

# The War behind All Wars (and the Child Born to Stop It)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you, Jenny, and Joe, for leading us this morning, leading us in worship. But really, the overall purpose is the same.

We're here as brothers and sisters in Christ, as God's people, meeting with our God in worship. And so we're going to go to his word this morning, Revelation chapter 12.

And we're going to read the whole chapter there, Revelation 12. So historically, Christmas is 12 days long.

You know, we sing about the 12 days of Christmas. Joe mentioned Epiphany, so between Christmas Day and Epiphany, you've got the 12 days of Christmas. So technically, we're still in the season of Christmas.

And so I have a Christmas message for you this morning, sort of, sort of, from Revelation 12. 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.

[ 1 : 29 ] She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven, an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.

His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. 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.

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1260 days.

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.

The great dragon was hurled down. That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray, he was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

[ 2 : 43 ] Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say, Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ for the accusers 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 and by the word of their testimony. They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them.

But 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. When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she might be taken care of for a time, times, and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

Then from the mouth the serpent spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

[ 3 : 55 ] Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring, those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So I'd like to begin at a battlefield outside of Saratoga, New York.

It's a Revolutionary War battlefield. Two key battles actually were fought there in the fall of 1777 between the British and the Americans.

British General John Burgoyne led his troops down from Canada, and his plan was to take Albany, New York. And eventually he wanted to cut off the northern colonies, the New England colonies, from the rest of the colonies.

Before getting to Albany, though, he was met by about 9,000 American troops. A battle ensued. Burgoyne and the British won. But just barely.

[ 5 : 11 ] They suffered many casualties in the process. The Americans regrouped. They brought in reinforcements. And three weeks later, the two armies met again.

Another battle ensued. And this time, the Americans won. A decisive victory. That victory came in October of 1777.

It was the Battle of Saratoga. The Battle of Saratoga. So what you see before you is a list of all of the Revolutionary War battles.

As you can tell, it's a long list. There are lots of battles. The British won some of them. The Americans won some of them. The Battle of Saratoga is on there. But as you can see, it was just one of many, many battles.

And it happened around a third of the way. Just a third of the way through the war. Looking back, though, historians who have studied this, they look back and they see and understand the Battle of Saratoga as being a real turning point in the war.

[ 6 : 17 ] It wasn't a long battle. It actually didn't involve the main armies on either side. The war, it actually kept going on for years afterward. In the larger context, though, it's become clear.

That battle was the turning point. It boosted morale on the American side when a boost in morale was really needed. And it also boosted support for the American cause when a boost in support was really needed.

Especially from other countries like France. It was the turning point. The larger context shows us how key that was. That battle out on the edge of a town called Saratoga.

Well, something like that happened about 2,000 years ago. Out at the edge of a town called Bethlehem. We read about it in Matthew 1 and Luke chapter 2.

And it's quite the story. You've got the census and the long journey and no room in the inn. And then the child's born and the baby's placed in a feeding trough and a manger.

[ 7 : 26 ] And you have the shepherds showing up and the wise men, too. And it's quite a story. There are lots of good stories in the Bible, though. And there are lots of pretty amazing things.

Interesting stories that have taken place in faraway places throughout the course of history. And we could go and we could list them. And we'd develop a long list of these things.

Our list would be longer than that of the Revolutionary War battles. So then why is Christmas such a big deal? Why is the Christmas story so significant?

Well, that's what we're talking about today. The book of Revelation tells us why. It gets at the significance for us. It gives us the larger context. And that's really why the book of Revelation is in the Bible for us.

To pull back the curtain for us. To reveal some things to us. To help us see the bigger picture and what's really going on. The Gospels.

[ 8 : 27 ] What they do is they zoom way in. Right? You see the details. And that's kind of where we've spent our time and our focus. Maybe over the last couple of weeks. In close.

Looking at the nativity. And looking at the details. And all the things that happened on that holy night. And that's important. We do that for good reason. But we also need to zoom out and get the bigger picture of what happened there in Bethlehem.

The larger context of Christmas actually goes back almost to the beginning. There was something that happened already in Genesis chapter 3 that kind of set Christmas in motion.

Adam and Eve. Representing all of humanity. They had just rebelled against God. Satan deceived them into turning on God. Kind of elbowing God out of the way.

