**Revelation**

*Lesson 24 – Revelation 12:1-6*

* Chapters 1-11 form the first part of Revelation where the focus is on the things that God is doing on Earth as part of His judgment upon the wicked and sanctification of the righteous between the first and second comings of Christ. Chapter 12 begins the second part and now the book shifts to a behind the scenes view. If chapters 1-11 talk about the spiritual battle on Earth, chapters 12-22 talk about the spiritual battle in the spiritual realm.
* Greg Beale writes, “Ch. 12 now reveals that the devil himself is the deeper source of evil. The devil is the grand initiator of the trials and persecutions of the saints. He unleashes the beast and the false prophet. The harlot Babylon is also his servant. John pictures the four figures (the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and the harlot) rising in this order and then meeting their demise in the reverse order in chs. 12–20 in order to highlight the devil as the initiator, from first to last, of all resistance to God and His people. In this respect, ch. 12 can be seen as introducing the second half of the book.”

*Verses 1-6*

1. This woman represents the people of God, beginning first with Israel which ultimately becomes the Church.
2. Genesis 37:9-10 – “**9**Then he [Joseph] dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, ‘Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, **the sun, the moon, and eleven stars** were bowing down to me.’ **10**But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?’”
3. Micah 5:3 – “Therefore he [a ruler from Bethlehem] shall give them up until the time when **she who is in labor has given birth**; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.” You can also see Isa 54:1-4 and Isaiah 66:7-13 that pictures Israel as a woman giving birth.
4. This woman is “clothed with the sun” and in Revelation 1:16 Jesus’ face is described as like the sun shining. This woman reflects the glory of Jesus. And she’s also wearing a crown. A crown was promised to those churches who were faithful and endured persecution (Rev 2:10, 3:11, 4:4). The woman not only reflects the glory of Jesus but she also has a share in Christ’s kingship and reward for being victorious in battle over the enemy.
5. This woman is pregnant and crying out in giving birth which is a picture of weakness, pain, and agony. It’s a picture of persecution.
6. “The woman’s birth-pangs refer to the persecution of the covenant community and the messianic line during OT times and especially the intertestamental period leading up to Christ’s birth. The idea of persecution is expressed in the phrase **in pain** (literally “being tormented”), since the verb (Greek basanizō) is used in the NT of the suffering of punishment, trial, and persecution (Matt. 8:29; Mark 5:7; 6:48; Luke 8:28; 2 Pet. 2:8). The suggestion is that the woman is being tormented and suffering as she attempts to give birth, which fits with a picture of the faithful Jewish community being persecuted in the period leading up to the birth of Christ.” –Greg Beale
7. John 16:21-22 – “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. **22**So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”
8. Ultimately, this picture goes all the way back to the beginning. Genesis 3:15 – “I will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he [Messiah] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”
9. This leads us to the dragon described in verses 3-4. Dragons in the OT are repeatedly used to represent evil kingdoms who persecute God’s people (Ezek 29:3, 32:2). But Satan himself is also called a dragon. Revelation 20:2 – “And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years…” Satan is depicted as vicious and powerful like a dragon.
10. This dragon has 7 heads which symbolizes multiple manifestations of 1 single enemy and also increases the viciousness of this enemy of the woman. Vern Poythress writes, “In the same way, Satan manifests his power through multiple channels and in multiple institutions and events. Seven, the number of completeness, suggests that the Dragon has extensive power and many manifestations. He aspires blasphemously to imitate the completeness of God.”
11. The Dragon also has 10 horns which has its OT background in Daniel 7:7 – “After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and **it had ten horns**.” The 10 horns in Daniel 7:7, 24 represent earthly kingdoms and rulers, which means that satan is behind all those worldly kingdoms and rulers who oppress the Church.
12. This dragon also is wearing crowns, again trying to imitate and mimic God. Satan tries to make himself appear victorious and the sovereign ruler of the world.
13. The dragon is also red which is a picture of blood. The 2nd horseman was red and had a sword to slay people, especially the faithful believers (Rev 6:4, 9-10). In Revelation 17, the harlot and the beast are described as red “drunk with the blood of the saints.”
14. It’s hard to know to what the sweeping of the 1/3 of the stars of heaven refers.
    1. It could refer to when Satan fell. Now if this is the case, remember that 1/3 in Revelation is symbolic of a vast number (not the majority but still a large number). So nowhere in Scripture do we have the precisely 1/3 of the angels fell with Satan and 2/3 remains. If this is what Revelation 12:4 is talking about, then it simply means a large number, though less than half, of angels sided with Satan. See 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 where no numbers are given about the angels who fell.
    2. But stars could also refer to God’s people. Daniel 12:3 and Daniel 8:10,24 both call saints or describe God’s people like stars. In this case, the dragon is persecuting the people of God immediately before the birth of the child. And this is exactly what happened in that period of time between the Old and New Testaments. This also fits with the stars on the woman’s head in verse 1 which represents the people of God
15. This Dragon is ready to devour the child that is going to come forth from the pregnant woman, but when this child is born, who will rule the nations with a rod of iron, the child is taken up to God’s presence and throneroom.
16. Satan wants to destroy the Messiah himself and he probably thought he had succeeded at the cross. But God raised Jesus from the dead and snatched Him out of the power of death which is wielded by the serpent. Jesus’ entire earthly/incarnate life is described as a birth and then being caught up to God.
17. Psalm 2:7-9 – “I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them **with a rod of iron** and **dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel**.”
18. Revelation 2:27 – “[the faithful one who overcomes] will rule them **with a rod of iron**, as **when earthen pots are broken in pieces**, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.”
19. So after Jesus’ ascension, the woman flees into the wilderness which recalls the Israelites time in the wilderness after fleeing Egypt. There she is protected and nourished just as Elijah was protected and nourished in the wilderness after fleeing from Ahab and Jezebel. Jesus Himself went into Egypt and came out fulfilling Hosea 11:1 which is quoted in Matthew 2:15. Jesus also went into the wilderness and was nourished and protected. So the life of God’s people, the church, is described as being in a wilderness, under the nourishment and protection of God. This period is described as 1,260 days which we saw recently is the same as 42 months or 3.5 years, all of which symbolically represent the church age aka the Gospel age aka the Inter-Advent period. That is, the time between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ.
20. Notice how in these 6 verses, the entire Bible story from Genesis to the Cross and Ascension of Christ is covered. The whole story of the Bible is symbolically given to John and to us in this picture of a woman and dragon.
21. In sum: woman = people of God (both OT and NT), child = Christ, dragon=Satan, wilderness for 1,260 days = Church age where God’s people are persecuted
22. What about other views?
    1. Roman Catholic: woman = Mary; child = Christ; dragon = Satan;
    2. Christian Scientist: woman = Mary Baker Eddy; child = her unique teachings; dragon = the modern mind that seeks to destroy her influence
    3. Dispensational: woman = national Israel; child = Christ; dragon = Satan; wilderness for 1,260 days = national Israel in the time of tribulation

