

THE REVELATION TO JOHN

THE THINGS FUTURE, REVELATION 4 - 22

EXPLANATORY PROPHECIES, REVELATION 12 - 14

- This section is another parenthesis in which those who play important parts in the tribulation are introduced. The people include a woman representing Israel (12:1-2); the red dragon representing Satan (12:3-4); the male child representing Christ (12:5-6); the archangel Michael representing angels (12:7-12); the offspring of the woman, representing Israel (12:13-17); the beast out of the sea, the world dictator (13:1-10); the beast out of the earth, the false prophet (13:11-18); and the judgment by the Lamb (14:1-20).
- Grant Osborne, *Chapters 12–14 are the third and final interlude tracing the church’s involvement in the action of the three judgment sets, this time showing the war between the woman/church and the false trinity (the dragon and the two beasts).*

INTRODUCTION

- Robert Thomas, *The method of narration beginning at this point differs from anything previous, because it focuses on the secret maneuvers that lie behind the visible conflict to be portrayed under the seven bowls.*
- Kendell Easley, *In Revelation 12, John witnessed the beginning of a great heavenly spectacle that told in dramatic form the consummation of the ages.*
- The signs in chapter 12 deal with the struggles of the nation Israel during the tribulation. The woman, Israel, is attacked by the red dragon, Satan. Satan attempts to destroy the male child, Christ. Also, this section notes the battle in heaven in which Satan is cast down to the earth. The central role of Israel in the end times events is evident in this parenthetical section.
- Charles Ryrie, *Chapter 12 is a description of war—first on the earth (vv. 1-6), then in heaven (vv. 7-12), and then back on the earth (vv. 13-17). It not only reveals future things, but it also unveils the realm and activity of Satan and angels.*
- Thomas Constable, *In this chapter God gave John revelation of Satan’s special activity during the Great Tribulation . . . God gave John this information in order to enable his readers to better understand the reasons for, and the forces behind, the events of this strategic period of history.*
- John Walvoord, *About these main characters swirls the tremendously moving scene of the great tribulation. First to be introduced and of prime importance as a key to the whole situation is the woman representing Israel . . . These chapters do not advance the narrative chronologically, but present events and situations that are concurrent with the soundings of the trumpets. Chronological progress of events resumes in chapter 16.*

SIGNS OF STRUGGLE: REVELATION 12:1-17

A. The Woman and the Dragon (1-6)

1. A great sign appeared (1-2)

a. The sign was a woman (1a), **And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman**

- 1) Thomas Constable, *John saw a sign, which is something that signified or represented something else . . . Usually John used the Greek word semeion (sign) to describe something miraculous that points to some deeper spiritual significance connected with an event or object (cf. John 2:11, 18, et al.). He called this one a great sign (Gr. mega semeion).*
- 2) Alan Johnson, *In this section [chs. 12–14] there is what might be called a Book of Signs [cf. John 2–12] . . . Only one is a sign of good (12:1);*
- 3) John Walvoord, *The first of the seven personages to be introduced in this section of Revelation is described as a great wonder in heaven, or, better translated, a great “sign” in heaven . . . it is a sign or symbol of important truth rather than merely a wonder . . . As signs they were symbols of something that God was about to reveal and usually contained an element of prophetic warning. Though this sign was seen in heaven, the events which followed obviously occurred on earth.*
- 4) Charles Swindoll, *This new vision contains symbolic characters that point to real people or events in history—past as well as future.*
- 5) Grant Osborne, *“Signs” here, as in the Gospel of John, refer to divinely sent symbols or signposts depicting heavenly truths and challenging the readers to faith. So the woman and the dragon are signs that alert the reader to the key spiritual conflict of the book.*

b. Her description and identity (1b), ***clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.***

- 1) Charles Ryrie, *The description of this woman is reminiscent of Genesis 37:9-10 . . . The use of sun, moon, and stars is not to identify her but to describe her. Who she is must be determined from another consideration, namely, her relation to the child. Since the child is clearly Christ (from the description of His ruling in v. 5 compared with Ps. 2:9; Rev. 2:27; 19:15), the woman must be the one who bore Christ - Israel . . . it is this woman who is persecuted during the last half of the Tribulation (vv. 13-17). The woman is further described as being in travail at the birth of Christ.*
- 2) Mark Hitchcock, . . . *the woman here cannot be the church because the woman gives birth to Jesus. The church did not give birth to Jesus; rather, Jesus gave birth to the church. The church was born upon the death and resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Spirit . . . the woman in Revelation 12 pictures the nation of Israel rising to prominence in the end times. What we see taking place in Israel today strikingly foreshadows this prophecy.*
- 3) Thomas Constable, *In view of Old Testament imagery (cf. Isa. 54:1-6; Jer. 3:20; Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:19-20), and for the following reasons, the woman seems to symbolize the nation of Israel . . . There are many figurative references to Israel as a travailing woman (pregnant and in labor) in the Old Testament (Is. 26:17-18; 66:7-9; Jer. 4:31; 13:21; Mic. 4:10; 5:3). She (Israel) eventually gave birth to Christ (v. 5). In Genesis 37:9-10, the sun corresponds to Jacob, the moon to Rachel, and the 12 stars to Jacob's 12 sons (cf. 7:5-8; 21:12).*
- 4) John Walvoord, *This identification of the woman as Israel seems to be supported by the evidence from this chapter. Israel is obviously the source from which have come many of the blessings of God including the Bible, Christ, and the apostles. The twelve stars seem to refer to the twelve tribes. The persecution of the woman coincides with the persecution of Israel.*

c. Her condition (2), ***She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.***

