

Notes on Revelation 12

Intro: It is important to keep the structure of the book in mind as we study. Revelation tells a story of the victory of God and His people over all opposition. God is pictured on his throne, in control of all that happens. He holds the knowledge of the future as symbolized in the book in his hand. Only Christ is worthy to take that book and unloose its seals; thereby revealing the purpose of God. When the first four seals are loosed horses go out, indicating the preludes to judgment, the fifth reveals the martyred souls under the altar calling for vengeance. The sixth introduces the day of wrath of God and the Lamb. Before the loosing of the final seal, the saints are sealed, protected from the destroying winds about to be released. Then the seventh seal is opened, 7 trumpets sound calling forth a holy war between God and his enemies. In these symbolic pictures, which borrow heavily from the imagery of OT prophecy God is warning his enemies of their complete overthrow if they do not repent.

Before the seventh trumpet sounds God's people are given a glimpse of why these severe judgments have been announced. It concerns the fulfillment of the mystery which God had proclaimed to his servants the prophets (10:7). Yet just as God had revealed that further information would be given at the time of the end (Dan. 12:7,9), so John is given a "little book" which contains prophecies concerning "peoples, nations, tongues, and kings". This is given to John to make known to God's people (10:8-11).

The "holy city" (Jerusalem) is to be given to the nations and trampled under foot for 42 months just as God had prophesied in the past; but the kingdom of God "represented by the temple, the altar and those who worship in it" will not be destroyed. Here is how events will unfold: First, the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed by God's prophets as a solemnly warning of the day of the Lord to come (Cf. Mt. 24:14). In this work, they shall be under God's protection as were Moses and Elijah who also declared God's judgments against sinful people.

However there will arise a "beast from the abyss" who succeeds in silencing the voice of God's prophets. In his trampling of the holy city it will appear that God's kingdom message has failed (and those who proclaim it) are forever silenced. It will appear that the world power of Rome has won. And in their celebration, the enemies will treat them just as they did their Lord, using the power of the Roman empire to put them to death. They will want to make sure that this time that no "resurrection" takes place. (Thus they will not suffer them to be buried.) But even this cannot defeat the kingdom message, for the witnesses are raised in the streets and God's judgment comes forth from God in heaven on the city that killed the Lord and his people. This judgment itself signals the deliverance of God's true people, the conversion of many unbelieving, and brings the warning of the complete overthrow of the enemy and the

complete establishment of the kingdom. The seventh trumpet sounds, indicating the victory of the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the world.

Though victory is clearly established for the kingdom of God, there are still many unanswered questions. Exactly who is behind this conflict? Why does it exist? What events have brought God's people to the state of affairs described in this book?

It all begins with:

The sign of the woman

Clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, twelve stars upon her head. The picture is one of glory and radiance.

She was to bear a child and the birth was imminent.

Context seems to suggest that this woman is the faithful remnant of the OT. These were robed in the glory of truth. This is the woman who travailed to give birth to the Messiah (Mic. 4:10).

The sign of the great dragon

Great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems. The diadem is a symbol of rule or authority. The seven heads and ten horns may be mentioned because of the relationship to the beast who is yet to be mentioned who also has seven heads and ten horns. The heads and horns are the the dragon's means of destruction. Or, they may stand as symbolic of the fullness of cunning deceitfulness and power.

Tail sweeps away a third of the stars and threw them to earth. A symbol of great power. Beyond that it may suggest Satan's angels who join with him in his work (Mt. 25:41) or other fallen ones (Cf. Dan. 8:10).

The sign of the male child

Male indicates strength

It was Jesus, the Messiah who was to "rule the nations with a rod of iron" (Ps. 2:7-9).

Christ gives that power to his church (Rev. 2:27).

The child was caught up to God's throne. This is victory over Satan. It implies Satan's unsuccessful attempts to destroy the Christ with temptation and death. It also implies the seating of Christ on David's throne.

The woman flees to the wilderness

It is clear that the woman has a continuity in the gospel age. The OT remnant became the N.T. church. It was at first primarily Jewish.

The dragon seeks to destroy the woman (cf. v. 13ff) but she is protected by God. She flees to the wilderness where she is nourished by God. This whole story is reminiscent of the exodus in which God carried Israel on "eagles wings" (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:11) to the "wilderness" where they were

"nourished" by God with manna from heaven. Here these ideas are brought together to symbolize the salvation and spiritual growth of the N.T. church.

The fall of the dragon

The action is interrupted by this scene. It is a flashback that helps explain what motivates the dragon in his destructive efforts.

This is not a literal battle but a symbolic portrayal of the struggle between God and Satan. Michael is the "prince of the nation of Israel" (Dan. 10:21; 12:1) and ruler over other angels (Jude 9). His name reminds us of the greatness of God. "Who is like God?"

We are now told who the dragon is--the old serpent (Cf. Gen. 3:1). Devil is "accuser" and "Satan" is Hebrew for "adversary".

The victory takes place at the resurrection of Christ. Cf. Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11. It is made known at Pentecost.

The fall comes with Christ's salvation, power, kingdom and authority being exercised among men.

The victory of Christ assures the victory of his followers, conditioned on three important principles:

The cleansing of Jesus' blood

Faithful adherence to his word

A Commitment that is willing to die for Christ

Woe to the earth. Satan now knows his time is "short". The period for deceiving the nations and mobilizing forces for the physical persecution of God's people is limited. Cf. Rev. 6 and Rev. 20.

The dragon seeks to destroy the woman

The destruction is to take the form of persecution. But the woman is protected by God.

He sends after her a flood of falsehoods that destroy (Cf. Ps. 32:6). These the world drinks up; however, the church does not, thus is protected from destruction.

The dragon seeks to destroy the woman's seed

Having failed to destroy the woman, he turns his attention to other followers made by the evangelistic efforts of the woman. While the woman is nourished for "1260 days" she also prophesies, leading to other converts.

Satan turns his attention to these converts, seeking to destroy them by a coalition of political power and pagan religious support.