

REVELATION CHAPTER 12

THE REAL REASON FOR THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD IS THE WARFARE BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN

PART 1. Revelation 12:1-2. THE WOMAN.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:1 Ana a great and wondrous sign (Greek: *semaion*) appeared (Greek: *horao, opsomai, ophthen, heoraka*)(*aurist passive*) in heaven. The book of Revelation reveals by means of signs or figurative symbols (1:1). The sign of the woman and the sign of the dragon are two symbols that represent literal realities.

A woman (Greek: *gune*)¹. The woman signifies the Church consisting of God's true people from both the Old Testament (Isaiah 50:1; 54:1; Hosea 2:2) and the New Testament (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:32).

The Bible emphasises the fact that God's people in both Testaments are *one*. God's Old Testament people and God's New Testament people are *one* vineyard and *one* kingdom (Matthew 21:33-44; cf. Isaiah 5:1-7; Isaiah 9:6-7). They are *one* flock under *one* Shepherd (John 10:16; cf. Ezekiel 34:2,8,16). They are *one* olive tree growing on *one* Root (Romans 11:17,24; Jeremiah 11:16; Hosea 14:5-6). They belong to *one* household of God in heaven and on earth with *one* Father (Ephesians 2:19; Ephesians 3:14-15; cf. Isaiah 63:16; Isaiah 64:8). They are *one* household of God (1 Timothy 3:15), with Moses as servant in all God's house and Jesus as son over God's household (Hebrew 3:5-6). They are *one* chosen people, *one* holy nation, *one* people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9; cf. Deuteronomy 10:15). They are *one* bride of the Lamb (Revelation 21:1-2,12,14). They are *one* New Jerusalem (Hebrews 11:10,16; Hebrews 12:22-24; Hebrews 13:14; Revelation 21:1-2,9-14). They are *one* Assembly or Church (Hebrew: *qahal*, Greek: *ekklesia*) (Jude 20:2; Psalm 22:22; Psalm 107:32; 2 Chronicles 29:28) in the Old Testament which is *continued and is expanded* as the one Church in the New Testament (Matthew 16:18; Hebrews 12:23) to include believers from all the nations.

The woman in the Old Testament. First the woman in Revelation 12:1-2 is pictured as the Old Testament community bringing forth the Messiah, personalised in Mary (12:1-5). In the Old Testament, Israel is frequently depicted *positively* and in figurative language as the spouse of the Lord (Isaiah 54:5-6) and as his future bride (Isaiah 62:5). Unfaithfulness to the Lord is denounced as spiritual adultery and then Israel is spoken of *negatively* and in figurative language as a prostitute (Jude 2:17; Jeremiah 3:1; Ezekiel 16:15-19), adulterous wife (Hosea 1:2) and as a faithless wife (Jeremiah 3:1,14,20). Moreover, the Old Testament also speaks of a future betrothal of Israel to the Lord. In the Old Testament, after Israel's unfaithfulness to the Lord, the Lord will again make a future covenant with Israel in which "he will betroth her to him (get legally married) forever in righteousness and justice" (Hosea 2:18-20).

The woman in the New Testament. Thereafter, the woman in Revelation 12 is pictured as the New Testament community on earth persecuted by Satan and his evil allies (12:6-18). In the New Testament, the Church is spoken of *positively* and in figurative language as a pure virgin once in all time espoused to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). Paul says, "I espoused (gave in marriage) you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ". He is not speaking of a virgin, but of a virgin given in marriage! Figuratively, Paul had begotten (1 Corinthians 4:15) the Corinthians through the gospel. It is the father's right to give his daughter in marriage to an approved bridegroom. So Paul as the spiritual father of the Corinthian Christians had given them in betrothal to one husband, a Divine Husband. The betrothal of a maiden implies purity and faithfulness and she ought to be committed to the one man to whom she has been engaged to be married. Paul anticipates with joy the presentation of his Corinthian converts as a faithful and undefiled virgin to Christ, when at his second coming he takes his bride to himself and brings her to that eternal home which he has gone to prepare. At Christ's second coming the marriage of the Lamb will take place (Matthew 22:1ff; Revelation 19:7ff; 21:2,9). In the light of the former immoral manner of life of the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), Paul's hope in refashioning them into spiritual virgins causes us to marvel. Like in the Old Testament, unfaithfulness to the Lord is *negatively* described as spiritual adultery (James 4:4)!

It belongs to the essence of apostolic Christology that Christ is none other than the LORD (Hebrew: 'Jahweh', Isaiah 40:3; Greek: 'kurios' Mark 1:3). God's Old Testament people have the LORD as Husband (Isaiah 54:5) and are called the Church in Jude 20:2; Psalm 107:32; and 2 Chronicles 29:28). God's New Testament people have Christ as Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15) and are also called the Church (Matthew 16:18).

