



Revelation Class #7: Revelation 12: The Heart of the Book

REVELATION 12 outlines the decisive characters in the great controversy--*their warfare for the hearts of humanity* as seen from **heaven's vantage point**.

Revelation 12:1-4

A **great sign** appeared in heaven: a **woman clothed with the sun**, with the **moon** under her feet and a crown of **twelve stars** on her head. She was **pregnant** and cried out in pain as she was **about to give birth**. Then **another sign** appeared in heaven: an **enormous red dragon** with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. **Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky** and flung them to the earth.

Many scholars believe John drew imagery for this scene *from both the Old Testament and earlier pagan mythology*. The major actors appear in the earlier redemption myths of **Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece**. They are a **celestial pregnant woman** whose **son** is to rule the nations and an **evil usurper** (*usually a multiple-headed dragon*) bent on *murdering the rightful heir at birth*; but whose plan is foiled and finally defeated by the **now grown true king**. Beasley-Murray believed that by using these familiar elements and declaring their realization in the death/resurrection of Christ, "*John has at a stroke claimed the fulfillment of all pagan hope and Old Testament promise in the Christ of the Gospel.*"¹

John sets the stage by introducing **two "great signs" (semeion)**, the pregnant **woman** in the heavens (12:1-2) and the great red **dragon** pursuing her (12:3-4).²

The **first 11 chapters** began with **the sign of Christ** radiant as the **sun** and holding the **7 stars** (1:16). Now the **final 11 chapters** begin with **the sign of the Church**, symbolized as a woman robed in the **sun**, standing on the **moon**, and wearing **12 stars** as a crown. Both Christ and the Church are designated in scripture as the "*light of the world*" (John 8:12; Matt 5:14). Their unity

¹ The Babylonian's **Marduk**, the Persian's **Son of Ormuzd**, the Egyptian's **Horus** and the Greek's **Apollo** are all mythical expressions of pagan piety and religious yearning, which **Jesus alone can fulfill** (Beasley-Murray, pp. 196, 192-95). But see also Morris' comments on "ill-digested pagan myths" in Morris, *Revelation*, p. 156.

² Johnson points out that while no "signs" or portents of great events appeared in Rev 1-11, there are seven signs in chaps. 12-19 (cf. the seven significant pre-cross "signs" or attesting miracle of Jesus Christ in John's gospel: 2:11; 4:54; 5:8-9; 6:11-14; 6:19-21; 9:7ff.; 11:43-47). Alan F. Johnson, "Revelation," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 12:510. John also has one post-resurrection "sign" (Jn. 21:1-14). The majority of the signs in Revelation are judgments on evil or demonic deceptions designed to turn men away from the two great miracles of divine grace: Christ and the church (Rev 1:5-6; 12:1; cf. John 20:30-31). Beyond these two signs--the "everlasting gospel" of Christ; and His messengers, the church--God offers no further miracles to persuade mankind until the final hour of judgments (Rev 15:1, cf. Heb 1:1-3).

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and shared victory are the constant and central theme of John's visions in Rev 12-14.³

The **woman** is initially portrayed as “*in heaven*” (12:1). This is a theological statement of her judicial standing before God—not a description of her physical location. Through their union with Jesus Christ, His people already reside *with their Lord* in the heavenly Jerusalem (14:1; Gal 4:26; Eph 2:6; Heb 12:22-23; Phil 3:20). Our acquittal and standing before God is an accomplished fact by our trust in His saving righteousness (Rev 7:12-14; 22:14; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

The **woman clothed in celestial Light** stands in obvious contrast to the vile **harlot**, the **city Babylon**, pictured in Rev 17-18. Both include people from “*every nation, tribe, tongue and people*” (Rev 5:9; 7:9; cf. 14:8; 17:15). The **harlot**, having **cast aside her celestial garments** (cf. 16:15), is dressed in the purple and scarlet of human pomp, pride, and passion (17:4; 18:3, 5, 7). She has murdered the witnesses of Jesus (17:6), and in her is found “the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth” (18:24). Yet the saints are called to rejoice, for God executes “*judgment upon her*” (i.e., destroys the harlot, 18:20; 19:2) for them.

