

Revelation Chapter 12

An Interpretation

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Introduction:

1. Chapters 4 to 11 revealed the interaction between the church (the Lord's people), and the Roman Empire. This was is largely a physical conflict. John has been putting the images that he saw into words that his readers could put back into images in their minds.
2. This new cycle depicts in depth the nature of the spiritual conflict.

We will meet seven symbolic characters:

- the sun-clothed woman
- the red dragon
- the man-child
- the beast from the sea
- the beast from the land
- the 144,000
- the Lamb on Mt. Zion

These represent two sides of the war between the forces of Heaven and the forces of Satan.

3. Our goal in this lesson is to provide the overall picture of the struggle between the church and the forces that Satan will throw against the true church in order to destroy it.

1. The Woman, the Man Child and the Dragon

(1) A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;



(2) and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. (3) Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. (4) And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. (5) And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. (6) Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Comments:

Verse 1. **A great sign appeared in heaven.** Heaven here may be the place of spiritual rule rather than the dwelling place of God. It is used that way in Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12. Heaven may be the screen that John was watching.

It fits well to consider the **woman** as the church. The church

is pictured elsewhere as the Bride of Christ, the true church of the Book of Acts. Galatians 4:31 reads:

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

The church as a **woman** would be familiar to John's readers.

Clothed with the sun, our source of light, so the church is the true source of light for the world. All of the light comes from a single book. How we must prize it.

The moon under her feet. The moon is a secondary source of light, the church is not dependent on reflected light to see clearly. It was under her feet.

On her head a crown of twelve stars. It has been suggested that the twelve Apostles were the crown of the church. Jesus had put them there. The following was spoken to Peter, but also fits all of the Twelve:

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven. Matthew 16:19.

Discussion: What elements of John's vision has the artist captured? There are at least five.

Verse 2. **Pain to give birth.** The **woman** had a **painful** childbirth. There was lots of **pain** as new believers were born in Acts. Some were persecuted in their synagogues and churches, and some were arrested and killed for believing that Jesus was the Messiah.

The first great political opponent of the church was Judaism. This opposition continued throughout the Book of Acts.

During these years, the Roman Empire was largely neutral towards the Faith and played a useful role in protecting believers. An example is how the Romans protected Paul from being killed by angry Jewish leaders. For John's readers, this was already history. Their threat was the pagan Roman Empire.

Immediately following the close of Acts, the Roman Empire singled out believers as the enemy of their system (AD 64) and began to persecute them. This continued until about AD

325, when Christianity actually became the official religion of the empire.



Verse 3. **Great red dragon.** The opponent of the **woman** was this **dragon**. The **red** may point to bloodshed. The **dragon** had multiple heads which may point to multiple personalities. He wasn't always the same nor did he appear to everyone the same. The **ten horns** may point to his forms of power. They were more numerous than his personalities. Just as the **woman** had a **crown of twelve stars**, so this great imitator had **seven diadems on his heads**. The graphic is the flag of Luxembourg shown for an example of a red dragon.

Verse 4. **His tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.** The **stars** show law and order. They are stable and consistent. The dragon overthrew one third of the law and order. There was constant struggle and strife within the empire.

The dragon stood before the woman. He didn't want her child to live. But he did, anyway.

B.W. Johnson in *Vision of the Ages* says on page 237:

This, then, is the period when the Church is sweeping on with a mighty increase; when imperial Rome seeks to check that mighty growth; when Diocletian decrees the utter abolition of the Christian name; when Maxentius, the competitor of Constantine for the empire, vowed to Jupiter that if he would give him success, he would exterminate Christianity from the face of the earth. It is a period of mighty conflict, of a stern grapple between the moral resistance of the Church and the murderous legions of Rome. It is the period when the dragon, red, bloody, mighty, seeks to destroy the offspring of the woman, the saints, from the earth.

Verse 5. **Who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.** Her son was to **rule**. While it is true that Christ is to rule with a rod of iron, it is also true that believers are to rule with a rod of iron. Revelation 2:27. An iron rod, or scepter, is one that cannot be broken. The Scriptures we live by are not bendable. Christians of the second century lived by the

same Word of God that informs believers today. How different than the ever-changing laws of human governments.

Discussion: How do the Scriptures bring stability to both church and home?

Her child was caught up to God and to His throne (Verse 5). So God took note of the man **child** and took him to the very throne in heaven. God is watching the persecution.

Verse 6. Then the woman fled. She wasn't intimidated by the old dragon, but fled to safety for 1260 days or 1260 years.

(7) And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, (8) and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. (9) And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Verse 7. God did not allow the **dragon** to stay in control. He sent **Michael and his angels for war.**

Verse 9. The **old dragon** was not allowed to control the universe. **Michael and his angels threw the dragon and his angels** out of the place of rule.

