



# *The Drama of Redemption: From New Creation to Consummation*

## Interpreting the Book of Revelation

### Revelation 12

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#### Introduction

The Book of Revelation is saturated with the Old Testament in its truth and symbolism. This book declares to readers a blessing that makes it unique out of all the inspired books (although there is indeed a blessing when you read them as well).

*ESV Revelation 1:3 Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.*

At the risk of being simplistic, but attempting to be simple, the Book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John is to give a visual picture of the great cosmic conflict between the Seed of the Woman (who is ultimately Christ), and the seed of the serpent (the Devil and the enemies of God).

Many people look in the Book of Revelation for the key to certain significant future events, but it should be argued that the book's purpose (and purpose of the Apostle John who wrote it) is more concerned with making sense of the past redemptive-acts and revealed truths of God, and bringing it into the story of God's people today (whenever and wherever that "today" applies).

Here in Revelation 12, we have a wonderful passage that is considered by many sound interpreters of the book to be the central summary chapter of the entire 'Apocalypse of John'. Dr. Vern Poythress calls this chapter a "symbolic history" of God's redemption in Christ (*The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, pg. 133- 34).

The story of God's redemption of his people came to a great climatic crescendo in the fullness of the times when God became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1, 14). Christmas is the time we should remember and celebrate as the birth of the "Seed of the Woman" who would crush the head of the serpent as God promised in Eden when the Gospel of God's grace was announced for the first time (Gen. 3:15-16).

In Revelation 12, the Apostle John paints a vivid picture of not only the incarnation that we joyously celebrate at Christmas, but the decisive and climatic victory of the "Seed of the Woman" who is Jesus Christ, who overcame *for us* death, hell and the devil, which was the purpose of his birth in Bethlehem (Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:8). In our sermon today, we will look at the multiple redemptive-historical facets of the significance of Christmas that the Apostle John shows to us through his apocalyptic vision. The purpose for which the book was written was similar to the Book of Hebrews, where believing saints on earth are suffering great persecution and therefore in great need of encouragement of Christ's victory, and persistence in walking by faith by God's grace amidst the great Satanic calamity.

The birth of Jesus Christ we celebrate at Christmas is the climax of God's revelation in history. God

became flesh and dwelt, or tabernacled among us (John 1:14). In the birth of Jesus, the dawn of the restoration of all things spoken of in the prophets had begun. And so, because of this, there was a great cataclysmic and cosmically spiritual reaction to the One who was the Seed of the Woman born to crush the head of the ancient Serpent.

Remember when interpreting the Book of Revelation, that it can be understood with the help of the Spirit of Illumination (1 Cor. 2:6-11), and we should not have to be speculative, but to understand the book through the recognition of imagery primarily from the Old Testament. As New Covenant people united to Jesus Christ, we should not live functionally as if we only have a 26 book New Testament when the LORD God has given us 27 books to understand his redemptive work in the Person of Jesus Christ!

### **The Book of Revelation is God's Word to Us!**

The Book of Revelation is a book that is either misunderstood and/or avoided, or it becomes a book where Christians become overly preoccupied or imbalanced in their study of it. Oceans of ink has been spilled in attempts to interpret the book rightly, and there have been a variety of interpretations, particularly with regard to issues such as the Millennium (Is the Millennium referred to in Revelation 20 literal or symbolic?), the time of Christ's return, as well as many other issues.

I do not presume to have all the answers for this challenging, as well as important book, but I do know that it is part of the God-breathed, infallible, and inerrant revelation of God to man. The Book of Revelation is part of what God has given us for the people of God to be fully equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). He has given it to us in Holy Scripture to rebuke, encourage, correct, and strengthen us. He has revealed Jesus Christ in this book so that we might have everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3- 10). Therefore, for all these reasons, it is important for us to try and understand this book as Christians.

If there is one diabolical trick presently that should be exposed, it is the misinterpretation of the Book of Revelation that has gone on throughout church history; it is the misunderstanding that one needs a specialist, someone with a "secret key", to unravel the "true" meaning of this book; it is the mistaken focus on the lesser important details of the book causing the Christian to theoretically and functionally only have a 65-book canon, or a 26 book New Testament! I am afraid many have been duped, tricked, mistakenly informed by the wiles and craftiness of the devil who is revealed in Revelation as the Great Deceiver (Rev. 12:10)!

Think about it, if there is a blessing from God, a clear revelation or unveiling of Jesus Christ, especially meant for Christ's people who live in a world of sin and misery, an age ruled by the evil one (Eph. 2:1-5; 6:10-18; 2 Cor. 4:4), then this would be a book that the devil would want us to avoid, or become overly preoccupied with in an unhealthy manner! Christians be encouraged! God has not left us without a Teacher, a Great and Sovereign Interpreter, the One Who wrote and inspired it Himself! (cf. John 14:25ff; 16; 1 Cor.

2:6ff). The Holy Spirit will help and guide God's people by faith as they truly believe that there is indeed a blessing for those who read aloud, hear, and keep what is written in the book!

As you read the book, be reminded that John records visions that are in cycles. Each cycle begins with the past history of redemption and culminates in the Last Day or Second Coming of Christ in Judgment when Christ shall return and judge the world. We should not look for consecutive occurrences of the events John sees. Rather they are all visions that show the same victory of Christ over death, hell and the devil from different angles or perspectives.

### **"The Main Thing"**

The title of the book, 'The Book of Revelation', comes from the first sentence which describes the book

as *'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'*. As we begin this study, I think it supremely important to understand that the book, in addition to everything else we learn in it, is foremost 'The Revelation of Jesus Christ'.

In other words, the Book of Revelation is to be understood as the unveiling, or revealing *of Jesus Christ*. Not merely Jesus' revelation (the revelation belonging to Jesus), but the book should primarily be understood as the revelation of, or about Jesus (God's revelation about Jesus -- *to us!*). The knowledge and understanding of this important focus may keep us away from unhealthy preoccupations with how history will unfold in the future, as well as fictional speculation on when the return of Christ will be. [See note below].