A **wedding banquet** awaits the **pure woman** at the end of her sojourn in the wilderness (19:7-8); but the drunken, **fornicating harlot**—the “*great city*” and all its inhabitants are racing toward the “*hour of judgment*” (18:10, 19) and final annihilation.⁴

The 2nd heavenly sign (*semeion*) is “**a great red dragon**” (12:3). His **7 heads** wear **7 crowns** (*diademata*) and **10 horns** (kingly power). Hengstenberg said: “Prophecy and history respecting

³ Genesis 1:16-17 records: “*God made the two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, and the lesser light to govern the night; He made the stars also*” (NIV). The sun, moon, and stars were the God-given sources for light upon the earth. Aptly **John's pure woman is clothed in all three, she is arrayed as a light-bearer from head to foot**. In this she is intended to be the **emblem of divine light for men, that is, the true Church clothed in the righteousness of Christ—the true life-giving light of the world** (John 1:9; Matt 5:14). Of the phrase “clothed with the sun,” is to be adorned in God's glory [the sun]; it is to possess in faith the full New Testament revelation of Christ and His atoning righteousness (Rev 21:23; cf. Matt 17:2; 2 Cor 4:6; Isa 60:1-3), which had been prefigured in the reflected light of typology and prophecy in the Old Testament (i.e., the moon). See further discussions of these symbols in: Hengstenberg, *Revelation*, 1:453; and Morris, *Revelation*, p. 156.

⁴ For a further discussion of these symbolic women, see Edgar J. Brunns, “The Contrasted Women of Apocalypse 12 and 17,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (October 1964): 450-60. In Rev 12 the woman is seen, not only as the mother of the man-child but also as the representative of those who put their faith in Him *after* His ascension—a people identified as “the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus” (12:17, KJV). In her totality then the woman represents the messianic community of both dispensations, as Swete suggests: “Doubtless the Church of the Old Testament was the Mother of whom Christ came after the flesh. But here, as everywhere in the book, no sharp dividing line is drawn between the Church of the Old Testament and the Christian Society; the latter is viewed as the Jewish church come to its maturity. Thus, the woman who gave birth to the Christ is identical with her who after his departure suffered for her faith in Him, and who is the mother of believers” (Swete, p. 146). Joseph's dream in the Old Testament (Gen 37:9-11) where the sun, moon, and twelve stars represent the whole family of Israel supports the interpretation that the woman points to the faithful of both dispensations, as does the fact of **her continued existence for 1260 days after the ascension** of her Lord.

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God's kingdom only come to their main point when the conflict between Christ and Satan is brought into view.”⁵ The dragon’s introduction reveals the **true antagonist who inspires human suffering**; and the scorn and persecution inflicted upon the church.

The dragon is red, the color of blood (6:4), identifying his vicious seeking to destroy mankind: “*He was a murderer from the beginning*”; “*Cain was of the evil one, and slew his brother*” (John 8:44; 1 John 3:12). Concerning the dragon's kingdom John wrote: “*I saw the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus*” (Rev 17:6).

The dragon has **7 heads**. He is the **source-point of all human cruelty**, and oppression by all kingdoms (7 crowns) and villains throughout history through which the dragon has exercised his power (Rev 17:9-10; Isa 27:1; Eze 29:3). **His 10 horns** indicate **his dominance over all the kingdoms of the earth**:

Luke 4:5-7

The **devil** led Jesus up to a high place and showed him in an instant **all the kingdoms of the world**. He said to Him: “I will give You all their authority and splendor; *it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to*. If You worship me, it will all be Yours!”

He is the power and ruthless intelligence behind the world’s evil. His supernatural allies are *those angels who by his deception (his tail)* were cast down with him (Rev 12:4, 9; Daniel 8:10).

The Male Child: Next we see what seems a hopeless situation, followed by an amazing reversal. Who is more helpless to defend herself than a **pregnant woman** in the *final stage of labor*, except perhaps her **newborn baby**?

Revelation 12:4-5 [LEAVE UP]

The **dragon** stood in front of the **woman** who was about to **give birth**, so that it might **devour her Child** the moment He was born. She gave birth to a **Son**, a male Child, who “*will rule all the nations* with an iron scepter.” And **her Child** was snatched up **to God** and to **His throne**.

The **woman’s Child** and the **dragon** (“*that ancient serpent*” 12:9) point to **Genesis 3:15**, the first Gospel promise and prophecy of a Redeemer whose death would destroy the devil:⁶

⁵ Hengstenberg, 1:458.

