

## **“THE WOMAN AND THE SERPENT.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**June 14, 2015, 6:00PM**

**Scripture Texts: Revelation 12:1-6**

### **Introduction.**

We are at the half way point of Revelation, eleven chapters down and eleven to go. It is fitting to note that the end of chapter eleven is a pinnacle kind of chapter. Last week we were listening to trumpets and singing:

**Revelation 11:15-16** Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Christ has ascended to His throne and has been coronated as King and has begun His reign.

It is a Sunday to Monday kind of jolt when a new scene opens and we come face to face with Satan.

When we walk out of the doors of the church we walk back into a world ruled by a devil. When we turn the page to Revelation 12 we are flashing back to the middle of the story and the story is a war, a battle scene, with images we have never seen or heard before.

Is there anything more vulnerable than a woman about to give birth? She is totally preoccupied with one thing, all her mental, emotional and physical energy focused on one thing.

Is there anything more frightening or threatening than a huge dragon, unless it would be seven headed dragon with ten horns?

We are entering a powerful drama filled with danger and intensity, a great clash of good and evil. A dragon that intends to eat the world’s last hope the moment it’s born. Let’s look at the three characters in this great drama.

### **The Woman, 12:1-2.**

The scene opens with a stunning image of a woman surrounded by sun, moon and stars. She is called a sign, she is a symbol of something.

Some have said this woman is Eve whose offspring was prophesied/promised by God to kill the serpent.

**Genesis 3:15** 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.”

Some Roman Catholic commentators have argued that the woman is Mary. But the part about being persecuted for 1,260 days doesn't make sense.

Some have said she is she is the heavenly Jerusalem. In the prophecies they spoke of Jerusalem giving birth to a Messiah (Isaiah 66:7-10). The light points to the glory to come and the glory of the New Jerusalem. Her splendor and glory is a reflection of the splendor of heaven.

Others say she is OT Israel. We are reminded of several OT dreams, visions and prophecies. Joseph saw the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing down to him. That represented the whole family of Israel.

Yet others that she is the NT church. They are getting warmer.

She is the church, Israel in the OT cared for and protected by God in the wilderness; and the church in the NT and post-NT, cared for and protected by God through every trial and persecution.

She is Israel, the community of faith that gave birth to the Messiah (12:1) and the Church, the community of faith that continues to faithfully follow the Messiah (12:6). She continues to exist after Christ's ascension.

This view makes the most sense of Revelation 12:17. We read she flees into the wilderness and continues to have other children, other Christians.

**Revelation 12:17** 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.

Meaning all the saints, all the followers of the child.

She is a symbol of God's people on earth. Both in the OT and the NT a woman is often used to symbolize God's people.

The birth pangs are the OT, the prophecies of anticipation, waiting for the consolation of Israel, yearning for the seed of woman to come. Israel was pregnant with the Messiah since Genesis 3:15.

And the birth pangs are in the NT, the persecution, punishment, suffering, trial, and the torment inflicted by demons in the age of the church.

## **The Dragon, 12:3-4.**

The dragon is also called a sign, a symbol representing something. We don't have to guess at this symbol, we are told who the dragon is in 12:9:

**Revelation 12:9** The great dragon ... that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

In John's vision he sees something utterly fantastic to our imaginations, a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns and tail that sweeps away a third of the stars of heaven.

In Daniel and Revelation seven heads and ten horns represent power, the seven crowns represent authority. This shows the great power and influence of Satan. He has great authority, princely authority. Remember he is called the ruler of this world.

Dragons in the OT represented kingdoms that oppressed Israel. Satan exercises his power and authority through wicked leaders.

The dragon attacks God's creation and God's order and rule. He assaults heaven itself and has a great effect on creation. We are reminded in Romans 8 that all creation groans under the effects of sin and evil.

Some interpret this passage to mean that a third of the angels fell with Satan from heaven. It's possible, but the Bible says very little about the fall of Satan, and this passage is not about Satan's original fall. It's about Satan's attack on this male child.

Furthermore, 12:4 is referencing a time around the birth of Jesus, whereas the holy angels that fell with Satan took place around the time of creation. Finally, this and the previous references to tails in 9:10 and 19 all refer to afflictions visited on God's people on earth and not on angels in heaven.

More likely this is a reference to his great might, he can impact up to a third of the realm, not a majority, but a great portion. In previous chapters a third symbolized a significant but limited action. He is a bound and restrained devil, under God.

## **The Woman's Son, 12:5-6.**

**Revelation 12:5** 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.

The child is well identified by the fact he is to rule all the nations. The original prophecy is in Psalm 2.

