

Thoughts on Revelation 12

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Introduction

Rev 12 is a chronological crossword puzzle, but there is pattern and order in it. Five periods of time are broadly represented (creation, cross, early centuries, middle ages, end time) and this is done in four sequences of verses (12:1-6, 7-12, 13-14, 15-17). No two sequences are the same in every particular.

This brief note accompanies a table, which may be briefly summarized as follows.¹

Table
Outline Summary of Rev 12

		1	2	3	4
1	Creation		12:7-9a		
2	Cross	12:1-5	12:9b		
3	Early centuries			12:13	12:15
4	Middle ages	12:6 (1260 days)		12:14 (3.5 times)	12:16
5	End time		12:10-12		12:17a

Comments on the Chapter

Sequence #1 (12:1-6)

The first sequence consists of Rev 12:1-6. These verses begin in the first century and deal with the birth and ascension of Christ. They then skip forward to the middle ages, with a reference to the "1,260 days" (vs. 6). This first sequence sets the tone for what follows, because, while the time associations are clear at each point, there is no attempt to say everything that might be said. Much is omitted.

Sequence #2 (12:7-12)

The second sequence includes 12:7-12. The war which found full expression at the cross did not begin then. The words, "Now war arose in heaven" (vs. 7), take us back to the timeframe of creation. This fact establishes a second data point for the chapter, i.e., events are not narrated in one unbroken sequence. Instead, they are

¹ In the accompanying document, and in what follows, all English Scripture quotations are drawn from the *The Holy Bible, English Standard Bible* (ESV Text Edition: 2016).

narrated in four sequences. There is a question when Lucifer was "thrown down" (vs. 9a), and whether 9b ("he was thrown down to the earth") is a repetition of 9a, or whether some distinction is possible. I suggest that vss. 7-9a deal with Lucifer's expulsion from heaven and that 9b deals with his subsequent confinement to the earth at the cross. Saying, "his angels were thrown down with him" (9b), is a general statement.

Verses 10-12 take place in a different timeframe than 7-9. We know this because, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come" (vs. 10), repeats words from the previous chapter which are initially stated in the timeframe of the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet is the third woe, which follows the second woe, which follows the first, all of which follow the first four trumpets; it does not sound in the first century. These facts place the earlier statement that, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever" (11:15), in a clear chronological context, and now substantially the same words are stated again in 12:10. This places 12:10 in a clear chronological context. Verse 10 must be placed in the end time – not at the cross.

Sequence #3 (12:13-14)

The third sequence consists of 12:13-14. Saying the dragon "pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child" (vs. 13), places this statement after the time when the Child was born and before the woman was taken to "the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time" (vs. 14). This is the period of persecution, extending from the first to the fourth century. The period of "a time, and times, and half a time" is the same as the "1,260 days" vs. vs. 6. This is a description of the middle ages. The period occurs seven times in Scripture, in three different spellings ("times" [Dan 7:25; 12:7; Rev 12:6]; "months" [Rev 11:2; 13:5]; "days" [Rev 11:3; 12:14]). In each case the reference is to the middle ages.

Sequence #4 (12:15-17)

The fourth sequence consists of vss. 15-17a and begins by repeating the third. The statement that, "The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood" (vs. 15), is parallel to saying, "he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child" (vs. 13). And the statement that "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth" (vs. 16) is parallel to saying the woman had a place "where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time" (vs. 14). Verse 15 is not saying the same thing as vs. 16, but vs. 16 is saying the same thing as vs. 14. This ties vs. 16 to the timeframe of the "time, times, and half a time" of vs. 14. The first part of vs. 17 is pertains to the end time, when obedience to "the commandments of God" would become an issue in the years following 1844.

It would also be possible to interpret the fourth sequence as an extension of the third.

Summary

At each point it is possible to know the chronological context for what's being said. The only real point of uncertainty is whether Satan being "thrown down to the earth" (vs. 9b) contrasts with Lucifer being "thrown down" (vs. 9a), or whether this is the same statement given twice. If the one statement is merely a repetition of the other, that would be unique within the chapter. In each sequence of verse there is repetition in one sense, and yet in each case there is added value.

