

The Moon, the Maid, and the Monster

Looking at Revelation 12

Revelation 12 is a new vision. Before describing the final battle involving God's people, John spends time explaining the cause for the hostility. This chapter has three sections:

- **Verses 1-6** describe the birth of the child who is to rule all nations, the opposition He receives and His final exaltation.
- **Verses 7-12** narrate the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven and their opposition to the church.
- **Verses 13-17** depict the persecution the dragon gives to the church.

▷ Read Revelation 12:1-6

Verse 1: The Moon and the Maid

The "great and wondrous sign" mentioned here is something special and remarkable.

In using these words John is telling us we are not actually looking at a woman but rather she is a symbol for something.

This symbol was familiar to the readers in John's time. The Old Testament portrays the covenant people of God as the wife of God (see Isaiah 54:5).

The woman described here is like Solomon's bride: "Fair as the moon, bright as the sun" (Song of Solomon 6:10). Love causes people to talk like that!

The 12 stars on her head are linked to the 12 tribes of Israel, and—also the 12 apostles. In verse 5 she represents of Israel before Christ was born and in verse 6 and 13-17 she represents the followers of Jesus in the Christian church. Later on Revelation uses similar imagery to portray the church as the bride of Christ (see Revelation 19:7, 8).

But at this stage, the woman represents Israel.

The Big Picture

Until now, the story has been about the struggles the church faces both internally, with its spiritual temptations, and externally, as it faces the hostile world. Now the second half concentrates on the time of the end and the final events in this world's history in the context of the periods of history reviewed in the first 11 chapters.

In Revelation 12 the curtain is drawn back to show us why the church so often has a hard time. Like an ancient drama, the main players are introduced and begin to appear on stage.

This helps us to see ourselves as part of a greater cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil. Life can be puzzling at times; things can appear to happen to us without any reason. However, life's burdens can be easier to bear if we can see there is meaning and purpose. If we are in a right relationship with God, we can expect to have some opposition.

Verse 3: The Monster

Then another sign is described as an enormous red dragon sweeping a third of the stars from heaven and flinging them to the earth.

Satan is identified as being represented by the dragon in verse 9. The same verse identifies the stars as the angels who also rebelled against God.

The rebellion against God marked the beginning of all our troubles.

Eventually Satan was cast out of heaven and here, on this earth, he caused our first parents to follow in his path of disobedience to God.

The dragon is shown as red in colour and has a frightening appearance. His seven heads seem to represent the kingdoms through which Satan oppressed God's people over the ages. We see again in Revelation 13 where the beast has seven heads and one of its heads receives a death wound. Additionally, in

chapter 17:9-11 we find they are consecutive powers that oppose God and His people.

The 10 horns seem to link with Daniel 7:24, where they symbolise the political powers coming out of the fourth beast, which is the Roman Empire.

Verses 4, 5: A Child is Born

The son to whom she is about to give birth is none other than Jesus Christ (see Revelation 12:2, 5). This child is to rule all nations with a rod of iron Revelation 19:15 describes Jesus when He returns as the One Who will rule all nations with a rod of iron.

The dragon awaits the birth of Christ in order to devour Him. Herod tried to kill Christ when He was born. He was used by the dragon to do this. But Jesus was taken by His parents to Egypt for safety.

History shows that the actual attempt to kill Jesus when He was born was carried out by Herod the Great who has acting as a representative of pagan Rome. So we can see the dragon is also identified with political

The Woman and the Dragon | Ted Larson





A child is born | Pearl | Lightstock

powers on earth through whom it works.

Throughout Jesus' life, the dragon tried to harass Him. Eventually the dragon (working through pagan Rome's rulers) had Jesus put to death on Calvary. But He rose, conquered death and ascended to heaven. This is what is meant by *"her child was snatched up to God and to his throne."*

Verse 6: The Dark Days

Since the dragon can no longer attack Christ he turns his attention to the church, that is, Christ's followers. He knows how precious the church is to Christ, so this is another way of getting back at Christ.

Now we know why the church on earth often faces hard times.

Because of this attack, the woman flees into the desert for 1,260 days, where God protects her. This imagery again reminds us of the Exodus where Israel was able to leave Egypt and go into the desert to be cared for by God.

The time period mentioned here—1,260 days—is frequently mentioned in both the books of Daniel and Revelation.

This period is often called the "Dark Ages" for a good reason. Most of the medieval church lost the gospel. During this time the Bible

was hidden away in a language only a few scholars could read. The common people had no way of reading it.

People lived in fear of God. He was seen as someone a long way off. To gain favour, rituals of fasting and pilgrimages were necessary. Giving money could buy us and our relatives a place in heaven. People were unable to think for themselves.

Learning and civilisation were held back for more than 1,000 years.

During this time there were people who wanted to be faithful to God, but often they had to flee for their lives, just as the prophecy states. God's people survived but it was difficult.