Thus, God's New Testament people (the Church) are *continuous with* God's Old Testament people (the Church). Hence, Paul elsewhere describes the Church as the Israel of God (Galatians 6:15-16; cf. Galatians 3:7ff,29; Romans 2:29; 4:9ff, 9:6ff; Philippians 3:3). The New Testament Church has *not replaced* the Old Testament Israel at Christ's first coming. Nor will Israel replace the New Testament Church at Christ's second coming (the rapture). God's Old

¹ ἡ γυνή. An adult female in 1 Corinthians 14:34ff. and 1 Timothy 2:11ff. or a married wife in Ephesians 5:22ff.
A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich p.167

Testament people Israel is continued on a new level in the Church of the New Testament and is expanded to include believers from all other nations in the world! The new level consists of the new covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6-13). The Bible clearly teaches that God does not have two 'peoples of God' (or two wives), but just one people of God (Ephesians 2:11-22!; 3:6; 1 Peter 2 :9-10)

clothed (Greek: periballo)(perfect) with the sun (Greek: helios), with the moon (Greek: selene) under her feet and a crown (Greek: stephanos) of twelve (Greek: dodeka) stars (Greek: aster) on her head. Although the Church is plain from the viewpoint of the earth, the Church is glorious from the viewpoint of heaven. This description shows that the origin of the woman is in heaven (21:2,10; Galatians 4:26). The sun, moon and stars express the glory of the universe and rule over life on earth (Genesis 1:14-18). They express God's glory, favour and blessing (Isaiah 60:20; Daniel 12:3). The woman is clothed with the sun, for she is glorious and exalted. She has the moon under her feet, for she exercises dominion. On her head she has a wreath of twelve stars, for she is victorious. The number 12 expresses both the completeness of God's people in the Old Testament and later the completeness of God's people in the New Testament (21:12-14).

12:2 She was pregnant (had sth. in her stomach)(Greek: en gastri echousa)(present) and cried (Greek: krazo)(present) out being in labour (Greek: odino)(present) and pain (Greek: basanizo)(present) of giving birth (to a child) (Greek: tikto, texomai, etekon)(aorist). The task of the Old Testament community was to bring forth the Messiah or Christ according to his human nature (John 4:22; Romans 9:5; Galatians 4:4). Now that time had arrived. This fact points to the beginning of the New Testament period, to the first coming of Christ.

(2) Different views about the woman (12:1-2,6).

A futurist view. The woman (the 1st personage) in Revelation 12:1-2 is *Israel* during the Old Testament period AND in Revelation 12:6 is *Israel* during the first half of the future tribulation period (Larkin)².

A second futurist view. The woman in Revelation chapter 12 is either *Israel* during the Old Testament period until the first coming of Christ OR is *Israel* during the second half of the future tribulation period until the future second return of Christ (Tenney)³.

The correct explanation. The woman is a symbol for *God's true covenant people* from both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period (Greijdanus, Hendriksen, Groenewald)⁴.

PART 2. Revelation 12:3-4. THE DRAGON.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:3 And (then) another sign (Greek: semaion) appeared (Greek: horao, opsomai, elthon, heoraka, ophthen)(aorist passive) in heaven. The dragon is another *sign or figurative symbol* in heaven. It is a symbol of Satan (12:9; 20:2; Genesis 3:1).

an enormous fiery (red) (Greek: puros) dragon (Greek: drakon) having (present) seven (Greek: hepta) heads and ten (Greek: deka) horns (Greek: keras) and seven crowns (Greek: diadema) on his heads. He is terribly strong. His literal fiery red colour is a sign of his thirst for blood and destruction (6:4). The seven crowned heads and the ten horns indicate Satan's dominion over the wicked world that consists of large world empires and smaller kingdoms that oppose God and his Christ (cf. ch 17; Luke 4:5-7; John 12:31; John 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; 1 John 4:4; 5:19; Colossians 1:13)(13:1; 17:9). The number 7 for his heads means that he is difficult to kill. And the number 10 for his horns means that he has complete destructive power. His seven crowns or diadems are not wreaths of victory, but crowns of his arrogant claim to authority (13:1). Although he falsely claims authority over the whole earth (Luke 4:5-6; cf. John 8:44) he is in fact only the prince of this world, that is, the leader of the wicked and unbelieving world consisting of all kingdoms and lesser powers that are inspired by Satan (John 12:31). Satan has only seven crowns, but in comparison Christ has many crowns (19:12). Satan is powerful, but Christ is all-powerful (19:16)!

