

THE DRAGON DECEIVER

PART 2 – REVELATION 12

“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Revelation 12:6).

The “man child” is now beyond Satan’s reach noted in verse 5. The story turns again to the woman. She was initially represented as a “great wonder” – a “sign” in the **heavens**. A transition in redemptive history was introduced. Now the scene changes to **earth**. The Messianic community is in view. Prophecy refocuses on active conflict between Satan and God’s church. The church flees into the wilderness for protection (“a place prepared of God”). It is intimated that the dragon has begun to war against the woman. God’s church is in peril.

“and the woman fled (ephygen – G) into the wilderness.” (vs 6)

We are witnessing the church during its “final period of human history.”¹ It is **when** prophecy repeatedly states that terrible persecution will occur. The picture of **fleeing** conveys that she **is**:

1. Escaping from the wrath of Satan
2. Going to a place of safety.

In the gospels Jesus noted that **when** you see the abomination that leads to desolation threaten God’s people and/or His church – “flee” (an imperative using the same Greek word as here in verse 6). There, they were to **flee** to the **mountains**. For the Jewish Christians it meant a literal escape across the Jordan to the hills of Pella in Decapolis in 66 A.D. *“Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast”* (Psalms 36:6). The “mountains” were a divine, ordained place of protection. For God’s end-time people it has even a deeper spiritual meaning: “Flee to” portrays complete dependency on God’s guidance, His holiness and goodness. “Flee” to the foot of the Cross. “Flee” into the arms of Jesus. It conveys total trust in Him!

When the hatred against God’s people comes, the “escape” imagery here is to a **wilderness**. This will be embellished more deeply in verse 14. However, it echoes many rich metaphors from the Old Testament.

1. The time when Israel fled Egypt into the **wilderness**, they were protected and nourished (Exodus 16:32, Deuteronomy 2:7, 8:3, 15-16; Joshua 24:7; Psalm 78:5, 15, 19; Hosea 13:5).
2. The wilderness is the “avenue” through which God guided Israel to the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:31, 9:7, 11:5).
3. It might even be a place of protection “in the presence of their enemies” (Psalms 23 and 78).

¹ Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 464.

God's church was born through an exodus/wilderness metaphor. Similar imagery is used for this end-time church.² This understanding is riveted further by the next phrase.

"where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there," (vs 6)

This invites us to reflect again on the elevated meaning of a wilderness refuge that God provides. *"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her"* (Hosea 2:14; cf. I Kings 17:2-3, 19:3-4). God's church finds there a **spiritual refuge**. Jesus went into the wilderness when "being led by the Spirit" (Matthew 4:1; Luke 1:80, 4:1; Mark 1:12). That prepared Him to finish His work. The mountain and wilderness imagery are similar.

This word "**place**" is a metaphor as to what God specially prepares for the "latter-day Israel," the 144,000. It does not imply that God will protect His church from persecution, temptation or even martyrdom (Revelation 6:9-11, 10:8-10, 11:2, 7-8, 13:7), **but** it is assurance – a divine promise – that they will have **spiritual** protection and nourishment. A "table" will be set in the midst of their enemies (Psalm 23).

"that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (vs 6).

This timing period was introduced in the previous two chapters. A careful analysis of its structure and sequence will lead to a beautiful understanding here in verse 6.

1. The unsealed portion (the *ha hazon* portion) of Daniel is in Christ's hands (10:2).
2. He prophesies (future tense) while taking an oath to God the Father (cf. Daniel 12:7) that "there should be time no longer [delayed]" (10:6).
3. The judgment of the living ("worshippers") is noted (11:1).
4. There is persecution for 42 months (11:2) (the delay has ended).
5. The two witnesses are active 1260 days (11:3) (same period of time).
6. Then, the Second Coming (11:12).

This is literal time, which was introduced in unequivocal language in Daniel 12. There is no reason here in verse 6 to change this established view. That will be riveted further in a repeat of this period, using a different timing expression in verse 14.

There is considerably more woman/seed information later in this chapter. As is true of most apocalyptic prophecy, the "good" is in conflict with the "evil." This woman imagery, beginning in the heavens (everyone sees and knows) is an end-time "sign" of holiness that has come to a group of God's people. Concomitantly, there is also another competing "sign." This moves forward the prophecy given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. The heel of the woman will be bruised by the serpent. We must now address that evil dragon.

