

The Woman, the Child and the Dragon

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Date: 15 December 2019

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[0 : 00] The second passage we read in Revelation chapter 12, that passage that begins with these words, 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, and so on.

Most of you will know that TV advertising at Christmas, TV advertising carries a massive focus, massive focus in the media, massive focus socially.

The main stores are trying to vie with each other, to produce something that's eye-catching, something that's memorable, something that's going to induce people to spend, spend, spend, at this time of year.

This year, the big sensation, it seems, the big sensation was the combined John Lewis Waitrose advert, with a key focus on that imaginary dragon, I think his name was Excitable Edgar.

And despite his best efforts, he spoils Christmas with his fire breathing, until he breathes on and lights the Christmas pudding, and he saves Christmas, or at least we might say he redeems himself.

[1 : 17] He's a kind of anti-hero, an unconventional character, you know, despite his failings, he saves the day for himself, he saves the day for others. There's that feel-good factor that's meant to be produced in that advert, and it's no doubt increased the sponsor's takings in sales across the country.

The feel-good factor focuses on the dragon who saves himself and saves Christmas. But the character of the dragon in Scripture, the symbolic representation, as we'll see, the symbolic representation of Satan, and Satan's evil intent to thwart God's plan of salvation.

The dragon is no feel-good factor, no feel-good character. There's nothing in Scripture to indicate that the dragon, as I say, there's representation of Satan.

There's nothing to indicate in Scripture that there's any saving of self or saving others. Because the picture that we find here in Revelation 12 and elsewhere of the dragon of Satan tells of a fearsome individual with all the fury that Satan has against Christ and his church.

The picture that we find here in elsewhere tells all too accurately of the struggle, the cosmic struggle that we were considering last Sunday morning, the struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, the offspring of the woman, those who are of Christ, of God's saved people.

[3 : 00] The struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, those who are opposed to Christ and his rule. Two sides in the spiritual warfare, two sides, Christ and his church on the one hand, Satan and all who reject the Savior on the other hand.

You saw that, as we said, last Sunday morning, Genesis 3.15. Remember, when God cursed the serpent, the serpent that had deceived Eve, and in that curse, prophesied of one to come who'd crush the serpent's head and, of course, crush Satan's head, destroy Satan.

Well, Satan would bruise the heel of the one who conquered him. Satan would, of course, and alluring, of course, to the suffering of Jesus and his work of salvation.

And that enmity between Christ's church and Satan's realm, it's what we see throughout Scripture. It's what we see in the history of the world. And that's going to be continuous until the Lord Jesus returns.

And it's that theme, this constant struggle between the Lord's people, between the Lord himself and Satan and his demons and those who follow him, it's what we see in the book of Revelation.

[4 : 18] It tells of conflict. It tells of the present conflict that existed since sin entered the world through Satan. And it tells of that conflict that's going to continue and find its climax in the future when Jesus will come again and Satan and all who are his cast into eternal darkness.

It's that theme then of that struggle that we find particularly emphasized here in Revelation 12. Now, some of you might know, and maybe even the children will know, that this particular portion of Revelation 12 has actually been made into a short film.

It's made into a film in connection with the birth of Jesus. Some of you might have seen it. It's been produced by what's called Speak Live Ministry, the ministry of Glenn Scrivener.

Now, I'm not going to refer to anything in that film. The focus here is on God's Word, what we find in Scripture. But, I'll just say it as an aside. Actually, it's a very good film.

It's very helpful because it's, as with Scripture here, it scotches the myth of a carefree Christmas devoid of the presence of Satan.

[5 : 32] And it's that reality, the presence of Satan at the time of Jesus' birth and beyond. Indeed, the presence of Satan throughout the history of the world. That's what we'll be considering in a moment when we look at this passage.

That's why we read, for example, as we read in Matthew 2. Again, we'll see the actions of Satan through King Herod and trying to destroy the Christ child.

And, of course, we'll look at that in more detail when we come to that particular reference here in Revelation 12. But, before we do all that, we do have to identify these three characters that appear in Revelation 12.

We've got to ask, who do they represent or what do they represent? I mean, what message does this vision give for your encouragement? I mean, how do these figures fit in with the story of salvation?

