

Cosmic War Over a Birth

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

- [0 : 00] So with that, let's begin our worship. Now we're singing this evening firstly from Psalm 66. Psalm number 66, and that's on page 83, using the psalm books.
- 66, verses 1 to 6. Shout loud with joy to God, all earth your chorus raise. Sing loud the honor of his name, and glorious make his praise.
- Speak thus to God the Lord, how great your works of power, so overwhelming is your might that foes before you cower. Verses 1 to 6 on page 83.
- Shout loud with joy to God. Shout loud with joy to God, all earth your chorus raise.
- Sing loud the honor of his name, and glorious make his praise.
- [1 : 13] Speak thus to God the Lord, how great your works of power.
- So overwhelming is your might that foes before you cower.
- All earth bows down to you. They sing how loud your fame.
- They never cease to celebrate the glory of your name.
- Come see what God has done. His mighty words of old.
- [2 : 28] His deeds to watch the human race. God is one of us.
- How awesome to be hold. How awesome to be hold. To let his people pass on foot through years abroad.
- Let us now unite in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer.
- O Lord, our gracious God, as we gather once again to worship you, we give thanks that your truth goes before us, that as we come even to cross the threshold of worship, we do so with your word upon our lips and in sung praise.
- We thank you, Lord, for these words that we have sung that set out aspects of your greatness. And we thank you that your greatness always confronts us in your word, that your word leads us to consider your greatness and the aspects of it that you have revealed in your attributes and in your wondrous works, as this psalm itself has reminded us, O Lord.
- [4 : 06] We are invited to come and behold the wondrous deeds of the Lord that he has wrought in the earth. We thank you that these are brought before us in your word, that we can see them, as it were, in the words of Scripture and be able to think upon them in our mind, even as if we were there, because we know that your word is a true and accurate record of all that it speaks to us of.
- And we thank you, Lord, that in speaking to us in this way through your word, you direct our attention to those things that are above, those things that are of spiritual and eternal importance, and you require of us that we should apply them in the principles of them and in the application of them to life as we know it on earth.

And we thank you, Lord, as we come before you to worship you, that we do so in recollection of your goodness over that year that has now passed. We thank you that that stretches back into our own personal past as we think upon our lives from the day we were born.

And before that, as we think of this congregation itself and its history, the way that you have blessed your word here, the way that you have maintained a people to witness for you, the way that you have added to their number from time to time, the way that you still continue to encourage us, O Lord, by having people come to follow you, by having people come to confess your name and commend you to others.

Lord, we thank you for your own steadfastness, for your commitment to your covenant promises, for the way in which your purpose, as you have planned it, will come to pass, for the way that you will never be deflected from it, and that there is no power in earth or in hell, no power anywhere that can stand before you to thwart you or to resist the advance of your cause.

[6 : 12] Lord, we are encouraged as we read these things in your word, as your word assures us that whatever happens in the turnings of time, whatever happens from generation to generation, whatever great changes may come and go, in the upheaval and in the risings of governments and empires, as has been the case down through history, your kingdom remains.

Your word contains truth that will always be relevant to the changes of time. We thank you tonight that we can apply to your word for our own guidance in our own day.

We ask your blessing, Lord, upon your word once again for us. May your Holy Spirit tonight truly take your word and apply it to us. Open our minds, we pray, to further understand the things that are written in your word.

Give us, Lord, we pray, that they be applied by your Spirit. There is nothing better for us, Lord, than that the author of the word should himself come to divulge its meaning to us.

And we thank you that this word written and directed by your Spirit, through human agents down through the centuries, is the word that you still use, and coming to convince us of our need, of our sin, of our guilt, of our need of salvation.

[7 : 36] And having done so and having brought us to know you, you use your word for our feeding, for our upbuilding, for our progress in faith. Lord, we thank you tonight that your Spirit is promised to all who seek you, that you will not be short of your promise that whoever asks you, you will give the Holy Spirit to them, as we come with that believing sincerity of asking.

And so we pray, O Lord, that your Spirit will truly be evident among us. Make it known to each one of us, Lord, that your Spirit is speaking to us, striving with us, guiding us, directing us, teaching us.

Help us to speak and to hear, as if we were indeed, as we may well be, on the very limits of time and entering into eternity.

Lord God, we pray that you would bring eternal things to our notice in a very real way. Help us especially to focus upon the Savior himself.

