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# The Drama of Redemptive History

## Revelation 11:19 -12:17

*Russ Kennedy*

Redemption is a story. It is a true story. It is a drama. God has written and produced the drama of redemptive history. The book of revelation is telling that story. It is doing so, not through narrative or history. It is telling the story largely through apocalyptic language and visions. This is both its power and its problem. Here is what God's Word says:

<sup>19</sup> Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

<sup>1</sup> And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. <sup>3</sup> And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup> His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. <sup>5</sup> She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, <sup>6</sup> and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

<sup>7</sup> Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup> but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup> And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. <sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

<sup>13</sup> And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup> But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. <sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup> But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep

the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

## An Outline of the Book

I want to acknowledge my debt to Ken LeBrun and to Greg Beale for much of the structural work I am using and showing you in Revelation. Their work has helped me immensely. Here is the outline of the book showing its chiastic structure.

- A. Prologue: apocalypse, epistle, prophecy (1:1-3, 4-8, 9-20)
  - B. Message: the saints on earth ( 2-3)
    - C. The Heavenly Court Convened for Judgment and Enthronement ( 4-5)
      - D. Seven Seals (6:1-8:1)
        - E. Seven Trumpets (8:2-9:21)
          - F. Theophany: the Lord's messenger descending to sea and land (10)
            - G. War against the Saints on Earth (11)
              - G'. War against the Dragon in Heaven (12)
                - F'. Counter-Theophany: the Devil's two messengers ascending from sea and land (13)
                  - E'. Seven Proclamations (14)
                    - D'. Seven Bowls ( 15-16)
                      - C'. The Heavenly Court Convened for Judgment and the Messianic Reign ( 17-20; cf. 20:4-15)
                        - B'. Marriage: the saints in heaven (21:1-22:5)
                          - A'. Epilogue: apocalypse, epistle, prophecy (22:6-9, 10-20, 21)

As we take up this important chapter, here is the overall outline: [Greg Beale]

We are in Scene 5: The Drama of History: the central story line (11:19-12:17)

Our setting is in Rev 11:19 where we are taken behind the veil and shown God's covenant. This overview of history is unfolding of God's redemptive covenantal purposes.

- The story of God's Child(12:1-6)
- The struggle of God's children (12:7-17)

## The Structure of the Text

Chapter 12 is the center of Revelation's chiasm. Here is the basic outline of the chapter. As we look at this, let me remind you that structure is not meaning. But structure illuminates meaning. Just because I can give you

- The woman (v. 1, 2)
  - The dragon's main encounters outlined (v. 3-6)
    - General overview of the war (v. 7-9)
      - The voice from heaven (v. 10-12)
    - General overview of the war, Part 2 (v. 13)
  - The dragon's main encounters outlined, Part 2 (v. 14-17a)
- The remnant of the woman's seed (v. 17b)

On a closer analysis we can see the fine chiastic detail

- The woman described (v. 1, 2)
  - The dragon sweeps a third of the stars from heaven (v. 3, 4a)
    - The dragon's unsuccessful plot against the woman's child (v. 4b, 5)
      - The woman flees to the wilderness for 1260 days (v. 6)
        - War in heaven: Michael against the dragon (v. 7, 8)
          - The dragon cast to earth (v. 9)
            - The voice from heaven (v. 10-12)
          - The dragon cast to earth (v. 13a)
        - War on earth: the dragon against the woman (v. 13b)
      - The woman flees to the wilderness for 3½ "times" (v. 14)
    - The dragon's unsuccessful plot against the woman (v. 15, 16)
  - The dragon makes war with the remnant of the woman's seed (v. 17a)
- The remnant described (v. 17b)

At the apex of Revelation's chiasm, verses 10-12 encapsulate its message

1. The outcome of the great controversy is announced:
  - The kingdom of God is forever secured
  - The authority of Christ is permanently established
2. The verdict of the judgment is in:
  - The loyalties of God's people have been tested unto the death
  - Satan's charges against them have proven false
3. The salvation of the church is assured:
  - By the blood of the Lamb
  - By the word of their testimony

## A Summary of the Text<sup>12</sup>

Simon Kistemaker has summarized this text in a way that will help us to see what John was pointing towards.

