

THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST: THE REBELLION

The Woman and a Dragon
Revelation 12

Mark Vroegop

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea (Rev. 12, ESV).

There’s a particular song that comes to my mind as we consider restarting our sermon series on the book of Revelation. It’s a song that we’ve often sung with students and children because it features a peppy tune and hand motions.

But the words are important and, frankly, rare.

*I'm in a fight not physical
And I'm in a war
But not with this world
You are the light that's beautiful
And I want more
I want all that's Yours*

*Joy unspeakable that won't go away
And just enough strength
To live for today
So I never have to worry
What tomorrow will bring
'Cause my faith is on solid rock
I am counting on God*

*I am counting on
I am counting on God¹*

One reason why Revelation is in our Bible is because we need to be reminded that we're in a fight not physical, and we're in a war. We have just enough strength to live for today. Our faith is on the solid rock. I'm counting on God.

Can you think of a time when you knew and felt that you were in a war? If you can remember that time, you can probably also testify to how it affected your desperation, your prayer life, your reading of Scripture, and maybe even your singing.

This week our staff met for our annual prayer summit. Over the years (especially in the early years), we've witnessed God doing miraculous things in the lives of our staff: physical healing, marriages restored, adoptions, marriages, pregnancies. But over the last five years, we've witnessed terrible attacks from the enemy in days leading up to or right after those prayer gatherings. Over the years, my posture has changed from excited to see what God will do to also being nervous about what Satan is going to do. The more serious we became about prayer, the more serious the enemy became about opposition.

Today I want us to consider a simple fact: "We're in a cosmic battle."

Now there are a number of implications of this reality. But you cannot embrace the implications if you don't understand that nature, the battle, and the outcome of this conflict.

A Quick Review

¹ Counting on God by New Life Worship, 2008

It's been a while since we've studied Revelation. This is the twelfth sermon, and let me review a few things with you:

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It's a moment when the curtain of life is pulled back, when we are given a glimpse of what is really happening: "Pay attention to God-man behind the curtain."

This book reveals a battle raging between heaven and earth, between Satan and God, between believers in Jesus and a hostile world. It pulls back the curtain to help us understand what is really going on and where history is headed. Revelation reveals the path for endurance. Revelation shows us there's really a massive bloody battle happening in the universe. It shows us what's really going on and where things are headed.

The book is a record of the revelation given to the apostle John during his exile on the island of Patmos. The book was meant to strengthen him as well as the church to whom he wrote.

In the first three chapters (The King), we saw an image of Jesus, and we heard the instruction given to John about writing what he sees. That led to the seven letters to the churches.

The second section, chapters 4-11 (The Victor), started to unfold the vision that John sees. From a throne room, to a slain lamb, to seals and trumpets of judgment, we witness the plan of God's victory unfolding.

Our third section, chapters 12-18, features chapters about the rebellion against God's rule. It's a section of Revelation that shows us how dark and difficult life can be. But it also—once again—shows us the powerful deliverance of God.

Let's explore this cosmic battle.

The Nature (vv. 1-6)

The first six verses set the context, or help us understand, that nature of the cosmic conflict. In other words, they help us know how to think about the kind of battle that we're talking about.

Verse one begins with the statement: "A great sign appeared in heaven." This is a marker or a reminder that what follows is a picture of something else. We've experienced this before, and it's part of the uniqueness of the book of Revelation. The book features apocalyptic material—something hidden being revealed or a symbolic description of something unseen. This literature issue makes Revelation interesting and a bit challenging because we have to constantly make decisions about how to interpret the symbols.

We see this same phrase in verse 3: "Another sign appeared in heaven." So, this section helps us see the nature of the conflict with two signs—a woman and a dragon.

The Woman

Verse 1 describes this woman as being “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” There are parallels here to Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37 that also involved the sun, moon, and stars. Since there are twelve stars like the twelve tribes, this is a reference to Israel.

