

Cosmic Conflict
Revelation 12
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Last year, I went to a conference that was focused on how we can disciple the next generation. The final evening, the speaker was sharing practical ways for us to make disciples. Suddenly, he paused and looked around the room. His tone shifted as he asked, who are you discipling the next generation to? He continued, “you are discipling everyone you meet.” Everyone you meet, from your words and your actions, you are teaching them and pointing them to what you believe is true. So, are you discipling them, are you pointing them to Jesus? Or are you discipling them to the world? You see, there really is no middle ground here. There is no fence to sit on. One pastor said, “if you are not discipling your children in the Word, the world will disciple them for you.”

I read an article where a parent was discussing that they didn't want to force Jesus on their kids. They didn't want to influence their kids or even encourage their kids to pursue Jesus, instead they just wanted to expose them to Christianity and then let them make the choice, if they wanted to follow Him. Now, no parent would ever say this next part, and let me be gentle while I say it. If you just want to expose your kids to Jesus, this also means that you want to expose them to the world and let them experience all that the world holds, and then make the choice if they want to follow Jesus or the world. The scary implication of this statement is who rules the world. John 12:31 calls Satan the “ruler of this world.” Now, scripture is clear that God is sovereign and has ultimate authority, and Satan can do nothing without the permission of God. BUT, Satan has a major influence on the ideals, opinions, goals, and views of the majority of people. His influence encompasses the world’s philosophies. One author states, “when people live as though there is no God, they by default follow the god of this world. The unholy thoughts, destructive ideas, wild speculations, and false religions of the world have sprung from Satan’s lies and deceptions. At times, we all try to do this. We all try to live with one foot in Heaven and the other foot in the world.

There is a raging spiritual war being battled. A cosmic conflict is currently underway for souls. Satan will stop at nothing to kill, steal, and destroy (John 8:44). He is like a prowling lion seeking to devour (1 Peter 5). There is no sitting out of this war. You can't run from it, you can't hide from it, you can't be indifferent or neutral to it. You have to pick a side in this war. This cosmic conflict is so much more than a battle of good versus evil, right versus wrong, light versus darkness. We see specifically that this battle is God versus Satan, truth versus deception, Christ versus the kingdoms of the world. Are you ready for the good news? God wins! But with every war, you have to pick a side. Have you chosen which side of this cosmic battle you are on?

Revelation 12 pulls back the curtain, and allows us to have a glimpse into the spiritual war that is happening.

The Woman and the Dragon

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.² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.⁴ 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.⁵ 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,⁶ 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.

Satan Thrown Down to Earth

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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!”

¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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.

PRAY

This is quite a passage of Scripture! It is such a vivid and powerful picture of the spiritual war that is ensuing, and yet it is full of promise and hope.

THE CONFLICT BEGINS V.1-6

Chapter 12 begins with John saying, “a great sign appeared in Heaven.” I imagine John with his eyes fixed upward, the clouds parting as the heavens are on display. John begins to witness this first of seven signs that are given in the last half of Revelation. Revelation chapter 12 clearly gives us two signs. These signs are a symbol of reality, not specifically a literal description of the future events. Verse 1 tells us this is a “great” sign. In the original Greek, this points to a cosmic scale of both literal terror and of supreme spiritual significance. In some Bible translations, the word “sign” is seen as “wonder.” In biblical literature, this word is frequently used to point beyond itself to God's power, purposes, or future events.

Revelation 12 pulls back the curtain, giving us a view into the spiritual war that is ensuing behind the veil of the spiritual realm. John looking to the heavens sees this vision of a woman. Who was “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” I imagine John shielding his eyes from the piercing light of this woman's clothing.

Now, this is the second of four women that are used for symbolism in the book of Revelation. The first woman was in chapter 2:20. Jezebel was used to symbolize sinful wicked paganism. The next woman, the scarlet woman, is in chapter 17 and represents the apostate church, the third woman in chapter 19:7 is the “wife of the Lamb, the bride.” She represents the true church. It has been debated who the woman in chapter 12 represents, that has the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars in the sign that John is viewing. Some believe this is Mary, the mother of Jesus, where others believe this is the church, others believe this woman is symbolic of Israel.