His approach explains the apparent break in the middle of the Apocalypse, where the writer calls attention to Christ and his church persecuted by Satan (vv. 3–6, 13–17). Being cast out of heaven with his angels, the devil gives authority to the Antichrist and the false prophet—the beast coming out of the sea and the beast coming out of the earth. All who do not have the mark of the beast or the number of his name are unable to buy or sell (13:1–18). But Christ takes on Satan and his cohorts, namely, the Antichrist and the false prophet. He appears as the Son of Man to inaugurate the Judgment Day (14:14–20).

Here is imagery with a story behind it - symbol and reality

We have two primary apocalyptic images:

THE MOTHER AND HER CHILD, a common motif in the Old Testament that is used for example in Joseph's dream. This has been much corrupted by the Roman Catholics in their false teaching of Mary as the mother of God.

THE DRAGON AND HIS DEFEAT by war, a repeated symbol in the Old Testament that is used a great deal by the New Testament writers.

The clearest connection is the allusion to Genesis 3:14-16.

<sup>14</sup> The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup> I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

<sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

This is the beginning of the story. The serpent, the dragon, is at war with the woman and her seed. One day, the seed of the woman will come. His heel may be bruised by the dragon. But He will crush the head of the dragon.

Knowing this is the source of the allusion and imagery will help us not get bogged down in whether the woman in Revelation is Eve, Israel or the church. It is meant as a canonical allusion. Eve was the first. Israel became the nation from which the seed came. Mary was the particular person. But the church becomes the reality to which all those point.

Now, through the lens of this imagery, what is the story line of redemption?

## The Protagonists

(v. 1-6)

We are introduced to the two main characters of the story.

<sup>1</sup> And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. <sup>3</sup> And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup> His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. <sup>5</sup> She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, <sup>6</sup> and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

### The Woman and Her Seed

John sees a great sign, a wonder. It is a woman in resplendent glory. She is portrayed in a way that points us back to Joseph's dream. Many of these elements also occur elsewhere in Revelation. She is also pregnant, and having contractions, ready to give birth. She gives birth to a boy, the Messiah, the promised One who is destined to be the ruler of all the peoples. However, not yet here on earth, for He has ascended into the heavens to the throne of God. On earth she is having to flee and is seeking shelter. For this period of time, this great trouble, she is protected and nourished by God. Why? Because of the dragon.

Who is this woman? She is the image of a reality. She is a composite of realities in redemptive history. She begins with Eve from whom the seed would come. Through the story of the Bible, she becomes Israel from whom Jesus came. She is Mary who gave birth to the Messiah. And finally, she is the church, the mother of us all. In the largest sense, she represents God's covenant people down through the ages. It is through them that God will reveal the glory of His Son through redeeming them.

But the woman has a great and terrible enemy.

### The Dragon and His Followers

Note the difference: here is another, lesser sign but the dragon who appears is great. He is red, the symbol of war. His seven crowned heads and ten horns connect him to the book of Daniel. He is both a personage and a picture.

He is the one who led the rebellion in heaven and brought one-third of the heavenly hosts into ruin with him. He is the serpent who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden and was condemned by God. He is that old dragon, Satan who has tried to withstand God. Down through the ages he has done all he was allowed to do to keep the promised Messiah from coming. He tried killing the brother, polluting the line, destroying the nation, tempting the nation and finally, testing the Messiah. What an image: this great red dragon poised before the woman ready to devour the child.