We thank you, Lord, for the clarity with which your word presents Jesus Christ to us as the Savior of sinners. There is no class of sinners that are outwith his reach.

[8 : 53] We thank you tonight that he is presented to us in the gospel as the one to whom we must apply and who is willing to receive us and will never cast us out as we come on the basis of your promise.

We thank you tonight for your church, for the way in which you have maintained your church down through the centuries, and for the way in our day as well that we see your continued upholding of your cause.

We thank you for this congregation. We thank you for its continuing existence and its progress. We bless you for the way in which your people uphold the gospel uphold the advance of your kingdom.

We thank you for the encouragements we have practically over the past year and that your people have indeed seen fit to support the gospel with their own means financially and in their presence and by their prayers.

Lord, we thank you for these encouragements. We pray that we may indeed return our thanks to you for it is by your enabling that we are able to carry out all of these deeds.

[10 : 00] We pray tonight for those of our number who cannot be with us. Lord, we pray especially for those who are laid aside in illness at this time. We know that there have been many, Lord, in the congregation who have not ventured out of their homes for some time who may still have difficulty especially with illness to think of coming physically to church.

We thank you for the means available through live stream for the gospel to be declared to them where they are. We pray for those who are newly ill in these recent times.

We ask, O Lord, that you bless them. We pray that you bless our elder, Mr. McLean, as he finds himself still in hospital. Remember him, Lord, we pray, in Annabelle and the family.

Grant to him, Lord, that the measure of improvement might continue and that you'd be with him especially at this time in his own soul that he may know refreshment and the presence of the Lord with him.

Remember, too, John Alec, our deacon, who's not been able to be out for some time. Bless him, we pray. Grant to him, O Lord, your continued hand to be upon him and encourage him and give him whatever his state of mind or circumstances may be.

[11 : 14] That you'd be near to him and that you would assure him of your love and of your own care for him and all others, O Lord, like him whom we know in the congregation and outwith at this time.

Remember, too, little Olivia and Melbost. We pray for her when she's not so well in these days. Lord, grant her your blessing. We pray, lay your good hand upon her. Be pleased, O Lord, to be with her family, two siblings, and with Dean and John as they continue to care for her.

We, Lord, give thanks for her and for all like her who may not have the faculties many of us enjoy, but we give thanks that they are precious to you and that we can commend them to you as one who takes an interest in all our lives, whatever people may think, whatever we have or do not have that others have.

O Lord, we pray that you would assure us of your knowledge and of your care and of your provision for us. And so we pray that you would grant, too, your blessing to all who mourn tonight the passing of loved ones and for whom this time of year is so poignant and brings back so many precious memories of loved ones that they would dearly love still to have with them, even from the youngest age through to old age.

Lord, there have been many bereavements in this past year. You have seen fit in your wisdom and purpose to act in this way in your providence. We pray for grace, Lord, to respond with the wisdom that would indeed accept your own wisdom, that would commit our lives into your hand, that would realize, Lord, that each and every day that you give us in this world are days in which you are available to us.

[13 : 07] And we give thanks that you are able to bless even the soarest providence so that it will be worked towards our good and that you assure your people that all things work together for good for those who love you, those who are called according to your purpose.

We pray now your continued blessing with us as we bring before you also those things in our notice sheet, Lord, today for prayer. We pray that you bless Steadfast Global in its work in various parts of the world.

We pray for them in Pakistan and for the support of their loved one and colleague there. Bless them and bless him and his family as he's now in hiding.

Oh, Lord, protect him, we pray. Grant to that nation, Lord, that in such visible terms shows antagonism and hatred for the gospel and are tied in various forms of belief, Lord.

We pray that you would bring the light of the gospel to shine upon that land and into the hearts of these people. And so we pray for all the nations of the world that they may come to be the nations of the Lord and of his Christ.

[14 : 25] Receive our thanks, hear our prayer, pardon our sin for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's now read God's word from the book of Revelation.

The book of the Revelation of John chapter 12. We can read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter. So that's Revelation chapter 12.

And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth so that when she bore her child he might devour it. She gave birth to a male child, one who was to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.

[15 : 37] But her child was caught up to God and to his throne and the woman fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God in which she is to be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come. For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down who accuses them day and night before God.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them.

[16 : 46] But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows that his time is short. And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness to the place where she is to be nourished for a time and times and half a time.

