

REVELATION

Seeing, Knowing and Serving Jesus Christ
Today at the Edge of History

Chapters 11:19-12:17

Text: Revelation 11:19-12:17 - The Theological Center: How We Overcome

¹⁹ Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The Woman and the Dragon

12 A great and wondrous 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 pain as she was about to give birth. ³ Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴ His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶ The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

⁷ And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴

The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.



Albrecht Durer: *The Woman & the Dragon* (1498)

Read & Reflect - 11:19-12:17

First Reading/First Impression:

- Reading Revelation 11:19-12:17 is like... skipping ahead to the last chapter of a murder mystery
 watching another "Lord of the Rings" sequel receiving a coded message from the front lines of World War III
 reading an urgent letter from a wise and trusted friend other _____

Second Reading/The Big Idea:

Who fights the battle here? Who wins? How do God's people overcome "the accuser" (v.11)?

"[Revelation's images] are not mere illustrations of something that can be said more directly. A picture makes its own statement, is its own text. It does not communicate what it has to say by being reduced to discursive, propositional language. Just as is the case in visiting an art gallery, while commenting and explanation may help one to 'get the picture,' language about the picture can never replace the message communicated in and through the picture itself..."

It would be a violation of Revelation's mode of communication to attempt to summarize its message in a manner that would make the text itself unnecessary."

- Eugene Boring, Revelation, pp. 52 & 62

Search

11:19 - What is now "opened"? (Compare to 4:1; 6:1 & 10:2)

12:1-6 - Where do the "signs" appear? What three characters are introduced in this section?

Whom or what might the "woman" (called "a sign") signify? What clues might "the sun & moon" (see Genesis 37:9) & the number "twelve" give)?

Whom does the "red dragon" (called "a sign") signify? (Note: The answer to this question is explicitly given in v.9) Have we seen a dragon before in the Bible? (see Genesis 3:14-15)

Who is the "son"? (Why do you suppose He is not called "a sign"?)
 What is He going to do (v.5)? (How does the word "scepter" help us identify Him? -- see Genesis 49:10 & Psalm 2:9, 45:6 & 110:2)
 What happens to Him? (v.6)

Genesis 3:14-15

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, & between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

STUDY GUIDE FOR SEEKERS AND FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST

12:7-9 - Where does "the war" take place? Why does the dragon lose? What happens to him? (Where is he now?)

How smart is the dragon ("seven heads" v.3)? How strong ("ten horns" v.3)? How much authority does he have ("seven crowns" v.3)?

What is the dragon powerful enough to do (v.4)? What is he *not* able to do (vv.4-5, 8, 13-17)?

12:9-10 - What does the "ancient serpent" do in relation to people in the world (v.9)? What does he do in relation to the people of God, the Church (v.10)?

12:11 - What are the two weapons God's people have by which they "overcome" the Evil One?

1.

2.

What attitude do people using these weapons develop that is also then part of their "overcoming"?

12:12 - Why does heaven now properly rejoice but earth shudder? What makes the devil so angry these days?

12:13-17 - Against whom does the furious devil vent his rage? What allies does the woman have?

Apply

1. What does the "blood of the Lamb" mean to you? How does the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what He has done help you overcome evil temptations and painful accusations?

2. What story can you tell ("word of testimony") about God's faithfulness to you & the reality of Jesus in your life?

3. Write a prayer thanking God for the ways He has been faithful to you & asking for protection from our angry and already- defeated adversary.



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Summary... This new section (marked by the “opening” of God’s temple in heaven) is about the cosmic battle between good and evil. God and

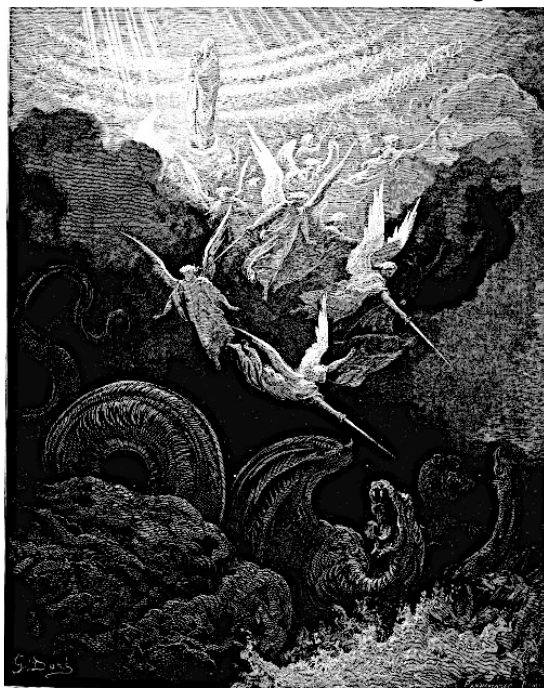
the devil, that is the context for our life on earth. It looks backward to the events of Christmas and the earthly life of Christ through which the Evil One was defeated once and for all. It looks ahead to continuing and escalating struggles on earth against the Church’s doomed accuser and adversary. Thus it informs the present with overarching theological insights (explaining why things are difficult for us even though God’s victory is won) and especially with a special word concerning how God’s people “overcome” evil (v.11).