⁶ The woman and her seed in Rev 12 is drawn from Gen 3:15 and thus, as Huntingford sees the union of the prophecy in the first and the last books of Holy Writ: “We are in one sense taken back to the very beginning of things, for we have here the promised Seed of the woman, and His battle with the great deceiver of our first parents. If Moses teaches us how Paradise was lost; these visions reveal to us how Paradise is to be regained. This vision in the last book of Holy Scripture reveals the mystery of the earliest prophecy in the first” (Huntingford, p. 192).

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Genesis 3:15

So, the Lord God said to the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. **He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel.**”

Revelation 12:6

The **woman** fled into the **wilderness** to a *place prepared for her by God*, where she might be taken care of for **1,260 days**.

Once her Child is safely enthroned, the vision returns to the fate of the woman (the church) who also seems doomed to destruction before the superior power and size of the dragon. John delights in setting up such **seemingly hopeless contrasts** (a **Lamb** [*Arnion*] versus a monstrous seven-headed **beast** [*therion*], 13:1-14:1). This is done to remind us that the earthly appearance of things is not the true and final reality. The **final word always belongs to God**, who protects the woman as He did her Child. Thus the evil designs of the dragon are doubly frustrated.

The **woman** is nourished **1260 days** in a place prepared for her in the **wilderness**.

Verse 6 anticipates the **last 5 verses** of chapter 12 and *parallels the Exodus story*.

Following their redemption from Egypt, God’s **Old Covenant people** were sustained in the wilderness until entering the promised land. Now the **New Covenant people** of God, *after their redemption from Satan’s domain*, are also sustained in the wilderness for **1260 days** as they journey toward the New Earth.

Ancient Israel “*all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the same spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ*” (1 Cor 10:3-4).

Now the church is also led into the wilderness to be miraculously sustained by God with heavenly provisions: the manna of **Christ’s Word** (Rev 2:17; cf. John 6:63) and the living waters of **Christ’s Spirit** (Revelation 22: 1; cf. John 7:38-39).

For **1260 days** the **church** receives divine nourishment, a time identical to the **1260 days** of Christ’s **two witnesses** (11:3), and the **42 months** of the **Beast’s dominance** over the world (13:5). The **1260 days** and the **42 months** are **synonymous**. The Israelites had **42 encampments** from their **departure** from Egypt and their **entrance** into the promised land (Num 33).⁷ The **wilderness** is *more than a symbol of suffering* for the church. It denotes trust: dependance

⁷ Wilcock suggested a second reason that the **1260 days** were chosen to designate the entire time of the ministry of the church in a hostile world: because it **approximates the time between Christ’s baptism and ascension**. As Christ went, so His spiritual body the church follows. It is called to minister for three and a half symbolic years between its “baptism” at Pentecost until its ascension to meet the Lord at His return. As mentioned in the comments on 11:3 the New Testament also ascribes three and a half years to the drought which resulted from Elijah’s prophesying and praying (Luke 4:25; Jas 5: 17). See Wilcock, p. 130.

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on divine provision and protection during its entire earthly pilgrimage, like the 42 encampments of Israel--until it too enters the promised land. Verses **6 and 14** make this promise explicit.

Moving the woman from **heavenly glory to a wilderness** ties together our heavenly status (in Christ) and the visible earthly state of God's people. Says Schick: "*Ideal and visible, supernatural reality and earthly appearance, eternal destiny and the transitory circumstances of the Church--all this is caught up in the few strokes of this changing image.*"⁸

Revelation 12:7-9

Then **war** broke out in heaven. **Michael** and **his angels** fought against the dragon, and the **dragon** and **his angels** fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was cast down—that **ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan**, who **leads the whole world astray**. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation 12:7-8 is a warfare scene modeled on the **pre-creation struggle in heaven** between good and evil.⁹ But this is about more than the original defection of evil angels. As elsewhere in Revelation, the narrative found in **12:7-9** can only be interpreted correctly by the **hymn** which follows in **12:10-12**.

The hymn explains that the cosmic battle of Michael and the dragon *is a symbolic representation of the redeeming work of Christ*, the same work described in **Rev 1:5; 7:14; and 5:9**. "*The ejection of the dragon from heaven is, in fact, a pictorial expression of the Atonement.*"¹⁰

Michael takes the offensive action. The **dragon** puts up a vigorous defense, but his resistance is futile. The earthly reality behind this scene is the birth of Christ, His holy life, and substitutionary death on the cross. It highlights the paradox that **Jesus, through apparent weakness and defeat, defeated the dragon**.

This scene portrays **the power of self-sacrificing love conquering the selfish love of power**. Christ appeared to "*destroy the devil's work*," but He accomplished this goal only by laying down His own life, and thereby He destroyed "*him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil*" (1 John 3:8; Heb 2:14).

