

The Great Red Dragon, the Male Child, and the Woman in the Wilderness

Revelation 12:3–6 | Wednesday, August 19

“Then another sign appeared in heaven: There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on its heads were seven crowns. His tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. But she gave birth to a Son, a male who is going to rule all nations with an iron rod. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, to be nourished there for 1,260 days.” — Revelation 12:3–6

THE BIG IDEA

The dragon looks unstoppable—seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns, a tail that sweeps the stars. But his whole strategy collapses in a single sentence: **the Child is born and caught up to God’s throne**. Tonight we learn to tell the difference between *visible power and ultimate power*.

I THE GREAT RED DRAGON (V. 3–4)

Two rival powers — the contrast

The woman is clothed with the _____; the dragon is red.

She wears one stephanos of twelve _____; the dragon displays seven royal diademata.

The woman produces _____; the dragon waits to consume it.

The woman’s destiny is _____; the dragon’s activity is destruction.

Who is the dragon? (Revelation 12:9; 20:2)

1) the great dragon 2) the ancient _____

3) the _____ 4) Satan

5) the _____ of the whole world

Bottom line: whatever dimensions the dragon takes on, the fundamental referent is Satan. This matters because he soon gives authority to the beast (ch. 13)—bestly empire is not Satan, but it becomes satanic by receiving and performing his agenda.

“Dragon” draws on the chaos-monster tradition

- Psalm 74:13–14 — God crushes the sea _____ and Leviathan.
- Isaiah 27:1 — the Lord punishes Leviathan, “the dragon that is in the sea.”
- Isaiah 51:9–10 — _____ and the dragon, tied to God’s defeat of Egypt and deliverance through the sea.
- Job 40–41 — Behemoth and Leviathan are beyond human mastery but wholly under God’s sovereignty.

The creature that terrifies humanity is no threat to God. Revelation takes the ancient chaos monster and gives it a _____, _____ **identity**.

Seven heads, ten horns, seven diadems

- Seven heads — a parody of fullness/completeness. He is not _____, _____, or _____ to God; later read as mountains and kings (ch. 17).
- Ten horns — Daniel 7's fourth beast has ten horns tied to kings. Horns = _____ (military/royal). Satan's power is _____—through kingdoms, rulers, economies, propaganda, and coercive systems—not only inward temptation.
- Seven diadems — royal claims (unlike the woman's stephanos). The true throne stands in chs. 4–5; the dragon cannot _____ a throne, only _____ one.

Counterfeit — a central theme of Revelation

- The dragon imitates divine _____.
- The beast imitates _____.
- The second beast imitates _____ power.
- The beast's wound and "recovery" parody _____ and _____.
- The mark counterfeits God's _____.
- Babylon imitates the true city.

Why is the dragon red?

The wider cultural background: Python, Leto, Apollo, Isis

But note the key difference: in the common myth the child grows up and fights the monster. In Revelation the child **does not fight**—he is born and caught up to God's throne. John uses a familiar form without adopting its theology, and radically rewrites it:

- Apollo is not the world's true _____.
- Caesar is not Apollo's earthly representative.
- Rome does not defeat _____.
- Israel's crucified and enthroned Messiah rules the nations.
- The serpent stands on the _____ side of history.

"His tail swept away a third of the stars" (v. 4)

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE THIRD OF THE STARS

The stars are fallen angels. Stars picture heavenly beings (1:20); 12:9 says the dragon has "his angels." **Strength:** the angelic reading is plausible. **Limitation:** v. 4 doesn't say it describes Satan's original, prehistoric fall.

The imagery comes from Daniel 8:10. There an arrogant horn casts down some of the host and stars—picturing the scale of the dragon's ambition. **Strength:** it fits Revelation's heavy use of Daniel. **Limitation:** it is a background image, not a precise event.

"A third" stresses limited power. The trumpet judgments struck "a third" of earth, sea, creatures, ships, rivers, light—severe but bounded. **Strength:** it guards against overreach. **Limitation:** it may under-read the angelic dimension.

→ **Most balanced:** probably a heavenly/angelic dimension (esp. v. 9) with Daniel 8:10 behind it—a massive but limited assault, not an angelic census. Evil is terrifying, yet limited.

The dragon waits to "devour" the Child

Pharaoh kills the Hebrew boys — _____ 1:15–22

Athaliah destroys the royal offspring — 2 Kings _____ :1–3

Haman seeks to exterminate the Jews — _____ 3:8–15

Herod orders the deaths in Bethlehem — _____ 2:13–18

Earliest pattern of all: Genesis 3:15—the serpent’s hostility toward the woman’s seed. The promise is repeatedly endangered; the adversary repeatedly attacks it; God repeatedly preserves the line. Revelation 12 stretches the conflict from Eden to Messiah.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Rev 12:9; 20:2 • Ps 74:13–14; Isa 27:1; 51:9–10; Job 40–41 • Dan 7; 8:10; ch. 17 • Rev 4–5; 6 • Gen 3:15; Ex 1:15–22; 2 Kings 11:1–3; Esther 3:8–15; Matt 2:13–18

II THE MALE CHILD (V. 5)

The Child is overwhelmingly identified as Jesus Christ

The male child is _____.

“A son, a male” echoes Zion imagery

“Rule with an iron rod”

The verb for “rule” is *poimaino*—“to _____ / tend.” Messiah is a shepherd-King: the iron rod = unbreakable authority, the verb = the manner of rule. Unlike the beast (which exploits, coerces, deceives, kills), Christ’s kingship is rooted in the Lamb who was slain—absolute, yet inseparable from the cross.

