

Apokalypsis – Overcoming the dragon!

Text: Revelation 12:1-17

Theme: The Book of Revelation, End times, Prophecy, Salvation, Spiritual warfare, Combating evil.

- Chapters 12-14 are another few chapters to be taken together in Revelation. As a unit these chapters help us have a deeper understanding of why the people of God have been persecuted throughout the ages. These chapters show us the real reason for suffering and tribulation – **the rage of Satan** (D.A. Carson). These chapters also show us God’s protection of his people, and Jesus’ ultimate victory over Satan and the forces of evil.
- Chapters 12-14 of Revelation makes me think of Martin’s Luther’s hymn: ***A Mighty Fortress is Our God*** and his depiction of the spiritual battle we all face as followers of Jesus. **“A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing. Our helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing! For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe. His craft and pow’r are great, and armed with cruel hate. On earth is not his equal.”** I wonder if it was Revelation 12 that inspired some of these words.
- Just as we worship a Holy Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Revelation depicts an unholy trinity (Carson). Satan (the dragon here in ch. 12) is the antithesis to **God the Father**. The beast out of the sea (chapter 13) is the antithesis to **God the Son**, and the beast out of the earth (also in chapter 13) is the antithesis to the **Holy Spirit**. An unholy trinity aping the Trinity itself (Carson). This aping of God turns out to be very effective. He will deceive millions and lead masses astray into false and evil worship. Chapter 14 celebrates the final victory of the Lamb! (So read chapters 13 and 14 this week as 12-14 are a unit to be read together).
- Out text this morning- Chapter 12- reveals a **massive cosmic battle**. It also tells again the Gospel story! It retells the story of God – of what He did to save the human race in Jesus and it does so in an exciting way because we are living it out – we are a part of it. We will see ourselves and our days in this chapter. (At least I hope we do!). Do you remember the movie **“The Never Ending Story”? (1984)** As the main character Bastian reads the storybook, the story actually comes to life. Bastian enters the story and he lives it out in real time. Well chapter 12 of Revelation should do that for us. It reveals to us just how much we are a part of the Story of God in real time today.

- I love John Stott's summary of chapter 12. **Chapter 12 is a "marvelous condensation of the gospel story from the Messiah's birth in fulfillment of the Old Testament to his resurrection and ascension, and on the time of the persecution and protection of the church. It is also an expression of the age-long "enmity" between the serpent and the woman (Genesis 3:15).**
- To tie scripture together, let's look again at the very first prophecy of the Bible in Gen. 3:15. It reads this.... **"And I will put enmity (hostility, hatred) between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."**
- And so way back in Genesis 3, began the battle of the ages. The battle between the great serpent – the Devil and His angels, and the seed of woman – through which of course, Messiah would be born. Think about it. **Who was ultimately behind Pharaoh's massacre of the Hebrew babies during Moses' time?** The dragon. **Who was behind Haman's plan to exterminate the Jews during Esther's time?** The dragon! **Who was behind Herod's massacre of the Hebrew babies of Bethlehem?** The dragon. **Who was behind Hitler's extermination of the Jews during WW2?** The dragon! There have been "monsters" in our history. Behind the "monsters" is the "Monster". He is the Dragon behind the dragons! Let me ask you: **Who is ultimately behind the current and horrific slaughter of children through abortion?** The dragon! It is the battle of the ages!
- Let's look at the two sides in this cosmic battle from the text. **In one corner** you have the red dragon or Satan. **In the other corner**, you have the "woman and her offspring":
 1. The Red Dragon = Satan. ³ **Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.** ⁴ **His 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 he might devour her child the moment it was born.** His seven crowned heads and ten horns symbolize his great power and authority. The dragon's tail swept "1/3 of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth". For the Jews the "stars falling" meant great trouble. Translation: The dragon has brought much trouble, evil and tribulation on the earth. Many scholars also see this as a reference to Satan's demonic host with him. Now look at vs. 7...

And there was war 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.

(So there the dragon is clearly identified by the text itself. Sometimes Revelation does this and sometimes it doesn't.)

Here's where we should find ourselves in this reality....

Vs. 12 – “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.

Notice the realm of Satan's activity (planet earth!) and the reason why he is enraged (his time is short). And so the focus of his pursuit? The woman. This introduces the other side of the battle. In the other corner...