I was once told by a wise pastor that one important idea to keep in mind when speaking, writing, or preaching is this: ***"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."*** In our study of *Revelation*, by keeping the main thing, well, the *main thing*, that is the focus upon God's revelation of Jesus, then our attention and our primary concern in our interpretation and understanding of the Book of Revelation will be *on the present work of Jesus NOW for his people and the encouraging hope, promises, grace, and strength that this knowledge, this revelation brings to us today in the midst of our struggles in this world and our pursuit of holiness.*

[Note: This book is entitled *Revelation* (singular), not *Revelations* (plural); this matters in our interpretation. Many today call it *Revelations* and I think this is because there is a misunderstanding of what the Book is communicating.]

### **What in the World is an Apocalyptic?**

Part of the frustration for us today in reading the Book of Revelation is not fully understanding ***what kind of book it is***, or its genre. The Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation in the last part of the 1st century in a genre that would have been extremely familiar to the people. *Genre* is a type of written material or literature (like a letter, history, narrative, poem, etc.).

The genre of the Book of Revelation is called ***apocalyptic***. The Book of Revelation is mostly an apocalyptic piece of literature as a genre, but it has other genres such as prophecy and letter as well. The apocalyptic aspect of the book is what is the big stumbling block for most and the reason why many Christians are apprehensive about attempting to read it.

Simply put, apocalyptic literature in the Apostle John's day was written to encourage believers that God was on the throne and ruling over His creation. However, apocalyptic was written in highly symbolic language. In Jewish apocalyptic writings, the Jews of the 3rd to the 1st century B. C. were encouraged through persecution and warfare in this world that there was another world that God had promised that would eventually come.

The purpose of apocalyptic literature was to develop and encourage perseverance under trials, sobriety and continued faith through sufferings, martyrdom and times of unfaithfulness and faithlessness, and to be reminded that God sits upon the throne of the universe, ruling history for his good purposes as well as for the good of his people!

This is ultimately the same purpose for which John wrote. He addressed the Book of Revelation to the seven churches in Asia Minor: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Rev. 2-3). The primary reason for his writing a letter and prophecy in an apocalyptic genre (or type of literature) was to encourage the saints that Jesus the Messiah and His Kingdom had come and that he will come again in victory and power.

The Lamb sits victoriously upon the throne because he completed all the work on behalf of his people

and therefore they should not fear (Rev. 4:2-11), but be encouraged that Jesus reigns and will come again to restore all creation in order to bring about a new world without sin and misery where holiness and righteousness are all that is to be found (Rev. 5:9-14; 21-22).

William Hendricksen wrote in his excellent commentary *More than Conquerors* many years ago in this way: "Persecuted believer, this book of Revelation seeks to impart comfort to you. That is its main purpose: to comfort the militant church in its struggle against the forces of evil. It abounds with consolations for afflicted believers. Unto them is given the assurance that their final victory is assured (15:2), their blood will be avenged (6:9, 8:3), and their Beloved Jesus Christ lives, and reigns forever and ever! It is he who governs the world in the interest of his church (5:7, 8). He is coming again to take his people unto himself in 'the Marriage Supper of the Lamb' and to live with them forever in a rejuvenated universe (21-22)" (pgs. 11-12).

The Apostle John wrote 'the Revelation of Jesus Christ' to encourage, to assist the saints by the Spirit's work to persevere in their faith no matter how corrupt or difficult this present evil age becomes, no matter how much they are tempted to give up and give in to sin, they were to be sober, watchful, standing firm in the victory of Jesus Christ as they fix their eyes and the focus of their lives upon the Redeemer ever present to help in times of trouble and through many trials!

The seven churches were seven real churches in the historical setting of the 1st century, but these churches had representative problems as well as spiritual virtues that would be addressed by the living and active Word of God in the present to churches today. So, even though the churches were real historical churches, the problems, the challenges, the temptations, the spiritual virtues, were similar to all congregations of the visible church throughout history all the way up to this very day! The Word of God, the Living Christ still speaks to his churches for those who have ears to hear what the Spirits says.

The Book of Revelation should be understood as a pictorial summary of the cosmic struggle between the Seed of the Woman, and the seed of the Serpent, and how Jesus the Christ overcame death, hell and the devil on behalf of God's elect and beloved children. Because of the victory of the Lamb of God, his people can persevere in him and overcome the world, the flesh and the Devil by his grace.

More precisely, the Book of Revelation simply is about the victory of God in Christ summarized in the Apostle John's teaching:

*ESV 1 John 5:4-5: For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world- our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

*ESV Revelation 17:14 They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."*

### **Outline for Our Study on Revelation 12**

- I. The Woman and the Dragon (12:1-6)
- II. The Defeat of the Dragon (12:7-12)
- III. The Victory of Christ's Bride (12:13-17)

*KJV Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

## I. The Woman and the Dragon (12:1-6)

ESV **Revelation 12:1-6:** 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. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. <sup>3</sup> And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, <sup>6</sup> and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

*ESV Revelation 12:1 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.*

### **A Vision of a Regal Glorious Woman: Corporate "Seed of the Woman" (Gen. 3:15)**

A vision that John has: a sign in heaven: A woman who has a royal crown of twelve stars. This imagery is based on Genesis 37:9 where sun, moon, and eleven stars are used to describe Jacob, his wife and the Twelve Tribes of Israel; Joseph who has the dream, is the twelfth "star":

ESV **Genesis 37:8-10:** *His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. <sup>9</sup> Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "**Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.**" <sup>10</sup> But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?"*

The twelve stars represent elect or faithful Israel through Jacob, the son of promise in the Old Covenant. There is also continuity here that should not be missed. In the New Covenant, we understand more of the twelve stars to represent also the Apostles as the foundation of the New Covenant community in continuation of the reconstituted twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 5:1-11; Eph. 2:19-21). ***The Woman is Israel; the woman is the Church.***

Notice how the woman is described gloriously as "clothed in the sun", showing that the true people of God are lights of the world who foreshadow the glory of the new creation, and especially are the people of the new Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21:11, 22-27) as their citizenship is in heaven, seated with Christ (Phil. 3:20). The people of God share in the heavenly citizenship now, but they are still in spiritual warfare with the evil opposition until Christ returns.

ESV **Daniel 12:3** And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

ESV **Revelation 21:10-11:** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

<sup>2</sup> *She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.*

### **A Vision of a Pregnant Woman Giving Birth**

We should recognize the Old Testament imagery of Israel-Jerusalem here as a woman who experiences great pain and suffering in childbirth at the hands of the nations who are enemies of God and his people. Through the suffering or tribulation of Israel-Jerusalem here on earth, God's prophets encouraged them by faith to look for a heavenly kingdom and a restoration of creation that would be the end of their great trouble when Messiah would come. As Hebrews 11:8-14 teaches us, the truly faithful Israelite remnant was looking for an eternal kingdom as strangers and exiles here on the earth.

