

# Spiritual Battlefield Reports

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[ 0 : 00 ] Three pieces of war reporting, but the context here is of spiritual battle. So we hear reports taken from the heat of the battle.

In chapter 13, we're taken inside the enemy camp to learn something of our enemy's strategies. And then in chapter 14, we're taken to the final outcome to see the victory of the king and the peace that he brings.

I think there's a growing awareness in our culture of the reality of the spiritual realm, of the reality of good and evil, that evil is real and we need real hope and we need real goodness as the antidote. And that's why these chapters come to us as good news. You know, they have something of the qualities of a graphic novel. They can be quite hard for us to grasp some of the images. There's really vivid pictures.

But the basic idea is that there is this war going on between the forces of good and evil, but it's not a battle of equals. Good will triumph in the end. That Satan will fight against God and his purposes and his people, but he is defeated.

[ 1 : 14 ] That the victory belongs to Christ Jesus. That victory which we see begin at the cross and finishes when he returns. So as we get into these battlefield reports and as we think about the big picture, and there's some details that we'll grapple with as well, let's ask ourselves the question, why does Jesus give them to the first century church and to us today?

And hopefully that as we ask that question, as we think about the details, it would help us to understand that these are given to us so that as Christians, if we're Christians here today, we would keep trusting our God and our Savior.

And if you're not a Christian, you would understand the importance of joining Jesus in order to share his victory. So turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation 12.

We come to the first battlefield report, and the headline is that God protects Jesus and protects his church. So we're introduced to the story of a woman and a son and a dragon, and there's tension and there's threat.

And it actually reads, there's lots of ancient stories and ancient myths that sound a bit like this. So in the Roman Empire, there was the story of the goddess Leto, who was pregnant with the god Apollo, and there was the threat of the snake, the serpent, the python, and Poseidon came to the rescue.

[ 2 : 36 ] And so, oh, it's like that. But actually, there's a huge difference in what we have in the book of Revelation. Because while there are these sort of graphic pictures, it's not myth.

These events take place in history. And the great hero of the story is none other than Jesus. And Jesus is the one who is presented as offering hope to all peoples, from all cultures, in all times and places.

He is the one who defeats the forces of evil. He defeats the dragon. He is the one through whom good triumphs. He is the one through whom we can have the true happily ever after.

But let's get into these verses. Recognize, first of all, the opposing forces that we have. And we see, first of all, there is the woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars.

This woman represents the people of God. The church in the Old Testament and the New Testament. And wonderfully, clothed with the glory and the majesty of God.

[ 3 : 44 ] Psalm 104, God wraps Himself in light. Now God wraps His church in glory and majesty. So there's the woman and the sun. You know, she's pregnant and about to give birth.

And in verse 5, she gives birth to a son, a male child, who would rule all the nations with an iron scepter. This is talking to us about the promise in the Bible of a coming king and savior.

This child represents the true king, God's king, who represents the shepherd who will rule over and who will defend His people, and who will defeat His people's enemies.

This iron scepter is the same rod that we meet, held in the hand of the good shepherd of Psalm 23. This is speaking to us of Jesus, the shepherd and the savior.

But then on the other side, there is the dragon, the red dragon. And the dragon in the Bible, and I guess through all ancient stories, is a symbol of chaos and evil and death.

[ 4 : 48 ] And we're told in verse 9 that the dragon is representative of Satan. And we meet this dragon in verse 4, poised to kill the son when the son's about to be born.

And perhaps if we go to the beginning of the Gospels, we think about King Herod, so eager, bent on evil, to kill King Jesus.

And we see the dragon in verse 6, pursuing the woman, pursuing the church. And so we're reminded that there is the devil who would seek to destroy and to harm the church of God.

And think about brutal opposition that there has been to the church from the first century until now, making it clear that in this battle, people need a savior.

God's people need a savior. And so we're presented as well with the protection of God. First of all, notice how God protects the son.

[ 5 : 55 ] In verse 5, the child was snatched up to God and to his throne. It's almost as if the whole events of the life of Jesus are captured in a sentence. So Jesus is born, the devil tries to kill him through King Herod, but he's kept safe.

And then Jesus lives this perfect life, and then he dies on the cross, and it looks like defeat, but it's actually victory. And then he's risen, and then he ascends back up to heaven where he now sits on the throne of glory.

Now he sits today as king. So God protects Jesus, the one who came to be savior. How does God protect the church?

Notice verse 6, the woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God. The wilderness is this place in the Bible where God meets with his people, where he provides for his people, where he offers protection to his people.