“Caught up to God and to His throne”

The verb “caught up” is _____ (to seize / snatch away suddenly; cf. Acts 8:39; 1 Thess 4:17).

The natural referent is Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and exaltation as one movement into heavenly rule. John **assumes the cross** (central in ch. 5; interpreted in 12:11) and here concentrates on the outcome. The narrow question: can the dragon prevent Messiah from reaching the throne? **Answer: No.**

Is this the “rapture” of the church? — weighing a minority view

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE CHILD CAUGHT UP

Majority — the Child is Christ. Messianic birth imagery, Psalm 2’s royal King, the iron-rod rule applied to Christ in 19:15, and the move to God’s throne all point to Jesus. **Strength:** *it fits every detail of the scene.*

Minority — the Child is the church / 144,000 (a rapture). Appeals to harpazo in 1 Thess 4:17 and believers’ shared Psalm 2 authority in 2:26–27. **Strength:** *Revelation does teach believers share Christ’s reign.* **Limitation:** *the immediate evidence points to Jesus, not the church.*

→ Strongest reading: the Child is Jesus, whose victorious destiny becomes the pattern His people later share.

The surprise: the Child does not fight the dragon here

The dragon waits. The Child is born. The Child is taken to the throne. The dragon fails—no duel between equals. All that monstrous power—seven heads, ten horns, seven diadems, a star-sweeping tail—cannot stop one child from reaching the throne. **The dragon _____ stronger; the Child _____.** That is Revelation’s understanding of the world in miniature.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Ps 2:7–9 • Rev 2:26–27; 19:15 • Acts 4:25–28; 13:32–33; Heb 1:5; 5:5 • Isa 66:7 • Acts 8:39; 1 Thess 4:17 • Rev 5; 12:11

III THE WOMAN IN THE WILDERNESS (V. 6)

“Wilderness” — one of the Bible’s richest double symbols

- Exodus 16 — _____ in the wilderness.
- Exodus 17:1–7 — _____ from the rock.
- Exodus 19:4 — God carries Israel “on _____ wings.”
- Deuteronomy 32:10–12 — God finds and cares for Israel.
- 1 Kings 17:1–6 — Elijah is _____ away from hostile royal power.
- Hosea 2:14–15 — God speaks tenderly to His people in the wilderness.

“A place prepared by God” emphasizes providence

“Nourished” emphasizes continued sustenance

God’s prepared place can still be a _____; provision can coexist with _____.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Ex 16; 17:1–7; 19:4 • Deut 32:10–12 • 1 Kings 17:1–6 • Hos 2:14–15 • Rev 13

IV THE 1,260 DAYS — A MEASURED SEASON

Rev 11:2 = 42 _____

Rev 11:3 / 12:6 = 1,260 _____

Rev 12:14 = a time, times, and half a _____

Rev 13:5 = 42 months. Do the math: 42 months = _____ years; $1 + 2 + \frac{1}{2} =$ _____.

Daniel supplies the basic grammar

A “broken seven”

Seven is completeness; three-and-a-half is half of seven. Satan, the beast, and the persecution do not get “seven.” The message: **suffering has a** _____.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES Rev 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5 • Dan 7:25; 12:7

V INTERPRETATION VARIATIONS FOR THE 1,260 DAYS

INTERPRETIVE OPTIONS — THE 1,260 DAYS

Literal future 3½-year tribulation (Futurist). Woman = Israel; v. 5 recalls Christ’s birth/ascension; v. 6 leaps across the church age to a final tribulation preserving a Jewish remnant. **Strength:** takes the precise, repeated time-figures seriously. **Limitation:** Revelation never says “seven-year tribulation,” and a big gap between vv. 5–6 must be supplied.

First-century persecution (Preterist). The period sits in the first-century crisis (early church, Jerusalem, Rome, the Jewish war); some link the woman’s flight to Christian escape before AD 70. **Strength:** keeps Revelation meaningful for its first hearers. **Limitation:** hard to name a precise event lasting exactly 1,260 days.

1,260 years (Historicist). By the day-year principle, the days become 1,260 historical years of persecution and institutional corruption. **Strength:** takes the long sweep of church history seriously. **Limitation:** the text doesn’t teach a day-year conversion; chronologies compete.

The whole church age (Idealist). Daniel's symbolic span for the interval between Christ's two comings—city trampled, witnesses prophesying, woman nourished, beast reigning, all the same era. **Strength:** *explains why the same span fits both witness and oppression.* **Limitation:** *pressed alone, it can flatten Revelation's forward hope.*

→ **Most balanced:** settle the sure thing first—1,260 days is Danielic language for a divinely limited period in which God's people are oppressed yet preserved. An eclectic/idealist reading with an eschatological climax lets the pattern describe the whole wilderness era while still allowing a final intensification.

Eclectic reading: Revelation 12 already reaches across time—birth, enthronement, ongoing persecution, and final conflict—so a single symbol can hold a first-century horizon, a church-age pattern, and a climactic fulfillment at once.

TAKE-HOME TRUTH

The monster can look larger than the Messiah—and still lose. Empire can look larger than the church—and still lose. The powers that threaten the saints may control markets, courts, armies, and headlines—but they do not control the throne. The dragon's rage turns toward the woman, whose destination is not immediate comfort but wilderness—where God has already prepared a place and continues to nourish her.