As Brian began this series of going verse by verse through the book of Revelation he was clear that there are multiple interpretations and timelines that are debated by scholars that are way smarter than I am. Listen, we are not here to debate. Today, we are here to open God's Word and to worship Him for how amazing He is. Pastor Brian has said time and time again, that the Book of Revelation is not just timelines, but it is all pointing us back to Jesus! With that said, I believe this woman represents Israel. Although, we will also see that there are parallels with the virgin Mary and with the church, in this scripture, I hold that the intent of Chapter 12 is that this woman is symbolic of God's chosen people of Israel.

You see, a similar sign or dream was given to Joseph. Joseph was one of the sons of Jacob, whose name God changed to Israel.

Genesis 37 tells us that Joseph

⁹Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, “Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

Around 2000 years after Joseph had a sign including the moon and eleven stars that represented the sons of Israel, John had a similar one. One pastor describes this scene, the fact that the woman is clothed with the sun speaks of the unique glory, the unique brilliance, the unique dignity of a redeemed Israel that is going to be lifted up and exalted in the end. The crown of 12 stars on her head represents the 12 tribes and is associated with suffering and struggles. I love the parallel of Joseph's life and Israel. Joseph was sold to Gentiles and

enslaved in captivity. Yet, became prominent, preserved, delivered, saved, given authority and given a kingdom. Romans 11, Paul describes how Israel is being preserved and a day is coming where Israel will be delivered and saved, where they will enter into the Kingdom that was promised to them so long ago. Scripture is clear that Israel as a nation holds an important role in the end times.

John notes that this woman is pregnant and crying out in childbirth. Suddenly, the scene changes as he is given a second sign in the heavens.

Behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.⁴ 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.⁵ 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,⁶ 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.

If we jump to verse 9 for just a moment, we are told that this dragon is Satan. Can you imagine the shift for John? Looking to the heavens he sees this woman wearing the sun, standing on the moon, a crown of stars. In a moment, the scene shifts as a great red dragon sweeps into view. Seven heads each with a diadem and ten horns. This term dragon in Hebrew is where they get the Leviathan, which is a fearsome, multi-headed sea monster or serpent that is a symbol of chaos and evil. In Psalm 74, God is described as crushing the heads of Leviathan, defeating the forces of spiritual darkness and chaos.

Yet God my King is from of old,
working salvation in the midst of the earth.

13

You divided the sea by your might;
you broke the heads of the sea monster on the waters.

14

You crushed the heads of Leviathan;

John MacArthur describes the Dragon saying, “he is depicted as a monster that rules the world. The seven heads represent seven consecutive world empires running their course under Satan’s rule, the horns represent the kings who will rule under the Antichrist. As Satan fell, he swept his tail and took one third of the stars of heaven. One third of the angels were cast from Heaven with Satan. Revelation 9:16 reveals that 200 million demons will be released. This all reminds us that Satan’s evil influence is not limited to only the spiritual realm, but also extends to the physical world we live in.” There is a very real spiritual battle that is raging!

As all of this is going on, Revelation 12:4-**And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.**

As I was studying this passage, I was reminded of just how evil, evil really is. I was reminded that there is no middle ground. In this war, you have to pick a side. I found myself overwhelmed with the weight of what was going on in this scene. But when I paused for a

moment, thinking how Satan just sat there, waiting, for this child to be born, so he could devour it. This wrecked me. I had to walk away from my sermon notes and compose myself.

I sat back down to my computer to verse 5. We are shown that she is not pregnant with just any child, but the Savior. She gives birth to a son, who is to rule all the nations. **Psalm 22:28 For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.** The son being referred to in Revelation 12 that Israel gives birth to, is Jesus the Messiah. As quickly as Jesus is brought onto this scene in this vision, we then jump straight to His ascension as “her child was caught up to God and to His throne.” Now, the vision just keeps playing out for John, who still has his eyes fixed firmly on the heavens. But we need to pause here for just a moment. Something pivotal just happened. Satan knows Scripture. Satan knows the prophecy that just played out with the birth of this child. Satan was unable to eliminate Israel, he was unable to stop the birth of Christ, the ministry of Christ, in the death of Christ, Satan finally thought he was victorious, but then three days later, Christ rose from the dead, proving His victory over death and sin. Once again Satan was unable to stop God's plan of redemption. Satan is defeated! God wins!

