

Revelation 12:1-17 // The Desperate Defeated Dragon

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[0 : 00] Our passage tonight is Revelation chapter 12. It's found on page 1241 in the Church Bibles. So please do follow along with me as I read.

Revelation chapter 12. A great sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and the 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 his head.

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. 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.

[1 : 14] The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, which might be taken care of for 1260 days.

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 hurled down, that ancient snake called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

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. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

[2 : 15] They did not lose their lives so much as to shrink, did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 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. 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 snake's reach.

Then from his mouth, the snake 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 has spewed out of his mouth.

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman, and off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

[3 : 26] Well, good evening, everyone. Thank you to David for reading. And let me add my welcome to Robbie's. We're so glad that you've come to join us tonight, and it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at page 1241.

Let's pray together as we start. Father God, thank you for your word and for this opportunity for us to come before it and to see what you have to say to us. May the meditations of our hearts and the words of my mouth be glorifying to you alone.

In Jesus' name, amen. Why is it that Christians so often look like underdogs? Why does the church seemingly look weak and unimpressive?

If you're new or returning to church tonight, you might have walked in and thought, well, I don't really get what the big deal is about. It doesn't look that great or impressive. And in many respects, at least on the face of it, you would seem to be right.

Nobody here looks or does anything that seems, on the face of it, overly special. And Christians don't often seem to be wandering around smiling all the time, or at least there's not many of them that manage that.

[4 : 36] But what we're going to see in Revelation 12 is that John is pulling back the curtain to show us a reality that's going on that we would easily miss. It's a reality that shows us that Christians are doing something very special.

Indeed. What we see is there's a spiritual being out to get us. A spiritual being that's out to keep everybody from God. And I wonder if you've thought about that before.

And if you're here as a visitor, it's a reality that Christians hold to be true. And when we talk about fighting the devil, what does that actually mean? How do we actually do that? Well, the more we know about the one that we're meant to be fighting, the better equipped we'll be able to do it.

And I hope we'll find that today. As David read the passage as well, you might have noticed that this passage includes the Christmas and Easter story, but it's just covered in one verse, verse 5.

And what we're really interested in tonight is what happens before and after it. John, the human writer of Revelation, has recorded a series of visions for us that God gave him that gave an angle that we might not otherwise see on what's going on in heaven and on earth.

[5 : 45] For it's very easy for us to get tunnel vision in life, isn't it? We get so focused on what's right in front of us that we actually miss lots of things that are going on all around us. And if you're a Christian here today, then I guess we too often get tunnel vision.

We get so focused on the immediate things that are right in front of us that we do just completely miss what's going on around us. Well, Revelation 12 will help us to see the spiritual reality that we live in, where the dragon persistently wages war against us until the end.

But what we have here in many ways is a one-chapter summary of much of the Bible. Before Easter, we looked at chapter 11, and we got this tantalizing view of the heaven's opening, and we saw in to the Ark of the Covenant.

But now we get another line of sight on things that must happen before we proceed with that. And what we get tonight is actually the first sighting of Satan in a vision in Revelation.

So let's turn to our first point together. They're up on the screen. Satan's opposition to Christ on earth, verses 1 to 6. So in these first six verses, we get a recap of the story of the Bible up to Jesus returning to heaven.

[6 : 58] We start with two signs that introduce the prominent players in the narrative. A woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars on her head.

And she's pregnant. And then we get an enormous dragon with seven heads and seven crowns and ten horns. And this is meant to remind us all of the whole Old Testament.

The rather odd description of the woman picks up on a dream given to Joseph way back in Genesis, who was one of the founding fathers of God's people, Old Testament Israel. There, the sun, moon, and 11 stars represent Joseph's father Jacob, his mother, and his 11 brothers bowing down to him.

And we get such images elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe where God's people, what they're like, such as in Song of Songs 6, verse 10. And the description of God's people as a woman is also common throughout the Bible.

We see it in lots of different places. So John's description of the woman would have left the original readers and no doubt whatsoever that this woman is Israel, a people who it was as if they were pregnant, verse 2.

[8 : 06] Those of the Jewish nation who are faithful to God and trusted in him are being represented in the crown of the 12 stars that we see on the woman. But they were being persecuted and they were suffering as they waited for God to rescue them.

The prophet Isaiah spoke of Israel having to wait in birth pains, waiting to give birth to their savior in chapter 26 as they went off into exile.