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads" (Revelation 12:3).

² Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), p. 234.

As has been previously observed, the narrative of the dragon attempting to destroy the Christ child, when He was born, is a historical view. The move by Herod to put the Savior to death was satanic. The deeper meaning of this story, however, relates to the time of the end.

“Under the symbols of a great red dragon, a leopard-like beast, and a beast with lamblike horns, the earthly governments which would especially engage in trampling upon God’s law and persecuting His people, were presented to John. The war is carried on till the close of time. The people of God, **symbolized by a holy woman and her children**, were represented as greatly in the minority. In the last days only a remnant still existed. Of these John speaks as they ‘which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.’”³

Verse 9 pointedly reveals **who** this dragon beast is – the serpent, devil and Satan. As a “sign,” his image and actions are to be clearly understood, in **contrast** to that corporate body of people – the pure, holy woman. Riveting is this comparison!

Why not compare Christ with Satan as the “signs?” Astonishing and elevating, however, is this picture. God’s people are Christ’s holy representatives! **They** will be victorious against Satan. Before a witnessing universe, God’s character will be heralded **through the saints**. The submission of the wicked to any temptation of evil will be shown as without excuse by the saints lives. Through the purity of the “woman,” and later the “remnant” (vs 17), the “death knell” of this arch-rebel will be assured!

In the great courtroom of heaven, first opened in Revelation 4 and 5, the saints will be the “last witnesses” to be called. Their testimony will be the “smoking gun” against Satan.

This is a legal report of what was predicted in Daniel 8 and 9! Jesus then said in passive language, “holiness would be adjudicated” (8:14). Gabriel reported on how that would be accomplished through God’s people by successfully resisting sin (chapters 9 and 12) and demonstrating holiness!

“And there appeared another wonder in heaven” (vs 3)

Contextually, the word “another” is compared to the “woman” that he just saw in the heavens as a “great sign.”

“behold a great red dragon,” (vs 3)

“Behold” (*idou* – G) is used often by John. He is drawing us into the vision with him. It is like our saying to someone: “Look” – and then pointing to something. “Look up there (catching his breath), a great red dragon.” The word “great” suggests that he is either huge in size or extremely obvious. This is just how the devil impacts mankind – as an overwhelming power or force.

In the New Testament the word “dragon” (*drakon* – G) appears only in Revelation. It is identified as the devil, and thus has a tie to the serpent of Genesis 3:15 and the Leviathan (Psalm 74:13-14; cf. Romans 16:20).⁴

³ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, November 1, 1899.

⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*

The Revelation 17 beast was depicted as scarlet (*kokkinon* – G), the color of sin (Isaiah 1:18), which contrasts with the word “whiteness” – of the righteous purity of the saints (7:14; 19:11, 14). The dragon is “red” (*pyros* – G), tied to “blood-red” or death (John 8:44, I John 3:12). Intriguingly, the harlot that rides the Revelation 17 beast is “drunk with the blood of the saints” (Revelation 17:6).

This color represents his desire to kill God’s people. This was depicted in the “red horse” (6:4) and the shedding of the blood of saints (16:6, 17:6, 18:24). Jesus called Satan a “murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).⁵

“having seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns upon his heads” (vs 3)

The dragon gives power, his seat and great authority to the sea beast (Revelation 13:2, 4). It **partners** with that beast and, in turn, the false prophet, out of whose mouths (all three) sprang three “unclean spirits ... of devils” that go forth to the kings of the earth and to all of the world’s inhabitants (Revelation 16:13-14). There is a distinct separation of “beings” – but they function as a coalition. Are the heads, crowns and horns symbolic of or borrowed from the wilderness beast (17:3) or the sea beast (13:1; cf. Daniel 7:7, 24)? This has been a puzzling question to expositors. This is also an allusion to the Leviathan noted in Psalm 74:13-14:

The dragon is more than a metaphor for some evil kingdom. It is Satan himself, as the head of all evil who is out to destroy God’s holy church – His people. **Yet** – we are given additional light in how he operates in chapters 13 and 17. He “performs his oppressive will against the church and world **through** his kingly representatives on earth.”⁶ This is our key.

Satan is called the “prince of this world” (John 12:31) and the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). **Yet** – his influence effectively works **through** his earthly agents. Since the great purpose of this imagery is to reveal a distinct window of time in that apocalyptic conflict, those “anatomic parts” must have end-time meaning.