The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

And he stood on the sand of the sea. And again, we pray for God to bless that portion of his word to us. Let's sing once again before we turn to this passage.

[17 : 57] And this time we're singing in Psalm number 70. And it's Psalm 70 in the Scottish Psalter, not in the Sing Psalms version as in the bulletin. Psalm 70 and the first version of it on page 309.

Lord, haste me to deliver with speed, Lord, succor me. Let them that for my soul do seek shamed and confounded be. Turn back be they and shamed that in my hurt delight.

Turn back be they ha ha that say their shaming to requite. The whole of the psalm, Psalm 70, the first version, Lord, haste me to deliver.

Lord, haste me to deliver with speed, Lord, succor me.

Let them turn back for my soul to seek shamed and confounded be.

[19 : 11] Turn back be they ha shamed that in my heart delight.

Turn back be they ha ha that say their shaming to requite.

And they let all be glad and joy that seek for thee.

let them who thy salvation love say still what praise be.

I poor and need thee am. Come, Lord, and make no say my health thou and deliver heart.

[20 : 32] O Lord, make no delay. Now, if you would turn with me, please, as we further wait on the Lord, to Revelation chapter 12.

I would like to look at some of the teaching in this chapter that we find as we've just read it a short time ago. I can begin just at the beginning, and I saw 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.

She was pregnant, and was crying out in birth pains, and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven, behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and his heads seven diadems.

His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth, and the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give her child, he might devour it.

She gave birth to a male child, one who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God.

[21 : 53] And so on, down through the chapter. We rightly turn to the Gospels when we're thinking of the incarnation of the Son of God, becoming human, taking out human nature.

We tend to go to the first three Gospels especially, although John of course has his own version of that in his own way. And it's right that we do so because that's where we find the historical events that are described there as to the birth of Jesus, what went immediately before and what then followed immediately after, and the ministry of Jesus himself from his birth until the time that he returned in his ascension to heaven.

But of course we find teaching about the incarnation, about the coming of Jesus in other parts of the New Testament as well, and indeed of the old too, in prophecy and in various depictions of Jesus as the king of his people.

And we find it too here in the book of the Revelation. The theological aspects of it as you find it throughout some of the epistles that widen out and amplify and give us a deeper entry into some of the theology of the incarnation and of the ministry of Jesus and especially its place in relation to the rest of salvation, the other aspects of salvation.

But also here in the book of the Revelation you find very much to do with Jesus and with his people. Indeed, the book of Revelation you could take as a great drama that's been performed in the way in which these visions, these descriptions, some of which are very difficult and very mysterious in some ways, and yet you get the gist of most of it as you go through.

- [23 : 37] But the main thing to remember about Revelation being a drama of events is that it's about Christ and his church. That is the main theme of it, not just about Christ and his church, but also the way in which the victory belongs to Jesus and his people over the devil, over sin, over evil, over everything that is opposed to God.

Ultimately, the triumph of Jesus and the triumph of his church united to him will be displayed for all to see. And that's really the drama that's being witnessed to, or you're looking at a drama being performed, if you like, in the way in which it's in words here in the book of Revelation as we're taking into these images that these words set out before us from the beginning of the book through to the end.

And so in chapter 12, we're coming to look at what we're going to call a cosmic war over a birth, over a significant birth. And it's right for us to take this as the birth of the Messiah, who was being expected all the way through the Old Testament, and as he came into the world, came to be known as Jesus, Jesus of Nazareth.

And so it's quite right of us to see that this is actually, in its own terms in Revelation, a description of the fulfillment of all these prophecies about the coming of the Messiah and his birth into the world as a human being.

It's the birth of Christ and the resulting cosmic war, as we'll see here described, that took place immediately after or in consequence, direct consequence, of the birth and the ministry of Jesus.

- [25 : 27] Now it's an important principle always in trying to interpret Scripture, especially a book like the book of Revelation. It's an important principle that we do not over-apply the details.

You do not over-apply certain details as if every single detail described in all of these scenes has to have some spiritual significance.

You find a similar thing with the parables of Jesus. You mustn't go to the parables of Jesus expecting or looking for every single detail to have an important spiritual application.

In many respects, there is a framework given to the main teaching of these passages like the parables, and very often the framework is just there for a framework.

It's there to support the teaching that's being presented, the main thoughts, the main teaching of the passage, and in many ways Revelation is the same. For example, we'll see tonight in verse 16 there, the earth came to the help of the woman.