12:4 And his tail (Greek: oura) swept (dragged)(Greek: suro)(present) a third (Greek: tritos) of the stars out of the sky and flung (Greek: ballo)(aorist) them to the earth. After God had created the heavens and the earth (the universe) he saw that everything was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But soon afterwards a crafty snake appeared who tempted the first people (Genesis 3:1). Thus Satan must have fallen into opposition to God somewhere between the completion of creation and the fall of man. He was originally a glorious heavenly being, but lost his place in heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-17). When Satan fell, he dragged down or rather flung down a vast number of 'stars' representing *angels* on to the earth. These angels all became demons or evil spirits (Job 38:7; Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). A third part is a very great part, but nevertheless limited by God's sovereign will (cf. 5:11; 8:7).

The dragon stood (Greek: histemi, stesomai, esteka, hesteka)(perfect) continuously in front of the woman who was about (Greek: mello)(present) to give birth (Greek: tikto)(aorist), so that when (Greek: hotan) she gave birth (Greek: tikto)(subjunctive, aorist) he might devour (Greek: katesthio, ephagen)(subjunctive, aorist)

² Larkin, Revelation pp. 89-90

³ Tenney pp. 76, 114

⁴ Greijdanus p. 188, Hendriksen p. 164; Groenewald pp. 128-129

her child. The expressed purpose of Satan throughout the Old Testament period was to destroy the Messiah that would be born among the descendants of the woman (Genesis 3:15). Only if he could succeed in destroying the Messiah, would he be able to rule the earth. Then God's plan of salvation would fail. This opposition of the dragon to the woman was manifested throughout the Old Testament period in the world powers, like old Babylonia, Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, Syria and the mighty Roman Empire, trying to destroy Israel. It was also manifested throughout the Old Testament period in attempts to destroy the Messianic line. That is why the text says, "The dragon stood *continuously* before the woman". From this point of view, the entire Old Testament becomes the story of the conflict between Satan (the serpent or dragon) and Christ (the seed of the woman). Throughout the history of the Old Testament, the enemies of the Christ have tried to prevent his first coming to earth.

(2) Different views about the dragon and the stars (12:3-4)

The futurist view. The dragon (the 2nd personage) is Satan who dragged a great number of angels down in his fall. Up to the present time (in the Church period) he has *universal dominion over everyone on the present earth* (Larkin)⁵.

A second view. The dragon is the embodiment of the powers of chaos that disrupted a third of the cosmic powers (stars). His power in comparison to Christ is limited. He is also called Leviathan or Rahab. His red colour shows that he is bloodthirsty in nature and intention. He resembles the fourth beast of Daniel (Daniel 7:7), the Antichrist (13:1) and Babylon (17:3). He has much power, but in comparison to Christ, he is limited (19:12) (Groenewald)⁶.

The correct explanation. The dragon is a symbol representing Satan and his arrogant, yet false claim to universal world dominion. He has *limited dominion over non-Christians in the present world*.

PART 3. Revelation 12:5. THE MALE CHILD.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:5 And she gave birth (Greek: tikto)(aorist) to a son (Greek: huios), a male (Greek: arsen). The male child is a symbol that represents Jesus Christ, because according to Psalm 2:9, he will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre (2:27).

who is about (Greek: mello)(present) to (shepherd or) rule (Greek: poimaino)(present) all the nations (Greek: ethne) with an iron (Greek: sideros) sceptre (Greek: rabdos). The nations are here a symbol of those who do not belong to God's people and oppose God, his Messiah and his people (Psalm 2). At Christ's second coming all the nations will be brought or driven before his throne of judgement (Matthew 25:31-33). The expression 'to rule with an iron sceptre' identifies him with the Messiah (Ps 2:9). The expression does not refer to *his reign over a long period* of time (for example for a 1000 years), but to *his final judgement* when he will 'dash them to pieces' (2:27). The expressions 'rule' and 'dash to pieces' are parallel. In Hebrew poetry the second expression explains or elaborates the first. The activity as shepherd here has destructive results⁷. It speaks of breaking all opposition and forcing even unwilling opponents into submission (Philippians 2:9-11; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:25).

And her child (Greek: teknon) was snatched (Greek: arpazo)(aorist, passive) up to God and to his throne. The words 'snatched up' means that God the Father acted on his behalf. This symbolises Christ's resurrection from the dead (thus also an allusion to his sacrifice of atonement on the cross), his ascension to heaven and his enthronement in heaven (Luke 23:46; Acts 2:33,36; 1 Peter 3:21-22). It is described briefly in one verse, because it is not the main theme of the vision in chapter 12. It nevertheless marks the time as the beginning of the New Testament period (Christ's first coming).

(2) Different views about the male child (12:5).

The futurist view. The male child (the 3rd personage) is Christ at his first coming. But *during the period of the future millennial kingdom* he will *autocratically rule* the nations with a rod of iron (Larkin)⁸.

A second futurist view. The man-child is either Jesus Christ at his first coming that is snatched into heaven, or *the Church* that is snatched into heaven in the middle of the future tribulation period (Tenney)⁹.

