

WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Rapture predictions hit an all-time high this year. Someone noticed that the stars and planets that form the sign in the heavens predicted in Revelation chapter twelve was going to happen on September 23rd of this year.

Using a program called Stellarium, it was said that the particular alignment had never occurred before, and never will again.

As if that wasn't enough, the sign coincided with the Feast of Trumpets. I disagree, but many who emphasize Bible prophecy think that the Rapture will coincide with a Feast of Trumpets.

Well... The Feast of Trumpets came, and the Revelation 12 sign occurred in the heavens - **but we are still here.**

A few of these guys are hanging-on, saying that the rapture will take place before October 14th. It could - but only because it can happen any time.

Now that the dust has settled, we can talk about something that was overshadowed by the Revelation 12 predictions. All of this started when a conservative Bible scholar, a professor of theology at prestigious Dallas Theological Seminary, rediscovered something in Revelation 12 that is regularly overlooked or ignored or dismissed.

In that prophetic passage, we read,

Rev 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Rev 12:2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Rev 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Rev 12:4 His tail drew 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.

Rev 12:5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

Rev 12:6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Rev 12:7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought,

Rev 12:8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.

Rev 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

The overlooked or dismissed or ignored insight is the phrase “caught-up” in verse five. It is the word *harpazo*.

Does that sound familiar? You should recognize it from First Thessalonians 4:17, where the apostle Paul said, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds, to meet the LORD in the air: and so shall we ever be with the LORD.”

Same word - *harpazo*, rendered “caught up.” In Latin, *rapturo*; in Greek, *harpazo*; in English “caught-up.” It’s the rapture.

Here is a fascinating fact: In the Book of the Revelation, which is all about the end times, **the only occurrence of the word *harpazo* is this one time in chapter twelve.**

We see types and figures of the rapture, e.g., when John is called-up to Heaven in chapter four.

But this is the only time the word we associate with the rapture is used. You’d think that the great prophetic book of the New Testament would have at least one passage directly about the rapture.

Maybe this is it.

“Wait a minute,” you object. “This is describing Jesus’ ascension into Heaven - *not* the rapture.”

Is it? *Harpazo* means to *seize*: catch (away, up), pluck, pull, take (by force).

Would you describe the ascension of Jesus that way?

Act 1:9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Act 1:10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel,

Act 1:11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

Jesus seemed to float slowly up and out of the disciple's sight. He wasn't taken up by force. He wasn't *harpazoed*.

Remember, too, that the Revelation is about future events. The ascension of Jesus was not future when John wrote the book. The rapture was. John was not looking back, but ahead, to the future rapture.

"Wait a minute," you object. "If this is true, how come no one else has ever seen this?"

They have. Most notably, John Nelson Darby and H.A. Ironside taught that this passage was describing the rapture of the church.

One author said, "Revelation 12 was the original proof-text of the modern dispensational movement and the founders of modern pre-tribulationism recognized it as such."

It isn't that no one has seen it so much as it is we have overlooked or ignored or dismissed it.

So, how does this work out, if it **is** describing the rapture?

There are three symbolic persons in Revelation 12 - the woman, the dragon, and the male child.

Pre-trib, pre-millennials like ourselves do not dispute much as to the identity of the woman, or that of the dragon.

The signs and symbols in the Revelation draw heavily from the Old Testament. There are something like 800 references to the Old Testament in the Revelation. The Old Testament is like the decoder for the signs and symbols found in the Revelation.

The “woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars,” is easily identified as the nation of Israel. It comes from Joseph’s dream in Genesis chapter thirty-seven. It’s unmistakable.

The “dragon” was identified for us in verse nine, where we read,

Rev 12:9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

That leaves only the “male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” Isn’t that Jesus?

Yes and no. Here is where I will rely heavily on the articles I read by and about Dallas Seminary professor Michael Szigel.

He says, “I argue that the symbol of the male child in Revelation 12:5 is best identified as the body of Christ, the church, and the child’s catching up to God and His throne is best identified as the catching up of the body of Christ elsewhere described in First Thessalonians 4:17.”

One of his interesting observations involves the specific wording of an Old Testament passage - Isaiah 66. We don’t see it immediately because we don’t read the texts in their original languages, nor do we understand the grammar. Dr. Szigel observes,

The use of the neuter adjective *arsen* (male) modifying the masculine noun *huios* (son) and the image of Israel giving birth points careful readers back to Isaiah 66:7–8, where we read in the Septuagint (Greek version of the Old Testament): “Before she travailed, she brought forth; Before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy (*arsen*). Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Can a land be born in one day?

Can a nation be brought forth all at once? As soon as Zion travailed, she also brought forth her children.”

The image is parallel in Revelation, and John explicitly breaks the rules of Greek grammar (modifying the masculine “son” with the neuter “male”) to point us back to this passage in Isaiah 66. **The child in both cases is corporate, not individual.**

The Apostle John intentionally made a grammatical error in Revelation 12:5 by modifying masculine *huios* (son) with neuter *arsen*. He is clearly connecting this particular male child with the male child in Isaiah 66, which is a corporate entity.

The words in Revelation 12 purposely send us back to Isaiah 66, and by doing so they establish that the “son” being born **is more than one person**. It is Jesus as the Head and the church as His body.

But doesn’t it say, the “male Child... was to rule all nations with a rod of iron?” How is that the church?

In Psalm 2:9, God tells the Messiah, “You will break them [the nations] with a rod of iron, You will shatter them like earthenware.”

In Revelation 2:26-27, **Jesus extends this promise to the Church, the body of Christ:** “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received [authority] from My Father.”

In Revelation 19:14-15, Jesus and the armies come to earth, fulfilling the promise: “And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white [and] clean, were following Him on white horses. And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.”

This same Psalm is quoted in Revelation 12:5 and applied to the male child. Thus, the male child as Christ in union with His body, the Church, is most consistent with the application of the promise of Psalm 2:9 extended both to Christ and the Church.

I mentioned H.A. Ironside. He said this:

Is there any incongruity with understanding the male-child to represent both Jesus Christ our Lord and His church? Surely not, for He is the Head of the body, the church, which is the fullness, or completion, of Himself; so that the title "The Christ" is applied both to Head and body viewed as one... We may... on the authority of Scripture itself, safely affirm that the male-child represents the one New Man who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron - Christ, the Head, and the church, His body.

Let's say Revelation 12 is describing the rapture of the church. How does that affect the timing of the rapture?

It essentially presents a summary of the entire seven-years of the Great Tribulation, with the rapture preceding it:

- The rapture is likely what precipitates the war in Heaven described here. Satan is, after all, "the prince of the power of the air." It is likely he tries to interfere with the rapture, as the saints pass through his atmospheric domain. Michael the archangel fights him. Remember, the discussion of the rapture by Paul in Thessalonians also mentions the archangel being present, presumably to fight Satan, thereby allowing the church passage home. The catching up of the male child and the resulting war in Heaven therefore take place just prior to the start of the seven-year tribulation.
- The war in Heaven and casting down of Satan, followed by the earthly invasion, and attempted attack on Israel, all take place in the first three-and-a-half years.

- Then the reign of the Beast and the flight of Israel into the wilderness takes place in the second half of the tribulation.

The whole subject is certainly worthy of further study. But we've seen that there is enough biblical evidence to say that the Revelation does present the premillennial, pre-Tribulation rapture of the church in chapter twelve.

I didn't really mind all the hype about the Revelation 12 sign. I was secretly hoping its proponents were correct - although I held on to the biblical teaching that the rapture is imminent.

The fact that we weren't raptured during this year's Feast of Trumpets does not discourage us. It encourages us to remain ready.