- [26 : 32] The earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. And there's all kinds of speculation as to what that represents. Whereas it's really a detail that really just sets out how God protected the woman by means available to himself, sometimes miraculously worked, like you find in the book of Acts, with the way in which Peter was preserved in prison and then released when the angel came to release him.

There are details like you find here where you mustn't press it to ask, well, what does the earth represent there? It doesn't necessarily represent anything in particular except that it's presenting us with the fact that means are available to God to protect his people, to secure them from the reach of the great serpent, this Satan who is their chief enemy.

And we have to remember that too much interpretation of Scripture is actually just as dangerous as too little because over the years there have been in prophetic type movements especially so much fantastic interpretation, fantastic in the sense of really being way over the top and trying to identify specific times in the book of Revelation that answer to the processes of history.

We mustn't be doing that. We mustn't actually seek that much detail in some of the descriptions that you find there. Stick to the main theme of the teaching.

Stick to the main theme of the passages. The progress of Christ and his church against all types of assault and opposition on the part of Satan and his agents.

[28 : 16] And as we'll see that can actually take the form of him using as was used in the time of Jesus on earth physically many different agents used by the devil to actually try and deflect Jesus from the purpose for which he was in the world to work out salvation for his people.

That by way of introduction just to alert our minds to these important aspects of how to interpret a book like Revelation. Well let's come to the passage itself.

And there are two things I want to just draw before your minds. First of all verses 1 to 4 what we'll call Satan's failure to destroy Jesus. Satan's failure to destroy Jesus.

And there are three main figures in the drama. If you're looking at it as a drama as we've said you can think of the book as a drama. And the various acts of a drama just like a literal drama.

Well here is the first act in this chapter if you like and that contains three important figures. The woman, the dragon, and the child that was born.

[29 : 26] And then the scene changes and you're into another act from verse 7 onwards. And verse 7 onwards you find Satan's harassment of God's people.

I will see that that's in consequence of his failure to destroy Jesus himself, the child that was born. When that failed he took out his anger upon the woman who had born the child.

I will see that that represents God's church in the world and that that is what we still have and will be so to the end of time. How Satan represented by this great red dragon, seeks to harass the people of God using the means available to him.

Always thankfully under the sovereignty of God himself. First of all, Satan's failure to destroy Jesus. Look at the woman first of all, the description of the first figure there of the woman.

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. she was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and in the agony of giving birth.

[30 : 37] Who is she? What does this woman represent? If you went down through the history of interpretation of scripture, you'd find many different ideas of who this woman represents.

For example, in Roman Catholic tradition, it's very much given to a description of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and you'll find depictions of Mary in Roman Catholic theology and like-minded theologies with the same sort of imagery, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and crowned with twelve stars.

And that's really led to the veneration of Mary much beyond what scripture warrants. Indeed, Mary is not to be venerated, only God is to be venerated, because venerated means really essentially giving worship to some figure, and only God is deserving of worship.

Mary, for all that she has singled out and chosen to be eminently in history as the bearer of the Messiah in his entry into the world, she herself belongs to the church.

She belongs to the number of people that are dependent, and there's just a mystery in this, dependent on the son that she brought into the world for her own salvation.

[31 : 59] That, by the way, that's just an example of it. But who does the woman represent? Well, the woman represents the church of God, and especially the church, to begin with here, at the beginning of the chapter, in the Old Testament days, looking into the new and to the coming of the Messiah.

That's why she described in this passage as being pregnant and crying out in birth pains. Now, she's described as a figure of beauty, and she has this clothing of the sun, this wonderful brightness, this beauty, the moon under her feet, the authority that she has.

She has really, in a sense, royal status, because God, having chosen his people, is giving them royal status. That's the status that belongs to them, and that really fits the description there, admirably.

And you'll find the beauty of God's people described in the Old Testament in many ways. I don't want to go into the passages, just now look up Ezekiel 16 for yourselves when you get a chance later.

Ezekiel 16, verses 1 to 14, and the wonderful description there of how God took Israel and made her beautiful as a people for himself. But do remember that that description, verses 1 to 16, is highlighted by God so as to show the ugliness of her departure into spiritual idolatry and spiritual unfaithfulness, spiritual promiscuity, if you like.

[33 : 28] But God's church, God's church represented as this woman, and the description of her here as pregnant, and really getting to the stage where a child is about to be born, that's really a picture, if you like, of the Old Testament, the church in the Old Testament longing for the birth of the Messiah.

