

The Great Red Dragon and the Woman – Rev. 12

Prayer: Father we indeed stand in awe of this depiction of the history of our world, and especially of the age in which we are now living. Help us that our minds might become adept at understanding the picture-book imagery in this book and that we might especially be able to understand its relevance and application in our own lives, and that we may see clearly what is our calling, as the followers of Christ, in this world. ... in His name we pray. Amen

Begin by reading Revelation 12 ...

Intro. Revelation 12 presents the history of the world in the imagery of a **great Red Dragon, a woman and a child**. Richard Phillips argues that every child should be as familiar with Rev. 12 as they are with Psalm 23! Rev. 12 should resonate in our hearts just as the comforting words of Psalm 23. This chapter presents a picture of the history of the world as God’s great eternal purpose unfolds. It explains the cause behind all the trouble in the world, and it assures us there is a God in heaven who has everything well in control, despite appearances to the contrary that often trouble our hearts.

This is the story of how Satan has sought to destroy “*the seed of the woman*” from the start [Gen. 3:15 – “*You will bruise his heel and he will crush your head*”]. Think of all the examples in the Old Testament: think of Haman in the time of Esther; ... King Herod in Matthew [trying to slay all the male children born in Bethlehem; ... Satan is trying to keep the Messiah from coming [that’s **verses 1-6**, and it connects the fall of Satan with all this]. That’s the first part of rev. 12 ...

Starting in **verse 7**, ... it goes on to picture our era of church history; ... it goes on to picture Satan’s warfare against God’s people. Satan suffered a terrible defeat [a “crushing” defeat] in the coming of the Messiah [Christ]. But, nevertheless, he continues to ‘rage’ with the resources he has left. The key point here is that in the church age [from the incarnation – the FIRST coming of Christ into the world, to the SECOND coming] we need to understand that the entire church age is marked by the rage and the anger of the fallen one [and this is the reason the N.T. places such emphasis on “Spiritual Warfare” in the Christian’s life – Eph. 6, ... II Cor. 10:3-5]!

The theme of this section is the defeat that Satan suffered because of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ! V. 7 speaks of “war in heaven” ... Therefore, spiritual warfare is not something that only happens on earth. In fact, the spiritual warfare of greatest importance is probably that which occurs in heaven. ‘Michael’ is not mentioned here for the first time. In **Daniel 10** [where we are told that Michael was one of the chief princes among the angels] we read another passage which seems to suggest conflict in the spiritual realm of heaven, ... and Michael is involved! ... Remember, Daniel has prayed and asked for his people to be forgiven and to be released from the Babylonian captivity and to be returned to Jerusalem. And, Daniel was told that his prayer was heard and an angel was dispatched as soon as he prayed. ... But, the angel’s passage was blocked by an evil angel. And it was only when Michael came to help, that Daniel’s angel could get through [Dan. 10:13]. ... NOTE: this is cosmic warfare in the spiritual realm! – Dan. 10:2-4 tells us it was Daniel’s persistence in prayer and intercession that provided the spiritual resources for Michael to intercede [This demonstrates the importance of Paul’s admonition to Christians to always keep praying – Eph. 6:18 – immediately after his admonition to “put on the whole armor of God” in that passage. i.e. it demonstrates the Christian’s ability to influence cosmic spiritual warfare, even in heaven, through prayer!].

And, the book of Daniel ends with the promise that during the trials of the church age shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people [Dan. 12:1]. So, Richard Phillips says, this passage [Rev. 12:7-8] is the fulfillment of the holy war Daniel had predicted [i.e. Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and his angels and the dragon and his angels fighting back].

To understand this passage, we must understand **WHEN** this great battle took place. Verse 12 provides the answer: it was during the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, ... particularly as it culminated with his ascension into heaven. Verse 13 says that after the dragon had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman that had given birth to the male child. That means that at the inauguration of the church age, i.e. actually before the church age began, Satan was cast down from heaven. And, why is that? It's because of Jesus' great victory on the cross, crowned with His ascension to heaven's throne. Satan and his armies were defeated [Col. 2:13-15]; ... there was no longer any place for them in heaven [vv. 8-9]. ... And, **what does it mean for the devil to be thrown down out of heaven?** Verse 10 answers this question [says Phillips]: "the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before God." ... Phillips explains: "What this means is that because of Jesus' death, burial resurrection and ascension, Satan has been kicked out of 'the bar association' of heaven." **I John 2:1-2** says that Jesus now appears in heaven before the throne of God the Father, and that He appears as our "advocate." And **Romans 8:1** says **there is now "no condemnation"** for those who are in Christ! ... Satan has lost his arguing privileges in the court of heaven before God! He is no longer allowed to go in and out before the presence of God to accuse Christians before God [cf. Job 1:6-12]! Satan lost his arguing privilege in heaven. Phillips points out that the "war in heaven" should therefore be viewed as a legal battle that was lost by Satan, and **Michael** the angel acted as the bailiff to enforce the court's decree against the "prosecuting attorney" [Satan] by removing him from the courtroom in heaven [v. 9].