The seven heads collectively allude to the Revelation 17 beast (17:3, 9), with seven numbered or successive heads, where they are called “kings.” Therefore, they had a “kingdom,” represented by the beast they were on. The “kingly crowns” (*diademata*) on the dragon heads affirm further those Revelation 17 papal heads on the beast (the Vatican kingdom), which coalesced into a church–state in 1929.⁷ These heads were also called “mountains” in 17:9, alluding to Rome, the city of the seven hills. This **power** is depicted as rising from the sea in Revelation 13:1, emerging out of the “slime,” strife and wickedness of the world (Isaiah 57:20-21). Thus, the papacy is portrayed as a unique, end-time force to forward Satan’s end-time agenda. *“The dragon gave him his power and his seat, and great authority”* (13:2).

The dragon imagery is again designed to portray hatred, persecution and death, warning God’s people and church!

⁵ Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 8–22 – An Exegetical Commentary* (Moody Press, Chicago), 1992, p. 122.

⁶ Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 634.

⁷ Fowler, Franklin S.; *When “The” Church Rides the Beast*, p. 14.

The “ten horns” parallel, first, those without crowns, waiting for their kingdoms (Revelation 17:12), which are later revealed as having received “true kingdom crowns” (*diademata* – G) (Revelation 13:1).

Here in Revelation 12, it does not say where those ten horns are located.⁸ We must, therefore, conclude that they are on the dragon, per se. These symbolize the ten divisions of the world (the New World Order), which the United Nations and the Club of Rome assigned years ago to the whole world.⁹ These gives power to the beast and, in turn, Satan, for “one hour” (Revelation 17:12), depicting “a brief time.”

Thus, a massive coalition of wicked powers emerges between the dragon (Satan), the beast (papacy) and the false prophet (earth beast), seen as another religious power (noted in 13:11-17). The latter is shown to be apostate Protestantism in the United States.¹⁰

As with the pure woman, depicted as a “sign” in the sky, where her description reveals her identity, John follows the same format with the dragon. To make sure that it is no arbitrary evil power, the next verse begins a series of notations about this creature. They make pristine clear that it is Satan – the devil himself!

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Revelation 12:4).

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth:” (vs 4)

A tail was previously described on the fifth trumpet creature as scorpion-like. There, as an appendage of a locust-like creature, meaning that its painful work was in the back, hidden or guised. That symbolized its ability to powerfully deceive and ultimately hurt mankind (9:7, 10). A similar picture is here characterized with the dragon. Through deception, a third of the “stars” of heaven are swept into his ranks.

Elsewhere in this apocalypse, wherever stars are referred to, they appear to represent either leaders of God’s church (1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1) or heavenly angels (9:1, 22:16). Since they are cast to the earth, the imagery suggests angels who fell with Lucifer/Satan, thus depicting the original war in heaven.¹¹ This describes his stunning power.

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,” (12:7)

- Michael with his angels are contrasted with the
- Dragon and his angels

The context portrays a “history” that takes us back to the time when Satan began his deceptive work in heaven. One third of that angelic host succumbed to his scurrilous work. Revelation

⁸ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

⁹ See *Emerging Geopolitical Religious Forces*, endtimeissues.com.

¹⁰ Fowler, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

¹¹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

12:4 reveals Satan's past victory; verses 7-9 detail the resulting war. Though it looks initially as though the dragon casts those beings to the earth, we will later see that it was Michael – Christ Himself.

“The influence of mind on mind, so strong a power for good when sanctified, is equally strong for evil in the hands of those opposed to God. This power Satan used in his work of instilling evil into the minds of the angels, and he made it appear that he was seeking the good of the universe. As the anointed cherub, Lucifer had been highly exalted; he was greatly loved by the heavenly beings, and his influence over them was strong. Many of them listened to his suggestions and believed his words. ‘And there was war in heaven; Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought, and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.’”¹²

“When Satan became disaffected in heaven, he did not lay his complaint before God and Christ; but he went among the angels who thought him perfect and represented that God had done him injustice in preferring Christ to himself. The result of this misrepresentation was that through their sympathy with him one third of the angels lost their innocence, their high estate, and their happy home. Satan is instigating men to continue on earth the same work of jealousy and evil surmising that he commenced in heaven.”¹³