Messiah. Remember, the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of God in his human nature, came to be born not outside of the church, not outside of the covenant people.

He is, as Romans chapter 1 puts it, for example, made of the seed of David. He's the Son of David. He has come through that line of ancestry in terms of his human nature.

And therefore, the church is represented as this woman, this beautiful woman, this woman with royal status, this woman that's specially chosen by God to be his people, his church.

And there they are in the Old Testament represented here as just waiting for and longing, in birth pains, if you like, just longing for this time that these promises will be fulfilled, the promises of a Savior to come to be the deliverer of Israel.

[34 : 39] Israel. And that longing for the Messiah is represented in different ways in the Old Testament before we come to the next part of it.

Just let me pick up some of the imagery of the Old Testament itself uses. Isaiah, for example, chapter 66 and verses 7 to 8. You'll find here talking about Zion or Israel.

Before she was in labor, she gave birth. Before her pain came upon her, she delivered a son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day?

Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon a sign was in labor, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth, says the Lord?

Shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb, says your God? Now it's a people certainly that's predominantly in view there, but you can see the imagery is the same. Zion, the people of God, represented as a pregnant woman looking towards the time of the birth of the child.

[35 : 48] And here in Revelation 12, it's the birth of the Messiah. Now, of course, that's replicated. Let me just make the point. It's interesting. It's an interesting point that this situation of a woman just about to give birth and her birth pains coming upon her, that's the Old Testament church, the church in the Old Testament looking forward to the birth of the Messiah.

But the New Testament church, it's really the one church all the way through history, the church in the Old Testament, as it gives way to the church in the New Testament, you'll find exactly the same thing.

Because we, as Romans chapter 8, you well remember, says, the whole creation travels in pain like a woman about to give birth until now. And not only so, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit.

We groan with birth pangs waiting for the adoption of the body. That's the resurrection of the coming of Christ. So you see, there's this correspondence between the longing of the Old Testament, of the church in the Old Testament, for the coming of the Messiah the first time, and the longing of the church now for the coming of the Messiah again in his second coming, in his return, at the end of the age.

So there's the woman, there's the Old Testament, there's the church in the Old Testament. There are God's promises to her that she would come and there would be a Savior born from within that covenant people.

[37 : 20] And she's longing for that. And as you examine the prophets, as you examine these, you'll find many similar passages. There's waiting, there's longing, there's almost a sense of impatience that the Messiah has not yet arrived.

And then the second figure is the figure of the dragon. Another sign appeared in heaven. Behold, a great red dragon, there's a description of a fearsome beast, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his head seven diadems or crowns.

The word for crowns is rightly translated there in the ESV. It's not the same word as the crowns that the woman has on her head. The crowns that the woman has are crowns of royal status given by God.

The crowns of the dragon are not the same kind. They are crowns with which she's crowned by human authorities that are pleased to make him their king.

That's a very different concept. But leaving that aside, here is this figure of the dragon. Now, who is this dragon? And what is this dragon? Well, if you go to verse 9, you'll find more evidence and more light thrown.

[38 : 32] The great dragon was thrown down. That ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. So it's obvious from that that the dragon is in fact Satan.

And it's a depiction, a representation of this chief spiritual enemy of God and of his people. Satan himself represented in the great red dragon.

And he's waiting for something specific. He's actually waiting for this woman to give birth. He's waiting for the Messiah who is promised to the woman in the Old Testament, to the church in the Old Testament, waiting for that moment when he will arrive in the world because he wants to destroy him.

He wants to actually take over authority. He wants to be king. And of course the agent used especially at the time of Jesus' birth was King Herod.

You remember the story very well yourselves. How Herod sought all the means available to him to destroy this child, this baby, this rival to himself.

[39 : 42] And of course God again protected the infant Jesus by the measures that were taken by Mary and by his legal father Joseph.

But this is the intent of the dragon. This is the intent of the devil. This is his purpose. This is what his mind is set upon. And as we'll see his mind is still set upon destruction.

When he couldn't destroy Jesus himself and there were many ways in which he tried not just at his birth but remember the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Satan three times recorded there giving him various options by which he might bypass the sufferings of the cross.

By which he might take it on himself not to accept the death of the cross after all. And of course in the third of these as Matthew has them the arrangement that he has it's very obvious in the third of these there's no hiding.