Note: Satan is described as "*that ancient serpent*" that led our first parents and led astray our entire race into sin and condemnation [Adam and Eve – Rom. 5:12]. V.9 he is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. The name "Devil" means 'slanderer,' 'accuser.' "The word "Satan" means 'adversary' of God's people. He's the accuser who is the adversary. And he works as a deceiver of the world and thereby holds them in the bondage of unbelief [II Cor. 4:4]. And this tells us how Satan wages war against God's people. He wants to 'deceive' you! He wants to 'accuse you of sin in the courtroom of God [which he no longer can do], and also in your own conscience [Therefore the importance of I Jn. 1:9 ff].

The New Testament clearly associates this great event [the casting down of satan out of heaven] with the saving work of Jesus Christ in his first coming:

1. Luke 10:18 – "*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*" – Jesus foresaw that the news of his impending death and resurrection [the Gospel] had removed Satan from heaven!
2. John 12:31 – "*Now is the ruler of this world cast out.*" – Here again, Jesus was speaking of his impending death on the cross.

So the casting out of Satan is accomplished by Christ's atoning death and by the preaching of it! Note, this passage says that Jesus himself was filled with joy at the report of the 72 disciples. This is because he knew that this was the end of Satan's campaign of accusation and deceit.

And now that Jesus himself has ascended to heaven before the throne of God to defend us, his presence has forever barred Satan from appearing to accuse us [Rom. 8:1]. – [Again, ... Michael was the policeman, the balif who enforced this decree against Satan – casting Satan from the courts of heaven – vv. 7-8.]

Now, given the importance and significance of this passage, we are to understand what part **we** are to play in defeating the accuser of the brethren:

1. **Verse 11** suggests that Christians also have a part in routing the devil from his position as accuser in heaven! And here's how: "***They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony!***"
 - a. It is by Christ's blood that believers are able to overturn/overthrow the accusations of the devil [I Jn. 1:7].

b. The very reason Satan appeared in heaven was to accuse the brethren.

c. **Zechariah 3:** - Joshua, the high priest, appears to intercede for his people before God, ... but he is clothed with filthy garments. And so there he stands before God to intercede for all the people of God [to plead for their release from the Babylonian exile, with Satan at his right hand. – And Satan argues: “Look at this man standing before you! He himself is a sinner! ... and what’s really bad is that Satan has all the ammunition he needs to win the case as the ‘Prosecuting Attorney’ before God in the courtroom of heaven [Zech. 3:3]! Israel was in bondage in Babylon because of the filth of their sin and their idolatry! And the history of Israel is replete with their sins against God; and therefore prior to Jesus’ death, Satan had a good case against the people of God. ... [Think of David [II Sam. 11] - Satan could bring up about Bathsheba and Uriah!]. Or, Satan could bring up Moses, the murderer. And so it was for all the Old Testament saints. And yet, God had admitted their souls into heaven!]

But then when Christ Himself came into heaven to plead His own blood for the remission of sins, everything was changed. [We must recall that the O.T. record of types and shadows did not rely on the shedding of blood and the slaughter of sacrificial lambs; ... **the blood had to be presented before the altar of God by the priest of God!** – It took not only the slaying of the lamb and the shedding of blood, but also **the priestly presentation of the blood before God.** ... And **that took place** [in fulfillment of all the O.T. types and shadows] **when Christ Himself entered into heaven, having shed his own blood [as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” – Jn. 1:29]. This climactic event had cosmic implications!** Now the redeemed no longer had any charge against them in the justice of God! The law had been satisfied! *“The wages of sin is death”* and Jesus, the Son of God, had died a substitutionary death for the sins of the world – **Isa. 53:6; II Cor. 5:21.** – When the sin has been removed, - there can be no accusation!

And, going back to Zechariah 3 – “The Angel of the Lord,” was the preincarnate Christ Himself, who said: “remove the filthy garments from him!” Imagine the misery of Joshua, the high priest of Israel, who knew his sinful failures and his hypocrisy as he stood before the lord to intercede for his people; ... and then, the Lord said: *“remove the filthy garments from him!”* [Zech. 3:2] – Zechariah doesn’t tell us what happened to those ‘filthy garments,’ but we now know that the Lord took the filthy garments and put them on himself [II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:6]. i.e., not only did Jesus take on himself the stench and the filth of our garments, **he also placed upon us his own righteousness to make us acceptable in the Father’s sight!** The apostle Paul rejoiced then, in Romans 8:1: *“There is now, therefore, no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.”* And this means that if you have truly embraced Jesus and believed on him as your savior and Lord, Satan has lost his ability to accuse you before God!

