

NOW WE KNOW WHY

Probably no portion of Revelation has been more misunderstood, more misrepresented, and more abused than the 12th and 13th chapters. Such will be basis for my lesson this morning. While I do not claim to be an expert or authority on this marvelously, mysterious book, I do believe that there are a few things we do know and there are some things we can figure out using common sense. My purpose this morning is to help you do that especially as it relates to chapter 12. Hopefully in the process we can learn a lesson that will help all of us become stronger in our faith and more faithful in our living.

If you will this morning, please open your Bibles and let's read together **the 12th chapter.**

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2) She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3) And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4) His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5) She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6) and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. 7) Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8) but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9) And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10) And 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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11) And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12) Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" 13) And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14) But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15) The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16) But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17) Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

It really wasn't hard to get the picture of what's going on in these chapters; that part is fairly easy. **Chapter 12** begins with the appearance of a woman, obviously a symbolic woman, who is clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and wearing a crown of twelve stars. The woman is pregnant and in fact she was about ready to give birth. John called all of this "*a great sign*" that "*appeared in heaven.*" Perhaps it was a vision that John saw beginning to form far off on the horizon, and was amazed as it began to grow, coming closer and closer to him.

Then he saw another sign appearing in heaven. This time it is of a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads ten crowns. Now we are told in verse 8 just what this symbolized. John says, "*And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.*"

This dragon is said to have swept down a third of the stars of heaven, which led to their being cast down to the earth. In chapter 1, stars are used to symbolize angels, which is likely the meaning that is to be understood here. Probably we are to take from that a picture of what is then explained further in verses 7-12.

In the second half of **verse 4**, we see the dragon standing before the woman who is about to give birth, with the purpose of devouring the child it she gives birth. **Verse 5** says she gave birth to a man child, and it seems clear from what is said about him that this is meant to symbolize our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. This is one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron—a clear reference to what is said about the Lord in verse 9 of the 2nd Psalm. Furthermore, this child is caught up to God and to his throne, which could only be said of one person, and that is Christ.

In **verse 6**, the woman flees to the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her, and there she is nourished for 1260 days. As you probably know, 1260 is the same length of time thing as the 42 months spoken of in 11:2. There we learned that the nations will trample the holy city for that length of time. I believe the 42 months, or 1260 days represents the gospel age, or all of the time from the resurrection and ascension of Christ to his coming back again, which ushers in the end of the world as we know it.

Well that helps us understand who the woman is. She is the symbol of God's faithful people, those who believed and trust in God and who make every effort to be obedient to Him.

Beginning in verse 7, you have something that confuses a great many people. Some assume that what is talked about in these verses—7-12, describe things that follow the birth and life of Christ. I believe you will quickly understand that isn't what John was indicating. First of all notice that this isn't something John is said to have seen. It is something he is telling, and if you look at it carefully, it is as if he is telling you, in a kind of parenthetical way, why this dragon was trying to kill this woman's child.

Verses 7 through the end of chapter 13, is really a kind of explanation for what is going on in this world.

We have all wondered, have we not, why there is so much evil, so much pain and suffering, so much heartache and sorrow in the world? We have all wondered, have we not, why does life have to be so hard, and full of trials? Well, after we read and grasp what John reveals to us in these two chapters, then we will be able to say, "Now we know why!"

It all goes back, undoubtedly to a time before the beginning of time as we know it. John relates, there was a war in heaven. It involved the angels of the Lord, on the one side led by Michael the archangel, and they are fighting the dragon and his angels; the dragon himself being an angel. There is a war, John says, but in **verse 8** says, he says the dragon was defeated and so he and his angels are cast down out of heaven to the earth.

Notice **verse 10**, John says he 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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*" That is referring to what happened before the creation of the heavens and earth, and we begin to see why God invested Himself in all of this that we call the universe and the scheme of redemption. With the casting down of the devil and his angels, and the creation of the earth, God's scheme of redemption got underway.

The voice goes on to say, "*And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*" These verses capture for us both the past and the present, even down to this very day.