How do they fit in with the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth? What do these events tell us? What does this vision tell us?

[6 : 38] The coming of the Lord Jesus to earth. what does the woman represent? The child represent? The dragon represent? Well, let's start then with the woman we see here in verse 1.

The woman, we're told, who's clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and in her head a crown of 12 stars. Verse 2, she's pregnant, crying out in birth pains, the agony of giving birth. Then we're told in verse 5 that she gives birth to a male child. And we're told that she and that child flee into the wilderness. Read that in verse 6.

So, who is this? Who's this woman, this character representing? What are the clues even here that help us to identify her? Some people say, oh, this has to be an allusion to Mary.

Well, certainly Mary does feature, I think, in the word picture presented here, but there's something far, far more general, surely. Something more in keeping with God's word because we have to see the bigger picture.

[7 : 44] We've got to see even here what Genesis 3.15 told us about the seed of the woman in conflict with the seed of Satan. And when we compare scripture with scripture, then we see this vision of the woman here surely connects the woman with the church, with God's people, with the Israel of God.

You go to the Old Testament and the twelve tribes of Israel, if you like, the Old Testament church. And you go to the New Testament, the new Israel of God.

Let's see how we fit all this together. You go to Genesis 37, you read there of the nation of Israel that comes from twelve tribes, the families of Jacob.

Remember, Joseph has a vision. Joseph has a vision of a dream of his father Jacob and Jacob's wife and their eleven sons bowing down to him. And when we read in Genesis 37, those who are bowing down are depicted as the sun and the moon and the stars exactly as we see here in Revelation 12.

So the family of Jacob, if you like, the nucleus of the Old Testament church, that church that would be, we might say, transformed by the Lord Jesus when he came into the world to redeem his people, when he came to bring in into the new Israel of God the church of the living Savior.

[9 : 22] So the woman then, we would have to say, is the believing community of God, the seed of the woman, the woman herself. So, I think you might say, well, how is the church then going to give birth to the child that we see here?

Well, I'll leave that for you for the moment. We'll look at that in more detail in a little while. But we'll have to see how the vision is emerging. Because if the woman is representing the church, then the church being the Lord's people, the Lord's people caught up in conflict with Satan and his offspring, that conflict that's centred in the Lord Jesus, as the child, the child who's described here as one

who's to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.

So this child that we see here in Revelation represents the Lord Jesus. We might say the ultimate seed, the ultimate offspring of the woman in Genesis 3.15.

But again, you go to other parts of Scripture. That's why we sang Psalm 2, the psalm that prophetically speaks of the Son of God, the one who'll conquer and defeat his enemies.

Psalm 2, verse 9, shall break them with a rod of iron. And you see the child here in Revelation 12 as one who's set to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

[10 : 44] But then back to that question, how can the child here, how can Jesus be said to have been born of the church, if you're following the wording of the vision here?

Well, surely this. I mean, see how Scripture refers to Jesus in relation to his earthly ancestors. He's referred to his son of David, son of Abraham.

Jesus in his human nature descended from the fathers, the patriarchs of Israel. That's what Paul wrote in Romans 9.5, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ whose God over all.

So when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in his human nature, he's in that family line that's descended from the fathers of Israel, the fathers of the Old Testament church.

Jesus is the ultimate offspring, the ultimate seed, who's descended in his human nature from Eve.

That ultimate seed that Satan would seek to destroy, even at birth, even at the birth of Jesus.

[11 : 54] Even in Jesus' childhood, even in Jesus' life on earth, even on the cross. And then there's the dragon. And the dragon's described here in the most fearsome of ways.

Seven-headed, ten-horned, this red dragon about to devour the child that the woman's about to give birth to. And the picture that you find here is of a creature of immense horror, utterly without morality, completely vicious and cruel and without any shred of beauty.

Surely there's none other in the representation of Satan. And this dragon metaphor that you see here again connects with the serpent of Genesis 3, the serpent that deceived Eve, the serpent that Satan used in the serpent form to bring sin into the world.

Again, we have to say, as we've said before, we use Scripture to interpret Scripture. You go elsewhere in the Word of God and read there of the dragon compared to a sea serpent, a sea creature, a creature of power and ferocity.