The correct explanation. The male child is Christ at his first coming. He will dash all his opponents to pieces *in the final judgement at his second coming* (Greijdanus, Hendriksen)¹⁰.

⁵ Larkin, Revelation pp. 90-93

⁶ Groenewald p. 130

⁷ A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich

⁸ Larkin, Revelation p. 94

⁹ Tenney p. 115

¹⁰ Greijdanus p. 190, Hendriksen pp. 164-165

PART 4. Revelation 12:6. THE WOMAN IN THE DESERT.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:6 And (then) the woman fled (Greek: pheugo, ephugen)(aorist) into the desert (Greek: eremos) to a place prepared (Greek: hetoimazo)(perfect) for her by God, so that there (in that place) (Greek: ekei) she might be taken care of (nourish)(Greek: trepho)(subjunctive, present) for 1260 (Greek: chilias diakosias hexekonta) days. The woman in Revelation 12:6 is the same woman as in Revelation 12:1-2, but now after the first coming of Christ the New Testament people of God! The woman is a symbol of God's Old Testament people (Israel, also called "the Church")(Psalm 107:32) that is continued as God's New Testament people (called "the Church")(Matthew 16:18) and extended to include believers from all the nations (Matthew 21:42-44). God's care for Israel during their 40 year journey through the desert after their exodus from Egypt is a type of God's care for the Church during their 1260 days journey through the desert between the first and second coming of Christ.

Verse 6 is a summary which is elaborated in verses 13-18. There is related that the Church is kept out of reach of the deadly grip of the dragon during the whole New Testament period. The desert place which God prepared for her is not some geographic place (e.g. Petra), but a symbol of the journey of believers wherever they live during the New Testament period. The believers are fed and protected by all the means of God.

And the 1260 days is a symbol for the whole New Testament period from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

PART 5. Revelation 12:7-9. THE DRAGON DEFEATED.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:7 And there occurred (Greek: ginomai)(aorist) war (Greek: polemon) in heaven. The first and immediate effect of Christ's birth, life on earth, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement, is that Satan is defeated and evicted from heaven (cf. 9:1)!

Michael and his angels fought (Greek: polemeo)(aorist) against the dragon fought (Greek: polemeo)(aorist) together with (Greek: kai) his angels The name of the archangel, Michael, means 'who is like God?' Only Christ is like God! He is God who also became Man. The archangel Michael does not act on his own against Satan. He acts against Satan in the authority and power of Christ and his victory at his first coming. Michael is one of the chief princes (supreme beings) (Daniel 10:13). The representation is that each nation has a representative in the heavenly court that fights its legal and military battles. He is the archangel of God's people (Daniel 12:1), that is, Israel insofar as it resists the pressure of Antiochus IV and the reformists (Jews that adopted the heathen Greek culture and hardly count as Israel) (cf. Daniel 11:32; Romans 9:6). Michael is thus the archangel, not simply of the natural nation of Israel, but of God's people within Israel. At Christ's first coming the majority of Christians were believing Jews.

The picture is of Satan and his demons that rush after Christ to heaven in order to grab him and to drag him down from his throne. But the heavenly army of angels blocks their way, fight them and conquer them. This war or battle between Michael and God's angels against Satan and his demons is another way to describe the binding of Satan.

12:8-9 But he (the dragon) was not strong (Greek: ischuo)(aorist) (enough), and their (the dragon and his demons) place was no longer (Greek: eti) found (Greek: heurisko, heureso, euron, heureka)(aorist passive) in heaven (e.g. was once for all time lost)! And the great dragon, that ancient (Greek: archaios) serpent (Greek: ophis) called (Greek: kalao)(present) devil and satan,

The great enemy and opponent of Christ, the Christian Church and individual Christians is revealed in both his Old Testament and New Testament symbols, thus confirming the fact that he is still trying to destroy God's people. Satan is a serpent that possesses the deadly poison of cobras (Deuteronomy 32:33). He deceives and incites people to disobey God (Genesis 3:1-7; 1 Chronicles 21:1; Matthew 4:1-11). He is a liar (John 8:44). He is a devil (slanderer) and a Satan (opponent). His purpose is to keep people away from Christ and the gospel (Luke 8:12; 2 Corinthians 4:4).

who continually deceives (leads astray) (Greek: planao)(present) the whole world (Greek: oikoumene). During the Old Testament period Satan was a seducer. He seduced many, e.g. Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7) and king David (1 Chronicles 21:1). But also after his defeat at Christ's first coming he continues to deceive the world. The word 'world' here refers to the inhabitants of the world. To lead astray means to deceive, to mislead. The same word is used in Matthew 24:24 where Jesus says that it is impossible to deceive his elect! Therefore, the word 'world' here means *the evil world* in which people persist to do evil and are hostile against God, Christ and Christians (John 7:7; 8:23; 12:31ab; 14:17,30,31; 15:18; 17:9,14-16,25; 1 John 5:19). It is limited to that world that Satan can lead astray and continues to lead astray (2 Corinthians 4:4)!