That is an absolutely fascinating passage, one of the most helpful in all of the Bible. From those three verses—**10-11-12**—we learn about something that happened before the world and time began, and we learn why the devil, as Peter says, is going about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We are not given any of the details, but he attempted to do something that must have been infinitely evil. As a result of that, a war broke out in heaven; a war between the devil and his angels, and the angels of God led by Michael the archangel. The devil and his angels were absolutely defeated, and then forever barred from the presence of God. There may be a reference to this also in **Colossians 2:15**, where Paul writes that God "*...disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*"

And so, in **verse 13**, we learn that the dragon becomes obsessed with persecute the woman and her children. Who is the woman, did I say? She is symbolic of God's faithful people. She is identified as the woman who gave birth to the man child, but the persecution of this woman began long before Christ came upon the scene. If you want to get a feel for what is going on here, go back to **Genesis 3:15** where God says to the serpent that had deceived Adam and Eve,

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring, he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

But the woman, John says, was given the two wings of the great eagle, a symbol of God’s protection and providence, and she flies into the wilderness where she is nourished for a time, times and half a time. God’s faithful people are in the wilderness. The wilderness of course, as we know from the story of the Exodus, is the place where God’s people had to live before they were allowed to go on into the land of promise. It is the place where God’s power and providence sustained them.

So this flight into the wilderness, if you will is a symbol of God’s people in a world that is foreign and hostile filled with difficulties; a wilderness, if you will, in which God’s people must live until they are able to cross over the Jordan and enter into that rest that God has promised.

The dragon attempts to destroy the woman—God’s faithful people, by a great flood of hostility, but the earth providentially comes to their rescue and causes whatever the dragon attempts to fail. I take that to be the symbolic way of saying that although, from one perspective, the world is hostile towards God’s people, from another perspective, under the sovereignty of God, it is so designed that it somehow provides a kind of insulation for His people. But just as the devil did not give up trying to tempt Christ when our Lord walked upon the earth, neither does he give up on trying to destroy the rest of the woman’s offspring, even those beginning with the apostolic age, who are those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The devil knew that his time was short, verse 12 says, but that doesn’t refer just to the time following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. It refers to what happened when he was cast down following that failed attempt to take by force what belonged to God. So, obviously, what do you think the devil and these angels are feeling and thinking about all of this?

You know they have been inflamed with anger and rage, inflamed with bitterness and an unloving desire for revenge, and thus having been vanquished in a struggle with angelic forces, they seek to destroy those who have been a little lower than the angels. Paul writes about this struggle in

Ephesians 6, beginning in verse 10,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11) Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12) For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13) Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14) Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15) and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17) and take

the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18) praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints,

Chapter 13 is a continuation of this vision that John saw. In that chapter we are shown two additional beasts, one rising out of the sea, the other rising out of the earth. All sorts of imaginative and speculative theories and ideas exist as to who or what these beast symbolize, but suffice it to say, for the sake of this lesson, that in this world you will have tribulation—**John 16:33**—but be of good cheer, Christ has overcome the world. Whatever the meaning or application one imparts to the two beasts of chapter 13, the number of the first beasts name gives him away. The number 666, John tells us is the number of a man. It is not the number of a specific man, but of man. In the Greek it literally says, “number for man is.” That is, these forces that are hostile to the saints, that receive power from the devil to exercise power and influence are not divine in nature. There is nothing supernatural about them. They are of man and along with devil and his angels, they will one day suffer the wrath of God. And that, in a nutshell is the message of chapter 14.

So, now we know why. Now we know why the devil is out to destroy us. Now we know why life in this world is so hard and filled with problems and troubles; which we sometimes unnecessarily add to by our own ignorance and arrogance. But now we know why truth matters, why it is important to get worship right, why it is critical that the church takes seriously its mission of taking the gospel into all the world. Now we know why the devil hates us and wants to deceive us. Now we know why the world is so full of lies and hatred and bitterness and killing. Now we know why the world has to be so complicated and full of injustice and why so many times it seems like the dark side is winning!

But we also now know why we must not believe the lies, fall for the siren calls for pleasure and acceptance. Now we know why John wrote, “Here is the call for the endurance (or patience) and faith of the saints. Now we know why we must never quit, never give up, never compromise, never sell out. Now we know why **[read verses 7-9, and verse 12]**

7) Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8) but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9) And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

I want to ask you in closing this morning, do you know whose side you are on? I don't mean, whose side do you think you should be on. The question is, whose side are you on? If you have

yet to make up your mind about that, then you are still on the wrong side. If you have yet to obey the gospel, confessing your faith and being baptized, you are on the wrong side. If you have become a Christian but have started walking in the darkness again, you have gone back to the wrong side. One day you are going to come to the end of your journey through this world, and one day Christ is going to come back for his people, and when either of those days come, tell me good people, whose side do you want to come?

Invitation

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