Israel is pictured metaphorically in the prophets as a woman who is anticipating the birth of Messiah who will cause joy after the pangs of child labor:

ESV **Isaiah 26:17-18** *Like a pregnant woman who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near to giving birth,* so were we because of you, O LORD; <sup>18</sup> we were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind. We have accomplished no deliverance in the earth, and the inhabitants of the world have not fallen.

ESV **Isaiah 66:7-9** *"Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son."* <sup>8</sup> 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 as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children.* <sup>9</sup> *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.

ESV **Jeremiah 4:31** *For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor,* anguish as of one giving birth to her first child, the cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands, "Woe is me! I am fainting before murderers."

ESV **Micah 4:9-10:** Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pain seized you like a woman in labor? <sup>10</sup> *Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.*

ESV **Micah 5:2-3:** But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. <sup>3</sup> *Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.*

Elect Israel represented by a woman was the covenantal people through which God would fulfill the promise to Adam and Eve that the "Seed of the Woman" would crush the head of the serpent permanently. We see this imagery of "seed" or "offspring" in other prophetic texts such as in Isaiah's vision of restored Israel when Messiah comes:

ESV **Isaiah 54:1-3:** "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married," says the LORD. <sup>2</sup> "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your ~~cords and strengthen your stakes.~~ <sup>3</sup> ***For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring ("seed") will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities.***

ESV **Isaiah 61:9-10:** Their offspring ("seed") shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the LORD has blessed. <sup>10</sup> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

ESV **Isaiah 7:14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah the Prophet taught prophetically that through God's covenant people Israel (Isaiah 61:8) their "seed" or offspring will be blessed and clothed with garments of salvation, a robe of righteousness, bedecked like a beautiful bride. We should particularly appreciate that this is where the Apostle Paul gets the imagery of the "Bride of Christ" in Ephesians 5:22ff).

Through Eve's seed, the woman Israel, the child will be born to crush the head of the serpent. Every generation of woman in Israel longed to be the privileged mother of Messiah-Christ, who would be 'Seed of the Woman'. This is why barrenness was so troublesome and difficult for Old Covenant women, and God would show his grace and mercy by making barren women the means through which he would continue his seed (Gen. 17:1ff; 25:21).

We should never forget God's faithfulness to his people, and how many times the "Seed of the Woman" or royal line of covenant promise was threatened in redemptive-history. Abel was killed (Gen. 4); Sarai was barren (Gen. 11:30); Rebekah was barren (Gen. 25:21); Rachel was barren (Gen. 29:31); the wife of Manoah was barren (Judges 13:2); Hannah was barren (1 Sam. 2); Ruth's husband had died, David's first son with Bathsheba died.

This defeat of the ancient serpent began when God pronounced the gospel and the curse upon him (Gen. 3:15). The gospel and curse of God were realized as God preserved faithful Israel, and climatically in the womb of Mary (of the House or Dynasty of David), through great sweat, pain, tribulation and difficulty gave birth to Jesus Christ, the God-Man.

As the Seed of the Woman had constantly been threatened, so Messiah-Christ's life

would be severely threatened by death by the seed of the serpent in the person of Herod the Great (Matthew 2:16ff) as soon as he was born! But God protected His Son to fulfill his covenant promises to his people.

From yet another angle, we should appreciate the fact that Jesus uses this language of the Apostles, connecting their ministry with the suffering of Israel in the Old Covenant, and using the imagery of a woman in labor to describe their tribulation at the time of the death of Christ:

ESV **John 16:19-22:** Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" <sup>20</sup> *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.* <sup>21</sup> *When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.* <sup>22</sup> *So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*

The sorrow of the Apostles (the "Messianic Mother") will not last- -the victory of Jesus Christ is sure; the Apostles will weep and mourn as a woman in childbirth, but the joy of the resurrection will come! This is the fulfillment of Isaiah that when Messiah comes the woman in labor would bring forth the rebirth of the nation of Israel:

ESV **Isaiah 66:7-14:** *"Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.* 8 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 as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. 9 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. 10 *"Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; 11 that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance."* 12 For thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. 13 *As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.* 14 *You shall see, and your heart shall rejoice; your bones shall flourish like the grass; and the hand of the LORD shall be known to his servants, and he shall show his indignation against his enemies.*

There is a unity and continuity between the imagery and symbolic truth that was promised for Israel and what comes to pass in the Church because of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; this is helpful for seeing how prophecies of the Old Testament came to fulfillment and found their climax in Jesus in many times a surprising way (what Paul calls the "secrets" or "mysteries" of the Kingdom (Rom. 16:25-27; Eph. 3:3-9; Col. 1:24-29).

<sup>3</sup> *And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.*

**A Vision of the Great Monstrous Dragon: "The Serpent" (Gen. 3:1-15)**



This is a great monster that shows the people of God that their main opposition is not earthly power or "flesh and blood" (Eph. 6:12-18). In the Old Testament, the imagery of dragon is used to represent imaginatively the enemies of God and his people, but the main conflict is a spiritual one. Pharaoh in the Exodus, the great redemptive event of the Old Covenant is described by the prophets as a dragon:

ESV **Ezekiel 29:3** speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.'

ESV **Psalm 74:13** You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters on the waters. <sup>14</sup> You crushed the heads of Leviathan [image of a sea monster]; you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.

ESV **Isaiah 27:1** In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

ESV **Isaiah 51:9** Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, that pierced the dragon?

Compare this "Rahab" or dragon with other Old Testament texts; Rahab or the sea monster dragon is a picture of Egypt, and therefore should be understood symbolically as representing all of the nations that oppose the LORD and His Anointed One-Messiah:

ESV **Job 26:12** By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab. <sup>13</sup> By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

ESV **Psalm 89:10** You crushed Rahab like a carcass; you scattered your enemies with your mighty arm.

The reason for these images is that although there is a threat of persecution and satanic opposition to the Lord's fulfilling his promises to Adam and Eve as well as to Israel by sending forth a child to be born, nevertheless, God will ultimately defeat this hideous monster- -the great serpent-dragon threat of his people. God will defeat him through death and the weakness of the cross disarming the powers of this ancient and powerful serpent (Col. 2:15).