⁸ Schick, 2:8.

⁹ See **Eze 28:11-19; Jude 6; 2 Pet 2:4; Luke 10:18**. "The idea of a fall which the rebellious spirits experienced before time began, when they were defeated by the angels who remained loyal in the service of God, stands behind these portrayals. To this extent an explanation concerning the origin of evil is also contained in their substrata; evil is present in the world, not as an external principle but in the shape of originally good angels, powerful spirits who fell away from God and were therefore cast out" (Schick, 2: 10).

¹⁰ Kiddle, p. 223.

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There is strong Biblical evidence for interpreting the Danielic figure of **Michael** as **Christ** Himself. The name **Michael** means “**Who is like God?**” He is the **archangel**, which can be translated as: “**above [or over] the angels.**” In **1 Thessalonians 4:16** Paul declares that “*the LORD Himself shall descend with the voice of the archangel.*” In **Jude 9** it is the archangel **Michael** who combats the devil concerning the resurrection of Moses.

Daniel 12:1 says **Michael is the “great Prince”** whose rising brings the **end of the age**. What is here attributed to Michael: **the conquering of Satan**, is throughout the New Testament attributed only **to Christ**. And when the opposing armies meet *it seems logical* that **Christ** (as Michael) stands at the head of “His” angels even as the **dragon** leads his angels.

In the first recorded words of the dragon, “that ancient serpent” to Eve we hear Satan's personal dream wish: “*You shall be like God*” (Genesis 3:5). Now **Satan**, through the agency of the Beast, indirectly receives his blasphemous worship: “*They worshiped the dragon* because he gave his authority to the beast; and *they worshiped the beast*, saying, ‘**Who is like the beast?**’” (Rev 13:4).

But Satan's goal to be worshiped as God is effectively denied by **Michael** whose name translates literally: “**Who is like God?**” Schick says these two questions summarize the essential issue of the war between good and evil:

The **two contrasting slogans** in the combat projected into the world of men explain fundamentally **all conflicts in human history** as well as in the **heart of every individual**.¹¹ Suddenly, verses 9-11 shift from **military** to **legal** imagery. The dragon is identified by his judicial function as the *kategor* of the brethren, a Greek term commonly used to denote “*one who accuses another before the judgment seat.*” The term *ballo*, which in vs. 10 describes Satan's ejection, is also a judicial term, denoting either “*judicial punishment...or expulsion from the community*” (John 9:34; 15:6; cf. Matt 3:10; 13:42).

Revelation 12:10-11

I heard a loud voice in heaven: “**NOW** have come the **salvation** and the **power** and **Kingdom** of our God, and the **authority** of His Messiah. For the **accuser** of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been cast down. **They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony; and they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

¹¹ Schick, 2:10. This idea explains the earthly eschatological battle portrayed in Rev 13-14 where all men must either worship the beast (and thereby Satan, 13:4), or worship the Lamb (and thereby God)-the creature or the Creator. The declarative intent of Michael's name is directly challenged by the worshipers of the beast: “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” 13:4. See further discussion of “Michael” in Hengstenberg, 1:466.

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Verses 10-11 are the thematic, geographic **heart of the book**. A triumphant shout from heaven *declares* the enemy *vanquished*, the kingdom *established*, and its faithful citizens *secured*—ALL through **“the blood of the Lamb.”**

God declared His verdict at the Cross. There **judgment was executed upon all the sins of all who trust in Christ**. *All further activity of divine judgment* in Revelation falls only upon those who refuse or turn from trust in the Lamb.¹²

Satan as the **“accuser”** in the heavenly law court is elsewhere confirmed (**Job 1:6-12; Zech 3:1-6; Jude 9**). God recognized the justice of his accusations; so Satan's testimony was tolerated. But at the cross the “accuser” is *silenced*, his testimony *disbarred*. The **“now”** of 12:10 indicates this is an accomplished fact. Satan's legal case is no longer valid, and he is **cast out** of court.