The devil just simply jumps out in all his hideousness in front of Jesus and says all of these kingdoms I will give to you if you will fall down and worship me.

[40 : 51] There's no dubiety as to who the person is who this figure is. And of course Jesus at every occasion there in the temptation thwarts the devil successfully and banishes him sends him away.

And then all the way through the ministry of Jesus you'll find different times at which he was tempted through Peter on one instance. This shall not happen to you Lord there's no no cross going to be in your experience no death like that.

And then all the way through you'll find right to the cross itself the attempts of the evil one to use various human agents to try and not bring this about this death of the Messiah this ministry of Jesus.

He's set if it were possible on his destruction. Well that of course wasn't possible. So then you see the description there of the child. The child that was born.

The child she gave birth. Verse 5 to a male child. One who was to rule the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was caught up to God and to his throne. Now these words to rule the nations with a rod of iron that's taken from Psalm number 2 which is a messianic prophecy.

[42 : 11] So there you see the link between the Old Testament promises of the coming of the Messiah and what he was going to be like and his rule and his authority. And it's keyed in here in Revelation to this wonderful scene.

And when this was attempted by the dragon the child was caught up to God and to his throne and the woman fled into the wilderness.

And I think it's right for us to look at these details as significant because they well they're not just specified as the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus.

That's obviously the kind of imagery you've got there. The attempts of the evil one when they failed to prevent him from the death of the cross. Well then Jesus was caught up to God and to his throne and the woman fled into the wilderness where she's a place prepared by God.

And that really refers to the 1260 days. Again it's not a detail that's necessary to press. All it means really essentially is that there is a period given to the church between the time of Christ's ascension and his return again when she's in the wilderness.

[43 : 29] When she's gone into the wilderness and as we'll see she's going to be there harassed by the devil. Harassed because he knows his time is short. He knows he hasn't managed to kill the Messiah.

And so he's taking it out upon his followers the church. Satan's failure to destroy Jesus. Friends it's through right up to now and it'll be through to the end of time that for all the events that take place in this world that are spiritual significance and ultimately ultimately all of them have some measure of spiritual significance in God's plan.

But for all of these events there shall corresponding event or events in the unseen world of the spirits. In the unseen world of the angels and the unseen world of the good and the bad angels.

The spiritual heights as Paul calls it in Ephesians. And what Revelation does at times is just lift the curtain a little bit so it will see into that.

And shows us that as there are certain things taking place in the world such as the cross of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, there are corresponding attached events taking place in the unseen world, the spiritual world, the world where there's still a clash between the God of heaven and the God of this world, Satan, the great red dragon.

[45 : 04] Satan's failure to destroy Jesus then. Secondly, Satan's harassment of God's people from verse 7. Now he says there a war arose, war arose in heaven.

Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought back. So it's really taking us behind the scenes as it were.

As we've said, the cross and the resurrection have a correspondence to the spiritual world. But what is this about in talking about the dragon and his angels being defeated and then they were thrown down, thrown down to earth, the deceiver of the world thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him.

Now this is not to do with what is really not revealed in scripture at all, in any detail at all. And that is Satan and his rebellion against God himself.

As you find Genesis chapter 3 describing the serpent that came to the woman, there were human beings still unfallen, still sinless, still right with God.

[46 : 16] But the serpent comes along and he's not right with God. There's already sin in the creation before there is sin in humanity. There is sin in the devil.

There is sin in that world of darkness. However it came about, we're not given the details and we mustn't pry into what scripture has not revealed. That's left to God.

That's left to the wisdom of God in keeping it from us. But it's not that particular fall, if you like, of Satan at the beginning or whenever it took place.

Prior to the fall of man. This is keyed in in Revelation to the ministry of Jesus. And the ministry of Jesus was a cataclysmic event in relation to Satan and to Satan's hold of people in darkness.

Because up to the time of Christ's death on the cross, there had not been an actual atonement rendered for sin, though the promise of it was there right through the Old Testament days.

[47 : 19] And until that particular atonement of the cross, of the death of Christ, and the resurrection of Christ from the dead had taken place, there was nothing of which you could say assuredly, apart from the fact, of course, that the word of God is always sure.

But there was no actual event that you could point out and say, well, that is really the evidence absolutely and definitively that Satan is defeated.

And so Satan could use that and kept people in bondage, in slavery, in their sins. But when the cross took place, and when the resurrection took place, and when the ascension of Jesus took place, and when the gospel went out to the nations, Satan's authority, such as it was, is no more.