They were getting ready to receive their long-promised savior. But before the birth, another sign appears of the enormous red dragon. Verse 9 tells us that this dragon is the dragon that is the ancient serpent called the devil or Satan.

And he's not here to welcome the savior to earth. He's not pleased that Jesus is here. But he's there to rival him. His seven heads and ten horns show the power that he has.

And the seven crowns show the different source of authority that he offers compared to the crowns of the lamb, or sorry, the horns of the lamb that we saw back in Revelation chapter 5.

[9 : 10] And the dragon, well, he attacks those who share in the woman's crown instead of his crowns. In his rage at the impending birth of the savior, he strikes a third of the stars out of the sky.

Most likely, this is a depiction of Satan's persecution of Israel as he strikes a significant blow against them. And as the woman nears giving birth, we have our attention switch, the dragon's attention switches, to devouring the child the moment that he is born.

This child is a massive threat to the dragon. As Jesus is born in the manger, we're told that Satan is right there trying to devour him. When King Herod ordered the infanticide of all two-year-olds in and around Bethlehem, that wasn't a coincidence.

Satan was there trying to devour Jesus. We don't often think of Satan being there right at the manger. I don't know the nativity scenes that you've seen, but there's not normally a red dragon sitting there.

But Revelation is 12 for it. Revelation 12 is clear for us that Satan was right there at the start, that he was trying to destroy Jesus, and God's people. And so we have a moment of real tension here as we read this vision.

[10 : 26] The woman has suffered for so long and is ready to give birth. She's about to give birth to a desperately needed child, and yet standing there ready to devour him the moment he is born is this enormous dragon.

And it's hard to see how the child will survive. He's the massive underdog in this situation. Is this the point where Satan destroys the woman's only hope of escaping the suffering and persecution at the dragon's hand?

After all this time and generations of Israelites trying to be a faithful people fighting for God's name, is this their last chance? Gone? Are they doomed to be at the hand of the dragon and to be far from God forever?

Well, verse 5, the child is born and this child will rule all of the nations with an iron scepter. This right here is the one that they've been waiting for.

He's the one who will save and will rule. This is a quote from Psalm 2 where God promises to set his king over all the other kings through the different nations who sought to overthrow God and be in authority instead of him.

[11 : 36] There is one coming who will quell any nation or king who rejects God and his people. He is finally here and the dragon fails to devour him. God snatches him up to himself and to his throne to start his rule over the nations.

In Christ's death on the cross, Satan may think that he's got him. Satan may think that he's won. The savior and king lying dead on a cross. It doesn't look too impressive.

But God snatches Jesus up through the resurrection and through the ascension to heaven. Satan fails, the child Jesus reigns, and the woman, God's people, flee into the wilderness where God in his kindness has created a place for her to stay.

And none of this took God by surprise. He knew that Satan would be there when Jesus was born. He also knew that Jesus would be victorious. and he knew that the woman would need to be taken care of for a short time.

As we saw in chapter 11, 1,260 days. It's just a symbolic figure for a short time, a bit like a time, times, and half a time that we see later. A short time where God's people are persecuted but cared for before Jesus returns.

[12 : 55] We'll come back to the woman in a moment, but the attention now shifts away from the earth towards heaven, where Satan opposes Christ's rule in verses 7-12. After Christ's ascension to heaven, his rule over everything started with the removal of opposition from heaven.

Michael, portrayed in the Bible as the head angel and the guardian of God's people, fights against the dragon and his angels. And here John again lifts the curtain so that we can see what we might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

When Jesus ascended, there was war in heaven, that's what we're told. And those angels who are loyal to God fought against the dragon, Satan, and his angels, where previously they had all been in heaven in God's presence.

Now Michael is fighting against the dragon to force them down out of heaven forever. And they overpower the dragon. He has lost his place in heaven. This is no small victory.

Verse 9, the hurling down of the dragon is the hurling down of the ancient serpent that led the whole world astray. This is the serpent from Genesis 3, the one that deceived Adam and Eve into rejecting God's good design.

[14:10] And this led to the corruption of the whole earth, the corruption of all of humanity that led all of humanity astray from God where they could not be in his presence. So this ancient serpent being cast down is a massive moment.

Satan has been defeated in heaven and he is now on earth, that same earth that the Sam 2 king Jesus reigns over and will destroy all the authority that doesn't submit to him.