Obviously, this does not mean we have not sinned. But **I John 1:7** says: : the blood of Jesus, God’s son, cleanses us from all sin! [cf. **Charles Wesley’s “And Can it Be?”** – esp. the last verse!]. Christians conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb. ...

“No condemnation now I dread: Jesus, and all in Him, is mine! Alive in Him, my living Head, And clothed in righteousness divine, Bold I approach th’ eternal throne, And claim the crown, thru Christ my own. Amazing love! How can it be ... That Thou, my God shouldst die for me.”

And **Christians also conquer Satan by the word of their testimony!** You see, Satan wants the news of his defeat kept quiet! ... [example: the 72 disciples Christ sent out; ... they conquered Satan’s forces through their preaching of the gospel; this was *“the word of their testimony”*: ... and, they returned rejoicing because even the demons submitted to them]. Everyone in the world, including our friends and loved ones, suffer from a guilty conscience and the fear of death and judgment. Christians know the answer to this in the gospel of grace, and they can help others to also conquer by telling the truth [testifying about the good news!] about Christ and his victory over sin and guilt [i.e. *“... they overcame him by the word of their testimony and by the power of the blood”!*]

Eph. 4:8-15 –

⁸This is why it says:

“When he ascended on high,
he took many captives
and gave gifts to his people.”

⁹(What does “he ascended” mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? ¹⁰He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) ¹¹So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹²to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

¹⁴Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

D.A. Carson writes: “The host of darkness are pushed back by Christians bearing witness, giving testimony to who God is, and what he has done in Christ Jesus. How else can we push back against Satan and his forces of darkness? We will be defeated if we simply stay silent! If you never share the gospel with anybody else, you yourself are defeated. You are not pushing back against the frontiers of darkness. This is how Satan is defeated by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony.”

Thirdly [i.e. first, ‘by the blood of Christ,’ and second, ‘by the word of their testimony’] Christians conquer [verse 11] **because they love not their lives even unto death.** Since Christ has saved us by his blood, we not only proclaim the Gospel, but we hold onto it for our own salvation, yes, even unto death. We embrace all manner of suffering for Christ’s sake, including the daily battle we are called upon to wage in our daily sanctification. Carson points out that suffering will take different forms for each of us. Some of us will be called upon to suffer intellectually. We will be mocked for taking up our cross and daily following Jesus with our minds. For others it will be actual physical suffering that they will have to endure. It is not easy to suffer for Christ in this present evil age. But **a true believer will endure anything rather than leave off trusting in Jesus Christ.**

James Hamilton writes: “It is better to die trusting in Christ and clinging to the Gospel than to go on living by denying that gospel. Without the gospel, when you stand before God all Satan’s accusations will ring true and you will be damned with him.” ... This shows how important it is that we confess our sins [I Jn. 1:9] and that we become and remain faithful friends at the cross.

>The final verses of chapter 12 go on to explain the situation for Christians and the church after this victory; ... after the ascension of Christ into heaven and the casting of Satan down to the earth. ... There are two results of all this. The **first** is the eternal rejoicing in heaven of its inhabitants. The **second** is the temporary suffering of the church on earth. [Read verses 10-12 re. the eternal rejoicing in heaven]. Christ’s work of redemption on earth has brought the promised salvation. It has established Christ’s authority as Savior and Lord.

What better news can anyone ever hope to hear?

Satan the accuser has been cast down ...

The victory is won ...

Salvation is secured ...

The kingdom of God is launched ...

And, ... There is Christ seated in heaven, reigning on high ...

Story of Doug Kelly – growing up in a strict N.C. town where dancing was forbidden. But the day when the announcement came that WW II was ended, everyone lost their restraint, and there was dancing in the street! The evil enemy had been defeated and cast down and the joy was too compelling to remain unemotional – the energy of rejoicing had to be expressed! – How much greater the joy in heaven over the defeat and the casting down of Satan! – For Christians, it is the joy of sinners being reconciled to a long estranged heavenly Father!

***But this victory also brings temporary suffering here on earth!** [Read verse 12]. This final section shows the attempts of Satan to afflict the church on earth since he can no longer accuse Christians in heaven. [Read verse 13 – this (the woman) represents the church]. Satan seeks to harm the church and believers in time, because he can no longer touch us in eternity! [Read verse 17] ...

