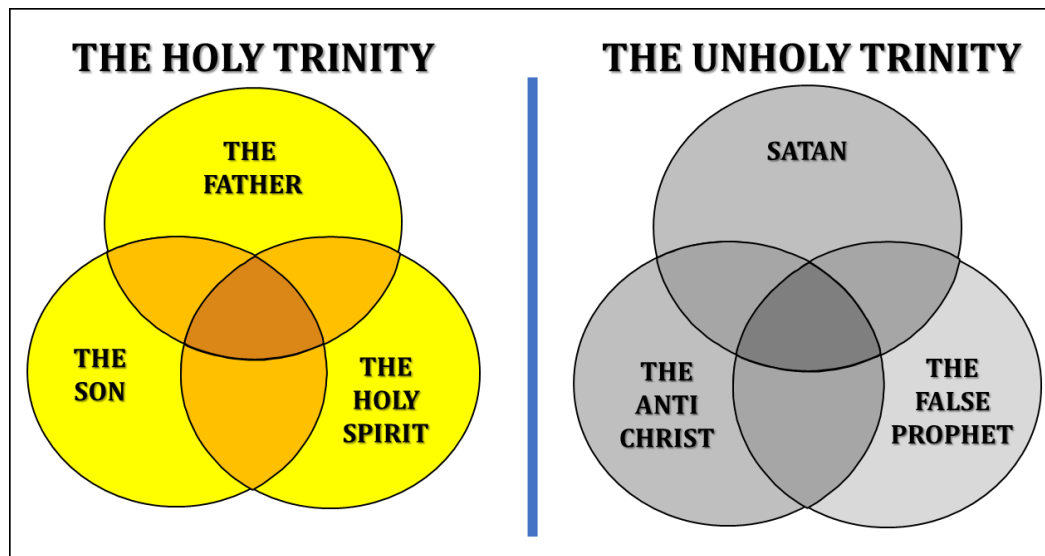


PART 8: THE TRIBULATION, CONT'D

CHAPTERS 12-13

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MAIN IDEA

Chapter 12 describes Satan's final war against God which is yet to be fought. This war will take place during the tribulation period, very likely during the last half of this period. In describing this final war John introduces three main characters involved in it: the woman (Israel), the dragon (Satan), and the male child (Jesus Christ).

Chapter 13 records the war's culmination as Satan attempts to prevent Jesus from setting up his earthly kingdom by setting up his own kingdom under the authority of the Antichrist ("beast out of the sea"). The Antichrist is aided by the false prophet ("beast out of the earth") who completes the *unholy trinity* where Satan is a counterfeit of the Father, the Antichrist a counterfeit of Jesus Christ, and the false prophet a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTS

The Characters of the War (12:1-6)

John now records a war depicted in heaven involving three main characters; the woman, the dragon, and the male child.

The woman (12:1-2). The woman is a representation of the nation of Israel. The fact that she is pregnant and in pain, probably refers to the experience of Israel down through the centuries, waiting for the coming of her Messiah (Isa. 26:17-18; 66:7-9; Jer. 4:31). Her sufferings refer to the nation as a whole, not to Mary the mother of Jesus.



The woman is "*clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars*" (Revelation 12:1). Note the similarity between this description and the description that Joseph gave of his father Jacob (Israel) and his mother and their children (Genesis 37:9-11). The twelve stars that the woman had on her crown are referring to the twelve tribes of Israel.

"She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne" (Rev. 12:5 NIV). Later, after giving birth to the male child, the woman (Israel) flees to the desert for 1,260 days (3½ years) to escape the red dragon. This period is probably the last half of the tribulation period that Jesus referred to as the "great tribulation" (Matt. 24:21 ESV).

A place of protection for Israel will be prepared by God. In Matthew 24:16-17 we find another reference to this event "*So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel, let the reader understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*" (Matt. 24:15-16 NIV). The only escape they will have is to the red mountains of Edom, once occupied by Israel's (Jacob's) brother, Esau. The city of Petra will most likely be this refuge.

The Dragon (12:3-4). The enormous red dragon represents Satan (12:9). He has been the enemy of Christ and Israel throughout the scriptures. The fact that he is red is probably because he is covered with the blood of all the wars and slaughters of history which he instigated.



The dragon has seven heads with ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. These could represent the seven consecutive world empires running the course under Satan's dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia; Greece, Rome, and the Antichrist's future empire (17:9-10). The ten horns most likely represent the kings who will rule under the Antichrist (17:12).

The phrase "*his tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth*" may be describing either Satan's power during the great tribulation or his leadership over the fallen angels (demons) which are hurled to the earth with him (12:9).

The dragon stood in front of the woman so that he might devour the child the moment it was born ties closely with Satan's desire to prevent the birth of Christ, and to try to

destroy him after he was born. He must have inspired Herod to murder all boys two years old and under at the time of Jesus' birth in an attempt to murder Jesus (Matt. 2:16).

The Male Child (12:5-6). Bible expositors have argued about the identity of the child, some believing it is referring to the church, others to Christ. Since this is a male child it is most likely referring to Christ. If it were the church the Greek word would be in the feminine.¹ The male child will rule all nations with an iron scepter (absolute authority).



This is confirmed in Revelation 19:15 and in Psalm 2:9 where Christ will rule with an iron scepter at his Second Coming.