You can think about the book of Exodus. You can think about the shepherd of Psalm 23, guiding and providing green pastures even in the wilderness.

[ 7 : 00 ] Well, as the story continues in chapter 12, we're then invited to see that war breaks out in heaven. So the report changes focus. So now it's thinking about what's happening in the spiritual dimension.

Verse 7 and 8, we're told war broke out in heaven, and you've got Michael and the angels of God fighting against the dragon. And what we discover is that Adam and Eve, they were not the first to try to be like God.

They were not the first to rebel against God and to reject his authority. Actually, that happened first with the devil leading some angels astray to try and rebel and remove God from the throne.

But what we see is that God's angels defeat the devil and he's cast down. We're told in verse 9 something of the description of Satan.

He's the great dragon, he's the snake, he's the devil, he's the Satan who leads the whole world astray. We're going to think about that in a few minutes.

[ 8 : 06 ] The biggest con man of all is the devil. He knows in verse 12 his time is short, he is full of fury against God, so he's full of fury against God's church.

And so he fights in opposition, wanting to drag people away from God. But the wonderful truth that we have in Revelation 12 is that Satan has been defeated.

That when God and the devil are locked in spiritual battle, this is not a battle of equals. God is greater.

The outcome is not in doubt. So listen to the song that we have in heaven. Now has come the salvation, the power, the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah for the accuser has been hurled down.

Hurled down in defeat. Really interesting when Jesus sent his 72 disciples out on mission and they came back reporting that people had become followers of Jesus.

[ 9 : 11 ] Jesus said, I saw Satan fall. Whenever someone turns to put their faith in Jesus, it's like there's another defeat of Satan beyond that original defeat.

There is defeat because the kingdom of God is established. established. And it's established, verse 11, they triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

So God is greater and has the victory and the church in Christ has the victory, wins victory over Satan. Not in our own strength, but as we trust in what Jesus has done for us, there is victory for us in the sacrifice of Jesus.

and as we hold on to the testimony, to the gospel word, to the good news. And so there is joy. Rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them.

For those who are associated with Jesus, there is joy. There's joy now and there's joy that will last forever. But there is woe for the enemies, according to verse 12.

[10:22] So war breaks out in heaven. And then we also need to see in verse 13 to 17 that this war breaks out on earth. When the dragon saw that he'd been hurled to the earth, here's his response.

He pursued the woman who'd given birth to the male child. So he failed to dethrone God. He's hurled down in defeat. Now he turns his guns, his weapons, on the church, the people on the earth. And the scene that we have here, it's pictured a little bit like the book of Exodus. In the book of Exodus, we have an evil king, Pharaoh, who is chasing down the people of God, looking to destroy them.

And again, in that context, hear God's protection. So the devil is pursuing, but verse 14, 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'd be taken care of.

Book of Exodus, chapter 19, God has taken his people all the way to meet with him at Mount Sinai and he puts it like this. He said, I rescued you and brought you on eagle's wings. God uplifts, protects, guides his church.

[11:33] Safety on the eagle's wings. And again, brought into the wilderness, brought to meet with God, to enjoy God's presence and protection. And even here, there's this image where the snake trying to destroy the church spews out a torrent of water.

But God's people are kept safe from the flood. Again, Book of Exodus, kept safe through the Red Sea. God protects his church. So we are reminded of two things in this.

We're reminded that Satan will keep attacking. Verse 17, the dragon was enraged and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring. So if you want to stay faithful, if you want to keep obeying God, if you want to be a follower of Jesus, there is the reality of spiritual battle.

But there's also the greater reality that Jesus has won the victory. And so our call is to hold fast, to live with faith in Jesus and obedience to God's Word.

Just to help us to think about this, two things that we can take from this first battlefield report. I think the first thing is to stay awake because spiritual battle is real.

[12:51] I don't know how many of you have read C.S. Lewis' wonderful book, The Screwtape Letters. It imagines a senior devil writing to a junior devil and it's really instructive for the number of different strategies that the devil will use to try and fight against God and His purposes.

practices. So, this senior devil will speak about practices of trying to conceal themselves and their evil intent. Sometimes he will encourage this junior devil to, here's what you need to do, you need to distract a Christian by all the different good things of this world.

It's a reminder that the devil will use various temptations to lead us astray. The devil might appeal to our pride to say, I don't need God, I don't need to trust His Word, I'm strong enough by myself.

The devil might choose to use personality clashes, quarrels and conflicts. conflicts. He might choose a culture of flippancy where everything seems like no big deal.

Sin is no big deal, eternity is no big deal. There are all kinds of ways in which the devil is at work and so we need to stay awake because the spiritual battle is real.