For John, in a flash, the scene shifts again to an all out cosmic conflict. A spiritual war of literal biblical proportions. Now let me be clear, God and Satan are not equals! Satan is a created being, by God. God alone is all powerful. God alone is all knowing and God alone is all present. Satan is none of these things. We notice that God has his angel Michael leading the charge. Interestingly, one pastor points out that Michael is a powerful, created angelic being and from the context of both Revelation and the book of Daniel he believes that Michael specifically is the defender of Israel.

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ 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.

In Isaiah 14, we see that Satan tells God 5 times what he WILL do. Filled with pride, Satan says: "I will ascend into heaven."

"I will exalt my throne above the stars of God."

"I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation..."

"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds."

"I will be like the Most High."

Can you imagine telling God... What you WILL do? Telling God that you will be his equal?

Yet, Isaiah 42:8 God says: ⁸

I am the LORD; that is my name;

my glory I give to no other,

In this moment, God's righteous judgment was poured out on Satan and the demons as they were defeated, cast out of Heaven and thrown down to the earth. Satan is defeated!

John, still with his eyes cast toward the heavens, after seeing these two different signs play out, suddenly hears an audible voice coming from Heaven. I imagine this booming voice that is proclaiming victory once again. This voice says:

¹⁰...“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. ¹¹And 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.¹² 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!”

This voice from Heaven, tells us that the Devil, whose name means “false accuser” or “slanderer” is actually standing before God, accusing believers day and night. So, here is Satan, he is like a prosecutor before the throne of God trying to convict believers. This means, Satan is scouring the earth looking for evidence that he can take to the throne of God and present his case of our guilt. Satan is trying to watch every action we make, every word we speak, every sin we commit and is rushing back to the throne of God, building a case of our guilt. Do you know what the humbling reality is? The case he presents of our guilt to God... it is all true... we are guilty! Satan doesn't even have to make things up, he doesn't have to lie when he brings the charges of our guilt before God. It's all true. The depth of our depravity is overwhelming, the degree of our guilt is undeniable.

But, standing between God, the perfect judge, and Satan the accuser is Christ.

1 John 2:1 charges us to not sin, but continues “¹... But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. No matter how much evidence about our sin he collects, and I am sure he has plenty of it on us, no matter how much evidence of our sin he hurls before the righteous judge, Christ is defending us before God saying, I'll take that, that's on me. I'll take the punishment for that.

You see it was at the cross that wrath and mercy meet. One author asked, Christ has never sinned, so, why would a sinless man be suffering God's wrath, at the cross? Because He walked into that courtroom, He stood between the judge and the guilty person, and said, “I will serve *his* sentence.” He took other people's sin upon Himself. He took upon Himself sin to such an extent that He *became* sin. He became vile and detestable—the most vile and detestable thing that could ever exist—and God poured out the full measure of His wrath upon Him. He poured out His wrath upon Christ until that wrath was absorbed and exhausted, until every bit of justice was satisfied.

Christ served the complete sentence of just wrath that you and I deserved. This is the mercy of the cross, the sinless one serving the sentence of the sinner. Now we see that God has a

purpose in His mercy; there is a purpose in His patience. 2 Peter 3:9-10 says it so well: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” God does not wish that any should perish, so He gives time to repent. It is His loving kindness that brings us to repentance.

¹¹And 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.

They didn't conquer Satan because they were good enough, or because they tried hard enough, or because of who their family was, or even because they went to church or read their Bibles. They overcame Satan in three ways. First, because their sins were covered by the blood of the Lamb. The reference of it being the blood of the Lamb, immediately takes us back to Exodus, when it was the blood of the lamb that was put on the doorposts of their homes, and because of this, death would pass over the home. We are reminded that the death of Christ was a substitutionary death for us. He suffered and died, so that we could live.

Second, they overcame Satan by the word of their testimony.

Psalm 78 reminded Israel to remember how good God is.⁴

**We will not hide them from their children,
but tell to the coming generation
the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might,
and the wonders that he has done.**

Knowing and remembering the work of God in their life protected them from being deceived and believing the lies of Satan. Our testimonies are powerful reminders of how God is working in our lives. My wife and I disciple a younger couple, who have a prayer journal, where each of them takes turns writing their prayers. They are able to read each other's prayers. What an intimate moment to read the heart of your husband or wife, through their prayers. They shared with me that they went back, and read the past few months of prayers. They were reflecting on the ways so many of their prayers were answered. In this moment, they praised God for the reminder, the testimony of how God is so good! The reminder of God working in your life, overcomes the lies that Satan tries to convince you of.