But we’re told more about this woman (v. 2). She is pregnant. But it’s not a scene of a cute baby shower with gifts and games. The woman is crying out from birth pains and is in agony giving birth. This is before the advent of epidurals. Try to get this scene in your mind and feel the “head-snapping” shift from the glory of verse 1 to the agony of verse 2. This helps us understand the nature of this conflict: glory and agony, beauty and misery.

This pregnant woman is not only a symbol of Israel in general, but also of Mary in particular. The Old Testament prophets promised a coming deliverance through a coming Messiah (see Micah 4:10, 5:2-4). So, this scene also has the heightened drama of the arrival of the coming deliverer. And, of course, John’s audience would see this as Jesus. This agony will produce a child who is the hope of the world.²

The Dragon

There’s another sign. According to verse 3 it’s (behold!) a great red dragon. Throughout the Bible, a dragon is associated with evil, chaos, and the devil himself. What’s more, the dragon has seven heads with ten horns and seven crowns. These are designed to communicate authority, victory, and power. As we’ll see next week, it’s not just spiritual power, but the conflict intermingles with earthly authorities.

Verse 4 highlights that the dragon’s tail swept a third of the stars of heaven. Many commentators take this to be a statement about a previous rebellion where a third of the angels followed Satan in rebellion.

The scene becomes even more dramatic as this massive red dragon positions himself before the woman so that when she gives birth, he can “devour it.” The picture here is distressing, and it would probably seem extremely probable that there is no way this woman and child are going to survive.

The Child

In verse 5, the woman gives birth to a male child. But notice that John describes him as “one who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron,” a quote from Psalm 2:9. It pictures the global dominion and power. It’s the king and victor that we saw in our previous study of Revelation. Of course, this is Jesus.

The child, however, is rescued from the clutches of the dragon by being caught up “to God and to his throne” (v. 5). With the child removed, the dragon turns his attention on the woman. And she flees into the wilderness. At first this might seem to be a bad thing. But the rest of the text tells us that the wilderness is prepared by God for the woman. She is nourished there for 1,260 days.

² James M. Hamilton Jr., [*Preaching the Word: Revelation—The Spirit Speaks to the Churches*](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 247.

Some scholars believe this time period is the second half of the tribulation. Others take this to be more symbolic of the time between Christ's ascension and the second coming.

The point of all of this is to realize that there's something happening in our world beyond just our daily lives. There is a divine plan at work to redeem the world. There is a power struggle taking place behind the scenes of our daily lives. Heaven and hell are on a perpetual collision course.

I was watching a short documentary on a famous film composer. He was talking about how the musical score sets the tone and mood of what is happening and what is to come. I think about the scenes that we just celebrated with Advent. We sang songs like "Silent Night, Holy Night. All is calm. All is bright." But the entrance of the Christ-child into the world was more like storming the beaches of Normandy. A cosmic conflict is in motion.

Do you sense this potential for collision in the world and even within yourself?

The Battle (vv. 7-12)

The conflict is made even more evident in verses 7-12. It's like the lens of Scripture tightens on this cosmic battle. This part of Revelation is designed to show us that our struggle is part of a much broader battle related to God and the devil.

Remember that Revelation doesn't always operate on a timeline. It seems that verse 7 looks back. We're told about a great battle between the angel Michael and his angelic forces against the dragon. I'm not sure what image you have of an angel. But Michael is not some fat little cherub floating on a cloud, strumming a harp. He's more Seal Team 6 than he is Precious Moments.

After his defeat (v. 8), the dragon and his angels are thrown out of heaven. Similar to the Garden of Eden, they are expelled. Notice the descriptions of the dragon in verse 9:

- ancient serpent – a term connected to the temptation in the Garden of Eden
- devil – a name that means slanderer
- Satan – a name that means the adversary/accuser
- deceiver of the whole world

Notice the three-fold strategy of the devil: tempter, slanderer, accuser, and deceiver. It's that last one that I really want you to see. It's the scope of his activity that is the point of this text. The battle is raging everywhere. In other words, every single one of us has dealt with some element of demonic temptation, slander, accusations, and deception.