Enemies of God are compared to a dragon, compared to a serpent of the sea. Like Pharaoh, Ezekiel 29, verse 3, I am against you, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of the streams.

[13 : 24] And if we were to have read on in Revelation 12, you'd see in fact that the dragon is compared with Satan. Verse 9, the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who's called the devil and Satan.

Or to the back of the book, the end of the book, the end of the cosmic conflict between the Lord's people and Satan. We're told an angel sees the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil and Satan.

And you know, the very ferocity of Satan against the Lord's people, you see that in the description even here. I'm not going to go into all the detail. There's no need to go into all the detail.

But even the fact that the dragons describe this as red, that symbolic color that tells of the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs, martyrs for the cause of Christ.

And even the fact that there's a red dragon telling of the complete hostility that Satan has against Christ and his church. Even the fact we're told here the dragon's tail inflicting terror on the church and the attempt to devour the child at birth.

[14 : 35] It's all there. So, I suggest we have identified the woman and the child and the dragon, the woman being the church, the child is Christ and the dragon is Satan.

So, you might then ask, well, what's this combination got to do with, you know, the bigger picture about how the church has been confronted by Satan through the ages and even the events at Bethlehem?

How does this fit in with the birth narrative of Christ coming into the world? Well, certainly this portion here, this section, reminds us that there's spiritual warfare, that warfare involving Satan and his demons and those who are his opposed to Christ and his church, that enmity that's covered the ages.

Yes, Satan's been defeated. The church has survived Satan's attempt to derail its mission. The dragon hasn't devoured the Christ, as scripture tells us.

Not in Christ's birth, nor his life, nor his death. That doesn't mean to say that Satan ceased his work of attack upon the woman, upon the church.

[15:55] Justice in modern day warfare, for example, a defeated arm, even though it knows it's defeated, it still rages, it still carries on until the very, very last moment, even though it knows that it's not going to win the war.

Take the First World War, for example, many, many soldiers on both sides of the conflict lost their lives even days, even hours before the armistice was signed in the 11th of November, 1918. I've been reading Field Marshal Montgomery's autobiography and he tells of one of his closest aides who was with him throughout the campaigns from 1939 to 1945. And that individual lost his life a week before the war ended in May 1945.

And if that's the mindset of humanity, if that's the mindset of human beings, how much more Satan and the spiritual warfare that exists between the seed of the serpent, the seed of Satan, and the seed of the woman?

Bob Dylan once sang, will I ever learn that there'll be no peace, that the war won't cease until he returns? And that's a timely reminder.

[17:08] This time of year, all times of year, you know, even this time of year, amidst all the celebrations, amidst all the joy, the joy that this time of year brings, never forget the reality of the conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

Never forget that conflict between Satan and the Lord Jesus, between Satan and those who were his and the Lord's people. Because all too often we simply focus on the birth narrative of Jesus and all the subsequent episodes that we find in Scripture, as we saw there, the Magi, the wise men, and we forget to see the bigger picture.

Forget the spiritual warfare that was happening when Jesus was born, when Jesus was an infant. Satan knew that the child that Mary bore, that that child, the Lord Jesus, had come to save his people.

And Satan sought to devour the Christ child. And that's why we read in Matthew 2 the account of the wise men and Herod. And Satan, through Herod, trying to destroy the Christ child through his minion, Herod.

And that's why we read there in Matthew 2. Because so often we just simply think of the story of Herod as a jealous king wanting to be rid of a little child that he reckoned might challenge his authority as king in Judea.

[18:45] We have to again see the bigger picture. In Herod, the satanic impulse to be rid of the Savior. To destroy Jesus.

That's what we read in Matthew 2. The wise men, the Magi, they've come to worship the Christ child. They've followed that star that's led them to, first of all, to Jerusalem.

It's in Jerusalem where Herod has his palace. And Herod hears the news that all of Jerusalem has been talking about. These strange men from the east have come, these men have come outside of their immediate territory.

And all the talk's been about what they're saying about one who's born king of the Jews. And Herod's obviously heard this, he's troubled. After all, he thinks he's the king of the Jews.

Who's going to take his place of power? He's going to have to have him removed. But again, as I think of the bigger picture, Satan is behind this vicious mind that will kill a child for the sake of a throne.