The War in Heaven (12:7-12)

The Battle (12:7-8). Next, John describes a war which takes place in heaven. Michael, and his angels battle against Satan and his followers. Up until this point, Satan has access to God but now he is banished from heaven and hurled down to the earth by Michael.

The Victory (12:9). As a result of his defeat, Satan and his followers will be permanently banished from heaven and hurled to the earth. Ultimately, he will be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur where he will be tormented day and night forever (Rev. 20:10).

The Celebration (12:10-12). The ultimate defeat of Satan, and the fallen angels (demons) who followed him, will trigger an outburst of victorious praise. No longer will Satan stand before God accusing the "brothers and sisters" who have overcome him through Jesus' victory on the cross.

The War on Earth (12:13-17)

Satan attacks Israel (12:13-14). Following his defeat by Michael and his holy angels, the dragon (Satan) furiously pursues the woman (Israel) who gave birth to the child (Christ). Here it describes Satan's hostile pursuit and persecution of the Jews as they flee into the wilderness, probably taking place at the mid-point of the tribulation period when the abomination of desolation occurs (Matt. 24:15-16). The Jews will be in desperate need of any assistance they can get, and in God's providence, there will be some people who help them (Matt. 25:31-40).

Satan's army thwarted (12:15-16). Satan's attacking forces will sweep toward the Jews' hiding place like a flood. Yet in dramatic fashion, the earth will help the woman; "*But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that*

¹ Walvoord, p. 578.

the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:16 NIV). The imagery is reminiscent of Moses’ description in Exodus 15:12: “You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies.”

Satan attacks Christians (12:17). Frustrated, the dragon (Satan) will turn his fury toward new targets. Some have identified “*the rest of her offspring*” as the 144,000 (7:2-8; 14:1-5). Others see them as believing Gentile tribulation saints (7:9-14), *those who have faith are children of Abraham* (Gal. 3:7 NIV). However, it most likely refers to all believers in Christ during this time of the tribulation period.

The Beast and His Prophet (13:1-10)

The Antichrist will rise up from the “sea.” (13:1a). The Antichrist was introduced in 11:7 as the “beast” who killed God’s two witnesses. The word “sea” in biblical symbolism often pictures the restless masses of mankind. The word is used in Revelation 13:1 and several times in the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah 17:12; 57:20).² From this it is conjectured that the Antichrist will be a man who comes out of the restless masses of mankind which will be looking for a strong world leader to bring peace.

The Antichrist will be satanic in nature (13:1b). This description, “*It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name*” closely matches that of Satan (12:3) showing that the Antichrist is satanic in nature.

The Antichrist will be empowered by Satan (13:2). The reference to the leopard, lion, and bear could be representing the viciousness and ferocity of the world empires prophesied in Daniel 7. Satan gives his power to the Antichrist, an act which most likely occurs at the mid-point of the Tribulation.

The Antichrist will be fatally wounded (13:3-4). Whether his death is real or fake is not clear. More likely, the Antichrist’s alleged death and resurrection will be a counterfeit of Christ’s death and resurrection. The Antichrist’s ostensible power over death will win him widespread acclaim and worship.

The Antichrist will openly blaspheme God (13:5-10). He arrogantly blasphemes God and wars with believers for 42 months. Empowered by Satan, the Antichrist forces everyone to worship him as a god. Satan has always wanted man to worship him (Matt. 4:9; Isaiah 14:14; I Cor. 10:20; Rev. 13:4, 15).³

The False Prophet (13:11-18)

The false prophet will come “out of the earth” (13:11a). The expression “*out of the*

² Walvoord, p. 581.

³ For an excellent comparison between Daniel’s Fourth Beast (Chapters 7, 26 and 27) to the Beast in Revelation (Chapters 13, 17, and 20), see G. G. Cohen, *Understanding Revelation: A Chronology of the Apocalypse*, p. 37.

earth” suggests that he may come out of the land that belongs to Israel and could therefore possibly be a Jew.

The false prophet will have great power (13:11b). “He has two horns like a lamb.” He has some power (“two horns”) but not as much as the Antichrist who has “ten horns.” Horns in this context are symbols of authority or power. The term “lamb” is probably also referring to his religious role as a mimic of Jesus Christ.

The false prophet will mimic the Holy Spirit (13:12). He will be an apostate preacher who promotes the worship of the Antichrist. In this sense, he mimics the role of the Holy Spirit, who promotes the worship of Christ. He is called the “false prophet” (Rev. 16:13) because of his role in the unholy trinity.

The false prophet will perform miracles (13:13-15). He will perform great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people, mimicking Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-39). He will speak like the dragon (Satan), that is, with blasphemy and false doctrines. He will force mankind to build an image of the Antichrist and make it appear to speak. Those who refuse to worship the image will be murdered.

The false prophet will control the world economy (13:16-18). He will control all buying and selling by requiring people to place the mark of the Antichrist (666) on their right hand and their foreheads.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What can we learn about Satan (his character, activities, and destination) from Chapters 12 and 13?

2. Who are the people being accused in 12:10 and how do they triumph over the accuser?

3. Who will worship the beast during the Tribulation, and who will not worship the beast (13:8)?

4. Describe one thing that stands out most to you in Chapters 12-13, and explain why it impresses you.