11:19 - “**God’s temple... opened**”... (see 4:1; 6:1 & 10:2) this marks a new literary section of the Book... “**ark of the covenant**”... the most sacred acacia wood chest built to hold the tablets of the 10 Commandments... It was lost or destroyed probably at the time of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C... The people of Israel saw it as God’s throne...

12:1-2 - “**sign**”... A sign points beyond itself to a reality greater than itself... “**a woman**”... This sign probably points to three greater realities... 1. The people of Israel, 2. Mary the Mother of Jesus, and 3. The Church... “**sun... moon... twelve stars**”... reminiscent of Joseph’s dream (Genesis 37:9) about his brothers who with him would become the twelve tribes of Israel... “**cried out... about to give birth**”... the prophets used words like these to describe the struggles of God’s people (Isaiah 26:16ff & 66:7)... The pregnant woman would also clearly point to Mary the Mother of Jesus & woman of courageous faith... And also “**twelve**” is a symbol, as we have seen for the Church (the woman’s “other offspring” - see 12:17) with its twelve apostles...

12:3-4 - “**sign... red dragon**”... The greater reality here is the devil (explicitly identified in v.9)... He is

violently destructive (“**red**”), extremely intelligent (“**seven heads**”), and tremendously powerful (“**ten horns**”). He also has great wealth and authority (“**seven crowns**”)... “**a third of the stars**”... a fearsome enemy of great power, but also *limited power!*... And his plan is to kill the woman’s child as soon as he appears (An echo of the massacre of the innocents by King Herod? - Matthew 2:5)... “**a son, a male child**”... The son is not a sign!



Gustav Dore: *The Crowned Virgin*

He does not point beyond Himself to a greater reality. He points *to Himself* for there is *no greater reality than Jesus Christ!*... You will never find a literal “woman clothed with the sun” or a literal “red dragon,” but you will find a real “son, a male child,” God in the flesh!... “**who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter**”... the ultimate authority of Jesus using Old Testament images (see Genesis 49:10 & Psalms 2:9; 45:6 & 110:2)... “**snatched up to God and to his throne**”... an oddly brief summary of the earthly life of Jesus (see 1 Timothy 3:16 for another) which simply focuses on the purpose He accomplished as the key figure in the cosmic battle - He was “*born into the world to be King of the World*” (Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, p. 223).

12:6 - “**prepared for her by God**”... God has a plan, He is maintaining his control and He protects His people... “**1,260 days**” (see note on 11:2 in the previous issue)

12:7-10 - “**war in heaven... dragon was hurled down**”... Because of Jesus’ completed work, evil is defeated and God’s victory is forever won... And as a result the powerful “dragon” cannot accomplish his will! He is “**not strong enough**”!... John repeats the phrase “thrown down” - literally “bounced” - six times between verses 9 and 13!... “**leads the whole world astray... accuser of our brothers**”... Here are the essential activities of Satan as he works to destroy: 1. tempting everyone away from truth, from goodness, from wholeness, from God, and 2. Falsely accusing the family of God (“*You are unlovable, unredeemable... Your sin gets the last word about you!*”) - “*diabolos*” (devil) in Greek = “slanderer!”

12:11 - How do we “**overcome**”? (an important word in the seven letters! - 2:1-3:22) “**By the blood of the Lamb**” = the already accomplished atoning sacrifice of Jesus the Savior that cleanses us from sin... “**and by the word of their testimony**” = expressed agreement with God’s truth about His victory and our salvation... “**they did not... shrink from death**”... the truth of the Gospel means death is robbed of its power... Life in God is the greater reality and the death of martyrs tells of their “overcoming” faith!

12:12-17 - Why are things so bad? Because the devil has been cast down to earth, he is defeated, his time is short, his power is limited, he is very angry about all of this and his evil as absolute so he will never surrender... “**time, times and half a time**” - see note on 11:2)... “**spewed water**”... a dark counter-image to the “water of life... flowing from the throne” (22:1).. “**the earth helped the woman**”... creation is on the side of Jesus her Creator!... “**war against the rest of her offspring**”... That includes us, today, at the “edge of history!”