It should be noted that as God destroyed the dragon in the Exodus from Egypt, so he has done the same in the redemption in Christ and will with finality at the end of history. What happened at the Red Sea in the Exodus-Redemption is a judgment motif for all the nations that oppose the LORD that will one day be destroyed and defeated as we see ultimately in John's vision in Revelation 19.

The dragon serpent is the evil force who claims sovereignty (he has seven diadems or crowns attempting to counterfeit the King of kings and Lord of lords) and is behind all sinful disobedience and rebellion of the nations that rage (cf. Psalm 2), and he will be defeated along with those who have his "number" (Rev. 13), whose names are

NOT written in the Lamb's Book of Life (cf. Matthew 25:41ff).

Dr. Vern Poythress comments that in the ancient Near East there were certain myths about a sea monster or water god producing chaos in the world. He writes "Polytheistic myths dimly sensed the threat of satanic chaos, but in their confused groping they never penetrated to the reality" (*Revelation*, pg. 135).]

<sup>4</sup> ***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.***

### **A Vision of Cosmic Spiritual Warfare**

The Apostle John sees this great cosmic chaos dragon monstrosity that is so powerful his tail "swept down a third of the stars of heaven - "

At first glance, this sign or picture of the dragon stresses his great and mighty power. As a created being, he is so powerful that his tail can sweep the celestial heavens created by God (cf. Rev. 6:13; 8:12). With another longer look at this sign, and a meditation on the Old Testament, the powerful tail is involved in causing great destruction for God's people. The great dragon reveals himself as the "anti-creator" who takes what God has created and turns it to chaos; a reversal of "without form and void" of Genesis 1:1-2.

This imagery of "the stars of heaven" being cast to the earth in verse 4a is taken from Daniel 8:10 that says:

ESV **Daniel 8:10** It grew great, even to the host of heaven. ***And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.***

This prophecy originally was understood in the context of Daniel as being an end time conflict where the enemies of God would persecute the people of God. This had first application to the historical man Antiochus Epiphanes; here in Revelation John shows the power of the serpent himself behind the man and armies of Antiochus (and this is true for all earthly powers that oppose the LORD and his Anointed One (cf. Psalm 2).

The reason why John shows to us that a "third of the stars of heaven" is being cast down, is because although a portion ("third") of the true people of God ("stars"- used in Daniel 8 to describe the angels who represent the saints, cf. Rev. 1:20) are now citizens of heaven (they have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life, cf. Rev. 17:8; 21:27), they are called to suffering and persecution in this world until the restoration of all things at the end of history (the stars falling are a metaphor of Israel's suffering or tribulation in the Old Covenant, and a picture of the Church's suffering or tribulation in the time between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ, cf. 12:7).

This would have brought great encouragement to the suffering-persecuted-martyred saints who needed to overcome as conquerors in Jesus (see Rev. 2-3), and is important to remember the persecuted for Christ in our time as well.

In the greater redemptive-historical context, not Antiochus, but Herod another seed or offspring or seed of the serpent, who threatened the birth of Jesus Christ the Messiah, Mary's Son:

**Matthew 2:14-18:** And he [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt<sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."<sup>16</sup> Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.<sup>17</sup> Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:<sup>18</sup> "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more."

Jesus' life was not only threatened at his birth, but throughout his ministry:

ESV **Luke 4:28-30:** When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.<sup>29</sup> And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.<sup>30</sup> But passing through their midst, he went away.

Throughout Jesus' life he was constantly bombarded with Satanic opposition, whether it was the devil himself (Luke 4:1-13), or demonic threats (Luke 8:26-39), or the diabolical opposition from the Jewish leaders. In spite of this satanic opposition, the Sovereign God and Father protected his Son so that he would complete his Divine Messianic Mission and lay down his life at the appointed time, only to be resurrected from the dead on the third day as Victorious Conqueror (cf. John 12:23, 27; 17:1)!

**Acts 4:24b-28:** "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them,<sup>25</sup> who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit, "

Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?<sup>26</sup> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'-*<sup>27</sup> *for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,*<sup>28</sup> *to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*

<sup>5</sup> *She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.*

**A Vision of the Birth of the Long-Awaited Messiah-Christ: The Individual Who is the "Seed of the Woman" (Gen. 3:15)**

The woman gives birth! This is first of all a fulfillment of Micah 5:2-5, particularly verse 2-3:

ESV **Micah 5:2-5a:** *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*<sup>3</sup> *Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.*<sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell

secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And he shall be their peace.

G. K. Beale rightly says that this is a summary of Christ's entire life and ministry: "Now a snapshot of Christ's entire life—his birth, his destiny of kingship, and his incipient fulfillment of that destiny in his ascent to God's heavenly throne after his postresurrection ministry—is given in one line" (Revelation, NIGTC, pg. 639).

Mary, the seed of the Woman, true daughter of Eve and Sarah, gives birth to Jesus the Christ who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. As Psalm 2 declares against the evil and unbelieving nations that rage against the LORD and his Messiah:

**Psalm 2:8-12:** Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." <sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. <sup>11</sup> Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. <sup>12</sup> *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

In other contexts of Revelation, the Risen-Ascended Christ who has been given authority over heaven and earth will rule with a rod of iron and destroy all threats to God's people. As Revelation 19 fully reveals, Jesus is the One born to be King of kings and Lord of lords!

**Revelation 19:13-16:** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

ESV **Acts 13:26-39:** "Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. <sup>27</sup> For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand the utterances of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him. <sup>28</sup> And though they found in him no guilt worthy of death, they asked Pilate to have him executed. <sup>29</sup> And when they had carried out all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. <sup>30</sup> *But God raised him from the dead, <sup>31</sup> and for many days he appeared to those who had come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people.* <sup>32</sup> *And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, <sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, "' You are my Son, today I have begotten you.'* <sup>34</sup> And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, "' I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.' <sup>35</sup> Therefore he says also in another psalm, "' You will not let your Holy One see corruption.' <sup>36</sup> For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption, <sup>37</sup> but he whom God raised up did not see corruption. <sup>38</sup> Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything <sup>39</sup> from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.

