visible by way of divine revelation. This points to different levels of access into God's presence. Until the final great victory of Michael and his angels over Satan and his angels, it would seem that at some level, Satan 'the accuser of our brethren' (v.10) is permitted to approach the presence of God in 'the heavenly places' (Eph. 6:12).

J.J.

In my understanding, it is only Satan himself, and not any of his minions, who has access to God's presence from time to time, and not always at God's bidding

(Job 1:7; 2:2—"From where have you come?" ESV). 'The sons of God' in Job 1 and 2 and 38:7 are upright angelic beings. Satan is with us now in the sense which our fellow-editor describes, and also on account of the fact that he is the prince of the power of the air influencing unsaved sinners / sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2). As you say, we are unable to specify the type of military conflict that takes place in the heavenly realm between Michael and Satan and the forces under their command.

R.B.F.

Friends in Cromer surely mean in their second last paragraph that Satan is presently at work on earth, so if this was indeed intended, perhaps they are influenced by the Lord's statement, "'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'" (Luke 10:18 ESV). But that event is normally understood as referring to the anointed cherub's dismissal from the service of God and fall to earth (Ezek. 28:14; Is. 14:12), though the latter passage is metaphorical, as if a lofty tree were cut down. That fall, however, does not preclude another judgement, set at the close of the first half of Daniel's 70th week, in a straightforward reading of this part of Revelation 12 with the war in heaven at its centre.

3. (Greenock): These observations seem focused on the dominant character of Chapter 12. Yet the information given by the Lord to John includes some in the letters of Chs. 2-3, describing conditions in the seven churches at the time of writing, with some events from the past, e.g., the killing of Antipas (2:13). There is indeed revelation of the Lord's impending judgement (e.g., on those called 'Jezebel' and 'her children'), but some was of the saints' present troubles and past suffering. Thus 1:1 need not mean that every passage in the book is about the future, but refers to those parts that were to happen after the point of writing.

On (2.) we agree, but would add that the meanings should have some consistency. Thus, the stars can be messengers of the churches in 1:16,20, as prized and protected by the Lord to be so; and stars in 12:1 the tribes precious to God as His intended first witnesses to the nations. As to (3.), the reader of Scripture does well to reflect on the detail given and what deductions we can make in harmony with conditions of the time, and with the persons' characters. Is this not thoughtful reading, rather than fanciful? See 'Interpretation tools ... Some applications' at the close of Comments.

M.A.

4. (Greenock): There is a distinction to be made between the absolute authority of the One who sits on the throne and the delegated, limited authority which He will share on earth with the overcomers during the Millennium.

The same sort of distinction can be made with reference to 2 Peter 1:4 where the Holy Spirit enables us to lay hold on the promises of God and by adding 'virtue, knowledge, patience' and so on we may become 'partakers of the divine nature'—we can and 'shall be like him' (1 John 3:2)—but we will never have a

divine nature in the sense of possessing the thrice holy, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient nature of God.

While it is true as Podagatlapalli notes (para. 2), that there are analogies to be drawn between the Church the Body, and ‘the Jerusalem that is above’, and also true that members of the Church the Body of Christ will reign with Him, the only individual of whom it can be said that he will ‘rule all the nations with a rod of iron’ and the only ‘child’ (singular) of whom it is said ‘was caught up unto God, and unto his throne’ (v.5) is the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. A body of people is not in view here. For these reasons I reject the idea that the woman of Chapter 12 represents the Church. (See also Comment 8.) *J.J.*

Additionally, the woman’s child (v.4, Gk. *teknon*) is defined as a man child or male son (v.5, Gk. *arrhen huios*)—a single individual, speaking of the Lord Jesus, as opposed to ‘the rest of her seed’ comprising many others (v.17), who may include believing Gentiles as well as Jews (see Comment 1). That is, those who are living through the Tribulation, not the Church the Body, which will have been raptured before that terrible period arrives. *R.B.F.*

The woman and her male child cannot in any case *both* be the Church the body. *P.D.*

5. (Mount Forest): ‘The woman’ surely cannot be anything else other than a description of Israel as a unique nation, above all others, whom the Lord has chosen to be the vehicle of humanity for the birth of His Son into this world, and destined to occupy a place of supremacy in the purposes of God (Deut. 7:6-8; 32:8-10; Rom.9:5).