Part of what I want you to see is the scope and seriousness of this issue. This cosmic battle is raging everywhere, and it's important to see this as a serious issue. It's important to see it as part of our common struggle. We're not just trying to live our lives; we're trying to survive the battle. And with that comes a different mindset.

Some of us might need to take careful inventory because you're just floating along, and you are forgetting who and what you are really dealing with. Nancy Guthrie writes:

[Satan's] focus has turned from devouring Jesus and toward devouring Jesus' people. He has declared war on all who have been joined to Christ by faith. If that is you, you are on his hit list. He's out to destroy you. He wants to fill you with doubts about the reliability of the Bible and about the work of Christ. He wants to turn things upside down so that what is evil will appear morally good and right, and what is holy and just will appear to be outdated, irrelevant, ridiculous...And if that doesn't work, he wants to deaden you to things of God so that you will simply drift away.³

This should make us tremble, but not without hope. Look at verses 10-11. A loud voice makes a triumphant statement, maybe even a song!

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death" (Rev. 12:10-11).

Now, what's interesting about these verses is that the victory isn't in the future. It's not "they will conquer." No, it's "they have conquered." Christians accordingly are not working toward victory, but from a victory already achieved.⁴ And notice the means by which they do it! It's not by their strength or perseverance or power. It's by the "blood of the Lamb."

The image here is of a raging, scary battle. But one in which God's people are victorious as they celebrate the work of the Lamb. Verse 12 shows us that the environment in which we now live is not peaceful: "The devil has come to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short." This text shows us that the battle is real. But it also shows us something else.

The battle is already decided. It's just a matter of time until it's over. That's why God's people are called to fight their battles with faith and endurance. We need faith to believe what the Bible says about us, about Jesus, and about the devil. And we need endurance, which is merely a consistently applied faith. How do you battle? You believe today and tomorrow and the next day. You fight by trusting and believing.

The Deliverance (vv. 13-17)

³ Nancy Guthrie, *Blessed: Experiencing the Promise of the Book of Revelation*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 149-150.

⁴ Leon Morris, [*Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*](#), vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 157.

The final section shows us the dramatic deliverance from God. But this deliverance comes after Satan pursues the destruction of God's people, Israel and all his children. In verse 13, the dragon pursues the woman

According to verse 13, since the dragon was not able to kill the child he sets his opposition toward the woman who gave birth. But the woman (v. 14) is given wings to fly away into the wilderness. The time frame is the same as before, in 12:6.

Notice that God provides the means for the woman to escape. These wings are similar to what we hear in Exodus and Isaiah. "I bore you up on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4). "Those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles" (Isa. 40:31).

The devil doesn't give up, however. He still pursues the woman by spewing water out of his mouth. But God intervenes (v. 16). The devil becomes furious because of his thwarted plan, and he turns his rage toward "the rest of her offspring—those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17).

And our text ends with Satan standing on the sand of the sea. His strategy isn't working. As we'll see in the next chapter, the devil will call two "beasts out of the sea" to continue his work. God's deliverance is glorious and victorious, but the devil is not done.

Implications

Last week we talked about our theme of impact, and I'd like to return to the two application points related to personal renewal and mission-oriented risk. How does this text relate to renewal and risk?

Renewal – This text shows us the battle that is raging behind the scenes, the kind of struggle that Paul talked about in Ephesians 6.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph. 6:10-12).

Let us celebrate the power of God while we understand the nature of the battle.

Risk – This text shows us God's ability to help his people and advance his kingdom. We don't need to give in to fear or faithlessness.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his

eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Pet. 5:6-11).

This is how God's people win!

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death (Rev. 12:11).

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