

THE FALSE TRINITY, PART 1: THE DRAGON

The Victory of the Lamb, part 8: Revelation 12:1-17

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 3/5/23, Matt Heerema

In our section today we continue a look at an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets. In this interlude, from chapters 11-14, some count another seven visions (The Mighty Angel, Two Witnesses, Woman and the Dragon, Sea Beast, Land Beast, The Lamb and his 144,000, and the proclamation of the three angels) - All with their own message, leading up to the final judgement described in the the seven bowls in chapter 15 and 16. Some have called chapters 12-14 "The heart of Revelation" - and what is going on in these chapters is that John is introducing us to the true enemy of the church, the power behind all the persecution and suffering of the church: The Dragon and his beasts, the false trinity. Today we're going to meet the first of the three: the dragon.

Let's read the chapter and then we'll sort it out.

Revelation 12:1-17 (CSB)

1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in labor and agony as she was about to give birth.

3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. 4 Its tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she did give birth it might devour her child.

5 She gave birth to a Son, a male who is going to rule all nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

6 The woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, to be nourished there for 1,260 days.

7 Then war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought, 8 but he could not prevail, and there was no place for them in heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was thrown out—the ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to earth, and his angels with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say,

The salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of his Christ have now come,
because the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night, has been thrown down.

**11 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their
testimony;**

for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them!

Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you with great
fury, because he knows his time is short.

13 When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the
woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given two wings of a
great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent's presence to her place in the
wilderness, where she was nourished for a time, times, and half a time.

15 From his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river flowing after the woman, to
sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman. The earth opened its
mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon had spewed from his mouth.

17 So the dragon was furious with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of
her offspring—those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony
about Jesus.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

The Woman

- Drawing from many of the old testament prophets who characterize Israel as a woman who gives birth to a son.
- This vision of the woman and the dragon utilizes imagery and language from both Egyptian and Roman mythology, reinforcing to God's people that the the made up "gods" and mythologies of the pagan world are only a cheap copy of the real thing.
- The imagery of the woman also indicates that it is not merely ethnic / genetic Israel who is represented by the woman, but *true* Israel, Israel from above as Paul puts it in Galatians 4.

- Nourished in the wilderness: Important to note, this is not a symbol of retreat, but of exodus, reflects Israel's 40 years of wandering, where they were cared for by God. This section is not calling Christians to build bunkers and hide out during the tribulation. It is saying that we are in a period of desert wandering. We are not home yet, we are on our way to a promised land, and God will provide for us, just like he did for Israel on their way to the promised land.

The Dragon (and his angels)

- Seven heads and ten horns - Imagery from Daniel 7 - more on this next week.
- Explicitly defined later as "the devil", Satan.
- 1/3 of the stars swept from heaven,
 - Some think this is from Daniel 8:10, Satan's defeat of "angels" which are representative of God's people on earth. In this case, the image would be a restatement of the devil's persecution of God's people, some of them all the way to martyrdom.
 - Some think this describes the satanic rebellion in heaven when the angel Lucifer fell and took 1/3 of the angels with him. Isaiah 14, combined with this verse is where we get that idea.
 - Either way - irrelevant to the meaning of the passage.
- What is he doing? He tried to stop the offspring of the woman. He and his angels lose a battle with the angel Michael and his angels, and are booted out of heaven.
- He makes war with the offspring of the woman.
- Where else do we see this? 1 Peter 5:8 - The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

The Son

- "Will rule all nations with an iron rod." Messianic Psalm, Psalm 2:7-9
- Jesus. Jesus is the promised Messiah that comes from Israel, the most important character in the whole Bible.

Michael (and his angels)

- Pictures the fulfillment of Daniel 12:1, Michael shows up a few times in Daniel, and then here in Revelation, a clear tie.
- He is the general of God's angel armies. The chief guardian angel of God's people.
- This is complicated, and there's possibly a lot going on and maybe someday we could do a series on angels, but
- The I believe the main message here is that even though God's people are under attack from the devil, we are spiritually guarded by God's angel army.

The Rest of Her Offspring

- Jesus's brothers and sisters: Christians. The Church.

WHEN IS THIS ALL HAPPENING?

1260 Days, Time, Times, Half a Time, 3.5 years, 42 months.

- Revelation 11:2-3, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 12:14, Revelation 13:5, Daniel 7:25, Daniel 12:7, Daniel 12:10-12

If this is referring to the same period of time, what is the picture we see?

- The nations are trampling the area around God's temple, but do not pose a threat to those inside (Revelation 11:2)
- The two witnesses have their prophetic ministry (Revelation 11:3)
- The woman is nourished and protected by God against the attacks of the dragon (Revelation 12:6, 14)
- The beast utters blasphemies and exercises authority and oppresses God's people (Rev. 13:5, Daniel 7:25)
- Many are purified, cleansed and refined, the wicked not repent. (Daniel 12:10-12)

Notably in Daniel:

- "The Time of the End" will last this long (Daniel 12:7)
- This time period is between the time the daily sacrifice is abolished, and the abomination of desolation is set up. (Daniel 12:10-12)

SUMMARY OF THIS SECTION

So I think if you put this all together, what you have is John painting a picture of the history of the church from its inception to the end when Christ returns.

