

We must always approach the study of God's Word with humility and a teachable spirit. God's Word is infallible, but our interpretation of it must always be tested with this in mind: what is the author's intent in what he is saying in the text before me?

This is critical in our study of Revelation. We must ask ourselves, "What did John mean when he wrote what he wrote? What was his *intent*?"

We must ever be careful not to impose our preconceived eschatological system upon the book of Revelation. The text is our authority, not our "system."

Having said that, I must also assert the following. When we study a text, it's impossible--and unwise--to approach the text as though we'd never learned anything before about the subject it addresses. When we come to the text we do so (to paraphrase Alistar Begg) with a "big T" and a "little s." The *text* is our final authority and is of primary importance to us, but our *systematic theology*, though not our final authority, may be helpful. It's like the scaffolding in a building project.

As I have worked through biblical texts in the past, I have come to the conviction that the "Pre-Tribulational Rapture" approach best systematizes all the biblical data. I recognize that other, godly men and women differ, and offer important points to consider for their positions.

My point is this. As I come to do work in the book of Revelation, I do so with a "scaffolding" in place. The scaffolding is not inerrant, but it is helpful. And it must be tested. The goal is always, in the end, to submit to the authority of the text.

This is especially important to remember as we come to Revelation 12. As we continue to move through Revelation, the symbolism and imagery increases. The interpretations of these images abound.

Setting:

--In chapters 4-5 we saw the Lamb approach and take the scroll from the Almighty. In chapters 6 and following the Lamb begins to open the seals, thus enacting the contents of the scroll, and bringing about God's judgment on the earth.

--We've been learning about the period of time known as the "Tribulation" period. We've been seeing in chapters 6-11 the terrible judgments that God will pour out on the earth.

--Now in chapters 12-13, we see the response of the enemy...

Tonight's Study--Revelation 12

Read the text.

Initial observations:

1. John says he saw two "signs" (1, 3) which he describes for us.

Note: He will mention a third "sign" in 15:1. (see *NIVsb* footnote about "sign")

2. The events in chapter 12 occur in heaven (1, 7).

3. It's very difficult to follow the chronology of this vision, and it's possible the vision does not flow in chronological sequence.

George Ladd observes (166), "This is not a vision of an event which is to take place at the end; it is a vision in highly imaginative terms of the heavenly warfare between God and Satan, which has its counterpart in history in the conflict between the church and demonic evil. As such, the vision completely transcends the usual categories of time and space. It is not meant to be a foretelling of history but a representation of the struggle in the spiritual world which lies behind history."

Now let's notice the scenes that occur in the text...

I. Scene #1: John sees a pregnant woman (1-2).

Q: What's true of this woman? Notice three details...

- A. She's clothed with the sun.
- B. She's wearing a crown of twelve stars.
- C. She's about to give birth.

Discuss: Who is this woman? Some think it refers to Mary, the mother of the Lord (e.g. Roman Catholic's). Others say it's the *Church*, but the church didn't give birth to Christ, rather Christ founded the church. Mary Baker Eddy was conceited enough to claim this woman represented *herself*.

Lehman Strauss says the woman represents *Israel*, for it was from Israel that the Messiah came.

Ladd says it refers to the "ideal Zion," that is, "the Jerusalem which is above" referred to by Paul (Gal 4:26; p. 167).

Donald Grey Barnhouse (in Strauss, pp. 229ff) says the woman represents "the spiritual Israel" and not merely the nation of Israel. She is "the elect of the race."

The *NIV Study Bible* says it's probably "a symbolic reference to the believing Messianic community."

II. Scene #2: John sees an enormous, red dragon (3-6).

Note three details about this being...

- A. He's powerful (3).

Q: How much so?

The seven heads seem to represent his great wisdom and the ten horns his great power (*NIVsb*).

- B. He wanted to kill the child (4).

Q: What did this being already do? Swept 1/3 of the stars out of the sky

Q: Where was this dragon when the woman was ready to deliver?

- C. His plot failed (5-6).

How so?

1. The child was snatched up to God.

2. The woman fled to the desert for 1,260 days.

Q: Where have we seen this time-frame before? See 11:2

III. Scene #3: John describes an angelic war in heaven (7-9).

Q: Who participated in this battle? Here were the sides...

- A. Michael and his angels fought the dragon and his angels (7).

What happened in the battle?

- B. The dragon lost and was hurled to the earth (8-9).

The dragon "was not strong enough." The result? They "lost their place in heaven." When did this happen? Is it Satan's original casting out of heaven, or a later one (see *NIVsb*)?

- C. The identity of the dragon is clarified (9)...

1. He's the ancient serpent.

2. He is called the devil, or Satan.

3. He is the one who leads the world astray.

IV. Scene #4: John records the reaction of heaven (10-12).

A voice announces the significance of the victory...

A. God's kingdom has come (10).

That seems to indicate this "casting out" is yet future. Back in 11:15 we saw that this will be a future event when "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." Indeed, it's the goal of history, the *climax* of God's redemptive plan.

B. The accuser has been hurled down (10b).

Q: Who does he accuse and where?

C. The key to the dragon's defeat is identified (11).

Q: How is the accuser overcome? By the "blood" and the "word."

D. What is gain for heaven will result in pain for the earth (12).

The dragon is cast out of heaven. Hooray for heaven! But where does he go? To the earth for a season. And so verse 12 announces, "Woe to the earth." Why?

V. Scene #5: John records the reaction of the defeated dragon (13-17).

What is the defeated dragon's reaction?

A. The dragon pursued the woman (13).

Q: What woman? The one who gave birth to the male child.

B. The woman fled to a prepared place for three and one-half "times" (14).

Q: What made it possible for the woman to flee?

Note: Sometimes God delivers His people *from* tribulation. At other times He takes them right *through* tribulation.

C. The dragon tried to destroy the woman, but failed (15-16).

Q: What did he do?

Q: Why did his plot backfire? The "earth helped the woman."--perhaps like the earth swallowed up Korah's men.

D. The dragon then sought to make war against the woman's offspring (17).

Q: Who is this offspring? If the child was Christ, the offspring apparently refers to believers in general.

Implications:

1. We learn *who* is behind tribulation in this world.

Discuss: What kind of effect does Revelation 12 have on you?

2. We learn *why* God's people face tribulation in this world.

Ultimately, it's because Satan takes out his fury against the Lord by attacking the Lord's people. He tries to "get at God" by "getting at God's people."

3. We learn that Satan's time is short, and he knows it.

See verse 12.