

**The Conflict of the Ages**  
(Sermon 20, chapter 12)  
3.2.25  
(Jim Cefaratti)

Please turn in your Bibles to Revelation chapter 12.

If I say the phrase “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...” what would I be referring to? Yes, Star Wars. The first movie came out in 1977. There have been 12 feature length movies, numerous TV shows and over 100 books. Who does not know that story of the conflict between the Empire and the Resistance, an epoch good verses bad conflict that extended generations. Well, there was nothing original in the Star Wars series. What we will study today is the true, genuine “Conflict of the Ages” that began before creation, is going on now, and will continue until the New Heavens and New Earth come into existence.

Chapter 12 is simply fascinating. This chapter is loaded with imagery. Add to that this chapter encompasses from a time-frame point of view the time from creation, Gen chapter 3 through the period just prior to the return of Christ. Because of the expansive content of this chapter we will need to focus on the core message.

<p><b><i>PROP: We are in the battle today. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. The enemy is defeated.</i></b></p>
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In order to focus on what I believe to be the main point of this passage we will need to quickly address the imagery. I am going to give you the bottom line in regard to the imagery. What I am sharing is well within the orthodox teachings, I leaned heavily on materials from men like John MacArthur and David Guzik (I am using a lot of his material in this message) and material from one of Scott’s message on this chapter. (Note - this document is not properly footnoted).

This passage is structured and we will examine it in three sections:

- The Woman and the Dragon - Vs 1-6
- Satan Thrown Down – Vs 7-12
- The Woman and the Dragon (again) – Vs 13-17

We will examine this passage in that order but we will come back to verses 10-12 as the focus and the applications.

Let’s read all of Rev. 12...

**[12:1] 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. [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 [the Church] have conquered him [the Devil] 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)**

As we examine this chapter we need to refer back to the guidance that Scott gave us at the start of this study regarding understanding the time-frames in this book. Some of what is going on here has happened, is happening and will happen. Also it is important to understand that chapters 4-11 represented God's point of view of what is happening, both in heaven and on earth. The seals and trumpets and scroll. Seeing all that is going on in heaven and the impact on the earth. In this chapter 12 there is a big shift. The perspective flips from God's view in heaven to Satan's view. We need also to understand that what is being described in chapters 12, 13 and 14 are happening at the same time as the events in chapters 4-11. Last week Scott discussed this style of writing in understanding this book. Don't get confused about this. It's just the best way the Holy Spirit decided to convey it to us for our understanding.

Now back to the text.

## **Section 1 – The Woman and the Dragon**

### **The Woman**

Now a great sign appeared: This is the first sign that John relates, and is described as a great sign and this great sign introduces the first imagery, the woman. A woman clothed with the sun. Scripturally, this woman clothed with the sun should be identified with Israel, according to Joseph's dream (Genesis 37:9-11). Israel is often represented as a woman (Isaiah 54:1-6, Jeremiah 3:20, Ezekiel 16:8-14, and Hosea 2:19-20). This woman represents not only Israel, but also all those through whom God promised to provide a savior. This woman represents the entire Messianic community.

### **The Dragon**

**Another sign appeared in heaven:** The creature here was not literally a **great, fiery red dragon**, but the dragon represented his nature and character, powerful and evil. Verse 9 tells us that this dragon image is the devil, no guessing needed here. This dragon had great power (**seven heads and ten horns**) and claimed royal authority (**seven diadems**). (There is further description given in 13:1 and the parallel references in Daniel 7:7-8:2)

**His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.**

Many believe this describes one-third of the angelic host in league with Satan (*his angels* of Revelation 12:9). This could be a reference to the fall

of Satan from heaven with 1/3 of the angels (The Bible describes Satan's fall from heaven in Luke 10:18 and in the Old Testament books of Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14.) This could also be describing an event yet to happen during the tribulation period described in the prior chapters or it could be inclusive of both. The important point is to know that it is the devil that is being described and that this created being who deems himself God's equal was ejected from heaven.

**What does he intend to do: To devour her Child as soon as it was born:** The use of the word devour is used here. The Greek word translated as "devour" is "katethio" (κατέσθειν), which literally means "to eat up" or "to swallow down" and can also be used to signify consuming or destroying something completely. There is no evidence that it even existed.

From a history point of view this attempt to destroy started with his actions in the garden of Eden, Moses's preservation, Joseph's escapes. Attacks on the life of David... The attempt to **devour her Child** is clearly fulfilled by Herod's attempts to kill Jesus as a child (Matthew 2:16-18). And includes the work of the enemy to kill Jesus during his ministry and the thought he had won when Christ was on the cross. But in every one the Dragon failed !!!! (here is where we give a yell and celebrate, too bad we do not have an organ, I might dance around).

### **The Man-Child**

**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.**

This refers to Jesus. In this one sentence we have all the contents of the four gospels, all the works of Christ while on the earth, his crucifixion, burial, resurrection and ascension all summarized in one sentence. Absolutely amazing. The life of Jesus started with an earthly birth but ends with his sovereign rule over everything. Remember every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Even the mouth of Satan.

