

Revelation Class Week 7: Revelation 12 The War In Heaven

The “Signs” In Heaven

The Woman: Clothed with the sun. Moon at her feet. Crown of 12 star. Pregnant.

The Dragon: Great red dragon. Seven Heads. Ten Horns. Seven Crowns. Tail swiping down “a third of the stars and casting them to earth.” Stood before the woman to devour the child.

The Child: Will rule all nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:26-29). Caught up to God and His throne.

The Final Exodus: The woman flees into the wilderness where she is nourished by God.

The War in Heaven

The Woman

1. The woman who bears a child who defeats a dragon is well attested in the Ancient World in Greek and Egyptian myths. John further attacks pagan beliefs through his writing. John will reinterpret this common myth to report on the truth of the life of Jesus.
2. The woman is not a goddess but is representative of Faithful Israel. Faithful Israel being like a women in child birth that leads to restoration is well attested in the Prophets: Isaiah 54:1; 66:7-10; Micah 4:9-10; 5:3; see also. Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; 26:18-19.
3. This tells us the timing of the events of the passage, it is going to start near the birth of the Messiah and end with the ascension of Jesus.
4. The birth of the Messiah is not something that was unknown to the powers of darkness.

Starting Herod killing all male children 2 and under and Joseph and Mary being warned to flee to Egypt. While most Jews didn't understand who Jesus is, the demons fully understood. While demons are liars by nature they don't lie when they proclaim who Jesus is (Matthew 8:28-29; Mark 1:23-24). We see this warfare further in the powers of darkness behind the betrayal of Judas' betrayal (John 13:2), the spiritual attack against Jesus' disciples (Luke 22:31-32), and the powers of darkness behind the crucifixion of Jesus (1 Corinthians 2:8). There was surely a great spiritual battle taking place in the heavens to veil the gospel and the identity of Jesus from the people of Israel (John 8:44) and continued into the Gentile world (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

The Dragon

5. There are two ways to look at the dragon “swiping down a third of the stars.”

In recent interpretation it has been taught that this is Satan deceiving a third of the angels in the Garden of Eden. However, there is no evidence of this taking place anywhere including this passage. The entire context of this passage as stated above is the life of Jesus. Adding any separate context to this battle is unwise especially with no extrabiblical connection of Jewish commentators during the 2nd Temple period (that I am aware).

Further this passage parallels Daniel 8:9-10. Daniel 8 appears to be a prophesy of something that is to come, not something that already happened. If Daniel is describing the same event as John this further discredits recent interpretation of this passage that suggests it being a primordial rebellion.

Even further the Bible seems to suggest multiple rebellions of angelic beings in Genesis 3, Genesis 6, and Deuteronomy 32/Psalm 82 which recalls Genesis 11.

Option 1: The 1/3 of the stars could depict a total number of angels who have rebelled and are under the authority of the dragon.

Option 2: The 1/3 of the angels could be defeated. The word “cast down” doesn’t seem to relate well with “deceiving” it sounds more like a defeat of the righteous angels. Battles that the powers of darkness would win against the righteous angels.

This doesn’t suggest that God is not powerful enough to win or to suggest the powers of darkness have any realistic chance of defeating Yahweh, but rather Spiritual Warfare is portrayed as a battle for the free will decisions of people. The enemy fights to blind the eyes of the people while the righteous come to minister in the spreading of the gospel. Ultimately victory comes by the decisions the person being fought over makes which is a choice by that person. Certainly the powers of darkness won many decisions by people as the people are ultimately the ones who rejected Jesus and demanded his crucifixion. Little did the powers of darkness know this was the plan all along, they were “honey trapped” into doing the one thing that would seal their ultimate defeat.

7. Leviathan is often a portrayal of chaos not only in the Bible (Psalm 74:14) but also many other cultures. Leviathan was often portrayed as having 7 heads just like the dragon mention in Revelation 12.

8. It is very possible, if not likely, that John is using this dragon language to connect the Satan to the serpent in the Garden. There is no verse that plainly says “the serpent in the garden is Satan” but there are several illusions in the Bible.

The Child

9. In the myths the son of the goddesses would defeat the dragon, however that is myth about false gods, demons, who are being targeted by John in this book. The truth, and thus the polemic against pagan beliefs is the defeat of the dragon by the true King and God: Jesus.

“In the common myth, the child born to the woman was a god or the emperor worshiped without controversy by the world system; John reinterprets the myth so that the child is the Lord Jesus, the crucified leader of the persecuted sect of Christians.

Further, whereas the common myth focused on the birth of a divine child, Revelation focuses not on Jesus’ birth but on his exaltation (12:5). Jesus was “begotten” as king at his resurrection and enthronement (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:3-5).” - Craig S. Keener, Revelation, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999), 318.

10. John will use Psalm 2 as his description of Jesus in this verse. The Son of God who will ask for the nations and rule them with a rod of iron.

11. A major difference between Jesus and the gods in the stories is that fact that Jesus is God. As we mentioned before this is a major point John continues to speak in Revelation.

The Final Exodus

12. After the ascension of Jesus the woman is persecuted by the dragon and escapes into the wilderness. This in correlation with Revelation 12:14-16 paints a picture very familiar from Exodus.

13. In Verse 14 the woman escapes into the wilderness on two wings of the great eagle. This is how the Lord describes Israel's escape from Egypt (Exodus 19:4).

14. Out of the dragons mouth comes a river to sweep the woman away in the flood but the earth opens its mouth and swallowed the river. Compare to the "Song of Moses": Exodus 15:11-13.

15. John will use Daniel's calendar and his 1260 days to show the persecution of Faithful Israel (and the grafted in Gentiles). While it's possible John is alluding to a literal 1260 days as we talked about in our discussion on the end times John uses Daniel solar calendar. The use of a solar calendar makes a future fulfillment of Daniel's 70 weeks unlikely if not impossible. Preterists (view that all prophesy is fulfilled) will use this passage to point to the destruction of Jerusalem, however we have no primary sources who claim this as fulfillment, nor primary sources who have the war lasting 1260 days. It seems most Jews view the 1260 days as the defilement of the temple in the Maccabean era. Thus John is probably alluding to a time period where the righteous followers of Jesus are persecuted which isn't limited to exactly 1260 days.

The Defeat of Satan - Revelation 12:7-17

1. Revelation 12:7-17 is going to give us more insight into the inner working of the Spiritual Realm.

2. The context of this battle is the same as verses 1-6, especially since the ending of the two passages are the same with the woman escaping into the desert because of persecution by the dragon.

3. Verse 7 and 8 depict a great battle happening, likely at the resurrection of Jesus. When Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4) Satan offers Jesus the all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if He'll bow down and worship him. Jesus' response was "Be gone, Satan! For it was written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'" Jesus doesn't suggest at all that Satan was bluffing and didn't have the authority over the kingdoms of the world. On the contrary the Bible implies Satan was not lying about what he owned (Deuteronomy 32; Revelation 1:18; Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

4. At the resurrection of Jesus, He now has all authority Matthew 28:18.

5. We are told that Satan has some sort of legal authority in heaven, but because of the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony of the saints Satan is overcome.

6. While Satan used to be able to accuse mankind before the throne he is now cast out of heaven. He still accuses the brethren but no longer has legal authority.