Satan is done for. He's doomed. And what a moment it is for us to rejoice in. For verse 10, now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah.

With the hurling down of Satan, God's authority is unchallenged in heaven and we have the start of Christ's kingdom. God's Messiah, the one he chose, Jesus' authority has been established but the wonders don't stop there.

We have more good news than that in this passage. But do you see how amazing news this is for every believer? Whether you're the original readers sitting there in Asia Minor struggling as they live in a hostile and violent city that opposes them or as we sit here in relative peace in Glasgow tonight.

[15:29] It's true for all of us that every Christian can rejoice because Jesus has started his reign and he is already victorious. Up until this moment Satan was there accusing God's faithful people every time that they did, thought, or said something wrong that they weren't worthy of being God's people.

He was there accusing them, urging God to reject them, to banish them, to smite them from the earth. For going in a way that goes against what God wants boots us in a position where we cannot possibly be in a relationship with him and a just God must punish that.

But in his mercy God provided sacrifices, sacrifices that paid the punishment of death, pointing up to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus. Instead of smiting people, God provided and fulfilled the promise he made way back in Genesis 3 to provide one who would crush the head of the serpent.

Satan no longer accuses us before God because he's not there. He's been cast down. But even if he was still there accusing us today, it wouldn't matter because verse 11, we too have triumphed over him.

Not because we've stopped sinning but by the blood of the Lamb. Satan would accuse us and Jesus sitting there in his throne would go, it's okay, I've paid the price for that.

[16:59] All Christians have triumphed, all Christians are victorious and we, if you are a Christian, get to share in the reign of the Sam 2 king. just as Jesus promised the church in Thyatira that we saw back in chapter 2.

And what an assurance that this is for everyone. No matter how it feels, Satan will never win. We are never too sinful to come back to God. Satan can't stop us from coming back to God because through Jesus we are victorious.

And it's not just by the blood of the Lamb that God's people have triumphed over Satan but also by the word of their testimony that they did not love their life so much as to shrink from death.

Their testimony is not the gospel nor is it them witnessing to other people but it's their words and actions in living faithfully for Jesus in the face of suffering and persecution in the world.

That is, the word of the testimony of how they lived and spoke made clear that they belonged to the Lamb and not to the dragon. In doing so, they proved the accusations of Satan wrong and defeated his attempts to separate them from God.

[18:15] And so, if you're a Christian here tonight, the testimony of your life plays a part in you being victorious over Satan. Faithfulness to God means holding your earthly life loosely.

You're unlikely to have to give up your life for God, although maybe some of us will, but you're almost certain to have to lose parts of your lives, areas of your life that start to cause direct conflict with your relationship with Jesus.

Whether that's situations at work, the negative influences of long-term friends, hobbies that move to diary clash with church commitments, or whatever else it might be, choosing God over them is a life testimony to the blood of the Lamb and your victory over Satan.

Therefore, rejoice, Saint Silas. You have triumphed over the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by the testimony of your life. The dragon no longer dwells in heaven. He has been cast down. And those who accept the Lamb as Lord and Savior are true citizens of heaven that live on earth as foreigners. We can and should join with the heavenly voices in praising the Lamb and rejoicing in that victory.

[19 : 33] But we must also heed the woe that comes after. Read the second half of verse 12 with me. But woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you.

He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short. Satan is on the earth and he is furious because he knows that his time is short. He knows that he is lost.

He will be crushed when Jesus returns. But until then he is resolved to doing as much damage as much as he can to prevent people accepting the blood of the Lamb.

He will do all he can to stop people turning to Jesus for the first time and to tempt those who have turned to Jesus not to turn back again. He wants people to love their life so much so that they will shrink from death so that they won't shrink from death.

Satan does not take his defeat lying down. He is crouching at the door trying to trip everyone up at every moment doing all that he can to keep you and to keep me and to keep everyone else from God.

[20 : 40] And with that woe our attention in our passage turns back to the earth where Satan goes after ordinary faithful Christians our third point Satan's opposition to you.

With direct war against God out of reach the dragon pursues the woman. The woman is still God's faithful people now represented in the church. But just like God brought Christ out of his reach to taking him up to heaven God again brings the woman beyond the reach of the dragon.

