

THE SEPTEMBER 23 SIGN IN THE HEAVENS – WILL THE RAPTURE HAPPEN THEN?

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Considerable speculation exists that Revelation 12:1-2 prophesies a unique and significant sign that will appear on the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah (aka The Feast of Trumpets), this Fall. To be precise, the event transpires on September 23, 2017. Many speculate that because this arrangement of constellations and “wandering stars” (i.e., the constellation Virgo, the sun, the moon, along with a “crown of 12 stars” in Leo) must constitute a magnificent milestone fulfilling Bible prophecy since it has not appeared for thousands of years in this specific alignment. (The arrangement includes nine principal stars in Leo plus three planets, Mars, Venus, and Mercury all in nearby conjunction.¹) Could this collection of heavenly skylights be the fulfillment of Revelation 12:1-2? And is it even more meaningful that the sign will be “invisible” – not witnessed by human eyes – since it happens during the daylight when the sunlight obscures the conjunction? There is much to consider. But first, let’s review the passage in question:

Rev 12:1-6 ¹Now *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. ²Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 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. ⁴His 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. ⁵She 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. ⁶And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

There are three characters in this passage. There is a **woman**, there is a **male child**, and there is a fiery red **dragon** with seven heads and ten horns. No one disputes that the dragon represents the devil or *Satan*. And almost no scholar doubts that the woman represents *Israel*. After giving birth to the *male child*, the woman flees into the wilderness to a special sanctuary prepared by God for her safekeeping (traditional contends this is Petra, or Mount Seir). The passage also indicates that the dragon stands ready to devour the *male child* as soon as he is born. While the woman is preserved by fleeing into the wilderness, the male child is protected from the dragon – he escapes his clutches – through a very special “airlift” rescue. That is, the child is “snatched away” (in the Greek, *harpazo* – pronounced har-pod-zho), the same word (Strong’s G276) used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, “*Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (snatched up) together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*” Revelation 12:5 states that the child will rule the nations with a rod of iron. Surely then, the child is Jesus. However, if we take note that Revelation 2:27 has Jesus promising the Church at Thyatira they will rule the

¹The alignment is even more complex that space allowed me to express here. See <http://www.watchfortheday.org/1260tetrad.html> for a detailed explanation.

nations with a rod of iron, then we can't jump to the conclusion the male child is Jesus.² The Church will reign and rule with Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 2:12) – which includes the “rod of iron” descriptor.

Thus, we are left with a most definite impression that the male child who is “raptured” to heaven is not Jesus Christ (who ascended visibly into the clouds as witnessed by the Apostles), but *rather the Church of Jesus Christ who becomes fully one with Him*. If so (and as we will see, many commentators insist this the male child comprises the Church and its “snatching up” is the “rapture”), then it begs the question whether the astronomical event (the arrangements of stars, planets, sun and moon) which transpires on September 23, 2017, signifies the very moment when the rapture of the Church will occur.

Prophecy students recall that the rapture has often been taught to be a “secret rapture” (not visible to unbelievers). And they expect it to take place on a very special date just as all other major prophecies have. In other words, we know that the great prophecies of the Bible are fulfilled on precise days, days upon which a major event took place that prefigured (and disclosed the meaning of) its future fulfillment. Moreover, these events and the days commemorating them would become a Jewish feast day or holy day celebrated by God's chosen people. The death of Jesus Christ on Passover (the day that commemorated the first-born of Israel being spared death in Egypt just prior to the Exodus), would be the prototypical example.

Indeed, the pivotal point that energizes today's avid speculation is the Feast of Trumpets on September 23, 2017 and the rapture being the event that it prefigures. Many commentators assert the Male Child is in fact the Church, while they also generally infer the “snatching up” of Revelation 12:5 constitutes the rapture. Therefore, it is easy to conclude that the “sign” in the sky on September 23, 2017, on Rosh Hashanah, seems like such a logical time for the rapture to occur. However, we must realize that the fulfillment of Bible prophecy remains a mystery until AFTER it has been fulfilled and we can discern its fulfillment in light of all the evidence.

