

The Book of Revelation

Week #12 – The Woman and the Dragon

I. REVIEW OF WEEK #11 (CHAP 11:1-13)

The first half of Chapter 11 describes events which occur between the sixth and seventh trumpets.

The contents of the little scroll revealed in Rev 11:1-13, act as an introduction to the events that follow the seventh trumpet, and are related to the tribulation to be suffered by the Church.

The ultimate cause of this suffering is the forces of evil, that is, the beast [antichrist] which makes its appearance in the Holy City [Jerusalem].

Summary of Rev 11:1-13.

- a. **Measuring the Temple [Verses 1-2].** The measuring of the temple is similar to the sealing of God's people, and indicates that they will be protected during the time of persecution [1260 days].
- b. **The Two Witnesses [Verses 3-6].** The preaching of the Two Witnesses heralds the end and converts many of the Antichrist's followers.
- c. **Period of Persecution.** The period of eschatological or end-time persecution is sometimes expressed in years [there and a half years], or months [forty-two months]; or days [1260 days].
- d. **Emergence of the Beast [Verses 7-10].** This is the first emergence of the Antichrist in the form of the beast from the abyss. The temporary triumph of the beast results in the deaths of the two Witnesses.
- e. **Triumph of the Witnesses [Verses 11-13].** After lying dead and unburied for three and a half days in the streets of Jerusalem, the witnesses are restored to life and ascend into heaven bringing about the conversion of many Jews.

This sets the stage for the third woe [seventh trumpet], which is about to begin.

II. THE SEVENTH TRUMPET (CHAP 11:15-19)

A. Overview of Rev 11:15-19

The seventh trumpet ends the second series of judgments and opens up the final series – the seven bowls. It gives us the key to their ultimate meaning, which will climax in the triumphal establishment of the New Heaven and the New Earth.

The blowing of the seventh trumpet signals the fulfillment of the mystery of God and the imminent arrival of the kingdom of Christ.

With this final blast, the kingdom of Christ appears, judgment begins and destruction overtakes the wicked.

This section anticipates and celebrates the ultimate victory of God and his Anointed One, Christ. It is a summary of what is still to come.

It tells us, first, about the climax of the confrontation between Satan and the powers of evil on the one hand, and Christ and the Church on the other.

It will describe the last battles in which the Beast and its armies are defeated, with Christ triumphing as Lord of all for ever.

Read: Revelation 11:15-19

[15] Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

[16] And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God,

[17] saying, "We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign."

[18] The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."

[19] Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was

seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

B. The Final Victory

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever."

The seventh trumpet is instantly answered by loud voices in heaven; voices of power and authority that announce and rejoice in the ultimate victory of Christ and his Church.

The voices are those of the twenty-four elders who proclaim that the kingdom of the world, that is, the kingdom of antichrist, has been defeated and has now come over to Christ.

The Messianic reign has begun on earth and Christ will reign forever. The climax of human history is the fulfillment of Christ's Kingdom, which is seen in this text to have already taken place.

This passage of Revelation also teaches that Christ's complete reign fulfills the prophetic words of **Psalm 2**, one of the most important Messianic psalms, which forms the backdrop for much of this scene.

C. The God Who Is and Who Was

Revelation carries us forward to that final moment when God's action in human history reaches its climax – the future is now the present.

That is why it now no longer speaks of God with reference to the future [as it previously did], "He who is, and who was, and *who is to come*" [Rev 1:4, 8, and 4:8].

It now speaks of God in relation to the present and the past only; **"God who is and who was."** The future no longer exists, since God has come at last as King and Judge over the earth.

D. The Ark of the Covenant

[19] Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.

John's vision begins with the opening of God's temple in heaven in which the *Ark of the Covenant* is seen.

It is hard to appreciate the shock value of John's vision of the ark. The Ark of the Covenant had not been seen for five centuries.

At the time of the Babylonian captivity, the prophet Jeremiah had hidden the ark in a place that "*shall be unknown until God gathers his people together again*" [2 Mac 2:7].