The fury of Satan: The history of WW II indicates that after D-Day [when the Allied Forces had landed in Normandy in June of 1944], the war was essentially over, and Hitler was effectively doomed to lose. Hitler's Generals even tried to convince him to negotiate an end to the war. But Hitler, in his madness and fury, did the exact opposite! He did everything he could to inflict pain on the nations of Europe and to hurt them. An example is the U-2 missile campaign he waged on the cities of England. It was during this time that over a thousand U-2 missiles landed in England and took the lives of thousands of individuals. This is also the period in which Hitler greatly elevated the persecution of Jewish people [i.e. the death camps – Auschwitz, Birkenau]

Amazing fact: Satan persecutes the church, not because he thinks he can take away our salvation; ... but because he knows he cannot!

Actually, the opposition to Christians, in this point of history, and the persecution of Christians confirms that we belong to Christ! Ours should be the attitude of Peter and his companions in Acts 5, when they were arrested and persecuted for preaching the gospel. Acts 5:41, ... having been beaten and persecuted, they rejoiced to be counted worthy to suffer for Christ!

Satan's time for persecuting us is short, and he knows it. But our time of rejoicing in heaven will be forever.

Lastly, John was shown God's provision and protection for the woman when she is driven into the wilderness of this world to flee the persecution of the Great Red Dragon. Verse 14 says she was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness to a place where she will be nourished "*for a time, times and a half time.*" ... This is Old Testament imagery! The O.T. often spoke of God carrying His people out of danger "on wings of an eagle." The Exodus was described in that way. And it symbolizes God's supernatural intervention to deliver his people from danger.

And the expression "*for a time, times and a half time,*" is 1260 days or three and a half years. Phillips mentioned that it is seldom appreciated that this is a symbol for the tribulation of the church in the present age that came from the persecution by Antiochus Epiphanies in the inter-testamental time of the Maccabees. That terrible persecution lasted three and a half years. And that description/"expression ... became a symbol, ... a well-known metaphor for a short time of persecution though it will be very intense. Phillips compares this

to the term “1776.” If you’re an American, you know what this means: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Revolutionary war, the founding of our nation. ... For Jews of this time, “Three and a half years” meant ... “Oh, the the time of Antiochus Epiphany.” A short, definite, but terrible time of persecution that ends in the victory of the church. It symbolizes the tribulation of the church throughout this age.

So, God not only brings us out of danger into safety, he sees to it that we are “nourished” [i.e. He causes our faith to be nourished, ... He feeds us in the desert! Primarily through the heavenly “mana” of His Word! And yet Satan still seeks/attempt to rage! Verse 15 – **Satan poured water, like a river, out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away in the flood** [it’s one thing after another]. And his deceits are like a flood that would drown us, just the way that Pharaoh wanted to drown Israel in the waters of the Red Sea, ... but that didn’t work out very well for him, did it? ... God intervenes to save us! [cf. **Isa. 41:10** “... *be not dismayed,*” – i.e. do not be “bewildered” or “overwhelmed” amidst the flood of trials, tribulations and persecutions of life in this world as believers. See also: **Isa. 43:1-4**]

In **Rev. 1:6** there is a double edged sword coming out of Christ’s mouth [the Gospel], to save and to judge in righteousness; but **here, in contrast**, we see what is coming out of Satan’s mouth. The flood of lies and deceit, by which he seeks to sweep away the unsettled, the unstable, and the unwary. “But the earth came,” verse 16, “to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth to swallow the river that the dragon had poured from its mouth.” This alludes to the time of the Exodus, when Korah and Nathan (?) and Abiron, when they opposed Moses. And the earth opened up and swallowed them up [Numbers 16 – a **demonstration of the supernatural power of God intervening on behalf of His people!**]. And these images are meant to encourage troubled Christians who are going through such times to pray. God has supernatural means of safeguarding the Christians in such times. Satan’s flood seems overwhelming, ... but we are reminded that God is greater and His power will swallow up the flood of deceit and lies that Satan has spewed out [Read from **Psalm 32:6-7, 10** – protection in the great waters – protection, deliverance! Cf. **Psa. 5:12; Psa. 34:7; Rom. 8:28**]. Even in this wilderness life, He saves us and protects us and sees us through! Protecting us from deadly danger.

Story of Namouri – native on island Payton ... So, what will happen if we preach the gospel as Namouri did, without being distracted by every excuse and without fear, even the fear of death? If we will daily embrace the cross-bearing death of Jesus. If we will seize by faith the victory of Christ’s blood and fearlessly proclaim his gospel... without concern for suffering and loss, yes, even death? Satan will be cast down from his little thrones of his slaves. And the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ will come and heaven itself will rejoice, and those who live in it will give great praise to God [verses 10 & 12].

We will conquer by the blood of the Lamb.

Prayer: Lord deliver us from the delights and preoccupations of this world, that we may see with the eyes of faith the reality of what you are doing behind the scenes of this world. ... And move us to step out in faith to participate in this great drama and to experience in our own lives the victory that comes through the blood of Christ to overcome Satan in each of our own lives, and in your church here on earth.