



THE REVELATION OF JOHN

Bible Study 32

Text: Rev. 12:13-17

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2. What the text means.

The Dragon Tries to Kill the Woman

Greek NT

13 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενά. 14 καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ αἱ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφευς. 15 καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ὄφις ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὀπίσω τῆς γυναικὸς ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμὸν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ. 16 καὶ ἐβόηθησεν ἡ γῆ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἠνοιξεν ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ κατέπιεν τὸν ποταμὸν ὃν ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ. 17 καὶ ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λουπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

La Biblia de las Américas

13 Cuando el dragón vio que había sido arrojado a la tierra, persiguió a la mujer que había dado a luz al hijo varón. 14 Y se le dieron a la mujer las dos alas de la gran águila a fin de que volara de la presencia de la serpiente al desierto, a su lugar, donde fue sustentada por un tiempo, tiempos y medio tiempo. 15 Y la serpiente arrojó de su boca, tras la mujer, agua como un río, para hacer que fuera arrastrada por la corriente. 16 Pero la tierra ayudó a la mujer, y la tierra abrió su boca y tragó el río que el dragón había arrojado de su boca. 17 Entonces el dragón se enfureció contra la mujer, y salió para hacer guerra contra el resto de la descendencia de ella, los que guardan los mandamientos de Dios y tienen el testimonio de Jesús.

NRSV

13 So 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 could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

NLT

13 And when the dragon realized that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the child. 14 But she was given two wings like those of a great eagle. This allowed her to fly to a place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be cared for and protected from the dragon for a time, times, and half a time. 15 Then the dragon tried to drown the woman with a flood of water that flowed from its mouth. 16 But the earth helped her by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that gushed out from the mouth of the dragon. 17 Then the dragon became angry at the woman, and he declared war against the rest of her children -- all who keep God's commandments and confess that they belong to Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

In this subsequent scene of the cosmic struggle between God and Satan, John focuses on Satan's efforts to destroy the mother of Christ since the Christ child was snatched away into heaven at birth before the dragon could harm it. The previous scene in 12:7-12 helps the reader understand how and why the attacks of Satan are no longer in the sky as in 12:1-6,

but instead on the earth. In Michael's overpowering Satan in the battle in the sky (vv. 7-12) Satan has been forced out and banished to the earth where he continues his attacks against God. Thwarted in his efforts to destroy the child at birth he now concentrates his attacks on the mother of the child (vv. 13-17), but against is thwarted in this and so turns "on the rest of her chil-

dren, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17). This in turn sets up the next series of scenes in chapter thirteen depicting the attacks of Satan with the help of his two henchmen, the two sea-monsters, against the people of God living on earth. The brutality of these attacks becomes very intense, but largely unsuccessful because Satan cannot attack the spiritual life of God’s people, only them physically. He tries to, largely through deception and temptation but only succeeds with the unbelieving world and not with God’s people.

Though in some ways this picture is bleak for believers, in many other ways it is quite encouraging. God is still protecting His people, and if martyrdom comes they have complete assurance of entrance into heaven itself in the full Presence of Almighty God. And this is something the unbelieving world along with Satan and his henchmen will never ever experience.

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Historical Aspects:

External History. In the history of the hand copying of this passage in Revelation no variation of wording significant enough to impact the translation of the text was found present among the several thousand known copies still existing today. Thus the editors of *The Greek New Testament* (UBS 4th rev. ed.) did not list any variations in the Text Apparatus of this printed Greek New Testament.



But as we have observed consistently in our studies, this does not mean that variations in wording among these known copies are not present. In the Text Apparatus of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) some twelve places surface where variations take place.¹ Once



¹Offenbarung 12,13

* εἰς ἐδὶ– ἄ2 (*: εἰδωκεν !) (ἐδίωξεν is replaced)
| ἀπηλθεν εκδιωξαι P⁴⁷

Offenbarung 12,14

* εδοθη P⁴⁷ ἄ² (ἐδόθησαν is replaced)
* P⁴⁷ ἄ 1854. 2329. 2344. 2351 M^K (αἱ is omitted)
| txt A C 051. 1006. 1611. 1841. 2053 M^A sy^h

* σπας –φηται 1611. (1854, 2351) M^K (ὄπου τρέφεται is replaced)

* C (καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ is omitted)

Offenbarung 12,15

* απο P⁴⁷ (ἐκ is replaced)
* ταυτην 051 M^A (αὐτην is replaced)

Offenbarung 12,16

* P⁴⁷ gig; Prim (ἡ γῆ is omitted)

more we notice that the changes are mostly in isolated secondary manuscripts and reflect efforts at stylistic improvement. Thus the adopted reading of the text can be exegeted in full confidence that it reflects the original wording of the passage.

Internal History. As with most of the depicted events in apocalyptic visions, these events are not presented as historical, but as cosmic occurrences. Sometimes historical events are implied with the cosmic depictions portraying the underlying supernatural dynamics taking place. But here the cosmic conflict of the dragon’s failed effort to destroy the woman do not reflect any particular historical event connected to the birth of Jesus by Mary. Rather, the cosmic portrayal lays out a spiritual effort by the dragon to destroy not only the earthly source of Christ but a turning from failure at this to persecuting “the rest of her children” on earth. Mary stands typologically as the mother of all God’s children. She can’t be destroyed just as her Son could not, but the other ‘children’ are open targets for the dragon.

Literary Aspects:

Genre: Rev. 12:13-17 continues as a part of the larger apocalyptic vision in line with the header of 1:1, Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *the apocalypse of Jesus Christ*. The vision begins in 1:9 and continues through chapter twenty-two. It has two major subunits in chapters two and three that are followed by chapters four through twenty-two as the second subunit.

