

War in heaven and on earth

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[0 : 00] Please turn to Revelation chapter 12. And this is the passage that we're going to look at this morning. We've been looking in Revelation in connection with the fact that I went to Sri Lanka to speak about it.

So it's sort of fresh in mind. And let's ask the Lord's help as we look at this. Lord in heaven, you have told us that your word is a lamp for us.

A light to our path. You have told that if we meditate on your word, we will be like trees planted by streams of water. We will not wither.

We will bear fruit in due season. And we pray that you would fulfill those promises as we come to your word to hear what you are saying in your word.

We pray that you would speak by the power of your Holy Spirit. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. In Revelation chapter 12, the adversary is cast down.

[1 : 17] And here are a couple of questions that we might have coming to this chapter. We might say, Jesus is victorious.

Jesus, according to the book of Revelation, triumphed. So if he has won, like we were saying, death is dead, Christ has won.

Why is life still so difficult for Christian people? Why is the church under such pressure?

If you look across the world, one statistic said that Christianity is the most persecuted religion at the moment. Now, statistics are always a little bit slippery, but it's certainly a point, isn't it?

Persecution for Christians is not an obsolete thing of the past. It's a reality in the present. And if we're not under the intimidation of persecution, there is certainly the temptation to turn away from the gospel.

[2 : 29] You only have to look at the number of empty churches, empty church buildings that there are to see there's been a huge pressure to turn away from faith.

Not based on persecution, but based on other things. And for ourselves, we might say, well, I feel under pressure.

Don't like to admit it to too many people, but I'm under pressure. All sorts of things can put us under pressure, can't they? Our health, situations at work, situations in the family, just the things that go on in our own minds.

All sorts of things can put us under pressure. If we're under pressure, what confidence can we have that we will survive? Very confident about God, but not at all confident about me.

Is there any help that I can count on? Does God care? Can he do anything?

[3 : 34] Will he do anything? How do I stand regarding that? Well, those, I think, are the questions that Revelation 12 is answering. Let's look at, that's what I think this chapter is about.

A couple of things, the story so far, the story so far. Well, here is a rather cluttered picture of the book of Revelation.

So, it's got lots of sevens in it. And if you care to think about it, it started off with lampstands, which were the churches. And there are seven of them arranged in a sort of pattern.

And then we went to the throne and there was a scroll, which was unwrapped with seven seals. And at the end of that, there was silence.

Then there were seven trumpets. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. A little bit of spacing between them. The first four always go together. Ended up with praise.

[4 : 34] And now, we are starting the sequence of seven visions. Seven big visions. Telling us things about the reality of the world, about spiritual reality.

And they end up with judgment and praise. And then we'll have seven bowls of judgment. So, I'm just saying there's various sevens. And at the moment, we're in the bit where there are the seven

visions.

If you like words, I'm afraid I like words. You might like to look in chapter 12 and notice there's a couple of significant words. Place is a word.

Verse 8. The dragon and his angels lost their place in heaven. They lost their place. But in verse 6, the woman goes into the desert to a place prepared for her by God.

And that's again in verse 14. The woman was given the two wings of an eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. It's always interesting when words are repeated.

[5 : 42] Satan doesn't have a place. But the people of God, as I'm going to try and persuade you, do have a place.

A place of safety. A place of belonging. Another word that's repeated is the word to throw. It's also translated as to spew.

To throw stuff out of your mouth, I suppose. The word to throw crops up in verse 4. Verse 4.

He flung. He threw. His tail threw a number of stars to the earth. And it's in verse 9.

Verse 9. The dragon was hurled down. And that's repeated. He was hurled to the earth. And verse 13.

[6 : 40] When the dragon saw he had been hurled to the earth. And verse 15. The serpent hurled water. Hurled from his mouth. Water. Translated here.

Spewed. And verse 16. The dragon had spewed out of his mouth. What do I conclude from this? Well, I simply conclude there's a lot of action going on. A lot of things being thrown around and chucked around and so on.

So, just a few things there about the words. So, let's look at this chapter and try and do it a bit at a time. So, let's first of all work out who the characters are.

That's not supposed to be there. That I've gone. Oh, come on. That's completely what I didn't want it to do. Let's see.