In what follows John records a couple of Old Testament images that mirror the story of the rescuing of Israel out of slavery through Moses towards a journey to the promised land.

That was a time of journeying in a land that was not their own while they traveled to their permanent dwelling place. And as they journeyed they were to depend on God alone and follow his word.

What we're being shown in these images is that we are the second exodus as we wait for Jesus to return and bring us home to our permanent dwelling place. Verse 14 the woman was given 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.

[22 : 00] This is the same event as we read of in verse 6 but this time we get more details as the focus shifts away from the sun and onto the woman. But Israel's journey was far from smooth sailing as they went towards the promised land with opposition coming from both inside and outside the people and from the nations around them.

This would have brought massive reassurance to the original readers as they read this imagery that although the wilderness was dangerous God was sovereign and he protected them and so it will be for the church.

As the dragon pursues he spews water like a river after the woman but the earth opens up and swallows the river. As the dragon pursued the woman with false teaching and persecution like a river God shows his power and his sovereignty in opening up the earth and swallowing that false teaching and persecution and preventing the dragon from being swept away.

And the dragon seeing that he was unable to devour the woman verse 17 went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring those who keep God's commandments and hold fast to their testimony about Jesus.

Satan's not strong enough to be in heaven with the risen Jesus. Satan's not strong enough to eradicate the faithful testimony of the global church but he does go after the offspring of the woman local churches and individuals.

[23 : 30] He is filled with fury at being hurled out of heaven and he's enraged that the global church has been booted out of his reach. He's a dangerous enemy of the local church and of UNI.

And so the message of Revelation 12 is a clear warning. You need to lift your eyes to beyond whatever you have tunneled in on and see the spiritual reality that we live in.

Jesus is on the throne and he has won the war against Satan but Satan is real and he is still active until the return of Christ. Yes, the church may look weak.

Yes, Christians may look unimpressive on the face of it but the reality is that Christians are victorious through looking that way. If you're here tonight and you wouldn't say that you're a

Christian I hope tonight has helped you consider that Jesus is on the throne and that when he comes again only those who reign with him will be left standing. Only those who have asked Jesus to pay the punishment for their sin can withstand that judgment. Not even Satan himself will withstand Jesus coming again.

[24 : 41] Time is short. Don't let the temptations that Satan boots in your lives to help you to love your earthly life above all else stop you from accepting Jesus' offer of forgiveness and rescue.

And if you've already taken that offer of forgiveness then expect to experience spiritual attacks in your everyday life. Satan is active on earth trying to get you away from Christ with all forms of false teaching persecutions and trickery.

He wants to disrupt your life testimony to the reign of Jesus in your dwelling in heaven. So don't be surprised when things in your life become hard. When work or family life or whatever else it might be becomes really messy on that day when you're meant to be going to growth groups or roots or central prayer meeting in the evening don't be surprised.

When the idea of spending ten extra minutes sleep and not getting up to read the Bible before you start your day looms large in your mind don't be surprised. Little by little he wants to pry you and I away from Jesus and away from the local church without us even noticing.

And when there's a wee voice in your head accusing you saying you don't deserve to be saved or how could God love someone like me or I've sinned too much this week to come to church know that that is Satan's accusations at work.

[26 : 07] You can reject his lies and boldly proclaim that he is defeated that Jesus is on the throne and that you are victorious with him. Jesus reigns. When all of a sudden your faith in Christ causes a direct conflict with an area of your life don't be surprised.

He is desperate for you to love something on earth so much that you shrink from death. Satan wants you to pry away from church. He wants you to walk away from Jesus.

So lift your eyes from the world's cynicism that says that everything that goes on around us is just chance. Whether it's good or bad there's nothing really behind it. We don't live in a neutral world.

Revelation 12 is pretty clear on that. Widen your eyes to the spiritual reality that's playing out in front of us. Satan is desperate to devour you but Jesus has won.

His is the victory and he lets us share in it. It's excellent news. So hold on to your earthly life loosely but hold on to your life in Christ as tight as you possibly can through Jesus who sits on the throne and is victorious.

[27 : 21] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father thank you that Jesus reigns and that all who turn to him in faith reign with him. We praise you that you have defeated Satan that he has been cast down and that his time is short.

Help us to keep on going until the end. May you never let us love anything in our lives more than we love you. Help us to hold our earthly lives loosely and Jesus as tight as we can.

In Jesus name. Amen.