In verse 13 of our chapter the Adversary is in hot pursuit of Israelites generally, hence the reason for John speaking of persecution of ‘the woman’ in verses 15-16 likewise. When, however, we come to the last verse ‘her seed’ is more specific as particularly referring to those who follow the Lord and hold His word as precious. *R.B.F.*

‘From whom’ (12:5), and the antecedents, are masculine because the series depends on ‘Israelites’ (v.4), meaning the nation, and this is the point of Paul’s adducing Romans 9:4-5. *M.A.*

6. (Mount Forest): This really introduces the impression that ‘the rest of her seed’ becomes more narrow in perspective, that is, those who are the elect of Israel’s nation according to grace (Rom. 11:5), and those of Gentile nations who have called upon the Lord for salvation, just as all who are of faith are classified as ‘sons of Abraham’ and ‘Abraham’s seed’ (Gal. 3:7, 29). See also *Bible Studies* July 2020,

p. 111, Comment 4 regarding the expression 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:16); and Comment 8 below. *R.B.F.*

I don't see it as a question of 'either'/'or' but of 'both'. The dragon (Satan) stands implacably opposed to the declared purposes of God in Christ whether manifested in Eden's promise, the promise of the Seed to Abraham, the promises pertaining to life and godliness in the age of grace or the rewards of faithfulness in the coming gospel of the kingdom. National Israel is central to those purposes and in the thrust of the whole of Revelation 4-20 and in particular here the specific language of Chapter 12, identification of the woman as Israel is unavoidable. But verse 17 does require us to seek a wider perspective as well, perhaps along the lines of that which I suggest. *P.D.*

7. (Mount Forest): Even though the names of the twelve tribes are on the gates of the city which is called the bride (Rev. 21), I think Israel, symbolised by 'the woman' in chapter 12 and 'the bride the wife of the Lamb' (Rev. 21:9) are two distinct bodies of people. *J.J.*

8. (Podagatlapalli): It can be deduced later in the paragraph that by 'The New Testament Church' is intended 'the church of the living God, pillar and ground of the truth' (1 Tim. 3:15 NAS, RV), since you say 'The members of the church are described as "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Pet. 2:9).' To serve as a united priesthood in the service of the gospel requires agreement on the truths of the gospel and the discipleship it teaches; as also to belong to 'one nation for God' requires unity about the obligations of its nationals. The 'Israel of God' that Paul has in view in Galatians 6 has been understood as 'the divinely gathered people of God in this dispensation' ('Notes on Galatians', J. Miller, Hayes Press, on 6:16). Some may see 'a new creation' in verse 15 as true of all believers, and so affecting the meaning of 'the Israel of God', but I think the apostle brings in that point as a basic truth to be acknowledged by the Galatians who were reverting to Judaism, before they could learn that they should commit to the series of 'rules' of discipleship that the whole chapter teaches. The single rule immediately mentioned is that new creation brings both enabling to follow Christ as Lord, and responsibility to keep all He commanded, as taught by His apostles. *M.A.*

9. (Podagatlapalli and others): These are literal stars, created heavenly bodies as opposed to the condemned angelic beings, minions of Satan, who are hurled to earth from their place in heaven at the same time as their supreme commander (see v.9).

10. (Ravulapalem): The Lord Jesus is the creator of angels, not part of their nature or state of existence (cp. Heb. 1:4-8; 2:16). When He comes again for those who

are His, believers who are members of His body—'in Christ'—His voice that summons them to meet Him in the air will sound like that of a mighty archangel in its powerful tone and authority.

11. (Ravulapalem): It is indeed of absorbing interest to examine the highly significant roles of Michael and Gabriel, two high-ranking angels it would seem, found in the Scriptures. Where do they stand, we might wonder, in relation to the four living creatures and the twenty four elders, who have such close access to the throne of deity? Are they numbered among 'the church of the firstborn', a select group of angelic beings, in the mind of some, distinguishable from the 'general assembly' of innumerable hosts of angels who have a place in the spiritual Zion where worship and praise is offered (Heb. 12:22-23; 13:15). Only Michael is accorded the highest title of 'archangel', and his unimpeachable behaviour in dealing with the Adversary over the body of Moses is indicative of his character of deep humility and exemplary subservience (Jude v.9). *R.B.F.*

INTERPRETATION TOOLS—SOME APPLICATIONS

In 2020's December issue (p.158) it seemed timely to remind ourselves of the simple tools that were noted on the front page of the Syllabus for that year, so they were amplified a little in 'Introducing', partly in the hope that they might be of use to future students who consult the bound volumes, or the internet version accessible on <https://churchesofgod.info/publications/bible-studies-archive/>

1. Passages that look back to past or present events before foretelling the future

We have noted in Comment 3 that Chapters 2-3 include passages that describe conditions in the seven churches at the time of writing, with some events from the past, e.g. the killing of Antipas (2:13). It seems less surprising, then, to have in ch. 12 an overview of Satan's hatred of the nation of Israel which first looks back to the birth of Christ, when the enemy used the hazards of travel for tax-registration, the cruelty of corrupt Herod and the flight to Egypt to try to destroy the child; then focuses on the power of the Father in raising His Son to glory, and then sweeps forward in verse 6 to the further protection of Israel during the 70th week that links with chs. 11 and 13.

