



gracefellowship

Revelation
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War in Heaven

:: Genesis 3:13-15

When Adam and Eve committed the first sin against God in the Garden of Eden, we find that the serpent was the instigator and used deception to misguide Adam and Eve into thinking God was withholding something from them. When God comes to the couple after their sin we find in two verses the theme that will play out for the remainder of human history.

:: Genesis 3:13-15

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.

15 And 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.”

God lets us know from the very beginning that when sin entered the world a war was part of the fall. The major combatants are the image bearers of God- his prize creation- and the serpent we are introduced to in Genesis 3. But the good news is that a champion was also prophesied about- the offspring of the woman who the serpent would bite his heel, but He would crush the serpent's head.

In the book of Revelation we are seeing how this war between the serpent, who we know as Satan, has continued to wage against God's people. We have also seen how God has and will bring judgment against sin and those who remain rebellious toward Him. In Revelation 7, 10 and 11 we saw how God specifically and supernaturally watches out for His people, even in the face of persecution and tribulation. In chapters 12-14 we are going to see even more fully how God does that. John is going to give us a look at how this war has been playing out throughout history between the serpent and the people of God. We will see in this passage some metaphorical language and John is going to use cosmic imagery to explain the events of history.

The purpose of this passage is meant to bring encouragement and offer hope.

A cursory reading of Revelation 12-14 might cause you to be frightened, but the intent is to show the power of God over His adversaries and to show His ability to keep those who are His even through the earth's darkest days.

:: Revelation 12:1-17

1 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.

2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.

4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. 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.

5 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.

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.

7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.

9 The great dragon was hurled 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.

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the 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 hurled down.

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

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

13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

14 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.

15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

17 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.

Let’s talk about some of the imagery we see here and what these things represent, and then I hope to become really practical in how we move forward in following Jesus as His disciples in a spiritual battle that is raging all around us. Revelation 12 serves as the theological heart of the book because it shows why the church faces spiritual hostility in this world and how God provides victory for those who follow Him and are victorious until the end.

The first thing John reveals in this chapter is a contrast of ideas:

A great sign- a woman

A sign- an enormous red dragon

These contrasting signs reveal to us a spiritual reality through symbols that the woman is superior to the dragon.

John tells us that 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.

Woman = The true Israel, the people of God; the Church.

Sun, Moon and Stars = Jacob, Rachel and the Tribes; also possible-Character, Dominion, Royalty

Isaiah 26 describes Israel as a pregnant woman writhing in pain to give birth, but they gave birth to wind. They were not able to bring salvation to the earth and the people of the world had not come to life. But now John describes the woman giving birth in Revelation 12, and this time John will describe the birth of the Messiah. But before we see that unfold we need to look at the second sign John saw in the heavens.

Enormous Red Dragon = Satan

Color red alludes to the devil’s character of violence and bloodshed.

7 Heads and 10 Horns and 7 Crowns = Great degree of power on the earth.

Satan is the god of this age and his purpose is to frustrate the work of Christ. God has given him a measure of power on the earth for a period of time to make war against humanity as part of his war against God. In the process of going to war against God, 1/3 of the stars are swept from the sky by the dragon’s tail. This is probably a reference to the angels who lost their place in heaven alongside Satan when they rebelled against God.

John tells us that the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that he may devour her child at the moment he was born. But he is unable to do so. While Satan desires to thwart the plans of God, he is unable to ever overcome the will of God.

5 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.

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.

The Messiah came specifically through Mary, but more fully through the nation of Israel, to rule all nations. But Satan couldn't destroy the Messiah. Yes, Jesus died on the cross and Satan thought he prevailed, but after 3 days Jesus rose again and ascended to Heaven where He rules over all creation at the right hand of God the Father.

What does John mean when he says the woman fled into the wilderness? We will see this language again toward the end of the chapter. Historically for Israel the wilderness was a place of trial for God's people. Following the exodus from Egypt the people of God wandered for 40 years and an entire generation of people died without seeing the Promised Land. But it wasn't just a place of trial; it was also a place of God's supernatural provision. In the wilderness God provided food, water and safety for His people. John is basically saying during our days on earth, the people of God will face trials and tribulations, but we will be taken care of by Him.

Look in verse 7 and we will see John describe another scene that plays out in the heavens:

7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.