That promise is now fulfilled in John's vision.

[People still speculate to this day as to the whereabouts of the ark. Remember the 1981 movie, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*? In the movie, the Nazis wanted the ark to make their armies invincible].

It was the "ark" that had protected and led Israel through the desert on their way to the Promised Land [Num 10:33-35].

But why does John introduce the Ark of the Covenant just before the events of Chapter 12?

The following facts about the ark will shed light on this question.

During the Exodus God's presence appeared over the Ark of the Covenant in the tabernacle. The presence of God made the ark holy.

But the ark was also holy because of what it contained, namely:

1. God's word, that is, the Ten Commandments, written by the finger of God on stone tablets;
2. Manna, bread from heaven – the miracle bread that fed the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness, and;
3. The staff of Aaron, the high priest.

III. THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

A. Overview

Read: Revelation Chapter 12

The next few chapters in Revelation [chap 12 -14] are an interlude between the judgments of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls.

This section occupies the centre of the book of Revelation and introduces us to the central figures in the eschatological fight between good and evil, between God and the devil. These figures are:

1. the woman;
2. the dragon;
3. the male child;
4. Michael the archangel;
5. the sea beast;
6. the land beast; and
7. The Lamb.

These are the contenders in the eschatological battles which mark the final confrontation between God and his adversary, the devil.

John uses three portents to describe the leading figures involved:

- a. The first is the woman and her offspring, including the Messiah [12:1-2];
- b. the second is the dragon, who will transfer his power to the beasts [12:3];
- c. the third is the seven angels with the seven bowls [15:1].

There are three successive confrontations with the dragon, not necessarily described in chronological order. The dragon confronts in turn;

1. The Messiah to whom the woman gives birth [12:1-6].
2. St. Michael and his angels [12:7-12];
3. The woman and the rest of her offspring [12:13-17].

IV. THE WOMAN WITH CHILD

Read: Revelation 12:1-2

*[1] 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 with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.*

Who is the woman clothed with the sun – a symbol of heavenly glory?

The twelve stars of her victorious crown symbolize the people of God – the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles.

She is both an individual person and a collective symbol. There are several layers of meaning here.

The mysterious figure of the woman has been interpreted ever since the time of the Fathers of the Church as representing:

- a. the ancient people of Israel;
- b. the Church of Jesus Christ;
- c. the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The text supports all of these interpretations but in none do all the details fit.

A. The Blessed Virgin Mary . . .

The woman is in labour and is about to deliver a male child who is undoubtedly the Messiah, since he is to “*is to rule all the nations*” [12:5]. The child is Jesus; His mother is the Virgin Mary [see Mt. 1:23].

The image of a sign [or “portent”] of a woman giving birth recalls Isaiah’s famous messianic prophecy:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel [Isaiah 7:14].

B. Ark of the New Covenant

According to the Fathers of the Church, when John describes the woman, he is describing the Ark of the New Covenant.

The old ark contained the word of God written in stone; Mary contained in her womb the Word of God made flesh, who became man and dwelt among us.

The old ark contained manna; Mary contained the living bread come down from heaven.

The old ark contained the rod of the high priest Aaron: Mary's womb contained the eternal high priest, Jesus Christ.

C. The People of Israel

The woman can also stand for the people of Israel.

Many passages of the Old Testament speak of Jerusalem as a woman. She is "Daughter of Jerusalem," "Daughter Zion," "Virgin Daughter," but especially *Mother*.

Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! [Zeph 3:14].

Psalm 87 sings with pride that all Jews are really born in her; they claim Zion/Jerusalem as their mother.

Also, the prophet Isaiah uses the image of a woman giving birth to describe the restoration or rebirth or renewal of God's people.

Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs, when she is near her time, so were we because of thee, O LORD [Is 26:17].

Daughter Zion is a maternal figure that represents the holy remnant of Israel groaning for redemption.