There is then a step back within the 70th week to a parallel or mid-point episode describing a war in heaven that results in Satan and his angels being cast down to earth. As to time, we can hardly avoid linking Satan's rage at his humiliation with the now open and rising persecution of Israel and sympathisers for as much as he can of the 3½ years that follow the Beast's breaking of the covenant.

2. Distinguishing symbolic or pictorial description from literal

We also generally agreed in 2020's study that metaphorical and symbolic language can be side by side with literal (and at times unnatural). The symbolic has to be consistent in what it represents at least through the author's book—else it would not develop clear resonance with the reader. Thus a woman is here symbolic of a nation, and in Chapter 17 of an international system.

It was commended that where a literal reading makes sense, there is no gain and possibly confusion in conjecturing non-literal reference. The woman's flight to the desert can quite possibly traverse and reach a literal place on earth, prepared by God's overrule in ways not yet revealed, though described in the beautiful poetry of Isaiah 35. (Cp. Dan. 11:41 on the thwarting of the Beast, the man.)

Comment 3 reasons that the stars of 1:20 have some consistency as symbols with those of 12:1. 'The stars of heaven' (12:4), however, are clearly not those in the woman's crown, and it is simpler to read them as literal stars (one third to John's view?) propelled with destructive force upon earth when Satan loses self-control, rather than make a case for them being his own following of angels.

For further examples, see *A Study in Prophetic Principles*, G. Prasher, Hayes Press, pp.42-43; and 'Principles for Interpreting Prophecy', *B.S.* 2005, pp.12-16.

M.A.

Covers for 2021 magazines

We're pleased that Kevin Jones of Vancouver again agreed to format the covers and make them print-ready--a great deal more work than may appear to the reader. For continuity with 2011's study of Revelation 1-11 we kept the same design. For the back cover, no graphic or photo could compare with the worth of the Lord's promise, and the ready response of John, the servant of Jesus.

It's also a pleasure to have British Columbia contributing inside as well, as friends in Victoria join us this year. Welcome to all who'll study the Word, and write for others too.

Editors

Feature

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

Introduction

The word of God does not pull any punches. The Lord's hand was heavy upon His erring servant David the king after his affair with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. The child she bore as a result of their forbidden union was not allowed to live. God's grace however reaches the very lowest and worst of sinners. It now reached the king. He was by this time married to Bathsheba, following her husband's death, cruelly instigated by David. She had another son, who was named Solomon. We are told 'the LORD loved him', and the name Jedidiah was given to him, meaning 'beloved of Jah', as directed by the prophet Nathan (2 Sam. 12: 24-25). He would be the builder of God's house, a privilege denied to David, because Solomon was a man of peace, as opposed to his father, being a man of war. The location of the building would be in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Abraham was told by God to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering, but graciously provided a ram to take Isaac's place substitutionally: the name of the place became Jehovah-Jireh, meaning 'the LORD will see, or provide' (Gen. 22: 14).

Although Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and the high places of the land were still being used for sacrifices and the burning of incense, the divine record tells us that Solomon loved the Lord and walked in the statutes of David his father. His humility and awareness of his limited knowledge in how to conduct his reign, and at the same time asking God for understanding and discernment, evoked God's approbation and approval, giving Solomon far more than he had asked for. His wisdom was legendary, in addition to which was his outstanding ability as an author and musical composer. His greatest desire was to build a house for the Lord His God, in keeping with the honour conferred on him by David his father under the hand of God. His reign in the city of Jerusalem over his people Israel lasted 40 years—971 B.C. to 931 B.C. (1 Kin. 3:1-5; 4:30-33; 5:3-5; 2 Chr. 9:30; Pss. 72, 127; Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; Eccles. 12:9). The books of Kings and Chronicles record the history of Jewish people from David's last days to around three decades after the captivity of Judah in 586 B.C. (circa 970 B.C. to 550 B.C.).

R.B. Fullarton, Bathgate
(To be continued)

He who testifies to these things says,
"Surely I am coming soon."
Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22:20 ESV