And the third way they overcame Satan was because they loved the Lord more than life itself. Even in this world that is engulfed with evil and persecution, their love of the Lord never waned. I don't know how you can experience the grace of God and are not radically changed. **INSERT HOW CHRISTIANITY SAVED CIVILIZATION QUOTE.....** Believers over the course of history have been so overcome with the depth of mercy and grace of God, that circumstances of life was not what defined them or their faith, it was their love of the Lord that drove them to be faithful. And because of this, once again Satan was defeated. Do you love the Lord, do you trust the Lord in a way that you hold on to Him tighter than life itself?

I said it when I started today, and I will say it again. There is a raging spiritual war being battled. A cosmic conflict is currently underway for souls. Satan will stop at nothing to kill, steal, and destroy. He is like a prowling lion seeking to devour. There is no sitting out of this war. You can't run from it, you can't hide from it, you can't be indifferent or neutral to it. You have to pick a side.

Studying through all of this can get heavy, scary, and overwhelming. But, we are reminded by Paul that ⁷ God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord... 2 Tim 1:7-8

John clearly tells us how to overcome the schemes of Satan, and how to keep our eyes clearly focused on the Truth of the gospel. Now, I warn you, these ways to overcome Satan are not easy... but they are simple.

Now, we are just over halfway through this chapter in Revelation. Are you all ready to settle in for another hour of preaching? LOL Kidding. I will give you a few application points here, but I encourage you to study through the rest of Revelation 12 on your own. It is amazing!

Here are three application points to this.

¹¹And 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.

- 1) Rest in the finished work of the cross. The night I placed my faith and trust in Christ, an old pastor asked me a question that I struggled to answer. He looked at me and asked, "what's holding you back?" He said, Chris, what's holding you back from living your life for Christ? Sitting there I realized I had run out of excuses. In almost a whisper I answered him "nothing... nothing's holding me back." So I ask you the same question. Whether you have not yet placed your faith in the finished work of the cross, or maybe today you realize there are some things you are still holding on to, you have not yet thrown at the foot of the cross. What is holding you back from resting in the finished work of the cross?
- 2) By the word of their testimony- our students are going to Denver Colorado this summer for evangelism training. In this time our students will have opportunities to share the gospel with others, and from this to share their testimonies with others. When we share our testimonies we remind ourselves and share with others the amazing ways God has and continues to work in your life. When was the last time you shared your testimony of how you came to place your faith in Christ, with someone? Be intentional to share your testimony with someone this week.
- 3) Love God more than life itself. David Jeremiah writes, "no one can say they have overcome the devil if they deny Christ in order not to be physically killed. The promise of eternal life means little to one who would fight to keep hold of earthly life. History is

filled with the accounts of those who “loved God more than life itself.” Satan cannot overcome people who have no fear of physical death. They are free to live their lives in complete obedience to the Lord because Satan has no power to separate them from the love of Christ.

For now, the dragon still rages because he knows his time is short. But, Church, we do not fight FOR victory — we fight FROM victory. Satan is defeated and Christ has already won.

A couple weeks ago at youth group, one of my freshman guys came running up to me. Excitement in his voice he shared that one of the guys from his hockey team, accepted Christ. He told me the story of how he actually got a penalty during the game and was pretty mad about the call. After the game, he called one of his buddies, to vent a little about receiving the penalty. In the middle of the conversation, he simply decided... I should take this conversation in a spiritual direction. So out of nowhere, my freshman guy asked his friend a tough question. He asked, “Have you given your life to Jesus?” His buddy stumbled over his words for a moment, then said no, they continued this spiritual conversation, and by the end of the conversation this guy is praying to receive Christ. My freshman guy and his buddy are texting each other prayer requests and prayers almost daily!

The quote I shared at the beginning was “if you are not discipling your children in the Word, the world will disciple them for you.” This high school freshman understands that a spiritual war is currently underway. He wants to use every moment that he has to disciple his friends, to point them to Jesus. He knows too well the draw the world has on our lives and in this spiritual war, he knows there is no fence to sit on, there is no middle ground, he has already chosen what side of the battle he is on.

My question today, have you?