was hurled (Greek: ballo)(aorist, passive) to the earth Literally the text says: "and even no place was found for them in heaven". It means that in this war or battle, the dragon and his army of demons were defeated and evicted from heaven *forever!* 'Heaven' is where God lives or from where he rules and conducts his court hearings in the presence of accusers. This may be high in the air. Before this war, Satan was still permitted to appear before God in heaven in order to accuse God's people (Job 1:6; 2:1; 1 Kings 22:19-22; Zechariah 3:1). During the Old Testament period Satan faked

that he was defending God's holiness and righteousness. Then he demanded punishment for the sins of believers. But at Christ's first coming, Christ's death made atonement for the sins of believers and Satan no longer has any semblance of justice in God's presence! After Christ's first coming, the evil and corruption of Satan and his demons became so glaring that Satan and his demons have been shut out of heaven, that is, shut out of God's presence, forever!

In Revelation 12:9, Satan and his angels 'were *once for all time* thrown down or smacked down onto the earth'. The verb suggests smacked down with force and disgust. This action is emphasised, because it is used three times (cf. 12:13)! In Revelation 9:1 the picture is of Satan 'all the time *lying fallen or smacked down*' on the earth. This whole symbolic picture refers to the binding of Satan at Christ's first coming (cf. 20:3; Matthew 12:28-29; John 12:31).

and his angels were hurled (Greek: ballo)(aorist passive) with him. On earth the dragon will continue to fight against Christians. But his power and dominion on earth has been *limited* (restrained, curbed, curtailed, bound) to only people who do not belong to Christ (Matthew 12:28-30; John 8:39-44; Ephesians 2:2; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 2:14-15; 1 John 5:18-19).¹¹

(2) Different views about the dragon defeated (12:7-9).

The futurist view. Satan will only be *defeated and cast out of heaven in the future, in the middle of the future tribulation period*. Then Satan would incarnate himself in the antichrist (Larkin)¹².

The correct explanation. Satan has *already been defeated in heaven and on earth in the past at Christ's first coming* in the sense that he has lost every semblance of justice for his accusations against Christians.¹³

PART 6. Revelation 12:10-12. CHRIST AND CHRISTIANS TRIUMPH.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:10 And (then) I heard (aorist) a loud voice in heaven say (present). This voice is the triumphant cries of many voices in heaven. They are not identified. They are probably angels, because Satan was not 'their accuser', but 'the accuser of their brothers'. Moreover, it is not they, but their brothers who overcome Satan (12:11).

Now (Greek: arti) once for all time have come (aorist) the salvation (Greek: soteria) and the power (Greek: dunamis) and the kingdom (Greek: basileia) of our God, and the authority (Greek: exousia) of his Christ. From Christ's first coming onwards God's salvation, which he worked through Christ, becomes manifest on earth. God's sovereign power is vindicated. God's kingship, kingdom or rule in the hearts of people is established (Matthew 12:28-30). The authority of Christ in heaven *and on earth* is proclaimed since the first coming of Christ (Matthew 28:18).

In Revelation 12:10 the heavenly hosts sing about the triumph of Christ and his kingdom that has begun at his first coming. In Revelation 11:15, they sing about the triumph of Christ and his kingdom that will reach its culmination on the final judgement day at Christ's second coming! At Christ's first coming everything has been decided in principle and the final triumph of God in Christ is secure. What remains is that this triumph must be worked out in history! Satan and his demons can no longer hinder the triumphant march of the gospel throughout history (cf. 6:2; 12:11; Matthew 24:14; Romans 8:28-39)!

because the accuser (Greek: kator) of our brothers who continuously accuses (Greek: kategoreo)(present) them before our God by day (Greek hemeras) and by night (Greek: nuktas) has been hurled down (Greek: ballo)(aorist, passive). Satan is called the accuser of our brothers. Before Christ's first coming he continually accused the brothers in a legal sense of "not being righteous" before God. He accused Job (Job 1: 6 to 2:6) and the high priest Joshua (Zechariah 3:1-3).

But at the first coming of Christ Satan is hurled out of heaven in the sense that he has lost his place as the accuser of God's people (the believers in Christ). Now that Christ's death has made atonement for their sins, Satan has lost every semblance of justice for his accusations against Christians. Although he continues to accuse today (1 Peter 5:8) he can no longer point to the unaccomplished work of Jesus Christ (Romans 8:33).