[19:48] Herod's told, told by his experts of the promised Christ who's prophesied to be born in Bethlehem. And Herod, when he learns to send these wise men to Bethlehem to find the child and report back to him so that, well, as he claims he can worship him.

And when the wise men dupe Herod and return another way home without reporting back to Herod, what do we read? Herod takes revenge. He kills baby boys under two years of age.

A futile attempt to be rid of the Christ child. So we might even say for Herod, root the dragon. The dragon, Satan in his fury.

Satan the dragon in his vicious hatred against the Lord Jesus and his church. But the dragon will not have the victory. The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

the great dragon, the evil one. As we read there in Matthew 2, the Christ child is protected from the fury of the dragon. Even in Jesus' early years, as we read there in Matthew 2, Mary, Joseph, the infant Jesus, they escape to Egypt, they get away from the clutches of Herod.

[21 : 07] Even after Herod's death, the family don't return to Judea, don't return to Bethlehem, but they go to Galilee. Galilee, because that's not the place where the Herod family rule.

Herod's son now, Archelaus, is ruling there. You see how the words of Revelation 12, they're fitting in with what we see in the case of Jesus even as an infant.

The protection of the Christ child, the protection of the church from the dragon, Satan. the generosity of that dragon, would seek to devour the child, but the child escapes.

The child, verse 5, was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, which is a place prepared by God. God's son. Let's think of that protection.

The protection of the child, the protection of Christ. The child was caught up to God and to his throne. Don't we see here more a summary, a summary of the complete protection of Jesus from the dragon.

[22 : 17] Don't we see here that we might say the entirety of Jesus' life, from birth to his ascension to heaven, caught up to God, ascension into heaven.

Jesus came into this world as a baby in all his sinless weakness, and his dependence, dependent upon his mother and his adopted father. Even there and there, their roles protecting him from the herds when Jesus' life was in danger.

And then in his Jesus' earthly ministry, again, kept from the devouring of Satan. Jesus wouldn't yield to Satan's temptations.

If he had, the mission would have failed. Christ's mission would have failed. And remember in Luke chapter 4, we read there of a crowd when they tried to throw Jesus off a cliff, when they tried to kill Jesus because of what he was saying against them and their legalism.

And we're told that as the crowd attempted to throw him off that cliff, Jesus walked through their midst unscathed. The dragon would not devour Jesus. Jesus. And then on the cross, when it seemed as if the dragon had devoured Jesus, Jesus wasn't devoured.

[23 : 30] He triumphed. How did he cry in triumph? It is finished. It's accomplished. He'd satisfied God's justice. He'd taken the penalty that sin, the penalty for sin that sinners deserve.

It was Jesus who defeated Satan on the cross. Not Satan who defeated Jesus. And in triumph over death, Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

And as the vision tells us, we've been caught up to God in his throne. He's there. He's the living Lord Jesus. He's the risen Lord Jesus. And the dragon could not devour.

So from Bethlehem to Calvary, the dragon, Satan, tries to devour Jesus. But the child of Bethlehem, the Jesus of Nazareth, he would devour the evil one.

He crushed Satan's head. And so this, this Christmas time, time when you remember the birth of the Lord Jesus. Even tomorrow, many of you will be here tomorrow singing the Christmas carols when we're with the Legion or maybe on Christmas Eve again in the building.

[24 : 48] And you're celebrating the joy of the birth of Jesus. Don't forget to praise God for the defeat of the dragon. Don't forget the truth of Scripture that tells us of the child that was born of the woman, that tells of the seed of the woman.

Don't forget to praise God that the child was not devoured. And that the red dragon did not triumph over Jesus.

You know, so much over sentimentality is crept into all of our Christmas celebrations. We do have to challenge that over sentimentality because the bigger picture has been presented here even in Revelation 12 that tells of the presence of Satan, the red dragon at Bethlehem and at Nazareth and in Galilee and in Jerusalem.

Yes, Satan's there. Intent on the destruction of Jesus. But it's Jesus who came to destroy the devil. Yes, we know the final, final destruction of Satan's yet to be, but be assured he's already defeated. That's what we rejoice in at this time of year. Jesus did come into the world. He came into the world to defeat the works of Satan. He came to defeat the devil himself.