And that rebellion, it ended up wreaking havoc on the whole of creation. The whole of the world that God made. It drove a wedge between us and God.

[ 9 : 34 ] Between humanity and our creator. And it drove a wedge between us and each other. And caused all that strife. And it just made life very difficult. Brought a curse on God's good creation.

Introduced death into God's good creation. We call that the fall. God created us good. All things good. And then we fell from that original goodness.

But God didn't turn his back on a world bent on destruction. No. Instead he turned to face it in love. Adam and Eve. They were hiding from God.

And God sought them out. Here's a summary of what happened from one of our older confessions. From the Belgic Confession. It says we believe that our good God.

By marvelous divine wisdom and goodness. Seeing that Adam and Eve had plunged themselves in this manner. Into both physical and spiritual death. And made themselves completely miserable.

[ 10 : 36 ] Set out to find them. What did God do? He set out to find them. Though they trembling all over were fleeing from God. God took the initiative. Set out to find them. And God comforted them.

And he gave promises to them. Specifically gave them this promise of a son. Of his son. Born of a woman. Genesis 3. To crush the head of the serpent. And to make them blessed.

In the third chapter of the Bible already. God talked about this seed. Born of a woman. God talked already about sending a savior. To crush the enemy.

God was very open. Right from the beginning. Very open about the struggle. That there would be real struggle down through history. He talked about the enmity. Between Satan and the descendants of the woman. He talked about Satan striking our heel.

And then he promised an end. Already then. He promised an end to the struggle. And he promised victory. And Satan's demise. And how would it happen? Through the seed of the woman.

[ 11 : 45 ] And we see it down through history. We see God protecting this seed. Right? He preserved Noah and his family. He intervened. And he gave sons to Abraham and Sarah.

And to other barren couples. Other couples who were barren with no children. And we see him preserving this seed. The seed carries on. Even under Pharaoh's thumb. That seed it carried on. God carried his people out of slavery. Right? Out of Egypt. Preserved them. Carried them out on eagles' wings. The Bible says. Through the Red Sea.

Through the wilderness too. Sustained them. Carried them along. And even when they turned away from him. Turned to idols.

Turned away from him. Rebelled. Went off into exile. After being defeated by the Babylonians. What did our God do? He turned toward them. He met them there in exile.

[ 12 : 44 ] And he preserved a remnant. And he kept renewing the promise. Kept making promises to them. A virgin will be with child. Will give birth to a son.

From the line of David. Will come for you a savior. The Messiah will come. He's coming. And then it happens. Right?

A virgin conceives. And gives birth to a son. In the city of David. The promised seed is born. It sprouts in Bethlehem.

The son of God is born into our world. He comes. The Messiah. Revelation 12 picks up that story. That story. It talks about the seed. And it talks about the woman. This mother. And as with a lot of what we find in the book of Revelation. There are a lot of different layers of meaning.

[ 13 : 41 ] Here. The woman in Revelation 12 is the woman from Genesis 3. It's Eve. But not just Eve. Also Sarah. And Rebecca.

And Rachel. And Ruth. And really every mother in that line of promise. Down through history. And in a sense it's the whole of God's covenant people.

All those who believed the promise. And were yearning for the Messiah to come. And in a special way. The woman of Revelation 12 is Mary.

All of history comes to rest on her. In her. She believed God's word to her. And she really embodies believers down through history.

Including us today. The Holy Spirit comes upon her. And she gives birth to a son. The very son of God. The promised Messiah. Listen again to those verses.

[ 14 : 39 ] The beginning of our text. It says. A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven. A woman clothed with the sun. With the moon under her feet. A crown of twelve stars on her head.

She was pregnant and cried out in pain. As she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven. An enormous dragon. With seven heads and ten horns.

And seven crowns on his head. And 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. And she gave birth to a son. A male child. Who will rule the nations. With an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God. And his throne. And the woman fled into the desert. In a place.

Into a place prepared for her by God. Where she might be taken care of. For twelve hundred sixty days. So. Satan hears the dragon.

[15:34] Right? He's the color of blood. And he's ugly as all get out. Right? With the seven heads. And the ten horns. He's this powerful being. And he throws everything he's got.

