

5. War in Heaven and on Earth - 12:1-14:20

a) War in heaven: the woman and the dragon - 12:1-17

1. Again a chapter full of imagery that may seem clear, but is it? A central question is, who does this woman represent? Different answers have been given. Is she the virgin Mary? Or faithful Israel? Or the church?
2. Who is the dragon? This seems more straightforward. He is called 'that ancient serpent', the Devil, and Satan. (Rev 12.9). In the context of 'that ancient serpent', we might think of the first promise of salvation in the bible. That promise was about the seed of the (first) woman, in Genesis 3.15.
3. Given the reference to that ancient serpent, I suggest the woman in heaven points to Eve and the 'second Eve', her posterity Mary who birthed the promised Christ. Does this fit with all we read?
 - Rev 12.2 - giving birth with pain
 - Rev 12.4 - the devil tries to kill the child
 - Rev 12.5 - the son is the one to rule all nations - Compare with Psalm 2.7-9
 - Rev 12.6 and 12.13-16 — the woman flees to the wilderness to be protected by God 1260 days
 - Rev 12.17 - the woman has 'the rest of her offspring'. These are clearly Christians
4. Other options for the woman
 - Could the woman also represent the faithful in Israel? Or the church as a whole? Or the church in Jerusalem?
 - Could 'the son' point at the whole church? Compare again with Rev. 2.27
 - The woman flees to the wilderness - is this the protection of the faithful during the 3½ years of war in Jerusalem? Commentators often point to the fact that based on a prophecy, the believers in Jerusalem escaped to Pella (the desert in Jordan) just before Jerusalem's destruction in AD70.
 - The rest of her offspring, could that mean the believers outside Palestine? Like those in Asia Minor - who would certainly identify with Rev 12.17? Compare with Rev 1.2,9.
5. The dragon was defeated. (Rev 12.7) What does this mean? When did Rev 12.7-10 occur? Compare with Colossians 2.15 etc.
6. After the salvific events by Jesus Christ - his death, resurrection and ascension - the devil was no longer able to accuse followers of Jesus of sins. So what did he do? He began to persecute the woman (the mother church in Jerusalem?) and when that did not work out, he went after the rest of the believers (outside Palestine?). This tells the believers in Asia Minor what is going on. The persecutions they suffer from are the devil's making. It is the devil himself, no longer powerful to accuse, who tries to kill the faithful.

