

Things are not what they seem; glimpses from Revelation

Saints, Satan and God

Chapters 12:1—15:5

After 11 chapters of this book, what do we know?

- The reigning Christ speaks to his churches, and maintains their witness (chs. 1—3).
- The Lamb rules among the nations and angels lead us to worship this Lamb (chs. 4—5).
- But then the world trembles under its world-be rulers and saints are especially targeted. But then, in glory, they lead the angels in praise for what God has done in Christ (chs. 6—7).
- The world is the arena in which God manifests his authority and purpose—his kingdom in its present action. He blows his trumpets—the earth trembles, and humanity trembles but will not repent. All manner of foul fiends torment humanity but the world prefers its idolatry (chs. 8—9).
- Saints are God's prophetic people and have a 'little book'—a working manual of what is in the hands of the Lamb. It is not enough to answer all questions but a word to sustain them and to announce to the world. They have all the power they need for witness. Even so, the world scorns them and leaves them for dead, and then, God raises them up and declares that his kingdom has come (chs. 10—11)!

Chapter 12 clearly begins again—supporting the view that the Book of Revelation consists of successive scenes that take us ever deeper into the mystery of what God is about through his Son. Like the unicorn says about the new Narnia in C. S. Lewis' *The Last Battle*, 'Come further up, further in.'

The variety of divisions offered for this Book warn us not to be emphatic, but for ease of treatment I am following an order suggested by Michael Wilcock in *The Message of Revelation*.

Taking 12:1 to 15:3 together enables us to see the interaction between three signs that introduce the main players in this scene: a woman (12:1), the dragon (12:2) and God having the final word (15:1).

The **woman** has a child, and then other children (12:17) or saints (13:7). The **dragon** or Satan exercises his power through a beast (13:2) and a second beast (13:11f). But **God** has the final word (15:1)—those who follow the Lamb celebrate it (14:1; 15:3); three angels announce it (14:6, 8, 9); harvesters execute it (14:14, 17).

God's people and the dragon (12:1-6)

The scene begins with a pregnant woman whose child is 'wanted' but caught up to God.

- Israel is God's witness that he will intervene in history—through his Messiah/Son.
- This Son is and remains the focus of Satan's dread—that another should claim the authority he has usurped. Cf. Matt. 2:16.
- He is powerless to negate the Child's victory—he who will rule all nations is raised up to God and his throne.
- The woman (Israel, or, more broadly now, the people of God) is enabled to 'fly' to a 'wilderness' for 1260 days—the age between Christ's ascension and return. Many times through Church history, God's people live in a 'desert' but live to continue the witness of Christ's victory.

The nature of the battle (12:7-17)

- Satan is defeated by Christ's death and resurrection (cf. John 12:31; Luke 10:18), but it is interesting that the angels are the first to assert it by denying Satan, and any other fallen angel, any further direct access to God (cf. Job 1:12; 2:6).
- The nature of God's salvation and reign, through Christ, is clear—Satan no longer has a place to accuse saints, and saints themselves (like the Michael and his angels) conquer Satan because they know that Christ's blood bought victory is final and they hold to this whatever (cf. Phil. 1:28).
- So now the battle is on, here on earth, and Satan knows he hasn't got long to create his mischief—to attack the woman and her seed—that is, those who follow Jesus, or saints.

- At each stage, Satan is thwarted.
 - The woman has eagle like ability to flee and is nourished in a wilderness—again for the whole church age probably represented as three and a half years (cf. Luke 4:25).
 - Satan attempts to drown God’s people but the earth is God’s ally and swallows these threats.
- The ‘rest of her offspring’—that is, of the woman are now identified clearly as Christians.

An imitation trinity and kingdom (13:1-18)

- The dragon is determined and, standing in a similar manner to the strong angel of 10:2, begins the ultimate blasphemy of aping God as a Trinity. The figures used may be based around the politics of the first century Roman world (see Paul Barnett, *Apocalypse Now and Then*).
- A world without a Father is a restless sea and from this arises an imitation Christ who blasphemes instead of worships
- One of his manifestations undergoes a miraculous healing from a deadly wound.
- His reign is 42 months (v. 5)—again, the whole church period.
- His reign is ‘allowed’ and is co-extensive with the kingdom of God, but brief!
- Christians conquer the Dragon, even though dying (12:11) but the Beast conquers Christians in the sense of killing them. He has catastrophic authority over the peoples of the world. We are being told this so as to be prepared, and to endure.
- A second beast (later called a ‘false prophet’—16:13; 19:20; 20:10) apes the ministry of the Holy Spirit—pointing to the first beast, doing signs, enlivening the first beast and enforcing its worship and putting a mark of ownership on devotees and excluding non devotees.

God’s people (14:1-5)

- The world tries to ‘own’ its people—to their undoing—but the Father and Lamb put their name on, and care for their people.
- They know a joy the world cannot learn: the purpose of God’s grace will be fulfilled.
- Amongst the compromises common in the world, God’s people will remain faithful, ‘purchased’ and pure.

God’s message to and about the world (14:6-13)

- Fear God!
- Babylon is fallen (this will be expanded in chapter 17).
- Beast worshippers will face the wrath of the Lamb.
- Saints must endure and are blessed in martyrdom.

God’s harvest (14:14-20)

- As with farmers, so with God and his world: the crop is what counts.
- An angel tells Christ to reap the earth—gathering his people as the world’s true harvest.
- A second angel tells another angel to reap the grapes—for wrath.

God’s victory (15:1-4)

This may introduce the next section but it also speaks to believers who feel the harshness of this present world.

- In addition to the finality of the world being harvested, there is wrath happening along the way.
- As human evil escalates, so does the clarity of God’s judgement.
- Saints see the greatness of what God has been doing and celebrate in ‘big picture’ terms—from the liberation under Moses to the finality of what Christ has brought to the world.
- No one has reason to ignore God!