

**Introduction to Revelation**  
**Session IV – The Woman and the Dragon (Rev 12-15)**  
**June-July 2012**

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**Revelation 12-15 in Context**

These chapters give us another perspective on the events we looked at last week, and show us a deeper spiritual reality to what's going on when destructive events happen throughout the church age. We are introduced to the character of Satan.

**'There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.'** (C.S. Lewis - *The Screwtape Letters*)

John wants us to know that behind some of the events that we see throughout the church age, there is another power at work. He doesn't want us to become obsessed about Satan and so time and again he stresses that God is on the Throne and the Lamb has the power, and Satan doesn't! But he sees value in us being forewarned, and so writes, **'here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints' (Rev 13:10)**

**Revelation 12**

**'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. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 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. 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, 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.'** (Rev 12:1-6)

The **child** is Jesus, which is clear from the use of Messianic language in verse 5:

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

Some commentators see the **woman** as Mary, but it's more likely that she refers to the people of God:

- The rest of the description of the woman doesn't seem to fit with Mary: she flees into the desert, and has other children who are faithful Christians
- The OT prophets often portrayed Israel as:
  - o An unfaithful woman (Isa 1:8; Jer 6:2, 23; 14:17; 18:13; 31:4, 21-22; Lam 1:6, 15; 2:1, 4, 10, 13; Joel 1:8; Amos 5:2).
  - o And occasionally as a faithful woman (Jer 4:31)
  - o And Isaiah particularly refers to the future restored Israel as a woman (Isa 52:2; 54:1-6; 61:10; 62:1-5, 11; 66:7-13).
- The NT also uses the imagery of the church being a woman or bride (Gal 4:26-27; Eph 5:31-32; Rev 22:17; 21:2, 9)
- There seems to be a parallel between this woman and the whore in chapter 17, who represents a community of people who don't believe in God.
- The period of 1,260 days seems to relate to a prophecy about Israel from Daniel

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The **dragon** is the sea beast of the OT (see notes from session 2, plus the description of the fourth beast in Daniel 7).

Two other references leap to mind when we think of the dragon: one is Isaiah 51:9-11

**'Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'** (Isaiah 51:9-11)

The other reference is 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.'** (Gen 3:15)

We're told that the dragon stood before the woman waiting for the child who was about to be born so that he could devour him. This is the Devil waiting for the one who was to emerge from Israel who would be his ultimate foe. In verse 5 we're told that the child was born and caught up to God and His throne which refers to Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension

John speaks here (and in chapter 11) about a period lasting 1,260 days. I would suggest that this period refers to the whole church age. It's based on a prophecy in Daniel 7:25; 9:27; 12:7, 11-12 which speaks about a period of hardship and persecution, and in Revelation it's depicted a number of ways:

- 1,260 days (11:3; 12:6)
- 42 months (11:2; 13:5)
- Time, times and half a time (12:14 – 43 months is 3 ½ years. Time = 1 year, times = 2 years, half a time = 6 months)

It's not entirely clear why John chops and changes between the different phrases, but it seems that he wants to allude to Daniel with the 1,260 days and the time, times and half a time; Elijah who had a ministry of prophesying for 42 months (Luke 4:25; James 5:17); and Israel who were in the desert for 42 years (tradition divides their journey up into 42 encampments, and suggests that they were in the desert for 2 years already before they received the punishment of being there for a further 40 years).

So how do we understand the role of the Devil during this period?

**'Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. 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. 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. 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!"'** (Rev 12:7-12)

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The OT describes Satan as being a created angel. Early on in creation he became proud (Ezek 28:17) and attempted to rise to become supreme in heaven, equal to God (Isaiah 14:13-14). As a result he was cast down out of heaven in punishment (Ezek 28:17; Isaiah 14:15). Throughout the OT he seems to still have access to the courtroom of God where he accuses people of sin before God (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-6; Zech 3:1-5, 9). All the while people are sinning, and their sin hasn't been paid for, Satan is permitted a role in heaven. But at the cross, sin was paid for once and for all, and so now Satan has no basis for accusing us before God.