While many think that the rapture will occur on either (1) the Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) given the connection of the rapture with the “trump of God” (1 Corinthians 15:51), there are others that argue (2) Pentecost is a better date. It too is often cited by eschatology buffs since *two prior dispensations began on this date*. That is, the *Dispensation of Law* began with the giving of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai at Pentecost (Exodus 20) and the *Dispensation of Grace* commenced on Pentecost with the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2), the great spring harvest festival (with the harvest of 5,000 souls after Peter's sermon and the outflowing of the Spirit through the miraculous speaking of the acts of God through “tongues.” It was then the Holy Spirit “conceived” the Church when He came upon Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem 50 days after the Resurrection of Christ, which was ten days after His ascension. Will the Spirit “birth” the Church – consummate its glorification and unity with Christ and the Father (Ephesians 4:4-6) – at the resurrection/rapture on a future Pentecost? I believe something wonderful may happen on September 23, 2017. But we can only continue to watch and wait upon the Lord. If it is the pre-ordained time, we will know instantly when we are translated from mortal to immortal. “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” (1 John 3:2)

² Note the King James Version capitalizes Child, presuming the child is divine. The seventeenth-century translators therefore presumed (mistakenly I believe) that Jesus is the “exclusive” male child in Revelation 12.

But is this very special alignment the fulfillment of the Revelation 12 prophecy – is it the very day when the Church is gathered together to be with Christ and one another from thenceforth and forever? The arguments for and against are many and fall outside the scope of what we can cover here. Instead, what we can do is consider the evidence that the male child of Revelation 12 is the Church, but might also be a “double fulfillment” referring to both Jesus as well as the Church.

From his research, Dr. Michael Heiser asserts Revelation 12 constitutes an *astral* prophecy (astral in the sense of a *sign in the stars*, being astronomical, but not pertaining to the occult as in *astral projection*). He believes it foretold the birth and resurrection of Jesus. There are those that would agree the sign of Revelation 12 was present at the birth of Jesus.³ According to Heiser (and Ernest Martin in his book, *The Star of Bethlehem: The Star that Astonished the World*), this sign occurred on September 11, 3 B.C. One commentator summarizes the remarkable information in these words:

While Dr. Martin's date for the birth of Yeshua (Jesus) agrees exactly with what is in the Bible code, can we infer that the birth of Yeshua took place exactly between 6:15 to 7:49 pm on September 11, 3 BC? I believe that we can accept the time of birth as being 7 pm plus or minus an hour based on the exact sign in the sky.

What about the death of Herod as it relates to all this? After all, many scholars have said that king Herod died in 4 BC or 5 BC? Dr. Ernest L. Martin in his book, laboriously goes through each possibility for the death of king Herod and with a number of other scholars, proves that Herod died a couple of weeks after the total lunar eclipse of **January 10, 1 BC**. He pinpoints the date of death of Herod to about January 29, 1 BC plus or minus a couple of days.⁴ [Emphasis added]

However, author Gary Huffman and I (from our book, *The Revealing*) believe that Revelation 12:1-5, points to a *double fulfillment*. To be more specific, the signs in the heavens can refer to both the birth and resurrection (glorification) of Jesus, the messiah, as the “already” while the “not yet” is the soon to be accomplished glorification of the Body of Christ. The first fulfillment serves as the typology for the future realization of the second fulfillment. As you will see below, there are many classic commentaries that agree with the idea of a double fulfillment and that the second pertains to the birth of a child that is yet future, i.e., the Church. In this sense, Acts Chapter 2 (the coming of the Holy Spirit) can be viewed as the “conception” and the 2,000 years “in between” as incubation, the final portion of that era as Labor pains (an analogy that even Jesus used), with the birth occurring at the second fulfillment of Revelation 12:1-5. There were several authorities that we cite in our book:

- From the *Faith Life Study Bible*: “In Revelation, the number 12 is associated with the 12 tribes of Israel and also the 12 apostles as the Church’s foundation (Rev 21:14). Thus, the woman could symbolize the faithful people of God. The Messiah is born from God’s people, Israel, and His work continues with God’s people, the Church.”
- *Barnes’ Notes on the Bible*, on Revelation 12:5, voices the same opinion:

³ Heiser, Michael, "September 11: Happy Birthday to Jesus". See <http://drms.com/september-11-happy-birthday-to-jesus/>.

⁴ Roy A Reinhold, “Other Scholarship Proving the Exact Date of the Birth of Yeshua.” March 28, 2002, Retrieved from <http://ad2004.com/prophecytruths/Articles/Yeshua/yeshuabirth5.html>.

