Revelation Chapter 12 Bible Study Notes

Recap from chapter 11:19

The image of the ark of the covenant appearing in heaven; being opened so that you can see God! This is extremely significant! The ark was the dwelling place of God during the Old Testament and only certain people at certain parts of the year were able to access it (ie Aaron the high priest, Moses, and remember the people of Beth Shemesh in 1 Samuel died because they looked into the ark and Uzzah in 2 Samuel died because he was trying to steady it! He even had good intentions!) Now with the ark opened, we are all given the privilege to enter the temple and encounter God.

Chapter 12: The Woman and the Dragon

12 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Historical significance of using this story: The images used in this story would appeal to both Jews and Gentiles during the time John was on Patmos (AD 96). Greek mythology has a similar story where Apollo’s birth involved the dragon Python who wanted to kill Apollo. Zeus however hid the island of Delos where Apollo and his mother Leto was so that the dragon could not find them. This shows that even in biblical times, the gospel was still competing against a whole host of other religions and beliefs- good reminder that evangelism is not easy and many before us have had to compete with idols and false religions.

Sign in heaven —>The woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars points to something more than just a “woman” She is representative of the people of God: Israel (Genesis 37:9 Joseph’s dream about the sun, moon and eleven stars bowing), Mary (Cries out during labour —>(Isaiah 26:16-18 and 66:7), and the church(other offspring Rev 12:17)

Sign in heaven —>The dragon reference to OT Leviathan and Behemoth, as well as evil kingdoms oppressing Israel. Colour red represents blood, Seven heads represents completeness (7) and authority. Ten horns also indicate complete strength. Diadems is a crown-like object, symbolic of wealth, ability to sweep away 1/3 of stars representative of his influence. Refers to Satan (Genesis 3)

The child is not a sign, he *is the reality = Jesus! the Messiah* Psalm 2 reference to the iron rod. The dragon trying to kill the child after its birth references back to K. Herod’s orders to kill baby Jesus in the gospels.

Satan Thrown Down to Earth

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers[a] has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood[b] on the sand of the sea.

Remember that everything happening in the physical world is paralleled in the spiritual realm. The images seen in Revelations 12 correlates with the Christmas story! Revelations 12 describes a war in heaven between the archangel Michael and the dragon (Satan). This war is ultimately won through the physical things happening on earth - the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ! The battle has been won! However, the battle exists because Jesus is already on the throne- Satan has lost but continues to attack us (the woman and the people of God) ultimately in order to attack Jesus.

“A time, and times and half a time” —> 1260 days = 42 months = 3.5 years is the symbol for the time it took for Israel to travel from Egypt to the Promised land and the time it takes for the church to travel from the crucifixion and resurrection to the descent of the City of God.

“a river out of his mouth”—>flood of accusation and deceit and threats; this is a world in which we live!

The dragon goes after God’s people in three ways: but we can overcome these attacks!

1. “accuser of brothers and sisters”—>trapped in the feeling of guilt by slandering God’s people before God and others and saying that because of their sins they are not worth of the love of God.   
(Reflection: if we partake in accusation and slander, we participate in the acts of the dragon!)

Overcome by the blood of the lamb. Because Jesus paid the price for our sins, we no longer are slaves to the feeling of guilt and shame caused by sin. By knowing that Jesus Christ has paid the ultimate price, we do not have to be afraid when the enemy tells us we are worthless and sinful- we know better; that we are redeemed because our identity is rooted in Christ.

2. “deceiver” —>deceives the world as the dragon is the (John 8:44 father of lies)

(Reflection: do not be caught up in deception and let your minds and hearts drift from the pursuit of following Jesus. There will be many lies thrown at us during our lives, even pressures often from people we love telling us that we should be chasing after things- wealth, status, power, things that take us away from living a Christ-centred life)

Overcome by seeking with our whole being to know the truth, speak the truth, and walk the truth (word of their testimony vs. 11). Do we know the truth about Jesus and can we not only live our lives according to His will but tell others about it as well? What does this mean for us when we witness heresy- are we even familiar enough with the truth that we can identify heretics?

3. “seeks to kill”—>red colour of blood, and intimidates with the threat of death (Hebrews 2:15 Satan controls through the fear of death).

(Reflection: Everyday we hear of tragedies around the world many of whom are martyrs for Christ. Or maybe we know of people who are suffering from a terminal illness. How are we responding. Do we fear death?)

Overcome by declaring the gospel to everyone! When we are no longer afraid of death, we are the ultimate winners knowing that victory belongs to those who lose their lives because of Christ. (Reflection: Consider the persecuted churches around the world- though martyrdom may seem like a distant concept to us and perhaps in your heart you hope that this will never happen to you but for believers in North Korea, or Iraq, this is a very real reality that they face on a daily basis!)