For example, saying "time, times, and half a time" (vs. 6) and "1,260 days" (vs. 14) is not mere repetition. The one spelling connects the references to this important time period in Daniel with those in Revelation. (Daniel has only "time, times, and half a time," while Revelation has "times," and "months," and "days.") Repeating the spelling from Daniel in Revelation establishes that the period in question is the same in both books. On the other hand, using all three spellings in Revelation is important because it invites the student to compare them, and this can only be done on the basis of a symbolic calendar (thirty days in every month) and therefore a symbolic use of time – in Daniel, as in Revelation; in Dan 12, as in Dan 7.

So different things are being accomplished in Rev 12:6 than in 12:14. The one statement is not merely a repetition of the other, and I submit that 12:9b is not merely a repetition of 9a. Being "cast down" means Lucifer lost his place in heaven, while being "cast down to the earth" is slightly different and means he and his angels are now confined to the earth. The cross destroyed his influence; he can no longer influence beings on other worlds. The two statements are similar, but distinct.

On the other hand, I suggest that 15-16 stands in parallel with 13-14, and that 15-16 is therefore not an extension of 13-14, but represents a fourth sequence in the chapter. It would be possible to hold the other view, but doing so would place parallels in the same sequence with each other, which does not happen elsewhere in the chapter, and in would place three dissimilar things (the fleeing of the woman, the nourishing of the woman, and a separate war against the woman) all in the end time. In my view, any parallels between what happens in the end time and what happens in the middle ages are fully accounted for by comparing 15 (=13)-16 (=14) with 17.

Discussion

Rev 12:17b is unrelated to the rest of the chapter. Instead it goes back to Dan 7:3 ("And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another"), and this serves to introduce Rev 13, which begins by describing a beast, like a leopard, with feet like a bear, and a mouth like a lion. This gives us an overview of the symbols in

Dan 7, but in inverse order (Dan 7: lion, bear, leopard, beast; Rev 13: beast, leopard, bear, lion). Thus, my remarks on Rev 12 have to do with 12:1-17a, omitting 17b.

At the other end of the chapter, in my view Rev 11:19/12:1 is perhaps the cleanest break anywhere in Revelation. Rev 3:21/4:1 is also a clean break, but only with respect to space. Saying, "Come up here" (4:1), introduces a change of location, but not of time. It would seem that opening the sealed scroll in Rev 6 would make Rev 5 and 6 a seamless whole, but there is a break here as well – in time. The seals run parallel to the churches and the churches bring us through time from the first century to the throne scene, in the timeframe of Laodicea. Discussing these things more fully goes beyond the scope of the present paper, but we need to point out that Rev 3/4 is not a break in every way (it is a break in space, but not time), not is Rev 5/6 continuous in every way (it is a break in time, but not space).

The transition at Rev 11/12 marks a clean break in both space and time. In space, because the seventh trumpet is described through the lens of the throne scene, which takes place in heaven, while Christ was born on earth; and in time, because the seventh trumpet marks the conclusion of a septet, while Rev 12 begins two millennia earlier in the timeframe of the birth and ascension of Jesus. There is no cleaner or more complete break anywhere in Revelation.

Thus, if what follows the seventh trumpet requires a sanctuary introduction, that introduction is best supplied by the seventh trumpet in its entirety, and not by its last verse in isolation. Unfortunately, while Ellen White has much to say about Rev 12:17,² she offers no substantive comment on Rev 12:15-16.

Conclusion

The interpretation of Rev 12 given here is consistent with a historicist reading of Revelation and inconsistent with either a preterist or futurist reading. Events such as the beginning of the war between the preexistent divine Logos and Lucifer, which continues on earth as a war between Christ and Satan, the birth and ascension of Christ, and events bound to the same timeframe as the seventh trumpet, demand a correct mapping onto time. They cannot be confined either to the lifetime of the prophet, or to that plus a moment of time at the end of the age. Rev 12 draws a wide range of chronological data into one narrative. Such data must be mapped onto the length and breadth of human history.

² See EGW Scripture Index ([EGW Scripture Index — Ellen G. White Writings \(egwwritings.org\)](http://egwwritings.org)).