



Part 27 – Satan Cast Down

Revelation 12:7-17

This passage recapitulates the same story depicted in the previous section but this time in greater detail. There is a basic progression at work: Christ triumphed, Satan attacked, God's protects his people. This is the way that human history unfolds. The devil and his angels make war against Christ and His angels and His people. It is exactly what happened during the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, but it is also the same pattern of spiritual war that takes place throughout fallen human history, that period of time recorded from Genesis 3 through Revelation 21.

God has been faithful to keep the ancient promise of Genesis 3:15 to preserve a righteous seed from whom the Messiah would come. That promise was kept in the birth of the Messiah, the protection of the church, and the ultimate defeat of the dragon. "The woman's other children share her son's victory as they testify their trust in Jesus the Lamb."¹

A War in Heaven

The second half of chapter 12 is a heavenly description of Christ's triumph which is described from an earthly vantage point in the previous passage: "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" (vs. 5). Once again, we see the use of recapitulation as John views the same event from two different vantage points.

Vs. 7 – "Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back" – This heavenly war will issue in the dragon's earthly pursuit of the Messiah and then the church. In Scripture, Michael is described as the champion of God's people. In Daniel 10:21 Michael is called the prince of God's people who fights against the prince of Persia. Daniel 12:1 prophesies about the end times, which were ushered in with the coming of Christ: "At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise." The authority of Michael is delegated to him by the Lord. His victory over the dragon is not for a single moment in question.

Vs. 8 – "Revelation could...be characterized as depicting an (unequal) power struggle in which (contrary to appearance) the power of the dragon (which is behind the power of human empires) is not strong enough to overcome the apparent weakness of the child or the slain Lamb."² There is no dual or "showdown" between God and Satan because the difference of power between the two is so great. So, God dispatches Michael, a created being whose power is far greater than the dragon, to do battle.

Vs. 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 earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." – The identification of the dragon as the *ancient serpent* identifies him as the agent of man's fall into sin in Genesis 3. After the fall, the Devil does throughout the world what he did in the Garden by actively seeking to lead humanity into sin and destruction.

Some commentators argue that all three accounts of Satan's defeat (his original expulsion from heaven, his defeat in the death and resurrection of Jesus, and his final destruction) are in mind here. That may be. However, I tend to think that this expulsion refers to Satan's removal from the "courtroom" of heaven at the accomplishment of Christ's redemptive work. The context seems to favor that interpretation.

A Hymn of Praise

The various hymns in Revelation serve in part to help us properly understand the events that are recorded. There are three main themes in this hymn: Celebration of God's deliverance (vs. 10), Satan conquered by the saints (vs. 11), and the implications of that victory for heaven and earth (vs. 12).

Vs. 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." – The opening words follow closely along with 11:15, which is another indication that the victory described here is the same from the previous chapter. In Job, Satan is called *the accuser*. Now he is once again given that title. It is a legal term attributed to the function of a prosecutor. But he can only accuse. He

¹ Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001) p. 186

² Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018) pp. 219-220

cannot successfully prosecute the people of God: “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (Romans 8:33-34).

Vs. 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.” – After his disciples’ return from a successful preaching mission Jesus said, “I saw Satan falling from heaven like lightning” (Luke 10:18). Jesus sees the ultimate defeat of Satan. Until then, there is a sense in which Satan falls whenever the church faithfully bears witness to the gospel, even unto death, and when salvation comes to sinners.

Vs. 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!” – The rejoicing in heaven contrasts with the woe upon the earth that will come from the malice of the dragon who knows his destruction draws near.

The Pursuit

Vs. 13 – “...He pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child...” – Having failed to devour the Messiah and now cast down, the infuriated dragon maliciously pursues the church (“the woman”).

Vs. 14 – “But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she may fly from the serpent...” – The purpose of the church’s exodus in the wilderness is to find shelter from the dragon and be nourished by the Lord. The background of the two wings may be found in Exodus 19:4 and Deuteronomy 32:10-12 where God speaks of carrying his people in the wilderness as an eagle. “The church is once again portrayed as later-day Israel taking over the role of the old Israel, and with the spiritual wilderness representing God’s protective presence substituted for the physical wilderness of Sinai...So God will strengthen and nourish the church in its exodus wanderings through the wilderness of the world.”³

Vs. 15 – “The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.” – In the Old Testament there are a number of references to floodwaters which function as symbols of the persecution against God’s people. David described Saul’s pursuit of him as “the torrents of Belial” (Psalm 18:4). In Psalm 144, David prays that God would deliver him “out of great waters” (vv. 7-8). And in Psalm 32, persecution against God’s people is described “a flood of great waters” (vs. 6). The river proceeding from the mouth of the serpent is symbolic of his guile toward the church. “Satanic agents in the form of false teachers, compromisers, and demons infiltrate the church in order to deceive her and to contribute to her demise (Rev. 2:14-16, 20-22; 3:15-17)...The churches to which John was writing had already begun to experience the devil’s flood of deception (Rev. 2:2, 14, 20)...”⁴

Vs. 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.” – Here is another allusion to the exodus history when the Egyptian army was swallowed up by waters. At the Red Sea, God defeated Pharaoh’s army through the very waters by which he delivered his people. Through the waters the Lord led them into the wilderness, the place of protection and nourishment. In the cross, God both defeated the dragon and delivered his people.

Vs. 17 – “Then the dragon became furious with the woman...” – His efforts to destroy the church have been thwarted but this does not stop him from continuing his malicious pursuit. The dragon stands upon the “sand of the seashore” because it is from “the sea” that the beast will arise, to whom he will grant his power to wage war against the church.

“The followers of the Lamb live in the in-between time which was inaugurated with Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension, and will be consummated with his return as depicted in Revelation 19-22. This is the age of the ‘third woe,’ when Satan is at large in this world even though he has no authority in the heavenly realm. Therefore God’s people will continue to experience the presence and protection of God, but they will also experience suffering (tribulation) and opposition because Satan continues to be at large for a ‘short time’...This paradoxical pattern of suffering and victory for Jesus’ followers is the same thing that Jesus himself experienced; the hardships of being a disciple are not a mistake, nor a sign of the failure of God, but are part and parcel of what it means to be a faithful witness.”⁵

³ G.K. Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) p. 260

⁴ G.K. Beale, 261

⁵ Ian Paul, p. 226