Because of Christ's death for us, *God need not listen to Satan 's accusations against His people* for they are **forgiven, fully acquitted**.¹³ Christ now stands as **the Advocate of His people**

¹² This concept of divine judgment at the cross recognizes the reality of the realistic and ongoing assessment of the believer 's faith described in each of the letters to the seven churches. *The universal nature of the judgment scenes* portrayed in 11:18; 14:14-20; and 20: 11-15 include references to the saints within their sweep of divine judgment activity. Yet it must be stressed that all these universal judgment scenes are executive and concern those who trust in the Lamb *only in terms of vindication and rewards*. John equates the actual activity of “judgment” to warfare (19:11). Judgment is the execution of divine retribution and reserved for those who have warred against the message and messengers of the Lamb of God (19:11-16, 19; 20:15). Says Bollier: “The final judgment confirms irrevocably the verdict men have passed on themselves by their attitude toward God and his saving purpose in Jesus Christ” (p. 24).

¹³ Pieters suggested that Satan's lawful accusations concerning mankind prior to the cross were not only a problem for men but a concern to the angels loyal to God. How could God both justify and be just? In the cross-event Pieters believed John saw an earthly and a cosmic resolution: “Before the coming and atonement of Christ, the sins of God's people were indeed forgiven, but they were forgiven on the ground of something that was to take place in the future, . not because of something that had already taken place. Hence, the problem of forgiveness was not solved; it was only, so to speak, laid on the table. As St. Paul puts it, in Rom 3:25, this was 'the passing over of the sins done aforesaid, in the forbearance of God.' Since we are expressly told that the angels take an interest in these things (1 Pet 1:12) we can readily believe that during all the ages prior to the atonement it was to them a dark and difficult question, how the holiness and justice of God could be reconciled with this passing over of sin. Abraham was called the friend of God, yet he lied; and David was 'the man after God's own heart'; yet he was guilty of the blackest crimes. That these accusations stood against all the redeemed is here symbolically expressed by the statement that Satan accused them before God day and night. The good angels could find no solution, for the truth of the said accusations could not be denied. Symbolically speaking, they could not cast out the accuser. When, however, the Son of God had died upon the cross, thus atoning for sin, this whole problem was cleared up. Against those thus redeemed, no accusation could any longer stand. This is pictorially shown by the scene in which the good angels, under the leadership of Michael, expel those who accuse the brethren. What is here dramatically presented is the truth so eloquently voiced by the apostle Paul [quotes Romans 8:33 and 3:25-26].” Albertus Pieters, *The Lamb, the Woman and the Dragon*, pp. 183-84. See also Johnson, “Revelation,” EBC 12:517.

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where once Satan stood as their **accuser** “*day and night*” (1 Jn 2:1-2; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:33).

As the **2nd Adam**, the *new representative of humanity*, Christ offered God a just life; and by His death took to Himself God's justice against sin (1 John 2:2; 4:10). Thus, what **began** as a military battle between Michael and the dragon is **transformed** into a legal scene where Satan and his testimony against us is cast out of court.¹⁴

John 12:31-32 has language remarkably like **Revelation 12:10-11**. When the two passages are compared (cf. **also John 16:11**), it is clear the *Cross not only silenced Satan's accusations against the saints* but judged Satan worthy of the very punishment he sought to have inflicted on them. As the “**prince**” or “**ruler**” of the proud, Christ-rejecting world, **Satan was condemned to death at the cross**. He is already “*wounded unto death*” in the same sense that the believers already “ *dwell in heaven:*” through **the blood of the Lamb**. Satan's *dethronement* on earth (John 12:31) and the *enthronement* of the Lamb in heaven (12:3) are both the result of Christ's death for the sins of the world (Revelation 5:5-14).

In his victorious judicial declarations in **Romans 8**, Paul captured the spirit and essential truths of the courtroom scene in **Revelation 12**: There is **therefore now no condemnation** for those who are in Christ Jesus! Who shall bring **any charge** against God's elect? It is God who **justifies**; who can condemn? It is **Christ Jesus, who died**, yes, who was **raised from the dead**, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed **intercedes for us**. **Romans 8:1, 33-34**

The **final two phrases of Revelation 12:11** show this **salvation** cannot be misconstrued into a cheap and careless **false assurance** in the Christian walk:

