

Lecture 21
The Woman and the Dragon
Revelation 12:1-17
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So far we have the church raptured into heaven, a glorious view of the throne room of God and the Worthy Lamb who has a scroll with seven seals. He opens six seals of judgment upon the earth. Then there is a brief interlude while 144,000 Jews are sealed and protected to be God's witnesses during the Tribulation period. With the breaking of the seventh seal, the scroll of destiny was opened to reveal the end of history as it began to draw near.

Then six trumpets sounded judgments. And again an interlude to allow two witnesses to come with signs and powers and testimony for 1,260 days (three and a half years). They are martyred and rejoiced over, but resurrected and ascend into heaven in sight of all. Then the seventh trumpet sounds and heaven rejoices, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign forever and ever." [Rev. 11:15]

Now, just before the third series of judgments, the seven bowls of God's wrath in chapters 15-16, John is taken behind the scenes of history to learn the fundamental reason for the intense antagonism that is mounting against believers in the last days. To understand that the rising tide of persecution is simply a final death struggle of an already defeated enemy will encourage believers to hold fast until it is over.

In the last verse of Chapter 11, vs. 19, we read: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within the temple was seen the ark of His covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm."

The Word of God tells us very plainly that the source of judgment is the same as the source of mercy, both flow from the heart of God. Both are essential to His nature and both can be understood only at the cross of Jesus Christ. We know and have studied the significance of the ark to Israel in our Old Testament studies. It contained the "mercy seat of God." Now in this scene, the heavenly ark is "mercy turned to judgment." These symbols of judgment – the lightnings, the thunders, the earthquake, the hail come from the throne of God. The Lord's patience has come to an end. He will vindicate His name and the honor of all those who have trusted in His Word. Those who have trusted in the redemption He has provided are as secure as God's throne is sure.

As John's vision opens, there appears in the sky a woman clothed with the sun. The moon is under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars adorns her head. This is a "stephanos" (victory wreath) crown. The scene depicts both authority and honor. The woman is about to give birth to a child.

A second sign appears – a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. Upon his head are royal crowns. These crowns are "diadema" (kingly crowns).

Revelation 12-13 will introduce us to the three key characters in the drama of the last half of the Tribulation: Satan who is the dragon; the Antichrist/false christ who is the beast and has a lot of similarities with Satan; and the false prophet - called "another beast." These three are, in a sense, an evil trinity opposing the true God and His people on earth.

The dragon/serpent (or Satan) has seven heads suggesting the perfection of wisdom he had as Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:12). The seven heads also relate him to the Antichrist we'll meet in chapter 13, and also connect Satan to the governments which the beast energizes in Revelation 17:9.

The ten horns of the dragon again relate him to the Antichrist beast who has ten horns in 13:1. The dragon's seven diadema crowns indicate his authority and rulership over the Antichrist. I'm sure you know this, but Satan will work through human means, - we'll see him in the Antichrist. He's a future world dictator who promises to solve the pressing problems of the nations. And we'll also see Satan in the false prophet/a religious system that will be the Antichrist's minister of propaganda.

I want to take a moment here to remind you of two important things. First, I am presenting an overall premillennial position to you which says in essence that the church will not go through the Tribulation, God still has a work to do with earthly Israel, and Christ will come at the end of the Tribulation to set up His earthly reign for a period of a thousand years (a millennium). There are many qualified and respected people who do not agree and believe that all of this is symbolic and relates to something that has already passed in history and that God is finished with earthly Israel. One day Christ will open the heavens and call all believers home without ever returning physically to earth again.

Within both the premillennial position and the amillennial position, people vary in their interpretation of events. We are constrained by time to fully explore all the options, and we invite you who have an avid interest in prophecy to read and study for yourself. So, if you've heard Revelation taught a different way, great! We invite you to be open minded to all teaching, test Scripture against Scripture and let the Holy Spirit be your ultimate teacher.