- 1) Thomas Constable, *In John's vision the woman was about to give birth and cried out in labor pains. Evidently this represents Israel's national spiritual pain before Jesus Christ's appearing at His first coming. Another view is that it represents "the emerging nation of Israel in its sufferings prior to the second coming of Christ."*
- 2) John Walvoord, *The woman was said to be pregnant and about to give birth (12:2). While in some sense this may be fulfilled in the birth of Christ to the Virgin Mary, the context seems to refer to the emerging nation of Israel in its suffering prior to the second coming of Christ. This is further supported by the verses which follow.*
- 3) Grant Osborne, *Isaiah 26:18 depicts Israel with child, writhing in labor, trying unsuccessfully to bring "salvation to the earth." This image is altered here to show that with Christ the tension of Isaiah is resolved and salvation has finally come to the earth.*
- 4) Charles Ryrie, *The woman is further described as being in travail at the birth of Christ. The picture is a paradox: a queenly woman in suffering.*

2. The other sign appeared (3-4a)

a. The sign was a red dragon (3a), ***And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon,***

- 1) Mark Hitchcock, . . . *it's clear from the context that the great red dragon is Satan.*
- 2) Charles Ryrie, *The second sign is a "dragon" (vv. 3-4a). The identification of this sign is made inverse 9. The dragon is Satan, but his description in these verses is startling. The use of a dragon to picture Satan indicates his intense cruelty. The adjective "red" (v. 3) indicates his murderous, bloodthirsty character.*
- 3) Thomas Constable, *Dragon (Gr. drakon) occurs 12 times in the New Testament but only in the Book of Revelation. In every instance it refers to Satan (12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). A dragon symbolizes a powerful, aggressive, deadly foe. Its red color suggests bloodshed.*
- 4) John Walvoord, *From similar descriptions in Daniel 7:7-8, 24 and Revelation 13:1, this beast represented Satan's control over world empires in the Great Tribulation. Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as Satan.*
- 5) Grant Osborne, *The dragon is red, a color associated with dragons in Egypt and Babylon, symbolizing Satan slaughtering the people of God (the "slaughtered Lamb" in Rev 5:6), as in the red horse of 6:4 and the shedding of the blood of the saints in 16:6; 17:6; 18:24.*

- b. His description (3b), **with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.**
- 1) Charles Ryrie, *The “seven heads and the ten horns” (v. 3) relate him to the Beast (13:1), and the “diadems” (v. 3) on his heads show his authority and power.*
 - 2) Charles Swindoll, *The symbol of the seven heads and ten horns corresponds with the same number of heads and horns in Daniel’s beastlike representations of the nations that opposed Israel in the Old Testament—Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Dan. 7). Satan always has used ungodly nations in his attempts to destroy God’s people, and a host of wicked angels have assisted him in his plans.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *Its seven heads and ten horns probably represent seven nations (powers) and ten rulers (cf. 17:12). Ten kings will at first rule under his authority, but when Antichrist rises to preeminence among them he will subdue three of them, leaving only seven (Dan. 7:7–8, 20, 24; Rev. 13:1). The seven royal crowns or diadems (Gr. diadema) picture the political authority of these seven rulers during the Great Tribulation.*
 - 4) John Walvoord, *The seven heads and ten horns refer to the original ten kingdoms of which three were subdued by the little horn of Daniel 7:8, who is to be identified with the world ruler of the great tribulation who reigns over the revived Roman Empire.*
- c. His revolt (4a), **His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.**
- 1) Charles Ryrie, *With his tail he swept away a third of the stars of heaven and “threw” (aorist tense, indicating a definite event) them to earth . . . sometimes stars refer to angelic beings (as 9:1; Job 38:7; and possibly Rev. 1:20). If that is the reference here, then the event described in the ancient revolt of Satan in which he took with him in rebellion a third of the angels (cf. Ezek. 28:15; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).*
 - 2) Mark Hitchcock, *That the stars here are angels is confirmed in the immediate context - Revelation 12:7, Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back . . . The event pictured here is the angelic revolt in heaven, when a third of the angels joined Satan in his rebellion.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *The third of the stars of heaven in this verse probably represent the angels that Satan led in rebellion against God (cf. vv. 8–9; 9:1; Dan. 8:10; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2:4). Satan has extensive authority, which this description reflects. John saw that God cast Satan and these angels out of heaven to the earth.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *Satan and all the angels were given the same choice as Adam and Eve. Satan chose to rebel against God, seduce one third of the stars, the heavenly host, and try to dislodge God from his throne. So the dragon uses his tail, like the tails of the scorpions in 9:10 and the horses in 9:19, to “sweep a third of the stars” out of heaven to earth.*
3. The struggle over the male child (4b-6)
- a. The dragon’s intent (4b), **And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.**
- 1) Charles Ryrie, *Verse 4b begins a separate sentence and refers back to the time of the birth of Christ and Satan’s efforts to destroy Him (Matt. 2:13).*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *The fact that Satan stood before the woman who was about to give birth probably means that he proceeded to take out his vengeance by trying to prevent the appearance (birth) of Messiah (cf. Exod. 1:15–22; 1 Sam. 18:10–11; 2 Chron. 22:10; Matt. 2:16). The birth referred to is evidently that of Jesus Christ at His first advent (v. 5; cf. Matt. 2:13).*
 - 3) John Walvoord, *The allusion here is unmistakably to the circumstances surrounding the birth of Christ in Bethlehem (the dragon referring to the Roman Empire at that time as dominated by Satan) and the attempts of Herod to destroy the Baby Jesus.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *He [Satan] “stands in front of the woman” so as to devour the child as soon as it is born . . . The primary parallel, of course, is Herod’s slaughter of the innocent baby boys under two years old at Bethlehem in Matthew 2:16, echoed in the plots of Jewish leaders in Mark 3:6; John 7:30, 44–48; 8:58–59.*
- b. The woman gave birth to a special child who was delivered (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,**
- 1) Charles Ryrie, *Christ’s birth is stated in verse 5; He is identified as the ultimate Ruler of the nations; then He ascension is mentioned, passing by His entire life and death. The reason for this omission is simply that the point of the passage is Satan’s war against Christ. Satan failed to destroy Him at his birth, and the fact that He ascended proves that he failed to destroy Him during His life and even in His death.*