Jesus, the One born in a manger in Bethlehem would live, die, be resurrected, and ascended to the Davidic Throne at God's right hand to wield all authority and power

through the gospel of grace (Acts 2:26-33), with promises to God's people that when he returns he will ultimately vanquish all evil, and the devil and his angels shall be placed in everlasting torment, along with all those who have opposed the LORD and His Messiah-Christ:

ESV **Romans 1:1-4:** Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> ~~which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,~~ <sup>3</sup> ~~concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh~~ <sup>4</sup> ~~and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord -~~

ESV **Revelation 19:15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty

*Those who believe and are united to Jesus Christ will rule with him!*

ESV **Revelation 2:26** The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, <sup>27</sup> and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father.

<sup>6</sup> *.and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

### **The Woman Protected by God's Sovereignty in the Wilderness-Desert**

In Old Testament prophetic understanding and expectant anticipation, it was believed by many that when Messiah would come to Israel, he would be found in the wilderness-desert (note also v. 14).

The wilderness-desert motif or imagery reminds us of the woman Israel who God protected by fire at night and cloud by day with his Holy presence, and fed Israel with bread from heaven and water from the rock:

ESV **Exodus 16:32** Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, *so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.*'"

ESV **Deuteronomy 2:7** For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. *He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.*"

ESV **Deuteronomy 8:15-16:** who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, <sup>16</sup> *who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.*

ESV **Psalm 78:15** He split rocks in the wilderness and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep.

ESV **Psalm 136:16** to him who led his people through the wilderness, for his steadfast love endures forever \_

These passages and this imagery from the Apostle John in Revelation would have encouraged the people of God that no matter how bleak their situation seemed "in the wilderness of suffering in this world of sin and misery", God the Covenant God would deliver and redeem them, and as he led them through the wilderness-desert in their redemption from Egypt, so he would do it once again- -in a greater way once Messiah came. ***A greater Redemptive-Exodus-Event was coming!***

Once Israel went into exile under the rule of Assyria and Babylon, the hope of the people was that God would once again redeem and deliver his people from exile by bringing them out from under foreign oppressors and out into the wilderness-desert to comfort this people (cf. Exodus 5:1, 3; 7:16):

ESV **Isaiah 34:16-35:2**: Seek and read from the book of the LORD: Not one of these shall be missing; none shall be without her mate. For the mouth of the LORD has commanded, and his Spirit has gathered them. <sup>17</sup> He has cast the lot for them; his hand has portioned it out to them with the line; they shall possess it forever; from generation to generation they shall dwell in it \_ **35:1** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; <sup>2</sup> it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God.

ESV **Hosea 2:14** *"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.*

ESV **Ezekiel 34:25** "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, *so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods.*

ESV **Isaiah 40:3** A voice cries: *"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

It is important to note the importance of John the Baptist's ministry here as a partial fulfillment of God calling his people out of exile through repentance and faith in Messiah.

In John the Baptist, God was not merely calling the people out of Egypt through Moses, but was calling them out of their death and bondage to sin in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ; God was speaking "tenderly" to Israel so that she might believe in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (cf. Isaiah 40:2-3).

As forerunner of Messiah (Isaiah 40), John the Baptist did indeed preach in the wilderness-desert, and he pointed to hope of Israel and the world found in the Person and Ministry of Messiah-Christ:

ESV **Matthew 3:1-12**: In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'"<sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.<sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,<sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"<sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.<sup>9</sup> And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.<sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.<sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

As Jesus told the crowds who were following him and listening to his Messianic instruction:

ESV **Matthew 11:7-11:** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?<sup>8</sup> What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.<sup>9</sup> What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.<sup>10</sup> This is he of whom it is written, "'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" <sup>11</sup> Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

It is also important to note with this wilderness-desert motif that Jesus began his public Divine Messianic Mission and Ministry by facing Satan himself in the wilderness and overcoming temptation on behalf of his people:

ESV **Matthew 4:1** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

Another aspect of this fleeing in the desert could be seen in Mary and Joseph's trek to Egypt; as Matthew writes:

**Matthew 2:14-15:** And he [Joseph] rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt<sup>15</sup> and remained there until the death of Herod.

The people of God are described in the Book of Hebrews and in 1 Corinthians 10 as being identified with those who like Israel are in the wilderness-desert and have yet to reach the eschatological Promised Land (see particularly Hebrews 3-4). We as those united to Jesus by faith in the New Covenant are identified with those Old Covenant saints in the wilderness, cf. 1 Corinthians 10:11:

ESV **1 Corinthians 10:6-11:** *Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.*<sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play."<sup>8</sup> We must not

indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.<sup>9</sup> We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,<sup>10</sup> nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.<sup>11</sup> *Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*

### **The Woman's Time of Tribulation**

This teaches the saints of the first century as us today that although we will experience tribulation in our wilderness-desert wanderings "in Christ" (cf. John 16:33), we nevertheless can count on and rest in the protection and provision of God as he protects us as an eagle her young under his mighty pinions, and he prepares a table for us in the midst of our enemies (Psa. 23).

*God will nourish and feed his people through Word and Sacrament until he returns (v. 6).*

We should notice that although Christ has been resurrected-ascended (v. 5), the woman, the Church, continues to experience opposition and tribulation (cf. John 16:33). Yet God watches over the woman for a complete period of 1,260 days.

We should be careful to avoid numerology and speculation here and let scripture interpret scripture. This time period of forty-two months, or three and a half years is also used in Revelation 11:2-3, 12:14, and 13:5:

ESV **Revelation 11:2-3:** but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for *forty-two months*.<sup>3</sup> *And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."*

ESV **Revelation 12:14** 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*.

ESV **Revelation 13:5** And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for *forty-two months*.

The first point to be made here is that it is a definitive time period set by God's sovereignty; the True and Living God dictates the calendar of events on his redemptive calendar and not His evil opposition. Most Reformed scholars argue that this definite time period is referring symbolically (not literally!) to the interadventual period between Christ's first coming and his second coming to Judge the world in righteousness.

This time begins at Christ's ascension to God's right hand as ruler and authority over all things (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:19-22), and will come to a definite conclusion upon Christ's return for his own (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Although Christ has overcome victoriously, and disarmed the powers and authority of the evil one, nevertheless the Church continues to struggle by God's grace to stand firm in Christ!

Dr. Poythress says that this time period of 1,260 days, forty-two months, or three and a half years is related to the three and a half days of Revelation 11:9, 11 and "thus it



designates a period of persecution of limited length (*Revelation*, pg. 128).