Second, when we talk about Israel we are talking about the remnant of God's people who are wholly committed to Him. God knows who they are. Just as Gentiles/the church contains people who are outwardly religious but do so out of heritage, habit or hypocrisy, and will not be included in the rapture of the church . . . so too Jewish synagogues contain people who attend for the same reasons. The protection of the 144,000 and the protection of Israel in this chapter concerns the remnant – the true believers, not every single person of Jewish descent.

Back to the dragon (Satan), vs. 4. With his tail, he sweeps a third of the stars from the sky and hurls them down to earth. The dragon positions himself in front of the woman to devour the child the moment he is born.

Since vs. 9 identifies the dragon specifically as Satan, the stars are a third of the angels Satan took with him in his original rebellion against God when he was cast down from heaven,

as we read about in Isaiah 14:12-15. Now we know that Satan still has access to the throne of God from our study in Job chapter 1. He is our accuser. When Jesus sent out the 72 disciples and they returned with joy saying, "Even the demons submit to us in your name" (Luke 10:17-18), Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you." Satan falls (or suffers defeat) every time the gospel is preached and people respond. Of course, when Jesus died on the cross, it meant Satan's ultimate defeat (John 12:31-32). But this fall in Revelation 12 is different still. Hold that thought for a moment as I back up a little.

These figures of the woman, the child and the dragon are not difficult to identify in the premillennial viewpoint. The woman is not Mary the Mother of God, although you will see statues of her in Catholic Churches that look much like this picture. The Catholic Church holds an amillennial viewpoint. The woman is not a representation of the church, because the church did not give birth to Christ, but Christ to the church. The woman here represents Israel.

The child to be born is Christ. He is the male child destined to rule the world with a rod of iron. The dragon's eagerness to devour the child explains the violent opposition that Satan has engaged in throughout the ages to try and stop Jesus from being born. For example, the edict to kill male children in Exodus and the edict from Herod in Jesus' day.

John's readers would immediately understand the great red dragon to be Satan, the archenemy of God and His people and, indeed, as we said, he is identified in vs. 9. But Satan's plans were thwarted. Jesus was born and victoriously ascended to heaven after accomplishing His purpose.

Then in verse 6 "the woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (Taken literally, that again is three and a half years – the last half of the Tribulation.) Her time of protection corresponds with her time of persecution as we'll see in Revelation 13:5.

Now the focus shifts to heaven and a war in which the combatants are Michael and his angels pitted against the dragon and his angels.

The dragon is identified in three ways:

- 1) that ancient serpent – an obvious reference to the historic encounter between Eve and the serpent in the Garden of Eden. Deceit has always been Satan's method.
- 2) the devil – which means slanderer. Having been cast from heaven, he now desires to take as many as possible with him into the torments of hell.
- 3) Satan – originally the word "Satan" was not a proper name. It simply meant *adversary*. In time it came to mean "*the* adversary," the one who accuses men in the court of heaven as we saw in the book of Job.

The war that is going on in heaven began with Satan's sinful rebellion. God did not immediately destroy Satan and his rebel angels, but moved in His own majestic way to perform His plan that would ultimately bring out His perfections and show the utter defeat of Satan. This warfare is still being carried on in many spheres. The result is always the same however, ultimately Satan is defeated. Every time you say "no" to sin and "yes" to Christ, he has lost another battle.

Donald Barnhouse tells an interesting parable:

A certain man had a beautiful estate upon which were some magnificent trees in which he took great pride. It was his custom to walk among them and gaze upon their beauty. This man had an enemy who hated him sorely. This enemy was always seeking ways of annoying the master of the estate. At last the enemy conceived a plan which he thought would greatly wound the heart of the proprietor.

He decided to go to the estate in the dark of night and cut down one of the most beautiful trees. He laid his plans well; took with him axe and saw and began his work. All night he toiled till his muscles were sore and his hands were blistered. As morning dawned he saw the proprietor riding with a companion toward the trees where he had been hard at work. He redoubled his efforts and the great tree began to creak and totter. As it gained momentum in the fall, the enemy began to shout in triumph! One of the branches, however, came toward him and pinned him to the ground to die in agony. His hatred, however, was strong, and he jeered at the proprietor who approached him.