### **The Woman Flees**

**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.** I want to be careful with this verse for it has "was" and "will be" elements. Historically the first century Christians, especially Jewish Christians, were persecuted in the most brutal manners. As Scott stated last week the persecution has continued and is at its height today. But this passage also has a future aspect associated with the activities of Satan that we will cover in the next

section. Persecuted by the dragon, the woman is protected by God in a **prepared** place. **One thousand two hundred and sixty days:** I am not going to spend any time on this phrase. In the messages that Scott brought on chapter 11 he addressed this 1260 day/42 month time frame and how to understand it.

## **Section 2 – Satan Thrown Down to Earth Vs 7-12**

There is a battle between the Kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. This battle started eons ago before the creation, is on-going today and will come to a climax just prior to the return of Christ. This battle started in heaven when Satan (Isaiah 14:12-14) sought to usurp God's position. Most scholars believe these specific verses refer to a future event. And in this future conflict the angel Michael leads God's angels, defeats them and they are cast down to earth. Now a lot has been written about this battle and you can do your research but the main point is, Satan lost and was thrown down.

### **(10-12) A joyful declaration in heaven.**

This next section of this passage is where I would like to "percolate" for a little bit.

**Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."**

If there is any passage in the scriptures that gives us great hope, faith, peace and strength it is this passage. Do we not know that there is an enemy that is after us and committed to weaken our faith, love, hope, service and hinder the work of the kingdom? Right now, there may be some right here who are in midst of a struggle, temporal or spiritual where you are wondering "where is God?" "Where is my reason for hope?". "God, please speak to me, my faith is weak, I do not know if I can endure!". Well this passage is the definitive proof that you can overcome. The enemy that has been accusing you and me, the enemy that has been asserting that God does not care or God cannot help or our faith is too weak and he is too strong, that enemy has been thrown down, he did not walk out no he

was thrown out, cast down. Just hold that picture in your mind, CAST OUT, just like the demoniac into the pigs. No choice no ability to resist, CAST OUT!!! And how do we overcome, by any strength that we have ourselves? By any acts of service performance or resource that we can control? NO. By nothing that originates in us. By the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, (what Christ did for us) and the confession of His keeping power. We are going to come back to this section for application but I want to move on to finish the passage.

### **Section 3 - The Woman and the Dragon (again)**

Vs 12 - 17

**In this passage we see the Lord gives provision to safely flee (two wings of a great eagle), the enemy aggressively pursues** (The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood), the woman is protected by God **and the dragon making war with the rest of the offspring (the church) described as** those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

This section ends with the introduction to the next chapter with “And he (the dragon) stood on the sand of the sea.

Ok so we have exegeted the passage. A lot of imagery, history, characters action, good against evil, good is winning evil is losing and we are even left with a cliff hanger ending. Why do we care and what does this have to do with us today?

Here is how: As we covered earlier in this message we are in a battle royale today. Let's go back to the Prop:

***We are in the battle today. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. The enemy is defeated.***

In the message two weeks ago, Scott talked about Mahamat, a young Christian living in northern Cameroon, [who] was imprisoned by his parents. Scott accurately stated that today more than any other time in history persecution of the church is at the highest point, around the world. In reflection I do not think I know anyone who was born and resides in the USA who has been persecuted the way persecution is described in the early church or in other nations around the world today. What we may consider persecution is at best being censored or verbally abused or

marginalized. The only first-hand knowledge of a form of persecution is from my grandparents, 100 years ago when in the town of Solvay, New York. An evangelist visited and a small group of Italian Catholics got saved and a small church was formed. They were ostracized, laughed at and spit upon. My father experienced this as a child. But that is nothing like what we have read about in Revelation. But even without such persecution we know we are in a battle today because of vs 10 “for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”

I would like to spend just a little bit of time examining the “accusation” element as a powerful tool of the enemy. So here is a question, does the enemy have a basis for accusations against us? Or another way of looking at it is, have we/have I given him reason or ammunition on which to accuse us? I can only speak for me and the answer is yes. I have repented of my sins. I have acknowledged Christ as savior and Lord, I seek to walk by the Spirit and live in a manner pleasing to the Lord as instructed by the scriptures. But the fact is although we are saved, translated from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. The same grace by which we were saved and clothed with the robes of Christ’s righteousness, that same grace is needed daily as we grow in sanctification. Being accused by the enemy that we are not good enough, that we have failed, that we sin that we still engage with “those sins that so easily entangles us” (Heb. 12:1). The fact is that those accusations are true!!!

Heb. 12 vs 1-4

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Scripture does not say that believers stop sinning. Scripture says that as believers when we recognize that we have sinned we are to look to Jesus as the founder and perfecter of our faith.

