

Future of the children of Abraham Part 2

Review of the teaching in the gospels

Last time in our study of Matthew 24 we saw that Jesus described three sequences of events occurring in parallel. In particular we saw that the time from the destruction of the temple in 70 AD up until the time when Israel controls all of Jerusalem is called “the times of the Gentiles”. During this time the gospel goes to Gentiles and many respond whereas the Jews are resistant to the gospel. When the gospel has been preached to all the Gentiles, then the times of the Gentiles will be over, Gentiles will no longer control Jerusalem, and according to Paul in Romans 11, the full number of the Gentiles who are going to be saved will have responded to the gospel.

The times of the Gentiles has lasted almost 2000 years so far. This has been a time of sufferings both for Jews and Christians. During this time there have been many false messiahs and false prophets but at the end of this time there will come false messiahs and false prophets who are able to do miracles. Their role is to deceive and harden the Gentiles who have rejected the gospel according to Paul in 2 Thess. 2v9-12.

Only after this will Jesus return. In connection with his return the remaining Jews who have not believed up to that time will believe in him and thus return to the tree of faith rooted in Abraham as described in Romans 11v23,24.

Synchronizing Revelation 12,13 and the Gospel account

With this in mind let’s turn to one of the most mysterious passages in the Bible Revelation 12 and 13. Let’s begin with chapter 13. There we have a description of a final false messiah and a final false prophet who will persecute Christians for three and a half years just before the return of Jesus. This connects us to Matthew 24v24,25 i.e. to the time at the end of the period of suffering for Jews and Gentiles and just before the return of Jesus.

When we study the end of Rev.12 and the beginning of 13, and we remember that there were no chapter divisions in the original text, it is clear that the things described in chapter 13 follow on from chapter 12. This means that the events in chapter 12 precede the coming of the antichrist and the false prophet.

Who is the boy in Revelation 12?

Let’s now focus on chapter 12. We are introduced to a woman who is pregnant and a dragon who wants to eat her child. Her first child is a boy, the dragon fails to kill him and he goes to heaven to the throne of God. Later on at the end of the chapter we see that she has other children, though when they are born we are not told.

We are told that the dragon represents Satan but we are not told who the woman is nor who her children are.

The boy is thought by most people to be Jesus because he is the one who was caught up to the throne of the Father and who will rule over the earth. Interestingly, David Pawson, with whom I agree about most things, does not think the boy is Jesus but martyrs in the end times. I thought this was such a strange idea that it motivated me to do my own studies. The problem for Pawson is that he has locked himself in by insisting that everything in Revelation after the end of chapter 3 is future. According

to him nothing in chapter 12 can refer to the past and thus this cannot be referring to the ascension of Jesus. Once we drop this requirement, then there is no reason why this boy should not be Jesus. Satan tried many times to kill him, beginning with Herod and ending with the crucifixion. He ultimately failed because of the resurrection. Jesus then ascended triumphantly to the Father's throne.

Who is the woman in Revelation 12?

The labor pains of the woman occurred before Jesus was born. Since the last part of chapter 12 indicates that the woman is still around to be attacked by Satan and that her other children will be attacked by the antichrist, it means that whatever the woman symbolizes has to have existed before the birth of Jesus and has to continue until the end times.

This excludes Mary from being the woman, as the Catholic Church believes and from where the twelve stars in the EU flag come from.

It also excludes the church because it did not come into existence until after the ascension of Jesus.

The most common explanation is that the woman represents Israel. Israel certainly existed before the birth of Jesus and has continued to exist until today and has been subject to the attacks of Satan throughout 2000 years. The problem is that the woman is told to have escaped the dragon. To me it is natural to understand that the first attack of Satan on the woman occurs soon after his failure to kill Jesus. This is different from the end time attack described at the end of chapter 12. Many, not understanding who the woman is, try to suggest that it is the same thing described twice in verses 6 and 14, but this destroys the logical order of the whole chapter.

One reason for thinking the woman is Israel comes from Joseph's vision in Gen. 37v9 where his mother and father and eleven brothers are pictured as bowing down to him. These are the founders of Israel. But before we jump to this conclusion with all its problems, let's see if there are any alternatives.

Since most of Revelation uses imagery from the OT, do we find any example of a symbol in which a woman gives birth to boy?