The Chosen People gave "birth" to Jesus Christ the Messiah, in his human lineage. The woman, therefore, is "Daughter Zion" who brought forth Israel's Messiah.

D. The Church of Jesus Christ

The woman also stands for the Church, persecuted by Satan, yet preserved in safety.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth;

The Second Vatican Council taught that Mary is a "type" or symbol of the Church, which labours to bring forth Christ in those who do not know Him.

The woman then is a collective image of God's people suffering as a new birth is about to take place. John makes no distinction between the people of the Old Testament and those of the New Testament.

The woman represents one continuous mystery of God working through his people to achieve his purposes.

V. THE RED DRAGON

Read: Revelation 12:3-4

[3] And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads.

[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 bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth;

The great red dragon represents Satan [Rev 12:9], the murderous archenemy of God. The red dragon, ***“that ancient serpent who is called the Devil and Satan”*** recalls Genesis 3:15, the first prophecy in Scripture to foretell the defeat of the devil through the offspring [Messiah] of a woman [a new Eve].

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

A. The New Eve

Thus, Revelation portrays Mary as the “New Eve,” the mother of all the living. In the Garden of Eden God promised to “put enmity” between Satan, the ancient serpent, and Eve; and between Satan's “seed and her seed.”

After the fall of our first parents, war broke out between the serpent and his seed, and the woman and hers.

In Revelation we see the climax of this enmity. The seed of the new woman, Mary, is the male son, Jesus Christ, who comes to crush the head of the serpent.

Satan knows this; that is why he concentrates his power to destroy the child at birth.

B. Historical Fulfillment

As historical fulfillment, if the child is Jesus, and the woman Mary, the red dragon may represent King Herod. Herod was an Edomite and “Edom” means “red.” So the red dragon could be Herod, who seeks to destroy the infant Child.

In modern times some suggest that the red dragon represents Communism whose emblematic colour is red.

C. Seven Heads and Ten Horns

The dragon has seven heads and ten horns. This signifies his mighty power. Each head is crowned with a royal diadem. This indicates his complete power over the kingdoms of this world, as opposed to the kingdom of God.

The image of political power is present in the dragon's ten horns, which is drawn from the fourth beast [the fourth kingdom] in Daniel's vision [Dan 7:7].

D. A Third of the Stars

His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.

Stars in Revelation are symbols of angels. The casting of the stars to earth, then, is a symbol of the fallen angels.

VI. BIRTH OF THE MALE CHILD

Read: Revelation 12:5-6

[5] she brought forth 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 to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The child which the woman bore was destined to “rule all the nations with a rod of iron.” This is a quotation from Psalm 2:9 and indicates that the child is the Messiah.

Before Satan can devour the new-born Child, He is caught up to God. This refers to Christ's Ascension which culminates with his heavenly enthronement next to the Father.

In this text we go straight from Jesus' birth to his Ascension, because in Revelation, John's interest is not in the human life of Jesus but in the exalted Christ.

A. The Flight of the Woman

The flight of the woman into the wilderness has several possible meanings. The wilderness stands for solitude and intimate union with God.

- a. The people of Israel took refuge in the wilderness to escape Pharaoh after the Exodus. In the wilderness, God took personal care of his people, protecting them from their enemies and wild animals, and feeding them on Manna.
- b. Some interpret this as the flight of Christians during the siege of Jerusalem to the safety of Pella across the Jordan, where they escaped persecution and death.
- c. The woman's flight into the wilderness recalls the escape of the Holy Family from Herod's attempt to kill the Child. They fled to Egypt just as Israel fled into the desert to escape Pharaoh.
- d. It is also an image of the Church pursued down the ages by the Evil One in his attempt to destroy it. But it is protected and nourished [especially by the Eucharist] by God.
- e. The 1260 days is the "standard" time of persecution during which the Church will be protected. Historically it could apply to the time during the siege of Jerusalem [67 AD -70 AD], and to some future time of tribulation for the Church. It could also apply to the time of persecution by Nero from 64 AD to 68 AD.