He's a defeated enemy. And let me just take you to connected passages in the gospels where Jesus himself shows his own understanding, of course, of these spiritual issues.

Luke chapter 10, verses 17 to 18. Now, this is those 72 that Jesus had sent out to bring the message of the kingdom into the districts round about.

[48 : 39] And they came back and said, as they returned with joy, saying, Lord, this is significant. Even the demons are subject to us in your name.

The power that Jesus had worked through them was evident, even in the way in which demons came to be subject to them in Jesus' name.

And then what Jesus says is then significant. He said to them, You see, there's Jesus saying, at that moment, at that moment when the gospel in its power, when the name of Jesus had gone forth in power through these disciples, then he said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

His authority is gone. Something has happened that has really addressed the hole that Satan has of people, and that bond has been shattered, that these chains have come to be shattered.

And you see in Revelation here how he is described as not only that ancient serpent, the devil, and Satan, but the deceiver of the whole world.

[50 : 03] He was thrown down to earth, and angels thrown down with him. Now, you think of that in terms of the authority that Satan was given, and that still had to hold people in spiritual darkness, to hold them in the chains of spiritual slavery and darkness.

And that he could point to the fact, well, there's no provision actually made to deal with your sins. There's no atonement yet. There's no cross.

It hasn't happened. There's no resurrection from the dead. There's no Messiah. Now the Messiah has come. Now the Son of God has taken human nature.

Now the Son of God has met with the devil and defeated him in open contest. And this Messiah has died, the death of the cross, and he's risen from the dead, and he's ascended to heaven.

And just the same as you find in John's gospel, so Satan's hold is broken. John chapter 12, just to pick up one other verse there.

[51 : 10] A couple of verses. John 12 from verse 31. And this is really dealing with, you remember, when Jesus said, Now is my soul troubled.

What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose I have come to this hour. This is the hour of fulfillment, the hour of the cross, the hour of atonement being rendered.

Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again. The crowd that stood there said, It had thundered. Others said, An angel has spoken to them.

And then Jesus answered, This voice has come for your sake, not mine. Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out.

And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. What is that about?

[52 : 10] It's about Satan being thrown down to earth in terms of his hold, of his authority, is broken. He has no argument anymore. The word deceiver there is used in Revelation chapter 12.

Satan is the great deceiver. Satan is the one who brings arguments against God's people. And he could up to this moment say that there is no atonement for these people. How are they going to be saved?

I have them in my grip. Who's going to rescue them from my grip? And now it's gone. He has no case. He has no argument to present.

It's been destroyed. And that's why the New Testament, like Romans, for example, Romans 8, and similar passages, where you find these great arguments, that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

And it goes on, as you know, to speak about those who is going to bring an accusation against the people of God. That's been Satan's role.

[53 : 17] That's been Satan's work all the way through since human beings fell in the Garden of Eden. But you remember how Paul there in Romans 8, what shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? How does he answer it? Jesus, Christ Jesus, is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

You might say that's the language of Revelation 12. There's the Revelation 12 idea of Satan's hold being broken, Satan's arguments completely being destroyed, and the way now seen clearly as to how human beings can have their case dealt with, not by Satan, but by the intercession of Jesus.

Based upon his own death on the cross, he intercedes for his people. He presents the case, a case that is perfectly acceptable to God the Father, so that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

[54 : 49] Now we have to move on. I want to try and conclude the way that the passage actually concludes. And Satan's defeat is there, but Satan's harassment of God's people follows on from that.

Verse 13 follows on from what you find in verse 6. The woman, the church, fled into the wilderness where she is nourished. She's fed there by God during her time in the wilderness.

And verse 13 then picks it up. When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. In other words, the harassment of God's people follows on from the attempts to deal with the Son of God, with his incarnation, with his life, and with his death.

That failed. So Satan is taking it out on his people. Remember, he's still under God's control, thankfully. But nevertheless, he's given to harass the people of God.

And here you find out of his mouth came a whole flood of water, a river, to sweep her away if it were possible with a flood. And the earth came to the help of the woman. What we said was God has a means by which the woman, his people are protected.

[56 : 03] And I think it's right to say that because it's describing something out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the serpent, that you can very rightly see this as all kinds of elements of false teaching, of false doctrine, of that which was heresy.