Rev. 12:13-17 do not follow a previously defined pattern in other literature which would justify the label of a sub genre. John is unique in his depiction here, although he does continue his pattern of borrowing bits and pieces of ideas and terms from other sources.

Literary Setting: The literary context of 12:13-17 is relatively easy to determine. The larger setting is the interlude between the blowing of the seventh trumpet in 11:15-19 and the implementation of its impact upon the earth with the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath (15:1-16:21).

With this pause in 12:1-14:10, John braces his readers for the full destructive impact of the seven bowls with an apocalyptic portrayal of human history that begins with introducing the cosmic war between Michael and the dragon in the sky (12:1-8). The drag-

* το υδωρ ὁ A (τὸν ποταμὸν ὄν is replaced)

* απο P⁴⁷ (ἐκ is replaced)

Offenbarung 12,17

* P⁴⁷ C (ἐπὶ is omitted)

* ἄ 1854 pc (the sequence of ποιῆσαι πόλεμον is reversed)

[Eberhard Nestle et al., Universität Münster. Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 656.]

Analysis of the Rhetorical Structure:

Here subunits inside the passage are more difficult to determine with certainty. The bulk of the passage centers on the futile efforts of the dragon to kill the mother (#s 380-385) and then upon failure at this his turning to persecute her other children (#s 386-387). The thought sequence seems to be efforts followed by failure.

Exegesis of the Text:

The above diagram with its analysis provides a two fold division for exegeting this passage that is more natural to the text itself.

A. The dragon's efforts to destroy the mother, vv. 13-16.

13 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενά. 14 καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ αἱ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφευς. 15 καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ὄφις ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὀπίσω τῆς γυναικὸς ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ. 16 καὶ ἐβοήθησεν ἡ γῆ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἤνοιξεν ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ κατέπιεν τὸν ποταμόν ὃν ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ.

13 So 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 could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Scene three in the cosmic saga of chapters twelve through fourteen continues the struggle between good and evil, God and Satan, but now on the earth.

The first sentence (v. 13) reaches back in the temporal clause, ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, when the dragon saw that he had been cast out on to the earth, to the latter part of verse nine: ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν, he was cast out on to the earth and his angels were cast out with him. Verses 13-17 resume the narrative flow established in vv. 7-9 after the interruption of vv. 10-12.

This signals the relocating of the conflict between God and Satan from the sky to the earth. The primordial aspects of the battle between Michael and Satan in the

sky serve to set the stage for the historical narratives of scripture beginning the Adam and Eve and continuing through to the very end of human history. When God's people encounter evil and temptation in this world, in actually they are participating in a cosmic struggle between God and Satan. This is the spiritual dimension of what is taking place that is hidden from human eyes, especially non-spiritual human eyes. Scene 3 sets this up in a fascinating manner with two successive failures of Satan to harm God and those connected with Him. But in defeat he turns to the people of God on earth with cunning devices to lure them into his trap. Those outside of the people of God are open game and largely helpless to resist. But God's people resist and do not yield, and consequently pay the price of the slaughtered Lamb in martyrdom. But even that becomes God's victory because it brings them immediately into the full presence of God Himself.

Upon realization of his failure to destroy the 'man child' (v. 5), Satan turns against its mother seeking to destroy her; verse 6 repeated in verse 13: Καὶ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ δράκων ὅτι ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἐδίωξεν τὴν γυναῖκα ἣτις ἔτεκεν τὸν ἄρσενά, and when the dragon saw that he had been cast on to the earth, he began persecuting the woman who gave birth to the man child.²

Interestingly, the reference to Christ here, τὸν ἄρσενά, the substantival adjective from ἄρσεν, -εν (male), refers back to υἱὸν ἄρσεν, male son (v. 4), where the adjective ἄρσεν is neuter singular in form rather than the required masculine singular. This grammar irregularity most likely comes out of the influence of τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς, her child, in vv. 4-5 in which τέκνον is neuter gender.

The dragon goes after³ the woman due to her con-

²In Plutarch's retelling of the Isis-Osiris myth, he relates how many were transferring their allegiance from Seth/Typhon to Horus/Harpocrates (the son of Osiris), and when Thueris, the concubine of Typhon, came over to the side of Horus, 'a serpent which was pursuing [ἐπιδιώκων] her was cut in pieces by the followers of Horus' (De Iside 358C-D). In a peculiar episode in T. Sol. 14:4, 'Solomon' interviews a demon called the 'Winged Dragon,' who chases after only beautiful women with whom he has anal intercourse. He claims that one of the women he attacked bore a child named Eros. Only the motif of a dragon chasing a fleeing woman connects that passage to this." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 704.]

³The verb διώκω can be rendered here 'persecute'¹⁴⁰ or 'pursue.'¹⁴¹ Regardless of which way the word is translated, both meanings are in mind.¹⁴² The devil now directs his efforts of persecution against God's people even more than before. He escalates his efforts because he is angry over having lost his former heavenly privilege (cf. vv 7-12). The object of attack is 'the woman who bore the male child.' It is the woman's identification with the 'male child' that causes the dragon to persecute her." [G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: a Commentary on the Greek Text*, New Page 665

nection to the man child. Angry that he was presented from killing the child at its birth (cf. v. 5), he now decides to kill its mother. She represents the incarnation source of Christ's coming from heaven to the earth. And she provides a good 'plan B' of attack.

But again God intervenes with special provision for her that rescues her from the dragon's grip (v. 14): *καὶ ἐδόθησαν τῇ γυναικὶ αἱ δύο πτέρυγες τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρὸν καὶ καιροῦς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφραως.* *But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.*

The passive voice *ἐδόθησαν*, *was given*, signals divine action in this granting of wings. These were wings belonging to τοῦ ἀετοῦ τοῦ μεγάλου, *the large eagle*. The only other mentioning of an eagle comes in 8:13,

Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἤκουσα ἑνὸς ἀετοῦ πετομένου ἐν μεσουρανήματι λέγοντος φωνῇ μεγάλῃ· οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκ τῶν λουπῶν φωνῶν τῆς σάλπιγγος τῶν τριῶν ἀγγέλων τῶν μελλόντων σαλπίζειν.

Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew in midheaven, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

The article τοῦ with ἀετοῦ in 12:14 could be understood to point to this eagle. But there seems to be no other possible signal in the text that John was referring back to this eagle mentioned earlier. This demonstrative function of the article usually comes with other signals of connection, but none are present here.

But in the background stands a large number of Jewish and Greco-Roman religious traditions with some similar tones.⁴ But significant differences exist

International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 668.]

⁴"The imagery suggests not that the woman is rescued by a large eagle, and is somehow borne into a wilderness fastness, but that she is outfitted with a pair of eagle's wings and is thereby enabled to fly into the wilderness herself. This suggests comparison with the many metamorphosis stories in Greek mythology in which people in danger are transformed into birds to enable them to escape (Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis*, 96–127 [esp. 106–7], 235–36). Appearances of deities in the form of birds occur in the mythologies of the eastern Mediterranean world. Philo of Byblos reported that Canaanite deities took the form of birds (Attridge-Oden, Philo, 56–59), and the mythological Ugaritic texts provide numerous examples of this conception (Korpel, *Clouds*, 544–53). In an Osiris hymn from the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt (ca. 1500 B.C.), Isis is depicted as having two wings with which she searches for her brother Osiris (Budge, *Osiris* 1:94). In another Egyptian myth, the gods flee from Seth-Typhon and change themselves into various animals (Apollodorus 1.6.3; Ovid *Metam.* 5.321–31; J. G. Griffiths, "The Flight of the Gods before Typhon: An Unrecognized Myth?" *Hermes* 88 [1960] 374–76). After deities have appeared to people

with John's account. The woman is not carried to safety by an eagle. The woman doesn't turn into an eagle and fly away to safety.⁵ Rather she is given the wings of a large eagle so that she can fly away. Much more likely in the background stands Exod. 19:4 where in figurative language God instructs Moses to say to the Israelites, *Αὐτοὶ ἐωράκατε ὅσα πεποίηκα τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις, καὶ ἀνέλαβον ὑμᾶς ὡσεὶ ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀετῶν καὶ προσηγαγόμεν ὑμᾶς πρὸς ἑμαυτόν, You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings*

in disguise, they sometimes assume the form of birds when they leave (Odyssey 1.319–23, 420; 3.371–72). Since the word 'eagle' has a definite article, the author appears to assume that this eagle is well known to his readers (Charles, 1:330). The argument that this could refer to the anarthrous *ἀετός* in 8:13 is specious (LeFrois, *Woman*, 183–84), as is the suggestion that the definite article indicates that the constellation Eagle is in view (Boll, 113).

"The notion of rescue by flying away like a bird is reflected in 1 Enoch 96:2, where it is said that the young of the righteous will mount up and rise like eagles in the day of distress. The precedent for this is the well-known biblical association between the Exodus from Egypt and the wings of an eagle, expressed in Exod 19:4, 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself' (cf. 4Q504 = 4QDibHama frag. 6, lines 6–7 [tr. Garcia Martinez, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 417], 'You have lifted us wonderfully [upon the wings of] eagles and you have made us enter to you'). Deut 32:10–14, part of the Song of Moses, contains three motifs that also occur here: the wilderness, protection by an eagle, and nourishment. These themes are expanded in Tg. Onq. Deut 32:10–14 (Grossfeld, *Targum Onqelos*, 91–92) and in the Fragment-Targums on Deut 32:10–14 (Klein, *Fragment-Targums* 2:86, 183–84). In T. Mos. 10:8, Israel will be rescued by mounting upon the neck and wings of an eagle (see 1 Enoch 96:2). The Latin word for 'eagle' is *aquila*, which could have been associated with *aquilo*, the Latin term for 'north wind'; see Hyginus *Fabulae* 140 (tr. Grant, Hyginus), 'by order of Jove the wind Aquilo [the Greek term is Βορέας] carried Latona [i.e., 'Leto'] away' (pointed out by Zielinski, *FuF* 7 [1931] 155–56). This motif brings the version of the Apollo-Leto-Typhon myth preserved by Hyginus closer to the version used by John in Rev 12." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 704–705.]

⁵"There are several Greek myths in which women pursued by an antagonist become birds and thus escape (Procne, Philomela, and Tereus in Apollodorus 3.14.8; see Ovid *Metam.* 6.667–74). The constellation Virgo was depicted as having two wings (Aratus *Phaen.* 96–146). One nymph fleeing the wrath of Typhoeus expresses the desperate wish 'O that I had wings to fly' (Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 2.126). Medea, after killing Pelias, is borne away by winged dragons (Ovid *Metam.* 7.350–51). This story suggests to Ovid many others that involve the escape from various dangers by figures of myth and legend who are miraculously provided with wings: (1) Ceramus of old was aided by the nymphs and escaped the flood by flying away with wings (Ovid *Metam.* 7.354–56). (2) Cygnus was transformed into a swan (Ovid *Metam.* 7.371–72). (3) Combe reportedly escaped on wings from her sons, who wanted to harm her (Ovid *Metam.* 7.382–83). (4) The king and queen of the island of Calauria were both transformed into birds (Ovid *Metam.* 7.384–85)." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 706.]

and brought you to myself. In [Deut. 32:10-14](#), the eagle plays a significant role in Israel finding protection from harm in the wilderness. These and other OT texts that speak of the ‘wings of an eagle’ gave John the picturesque language needed to portray the woman fleeing to safety on the wings of an eagle which God provided.