What does this mean? First, when we do sin I will guarantee you that the first person to inform us is the Holy Spirit not the enemy of our souls. And what are we to do? Agree with the Holy Spirit, repent and grow in

surrender to God. But let's say you don't do that. Let's say you are a strong willed self-sufficient arrogant Italian who does not like to be told what to do. You ignore the Holy Spirit and then the enemy comes and tells you what a failure that you are. What a fake you are. Your whole life is a shambles.

You better hope people never find out what you are really like. You are so weak. How can you stand yourself? You call yourself a servant of God and you claim to be an elder in your church. You should be ashamed of what you have done and of who you are. You do the same thing over and over again. There is no hope for you. And by the way your kids are a mess to, because of your failures.

For me this, more than any other way is how the enemy attacks and persecutes me. And my guess is that this is how he persecutes you too. It may be true that the accusations are valid but the bigger truth, the more important truth (that the enemy never mentions) is that those accusations mean nothing against us because Jesus has already paid the penalty for our sins.

Verse 11 "And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony".

The enemy accuses and when he does we do not even have to respond to that accusation. All we have to do is look to Jesus and make our confession "Jesus by faith I proclaim that your blood has cleansed me of all sin. I repent again with full confidence that your grace is sufficient. Help me Lord to run with endurance the race that is set before me. Help me to always be looking to Jesus." I have found that the more I respond like this the less the enemy accuses because all his accusations do is cause me to turn more quickly and desperately to Jesus and that really does not fit his objective. He is trying to drive me away from the savior and his accusations simply reinforce why I need a savior and what a good savior he is to accept me the way I am because I am his.

Now we know that our enemy is sly. He can come in many forms. Sometimes very direct (as above) with his accusations and sometimes quite benignly. By that I mean not with an outright accusation but with a somewhat comforting tone with whispers of:

That is not so bad  
No one is looking no one will know  
A little won't hurt  
Not now, later  
Everyone else is doing it

They have no right to judge you  
God loves you anyway  
You try so hard, everyone will understand  
No one knows what you are going through  
You can always repent later  
You need to take care of yourself first

Sounds a lot like “did God say?”

And when these whispers come how will we respond? Because this is not like a frontal attack we might be caught off-guard and respond with what I call “passive agreement”. We go along. Not aggressively pursuing sin, but passively. We block out the voice of the Holy Spirit and we just go along with the pleasant voice of the enemy who does not demand that we do anything, except keep going on our merry way.

What we do not realize is that this is the dragon. This is the enemy of our souls. This is the one who is seeking to destroy us and all that is Godly. These are how we are persecuted today. The active and passive accusations from the enemy. He will continue to seek to destroy us, with great wrath, even though he knows his time is short, he will not give up he will persist he will not stop!!! This is war and even though he is defeated his attacks will not stop.

So I give a warning. If there are any of us here who are living with “passive agreement” with the enemy be warned. He is your enemy not your friend. He seeks only to destroy. It may not feel or look like it but that is the fact. And if we realize what is going on how do we respond? For both the frontal attack and the indirect attack the response of the believer is the same:

Look to Jesus and make our confession “Jesus by faith I proclaim that your blood has cleansed me of all sin. I repent again with full confidence that your grace is sufficient. Help me Lord to run with endurance the race that is set before me. Help me to always be looking to Jesus.

The gospel is always the answer, always and forever. In one sense this almost looks defensive but it is not, it is in fact very offensive. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. When we confess the gospel, we are wielding the sword of the spirit, the word of God. We are tearing down the strongholds of the enemy: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds."

When we respond with the gospel we not only are being set free but we are destroying the works of the evil one. He comes to destroy but “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 we have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. Our response is not defensive, it is utterly offensive. The gospel always moves to expand the kingdom of God.

### Closing

I close with this: the persecution mentioned in this text. We here today may never experience such persecution. Our children may not. Maybe even our grandchildren or great grandchildren. But some day those that come after us will. It is promised.

How can we prepare and how can we set in place preparation for those who will experience persecution which could result in “resisting to the point of shedding your blood.” or “even unto death”? I believe it is living a life that is growing in surrender to God. As believers we are not here to defend against an enemy, we are here to tear down his works. As we incline our hearts toward God, as we yield to him and grow in surrender to him, as we give this example and testimony to our fellow believers today, to our children and our grandchildren. As we teach and exemplify how to live the gospel we, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit put in place all that is needed to resist the enemy, pull down his strongholds and be ready to suffer and endure persecution, even the possibility of death. Because we know all of that will be culminated, what everyone has been waiting on and longing for is finally here. The wickedness of the fallen world has been destroyed and replaced with the perfect, powerful, eternal reign of Jesus Christ – forever and ever! The consummation has come. All of this has finally come to pass. “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” How well we can be at peace knowing that we are contributing to the overcoming, potentially death facing, situations that those who come after us will face. Is that alone not sufficient for us today to grow in surrender to God.

***We are in the battle today. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. The enemy is defeated.*** And we can have confidence in the overcoming and keeping power of God that both we and those who come after will be victorious even in death as we yield to His grace and grow in love and surrender to Him, the keeper of our soul with whom we will reign forever and forever.

***(Let's Pray)***