[14:17] We need to be on guard by spending time in His Word and in prayer and in worship and in fellowship and remembering the good news of the Gospel because we need to stay awake but we also need to stay close to Jesus because His victory is certain.

So this is a spiritual battlefield report. Sometimes in spiritual battles and we find this in the Bible, it's a battle between two champions. Think about David and Goliath. And the way that that battle went was as it went for the champion, so it went for the whole people.

So if David wins and he did, that meant victory for all the followers of David. As it goes for Jesus, so it goes for the church of Jesus and Jesus has won the victory through His death and resurrection

which means if we're in Christ we're on the winning side.

We share in His triumph and our responsibility is to keep faith alive by keeping close to Jesus in the grace that He provides.

So that's the first spiritual battlefield report that reminds us that God protects Jesus and protects the church. Now we move to the second one which really zooms in on this fact, Satan's strategy of deception.

[ 15 : 42 ] To help us think about this, a little story from the American Civil War. So back in 1862 there was a battle called the Battle of Antietam or the Battle of Sharpsburg and the Union soldiers who were really struggling against the Confederacy at this stage, as this battle was looming they were walking through a farmer's field and they found three cigars with a piece of paper wrapped around it and that piece of paper was the Confederate battle plans and so all of a sudden this army that's been struggling they've got their enemies plans and with that intelligence it changed everything for the short term and ultimately in the course of the Civil War.

Now they have the capacity to halt the advances of General Lee they've got this key advantage in the battle. Now think about what Jesus gives us here in chapter 13.

He gives us insight and details about Satan's battle plan his strategy against the church which is all about deception.

We see it as we look through the pages of the Bible started with Adam and Eve deceived to think life was better without God to have the forbidden fruit. Think about deception as it happened in the story of Judas the disciple so he was deceived to betray Jesus.

Think about that deception that happens whenever we are persuaded that choosing sin over obedience is better. Or when a person says that life without Jesus is better than life with Jesus.

[ 17 : 28 ] Deception is how the devil operates. And so Jesus gives us this report to highlight the fact that our enemy acts by deception. And this chapter tells us how he deceived.

So the vision has some crazy images but the vision reveals that the dragon the Satan the devil he takes his limited authority and remember God is ultimate authority but he takes his limited authority and he uses that to try and imitate the power and the promises of God in order to draw people away from true worship of the true God in order to give their love and their loyalty and their worship to other things because the devil wants to destroy people made in the image of God.

He wants to spoil our ultimate joy. Let me just show you scattered through this text how there are these examples of deception so that we get the sense of the strategy.

Verse 3 Here is this beast being described this horrendous beast with ten horns seven heads and ten crowns. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have a fatal wound but the fatal wound had been healed.

What's the devil doing there? He's deceiving that there is a power here that is equal to the power of Jesus in his death and resurrection.

[ 18 : 50 ] There is this false claim that there is one who can give true life who is not Jesus. The whole pattern of the chapter sees the dragon and two beasts setting themselves up as this unholy trinity of evil mimicking the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit looking to deceive so that the worship would be directed away from the one true God.

Verse 13 and 14 This beast the second beast performs great signs and because of the signs it was given power to perform it deceived the inhabitants of the earth.

Jesus had miraculous power used for good to draw people to see the glory of God and be saved. The devil and the beasts will use a different form of power in order to drag people away to false worship.

We have read in recent chapters about God marking his people as belonging to him. Verse 16 and 17 the beast forced all people to receive a mark so they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark.

And the goal deception dragging people away from true worship. Verse 12 It exercised all the authority of the first beast and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.

[ 20 : 28 ] Verse 14 It deceived the inhabitants of the earth so they set up an image to worship. And then in verse 16 and 17 if a person is not willing to identify and have that mark there is exclusion and the threat of death.

Perhaps we think in our minds about that Old Testament story of Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar setting up that giant statue and the command worship or die. Perhaps if you know your history you

can think about the sort of the worst excesses of the Roman emperors calling themselves sons of gods and saying if you don't worship then there's the threat of exclusion or even death.

Perhaps we think about the brutal one religion systems that we see in our world today. If you do not worship in our way then you risk death and persecution.

We see the power of deception that Satan can do his work through regimes through governments to try and stamp out to destroy the Christian church to draw people away from true worship.

Jesus gives us these visions to remind us and to help us to know our enemy to understand that Satan always sells a lie but sometimes that lie can seem very very appealing.