We find our answer in Is. 66v7. When we look at it carefully we see that the "mother" is called "Zion" which is another name for "Jerusalem". It is quite common to picture a city as a woman. In Revelation the New Jerusalem is called the Bride and Babylon is called the Prostitute. In Matthew 2v18, Bethlehem is called Rachel who weeps for her children when Herod killed the boys in his failed attempt to kill Jesus. So the picture of a city as a woman has strong Biblical precedents. Of course the personification of a city as a woman is only symbolic, it is the citizens of the city who are the reality. It was the mothers of Bethlehem who cried for their dead babies not the buildings in the town. So is John referring to Jerusalem here?

To answer this, let's remember a verse we looked at last autumn from Gal. 4 where Paul contrasted two Jerusalems, the one on earth in Israel and the one in heaven. Each of these mothers has children. Specifically Paul writes that the Jerusalem that is above is "our mother" Gal. 4v26. Later, writing to the Philippians (3v20), he tells that we are

“citizens of heaven”. In the days of the early church, when citizenship of Rome was a prize most people sought after like, Christians instead rejoiced to be citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem. We see this clearly in Hebrews 12v22-24. Here we see the connection between the term “Zion”, “city of God” and “heavenly Jerusalem”. It is where Christians on earth come to in worship, it is also the city of both “the church of the first born” and “just men made perfect”. The latter are certainly dead believers from the OT period and the former thus most likely “dead Christians since the time of Jesus”. So the citizens of the city are dead OT believers, dead NT believers, and living NT believers on earth. This is “our mother” according to Paul.

Also when we look at the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21v10-14 we see that it shines brilliantly and that the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are written on the gates and the foundations have the name of the twelve apostles. There is some connection with the twelve stars here. In verse 23 it is told that it will not need the sun or moon to give light.

Let’s try how this idea fits with Revelation 12.

OT believers certainly longed and prayed for the coming of the Messiah as we can see in NT characters such as Elizabeth and Zechariah, Anna, Simeon, Joseph and Mary. Soon after the ascension of Jesus, Satan first tried to destroy the church through persecution and then he tried to destroy all Israel, including the Jerusalem church, in 70 AD. What happened? The whole Jerusalem church escaped into the desert and hid there for several years in the area of Pella. They were untouched by the Romans and later returned to the city when the war was over. This fits with what John tells in 12v6.

If we now jump to the end of chapter 12 we find that before the time of antichrist there will be another attempt by Satan to destroy believing Jews, presumably in connection with an attack on Israel. This will also fail. Then he gives up on the woman and goes to attack the “rest of her children”. Who are they? It looks pretty obvious from chapter 13 that the ones the antichrist and false prophet attack are Christians throughout the earth. Thus the rest of the children of the woman are mainly Gentile believers living outside Israel. They will be attacked while Messianic Jews in Israel will be protected, just like happened in the early church. Messianic Jews in Israel were protected from the Romans but Christians elsewhere in the Roman Empire were persecuted, first by Nero before 70 AD, then Domitian, which is why John was on Patmos, and on up to the time of Diocletian. The pattern fits. What then about the bit in the middle, v 7-12?

Spiritual warfare

Once again this is a passage people misinterpret. They see it tells about Satan being cast down by angels and they immediately connect it with the time before the creation of the earth when Satan, in heaven as the archangel Lucifer, rebelled against God. See Ezek. 28v11-19 and Is. 14v12-15. But this passage, from 7-12, clearly connects the casting down of Satan with the activity of Christians. It describes spiritual warfare. Christians overcome him by the blood of the lamb, by their verbal witness and by their physical witness, being willing to die. This must refer to the Christian era because the blood of the lamb means it happened after the death of Jesus on the cross.

This faithful witness of Christians on earth correlates with the angels fighting Satan in heaven and the result is that Satan is cast down to earth.

We need to understand that at present Satan is called the Prince of the Powers of the Air, Eph. 2v2, 6v12 . His realm of activity is no longer the heaven where God and Jesus dwell but an intermediate region between heaven and earth. When he was thrown out of the real heaven before the beginning of this earth he was limited to the dimension surrounding this earth, the spiritual equivalent of what we call the atmosphere i.e. the air. Both angels and demons can function in that realm though most ordinary demons are already on earth. One day Satan himself will be removed from that middle realm and limited to earth alone. This happens before antichrist appears. Antichrist is the final weapon of Satan in his desperate fight against God's people.

Now, if we are right in thinking that verse 6 refers to the failed attempt to destroy the Jerusalem believers in 70 AD, we see that verses 7-12 correlate with what we saw last time was called "the times of the Gentiles" which began from 70 AD when Jerusalem first came under the control of Gentiles. We also saw that the final false messiah and false prophet come at the end or after the end of the times of the Gentiles right before the return of Jesus.