“Satan in his rebellion took a third part of the angels. They turned from the Father and from His son, and united with the instigator of rebellion.”¹⁴

“and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (vs 4)

Within the historical review, this phrase is identifying Satan's attempt to take the life of the Christ child. An end-time picture can be drawn of later persecution of the remnant church, before it “ascended up to heaven” (11:12). At the Cross it finally appeared that the dragon was successful, “but the resurrection snatched Jesus from the power of the death wielded by the serpent.”¹⁵

Beale notes from the Dead Sea Scrolls (1 QH 3.7-12) prophetic wording that suggests a “leader” emerges (similar to Revelation 12:4) from a religious community. He observes that this is likely “a general picture of a believing community suffering the initial messianic woes of persecution in the end-time and begetting more righteous children.”¹⁶

John is briefed as to how terrible the “beginnings” of evil were:

¹² White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 85.

¹³ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 291.

¹⁴ White, Ellen G.; *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 114-115.

¹⁵ Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 637.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 638.

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven” (12:7-8).

This continues from the first part of verse 4. War culminated the conflict between Christ (Michael)¹⁷ and Satan. This led to Satan and his angels being cast to the earth from the precincts of heaven.

Verses 4 and 7-8 are a narration of the defeat of the devil in heavenly combat. The dragon/woman/child imagery depicts his warring spirit continuing on earth.

“Lucifer was enshrouded with glory as the covering cherub. Yet this angel whom God had created, and entrusted with power, became desirous of being as God. He gained the sympathy of some of his associates by suggesting thoughts of criticism regarding the government of God. This evil seed was scattered in a most seducing manner; and after it had sprung up and taken root in the minds of many, he gathered the ideas that he himself had first implanted in the minds of others, and brought them before the highest order of angels as the thoughts of other minds against the government of God. Thus, by ingenious methods of his own devising, Lucifer introduced rebellion in heaven....

“The exalted angel standing next to Christ was opposed to the Son of God. The underworking was so subtle that it could not be made to appear before the heavenly host as the thing that it really was; and so there was war in heaven, and Satan was expelled with all who would not stand on the side of loyalty to God’s government. The Lord God stood forth as Supreme Ruler.

“This condition of things had existed a long period of time before Satan was unmasked and the evil ones expelled (Letter 162, 1906).”¹⁸

“And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Revelation 12:9).

“And the great dragon was cast out, ... he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (vs 9a, c)

The allusion to this was first noted in 9:1: *“I saw a star fall (Greek past tense) from heaven unto the earth.”* Jesus had noted, *“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven”* (Luke 10:18). This continues the major theme of the book, the ultimate futility of Satan’s hatred. By the casting down, heaven was purged.¹⁹ He became a defeated foe, which we will see shortly in verse 12 (cf. Isaiah 14:12).

John now pointedly identifies the dragon:

“called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (vs 9b)

¹⁷ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁸ White, Ellen G.; *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1143.

¹⁹ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

Satan was first identified as the “serpent” that deceived Eve (Genesis 3:1-15; cf. II Corinthians 11:3). Intriguingly, it was “*more crafty than any of the wild animals*” (Genesis 3:1 – NIV). That became a prominent Biblical characteristic of Satan.

Satan and the devil annotations are portrayed in the Bible in various ways:²⁰

1. Adversary – accuser:
Numbers 22:22, 32
Job 1:6-12, 2:1-6
Zechariah 3:1-2
2. Ruler:
John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11 – ruler of this world
II Corinthians 4:4 – god of this age
Acts 26:18, Colossians 1:3 – potentate over wicked
3. Deceiver
John 8:44, I John 3:8 – liar
Revelation 20:3, 8, 10 – deceiver of whole world (cf. I Corinthians 7:5, Ephesians 6:11, II Corinthians 11:14)
I Peter 5:8 – destroyer
John 8:44 – murderer

The object of Satan’s deception is the **whole world**. Deception is his “chief aim and occupation.”²¹ Subjects of this deception are noted elsewhere in Revelation and include Jezebel (2:20), the land beast (13:14), also called the false prophet (19:20) and Rome (18:23).²²

(To be continued)

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²⁰ Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. 472-473.

²¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 132.

²² Aune, David E.; *52A World Biblical Commentary; Revelation 1-5* (World Books; Publisher, Dallas, Texas), 1997, p. 698.