And you can see that in the days of the Old, of the New Testament itself, the New Testament apostles, and how in their epistles they're dealing with heresy, with apostasy, with false teaching.

It's very much there to the fore in their teachings, in their letters to the churches. Where's it from? It's from the serpent. It's from the deceiver.

It's from the malicious power of Satan that failed to destroy the work of Christ and the person of Christ. And he will fail to destroy Christ's people as well, but it's not for want of attempting.

One of the ways is by the flood of false teaching. And off he goes again when measures are taken to protect her, go on to make war with the rest of her offspring.

[57 : 13] Indeed, it really means to the end of the world, as long as there are offspring, as long as there are people born again in the church of God, there will always be harassment by the evil one.

So there you have these particular details. And as you find at the end of the chapter of this verse, he stood on the sand of the sea.

That again is perhaps the chapter division there is not again helpful. I really need to wind things down in a minute because the time is gone. And you've been very patient and thank you for that.

But he stood on the sand of the sea, goes right immediately into the next chapter. This is the defeated, the frustrated devil, the dragon, the serpent.

His attempts have not been successful against Jesus, against the child that was born, against his people, against the offspring of the church.

[58 : 15] So what's he going to do? He's standing on the sand of the sea. He's looking out to sea, as it were, and thinking, what am I going to do next? What's my next move going to be?

That's really what the next part of Revelation, the book of Revelation, shows. Because immediately, you read, I saw a beast rising out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads and ten diadems and blasphemous names on its head.

This is the servant of the dragon. And it represents something like political powers or regimes that are bent on ungodliness, bent against the church, against Christ.

Christ. This is the first figure that's seen in the next attempt of the dragon to undo the work of Jesus and his people. And that's the way Revelation proceeds.

I'm just picking that up so that you can see it leads naturally into the rest of the book, essentially. But what are we going to say in conclusion, really, in a word about this?

[59 : 22] Well, let me just remind you or draw your mind back to what we're looking at in our studies on our Wednesday. evening studies. What is our response to chapter 12 of Revelation?

What's our response to Satan's failure to destroy Jesus? Well, of course, it's one of thankfulness. Thankfulness that God is in control, even of these great cataclysmic events and of the things that happen in the world of the spirits.

And also, in terms of Satan's harassment of God's people, what's our response to that? Well, remember what we're looking at in chapter 6 of Ephesians. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities, the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

that's Revelation 12. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God and then you have the various parts of it described. And what that amounts to is that in our salvation, the things that God has provided in our salvation, what he gives us by way of spiritual equipment, remember this, friend, they are designed specifically for the battlefield.

[60 : 51] they are not designed for times of peace because there's no peace essentially for God's people till this world is done.

But the weapons spiritually that he's given you as a Christian are manufactured and described by God. These parts of the armor, they're designed for the battlefield.

And remember this, however monstrous monstrous and formidable and frightening Satan is, he's no match for the weapons that God has given you and the armor that he's provided for you.

And especially, he is no match for God who is with us as our trust is in him. May he bless to us these thoughts and bless his word to us especially.

Let's conclude this evening singing in Psalm 124. Psalm 124, the first version of it on page 417.

[62 : 04] Words that are so familiar to us and precious as we think of God's protection and God's guidance of us against all that is at enmity with us.

Hath not the Lord been on our side? Now Israel, may Israel now say, had not the Lord been on our side when men rose up to slay? Then they had swallowed it quick when as their wrath against us did flame, waters had covered us, our soul had sunk beneath the stream and it finishes our sure and all sufficient help is in Jehovah's name, his name, who did the heavens create and who the earth did frame.

Psalm 124, to his praise. Had not the Lord been on our side?

Israel now say, Had not the Lord been on our side?

When men rose us to slay, they had not the Lord swallowed when us their wrath gave us
a still flame, waters had covered us our soul had sunk beneath the stream.

[64 : 00] Then had the water swelling high, O barn our soul may wait, bless bless be in the Lord
who to their teeth escape not far have free.

Our souls escape as a bird out of the fowl are near the snare as sand that broken is
and we escape it out how sure and the global

Lord we ask that your blessing will follow us now as we think of the fellowship immediately following this evening we ask that you bless Duny as he speaks and help those who take part oh Lord to hear those things that he will set before us in his own spiritual journey and we pray for him as he addresses us we pray now that your grace, your mercy and your peace will be our portion both now and evermore Amen