The owner of the estate called his companion toward him and said to the enemy, "You thought to do me a great harm, but I want to show you what you have done. This man with me is the architect of the beautiful home that I intend to build here in the midst of these trees. In order to make room for the house, it was necessary to cut down one of these trees. Look at this plan! The tree upon which you have toiled all night and which is the cause of your death is the tree which must be cut down to make way for my house. You have worked for me without knowing it, and your toil is nothing and bitterness your food in death."

Paul has told us in Ephesians 6:12, we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places. We saw some of the spiritual warfare going on in the book of Daniel as the angel was hindered from coming in answer to Daniel's prayer for 21 days.

Just as Satan's presence in heaven at the time of Job's trials did not cause Job's defeat, so Satan having access to heaven today does not cause our defeat. He can accuse all he wants, but we are covered by the blood of the worthy Lamb and we have an advocate in Christ Jesus. Satan's power over believers has been broken.

Well, Michael and the forces of righteousness prevail in this mighty battle, and the dragon and his defeated army are hurled to earth. This is a scene in the future when Satan will no longer have access to the throne of God as our accuser. "He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." [Rev. 12:12]

In vs. 10-12, a loud voice proclaimed that the sovereign rule of God has become a reality and with it authority and deliverance from evil. Satan is forever cast out of heaven and overcome, not only by the blood of the Lamb, but by the faithful testimony of believers as well. This defeat of Satan causes great rejoicing in heaven. The warfare with the enemy, which has been waged over such a wide front for so many ages, is now restricted to earth, the last battle ground for the enemy. We can see why the text says "woe to the earth and sea, because the devil has gone down to you!"

Following this burst of heavenly praise, John continues the account. The dragon, having been defeated by the hosts of heaven, now directs his hostility toward the woman, believing Israel, who gave birth to the male child, Jesus. Satan's battle against the woman most likely begins in full force with the breaking of the covenant by the Antichrist in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel. The many judgments inflicted upon the earth during the Tribulation's last 3 1/2 years originate with divine direction and power. Yet the afflictions on the earth's inhabitants come largely from the activities of Satan. These activities result in great destruction and martyrdom of multitudes of saints. The only consolation is that Satan's time on earth is limited to the last 3 1/2 years of the Tribulation. In referring to this time, Jesus said in Matthew 24:21-22, "for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor shall ever be. And except those days should be shortened, there should be no flesh saved: but for the sake of the elect those days shall be shortened." So Satan is desperate and full of fury.

Satan has always hated the Jews because they are God's chosen people and the vehicle through which salvation came into the world. He would like to destroy the nation, particularly at this time, because if he could destroy Israel, God could not fulfill His promises to them and that would give Satan victory.

The dragon pursues the woman, but she is given the wings of an eagle and flies off to a place prepared for her in the desert. J. Vernon McGee thinks she will flee to the Sinai desert. Many Bible scholars believe the faithful Jews of the last days will flee to the city of Petra, south of the Dead Sea – a strangely beautiful city hewn out of the rock of the earth that is presently an attraction for tourists and archeologists in the Holy Land. Perhaps that is true, no one can say with certainty. The point is that God will care for this remnant in a supernatural way. As God prepared a great fish for Jonah's deliverance, and as He, for forty years provided for His people in their wilderness experience, this faithful remnant will be kept in the desert out of the serpent's reach during the final turmoil for three and a half years.

In his zeal to destroy the woman, the serpent spews out a great river of water to sweep her away, but God opens the earth and swallows the torrent. Here again you could opt for the literal or the symbolic.

The water may be an actual flood of water, for Israel has been spared by water twice before. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, the Red Sea parted for them yet swallowed up the Egyptians. Then after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God miraculously parted the Jordan River so they could enter the land He had promised them.

Or, it might be symbolism of a vast host of soldiers sent by the Antichrist to overtake and destroy faithful Israel. Whichever, God will supernaturally protect them.

Enraged by this turn of events, the dragon goes away to make war against the rest of the woman's offspring, which is most likely the 144,000 Jews we met in Revelation 7 and will meet again in Revelation 14. They are the special band of believing Jews who move out into the four corners of the world preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God to all the nations. The devil gives his final attention to destroying this group because of their powerful and effective witness to the world.