This is the wrong slide. Right. What shall I do? I'll go all the way through to the next one. They're in the wrong order.

[7 : 42] Isn't that annoying? Right. Follow the action. No? Yes. Right. Okay. A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars on her head.

So, let's paint this woman. There's the woman. She's clothed with the sun. She has 12 stars, crown of 12 stars. She's pregnant.

So, I had to readjust my picture to give her a little bit of a bump for her tummy. And she has the moon under her feet. So, that's the first character.

Okay. A great sign appeared in heaven. That's the woman. The next character is in verse 3. And that's this person.

The enormous red dragon. And we're told that the dragon has seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns on his head. He's got a tail. And with his tail, he sweeps a third of the stars out of the sky and hurls them down to the earth.

[8 : 50] So, here's the dragon. I can't draw with seven heads and ten horns, seven crowns. There isn't room, but it's just a dragon. And, so that's the next character.

And then we follow the action. Verse 4. 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.

So, this is sort of interesting from an interpretation point of view. So, the signs are in heaven, but does this woman give birth in heaven or on earth? And I think you'll see that the action has actually moved to earth, as we'll see in a moment.

So, the dragon is confronting the woman. She was crying out in childbirth in verse 2. And now she's about to give birth. And the dragon is wanting to eat the baby.

So, there's the baby. Not very good at drawing babies, but that's a baby. And in verse 5, it says, She gave birth to a son, a male child.

[10 : 00] It's a little bit like the prophecy, behold, the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

And you might think, ah, I can think where that comes from. It's a quote. And the child was snatched up to God and to his throne. So, let's put the line between earth and heaven.

And the child is snatched up to the throne. So, the child goes to the throne. And what happens to the woman? So, this is verse 6.

The woman fled into the desert to the place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of. That's a desert. Well, the deserts in the Bible don't look like that, but that would indicate desert.

And she's looked after for 1,260 days. So, I put there 1,260. And I can never quite remember who I've done this calculation with because I've done it with so many people at different points.

[11:08] Why is 1,260 the same as 3 1/2? Yeah. The 3 1/2 is the years, and the 1,260 is the number of days.

It works if you have 360 days in a year, which is what they thought in those days. That's why we have 360 degrees in a circle because you go all the way around.

The Babylonians invented all that. And that's degrees in a circle, days in a year. 3 1/2 of them is 1,260. Okay, so that's one sequence of action.

One of the books I was reading, it said, the book of Revelation is a little bit like match of the day in that you see a goal being scored, and then they have a replay and see it again, and then they have a replay and see it again from a different angle, and then they have another replay and see it again from another slightly different angle.

And I think that's what's going to happen in this chapter. So we've seen the sequence of things, and we're going to get a little replay from another angle. We're going to have a replay. Oh, sorry, I should have said she was cared for in the desert, and she has a place in the desert.

[12:25] Now, let's look at it from a different camera angle. Verse 7, There was war in heaven, and Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought.

So this is making war. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven, and the great dragon, so there's no place there, and the great dragon is hurled down to the earth.

And we're told about the dragon who's hurled down to the earth with his angels with him. And this is a cause of great joy. So you get this long section here of cheering.

So when I was in Sri Lanka, I had to learn the names of the Sri Lankan cricket team, but I've forgotten them. Saddukandar? Saddukandar? I'm looking at you, Angel, because I think you ought to know this.

It says, Sri Lankan all-rounder, scores sixes and things. Anyway, whatever his name is. Okay, we'll take that. So you imagine this cricketer being...

[13:40] Okay, well, you think of a name, and you imagine this cricketer being bowled a ball, and in Sri Lanka you'd say, by the English, because they would love to humiliate the English.

And this batsman whacks it for six, and they're great cricket enthusiasts in Sri Lanka, and they'd all go, six, six, six, six, jump up and down, wave things, do all sorts of antics.

That is the sort of joy and exaltation that greets this hurling down of the evil one.

Look at what it says, verse 10. 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. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony.

[14:50] They did not live their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and all who dwell in them. So there's great joy. This is fantastic.

Something amazing and brilliant has happened. Exactly. So there's great joy in heaven, but there's a proviso, which is woe to the earth.