B.W. Johnson in *Vision of the Ages* asks on page 241:

- Did the dragon, under the form of Pagan Rome, assail the Church? Every reader knows that it made repeated, determined and bloody attempts to destroy the faith of Christ.
- Did it meet with defeat in this effort? The bleeding, mourning, suffering, crying Church grew stronger and stronger. The dragon prevailed not.
- Was the dragon cast down? At last, Pagan Rome, vanquished in the struggle, went down. Paganism fell to rise no more.
- Was this followed by a triumph of the Christian religion? The persecuted faith become the religion of the civilized world.
- What was the means by which this triumph was won? Not the might of arms, not the subtlety of human wisdom; **"they**

overcame by the blood of Christ and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto death." The first great struggle between the woman and the dragon ended with the triumph of Christianity.

(10) Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. (11) "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Verse 10: The cause of **heaven** prevailed. Satan was thrown out of the heavenly places.

Verse 11: The saints won because the **Lamb** died for their sins and the Scriptures conveyed this truth to successive generations. They held out in face of **death** itself.

(12) "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time." (13) And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. (14) But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Verse 12: Now is the time to **rejoice**. The devil only has a **short time** left.

Verse 13: **When the dragon** realized what had happened to him, he **persecuted** the church even more.

Verse 14: God provided **wings** for the church and **she flew** to the safety of **the wilderness for time, times and half a time**.

This is the same number as verse 6. Single, dual and half.
 $360 + (360 + 360) + 180 = 1260$.

B.W. Johnson: . . . it began during the persecuting reign of

Justinian, in A. D. 533, when the Pope was styled the Lord of the Church. For 1260 years from that period the persecuted Church remains in the wilderness.

The period ends about the beginning of the nineteenth century, and to this last epoch we may look for the re-appearance of the visible Church, or in other words, the Church will reappear about the beginning of the nineteenth century in a form that will prove its identity with the Church of the apostolic ages.

If we start the 1260 years at the date the monarch in Rome declared himself the Lord of the Church (533) and add 1260 years, we come to 1793. About that year, church leaders began to break from denominational control and take only the Scriptures as their creed and authority. The outbreaks were independent of each other and were in the U.S. and Europe. **James O'Kelly** of Virginia broke with the Methodists, **Elias Smith** of Vermont broke with the Baptists, **Abner Jones** of New Hampshire broke with the Baptists, **Barton Stone** of Kentucky broke with the Presbyterians, **John Mulkey** of Kentucky broke with the Baptists and **Thomas** and **Alexander Campbell** of Ireland broke with the Presbyterians.

Discussion: These breakouts were the beginning of a movement. How are we encouraged by learning about a movement back to the Scriptures?

(15) And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. (16) But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth. (17) So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Verse 15: The dragon spit a river of water on the woman to destroy her. That failed.



Verse 16: The attack of the devil failed with help from the earth.

Verse 17: **The dragon** turned his attention to even more persecution on believers.

Comments: The church in the time period covered by the Book of Acts was governed by elders as a group, an eldership, never a single elder. But that began to change, with authority being vested in a head elder or bishop. So the mechanism for a church government that mimicked the Roman Empire was already in place. As Christianity became legal and then the official religion, so the rule of bishops expanded vastly. But the true church was still findable here and there. But now it was persecuted by the apostate church. It did not make the history books.

For further reading, get a non-mainline church history such as *The Pilgrim Church* by E.H. Broadbent. Available from Amazon in paper back and Kindle Editions.

B.W. Johnson: An Apostate Church is visible, but for a long time the true Church is hidden from view. It exists in the hearts of those who love the Lord. It is hidden among the rocks and in the caves, behind the family walls, in true hearts, but in public it is not seen upon the earth. It is vain to seek it. It is in the wilderness.

The Woman With the Stars in Her Crown		
Persecuted by Judaism	AD 34—70	In Acts
Persecuted by Pagan Rome	AD 64—315	Rev. 12
Persecuted by mainline church	AD 315 - 1793	Rev. 12
Protected by God for 1260 years	AD 533 (1260 years)	"Pope is Lord of the Church"
	- AD 1793	Freedom to follow the Bible

Questions

1. Heaven may be the _____ that John was watching. (page 2)
2. Name three components of the picture of the woman. (2)
3. The community rejoiced to have believers among them. (3)
4. The dragon had 12 horns. (4)
5. Believers are to rule with a rod of iron. (4)
6. The red dragon is Satan. (5)
7. The woman fled for 1260 days or years. (6)
8. God provided protection for the woman. (6)
9. The end of the 1260 years may have been 1793. (7)
10. The dragon spit on the woman. (7)