[ 22 : 07 ] If we think about how he worked back at the beginning if we go back to how the devil operated in the garden of Eden think about some of the lies that he sells persuading Adam and Eve deceiving us perhaps God limits your joy God holds back his best there's more fun to be had more fullness to be had outside of God's commands choose to live your best life now don't think about eternity don't think about life in relation to God his deception includes that denial of God's authority no one can tell you what to do listen to do what God forbids that mean you become like God you can have true life when God is replaced on the throne be your authentic self don't let anyone tell you otherwise the devil would deceive us to reject

God in to favor our own desires this looks good this is going to be pleasing and the devil would persuade us there's freedom break faith with your creator in order to really live don't live according to those ancient restrictions and when we believe the lie the reality is so much better promises much but offers only death to go against the design of our creator to go against the way that we were made to say no to the wisdom of his God ordained limits to say no to healthy good life giving relationship with God to try and build the foundation for our life and our joy on something that is small and temporary and doesn't last is the path of defeat and disaster and so we need to know our enemy because he would tell us otherwise but as much as we must know our enemy we must also know the path to victory you know so we've read about

Satan's strategy that Jesus has delivered to us here but we also need to know about God's battle plan and about God's victory and so we need to know the wonderful truth of Revelation 13 and verse 8 there are people who don't worship the beast there are people who do enjoy life with God those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world the Lamb who was slain before the world was made think about what Jesus is telling us here through John before there was anything there was God Father Son and Holy Spirit and there was God's plan to save sinners who would rebel who would choose to reject him who would run from him who would turn to worship other things and that plan would involve the

Father sending the Son to come and die on a cross the Lamb who was slain and that in his death there would be this amazing reversal and victory so what looked like death and shame and humiliation actually becomes the place where Jesus is lifted up in glory where his victory is known where his salvation is experienced as he is raised on the third day and so the path of victory for us is a path of trusting Jesus and his death for our sin that by grace we would have our names written in the Lamb's book of life and to have our names there is to have eternal security is to be kept safe through every spiritual battle is to understand that as Jesus has won the victory so we as his people share that victory and so we are called as we're told in verse 10 to patient endurance and faithfulness trusting

Jesus and his promises and living by faith that Satan tries to deceive but Jesus has come and he's come to open blind eyes and there's life in him and that really takes us to the third battlefield report which remind us that Jesus King Jesus brings redemption so if this was live reporting if this was you know if the cameras were rolling and this was being portrayed the guns would now be silent the bombs would no longer be falling the troops wouldn't be charging the fog of war would be lifting and clearing and as we look up to the hillside we would see a king standing in victory and we would see his troops gathered around him and across the battlefield we would hear a great song of victory being sung because chapter 14 is the promise after the battle that the lamb wins that Jesus has the eternal victory that the outcome is never in doubt that the lamb who was slain in loving sacrifice now stands on the centre of the throne now stands in the midst of his people receiving glory and honour because he's saved takes place we're told in verse 1 on Mount

[ 28 : 33 ] Zion Mount Zion is God's hill the place of God's presence and glory and it's here that the saviour gathers his people to enjoy life with him the eternal reality for the church is a life of peace in the presence of God where God is where Jesus is God those who are gathered are the 144,000

who have the name and the father's name written on their forehead so remember that 144,000 that symbolic language here is the church in all times and places Old Testament and New Testament gathered together to praise Jesus the redeemer they have the name of Jesus and the father's name on their foreheads stamped as belonging to God and the redeemed sing a new song because they've experienced the final act of God's salvation the final defeat of

Satan and sin and death the beginning of God's eternal kingdom here on earth and so there is joy and there is peace for those who follow Jesus the king so as we consider the reality that we are in spiritual battle the thing that Jesus would say to us is this keep his final victory in view when people today are caught up in conflict think about a war zone there's really no way to know how that will end we don't have the ability to see into the future but when we open a history book and we read about a war from the past that's different isn't it because we've got the full story we know which side wins Jesus gift to you and to me today is to present from the standpoint of eternity the ultimate outcome of the spiritual battle that takes place so that if we're here today and life as a Christian is hard and we're wondering is it worth it where's it all heading perhaps you're not a Christian and you're thinking well what side should I choose Jesus invites us to recognize his victory is sure and certain and so he says to us trust me my battle is won you can look back to the cross to see the certain victory established and we're invited to look ahead with hope to his return when that victory is secure so that when we find ourselves in the spiritual battle in the fog of war when we're being tempted when we're being opposed maybe even just when we're being distracted we look to the king on the hill the king who died for us on Mount Calvary the king who stands and reigns for us on Mount

Zion because the battle is his and the battle is won and because of that the blessing can be ours let's pray together briefly■■■