Verse 12. 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. So there's a spin-off, an unpleasant spin-off, that things get more difficult down on earth.

And let's just follow the action through. It says that the dragon now pursues the woman, and she's given two wings to fly away.

You see the wings? Whoops. She's given two wings so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert. I think this is a repetition of what was said before.

[16:03] And she's taken care of for a time, times, and half a time. And if you, in the conventional way of doing that, time is one, times is two, and a half.

That's the three and a half that was mentioned before. Out of the serpent's reach. So the serpent is trying to get her, but he can't. And from his mouth, the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

I haven't drawn this. But a flood comes out to overwhelm her. But the earth itself helps by swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

So protection from the flood. And the dragon was enraged at the woman. He's still angry. And he goes off to make war on her offspring. And the offspring are those who obey the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

So that's the action. I was just trying to put everything in without doing all the details. That's the action that takes place. So let's now try and identify who the characters are in this action.

[17:18] So I'm going to have to wind back all the way through this because I've ended up with the slides in the wrong order. I'm going to have to wind back through all of that.

Oh, go away. Right. Who are the characters? So let's look at this. Look at the baby first of all.

So we've done this before. I don't know whether you remember it. But we can take the step of identifying those characters in that piece of action.

So the baby. The woman gives birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. He's born of the woman.

He rules the nations with an iron scepter, a rod of iron. And that's a quote from Psalm 2. Did you know that? Psalm 2. Let's look at Psalm 2.

[18:36] Psalm 2 is about the Messiah. And it says in verse 9, you will rule them with an iron scepter. You will dash them to pieces like pottery. It's the father saying in Psalm 2 verse 7, you are my son.

Today I have become your father. Ask of me. I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery.

It's about the Messiah. And that's what's quoted in Revelation 12. And he is the one who is snatched up to God and his throne.

When I was in Sri Lanka they said, why haven't you mentioned the rapture? And the answer is that the rapture is not mentioned in the book of Revelation. The word is only used here to snatch up and the person who is snatched up is this baby.

So do you think we could agree as to the identity of this person? It's Jesus, isn't it? Yeah. So Jesus is in this picture. And he is born of woman.

[19:52] He is born to rule the nations. He's snatched up to heaven and sits on the throne of God. It's a very, very, very brief description of what Jesus did but that's who it is.

Let's look at the dragon. And the dragon I think we can easily identify because we're told what this symbol symbolizes. It's in verse 9.

It says, the great dragon, he has destructive power. He can swipe his tail and I think a third of the stars are flung out of the sky.

It seems like a destructive thing to me. He has very destructive power. He has angels attending because it says in verse 7, the dragon and his angels fought and he is described as all these things in verse 9, the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver who leads the world astray.

And he's also, he's also described in verse 10 as the accuser, the accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God day and night.

[21:13] So his is the voice that says, you are such a hypocrite. His is the voice that says, if only people knew what you had been thinking.

How disgraceful. His is the voice that says, you are so mean-spirited. You are so cruel in the things you say.

His is the voice that says, you are so lazy. You don't care about the things of God. His is the voice that says, all that you say, you don't do it.

He accuses people. He, and according to this, he accuses night and day. And I wonder if you've ever heard his voice accusing you.

And I wonder if you have any answer to his accusations because that's what is at the heart of this chapter. He accuses what is the answer.

[22:16] And let's look at the third character. And I try and identify her. So the, this amazing woman.

The crown of twelve stars. The sun and the moon. There is actually a place in the Bible where somebody sees a vision of stars and sun and moon bowing down and worshipping them.

it's Joseph, isn't it? Joseph in the book of Genesis. And I might even have put the, yeah, it's Genesis 37 verse 9 where Joseph has a dream.

You know, Joseph and the amazing Technicolor dream coat Joseph. He has a dream that his family members will worship him and say how great he is.

It's perhaps a little tactless to tell them that. But he, that's what he said. And in 37 9 he says, listen, I had another dream. This time the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.

[23 : 26] And his father says, he told his father, his father rebuked him. What is this dream? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you? And that caused all sorts of problems.

But that was the dream. and the sun and the moon and the stars were that particular family. So there's certainly a connection with that.