9 The great dragon was hurled 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.

Satan draws heaven into a war, but notice who shows up for the fight: Michael and his angels. Jesus doesn't fight. God the Father isn't involved. The Holy Spirit isn't engaged in the battle. Michael fights and Satan loses because John says he was not strong enough!

Satan is God's opponent, not His opposite.

We often give Satan too much credit! Yes, we are in a spiritual battle. Yes, Satan is powerful. But Satan cannot overcome the plans and purposes of God! Through the cross Jesus has already prevailed over Satan. However, Jesus did not destroy Satan, so he is a wounded enemy looking to take down as many people as possible with him and he slithers toward his miserable end.

Here is what we need to know:

Satan is a defeated but dangerous enemy. For us to prevail over him requires standing fully with Jesus.

Look at verses 10-11

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the 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 hurled down.

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

In your Bible circle or underline the words SALVATION, POWER, KINGDOM and AUTHORITY.

With the death of Jesus on the cross, his resurrection from dead and his exaltation to the heavenly throne, Satan was defeated and the Kingdom of God made it's way to earth in the hearts of mankind. Satan cannot stop the progress of God's Kingdom, but he does fight hard against it. Look at the weapon of Satan in this war...

Satan's weapon against us is accusations and deception.

Satan throws fiery darts of accusations against us and seeks to deceive us in the same way he deceived Adam and Eve. If Satan can't stop you from following Jesus, he wants to do everything in his power to keep you from living a powerful, victorious life. He will stand and accuse you constantly that you aren't good enough, that you've blown it, that your past can't be overcome or that God isn't as good as you've been led to believe. Remember, Satan has been defeated, but he is still dangerous.

On August 15, 1945 the Emperor of Japan addressed his nation for the first time by radio broadcast to let his people know that the war had come to an end and they had been defeated by the Allied forces. But for a small band of soldiers the war was not over. Either they didn't receive clear instructions or they chose to ignore them, not believing what they heard, a number of soldiers continued to fight for years! The last of them was Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda, who carried on fighting until March 9, 1974- 29 years after WW2 had concluded! He surrendered only after receiving formal orders from his government. Jesus has defeated Satan by the cross. But Satan has refused to surrender. He continues to fight even though the war is over.

Because Satan continues to fight against God by making war on the people of God, we must know how to engage in this spiritual battle. John tells us in verse 11, “They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.”

Christians are victorious over Satan when we rely on the finished work of Jesus on the cross and stand firm as faithful witnesses to Christ even unto death.

:: John 1:9-14

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him.

11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—

13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

To stand firm in Christ in our spiritual battle we must put on our spiritual armor.

:: Ephesians 6:10-18

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Three different times in that passage we are told to take our stand and stand firm, but it's not in our own power, it's in the armor of God- the powerful things He provides for us to be able to remain faithful to Him in the war we are engaged in.

Let's wrap up by looking at the final verses in Revelation 12. Satan lost his place in heaven, but he turns his full wrath to the people of God on earth.

:: Revelation 12:12-17

12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to

the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

14 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.

15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

17 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.

When Jesus prevailed over Satan on the cross, Satan turned his full attention to the people of God on earth. And you’ll notice how John describes him: full of fury, because he knows his time is short!

Again, these final verses are meant to be viewed not as historical, but as metaphorical. The woman (the true followers of Jesus) was given two wings so she might fly to safety to a place in the wilderness.

This simply means that God provides protection for His people even in their places or trials and tribulations.

Satan spews out accusations, lies, false teachings, slander and persecution aimed at destroying God’s people, but the earth opened its mouth to swallow it up. I don’t think this is meant to be taken as a literal event as much as it is meant to describe the supernatural protection God brings to His people when Satan rages against us. So Satan goes after the rest of the woman’s offspring- all Christians- those who keep the commands of God and hold fast to their testimony about Jesus.

The goal of the Christian life is not to achieve a problem-free existence, but rather to persevere in the journey that will include spiritual battles.

We have a powerful enemy. But we serve the all-powerful God of the universe and come under the protection of Jesus, who died to ensure our life with Him forever. Be encouraged, church! In the battles that rage in our life and the persecution the Church faces, we have hope and victory in Jesus!

If you need to talk with someone today about the battles you’re fighting or the attacks Satan is bringing against you, we want to hear your story and pray with you. Your Life Group this week would also be a great place to open and share your needs so people who love you can pray with you and walk with you through the battlefield.