[26 : 10] But what of the woman? What of the woman? What of the church's protection from the dragon that we read of here in verse 6 when we're told that the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God?

Isn't this again a reminder of the protection that God gives to his people and the protection that God has given to his church? Even through the course of the ages, through the course of the church's existence.

And that protection that God will give his church until the Lord Jesus returns. I mean, the same God who protected his people, the Israelites, when they were oppressed by the dragon in Egypt. The same God who took, who enabled his people to leave that oppression and escape into the wilderness. It's the same God who, who protects his people in, in the place of escape where God's people know that safety and security from the, the clutches of the evil one.

But why is it, say here, a wilderness? Well, back to what the Israelites, back to the Israelites. The wilderness protected from, you know, from Pharaoh and his armies there in the wilderness.

[27 : 27] wilderness. But what do we note, what do we read off in, in, in their experience? Well, they experienced, what did they experience in the wilderness? Trials and protection.

Moses reminded the people of that. We wrote Deuteronomy 8, 15, God led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with its fiery serpents. God, they think, God nourished his people.

God protected them. He, he gave them life. He, he strengthened them. He gave them manna for food, water from the rock. The same God who brought his people into the promised land.

And the dragon didn't devour the remnant of the Israelites. And in the same way, the, the church of God through the ages, through the centuries, the church from its earliest times, certainly if you want to look at the church after Christ's ascension, then even to the present day, the church is being protected.

Protected by God from the, from the ravages of the dragon. And yes, in that protection, knowing trials and suffering in our, in our wilderness experience, even the wilderness journey that you're making, remember you're safe, safe in Christ.

[28 : 47] Yes, the dragon will try and hurt you and at times will hurt you. He will bruise you. He'll cause you pain. But he won't overpower you. He won't devour you.

He won't cause you to lose your salvation. You're safe in the arms of Jesus. So rejoice in that truth. The child who was born in Bethlehem, he's the true dragon slayer.

He's the one who's defeated the evil one. The church is safe. You're safe if you've given your life to the Lord Jesus. But if you've not given your life to the Savior, then, then be warned.

Because the dragon, Satan, is real. His doom is sealed along with all who are his. And that doom, that, that destruction, that, that final judgment, yes, awaits the devil and his angels and all who, who refuse to submit to the Lord Jesus in life.

For this Christmas time, if you haven't yet done so, give your life to the one who came from, from heaven to earth, who came to defeat the devil, Lord Jesus, who came to, to bring safely into his kingdom all who are his by faith, so that you are secure, secure eternally, secure from the dragon, secure in life eternal.

[30 : 11] You are secure in the one who by his victory over the evil one has made sure your salvation. Trust in him now.

Give thanks to him now. Praise him now. Give him the glory now that he is your protector, that he has given you that eternal security in him, that you are safe in him eternally, and that the victory is his, and the dragon truly is defeated, and we'll know that eternal destruction.

And so may God bless us his word. Amen. Let us pray. Oh Lord, our God, you give us much to ponder, much to think on in relation to that spiritual warfare that we know exists and will continue until the Lord Jesus comes.

But give us that encouragement, Lord. Give us that assurance that Christ is the victor. The devil and his angels do not triumph, but the Lord is the triumphant one.

And so, Lord, we give you praise and thanks for your protection over your people, for your being with your church, your people. And Lord, give your people that courage to proclaim the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 30] Give your people that courage to tell of the one who came from heaven to earth, who knew your love, your saving, your eternal love.

And we too know that love that is eternal, that you have loved us from all eternity. So continue, Lord, with us as we sing again from your word.

Go before us, bless our fellowship, one with another. Go before us for the remainder of this week.

And may to you be the glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Well, let's close in Psalm 144 on page 188.

Psalm 144. We'll sing from verse 1 down to verse 8. All praise be given to the Lord, because he is a rock to me. He trains my hands to fight in war, to battle with the enemy.

[32 : 30] My fortress and my loving God, my savior and defense is he. He is my refuge and my shield, subduing peoples under me. 1 to 8, Psalm 144 on the Tunis Turtle.

People. Thank you.