Revelation 12:11

¹⁴ Caird described the events of the betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ as the visible reality portrayed in the symbolic judicial victory of Rev 12:7-11: “The earthly side of this legal battle is worked out fully in the Fourth Gospel, to which we may turn for further light. The turning-point comes when Satan, through his earthly minions, of whom Judas Iscariot is the chief (John xiii. 2), accuses Jesus and demands the death penalty. Jesus is innocent, as Pilate thrice declares, and Satan, though he wins his case in the earthly court, loses it in the court of final appeal: ‘the prince of this world is approaching, but he has no rights over me’ (John xiv. 30). But he loses more than this one case. For Jesus, like his namesake Joshua the high priest [Zech 3:1-6], is a representative figure, standing trial on behalf of those he represents. He is the Messiah, in whose person God intends to gather into one the scattered children of God (John xi. 52). His death therefore is not his judgment alone but the judgment of all men. ‘Now is the judgment of this world; *now shall the prince of this world be driven out*. And when I am lifted from the earth, I shall draw all men to myself’ (John xii. 31-32). Because he has identified himself with all men where they are, under the judgment of God, he draws all men through his death into unity with himself where he is, in the bosom of the Father; and Satan, having lost his case, loses also his job” (Caird, *Revelation*, p. 155). (Emphasis supplied.)

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They **overcame** him by the **blood of the Lamb** and by the **word of their testimony**; and they did not love their lives *so much as to shrink from death*.

The decisive “**overcame**” is an *aorist verb* of past tense, a **completed action**. The Christian's victory is *derivative*: he conquers **only** by the blood of the Lamb.¹⁵ But as the *remainder of verse 11* makes clear, this is not a passive salvation in which the faith of the believer need not yield fruit in works of obedience. This victory truly received produces in us a **life-long and death-defying witness** to our risen LORD and Savior.

We **ARE** redeemed by the **Lamb's blood**. Now we **hold fast** to “*the word of our testimony*” at any cost, “**even unto death**.” In the 7 Churches, Jesus called us to hold fast to His “name,” “faith,” “deeds,” “perseverance” until the end to *continue overcoming* (2:13, 26; 3:8, 10). Our lives reflect our true allegiance, our determination to “*follow the wherever He goes*” (14:5).¹⁶

This is no “*faith plus works*” formula. It is an echo of Galatians 5:6: a “*faith that works through love*” (cf. 1 John 4:19)—a love that stands loyal in the face of **any adversity** (cf. 13:10; 14:12), **even death** (1:5; 14:13). Mounce said the entire Apocalypse offers a philosophy of martyrdom: “*The followers of the Lamb take the way of the Lamb. Only the sacrifice of holy love can overcome the principle of selfishness and sin that dominates the world.*”¹⁷ **Christ became obedient—even unto the death** of the cross for us—and therefore we also determine to **obey**

¹⁵ Though like Christ, the saints are called to “love not their lives unto death” (12:11, RSV) and perhaps suffer martyrdom, any comparison between their deaths and Christ's death should not be pushed too far. At no point, not even in dying, does their salvation rest even in part on an adequate imitation of Christ's work. Salvation is derivative: it is repeatedly described in the Apocalypse as “**given**,” that is, granted to the believer by God only based on Christ's finished work. This is the intent of the verses concerning the washing of the saints' robes in the blood of the Lamb, e.g., 7:14. see: Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), pp. 214-20.

¹⁶ At His coming Jesus rewards each man according to “what he has done” (i.e., his works, 22: 12). Throughout the Apocalypse the primary “work” of the Christian is to wash his robe (i.e., character) in the blood of the Lamb (3:4-5; 7:14; 16:15; 19:7-8 22: 14). But the fact that the saints also overcome “because of the word of their testimony” (12: 11) illustrates that while salvation comes through faith in the work of Christ alone, saving faith is never alone. It produces a life of courageous testimony.

¹⁷ Mounce, “The Christology of the Apocalypse,” p. 50. Yet it must be emphasized again that Rev 12:10-11 declares the *derivative* nature of Christian salvation. The judgment scene of the “great white throne” (20:11-15) well summarizes this tension of faith and deeds. In this scene of universal judgment numerous books called the “books of deeds”—signifying human works—are examined. But there is also “another book” (singular), the [Lamb's] “book of life” (20:12; cf. 13:8; 5:2, 6-9) signifying human faith in the work of Christ. The “dead” (cf. 20:4-5) are judged according to the “things written in the books, according to their deeds” (20: 12). Regardless of what good is found in these books of deeds, all who are judged by their content alone stand condemned (20: 15). The salvific hope rests only in the [Lamb's] “book of life” (13:8; cf. also 14:13; 1 Tim 5:24- 25). In other words, human works have no saving power, but serve as accurate indications of whether our life was guided and motivated by faith in Christ or by allegiance to some human system of security. John 6:27-29 clarifies the roles faith in Christ and works for Christ play.



Him, regardless of cost.