If we recall from a previous session, this time is mentioned in Revelation 11:3 as a time when the Two Witnesses are prophesying in sackcloth.

Many have acknowledged there are difficulties in trying to fit the three and a half time periods or 1,260 years into an exact time-frame. We know it alludes to the preaching ministry of Christ, even though He was rejected and put to death. So it is with the church.

This same parallel is also made in Revelation 13, where the beast power's work is portrayed as a counterfeit of Christ's ministry. It is possible that the figure is not to be counted too closely because of the symbolism that is applied.

As with many historical, political and social trends, it can be difficult to give exact dates to mark a sharp beginning and ending of the rise and fall, these developments were gradual. However the dates 538 AD and 1798 do fit the 1,260-year period as given in this prophecy in a remarkable manner. The rise of the Medieval church to prominence took many centuries; likewise the eventual end of this period. In fact, the end of those difficult times of oppression, which led to the freedom we enjoy today, was the result of many centuries of events.

► Read Revelation 12:7-12

At this point, John interrupts the story to tell us the story behind the story.

Satan's Expulsion from Heaven

Verses 7 to 12 tell us how the victory of Christ, His ascension into heaven and inauguration, resulted in Satan and his angels no longer having access to heaven.

Satan was first expelled from heaven when he rebelled against God (see Isaiah 14:15; Ezekiel 28:16-18). However, it seems he still had access to the heavenly courts. In Job 1:6-12, we see him appearing before the throne of God, making accusations against Job. In Zechariah 3:1-2, we see him before the heavenly court accusing Joshua the high priest.

The situation is now different;
Satan is cast out forever
because of Calvary.

Notes:

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Satan's expulsion from Heaven | Oxygen Multimedia

No longer can he accuse God's people before the throne of God (see verse 10).

Jesus knew this would happen and spoke about it:

- "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)
- "Now the prince of this world will be driven out." (John 12:31)

Christ's ascension into heaven (verse 5) means there remains no chance of Satan finding sympathy in any shape or form in heaven (verses 7-9).

The thought flowing from this is found in the loud anthem: "Now have come salvation and the power of the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ." It continues: "For

the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down." (Verses 10-12)

Satan the usurper, the one who abuses his power, had his power and authority replaced by Christ's ascension and enthronement in heaven. God's people are now able to overcome Satan: the sacrificial blood of the Lamb is their means of overcoming by trusting in the sacrifice made by Christ on their behalf at Calvary.

Testimony of the Faithful

In verse 11, "the word of their testimony" is a phrase to describe how the evidence of Christ's followers accepting His sacrifice is in the life they live. They are faithful to Christ even to the point of losing their lives, if that is needed.

- We also know that throughout the long time period mentioned in this prophecy, God cared for His people and their enemies did not prevail over them. The followers of Jesus were able to survive this difficult time ("the earth

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All through history there have been people faithful to God. These recently re-discovered underground cities in Cappadocia have a fascinating story to tell about the survival of God's people | komvvgory | Getty Images

helped the woman"). There were places where those who wanted to be faithful to Jesus were able to flee and find refuge: the distant Alps, Islamic lands, Holland, England, and eventually South Africa and the United States.

But because of his inability to crush Jesus' followers during this period, at the end-time the dragon is enraged with fury. He now comes to make a final war against the faithful followers of Jesus.

▷ Read Revelation 12:17

Now it's the Final Battle!

Verse 17 is a guide post because it summarises what has been happening and gives in a nutshell what is coming up next. As such, it serves as an introduction to Revelation 13, where we find the final conflict between the dragon and the followers of Jesus.

Satan goes away to make war—he retreats so as to better prepare for the last showdown. He is aware of his constant failure, and decides not to enter the contest alone. He finds two associates:

- The sea beast (see Revelation 13:1-10)
- And the land beast (see Revelation 13:11-17).

These three form a counterfeit trinity to go to war against Christ and His followers.

Those who survive this last great crisis are described as "the rest of her offspring" against whom Satan makes war. The Greek word used here to describe them is *loipos* which means "the remaining ones" or "the rest."

So far we have concentrated on how the faithful have survived persecution and deception over a long period of time. But now, at the end-time, the rest who remain faithful must face the full fury of Satan's persecution and deception.

In many Bible translations, *loipos*, or its Old Testament equivalent in Hebrew, was used to describe those who survived war and destruction. Sometimes it is translated "remnant."

A study of the Old Testament story of Israel shows that even in times of utmost darkness and difficulty there were people who remained faithful to God (see Isaiah 10:20-22; Jeremiah 23:3; Micah 2:12; Zephaniah 3:13).

Jesus Helps Those who Remain Faithful

John uses the same word to tell us that, despite the war made upon the followers of Jesus by the dragon and its accomplices, at the end-time there will be people who remain faithful to Christ.