At devouring the seed. Goes after that seed. But he can't do it. Can't do it. There's this ferocious battle.

And God wins. God preserves the woman. And preserves the seed. Maybe you remember an expression of this. In history.

And how this went down. With Herod. Herod tried to kill baby Jesus. And God intervened. And opened up a way. An escape. To Egypt.

Later when the Jews plotted against Jesus. And the Romans plotted against Jesus. And went as far as nailing him to a cross.

[16:33] God preserved the seed. The Savior raised him from the dead. Snatched him out of the grip of Satan. And placed him on the throne. God sent a Savior to save.

And save he did. And now he's our Lord. The Lord of all. So then why are things not all better? Why are things still so unwell? Underlying our text here this morning. That's the question. And I think in our own minds and hearts too. That may be the question.

We wonder about the Messiah has come. Why are things not all better? It's one of the reasons why I'm thankful. For the book of Revelation.

And in particular for Revelation 12. For giving us this bigger picture. God here is giving us a sense. As to why. He's pulling back the curtain for us.

[17:34] Helping us to understand. The bigger picture. What's really going on. So imagine for a moment. That you're a Christian.

You're living in the first century. In the midst of the Roman Empire. In the time after Jesus ascended. You might be a Hebrew. A Hebrew Christian. Or you might be a Gentile Christian. But even if you're a Gentile. You've heard now about the promises. You know what all God's people went through. And the promises that they held on to. And you waited.

And they waited. And they received Jesus. As the fulfillment of those promises. Jesus came. This Christ that you now follow. You know all about how he was born to save.

Born a child and yet a king. You know all about how he ushered in. The kingdom of heaven right here on earth. You know how he healed the sick. Cast out demons. Stilled storms.

[18:32] And showed God's love in powerful ways. You know all about how he offered himself. As the sacrifice for our sin. For the sin of the world. And how he rose from the dead.

And how he ascended into heaven. And is seated on the throne. Even now on the throne of our world. Where he protects us. And intercedes for us. Provides for us.

Reigns over all. You know all these things. And at the same time. You know. Very personally. Suffering.

You know suffering. It's clear that things aren't yet the way they're supposed to be. Life is hard. You live fearful of a Roman soldier beating down your door.

You live harassed by your unbelieving neighbors. You don't see a lot of peace on earth. Goodwill among men. And you wonder. If Christmas is true.

[19:30] And the cross and the empty tomb. If they're all true. Why then are things still the way they are? If salvation has come. Then why doesn't it feel like it?

It's something those first century Christians really wrestled with. And some of them even walked away from the faith.

Life was hard. And being a Christian seemed to make it harder rather than easier. So they walked away. And it's something we wrestle with today too.

And today too some are walking away from the faith. It just doesn't seem to be working for them. So they drift away. The big question here is.

Well it's probably one we all wrestle with. To some degree or another. If the Messiah has come.

And Christmas is true. And the grave is empty. And Jesus is king. Then why are things still unwell?

[ 20 : 31 ] At Christmas we sing, right? We sing glory to the newborn king. We sing light and life to all he brings. No more let sin and sorrow grow. Nor thorns infest the ground.

We sing about God and sinners being reconciled. And about peace on earth. So then why are things still unwell so often?

Well the book of Revelation helps answer that. Answer that question. It doesn't answer all of our questions. But it does answer the biggest questions.

It gives us a sense of why things are the way they are at this point. At this time in history. It tells us why there's tremendous good. And tremendous evil. Both at the same time.

It tells us why we experience the joy of our salvation. And still at the same time have all this angst. About our kids.

[ 21 : 29 ] And about our health. And about our country. And about the future of the church. And just the future in general. The book of Revelation is in the Bible.

To kind of put it into context for us. And to comfort us. And to give us real courage. To live for the Lord. No matter what's going on.

So in our Bibles we have the Christmas story. As told by Luke. We have the Christmas story. As told by Matthew. And it turns out we also have the Christmas story.

As told by Christ himself. That's what we have in the book of Revelation. It's Christ revealing. Christ speaking. And he's revealing to us. Showing us what's going on behind the scenes.

The first recipients of this message. They were believers in the early church. Like we talked about. And their leader. The Apostle John. He'd been hauled off.