This does **not** imply the **martyrdom of all believers** in the final crisis. All true Christians are **willing** to lay down their lives: They would **die rather than deny** their Lord, and many *have* added their blood to their testimony (13:10; 17:6). John J. Collins said to help develop such faith, which transcends death, is the primary purpose of Revelation.¹⁸ Yet because Christ is the **2nd Adam**, the *representative of all His people*, **His death and victory** stand before God as **their death and victory**. **His story is their history** in judgment. In Christ, every believer already has faithfully testified, endured, and died. Their deaths are not necessary. The Christian needs only to hold fast to what Christ has done, once for all.

God's final judgments are His justice on the adversaries of the martyrs. Thus, each martyr's death adds to the cup of God's wrath in the final outpouring of judgment (16:5-7; 18:20; 19:2).¹⁹ **Christ** has overcome, and in Him, **His people** have also. This steels them for **the attacks of a doomed and enraged enemy**.

Revelation 12:12

Therefore **rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!** But woe to earth and sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short.

We ("**who dwell in heaven**,") can live lives of **rejoicing** in the light of the Cross. Our eternal citizenship has been provided, requiring *only trust in Christ unto death*. Satan is impotent to change this fact. Yet we still endure earth's battles. Persecution and nourishment, *suffering-overcoming*, **run parallel** to each other.

The voice inviting those dwelling in heaven to rejoice, also declares that **Satan's defeat** brings "**woe to the earth and the sea**" that is, the rebellious world (cf. 13:8; 17:15). Over these Satan still reigns and leads them captive at his will. He now enters their affairs to dominate them "**having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time**". This "*short time*" of Satan's

¹⁸ John J. Collins, "Apocalyptic Eschatology as the Transcendence of Death," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36 (1974):21-43.

¹⁹ Adela Yarbro Collins suggested: "For the author of Revelation the eschatological battle is to be an act of divine vengeance for the blood of the martyrs. This impression is confirmed in the second portion of the body of the work, chaps. 12-22 5, where divine vengeance is described in more detail than in the first portion. Vengeance for the martyrs is not the only reason for the plagues on the earth and its dwellers, but it is the significant factor to which reference is repeatedly made." The idea of divine judgments in response to unjust persecution is strengthened by the constant allusions to the plagues upon Egypt found in the trumpets and bowls. Again, quoting Yarbro Collins: "The typological function of these allusions is clear: as divine judgment against the oppressors of the people preceded the first deliverance [Exodus] and time of salvation, so will it be at the end." Adela Yarbro Collins, "Political Perspective of the Revelation," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (April-June, 1977): 249-50.

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“*great wrath*” is analogous to the 1260 days of God’s protection of the woman in the wilderness.

Revelation 12:13-14

When the *dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth*, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male Child. The woman was given the **two wings of a great eagle**, so that she might fly to the **place prepared for her in the wilderness**, where she would be taken care of for **a time, times and half a time**, out of the serpent’s reach.

Revelation 12:13-17 expand **verse 6** and the woman’s flight into the **wilderness** for **1260 days**. The phrase “*when the dragon saw he was thrown down to earth*” shows the judicial nature of his defeat. The **dragon only realizes he is cast down when it is accomplished**. Now, having failed to conquer the Lamb, he turns **his anger upon the woman**. Persecutions arise NOT because Satan is too powerful to stop, but because he is beaten. He is *doing all the harm he can while he can*, precisely because he realizes **he does not have much longer!**

Verses 14-16 again uses **Exodus typology**. The woman is given “**the two wings of the great eagle**” as was ancient Israel in Exodus 19:4: “*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself*” (Deut 32:11; Isa 40:31). This ensures her escape to “*the place prepared for her in the wilderness*” (12:14).

The wilderness is the **land in-between**. It symbolizes the place of liberation and safety, a sanctuary where **God’s provisions are a daily reality**. For John the sphere of demonic activity and the Beast’s dominance on behalf of the dragon is **Babylon**, the “*great city figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified*” (11:8). This **city is coterminous with the entire ungodly world of human lust, indifference, self-sufficient pride, and power**; therefore “**the wilderness**” is **anywhere people stand outside Babylon resisting its authority and allurements through allegiance to the Lamb**.