- 2) Robert Newell, *All Satanic activities are carried on under the double motive of ambition to rule and be worshipped, and, hatred toward the One whom God has chosen to take the kingdom Satan has usurped.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *Satan failed to destroy Jesus at His birth, and because he also failed to destroy Him during His life and in His death, Jesus Christ ascended victoriously into heaven. Satan cannot persecute Him there. Christ will yet rule the world ("all the nations") with a shepherd's rod of iron (Ps. 2). The emphases in this whole review of Satan's opposition to Jesus are Jesus' victory and Satan's continuing antagonism.*
 - 4) John Walvoord, *He is described as destined to rule all nations with a rod of iron. This is an allusion to Psalm 2:9, where in connection with Christ's reign over the earth, it is declared, "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." A similar expression is found in Revelation 19:15, where it is stated of Christ, "He shall rule them with a rod of iron."*
 - 5) William Barclay, *The strange thing is the total omission of any reference to the earthly life of Jesus . . . It is due to the fact that John is not at the moment interested in anything other than the fact that Jesus Christ was delivered by the direct action of God from the hostile powers which continually attacked him . . . It is also due to the fact that, all through Revelation, John's interest is not in the human Jesus but in the exalted Christ, who is able to rescue his people in the time of their distress.*
- d. The woman was protected (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.***
- 1) Charles Ryrie, *Since Satan failed to kill Christ, he turns his attention to the woman - Israel - to pour out his vengeance on her. The details of the persecution for the last three and half years of the Tribulation are recorded in verses 13-17.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *Since Satan could not destroy Jesus Christ (Israel's son), he will turn his attention to Israel (the mother). John saw Israel as having fled into the wilderness where God protected ("nourished") her for 1,260 days (three and a half years: the second half of the Tribulation period; v. 14, 11:2-3; cf. Matt. 24:16; Mark 13:14) . . . Throughout Scripture a wilderness often represents a place of desolation, safety, discipline, and testing. The passive "be nourished" suggests that others, perhaps Gentiles, but definitely God and angels (cf. Dan. 12:1), will care for the Jews at this time.*
 - 3) John Walvoord, *There is obviously a tremendous time lapse between verses 5 and 6, but this is not an uncommon occurrence in prophecy; the first and second comings of Christ are frequently spoken of in the same sentence. Inasmuch as Israel is in comparative tranquillity and safety in the first three and one-half years of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27), the reference must be to the preservation of a portion of the nation Israel through the great tribulation to await the second coming of Christ.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *He [Satan] has a special hatred for the Jewish people and has been the power behind anti-Semitism from the days of Pharaoh and Haman (see the Book of Esther) to Hitler and Stalin. Finally, in the middle of the Tribulation, there will come a wave of anti-Semitism such as the world has never seen (Rev. 12:6). But God will protect His people during those three-and-a-half years (1,260 days; see Rev. 11:2; 13:5).*
 - 5) Grant Osborne, *Frustrated at his inability to defeat Jesus, Satan in 12:6 turns his evil intentions to the woman . . . As the dragon pursues her, the woman/church is taken to "a place prepared for her by God," a place of divine comfort where God is nourishing and protecting his beleaguered people . . . The "1260 days" is the third of five places the final three-and-a-half-year period of history from Daniel is mentioned. All are in Revelation 11-13 (11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5) and describe that period God has permitted at the close of human history for the false trinity of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet to do their nefarious work.*

Chapter 12: TO BE CONTINUED, LORD WILLING!