

The Synopsis

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1 THE REVELATION

1.1 Chapter 12

Chapter 12 gives us a brief but all-important summary of the whole course of events, viewed, not in their instruments on earth or the judgment of these, but the divine view of all the principles at work, the state of things as revealed of God. The first symbolical person, subject of the prophecy and result of all God's ways in it, is a woman clothed with the sun, having a crown of twelve stars, and the moon under her feet. It is Israel, or Jerusalem as its centre, as in the purpose of God (compare Isaiah. 9: 6, and Psalm. 87: 6). She is clothed with supreme authority, invested with the glory of perfect administration in man, and all the original reflected glory of this under the old covenant, under her feet. She was travailing in childbirth, distressed, and in pain to be delivered: on the other hand Satan's power in the form of the Roman Empire, complete in forms of power, seven heads, but incomplete in administrative supremacy-ten, not twelve horns. But Satan, as the open infidel enemy of God and God's power in Christ, sought to devour the child as soon as born, who was to have the rule of the earth from God. But the child, Christ, and the assembly with Christ, is caught away to God and His throne-does not receive the power yet, but is placed in the very source of it from which it flows. It is not the rapture as regards joy; for it goes back to Christ Himself but the placing Him and the assembly in and with Him, in the seat from which power flows for the establishment of the kingdom. There is no time for this: Christ and the assembly are all one. But the woman the Jews, after this fly into the wilderness, where God has prepared a place for them, for the half-week.

The assembly, or heavenly saints (as Christ, note), go up to heaven to be out of the way. The Jews, or earthly ones, are protected by providential care upon earth. This gives the whole state of things, and those in view in this scene, and their respective places. She that is to have glory and hold power in the earth is cast out. The child that is to have power, in and from heaven, is previously taken up there. This makes the position very clear.

The historical course of events is now pursued, the child being supposed to be already caught up. There is war in heaven; and the devil and his angels are cast out, and have no more place there. This brings out yet more clearly

the distinction of the heavenly saints and the Jewish remnant. The heavenly ones had overcome the accuser by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony; the woman's seed have the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, that is, the Spirit of prophecy. What they have of God in the word is according to the Old Testament.

But, to follow up the latter part of the chapter, a loud voice proclaims in heaven that the kingdom of our God and the power of His Christ is come-the testimony still of the second Psalm; only as yet it was only proclaimed from heaven, where the power of the kingdom was already made good by the casting down of Satan. Satan's anti-priestly power was over for ever; king and prophet he might yet put on; but his heavenly place was past. The saints of the heavenlies had overcome him by that which made their conscience and their title to heaven good-the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their mouth, God's sword by the Spirit-and gave up their lives to the death. The heavens and the dwellers there could now rejoice; but it was woe to the inhabitants of earth and sea; for the devil had come down, knowing he had but a little time left. I think verse II implies that there are saints killed after the rapture, who yet belong to heaven. If there were such killed because of their faithfulness, were they not taken up, they would lose earth and heaven, though more devoted than those who had earth. We see them moreover in chapter 20 in the first resurrection. The souls under the altar also had to wait for others-their brethren who had to be killed, as they were; and we are to note here that those celebrated as happy are the slain ones, none others. Yet it is before the last three years and a half.

So that we have these three parties in view: the voice of those in heaven; (our) their brethren who had overcome; and those who would be in the three years and a half of Satan's rage, which had not yet begun. Now, if the man-child in heaven be, as we have considered it, Christ and the raptured saints, the voice would be that of those already there,¹ and all self-evident: the raptured saints associated with Him celebrate the casting down of the accuser and the deliverance of those who belonged to heaven, calling them "our brethren"-the brethren whose conflict with the accuser was over, as he was now cast down, but who had had to resist him as a heavenly potentate, an anti-priest, all which part is mystery for John and those who now would be in trial, when he would act with rage on earth, as king and prophet. For the dragon, cast to the earth and unable to accuse in heaven or oppose saints having a heavenly calling (and the priesthood refers to such, not to union), persecutes the Jews, and seeks to destroy their testimony; but God gave, not power of resistance-the Lord must come to deliver-but power to flee and escape and find refuge where she was nourished the whole half-week out of the serpent's reach. He seeks to pursue; wings he has none: but he uses a river, the movements of people under the influence of special motive and guidance, to overwhelm the woman. But the earth, this organised system in which men live, swallowed the waters up. This influence was in vain-was not met by an army, a counter-power, but was nullified. There was such a disposition or course of the earth as neutralised

¹I do not continue to put the voice as Christ's. The application to Him is too questionable.

the effort wholly. So God ordered in His providence; and the dragon turned to persecute individually the faithful remnant of the seed-the Jews who held fast by the word.