This spiritual sojourn lasts for **three and a half times** or years which **equals forty-two months (1260 days)** which equals the **entire period of Beast’s dominance** (13:5) whose spirit was already at work in John’s day (1 John 4:3). **All three refer to the entire Christian age.**²⁰

²⁰ In the experience of the woman, the genuine Christian will find a portrayal of truths which depicts his sojourn no matter what age he has lived in. As Paul declared, all who desire to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3: 12), and the dragon dogs the steps of each person who refuses to succumb to the “cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16, NIV). The 1260 days in this sense continue until the mortal is clothed with immortality at the coming of Christ (1 Cor 15:54). This truth remains valid in whatever century and whatever society the Christian lives. Pieters was perceptive in his personal application of the wilderness experience: “When the Israelites had crossed the Red Sea they were fully delivered from the Egyptians, but the wilderness period intervened between them and the enjoyment of the Promised Land. So, for the Christian individual and the Christian church. Having believed on Christ, we are fully redeemed, and justified, but we

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Revelation 12:15-17

Then **from his mouth the serpent** spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the **dragon was enraged at the woman** and went off to **wage war against the rest of her offspring**—those who **keep God’s commands** and **hold fast their testimony about Jesus**.

The dragon's aborted attempt to drown the woman in a *river of hellish waters emanating from his inmost being* (12:15; cf. Rev 22:1) again uses Exodus imagery. Pharaoh (called a dragon in Ezek 29:3 and 32:2) and his hosts were likewise destroyed: “*You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them*” (Ex. 15:12). Here the **waters** could indicate destructive persecutions or **heretical soul-destroying doctrines** (Rev 17:15; cf. Isa 8:6-8).

Revelation 12 offers the spiritual reality behind the scenes of **chapter 13**, which details the hateful **wrath of Satan**; which brings, in **chapter 14**, the **wrath of God in response**. The drama of Revelation can be understood as the great confrontation of **two wraths**, one fully determined to destroy the righteous (13:15), and the other equally determined to rescue them (19:11ff.).²¹ **This demonic wrath has been active against the church since its inception but reaches a unique and universal intensity at the very end of time.**²²

Summary

Revelation **12:10-11** is the **HEART** of Revelation: **our triumph** in God’s courtroom **through the Lamb's blood**. As prosecutor, **Satan had incessantly accused humanity** before God as **worthy of death**. But at the Cross the **“accuser of the brethren”** was **silenced, his testimony disbarred**. By Christ’s substitutionary atonement, God’s people are **forgiven, fully acquitted**; and simultaneously **divine justice upheld**. Satan’s legal case is no longer valid and he is cast out. The divine verdict in our favor declares we have already overcome and are freed from the fear of condemnation in **God’s final judgment**.

are not yet glorified. The stage between is the wilderness of this life for the individual and is the stage of outward affliction for the church” (Pieters, p. 172).

²¹ G. Stahlin, TDNT, 5:439, s.v. “*orge*.”

²² Concerning the Satanic wrath directed against the remnant Ladd made these remarks: “This effort is not limited to a single historical event but is manifested throughout the entire history of the church. . . . Therefore, the only unique thing about the last time of tribulation is its intensity. The modern evangelical fear of suffering in the Great Tribulation has forgotten the Biblical teaching that the church in her fundamental character is always a martyr church (Acts 14:22)” (Ladd, “The Theology of the Apocalypse,” *Gordon Review* 7 [1963-64], p. 77).

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Our present victory is in the saving power of the Lamb's blood. But we must be **personally hold fast to** this victory until the end, by our faithful testimony and loyalty to the crucified and risen Christ. For us, **the hour of judgment is past**; and even now **we dwell in heaven**.

This chapter is **an introductory vision** for the events of **chapters 13 and 14**; just as the vision of **Revelation 4 and 5** introduced the **7 Seals and 7 Trumpets**. **Revelation 12** dramatically reveals **the battle in the spiritual world** which guides the course of human history.

The Devil is defeated. He knows his days are numbered. His vicious attacks are "*the despairing skirmishes of a retreating enemy who is already certain of his own destruction.*"²³ It is the despair of Satan, knowing that he is doomed, which drives him to do as much damage as possible.

As we **make our choice** between finding identity and security in the proud world or in the risen Christ, *Satan's attitude* of vengeance towards the innocent serves as a **powerful contrast** to the words of our dying Savior who **forgave His murderers** as they drove the nails of crucifixion into His flesh.²⁴

²³ Schick, *Revelation*, 2:17.

²⁴ Henceforth we must keep in mind the pattern of events surrounding the cross to understand the events portrayed in Rev 13. The passion of Christ is the paradigm for the experience of the church in the last days.