And she brought forth a man child - Representing, according to the view above taken, the church in its increase and prosperity - as if a child were born that was to rule over all nations. See the notes on Revelation 12:2. **Who was to rule all nations** - That is, according to this view, the church thus represented was destined to reign in all the earth, or all the earth was to become subject to its laws. Compare the notes on Daniel 7:13-14.⁵

- *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, regarding Revelation 12:5 agrees. The **male child** is the "mystical Christ", i.e., "his members, who are called by his name." Reading this statement in context:

And she brought forth a man child.... Not Christ, literally and personally considered, or Christ in his human nature, as made of a woman, and born of a virgin, which was a fact that had been years ago; but *Christ mystically, or Christ in his members, who are called by his name, because he is formed in them, and they are the seed of the woman, the church.*⁶

Another source who proposes identifying the male child with the Church is present-day scholar Michael J. Svigel, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. We draw from his paper, *The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation*. In his study, Svigel writes:

Within the smaller unit of chapter 12 itself, the woman and dragon are first introduced and the events of 12:1-6 appear to follow a general chronological order. The war in heaven of 12:7-12 appears to be an expansion of the fate of the dragon upon the catching up of the male child to heaven. Then, 12:3-18 recapitulates the events after the catching up of the male child, filling in details regarding the pursuit of the woman and the preservation initially described in 12:6 (pp. 27-28).

Svigel goes on to argue that Rev 12:5 refers the reader to Isaiah 66:7:

Thus, John's use of "poor grammar" in Revelation 12:5 is intended to point the reader back to the images of Isaiah 66:7, which reads: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she gave birth to a boy." The next verse demonstrates that the woman and child are not intended to represent individuals, but rather assemblies: "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 sons." The passage switches from the singular "son" to the plural "sons," and describes the birth of "a land" and "a nation" (p. 29).

On the identity of the Male Child, Svigel says:

"The Male Child. The crux of the argument of this paper lies with the identification of the male child born to the woman, Israel. The following section will examine this identification in greater depth. In preview, it will be argued that the male child born to the woman has, like the dragon, and possibly the woman, a double referent, one an individual, Jesus Christ, the other a corporate body, the Church. Five main arguments for this identification will be given: 1) the consistency in symbolism in Revelation 12; 2) the significance of the allusion to Isaiah 66:7-8; 3) the lexical issues involving the snatching up of the male child; 4) the identification of the male

⁵ Retrieved from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/12-5.htm>.

⁶ Ibid.

child as the one who will “rule over all the nations with an iron rod;” and 5) the absence of the death and resurrection of the Messiah argues for the identification of the male child with the Church. (p.30)

Svigel’s paper continues to expand those five points to insist that the **male child** *is the raptured body of Christ along with its head, Jesus Christ*. The paper is well worth reading, as he goes through the major views of the Rapture and looks at when it may occur in the timeline of Revelation.⁷

Thus, we conclude that the man-child the woman (Israel) brings forth is one who overcomes, and who believes (many so believe) – as written to the Seven churches in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3). We know that God the Father, brought forth one Son by Israel (in Mary) but that He must be joined to *many mature sons* to be one Body for the Messiah, Jesus. And when He comes in glory with them, they will rule and reign with Him.

Rev 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and *reigned with Christ for a thousand years*.

To expand further: the “man-child,” in the Greek says, “male son,” or *vios* (meaning a *mature son*, ready to rule the Father’s house).

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.

“That **they** should feed her there.” Could the “they” be members of the Body of Christ? Might they participate in the care of those Jews that flee to the wilderness? Might the “man-child” nourish the woman in the wilderness for 3½ years? We know that this period lasts for a 3½ years. And, likewise, it is agreed that a biblical, prophetic year is 360 days. Therefore, 1260 days = 3½ x 360 days, or 3½ years. There is no question that this period of safekeeping transpires during the same period that the Antichrist seeks to destroy Jews and those who have become believers during the Great Tribulation. The male child has been snatched up. But might those that comprise the male child continue to minister on earth, especially to the woman who has fled to the wilderness? (We discuss the many arguments for this ministry by the glorified saints in our book, *The Revealing: Unlocking Hidden Truths on the Glorification of God’s Children*).

But, to conclude, consider yet one more scripture which seems to reinforce that those who have fled will be comforted by the LORD. Might he minister through His body to those living in Petra, awaiting the return of the Messiah to conquer the Antichrist and bring an end to his rule of terror and the persecution and killing of those who have been martyred for the cause of Christ? “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, *will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her.*” (Hosea 2:14)

⁷ Svigel, Michael J., "The Apocalypse of John and the Rapture of the Church: A Reevaluation." *Trinity Journal* 22 (2001). 23-74. See <https://bible.org/article/apocalypse-john-and-rapture-church-reevaluation>.

Gary L. Huffman and S. Douglas Woodward, *The Revealing: Unlocking Hidden Truths on the Glorification of God's Children*, Faith Happens Books, 340 pages, 2017. Available in paperback and eBook form from Amazon at this link: [THE REVEALING](#).