VII. MICHAEL DEFEATS THE DRAGON

Read: Revelation 12:7-9

[7] Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

[8] but they were 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.

Michael, whose name means “Who is Like God” is the leader of the angels in heaven. He and his angels battle and defeat the Devil and his angels, who are thrown out of heaven.

However, the Devil and his angels are not cast into hell, but to the earth where the battle will resumed.

- In the Old Testament, Michael is the guardian or angelic defender of God’s people, Israel [Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1].
- In the Christian Liturgy Michael is the protector of the Church and the one who escorts the souls of the departed into heaven.

So it is no surprise that he and his angels fight to protect the woman [the Church] and Christ.

A. The Fall of the Angels

The casting out of the Devil and his angels from heaven was interpreted by the Fathers as referring to the angelic fall at the dawn of creation [See CCC 391-395].

The words the prophet Isaiah uttered against the King of Babylon [Is 14:12] seem to recall this event.

*[12] “How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!*

The Fathers also see this passage of Revelation as referring to the war Satan wages against the Church throughout history, a war which will take on its most dreadful form at the end of time.

B. Catechism – Fall of the Angels

CCC 391 Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy.²⁶⁶ Scripture and the Church's Tradition see in this being a fallen angel, called "Satan" or the "devil".²⁶⁷ The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God: "The devil and the other demons were

indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing."²⁶⁸

CCC 392 Scripture speaks of a sin of these angels.²⁶⁹ This "fall" consists in the free choice of these created spirits, who radically and irrevocably *rejected* God and his reign. We find a reflection of that rebellion in the tempter's words to our first parents: "You will be like God."²⁷⁰ The devil "has sinned from the beginning"; he is "a liar and the father of lies".²⁷¹

CCC 393 It is the *irrevocable* character of their choice, and not a defect in the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angels' sin unforgivable. "There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death."²⁷²

VIII. SONG OF THE MARTYRS IN GLORY

Read: Revelation 12:10-12

[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 brethren 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] Rejoice then, O heaven and you that dwell therein! 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!"

A. The Accuser is Cast Out

With the ascension of Christ, heaven celebrates the defeat of the devil and his angels and the establishment of the Kingdom of God, made present on earth through the Church.

The saints in heaven refer to the martyrs on earth as their "brethren." That brotherhood is closely associated with the establishment of God's kingdom.

By Christ's death and Resurrection, the accuser is cast out and Satan's power over the human race is broken. The "accuser" is a type of prosecuting attorney who makes damning accusations against the saints.

B. Those Who Conquered

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.

The saints/martyrs have conquered through the offering of their own lives [“the word of their testimony”]. They did not consider life more important than loyalty to Christ and his Church, even if this meant death.

Every time we choose to suffer rather than to be disloyal to Christ, Satan is defeated.

The victory of the martyrs is won through the Blood of the Lamb.

C. Satan is Cast Down to Earth

The “heavens” rejoice because Satan has been defeated and cast out of heaven. Unfortunately for mankind, he is cast down to earth and begins to take out his anger on man.

D. His Time is Short

The “short time” refers to the time from Christ’s Resurrection to the destruction of the temple – a forty-year period – one Biblical generation.

In another sense, the “short time” refers to the casting down of Satan after Christ has defeated him. The devil’s time to tempt men will be cut short when Christ returns in glory and casts him into the lake of fire, for eternal punishment.

E. Preparation for Week # 13 – Chapter 12 (continued)

Review

- f. *The Apocalypse* – notes by Archbishop Collins (handout)
- g. The Four Senses of Scripture (handout)

Read

- h. Revelation to St. John – Ignatius Catholic Study Bible
Chapter 12:13-17 – The Dragon Makes War against the
Woman's Offspring.
- i. *Coming Soon*: Finish Chapter 9 – The Archetypical
Woman – pages 158-168.

Discuss

- j. Multiple Choice Questions 1-6, and
- k. Discussion/Study Questions 1- 4 at end of Chapter 9 of
Coming Soon.