[ 22 : 33 ] He'd been banished to an island. A penal colony. And life for these Christians back on the mainland. Was pretty hard too. Pretty difficult.

And they struggled with why. Why? If the Messiah. Came as Savior. And Lord why are things. Still so unwell.

They could feel it. They could feel the battle. They could feel it in their bones. And so Jesus comes to them. And he reveals to them. What's going on behind the scenes.

And here in Revelation 12. He has some good news for them. And it's really good news. This baby. That was born. He says. When that baby was born.

The dragon was thrown down. The dragon was thrown out. Satan cast out of heaven. And biblically speaking. Heaven is like the headquarters. That's a good way to think of it.

[ 23 : 28 ] Heaven as the headquarters. The power center of the universe. That's where the throne is. Headquarters. And Jesus says that with his coming. Satan.

Was thrown out. In fact. He says it six times. In the space of five verses. That Satan was kicked out of the headquarters. Banished forever. It's good news.

It's good news. 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. Cast out. It's no wonder those angels sang like they did. Outside of Bethlehem. When Jesus was born.

Right? Christmas spells defeat. For Satan. The tide in this cosmic war. It's turned. The battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the revolutionary war.

[ 24 : 26 ] There were a lot more battles to come. But that was the turning point. Christmas. Was the turning point. For us.

The turning point in this cosmic war. The tide has turned. Victory has been secured. The Lord.

That's part one of the message. And for those persecuted Christians back in the first century.

And for us too. It's a powerful message. Satan's doom is sure. He's done for. His destiny is sealed. It's good news. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus.

Also. Though. He. Shares what might feel. Like bad news. Here too. In Revelation 12. The tide has turned. And the victory is sure.

But the war is not yet over. The bad news is. At this moment. At this time in history. The dragon has really ticked off. Satan's really ticked off. Listen again to verse 12.

[ 25 : 25 ] It says. But woe to the earth. And the sea. That's where we are. Right? On the earth. But 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. You see. Satan. He knows the gospel. He knows exactly what happened at Christmas. And what it means for him. He knows.

He knows he's been beat. And that's why he's ticked off. And that's why things for us are still unwell. And can be kind of crazy. Kind of scary.

The Bible says that Satan's days are numbered. The Bible says that God's got Satan on a leash. That God's in control. He's got Satan on a leash. And he's been banished from heaven. From the headquarters. But still for the time being.

He's able to cause problems here on earth. Things are still unwell. Because we still sin. And because Satan's still causing problems.

[ 26 : 23 ] Still active. At the end of the day though. This bigger picture. Christ's message here.

It's meant to speak to our hearts. And it's meant to encourage us. And I love the picture we get at the end of the chapter. The woman. She's given birth to a son.

Satan's been hurled down. He's chasing the woman. And then what does it say? It says the woman was given. The two wings of a great eagle.

So she might fly to a place prepared for her in the desert. Where she might be taken care of. Where she might be taken care of. For a time, times, and half a time. Out of the serpent's reach. And then from his mouth.

The serpent spewed water like a river. To overtake the woman. And sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman. By opening its mouth. And swallowing the river. That the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

[ 27 : 21 ] Now at this point. The woman. Represents us. This is us. Jesus here. Talking about his care. For us.

In the midst of the battle. He's going to raise us up on wings. Like eagles. He's going to take care of us. When we're in the desert. Or in those desert places. And times in our lives.

And he's going to swallow up the devil's forces. That's the promise. The same God who swallowed up the forces of Pharaoh. In pursuit of God's people. He's with us.

And he's for us. Today too. That's the good news. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

That is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing that Satan spews at us.

Will defeat us. That's the message. God wins. The tide has turned. That's the larger story of Christmas.

[ 28 : 17 ] Yes Satan is real. And the struggle is real. But God wins. That's the story of Christmas. Revelation style. Thanks be to God.

Let's pray together. Lord. Lord we are so thankful for your word. And for the way you.

Reveal yourself to us. And reveal all these things to us. Knowing this. And with your help Lord.

We're able to step with confidence. Into this new year.

And we pray that you will lead us on. Keep pulling back that curtain for us Lord. That we might see you. And trust you more. Deliver us from evil Lord.

And use us as your servants. For yours is the kingdom. And the power. And the glory forever. Amen.