When outfitted with these wings then she was able to fulfill the role God had in mind by giving them to her: ἵνα πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφεως, [so that she might fly into the wilderness, into a place for her where there she would be nourished for a short time away from the presence of the snake.](#)

Verse 14c, εἰς τὴν ἔρημον εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφεως, [into the wilderness, into the place for her where she is being nourished for the moment from the presence of the serpent,](#) represents a reworking of verse six, just like v. 13 is of v. 9b. Just before the interruption of vv. 7-12, comes the declaration in v. 6:

καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ἔχει ἐκεῖ τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα ἐκεῖ τρέφωσιν αὐτὴν ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα.

[and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.](#)

Again John repeats the essential ideas in verse six here in verse fourteen in picking up the narrative again from 12:1-6. A few variations surface between the two statements:

1) πέτηται εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, [might fly into the wilderness](#) rather than ἔφυγεν εἰς τὴν ἔρημον, [fled into the wilderness](#);

2) Insertion in v. 14c of εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, [into place for her](#), between ἔρημον and ὅπου. It replaces τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, [a place prepared by God](#), in v. 6.

3) Use of present tense indicative τρέφεται rather than present tense subjunctive τρέφωσιν.

4) Use of equivalent καιρὸν καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἡμισυ καιροῦ, [time and times and half time](#), for ἡμέρας χιλίας διακοσίας ἐξήκοντα, [days one thousand two hundred sixty](#), in v. 6.

These variations provide an interesting insight into how John can repeat a previously expressed idea. But he will not simply quote it. Rather he reforms the idea with enough common terminology to make it clear that he is restating, but he also inserts new words and new ideas into the subsequent statement as well.

The location of safety is interesting because it expresses a figurative idea of safety in the Jewish world of the first century that would not have been so under-

stood elsewhere in John’s world nor in our world. Wilderness equals safety is not a formula that registers with our day.

Unquestionably in the background here stands the Israelite Exodus event.⁶ But all through Israelite history in the OT and later, the wilderness especially in the southern part of Judea provided a place of refuge and safety for numerous individuals and groups, in spite of some dangers associated with it.⁷ One of those dan-

⁶“The wilderness has both negative and positive associations in the OT and early Jewish literature (see Talmon, “Desert Motif,” 31–63). The connection of the Exodus theme with a flight into the wilderness for refuge is undoubtedly present. It is positively depicted as a place of refuge and salvation (Isa 40:3; Jer 31:2; 48:6; Ezek 34:25; Ps 55:7–8; see Talmon, “Desert Motif,” 42, 45–46). Hagar fled into the wilderness to escape the anger of Sarah (Gen 16:6–14). The Israelites escaped Egyptian bondage by fleeing into the wilderness, where they were guided by God (Deut 1:31; Ps 78:52; Jer 2:2, 6; Hos 2:16–17; Amos 2:10) and fed by him (Exod 16:32). Individuals also fled to the wilderness for refuge, including Moses (Exod 2:15) and David, to escape Saul (1 Sam 22:1–2). Elijah fled to the brook Cherith, where ravens fed him (1 Kgs 17:1–7), and later to Horeb, where he was also miraculously fed (1 Kgs 19:4–8). The Qumran community, with its center in the wilderness of Judea northwest of the Dead Sea, understood their presence in the desert as an eschatological fulfillment of Isa 40:3 (1QS 8:12–14; 9:19–21). Isaiah and other prophets eluded Manasseh by hiding in the wilderness (Mart. Isa. 2:7–11; cf. Heb 11:37–38, which may allude to the Isaiah legend preserved in the Martyrdom of Isaiah). A quasi-historical event is the tradition of the flight to Pella (Mark 13:14–20 and par.; Eusebius Hist. eccl. 3.5.3; Epiphanius Pan. 29.7.7–8; 30.2.7; De mens et pond. 15; see C. Koester, “The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition,” CBQ 51 [1989] 90–106). The flight of the woman into the desert in Rev 12:6, 14 should be understood in terms of the tradition of the wilderness as a place of refuge and security, and perhaps also in connection with the expectation that the Messiah will come from the desert (Matt 2:15; Hos 11:1).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 705–706.]

⁷“Wilderness, a desolate or deserted area devoid of civilization. One Hebrew word above all others is used for ‘wilderness,’ or ‘desert,’ in the OT: *midbar*, indicating both ‘that which is desolate and deserted’ and ‘that which is beyond,’ i.e., beyond the limits of settlement and therefore of government control, perceived by both city dwellers and villagers as being essentially disorderly and dangerous, the home of wild beasts and savage wandering tribes. In time of war or repression refugees would flee to the midbar (Isa. 21:13–15; cf. Rev. 12:6, 14); ‘greatly distressed...enraged...[they] will curse their king and their God’ (Isa. 8:21–22). But only too often they would find ‘no way to a city to dwell in; hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them’ (Ps. 107:4–5).

“Certainly, the primary Israelite experience was that of escaping from Egypt through the desolate wastes of Sinai and of entering there into covenant with Yahweh, but they remembered how they hated the wilderness wanderings and had no desire at all to return (Exod. 15:22–25; 16:3; Pss. 78:40; 95:8). It remained for them always ‘the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water’ (Deut. 8:15). Midbar was for them, as ‘wilderness’ was originally

gers was the presence of poisonous snakes, perhaps accounting here for the identification of the ὁ δράκων, **the dragon**, (v. 13) as a dangerous snake, τοῦ ὄφεως (v. 14),

The woman fled εἰς τὴν ἔρημον. The wilderness was also τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, ὅπου τρέφεται ἐκεῖ, **the place where there she is being nourished**. As noted above, εἰς τὸν τόπον αὐτῆς, **a place for her**, replaces the τόπον ἡτοιμασμένον ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, **a place prepared by God**, in verse six. The verbal idea of τρέφεται is that of God taking care of her basic needs. The time specification here replaces 1,260 days in v. 6.⁸ From Daniel 7:25 and in English, the wild, alarming wasteland, where men and women find themselves bewildered and disoriented.