One commentator captured it this way when he writes:

This story of Satan seeking to exterminate Eve's godly offspring is repeated all through the centuries. Influenced by Satan, Cain killed his brother Abel, and Pharaoh drowned the male children of the Hebrews. With murderous intent King Saul hurled his spear at David, and Haman plotted to annihilate the Jewish people living in the provinces of Persia. In New Testament times, Herod the Great slew the baby boys up to two years old in Bethlehem. Whenever a new development was about to take place in the history of God's people, in this verse symbolized by the woman, Satan stood ready to thwart God's purposes and tried to eliminate his Son. Satan's attacks on the woman continue until Christ returns. [Kistemaker, p. 358]

## The War

(v. 7-9)

<sup>7</sup> Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup> but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup> And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

There was war in heaven. Michael and his angelic warriors seek out the rebels. The dragon encircled by his rebellious hosts fights back. There is no mistaking who this is. He is the ancient serpent of the Garden. He is called the devil. He named Satan. He is the great deceiver. But he is defeated. He is ejected from heaven, from the place where God's throne room is. He was thrown down to the earth and his demons with him.

## The Proclamation

(v. 10-12)

<sup>10</sup> And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. <sup>11</sup> And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan has been thrown down. He has been defeated. There is an already but not yet aspect to this. Since the resurrection and ascension, Satan has been confined to earth, chained here on a long chain, if you will. He has not only been defeated in the heavens, he has been conquered on earth. He has been vanquished, not by carnal means, but by the cross of Christ and the preaching/teaching of the Word. He has been defeated by saints who do not cling to life and but willingly died for the King and His true kingdom.

This proclamation is both good news and bad news. It is good news for heaven for the accuser has been banished. But it is bad news for the inhabitants on the earth. Now he is roaming about here in great wrath. And his time is short. He has been given the sentence of death. He has been confined to a prison planet. He is very, very angry.

So let us rejoice. The dragon, the serpent, the accuser, the deceiver has been defeated. His doom is sure. He has been defeated and is desperate to destroy redeemed humanity. And

Christ is reigning. He has begun His kingdom. He will bring it to its great consummation. Rejoice.

## **The Persecution**

**(v. 13-17)**

He unleashes his fury on the woman and her seed.

<sup>13</sup> And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup> But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. <sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup> But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. <sup>17</sup> Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Here is the wrath of Satan against God's covenant people. It runs through this age but reaches a crescendo in the final years before the end. Once again we are shown here how Satan is bent on destroying the church and God's people. Through this vivid imagery we are shown how he will persecute us especially during the last 3 1/2.

But the point of this is to comfort God's people. We may be hunted down and persecuted. We may flee. But God is watching over us. He will guard us, provide for us and comfort us. This is the whole message of Revelation. It is the particular message of this text. Satan hates us. Satan will try to destroy us. But God will provide. He will protect. He keep us in His care even to the end.

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## Reflect and Respond

For the encouragement of the saints, this text emphasizes the defeat of Satan. His overthrow is highlighted by the verb cast out/down, which occurs five times. One author says, "Throughout this chapter, Satan is portrayed as a five-time loser, while Christ and his church are victorious." [Kistemaker] Here are those five instances:

- The devil attempted to devour the male child, but God snatched him up to his throne (v. 5).
- Satan fought against Michael and his angels but lost (v. 9).
- The dragon pursued the woman, but God prepared a place for her in the desert (vv. 6, 14).
- The serpent wanted the woman to drown in a torrent, but the earth swallowed the river (vv. 15–16).
- Satan lost when he waged war against the woman's offspring, who kept on obeying God's commands and holding on to Jesus' testimony (v. 17).

Satan's crowns represent a pretended royalty. He has attempted to steal the dominion. And he exercises fearsome power. However, all the saints in heaven and on earth know that his power comes to an end at the consummation. We are able to sing joyful praises to Jesus because he rules supreme. (Kistemaker, p.356)

Rejoice, my beloved. Rejoice that Jesus is the victor. He has won. The enemy is strong and fierce and full of rage. But out Lord Jesus will protect and provide. Rejoice, rejoice.

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<sup>12</sup> Kistemaker, Simon J. and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.