These people will have two identifying marks:

- **Obey God's commandments.** We saw that the first table of the Ten Commandments is in focus in Revelation 13. The issue will be worship: who we are to worship, how we are to worship and when we are to worship.
- **They hold to the testimony of Jesus.** This passage demands a lot of attention.

A simple explanation is that it's talking of Jesus bearing witness to Himself through those who have the gift of prophecy.

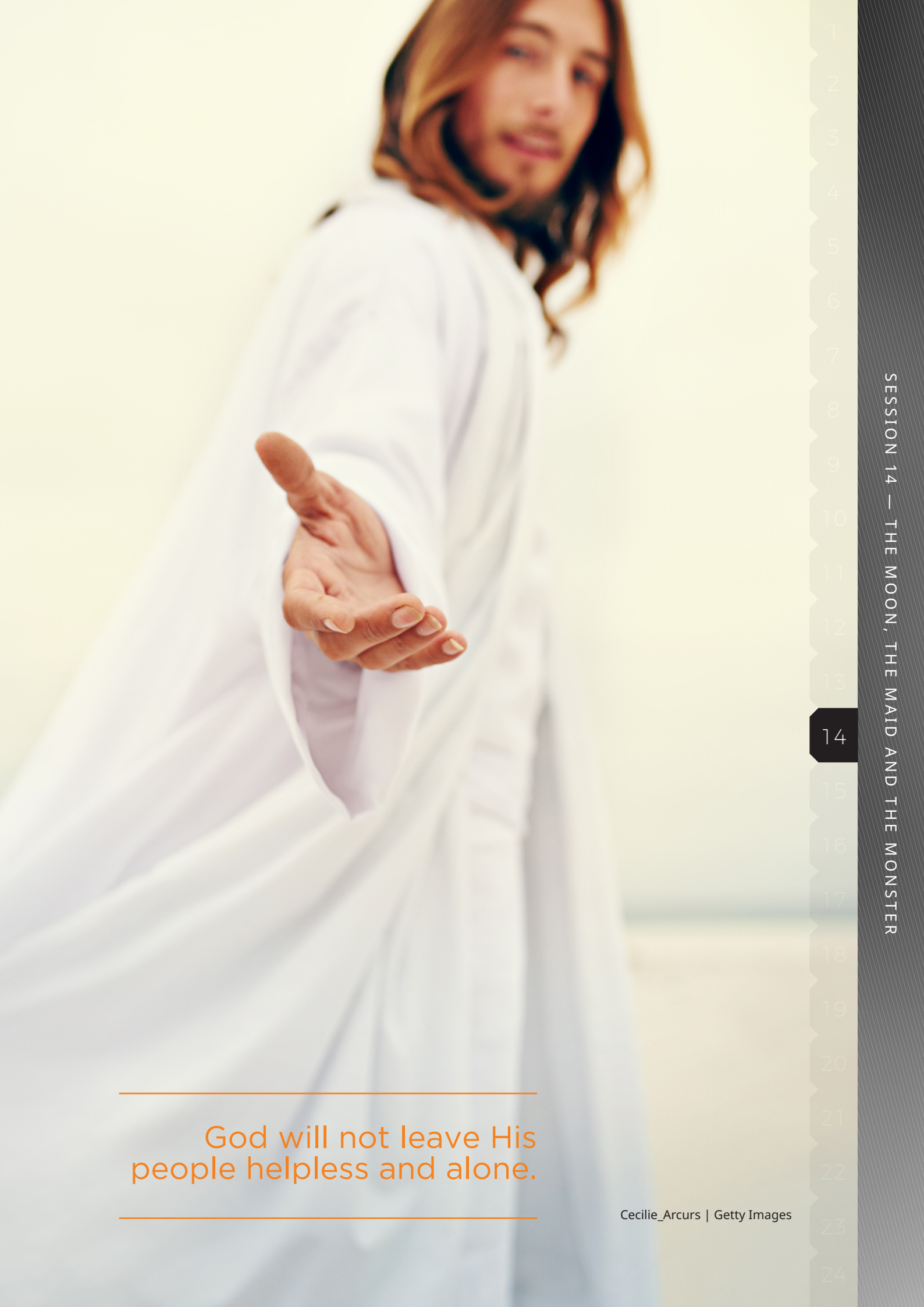
This seems to be how the term is used in Revelation 1:2 where the message comes from Christ to His people via John who is a prophet.

When Revelation 19:10 is compared with Revelation 22:9, we find that the term "testimony of Jesus" is the "spirit of prophecy." It is borne by people who have the gift of prophecy, as did John. The role of prophets is to bear witness to Jesus—they reveal Christ's messages to His people.

Revelation 19:10 confirms John is a prophet and has other "brothers" who are also prophets. John wrote this book to bear witness to Jesus. That's what prophets do.

At the end-time, those who remain loyal to Jesus will have the prophetic gift working in their midst, to guide them through the hard times.

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God will not leave His
people helpless and alone.