“Although often equated with the drought-stricken desert (Heb. *yeshimon*; Deut. 32:10; Ps. 106:14), the wilderness (midbar) included poor steppeland, e.g., the area surrounding the oasis of Damascus (1 Kings 19:15), and could include the marginal cultivated land on the Transjordan plateau (Num. 21:13; Deut. 4:43), as well as the pastureland east of Bethlehem, where in the Christmas story shepherds were ‘keeping watch over their flock’ (Luke 2:8), as David had done centuries before them (1 Sam. 17:28). It could comprise also tangled thickets and scrub, such as the ‘thorns’ and ‘briers’ of the wilderness near Succoth in the Jordan Valley (Judg. 8:7, 16). Wilderness (midbar) in fact merged into wooded areas (Heb. *ya‘ar*), which is normally translated ‘forest,’ and both were perceived by the settled Israelites as dangerous trackless country where one could rapidly become lost or be attacked by wild beasts. In fact, the two are equated in Ezek. 34:25 when God promises, ‘I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness [midbar] and sleep in the woods [ya‘ar].’ An even more impressive parallel may be found in Isa. 32:15, where wilderness replaces the thickly forested ‘Lebanon’ of Isa. 29:17. They both belonged to the savage, ill-controlled regions beyond the cultivated farmlands. To the north and west lay the woods; to the south and east the wilderness.

“NT writers held similar opinions (Heb. 11:37-38), viewing ‘waterless places’ as the natural habitat of evil spirits (Luke 11:24; see Isa. 34:14). It was therefore appropriate that it was in the desert that Jesus was tempted by Satan to abandon his vocation of suffering Son of God (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). When Jesus fed the multitudes in the wilderness (e.g., Mark 8:4), he showed he was able to overcome its dangers, both physical and supernatural. Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist, had also appeared in the wilderness with his message of repentance (Mark 1:4), thus reminding Israel of its first days as chosen people in the desert of Sinai. The fact that John performed a baptism indicates that the wilderness was not a waterless stretch of sand, but rather a desolate area where water was nevertheless available, perhaps somewhere in the Jordan Valley. The remaining NT references to wilderness are principally in contexts where Israel’s period of wilderness wandering is at issue (e.g., John 3:14; Acts 7:36; 1 Cor. 10:5).”

[Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 1133–1134.]

⁸“The phrase ‘a time, times, and half a time’ is an allusion to Dan 7:25; 12:7; the author uses this cryptic apocalyptic period of time in two other forms: as 1,260 days in 11:3 and 12:6, and as 42 months in 11:2 and 13:5.” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated,

12:7, ‘time and times and half time’ equals 1,260 days which equals 42 months. All signify a brief period of time.

The reader should not be misled here by John’s calling Satan, τοῦ ὄφεως, **the snake**. In the numerous ID tags listed for Satan in verse 9, ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος, **the ancient snake**, is one of the tags: ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφης ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὄλην, **the large dragon, the ancient snake, the one being called Devil and Satan, the one deceiving all the inhabited earth**. The idiom ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ ὄφεως, literally, **from the face of the snake**, conveys the literal meaning of ‘away from the presence of the snake.’⁹ Thus the woman is safe from harm by Satan.

But John does not intend to imply that Satan doesn’t discover her location, which verse fifteen asserts that he does: καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ὄφης ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὀπίσω τῆς γυναικὸς ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ, **Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood**. Satan located where the woman was located but couldn’t get close enough to her in order to harm or destroy her. So he decides to ‘flood’ her out by drowning her. Adversaries making use of water or the sea against enemies was rather commonplace in John’s world, particularly in his Jewish background.¹⁰ 1998), 706.

⁹“The phrase ἀπὸ προσώπου, a literal translation of the Hebrew מִפְּנֵי *mipnē*, means, literally, ‘from the presence of,’ but it may mean ‘because of,’ ‘for fear of’ (Rev 6:16; 20:11; BDB, 818; KB, 889; Charles, 1:330; Thayer, *Lexicon*, 551).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 706.]

¹⁰“In OT combat texts, the enemy of Yahweh is not only the sea but also the waters (Pss 29:3; 66:6; 74:15; 77:16[MT 17]; 93:4; Isa 50:26; 51:10) and rivers or floods, נְהַרִים *nēhārîm* or נְהַרֵי נְהַרִים *nēhārîm* (Ps 93:3; Nah 1:4; Hab 3:8–9). Baal’s opponent in the Ugaritic texts in CTA 2 is not only Prince Yam but also Judge River (Day, *Conflict*, 7). CTA 3.IIID.35–36, ‘Surely I smote Yam, beloved of El, surely I made an end of River [nhr] the mighty god’ (Day, *Conflict*, 13). In fact, they are synonymous terms used as a hendiadys for the same chaos monster (Wakeman, *God’s Battle*, 92–97; see Hab 3:8; Pss 74:15b; 66:6; Isa 50:26). The author of the Qumran Hodayot used the metaphor “‘torrents of Belial [נהלי בליעל] *nahālê bēliyya-al*” (1QH 3:29, 32) for the onslaught of the enemies of God instigated by Satan. In some OT passages, the chaos waters can be identified as a generic term for the nations hostile to Israel (Pss 18:5–18; 46:3–4; 144:5–7; Hab 3:15[MT 13]; see Day, *Conflict*, 120–38). Aegina, daughter of the river Asopus, was carried off (ἤρπασε) by Zeus: ‘Asopus pursued him, but by throwing thunderbolts Zeus sent him back to his own channel’ (Apollodorus 3.12.6). The river Scamander, outraged because of Trojan blood polluting its waters, attacked Achilles but was repulsed by the fire of Hephaestus (Iliad 20–21; Apollodorus *Epitome* 4.7; Lucian *Dial. mar.* 10). Typhoeus (who drank the rivers dry, Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 2.53–59) reportedly fought with Zeus by releasing the waters of the earth and causing great flooding (Nonnos *Dionysiaca* 2.68–76). Typhoeus claims that his brother Okeanos will bring his waters to Olympus and flood