2. The Woman and her offspring: 12:1-2 – **“A great and wondrous 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”. Vs. 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.**

This is obviously Jesus for me and for a number of reasons, the best interpretation for who is woman is for me is that she represents **the Messianic community** or those made righteous through faith in Jesus Christ (both Jew and Gentile). D.A. Carson calls her the “idealized mother of the people of God” – much like Zion is an image for the people of God, so this woman is a metaphor for the Messianic community. Out of the Messianic community came who? The Messiah. That is why the dragon is so enraged over the woman's offspring! He is pursuing the woman's offspring and in Vs. 17! ¹⁷ **Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.** (Here we are clearly told who the woman's offspring are).

So the battle is clear. Satan on one side, armed with cruel hate and he is after **Jesus' people** – the community of the Messiah! Making war against **us**. The picture Revelation leaves clearly is that this war will intensify and come to a peak before the end.

Yet clearly in this chapter - In the midst of the war -there is also Divine provision and protection...

⁶The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days... ¹⁴The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

1,260. "forty-two months", 3 ½ years. "A time, times, and half a time" - All refer to the same number and the number is a symbol/metaphor for something. The question is what? **Let's take it back to John's day – late 1st century.** Every Jewish believer alive in John's day would have caught the reference to the 3 1/2 years. 160 years before Christ, there was a great Jewish revolt to the oppression of the Seleucid Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes who was forcing his Hellenizing policies on Palestine. He was making everyone Greek. This Jewish revolt was led by 3 Maccabean brothers and it lasted 3 ½ years and it was followed by a time of peace and Jewish sovereignty and independence in the region known as the **Hasmonean dynasty**. This dynasty was eventually taken down by the Romans and the Herodian dynasty began 37 years before Christ (Herod the Great).

In December of 165 BC, Judas Maccabees formally cleansed the temple of Syrian pollution and celebrated the occasion with a great festival. This festival became a permanent fixture in Jewish culture, falling on December 25 and lasting eight days ([1Macc.4.52-1Macc.4.59](#); [2Macc.10.6](#); [John.10.22](#)). This is Hanukah folks! Hanukah celebrates the 3 ½ year Maccabean revolt against the Syrians!

So when John wrote the number 3 ½ years in Revelation – John's Jewish readers would think of the great patriotic Maccabean revolt. And so to me the 3 ½ years, or 1,260 days

are not literal, but a symbol for tribulation. That number symbolizes days of tribulation before great victory and peace. So here, the reference is that God's people will be cared for through a period of persecution.

- One of the main elements of apocalyptic literature is that it loves to mix metaphors. **What do the metaphors of the woman being given “two wings of a great eagle” and the “place provided for her in the desert” speak of? (Vs. 14).** When God led his people forth from Egypt and into the wilderness, he “bore them upon eagles’ wings” (Ex 19:4; Deut 32:11), and other Old Testament texts speak of God sheltering his people beneath his wings (Ps 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7; 91:4; cf. Jer 49:22); later Jewish texts speak of God’s protecting his people, under “the wings of his presence.”¹
- What does the metaphor of the “river” being spewed out of the dragon’s mouth speak of? Well vs. 15 shows us that the dragon intended to sweep the woman away with this river or flood. “Floods” are a typical image of judgment (e.g., Jer 47:2—war) and tribulation (Ps 32:6; 69:15) in the Old Testament, and here the woman is saved from it! Just like God led Israel through the flood of the Red Sea to victory, God here promises safety for the people of the new exodus in Jesus! (Is 43:2).²
- So the overall picture John’s visions here paint is this – and it is the age old story. Satan is out to rob, kill and destroy the people of God. That is his passion, purpose and goal. He is diametrically opposed to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and he knows his time is short and so he desires to take as many human casualties with him. Through tribulation, the messianic community will be victorious and ultimately find rest in Jesus! Until the final victory, a very real spiritual battle raging for the souls of humanity and Satan in furious!
- Obviously my view has been clear through these messages in Revelation: I believe the church will go through tribulation. Not the bowl judgments because they are God’s final wrath. For me, Jesus will return before the bowl judgments are poured out.

¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 12:13–14). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (Re 12:15). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- But the people of God are called something very important in this chapter aren't they?

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 Christ.**

**For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.**

¹¹ **They overcame 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.**

- Overcomers! How are we to overcome the devil?

1. The Blood of the Lamb (Gospel); We battle knowing The Battle has already been won through the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus!

2) The word of our testimony = evangelism – church expanding – Satan is defeated by evangelism; this is what the church needs to be about doing!

3) A willingness to die for your faith. “You cannot stop a Christian or a Church that believes it is an advantage to die”! – D.A. Carson.

- To help us overcome God has given us armour for this spiritual battle. Ephesians 6.
- **“Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing. Were not the right Man on our side - The man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be; Christ Jesus it is He! Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same. And He must win the battle!**