The Jewish family back in the days of the early fathers of the Jewish nation. And this woman gives birth to the Messiah.

Messiah. So you could say, well, who is she? She's a bit like Eve because the promise was that from her her seed, her offspring would crush the serpent's head.

So she's a bit like Eve. She's a bit like Mary herself, of course, who was literally the mother of Jesus Christ. She's like the Old Testament people of God because from the nation of Israel comes the Messiah.

[24 : 38] And there are places in the Old Testament where the nation of Israel is thought of as crying out in childbirth until the time that the Messiah comes into the world.

So I like to say that this woman is in fact the people of God, Old Testament people of God, and then she's still carrying on after the birth of Christ, after Christ has gone to heaven.

So I would say that she's the New Testament people of God as well. So she's the people of God, Old Testament and New Testament, if that makes sense. Does that make sense?

That's what I think she is. So those are the, we looked at the action and we looked at the characters, so you have to be patient while I click the button a lot of times to go through for the interpretation.

That was the action in which the people of God give birth to Messiah. Messiah is taken to the throne of God.

[25 : 51] The people of God are under attack and go to a place of safety. Looking at it from the heaven point of view, there's war in heaven and Satan is cast down and he attacks the people of God still more.

Makes war on them. Let's look at an interpretation then. What I think we have here is events on earth and looked at from a heavenly perspective as well.

On earth we have Jesus Christ being born, going to the cross, dying on the cross, being raised from the dead and being taken into heaven.

From the heavenly perspective it's like a conflict in which the lamb triumphs and Satan is defeated. Satan is cast down. Now let's just think what is meant by this Satan being cast down.

[27 : 01] So I've got some references. So in Job chapter 2 verse 1 in the book of Job you remember that Satan is strolling round in heaven and saying to the Lord well what he says is I've paraphrased it that Job is a hypocrite but what he says more than that I can never find the book of Job it's in my Bible somewhere Job chapter 2 it says on one day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with them to present himself before them and the Lord said to Satan where have you come from and Satan answered the Lord from roaming through the earth and going to and fro and the subject of Job is a believing man called Job is brought up and Satan says a man will give all he has for his own life if you stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones he'll curse you to his face so he's basically saying Job is a hypocrite so there's Satan in heaven walking around having this conversation with the Lord that's how it's depicted and saying look at this he's such a hypocrite so there's one thing to bring into it here's another reference from a prophetic book again pictorial

Joshua one of the key figures of that time before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing by to accuse him so again we're sort of in the presence of the Lord here's Joshua and Satan is there saying look at you you're such a miserable example of somebody who's supposed to have faith look at you reading your Bible your mind's wandering look at you praying you're going all over the place look at what's going on in your heart look at the things that you say look how inconsistent you are

you're just a disgrace so he's accusing and that's what Satan does he accuses and we have this point in Revelation that Satan would be in heaven accusing but something has happened the child has been born and the child has gone to the throne of God and so we have a different situation now we have the situation where

Satan is busy saying look at those Christians look at those Christians at Calvary what a disgrace they all are what a load of rubbish they are why do you bother hearing their prayers God why do you just chuck them out they fail you so often they're so inconsistent just get rid of them look at this catalogue of things that they've done wrong and that's actually quite a strong case because you and I are not going to say it's untrue are we but there is a new factor and the new factor is that Jesus has died on the cross and Jesus has gone to heaven and he stands in heaven and he says to Satan just one moment just one moment you are accusing these people of a huge list of things you are identifying all these outstanding issues with these people let me tell you something

I died on the cross for those people I shed my blood for those people and I have paid in full for every single one of those things I have paid in full how dare you bring these matters up how dare you show your face in this place with those accusations get out get out you are not welcome here you have no place here get out and do not come back who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen it is God who justifies who is it that condemns it is Christ who died more than that is raised to life at the right hand of God interceding for us and Satan is cast out Satan has no right to be there and he has no right to say those things get out and don't come back and in heaven there is this great cheer all right 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 and the believers overcome and they overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony they say their testimony is I believe in Jesus I know I'm a sinner I know I keep on sinning