So he spits out of his mouth a flood of water in a futile effort ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ, *to make her overwhelmed by a flood.*

In verse 16, it is the earth who comes to the woman's rescue: καὶ ἐβοήθησεν ἡ γῆ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἤνοιξεν ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ κατέπιεν τὸν ποταμὸν ὃν ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, *But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.* This idea of the earth swallowing large amounts of water in rescuing individuals is found in figurative expression both in the OT and in the Jewish literature of John's time.¹¹ Acting as God's agent, His creation, the earth, delivers the woman from the flood of waters spewed out at her by the dragon.

Satan by this point is getting really frustrated. He has been kicked out of the sky, has failed in his effort to kill the man child at birth, and now can't harm its mother. A string of defeats is leaving him without any way to undermine God and His actions on the earth.

B. Failure causes a shift of focus, v. 17

17 καὶ ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ.

17 *Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. 18 Then the dragon took his stand on the sand of the seashore.*

This final declaration in the scene shifts the action of Satan away from the mother and her child to τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, the rest of her seed. the stars (Nonnos Dionysiaca 2.277–80). In the so-called Aramaic Song of the Lamb (see Comment on 15:3), the giant Goliath (under the metaphor of a Bear) is pitted against the boy David (under the metaphor of a Lamb), and the former says (Staalduine-Sulman, "Aramaic Song," 270):

Blessed be you, boy [tly, = lamb],
if you go away from before me,
lest I spit on you,
and you would drown in my spittle.

"The dragon's attempt to 'wash her away' is, of course, an obvious metaphor for destruction."

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 706–707.]

¹¹"Earth is occasionally personified in the OT with verbs for 'swallowing.' Earth is said to have swallowed the pharaoh and his host (Exod 15:12) and later to have swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Num 16:32–34). In these stories Earth acts to destroy the enemies of God just as she frustrates the serpent's attempt to inundate the woman in Rev 12:16. Similarly, in the *Acts of Andrew* 31 (ed. MacDonald, *Acts of Andrew*, 161), the earth opened in response to a prayer of Andrew and swallowed [κατέπιε] the water that had inundated the wicked people of the city." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 707.]

This is motivated, John says, by anger: καὶ ὠργίσθη ὁ δράκων ἐπὶ τῇ γυναικὶ *and the dragon was furious at the woman.* The verbal ὠργίσθη, *was made furious*, suggests the level of anger and fury often associated with martyrdom stories.¹² Mostly likely implicit in this expression is Satan's determined effort to kill somebody connected to God, since the Son and His mother are out of reach to him.

Thus καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, *and he goes away to make war with the rest of her seed.* The verb ἀπῆλθεν asserts that he leaves alone the woman from this point. And consequently she disappears here from the narrative in the rest of Revelation.¹³

What is very strange here is the reference to the other children of the woman. First, they are defined as τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, *the rest of her seed.*¹⁴

¹²"The motif of the anger or rage of a persecutor is a frequent topos in martyrdom stories in both early Judaism and early Christianity (Dan 3:13, 19; 11:30; 2 Macc 7:3, 39; 3 Macc 3:1; 5:1; 4:12–13; 4 Macc 8:2; 9:10; Acts 5:33; 7:54; Mart. Pol. 12:2; Mart. Carpus [Gk. rec.] 9; Ep. Lugd. 1.17; cf. Pistis Sophia [ed. Schmidt-Till] 1.55 [p. 66, lines 30, 36]; 2.80 [p. 113, line 30]; see Kellermann, "Martyrertheologie," 74, where he lists the martyrological motif of the 'outburst of anger by the tyrants'). The presence of this motif suggests that this part of the story is modeled after persecution and martyrological narratives." [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 707–708.]

¹³In chapter seventeen another woman surfaces as a whore. She is called Babylon, but 17:18 makes it clear that this is John's code word for Rome.

Also in 19:7 the redeemed are presented as ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ, *His bride*, prepared for the wedding feast.

¹⁴"The term σπέρμα, 'seed, offspring,' occurs only here in Revelation and is unexpected since only the male child has been mentioned previously (vv 4–5, 13), with no hint that he has or will have any siblings (on the notion of Christians as siblings of Christ, see Heb 2:11–13). This abrupt mention of 'the rest of her offspring,' therefore, appears to be an interpolation intended to anticipate the mention of the war that the beast from the sea wages on the saints (13:7–10), i.e., to provide a transitional link from this textual unit to that found in Rev 13 (Bousset [1906] 356–57). However, since the phrase ἔτεκεν ἄρσεν, 'she bore a male,' in 12:5 is very probably an allusion to Isa 66:7, it is noteworthy that Isa 66:8 speaks of Zion delivering children.

"The phrase τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς, literally, 'her seed,' is a very unusual expression, for 'seed' or 'offspring' are normally associated with a male progenitor; but see P. W. van der Horst, "Sarah's Seminal Emission: Hebrews 11:11 in the Light of Ancient Embryology," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*, FS A. J. Malherbe, ed. D. L. Balch, E. Ferguson, and W. Meeks (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 287–302. This expression, therefore, is probably an allusion to Gen 3:15 (J. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 138), where God addresses the serpent in these words: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed,' a passage understood in some circles of early Judaism and by early Christians to refer to the birth of the Messiah (Prigent, *Apocalypse* 12, 143–44); in early Christianity the Hebrew term זרע *zera*, 'seed,' was un-

Normally σπέρμα assumes a male progenitor, and not the mother. Very likely what stand behind this unusual expression is a couple of OT texts.