**'There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1)**

**'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.'** (Rom 8:33-34)

In **Luke 10** the disciples start healing people, and setting them free and the disciples get excited and Jesus prophetically says **'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'** (v18) but then he qualifies this and says **'do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven'** (v20). In other words Satan's true defeat doesn't come by miracles and healings, but by believers having their names secured in heaven. Similarly in **John 12** Jesus speaks about him being lifted up, referring to the cross, and therefore the devil being cast out, or thrown down (v31-33).

**'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. 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. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 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. 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.'** (Rev 12:13-17)

Cast out of the courts of heaven, the Dragon pursues the woman, who represents the people of God, here on earth. We're told that the woman has wings like eagles to fly into the wilderness. This draws on OT pictures of God protecting people under His wings (Ps 54:6-8), and specifically Exodus 19 where it speaks about God rescuing His people from Egypt and taking them into the desert: **'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'** (Exodus 19:4)

Overwhelming floods often refer to persecution (2 Sam 22:5; Psalm 18:4, 16; 46:3; 66:12; 69:1-2, 14-15; 124:4-5; 144:7-8, 11; Isa 43:2) and the fact that the flood comes from the mouth of the dragon probably implies that it's to do with false teaching or declarations (cf. 1 Tim 4:1; 5:15; 2 Tim 2:23-26; Rev 2-3)

The earth swallowing the water again alludes to Exodus where the earth swallowed the Egyptians as they went through the sea (Ex 15:12) and then swallowed the families of Korah, Dathan and Abiram who rebelled against Moses and God (Num 16).

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**Further comments on Revelation 13-15**

**The Antichrist**

When we use the term *anti* we typically mean 'against' (like anti-aging, anti-social, anti-aircraft) but in Greek usage it more commonly means 'instead of.' So the Antichrist is an 'instead of Christ' – a parody, or false imposter. There are a number of ways in which the beast parodies Christ:

- Both have followers who have names written on their foreheads (13:15-14:1)
- Both have horns (5:6; 13:1, 11)
- Both are slain and rise again (5:6; 13:3, 8)
- Both are given authority over every tribe, tongue, people and nation (5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 17:12, 15)
- Both receive universal worship (5:8-14; 13:4, 8)
- Both are part of a Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit / Devil, Antichrist, False Prophet
- The Son receives authority from the Father (2:27; 3:21) and the first beast receives authority from the dragon (13:2)

John elaborates on the antichrist in his letters:

**'As you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come' (1 John 2:18)**

**'Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son' (1 John 2:22)**

**'Every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already' (1 John 4:3)**

**'For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist' (2 John 1:7)**

'Whenever any major opponent of God reaches his demise, it appears as if the beast has been defeated, yet he will arise again in some other form, until the end of history... consequently it is better to link the beast's resuscitation to the repeated rise and fall of oppressive states, world systems, or social structures that continue because the devil continues to inspire opposition to God's people, even though he has been decisively defeated by Christ.' (G.K. Beale)

**The Mark of the Beast**

**'It causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name.' (Rev 13:16-17)**

We've seen that the beast parodies the lamb in many ways, and so this mark is a parody of the seal that God puts on his followers. Just as the people here are marked on the head with the name or number of the beast, believers are marked on the forehead with God's name (compare Rev 13:16-17; 7:3-8; 14:1; 22:4; 3:12).

In the OT God told the people to put a sign on their head and on their hand to remind them of their commitment to God (Ex 13:9, 16; Deut 6:8; 11:18). The head represented ideological commitment or belief and the hand meant the practical outworking of the commitment.

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**‘This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.’ (Rev 13:18)**

In the ancient world, there was a system called gematria, in which the letters in the alphabet related to numbers. Many people have tried to decipher whose name adds up to 666, and have come up with countless alternatives. Of course, it’s one thing to translate a name into a number, and quite another to be able to translate a number back into a name!

I think this approach misses the point, and the clue is in the fact that verse 18 should be translated ‘the number of *man*’ rather than ‘*a man*’. 666 is the number of humanity, which falls short of God’s number: 777. When humans allow themselves to be marked with the number of man, giving allegiance to human powers and systems rather than to God, they fall short of what they were meant to be. When believers successfully resist the mark of the beast, and place their trust in Jesus, then they are marked and sealed in him, and so we read in chapter 14:

**‘Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.’ (Revelation 14:1-3)**

<b>Reading for next week:</b> Chapters 19-20
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