From Rev.12 we learn that Satan is cast down to earth near the end of the times of the Gentiles after a prolonged time of spiritual warfare with Christians. This is just the same period that Jesus described in Matthew 24 as a period of suffering for Christians and Jews. We also saw that what ended the times of the Gentiles was that the gospel was preached to all the Gentiles. Then after that has been accomplished the end can come. Thus there is a correlation between the successful completion of the task of spreading the gospel and the defeat of Satan in spiritual warfare.

The connection becomes stronger when we remember a verse in Luke 10v18. Jesus sees Satan cast down from heaven. Since there is no evidence to suggest that this actually happened during Jesus' time because Paul later still calls him the Prince of the Power of the Air, we must assume that it is a prophetic vision of Jesus. When does he see it? After the end of the evangelistic mission of the 70! Thus there is a correlation between a successful evangelistic mission and Satan being cast down. I suggest that what we have described in Rev. 12 is the fulfillment of that prophecy. Satan is really cast down to earth as a result of the successful spread of the gospel to all the Gentiles despite the spiritual opposition of Satan.

Thus we see a perfect correlation between Matthew 24 and Revelation 12 and 13:

First the believing Jews pray for the coming of the Messiah
Messiah comes and Satan fails to kill him and Messiah is taken to heaven
Satan then attacks the believing Jews in Israel but they escape him in 70 AD
This begins the times of the Gentiles.
During this time, Jerusalem is controlled by Gentiles
Both Christians and Jews suffer persecution and quite soon (after 135 AD) there is no
Messianic witness in Jerusalem or the land of Israel
Christians make progress in preaching the gospel to all nations
The Jews begin to return to their land and get control of it in 1948 and 1967

Finally the gospel goes to all the Gentiles
This is a massive defeat for Satan and he is thrown down to earth
The Jews also regain complete control of Jerusalem and the temple mount
The first thing Satan does is try to destroy the messianic Jews but this fails and his army is destroyed by an earthquake
In frustration he then gives up on attacking Jewish believers for a time and focuses his attention on the global Gentile church, just as he did after 70 AD. This time his weapon is the antichrist and false prophet just as he used the Roman emperors in the past
Even though many are deceived and many are killed Satan fails to crush the Church completely

I believe that this worldwide persecution of Christians along with the witness of Messianic Jews in Israel is God's way of preparing the hearts of the rest of the Jews for the next big event, which is when they see Jesus. This will result in all Israel repenting and being saved.

The attack described in Rev. 12v15,16 could well be a final attack by Muslim nations against Israel. It is not the same as the final international attack, which is called the battle of Armageddon and occurs when the antichrist and his armies are destroyed by Jesus at his return to earth.

So we see that there is a perfect correlation between Matthew 24 and Revelation 12 and 13. The children of Abraham through Isaac are brought back to the land and protected by God as he prepares them to receive the Messiah. The sufferings of the children of Abraham through faith contribute to softening the heart of the Jews so that when they see Jesus in the clouds they are ready to repent and acknowledge him as Messiah. Thus all Israel is grafted back into its own olive tree and they become part of the children of Abraham through faith.

The salvation of the children of Abraham through Ishmael is part of the gospel process though it is not impossible that a final major failure to destroy Israel, described in Rev. 12v15,16 may convince many of them to put their faith in the God of the Jews.

Anyway, our task is to spread the gospel to Jews, Muslims and everyone else because this is the key to Satan being cast down and Jesus coming back. But we also need to recognize that the consequence of that spiritual victory will first be the appearance of the antichrist before the appearance of Jesus who will destroy him. This is our calling and our destiny. I have tried to make it as clear as I can and I hope you will take seriously what you have heard and do your part in the work of the gospel as God leads you.

Graham Turner
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Gospels

Revelation 12,13

DESTRUCTION
OF JERUSALEM

SUFFERING
OF JEWS
AND CHRISTIANS

GOSPEL TO
ALL NATIONS

FALSE MESSIAHS
FALSE PROPHETS

JESUS COMES

CHRISTIANS
TAKEN UP

JEWS
SAVED

ONE PEOPLE
IN CHRIST

FAILED ATTACK
ON JESUS

FAILED ATTACK
ON MESSIANIC JEWS

SPIRITUAL
WARFARE

SATAN
FALLS

FAILED ATTACK
ON MESSIANIC JEWS

FALSE MESSIAH
FALSE PROPHET

FALSE MESSIAH
& PROPHET DESTROYED
(REV. 19.20,21)