This is the interadventual time period called the "last days" in the New Testament that is characterized by suffering and persecution for Christ, and the "last week of Daniel" in the Old Testament:

ESV **2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12-13:** *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.* <sup>2</sup> For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people - <sup>12</sup> *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,* <sup>13</sup> *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

ESV **2 Thessalonians 1:4-8:** Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring. <sup>5</sup> This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering- <sup>6</sup> since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, <sup>7</sup> *and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels <sup>8</sup> in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

**Daniel 7:25-27:** He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; *and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.* <sup>26</sup> But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. <sup>27</sup> *And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'*

Hendricksen wrote insightfully here: "The expression 'a time, and times, and half a time' occurs first in the book of Daniel (7:25; 12:7). It is the period of the antichrist. Now, John emphasizes the fact that the spirit of the antichrist is in the world *already* in 1 John 4:3. Hence, in the Book of Revelation this period of three years and a half refers to the entire Gospel age" (*More than Conquerors*, pg. 174).

Reformed Bible teachers have helpfully described and illustrated this interadventual time between the first coming and second coming of Christ by comparing it to a decisive battle of a war. For instance, the victory of the Resurrected-Ascended Christ at his first coming is compared to D-Day in the context of WWII. The ultimate victory of the Resurrected-Ascended Christ at his second coming is like V-E Day or Victory in Europe Day.

At D-Day in June 1944, although the enemies continued to march and there were battles throughout the world, the decisive battle had been won. It would not be until V-E Day (May 1945) that this victory would be fully appreciated and acknowledged and the war would be fully over when the enemies surrendered. Another comparison might be compared to the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1863) in the War Between the States and the surrender of General Lee at Appomattox Courthouse (April 1865).

*As Christ says to his disciples upon the hour of his death for sinners: <sup>ESV</sup> John 16:33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart: I have overcome the world."*

Re-read Revelation 12:1-6

### **Conclusion**

We are the "Maranatha people of God" just as the seven churches addressed in the Book of Revelation in chapters 2-3. We celebrate together between the times (of Christ's first and second comings) the Eschatological Advent Season every day of our lives.

As those who will suffer persecution in this world (2 Tim. 3:12), and those who will experience tribulation, in Christ we can be joyful knowing that he has overcome the world (John 16:33)- -and in him we too are more than overcomers by His sweet yet powerful grace!

While we live our lives as wilderness-sufferers in this present evil age, anticipating the return of Jesus Christ, God still graciously spreads a table for his people in the presence of our enemies, and feeds his people through the Word and Sacrament.

Let us have expectant-Adventual hearts every day of the year, reminding ourselves that in the baby born in the manger in Bethlehem was none other than God in the flesh *for us*- -and if God is for us, who can be against us?! (Rom. 8:31ff).

As Martin Luther reminds us of the defeat of the Evil One: "One little word will fell him!"

### **End Part One**

#### **Coming Soon: Part Two: The Defeat of the Dragon**

*the world you will have tribulation. But take heart: I have overcome the world."*

## **II. The Defeat of the Dragon (12:7-12)**

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 12:7-12:** Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup> but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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 our God. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! 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!"

<sup>7</sup> *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back...*

## **Cosmic Spiritual Warfare: Warfare between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent**

This should not be understood as the fall of Satan at creation as some teachers in the past have interpreted this. Rather, this describes the eschatological cosmic battle described in Daniel's prophecy that was heightened in the coming of Jesus Christ in his incarnation in Bethlehem. The war is a "heavenly war" (v. 7a: "Now war arose in heaven.") and Michael who is functioning as Christ's spiritual warrior makes war against the dragon.

In the original context of Daniel's prophecy it was the one like a "Son of Man" of Daniel 7:13-14 who is identified with Michael the Archangel (Dan. 12:1) as they fight against the evil angels of Persia and Greece (The enemies of God and his people at that time in redemptive-history). Michael is an agent of Christ to represent Christ's people. (As we learned in our the first part, they are fighting against the nations who oppose the LORD and his people, the enemies of Israel):

ESV **Daniel 7:13-22: *I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. <sup>14</sup> And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. <sup>15</sup> "As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. <sup>16</sup> I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. <sup>17</sup> "These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth. <sup>18</sup> ***But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.*** <sup>19</sup> "Then I desired to know the truth about the fourth beast, which was different from all the rest, exceedingly terrifying, with its teeth of iron and claws of bronze, and which devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet, <sup>20</sup> and about the ten horns that were on its head, and the other horn that came up and before which three of them fell, the horn that had eyes and a mouth that spoke great things, and that seemed greater than its companions. <sup>21</sup> ***As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them, <sup>22</sup> until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.******

One like the son of man is given eternal dominion and authority over all creation. This teaches the importance of the incarnation: God came to dwell with us (John 1:14) in order to overcome death, hell, and the devil as one like a son of man- -in our own flesh; God and man in one person with two natures!

There are other passages in Daniel's prophecy that reveal to us the cosmic battle or struggle that is occurring in the heavenly places:

**Daniel 8:8-9:** Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. <sup>9</sup> Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.

ESV **Daniel 8:10 *It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them.***

The enemy of God that is represented by the "little horn" (Dan. 8:9) is described as so

powerful that it threw down the host and stars to the ground and trampled on them (remember from the first part that the stars represent the angels who watch over God's people as described in Revelation 1:20; cf. Rev. 12:4a).

This prophecy originally was understood in the context of Daniel as being an end time conflict where the enemies of God would persecute the people of God. This had first application to the historical man Antiochus Epiphanes; here in Revelation John shows the power of the serpent himself behind the man and armies of Antiochus (and this is true for all earthly powers that oppose the LORD and his Anointed One (cf. Psalm 2; see Appendix below on Seventy Weeks of Daniel).

ESV **Daniel 10:13** [Daniel wrote concerning the enemies of God and the real cosmic conflict behind all earthly struggle and tribulation:]The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia \_

ESV **Daniel 10:20-21:** Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. <sup>21</sup> But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince.