Jesus says the same thing in Luke 10:18, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven". And in John 12:31, "Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out". This happened when Jesus Christ was lifted up from the earth: first on the cross to die and then lifted up to heaven at his resurrection, ascension and enthronement (John 12:32). By dying on the cross, Jesus Christ disarmed Satan and his demons and triumphed over them (Colossians 2:15). Satan is *bound* (curbed, curtailed, restrained, limited) to the extent that he can no longer oppose Christ's work in his chosen people (Matthew 12:28-30). He is permitted to veil the gospel only in those people who are perishing (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan is *bound* to the extent that he can no longer deceive the nations and keep the gospel away from them (20:3).

Because the angels and Christians may call one and the same God 'their God', they may also call one another 'brothers'. The angels love believers, serve them (Psalm 91:11; Hebrews 1:14) and call them 'our brothers' in

¹¹ Greijdanus p. 189, Hendriksen p. 165

¹² Larkin, Revelation pp. 91,96-98

¹³ Greijdanus p. 192, Hendriksen p. 171

Revelation 12:10. The brothers of Jesus Christ are not the natural Jews, but the true Christians from every nation, people who are Christ's disciples and do the will of God (Matthew 12:50; 25:40; 28:10; John 20:17; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11-13,17).

12:11 And they overcame (conquered)(Greek: nikao)(aorist) him by the blood of the Lamb. Christians in the world triumph decisively over Satan by relying on Christ's completed work of salvation on the cross. God's completed work of salvation through the death and resurrection of Christ on the cross set all believers free from their sins (1:5), cause people from every people group to belong to God (5:9) and cause them to survive the great tribulation of Christians throughout history at the hand of their opponents (7:14).

and by the word of their testimony (Greek: marturia). God's people in the world triumph decisively over Satan by testifying (speaking) about their faith in Christ.

And they did not love (Greek: agapao)(aorist) their lives (Greek: psuche) until (Greek: achri) death. They prove that their faith and love for Christ is genuine, because they persevere unto death. John shared the tribulation of other Christians "on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus" (1:9). Christians are slain for this testimony (6:9; 11:7).

12:12 Therefore continuously rejoice (Greek: euphrainomai)(imperative, present), you heavens and you who dwell (Greek: skenoo)(present) in them! But woe (Greek: ouai) to the earth and the sea, because the devil (Greek: diabolos) has gone down (Greek: katabaino)(aorist) to you having (present) continuously great fury (Greek: thumos), because he knows (Greek: oida)(participle, perfect) that he has (present) little (Greek: oligos) (appointed) time (Greek: kairos). While there is rejoicing in heaven, there is fear on earth. The people on earth still have to endure terrible persecution from Satan and others. Satan knows that his time is short and that the lake of fire (hell) awaits him (Matthew 25:41). Therefore he will try to cause as much damage as possible on earth. Non-Christians and Christians alike will suffer.

Christians live on earth, but have their citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). They are in the (evil and antichristian) world, but not part of it (John 17:19-20). Although the people belonging to the evil world are under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19), Christians are not. Satan cannot cause lasting harm to Christians (1 John 5:18; cf. John 10:28). Therefore, Christians have part in the "woe to the earth" and equally a part in the "rejoice you heavens" (Revelation 12:12). Because the triumphant song of all those in heaven is the background of the events on earth (12:10-12), threats, oppression and persecution should no longer cause anxiety and bewilderment or dismay to Christians. Christians must continually remind themselves that the reality of Christ's triumph is not yet completely realised (1 Corinthians 15:20-26). Therefore Christians can only stand strong and secure in this present history of the world when they see the history of God's salvation and judgement behind the history of this world – when they view the reality of Revelation 12:12 (the fury of Satan) in the light of the reality of Revelation 12:10 (the salvation, power and kingdom or kingship of Christ)! Such Christians do not allow the dragon, his demons and his anti-Christian political powers (antichrists), his anti-Christian spiritual powers (false religious prophets) and his anti-Christian immoral powers (the great prostitutes) to push them aside. Their place in this world is "in Christ" and only there they stand secure.¹⁴

It is remarkable that the song of praise in Revelation 12:10-12 is the exact midpoint of the book of Revelation.¹⁵ Compare this to the song of praise in Romans 8:31-39!

(2) Different views about the brothers (12:10).

The futurist view. The brothers are *literally the Jewish remnant* who are persecuted and die as martyrs *during the first half of the future tribulation period* (Larkin)¹⁶. It is their souls that are under the altar in heaven (6:9-11). Compare Revelation 12:17.

The correct explanation. The brothers are *Christians throughout the whole New Testament period* (Greijdanus, Hendriksen)¹⁷. Because the angels and believers may call one and the same God 'their God', they may also call one another 'brothers'.

PART 7. Revelation 12:13-18. THE WOMAN AND HER SEED PERSECUTED.

(1) Explanation of the symbols.