[32 : 48] I am bitterly ashamed of it but I still keep clinging to the cross of Jesus Christ because I know that he paid for my sins I know that he does not reject me I know that he does not cast me off but rather he is in heaven for me and he is faithful to his promises he keeps on interceding for me and I cling to that testimony I'm going to keep on clinging to it and I overcome by the blood of the lamb because that's the only thing that I point to when I get to the gates of heaven and they say why should you be allowed in I will not be saying because I've been such a good person and I will not be saying because I've succeeded in this and I will not be saying because I've evangelized so many people I will be saying please let me in because Jesus Christ died on the cross for me they overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony and that is victory

Satan is cast from his place if any I write this to you says John that you will not sin it's not an excuse to sin but if anyone does sin we have one who speaks to the father in our defense Jesus Christ the righteous one who is the atoning sacrifice for our sins that's the answer to the accusation that's the answer to the accuser I want to ask you whether that answer is going to work for you what is your answer when Satan accuses do you say well actually I'm not as bad as you make out I don't think that's a strong place to stand do you say I haven't actually done any of those things I would say you're actually in denial you might say well I don't know what guilt is I don't know what guilt is guilt doesn't touch me

I would say you are a complete fool I was looking on a blog the other day of one of the very senior workers one of the senior managers in I think actually in the national health service not absolutely sure she was very brave she wrote on there that she had to step down from her post for a while due to real emotional problems she had depression and so on and so on and she said one of the things that really was on my heart and mind was my sense of guilt poor woman guilt is real you can't just pretend it isn't there or doesn't happen Jesus has the answer to guilt he says

I died on the cross that is the only substantial answer for human guilt is it the answer that you are looking at is it the answer that you are trusting in because maybe you've come along here and you don't often come and you thought they haven't got much to offer me there apart from a lunch actually there's a huge amount to offer here here is the one place where there is the answer to the guilt of the human soul Jesus Christ dying on the cross let's look at the I was going to give the example of Martin Luther but it's much what I've already said so let's move on let's look at the second there's a second major aspect of this chapter Satan is cast out but that doesn't solve all the problems the woman is no longer accused successfully but she is persecuted the dragon is chasing after her so

Satan the accuser is curtailed but is he dormant is he asleep and the answer is no he's angry and active but the chapter shows that we are safe and protected and I'd like you to ponder I'd like us to ponder just for a few moments what happens to the woman because I think there's something rather beautiful going on here the woman in verse six fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God this is verse six she might be taken care of for 1260 days now that's the three and a year of persecution but being looked after the desert now to most of us desert seems a rather unfriendly place but in the

[38 : 09] Bible there's good things that happen in the desert do you remember when the children of Israel crossed the desert from Egypt to get to the promised land and they could have done it quickly but no they had to do it the hard way well okay they did it the hard way 40 years and while they were in their desert I've got it up here on the screen somewhere do you know what happened to their shoes the shoes didn't wear out what did they do for food for those 40 years every single day manna God looked after them with manna and he taught them lessons took 40 years to learn them but it was a place of being looked after a place of God saying okay we need some time so come into the desert with me and this idea of having a place prepared a safe place I think that's a

Satan is still out to get you you can hear his roaring and scratching at the door but you have a place where I'm going to look after you in the desert their shoes never wore out God provided manna every day he guided them with a fire and cloud they didn't have hot and cold running water did they but they did have God's guidance and the three and a half years as a time of provision during need and the bit at the end which I was incapable of drawing the bit about the water verse 15 from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent and sometimes Satan does that a whole load of things perhaps not persecution perhaps trouble perhaps illness perhaps bereavement perhaps things that all come in a cluster and you think I'm not going to be able to cope with this and

Satan can spew this out but in the picture of it here the earth itself is on the side of the believer and swallows this torrent of water help comes so it's a chapter about warfare!

it's a chapter about overcoming it's a chapter which says you know there's you're not in heaven yet not by a long chalk but you'll get there you will get there because the accuser has been cast down that's dealt with that's sorted and although you're being chased after God is well able to keep you so don't think oh I won't be able to manage might feel like that but you will his care his provision his guidance his tenderness is adequate for his church is adequate for you and for me we will get there and that's the way to the heavenly city is via the desert let's sing together number 503