Hopefully, by now you're able to say, "Yes, I see how this begins to fit together." God does have a plan. He is the glorious God of mercy and grace, yet His holy character demands judgment for evil and sin. I want to remind you of some truths in this lesson that are applicable for us here and now.

The same serpent who accuses the saints in heaven also deceives the nations on earth. One of his strategies is to lie about the church. He deceives the nations into thinking that the people of God are dangerous, deluded, even destructive. It is through Satan's deceptions that the leaders of nations band together against Christ and His people. God's people in every age must expect world opposition, but the church can always defeat the enemy by being faithful to Jesus Christ.

Satan is not equal to God. He is not omnipotent, omnipresent or omniscient. His power is limited and his tactics must fail when God's people trust the power of Jesus' blood atonement and the power of the Word. Nothing Satan does can rob us of our salvation, strength, and the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ! Revelation 12:10.

Revelation 12:11 is especially important and relevant for us to be reminded of this week. It tells how the saints of any age can overcome the evil purposes of the devil as he attempts to deceive us, neutralize our effectiveness for God and immobilize us with the poisonous emotion of guilt. We find a three-step plan for defeating the attacks and accusations of Satan.

1) Trust in the blood of Christ. Have you ever heard the devil accusing you in your conscience and emotions? Has an inner voice ever demanded of you, "What right do you have to call yourself a Christian? Look at all your sins and failures! Look at the mess your life is in. How could God ever love a sinner like you?" How do you handle such accusations when they come to mind?

We must honestly admit that the accusation of Satan is true: we are sinners! Our lives are a mess at times. Then, let's remind Satan that we are covered by the blood of the Lamb. Our debt of sin has been nailed to the cross of Jesus. Romans 8:1 "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." When Jesus covers you with His righteousness and makes a new creature out of you, the sins of the past, present and future are dead and gone . . . atoned for by the blood of the worthy Lamb.

2) **Put everything you are and have on the altar of Jesus Christ.** The verse says, "they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." [Rev. 12:11] Satan was overcome because they loved Jesus more than everything, even more than their own lives. They would rather die than bring shame to their Lord and His name.

3) **Share your testimony.** All around us are people who struggle with the heavy burden of sin and guilt and the devil's accusations. It is not only our duty but our JOY to share with others the freedom we have received through Jesus Christ. Remember when someone first shared with you? Are we sharing or bottling up that "good news" inside us?

So . . .

Step 1 – Reliance upon Jesus and His shed blood means we have to exercise **faith**.

Step 2 – Sacrificing all that we are and have for the sake of Christ means that we have laid hold of the **hope** of the Christian life – the hope that the loss of possessions, honor, even life itself means nothing compared to the promised inheritance of eternal life with Jesus.

Step 3 – Sharing the word of our testimony means we are exercising **love** towards others who are bound by Satan's lies.

Three steps – **Faith, Hope and Love!**

In the next chapter we'll see the terrible unleashing of Satan's power on earth. I'm sure you can feel the pace of events in the book of Revelation quickening. Day after day as we read the newspapers we feel the current growing swifter toward a vertical waterfall for the human race. So we need to ask ourselves a question. How am I doing with my personal battle with Satan? Am I relying daily upon Jesus and His blood as the source of my righteousness and not my own works? Am I sharing the word of my testimony with others? Have I placed all I am and have on the altar of Jesus Christ? How is my faith? hope? love?

Every day brings the dragon closer to his ultimate defeat and he knows it. Armed with weapons of faith, hope and love we are part of God's army, sharing in His victory over the dragon, marching in triumph toward a future day when the accusing voice of the dragon will be silenced forever.

Let's pray: Father in the power of Your Word – James 1:5 – says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." We ask that You help us to understand that You have a plan and it will be executed with precision and purpose and in Your time. Until we stand in Your presence, help us to live faithfully, hopefully and lovingly to bring honor and glory to our Lord Jesus Christ. In His name we pray. Amen.