**Psalm 2:7-9** I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you. 8 Ask of me, and I will make *the nations your heritage*, and the ends of the earth your possession. 9 You shall break them with a *rod of iron* and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

Several NT passages quote to Psalm 2 as referring to Jesus.

This is about the shortest summary of the life of Jesus you can write. Verse five refers to the first and last events of the earthly life of Jesus, His coming to earth at His nativity and His ascension from the earth. The moment when He came within Satan's grasp and the moment He escaped His grasp forever.

Satan's attempt to destroy this child right at birth reminds us of *Herod's* attempt to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem. And then again Satan's attack while Jesus was alone in the wilderness. Satan was in the background of every persecution and opposition from Roman and Jewish leaders. And the final attempt seems to be the most decisive, Christ crucified.

**Luke 4:28-30** When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. 29 And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. 30 But passing through their midst

Jesus arrives on earth in enemy territory and it is anything but a Christmas card scene, it is war, with all its fierceness and intensity, with all its blood and destruction, misery and anguish.

All of Satan's attempts and attacks failed, evidenced by God's raising Jesus from the dead and then raising Him up to heaven and setting Him on the throne at God's right hand. Jesus is out of Satan's reach, so he turns his attack on the woman and of all the followers of the Messiah.

We encounter again this number 1,260 which equals 42 months or three and a half years.

The Preterists (past) say this is the literal three and a half years from 66 to 70 AD when Rome laid siege to Jerusalem and destroyed the temple.

The Dispensationalist (future) also say this is literal, meaning the final years of history and the great tribulation.

The amillennialist (present) say this is symbolic of the time between the first and second coming of Christ, and age of church history that we are in, these are the last days.

This is the symbolic spread of Christianity into the whole world under God's provision and protection. Just as God provided for and protected Israel in the wilderness, so is He now provided for and protecting His church scattered throughout the world from the persecutions and assaults of Satan.

We look forward to the Promised Land of rest and peace and glory, but for now we endure in the wilderness and are tested and tried in the furnace of God's afflictions and suffering.

The church in the world is always vulnerable. Secular politics and nations and tyrants and leaders always hold sway and have the power. The church is always the child before the dragon.

The wilderness is not a place of rest and ease and comfort. The wilderness is a place of change and trial and testing. The wilderness suggests a tent-life, the life of a pilgrim, not the life of a settler.

**Hebrews 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

### **Application and conclusion.**

There are two periods of peace in the Bible and only two. When are they? In the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2, and in the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21 and 22. Everything else in between those two times is war, cosmic conflict between God and Satan, between the principalities and powers.

**Ephesians 6:12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

Satan's mission from the very beginning was to destroy all that God said was good. The devil hates the gospel and all those who love and obey and preach the gospel. In chapter 12 the curtain is pulled back to give us a behind the scenes look at the cause of all the struggle and suffering in the world. The devil is hell bent to destroy the church.

Once again we are reminded that in this open universe of ours with powers of good and evil, God's power trumps Satan's every time. The gates of hell cannot and will not prevail.

But we are also reminded that we are living in a warzone and we should have a battlefield mentality rather than a peacetime mentality. We should be rationing, and preparing, and armoring, and being on alert.

Remember it will always look like Satan is winning, that the battle is going his way. If you were going to bet, who would you bet on, a mighty seven-headed dragon or a pregnant woman?

Doesn't it look like Satan always has the upper hand and God always has the losing strategy? Turn the other cheek, blessed are the poor in spirit and the meek, bless those who persecute you, love your enemies, the first shall be last, preach Christ and Him crucified. He chooses the weak things, the foolish things of the world. The disciples were the uneducated ones, the fishermen from up north.

Ever feel like God has dealt you a losing hand? Ever feel like you are handicapped somehow? Ever feel inadequate or incompetent or a loser? You are exactly the kind of person God chooses for His team, those who depend on Him and look to Him and trust Him and not themselves. Then when the dragon is slain, God will get the glory.

Remember that in the end Satan always loses. The victory is already secure and in hand. Jesus is in heaven and from there He will return to kill the dragon.

Remember the theme of Scripture and of Revelation that I mentioned in my first sermon on Revelation, kill the dragon and get the girl. Jesus will kill the dragon and get the girl, the bride, the church.

The cause of all our grief and misery, the cause of all sin and evil, of all death and disaster is decisively defeated by Christ. We share in that hope and promise of victory even now in the waning throes of battle here on earth.