In Isaiah 66:7 phraseology used in 12:5, καὶ ἔτεκεν υἱὸν ἄρσεν, and she gave birth to a male son, show up in the LXX translation: πρὶν ἢ τὴν ὠδίνουσαν τεκεῖν, πρὶν ἔλθειν τὸν πόνον τῶν ὠδίνων, ἐξέφυγεν καὶ ἔτεκεν ἄρσεν, Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. But verse 8 speaks of plural children being delivered:

τίς ἤκουσεν τοιοῦτο, καὶ τίς ἐώρακεν οὕτως; ἢ ὠδινεν γῆ ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ, ἢ καὶ ἐτέχθη ἔθνος εἰς ἅπαξ; ὅτι ὠδινεν καὶ ἔτεκεν Σιών τὰ παιδιά αὐτῆς.

Who has heard of such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be delivered in one moment? Yet as soon as Zion was in labor she delivered her children.

Thus the male child has many siblings. Hebrews 2:11-13 makes a big point of Christians being Christ's siblings:

derstood (incorrectly) as having a singular rather than a collective sense (Westermann, Genesis 1:260–61; see Gal 3:16). This was facilitated by the fact that the masculine pronoun αὐτός, 'he,' occurs there, rather than the neuter pronoun αὐτό, 'it,' in the phrase 'he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.' This messianic reading, however, was probably not the intention of the LXX translator (see Michl, Bib. 33 [1952] 398, 401, 501). According to the tradition preserved in Tg. Ps.-J. Gen 3:15 (Bowker, Targums, 122) and in the fragmentary targums P and V on Gen 3:15 (Klein, Fragment-Targums 2:7, 91), when the offspring of the woman keep the Torah, they smite the offspring of the serpent on the heel, whereas in Rev 12:17, the offspring of the woman keep the commandments of God but are nevertheless attacked by the dragon (who is identified as the serpent in vv 9, 14, 15). The presence of the common motifs of the woman, her offspring, the serpent, and the importance of obeying the commandments strongly suggests that this aspect of the myth in Rev 12 appears to be a dramatization of the so-called *protevangelium* of Gen 3:15. The expression τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς symbolizes individual Christians, the spiritual children of the woman (Gollinger, Apokalypse 12, 179), perhaps specifically gentile Christians (Charles, 1:332).

"A general parallel occurs in the Herakles cycle of legends: after the ascension of Herakles to Olympus, his sons (the Heraklidae) were forced to flee from his old nemesis Eurystheus (Apollodorus 2.8.1). In Qu-ran 7.16–17, Iblī_s (= Satan), who has been cast out of heaven, says (M. M. Pickthall, ed., The Glorious Qur-an: A Bi-Lingual Edition with English Translation, Introduction, and Notes [Albany, NY: SUNY, 1976]), "Now, because Thou hast sent me astray, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Thy Right Path. Then I shall come upon them from before them and from behind them and from their right hands and from their left hands, and Thou wilt not find most of them beholden (under Thee)." In Qu-ran 17.62, a sentiment very close to 12:17 is expressed (tr. Pickthall, The Glorious Qur-an): 'He said: Seest Thou this (creature) whom Thou hast honoured above me, if Thou give me grace until the Day of Resurrection I verily will seize his [i.e., 'Adam's'] seed, save but a few?'"

[David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 708–709.]

11 ὁ τε γὰρ ἀγιάζων καὶ οἱ ἀγιαζόμενοι ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντες· δι' ἣν αἰτίαν οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται ἀδελφούς αὐτοῦ καλεῖν 12 λέγων·

ἀπαγγεῶ τὸ ὄνομά σου τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου, ἐν μέσῳ ἐκκλησίας ὑμνήσω σε,

13 καὶ πάλιν·

ἐγὼ ἔσομαι πεποιθὼς ἐπ' αὐτῷ, καὶ πάλιν·

ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ καὶ τὰ παιδιά ἃ μοι ἔδωκεν ὁ θεός.

11 For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, 12 saying,

"I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters,

in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

13 And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I and the children whom God has given me."

The idea of τῶν λοιπῶν τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, the rest of her seed, referring to Christians as siblings to Christ is not unknown in the early church. And it is clearly what John is intending here.

But there is the unusual label of her seed, τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς. This is accounted for from the LXX translation of Genesis 3:15,

καὶ ἔχθραν θήσω ἀνά μέσον σου καὶ ἀνά μέσον τῆς γυναικὸς καὶ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ σπέρματός σου καὶ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς· αὐτός σου τηρήσει κεφαλὴν, καὶ σὺ τηρήσεις αὐτοῦ πτέρναν.†

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

The children of Eve are referenced in the LXX also in the unusual terminology of τοῦ σπέρματος αὐτῆς, identical to Rev. 12:17. Additionally this prediction of hostility between the snake and the offspring of Eve very likely serves to provide a conceptual foundation for the cosmic struggle described in chapter thirteen.¹⁵

The further qualification of the woman's seed is τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἐχόντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, of those keeping the commandments of God and possession the testimony of Jesus. That this is referring to believers in Christ is very clear, and the repetition of it in 14:12 makes it even clearer: Ὡδε ἡ

¹⁵The presence of the common motifs of the woman, her offspring, the serpent, and the importance of obeying the commandments strongly suggests that this aspect of the myth in Rev 12 appears to be a dramatization of the so-called *protevangelium* of Gen 3:15. The expression τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῆς symbolizes individual Christians, the spiritual children of the woman (Gollinger, Apokalypse 12, 179), perhaps specifically gentile Christians (Charles, 1:332). [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 708.]