12:13 And when the dragon (Greek: drakon) saw (Greek: horao, opsomai, eidon, heoraka)(aorist) that he had been hurled (Greek: ballo)(aorist) to the earth, he pursued (Greek: dioko)(aorist) the woman who had given birth (Greek: tikto) aorist) to the male (child)(Greek: arsen). The second immediate effect of Christ's birth, life on earth, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement, is that Satan begins a relentless persecution of the Church and Christians on earth (1 Peter 5:8). The picture shows the dragon persecuting the woman on earth, because she gave birth

¹⁴ cf. Bavinck pp 45-51

¹⁵ Groenewald p. 133

¹⁶ Larkin, Revelation p. 98

¹⁷ Greijdanus p. 193, Hendriksen p. 171

to the male child. He was unable to destroy the male child (Christ) and therefore he tries to destroy the woman (the Church) - another phase of his wrath against the male child (Christ).

12:14 And the woman was given (aorist) the two wings (Greek: pterux) of a great eagle (Greek: aetos), so that she might fly (Greek: petomai)(subjunctive, present) to the place (prepared for her) in the desert (Greek: eremos) (12:6). The picture is expressed in terms of Israel's exodus from Egypt and sojourn in the wilderness (Exodus 15:22). This picture is an Old Testament type (event as illustration) of the New Testament Church in its journey to the heavenly Canaan. The Old Testament typology finds its final expression in the New Testament salvation.

The Church is given (by God) the two wings of an eagle. This is a picture of God's grace throughout the New Testament period. What the two wings symbolise is not stated. Some think it could be faith (Mark 9:23; Ephesians 6:16; 1 John 5:4) and prayer (Mark 11:24; John 14:13-14; James 5:15-16). Others think it could symbolise the righteousness and holiness which God gives to the Church (1 Cor 1:30) by which she escapes the corruption of this world (2 Peter 1:4). What is important is that God protects his Church.

The place prepared for her (Deuteronomy 1:32-33)(12:6) is not any specific place on earth and is nothing more than the place God assigned each person to live on earth throughout the New Testament period (Acts 17:26).

where (Greek: hopou) she would be taken care of (nourish, provide)(Greek: trepho)(present). Literally "in order that they may nourish her there" (12:6). Just as God took care of Israel by nourishing her in her pilgrim's journey through the wilderness for forty years, so he takes care of the Church by nourishing her in her pilgrim's journey on earth for its whole duration. The 'they' who nourish the Church are all God's providential instruments: humans as well as events and circumstances in the history of the world (cf. 1 Kings 17:2-6).

for a time (Greek: kairos), times and half (Greek: hemisu) a time (12:14). The number 42 months (11:2), 1260 days (11:3; 12:6) and 'a time, times and half a time' (12:14; cf. Daniel 7:25) are symbolic numbers that remind people of the terrible 3½ years period of affliction (drought) during the time of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1; Luke 4:25; James 5:17). These numbers signify the apocalyptic period of time during which Satan and his antichristian political powers (beasts) persecute the Church while the Church proclaims the gospel. It is symbolic of a period of affliction that seems to extend itself endlessly, yet abruptly and unexpectedly comes to an end! In the book of Revelation these numbers refer to the whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming (12:5-6) to Christ's second coming (11:2-3,11). The whole New Testament period from Christ's first coming (1 Corinthians 10:11; Hebrews 9:26) to Christ's second coming (Matthew 13:39; 24:3; Ephesians 1:10) is called 'the end of the ages'.

The whole New Testament period is expressed in terms of 'days' instead of 'months' (12:6), because like testifying (11:3), feeding is a daily activity (cf. Matthew 6:11). God takes care of his Church every single day!

The whole New Testament period is also expressed in terms of a period of 3½ times, a seemingly endless period (symbolically 7 times, which is symbolic for 'eternity') that abruptly and unexpectedly comes to an end (12:14)!

out of the serpent's reach (face, presence)(Greek: prosopon). Literally: "away from the serpent's face". This does not mean that the serpent could not see the woman (cf. 12:15), but that he could not reach her in order to destroy her. This phrase has the same meaning as "the dragon is bound for a 1000 years" (20:2-3). Both symbolic pictures refer to the literal reality that Satan has been bound (curbed, curtailed, restrained and limited) since Christ's first coming until just before Christ's second coming (20:1-3).

12:15 And (then) from his mouth the serpent (Greek: ophis) spewed (lit. threw)(Greek: ballo)(aorist) water like a river behind (after)(Greek: hopiso) the woman, in order to make (Greek: poieo)(subjunctive, aorist) a torrent (deluge, a sweeping away)(Greek: potamophoretos). The dragon is pictured in Old Testament symbols as a great sea monster, called Leviathan or Rahab (Isaiah 27:1; 51:9-10; Psalm 74:13-15), that spews water (cf. Isaiah 59:19; Jeremiah 46:7-8). Because the dragon cannot directly destroy the woman, he seeks other means to indirectly destroy her. With the flood of water like a river issuing from his mouth he hopes to carry the woman away.