- The woman (Israel) produces the child (the Messiah, Jesus),
- The dragon (Satan) and his fallen angel army tries to stop that from happening,
- He fails, because God protected the woman and the child.
- This earthly scene is repeated, reflected in a heavenly scene: the dragon making war with Michael and his angels, who fight on behalf of God's people in the spiritual realm.

- The result is the same: that Satan and his angels are cast to the earth. A detail is added: the devil's primary weapon is deception.
- A heavenly voice declares the outcome of the failure of the dragon to stop the child of the woman. The child's mission is accomplished, and he (Jesus) is given authority, power, and a kingdom, resulting in salvation for God's people, and the devil being cast out of heaven.
- The devil, being cast out of heaven, is furious, and makes war on God's people, but they are protected by God. **"Satan goes to war against our bodies only after he has lost the war for our souls."**¹

THE POINT OF THIS SECTION

We can debate these details, but none of the debate detracts from the most important point made in this section, and possibly the second most important point of all of revelation. The most important point in Revelation is that Jesus Wins.

To get at the point of this section, we need to remind ourselves of where the message of Revelation starts: It is a letter to churches. Seven churches, in first century Asia minor, and through them, to all churches throughout history.

What are these seven churches told? The are told to hold fast to the faith, and promised that *if they conquer, they will receive a reward:*

- *Revelation 2:7 (CSB) - To the one who conquers, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*
- *Revelation 2:11 (CSB) - The one who conquers will never be harmed by the second death.*
- *Revelation 2:17 (CSB) - To the one who conquers, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name is inscribed that no one knows except the one who receives it.*
- *Revelation 2:26 (CSB) - The one who conquers and who keeps my works to the end: I will give him authority over the nations*
- *Revelation 3:5 (CSB) - ...the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels.*
- *Revelation 3:12 (CSB) - "The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of*

¹ G. K. Beale and David H. Campbell, Revelation: A Shorter Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 257.

my God—the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God—and my new name.

- *Revelation 3:21 (CSB) “To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.*

And the point of Revelation 12 is:

How does the church conquer?

Revelation 12:11a (CSB)

11 They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony;

What does it mean that we conquer by the blood of the lamb?

Revelation 5:5 (CSB)

5 Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Look, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered so that he is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”

Revelation 5:9-10 (CSB)

9 And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slaughtered, and you purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth.

Revelation 7:13-15 (CSB)

13 Then one of the elders asked me, “Who are these people in white robes, and where did they come from?” 14 I said to him, “Sir, you know.” Then he told me: These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. The one seated on the throne will shelter them:

This answers the question we have about whether or not we might be able to make it. “I’m not sure I can make it through!” Answer: on what basis do you conquer the onslaught of the beast?

What does it mean that we conquer by the word of their testimony? This is not about their personal story of salvation, it is about holding firm to *the* testimony, The Gospel message. John has made this clear in his other writings, with which his recipients would have been familiar:

1 John 5:11-13 (CSB)

11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 The one who has the Son has life. The one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. 13 I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

I suggest you refer to the whole of 1 John 5 if you want more on this.

God's people, the church, those who conquer the dragon are

Revelation 12:17 (CSB)

those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony about Jesus.

Who does the church conquer?

"They conquered HIM" - the dragon. Satan. We don't set about conquering people, nations, kings, taking over governments, recapturing earthly cities, retaking earthly land, our struggle is against Satan. We're going to have a whole lot more on this next week when we talk about the dragon's beasts.

Why does the church conquer?

What makes them successful in conquering?

Revelation 12:11b (CSB)

11 for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

- This is a hard reality, the message of Revelation is hard but beautiful, glorious!
- Not all of us will die, but some will, many have throughout history, and we might!
- The question is are we ready?
- This reality unlocks the mystery of the Christian life. The power we have available to us. When we are not concerned about hanging on to our life, comfort, power, position, we are unconquerable. It is through fear of the death that Satan holds any power (Hebrews 2:14-15).

"Their only means of resisting the enemy's attack ... is patient endurance and faithful confession. This may mean suffering and death; but it was precisely by suffering and death that their Leader had conquered. It is to Jesus, not to Caesar, that world dominion belongs; it is Jesus, not Caesar, who is Lord of history, and those who confess him

faithfully before Caesar and Caesar's representatives participate in his victory and kingly power." F.F. Bruce²

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 (CSB)

7 Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us. 8 We are afflicted in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; 9 we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed. 10 We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus's sake, so that Jesus's life may also be displayed in our mortal flesh.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (CSB)

16 Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. 17 For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. 18 So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 85.