ὑπομονή τῶν ἁγίων ἐστίν, οἱ τηροῦντες τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, [Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith in Jesus.](#)

Although not clear in the English translation, this is not referring to two distinct groups in either passage. Via a fundamental rule of Greek grammar (article + noun/participle καὶ + noun/participle = one group viewed two ways), Thus to be a Christian means both keeping the commandments of God and possessing the testimony of Jesus = faith in Jesus.

Plus not much distance exists between keeping and possessing. The phrase τῶν τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ is common inside the NT as obeying what God said to do especially via the teachings of Christ.¹⁶ The idea of obedience is critical in the seven messages of chapters two and three. This grows out of possessing τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ, the testimony of Christ. That is, we openly declare our commitment to Jesus as the Christ and Lamb of God, which equals τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ, [faith in Jesus](#), in 14:12.

¹⁶“The phrase τηρεῖν τὰς ἐντολάς, ‘keep the commandments,’ also occurs in the Matthaean version of the Synoptic pericope on the rich young ruler (Matt 19:17), where it refers to the Decalogue, three times in John (14:15, 21; 15:10), where it always refers to the commands of Jesus (ἐντολή, ‘commandments,’ whether in the singular or plural in John never refers to the Mosaic law), and five times in 1 John where it always (as here) refers to the commands of God (1 John 2:3, 4; 3:22, 24; 5:3; ποιεῖν τὰς ἐντολάς, ‘do the commandments,’ occurs once in 1 John 5:2; see Brown, *Epistles*, 251–52), which must at least include the Christian understanding of the Torah. The phrase ποιῆτε τὰς ἐντολάς μου, ‘do my commandments,’ occurs in an extracanonical saying of Jesus (2 Clem. 4:5; cf. Matt 7:24; see Stroker, *Extracanonical*, 71). This entire clause (like v 11) also appears to be an explanatory gloss inserted into an originally Jewish source to Christianize the story (Wellhausen, *Analyse*, 19; J. Weiss, *Offenbarung*, 136; Charles, 1:331), reflecting the final revision of Revelation (Bousset [1906] 345). Some have argued that only the phrase ‘and maintained their witness to Jesus’ has been added since ‘who kept the commandments of God’ is a descriptive phrase fully in line with Judaism (see Justin Dial. 10.3). Keeping the commands of God is one of the major reasons that martyrs give for their willingness to suffer and die rather than compromise their faith (1 Macc 1:60–63; 2 Macc 7:1–3; 3 Macc 1:23; 4 Macc 5:16–17, 29; 6:18; 7:8; 9:1–2; Bib. Ant. 38:2; see Comment on 14:12, and Kellermann, “Martyrtheologie,” 71–72, where the motif of obeying the Torah is listed as a frequent motif in martyrdom stories). Of course, ‘obeying the commandments of God’ in such contexts refers primarily to circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath observance, and avoidance of any participation in pagan sacrificial rituals (Dan 3:3–18; 1 Macc 1:60–63). In early Christianity, particularly in dialogue with Judaism, the phrase “keep the commandments of God” (e.g., Barn. 4:11, φυλάσσειν ... τὰς ἐντολάς αὐτοῦ) came to have a very particular meaning, i.e., the ethical as opposed to the ceremonial commands (see J. C. Paget, *The Epistle of Barnabas: Outlook and Background*, WUNT 2.64 [Tübingen: Mohr, 1994] 64–65).” [David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, vol. 52B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 709–710.]

This last statement serves also to set up the depiction in chapter thirteen of Satan’s efforts to destroy believers on earth who seek to remain faithful to Him even in great persecution (cf. 13:10c, 18a).

2. What does the text mean to us today?

What John puts before us here is both an explanation of why the devil attacks the people of God on earth, and some signaling of the limitations of that attack.

Why is there an ongoing struggle between good and evil? This is an occasional off shoot question of the more basic one, Why is there evil in our world? Post enlightenment answers to this question most often leave a sour taste in our mouths because of their inadequacy.

For the ancient world, answers were always sought in different sources than those examined in the modern world. Virtually universally the world of John sought answers to the issues of good and evil in some sort of cosmic perspective that understood the existence of powers at work far beyond those of human abilities. In the Greco-Roman world there were good deities and bad deities, along with perpetual conflicts between the deities. Sometimes humans felt the brunt of victimization from these super terrestrial wars; at other times they suffered due to siding with the wrong set of deities.

In the Israelite - Jewish heritage of John experiencing evil in this world as a godly person came about due to the attacks of God’s main adversary, Satan. The Garden of Eden narrative in Genesis lays the foundation for this. To be sure this narrative was interpreted inside Judaism in some strange ways on occasion.

John in chapters twelve and thirteen presents a Christian view of the cosmic dimensions of this human struggle with evil in our world. His perspective sweeps across the totality of human history from the primordial defeat of Satan to his eventual total defeat at the end of human history.

In 12:13-17 we see the second of those defeats. He tried to destroy the Christ child (vv. 1-6) and then turns on His mother (vv. 13-17) only to be defeated again. In a final resort (vv. 13-17), he then turns on the other children of the mother, the followers of Christ on the earth, in a desperate attempt to harm them at least during the short time remaining for him (v. 12) before he is completely crushed by the Lamb at the end of history.

Why then do Christians suffer evil in this world? John’s answer here is simple. Satan is attacking you in a desperate effort to get at God before his demise. God’s plan is to totally rid the world of him at the end. During the interim we as God’s people must reach out to the sustaining power and help of our God through Christ Jesus.