Although the symbol is not explained, "the river" symbolises the lies, delusions and deceit issuing from his mouth, by which he tries to seduce the Church and Christians (cf. 16:13-14). Satan employs every possible means in the world to entice Christians away from Christ. He employs things like: 'the worries of this life', 'the deceitfulness of wealth or riches', 'the desires for other things or pleasures' (Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14), 'the love for this world' (2 Timothy 4:10), 'the corruption of the world' (2 Peter 2:20), etc. (2 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 John 2:16-17) to seduce Christians.

12:16 But the earth helped (Greek: boetheo)(aorist) the woman and the earth opened (Greek: anoigo)(aorist) its mouth and swallowed up completely (Greek: katapino)(aorist) the river which the dragon spewed (Greek: ballo)(aorist) out of his mouth. This symbol is not explained, but shows that the worldly powers are divided, so that they cannot work together to destroy the Church. They work against each other and break one another's power and schemes (1 Samuel 23:26-28). Whenever 'horns that scatter God's people' arise, then God brings 'craftsmen or smiths' that chop them off (Zechariah 1:18-21).

12:17 And (then) the dragon was enraged (Greek: orgizo)(aorist) at the woman and went off (Greek: aperchomai)(aorist) to make (Greek: poieo)(aorist) war (Greek: polemon) against the rest of her offspring (Greek: spermatos) - those who obey (keep, observe)(Greek: tereo)(present) God's commandments (Greek:

entole) and have (hold to)(present) the testimony of Jesus (cf. 19:10). The continued failure to destroy the Church as an institute that proclaims the good news of God enrages the dragon even more. Satan would only be permitted to destroy the Church as an institute at the very end of the New Testament period (11:7-10; 20:7-9). In the mean time, he directs his fury against her offspring and conducts war against them. The seed of the woman does not point to ethnic Jews, but to Christians from all the nations, because they *continue* to obey his commandments (cf. Matthew 28:19; Mark 12:30-31; Romans 13:8-10) and *continue* to hold on to the testimony of Jesus (cf. 1:2,9; 6:9; 12:11; Matthew 10:32-33). They faithfully hold on to Christ himself as the truth and to the words of truth which he taught. Only in secondary sense this means that these Christians also testify about Jesus and his truth.

12:18 And he stood (Greek: *histemi, steso, esteka, hesteka*)(aorist) on the shore (sand, beach)(Greek: *ammos*) of the sea (12:18 or 13:1). The original texts are divided between using the first person (“And I”) or third person (“And he”). **Preference: the 3rd person.**

- The first person would point to John taking his stand on the shore of the sea, from which he would see the next vision.
- The third person would point to the dragon taking his stand on the shore of the sea, to wait for the beast to appear or in order to cause the beast to appear. Or it would point to the dragon being divinely limited to the shore of the sea, that is, that God has limited Satan in the kind of evil he can do to the nations on earth.

(2) Different views about the woman in Revelation 12:13-17.

The futurist view. The woman fleeing into the desert is Israel kept hidden in Petra (in Jordan) *during the second half of the future tribulation period* (Larkin)¹⁸.

The correct explanation. The woman fleeing into the desert is the Church kept save from Satan’s destruction wherever in the world and *throughout the whole New Testament period*.

(3) Different views about the period of 1260 days (12:6,14).

The futurist view. 1260 days is the *literal* second 3½ years of the 7 year *future tribulation period*.

The correct explanation. The 1260 days is a *figurative* symbol representing *a period of affliction* that seems to extend itself endlessly, yet abruptly and unexpectedly comes to an end! It signifies the apocalyptic period of time between Christ’s first coming and Christ’s second coming during which Satan in the spiritual world and antichrist in the human world persecute the Church while the Church proclaims the gospel.

(4) Different views about the rest of the seed of the woman (12:17).

The futurist view. The rest of the seed of the woman (the 5th personage) is *literally the Jewish remnant* left behind in Palestine or among the Gentile nations *during the second half of the future tribulation period* (Larkin)¹⁹. Those who obey God’s commands are *Orthodox Jews* who observe the Old Testament Law. Those who hold to the testimony of Jesus are *Messianic Jews*, who have been converted by the preaching of the gospel of the (millennial) kingdom by the two witnesses, Elijah and Moses.

The correct explanation. The rest of the seed of the woman is *symbolically individual Christians* in contrast to the Church as an institute who faithfully continue to obey his commandments and continue to hold on to the testimony, which consists of Jesus Christ and his teachings, *throughout the whole New Testament period* (Greijdanus, Hendriksen)²⁰.

¹⁸ Larkin, Revelation p. 100-102

¹⁹ Larkin, Revelation p. 102

²⁰ Greijdanus p. 196, Hendriksen p. 172