

Text: Rev 12.1-17

The three-fold outline of Revelation (1.19):

1. The things you have seen (the vision of Christ) Rev 1
2. The things which are (the letters to the churches) Rev 2-3
3. The things which must come after these things (Rev 4-22)
 - a. The overture: the scene in heaven (Rev 4-5)
 - b. The seal judgements begin (Rev 6)
 - c. (Parenthesis): the believers of the Tribulation (Rev 7)
 - d. The seventh seal which reveals the seven trumpets (four in chapter 8)
 - e. The fifth and sixth trumpets (Rev 9)
 - f. (Parenthesis): Voices in heaven (Rev 10)
 - g. (Parenthesis): The Two Witnesses | the seventh trumpet (Rev 11)
 - h. (Parenthesis): The Long War Against God¹

At the end of Chapter 11 we hear the 7th trumpet sound, but, as with the 7th seal (8.1ff.) there is a pause in heaven as other material is discussed and the progression of judgement is set aside.

Chapter 12 forms a parenthesis describing primarily the activity of Satan in the final stages of his long war with God. This revelation helps us understand what is going on behind the scenes as the progression of judgement unfolds.

One feature of Rev 12-15 is the introduction of seven “personages” involved in the unfolding of the final stages of the book.

I. The dragon’s hostility to the male child (1-6)²

A. The sign in heaven: a woman in labour (1-2)

1. The woman is ‘a great sign’ – something that signifies something else (first of a series of signs: 12.3, 13.13-14, 15.1, 16.14, 19.20)
 - a. Incorrect suggestions for her identity:
 - 1) “Mother of the gods” found on Roman coins
 - 2) Believing covenant community incl. the church
 - 3) Mary, the mother of Christ
 - b. Instead, she is a sign of the nation Israel

¹ I borrow the title of Henry Morris' book of this same name for our chapter heading here.

² The main points in this outline are from Tom Constable in Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003).

2. Reasons for identification as Israel

- a. The woman is the object of persecution during the Tribulation (12.13, 17)
- b. Old Testament imagery (Isa 54.1–6; Jer 3.20; Ezek 16.8–14; Hos 2.19–20)
- c. She wears a crown with twelve stars, she is clothed with the sun, she stands on the moon (see Joseph's dream – Gen 37.9-11)
 - 1) In Joseph's dream, the sun = Jacob
 - 2) The moon = Rachel
 - 3) The 12 stars = the twelve patriarchs
- d. Prophetic references to Israel as the travelling woman (Isa 26.17–18; 66.7–9; Jer 4.31; 13.21; Mic 4.10; 5.3)

3. The birth pangs represent the struggles of Israel as a nation leading up to the coming of Christ (2)

- a. Since the woman represents Israel, not Mary, these birth pangs need not refer to the first coming (more below)
- b. The travails of Israel during the tribulation could fulfill the image; thus, pointing to the second coming (see following verses)

B. The second sign: a dragon in heaven (3-4)

1. A dragon is a powerful, aggressive, and deadly enemy: this image symbolizes Satan (see v. 9)
2. Seven heads and ten horns show his power behind the world empire of the last days (see 17.12; cf. Dan 7.24)
3. The ten horns refer to ten kings ruling simultaneously with the Antichrist, see Dan 7.7 and Rev 13.1
4. The stars (4) probably represent the angels who rebelled with Satan (see vv. 8-9; 9:1; Dan 8:10; Jude 6; 2 Pt 2:4) — they are cast out of heaven, but have some access to God at the present time (see Job 1-2)
5. The dragon took vengeance by attempting to thwart the birth of the woman's child (again, the timing of this birth is unclear)

C. The birth of the child and the flight of the woman (5-6)

1. The male child is clearly the Messiah – he is to rule the nations (5a)
2. The male child is caught up to heaven, out of reach of Satan (5b)

“The catching up of the Child referred to the Ascension...”³

3. Satan turns his attention to the nation, but the woman flees (6)
 - a. This flight is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture - v. 14, 11:2-3; cf. Mt 24:16; Mk 13:14
 - b. The mention of 1260 days (three and a half years) connects this flight with the last half of the tribulation (a period referred to repeatedly in Revelation and in Daniel – e.g., Rev 11.3, 12.14, Dan 12.7)
 - c. The woman would be protected in the wilderness and nourished

II. The dragon’s expulsion from heaven (7-12)

A. The final expulsion of Satan from heaven (7-9)

1. Michael leads the angels in battle with the dragon (7a)
 - a. Michael is the prince of Israel – the angel assigned to the nation Israel (Dan 10.13, 21; 12.1)
 - b. The dragon seems to be on some sort of equivalency of rank with Michael
2. The dragon’s forces are weaker than Michael’s forces and they are driven out of heaven (8)
3. The dragon is identified here as Satan and is seen here as thrown down to the earth (9)
 - a. At the present time, Satan has some access to heaven where he accuses God’s people (Job 1.6; Rev 12.10)
 - b. In the future, his access to heaven will be denied, as described in this passage

³ John F. Walvoord, “Revelation,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 958.

B. The celebration of the dragon's expulsion from heaven (10-12)

1. The accuser of the brethren has been cast down (10)
2. The brethren are celebrated as having already overcome the accuser (probably 'proleptic', viewing the coming martyrdom of tribulation saints as already having won the victory) (11)
3. Those in heaven rejoice because Satan is finally cast out, but woe to the earth because Satan now knows his time is short (12)

III. The dragon's vengeance on the woman (13-17)**A. The vengeance of the dragon against the woman is fierce now (13)**

1. He knows his time is short
2. This is a repetition of the revelation of v. 6, but now we understand the fierceness of this period of wrath – "the Great Tribulation"

B. The Lord enables many Jews to escape the wrath of the dragon (see Mt 24.15-28, Mk 12.14-23), protecting them for "a time, times, and half a time" – another reference to the last half of the Tribulation (14)**C. Satan makes one final attempt to destroy the fleeing Jews with a flood (15)**

1. Is the water literal? We are not told
2. The intent is clear, the metaphor [if it is a metaphor] is not

D. The earth will help the fleeing Jews and prevent Satan from destroying them with the flood (16)**E. The dragon will turn his attention on Jews that remain – "the rest of her children" (17)**

1. Some Israelites are outside the protection of the hiding place
2. Zechariah 13.8 seems to indicate 1/3 of Israel escapes the attack
3. At least some of those outside the hiding place are believers at this point (they "hold to the testimony of Jesus") – some of the 144,000?

Conclusion:

Our passage shows the course of events in heaven that lead to the intensification of activity in the last half of the Tribulation period.

Some interpreters attempt to make all of this historical, but certain aspects of the vision show that it *must* still be future, especially the doctrine of Satan as the accuser of the brethren. This is a present role for him, he appears to be busy about this business on a constant basis at the present time.