ESV **Daniel 12:1** "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

***There is a cosmic battle, but there is also deliverance and redemption in Christ!***

In Jude's Epistle, there is also a passage concerning the cosmic spiritual warfare between Michael and the forces of evil, and Michael is again acting as agent of God's redemptive purposes:

ESV **Jude 1:9** But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

In the larger redemptive-historical context, the churches who received the Book of Revelation (chapters 2-3) would have been encouraged that the saints would be victorious as promised because of Who fights for them, and will continue to fight for them cosmically and spiritually. We too, should be thankful to God for his great protection, and the safety we find as his Church under his wings.

In fact, as we are taught in Ephesians 6:10-18, all of the saints who are united to the victorious Resurrected-Ascended Christ are overcomers, and stand firm in him as they fight against the spiritual wickedness and powers. As Michael fought cosmically on behalf of Israel the Old Covenant Church, so now he continues to represent the Church of Jesus Christ who overcomes by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11).

But until the saints fully possess the Kingdom (cf. Dan. 7:22) at the restoration of all things (Rev. 21-22), we still undergo a great cosmic spiritual battle (Although it has been won by Christ in his death, resurrection and ascension, cf. Col. 2:13-15; Eph. 1:19-22; this is the

"Already-Not Yet" of the victory of Christ and his people we must keep in mind when interpreting the Bible).

In light of Christ's victorious resurrection-ascension, the Lord's people are to be armed for cosmic battle and warfare to stand "against the schemes of the devil":

ESV **Ephesians 6:10-18:** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> ~~*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*~~ <sup>12</sup> *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, <sup>15</sup> and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup> and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, <sup>18</sup> praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints \_

As Daniel described the saints' warfare in the Old Covenant: "As I looked, this horn made war with the saints and prevailed over them. " (Dan. 7:21) it seemed that they were losing the battle for the enemies of God "prevailed over them". However, this was only temporary, as now the saints stand firm in Jesus Christ, who has been given all authority in heaven and upon the earth and we are to understand that power as our victorious power over all evil:

ESV **Ephesians 1:19-23:** and *what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.* <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

*And the dragon and his angels fought back...*

Although the dragon and his angels put up a great fight, and although we would not stand a chance without Jesus Christ, we should as his people nevertheless keep our focus on Jesus' victory and promise of eternal judgment for the devil and his angels:

ESV **Matthew 25:41** "Then he will say to those on his left, *'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*

<sup>8</sup> *.But he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.*

### **The Defeat of the Great Monstrous Dragon**

The child who was born, the Seed or Offspring of the Woman (Gen. 3:14-16) was victorious over this great dragon, the evil Serpent of all (or "that Ancient Serpent"). This is similar language to the destruction of God's enemies revealed in Daniel 2:

ESV **Daniel 2:35** Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold, all together were broken in pieces, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that not a trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

The defeat of the great dragon and all of the nations and enemies of God who have persecuted and opposed God's people has decisively taken place in the Person and Work of Christ, particularly in the incarnation of the Son of God, his crucifixion for his people, and his glorious and victorious resurrection from the dead:

ESV **Colossians 2:9-10:** For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, <sup>10</sup> and you have been filled in him, *who is the head of all rule and authority.*

*Jesus is the Head of all rule and authority!*

**Colossians 2:15:** *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

*Jesus has disarmed the rulers and authorities, putting them to open shame by his great triumph over them!*

ESV **Hebrews 2:14-15:** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, *that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,* <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

*Jesus has destroyed the one who has the power of death- -that is the devil!*

ESV **1 John 3:8** Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. *The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

*Jesus has destroyed the works of the devil!*

ESV **Revelation 1:18** and the living one. *I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*

*Jesus holds the keys (has authority) over Death and Hades!*

Though Jesus died, he was resurrected and seated at God's right hand victoriously disarming the spiritual rulers and authorities of this present evil age, destroying the devil who has the power of death, and destroying his works climatically and finally.

In Revelation 1:18, Jesus is declared to be the "Living One" eternally alive- -and holding the keys of what once bound mankind in bondage: Death and Hades!

ESV **Revelation 12:8** *.but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.*

<sup>9</sup> *And the great dragon was thrown down [E'⬠).:r'8:r verb indicative aorist passive 3rd person singular], 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.*

### **The Great Deceiver and Accuser of the Brethren**

In verse 9, the devil, or great dragon is specifically called the "ancient serpent" of the Garden of Eden who is "thrown down". The verb translated "thrown down" is placed in Greek at the beginning of the sentence emphasizing this defeat. This is the same verb used of Daniel and his friend being "thrown" into the fiery furnace, and of the devil being thrown into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10:

ESV **Revelation 20:10** and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The great dragon is described and named according to his character in verse 9, being called **devil** (which means "slanderer") and **Satan** (which means "adversary-accuser"); he is a deceiver-liar, and counterfeiter of God's purposes in Christ:

From the very beginning of the Bible, we see that the devil, that ancient serpent is a great deceiver-liar:

ESV **Genesis 3:1** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "*Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?*"

ESV **Genesis 3:14** The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this [deceived and lied to Adam and Eve], cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

Remember from Old Testament prophecy in Isaiah that the devil is described metaphorically as a "twisting serpent" or chaos dragon that lives in the sea or the deep:

ESV **Isaiah 27:1** In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.

#### **1) "DEVIL": The Ancient Serpent is a Great Deceiver and Liar:**

ESV **Genesis 3:13** Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*"

Jesus says to the unbelieving Pharisees and Teachers of Israel:



ESV **John 8:44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. *When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*

ESV **1 John 2:22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son.

ESV **1 John 3:8** *Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*

ESV **2 John 1:7** For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

**2 Corinthians 11:2-3, 13-14:** I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> *But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ . .*

<sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.* <sup>15</sup> *So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.*

The devil is described in Revelation 12:9 as "**deceiving the whole earth**" with his lies and slander about God and Christ. The ancient serpent is behind all deception, all unbelief, false philosophies and worldviews, and every slanderous remark about the True and Living God who revealed himself in a glorious manger in the incarnation to save and give "glad gospel tidings" (Luke 2:10ff) to all who believe!

The devil-serpent lies to us that Christ is not as powerful or as real as other more tangible things such as money or possessions or stuff. Christ knows the devil-serpent's constant deception and warns us against greed, or the love of money, or allowing things of this earth to possess us; Christ knows that the devil-serpent's goal is to make us idolaters, and to worship and serve the created rather than the Creator who is forever praised! (cf. Rom. 1:20-25).

