

Ascending and descending in Revelation 11-12

by Douglas E. Cox

In Revelation 11 and 12, there are several things ascending and descending, and heaven and earth, the sun, moon, and stars, are prominent symbols.

In chapter 11:

- the two witnesses have power to *shut heaven*, [vs. 6]
- the beast *ascends* from the bottomless pit, [vs. 7]
- they hear a *great voice from heaven*, saying unto them, Come up hither, and they *ascend up to heaven* in a cloud, [vs. 12]
- the temple of God is opened *in heaven*, and the ark of the covenant is seen in it. [vs. 19]

In chapter 12:

- the sign of the woman clothed with *the sun* is seen *in heaven*, and *the moon* is under her feet [vs. 1]
- the dragon appears *in heaven*, [vs. 3]
- stars are drawn by his tail and *cast to the earth*, [vs. 4]
- the woman's child is caught up to *God's throne*, [vs. 5]
- there is *war in heaven*, [vs. 7]
- the dragon's place is not found *in heaven*, [vs. 8]
- the dragon is cast out to the *earth*, [vs. 9]

- the accuser of the brethren is *cast down*, [vs. 10]
- the *heavens* and those who *dwell in heaven* rejoice, [vs. 12]
- the woman is given *two wings of an eagle*, [vs. 14]

Jesus identified heaven as God's throne, earth as his footstool. [Matthew 5:34; 23:22] He quoted Isaiah.

Isaiah 66:1

Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?

The question "where is the place of my rest?" is connected with the house of God, and the throne of God. In Revelation 11:19, the temple of God is in heaven.

Paul taught that those who believe in Christ are raised up together, and "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." [Ephesians 2:6] This must refer to their status, as God's children; they have the opportunity to reign as kings and priests with Christ, right now, in their present lives. This is not referring to the after-life, as verse 5 shows. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." [Revelation 3:21]

Why is Satan pictured as a dragon in heaven, where he does not belong? And what is the war in heaven, that involves angels? The imagery corresponds to the warfare and spiritual conflict Paul discussed in Ephesians 6:10-18. He said, in verse 12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

There is "spiritual wickedness in high places," that is, among the saints, and in the church. The darkness of the world continues to influence people, when they believe in Christ. It does not instantly vanish, but there is a process of overcoming. The church has struggled with various forms of darkness, ignorance, partial understanding, flawed interpretations, etc., for centuries.

The sun which clothes the woman in heaven is the gospel, which is the great light mentioned in Matthew 4:16.

Christ reigns over all, and he is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." [John 1:9] This means spiritual light, which comes from believing God's word. The two witnesses are called candlesticks, which are meant to provide light, and they represent the Word of God and the Spirit, which are both sources of spiritual light; the psalmist wrote,

Psalms 119:105

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

The Lord is the light of the church.

Isaiah 60:20

Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.

The saints are called children of light:

Ephesians 5:8

For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

Paul said believers have been translated from the power of darkness into Christ's kingdom.

Colossians 1:12-13

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:

Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

In Revelation 11:7, the beast who ascends from the bottomless pit must refer to Satan, who is bound and cast into a bottomless pit. [Revelation 20:1-3] Jesus bound Satan, but in the experience of individual saints, Satan manages to slither out of his pit, and has made war with the two witnesses. He overcomes them, and kills them, that is the Spirit, and the light of God's word. Some no longer believe the Bible is God's word. This must be why the dragon appears in heaven in 12:3. But heaven is not his place. The saints who are faithful resist him. James wrote, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." [James 4:7]

The saints overcoming Satan by the word of their testimony and by the blood of the Lamb is the focus of Revelation 12. It is cause for those who dwell in heaven to rejoice. These are those who believe in Christ. The events described here correspond to the parable of the tares in Matthew 13. Jesus explained the parable to his disciples in Matthew 13:37-43. When the tares are removed from the wheat, he said, "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." [vs. 43] Similarly, Revelation 12:10 says, "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. . ." Recognizing that Jesus has all authority and power is the key here. He has been "made Christ," Peter said. [Acts 2:36] This implies he fulfills the promises of a Messiah who reigns forever on the throne of David. This throne is in heaven, in the heavenly Jerusalem, as the mountain of the Lord's

house was exulted to the top of the mountains, above the hills, when Jesus ascended to his Father's throne, as foretold in Isaiah 2:2. Jerusalem and mount Zion are heavenly, and spiritual. [Hebrews 12:22] On the other hand, according to the law of Moses, those Jews who reject Christ are cut off from Israel. Peter said:

Acts 3:22-24

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

John wrote:

1 John 2:22

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

The saints rejoice, but the prophecy says, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." [Revelation 12:12] This corresponds to the warnings of woe in Matthew 24:19.

What is meant by the two witnesses ascending to heaven? This event contrasts with Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven in Revelation 12:9.

Satan being cast out means he no longer deceives those who are in Christ; they overcome him by the word of their testimony, and by the blood of the Lamb. No place for him, or his doctrines, is found in heaven, and in the temple of God. He is cast out into the earth, with his angels, and the saints recognize Christ as their king.

The two witnesses hearing a great voice from heaven, and then ascending to heaven in a cloud in 11:12, contrasts with Satan and his angels being cast out of heaven in 12:9. The two witnesses ascending to heaven evidently represents the church's anointing with the *revived Spirit of God*, and believing the *living word of God*.