**Message for Us**

1. Behind all of the kingdoms and rulers that try to oppress and suppress Christians and Christianity, behind the senators and congressmen and women who try to do the same, behind the false religions that attack and slay Christians, behind all of that lies the hatred of Satan who because he can’t get at Christ, tries to get at Christ’s people. Behind all persecution lies the spiritual battle between Satan and the Triune God.
2. “…although Satan is the principal source of the persecution of God’s people, he has been decisively defeated by Christ, a victory in which we now share even in the midst of suffering and martyrdom.” –Sam Storms
3. “Israel, after the exodus from Egypt, wandered in the desert. This desert gave them relief from the idolatry and oppression of Egypt. But it was also a time of testing, when they were tempted to lose faith and rebel. They were to look forward to rest and satisfaction in the Promised Land. Similarly, the church looks forward to final rest in the new heaven and the new earth. But for now, she is subject to testing on earth.” –Vern Poythress
4. “Satan is constantly aiming at the destruction of the Christ. Thus viewed, the entire Old Testament becomes one story, the story of the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the dragon, between Christ and Satan. In this conflict Christ is, of course, victorious.” –William Hendriksen
5. Once again we see parallels between OT Israel and the NT church. The church is the heir to faithful Israel, which further confirms our covenantal understanding of Scripture rather than a dispensational understanding.