Jesus teaches us in contrast to the lies of the devil-serpent:

ESV **Matthew 6:24-33:** *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.* <sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. *Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?* <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like

one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> ~~Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'~~ <sup>32</sup> *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.* <sup>33</sup> *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

Our hope as Christ's people is to learn to cling to Christ and his righteousness **ALONE**, and to let go of all of the things that we cling so desperately and idolatrously to in hopes of finding our identity in this world (in something other than Christ), our comfort and security (in something other than Christ), or our satisfaction and fulfillment (in something other than Christ)! May we learn by God's grace in this new year to cling to Christ tightly and hold loosely all other things and people that compete for his Lordship!

*Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*

ESV **Romans 1:25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

ESV **1 John 2:21** I write to you [Christians in the Church], not because you do not know the truth, *but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth* . . . <sup>ESV</sup> **1 John 2:27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. *But as his anointing teaches you about everything- and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you- abide in him.*

Part of the judgment of God upon unbelievers is that they believe the lies and deception of Satan because they refuse to love the truth of God in Christ and to be saved:

ESV **2 Thessalonians 2:9-12:** The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, <sup>10</sup> and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, *because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.* <sup>11</sup> *Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,* <sup>12</sup> in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Even many in the visible Church are deceived in the last days or the time between Christ's first and second comings!

**1 Timothy 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons....

<sup>10</sup> *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 our God.*

**The Announcement of the Decisive Defeat of the Dragon through the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, the Seed of the Woman:**

*The serpent's head is decisively crushed.*

This announcement in a loud voice declares the victory over the satanic opposition that was revealed in the vision that John had seen in verses 7-9. Here we hear of the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God and the authority of Christ in his opposition to Satan and his evil kingdom that is recorded for us in the Gospels.

In the gospels we have narrative portraits revealing Jesus Christ's awesome power as the God-Man over death, hell, and the devil, and they serve as foretastes of the full restoration of all things when the ancient serpent shall be permanently banished ("Already-Not Yet").

In the Gospel of Luke we are told that in the preaching and proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom, Jesus sees Satan thrown down, or falling:

**Luke 11:17-20:** And the seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us in thy name. <sup>18</sup> **And he said unto them, I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven.** <sup>19</sup> Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall in any wise hurt you. <sup>20</sup> Nevertheless in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

As Satan and his angels fell at the first creation, so it seems necessary that John teaches us that Satan and his angels fall at the time of the second creation, or new creation made possible by the Person and Work of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). This falling of Satan because of the accomplished work of Christ in his resurrection-ascension is also what is being described in an already-not yet way in John 12 and Revelation 20 as well:

ESV **John 12:31-32** **Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.** <sup>32</sup> And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup> He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

ESV **Revelation 20:2** And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years \_

In Revelation 20:2, the thousand years are symbolic of a set period of time set by God in human history that has a culminating end point.

## 2) **"SATAN": The Ancient Serpent is also the Accuser of the Brethren:**

***Revelation 12:10b for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.***

As their great Adversary, the devil-serpent tempts the brethren (those united to Jesus Christ) not to trust God, to look for sufficiency in themselves or something or someone other than Christ (Satan desires God's people to become idolaters), and constantly accuses them before God because of their sins.

***He is not only a deceiver- -he is an accuser. He not only thrives on deceiving the world and God's people, he then is pleased to accuse them before God for their sinful gullibility in believing his lies!***

**Job 1:8-11:** And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" <sup>9</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "***Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. <sup>11</sup> But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.***"

**Job 2:3-6:** And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without reason." <sup>4</sup> Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. <sup>5</sup> ***But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.***" <sup>6</sup> ***And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life."***

ESV **Zechariah 3:1-5:** ***Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.*** <sup>2</sup> And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" <sup>3</sup> Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. <sup>4</sup> And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." ***And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments."*** <sup>5</sup> ***And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments.*** And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

As in the Book of Job and the Prophecy of Zechariah, Satan is the Accuser who accuses the saints of sin and their unworthiness before God. It must be understood that Satan's accusation is a true accusation according to God's own holy Law, but Christ was born in Bethlehem of a woman, under the law (Gal. 4:4ff) in the fullness of the times, to redeem those who were cursed under God's law for their sins.

In the place of His people, Jesus Christ kept the law perfectly on their behalf as their substitute (Matt. 5:17-20, 48; Gal. 3:21-26), and His perfect and righteous Law-keeping record is imputed to us by faith, as our heinous sins against God were imputed to him on the cross.

***The doctrine of justification by faith alone is a monumental threat to Satan as the Accuser. And no wonder that this doctrine has been threatened many times in the history of the Church, as it is again being threatened in our time. Many Christians today cannot even articulate a biblical understanding of this most important doctrine (the doctrine that Luther described as what causes a church to stand or fall).***

In this sweet biblical doctrine we find our hope against all accusations! We find the very righteousness of God in Christ (cf. Rom. 1:17). This doctrine is one Christians must

know and remember daily as we look to Christ for hope and not ourselves- -this is part of the armor of God, the belt of truth.

As the Heidelberg Catechism encourages us of this scriptural truth in Question-Answer 60 "***How are you righteous before God?***":

*Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.*

In the Old Covenant time period, Satan was allowed access as accuser in heaven before Christ was resurrected-ascended as Mediator of the New Covenant.

It seems right and true to conclude from this passage in Revelation 12:10 where there was no longer any place for the devil and his angels in heaven, that Satan thought God was unfair and unjust in his gracious and merciful treatment of Old Testament saints.

As G. K. Beale comments in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*: "The Old Testament texts [Job 1:6-11; 2:1-6; Zech. 3:1-6 listed above] portray Satan accusing saints of unfaithfulness, with the implication that they did not deserve God's salvation and gracious blessings. Implicit also in the accusations was the charge that God's own character was corrupt" (pg. 1125).

In Satan's estimation, God had punished him for his rebellion, but had not always held the saints immediately accountable for their sins, but was patient with them according to his covenantal loving-kindness.

In contrast to Satan's character as judgmental deceiver-liar, God is merciful and judges according to his holy character as revealed in Exodus 34:6-7:

ESV **Exodus 34:6-7**: The LORD passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,<sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

Here in Exodus 34:6-7 we see that God is merciful and gracious as well as a just judge of sin.

From the passage in Revelation 12, we learn that Satan the Accuser has no more claims upon God's supposed or perceived injustice because a once and for all sacrifice has been made and God has judged sin in the death of his Beloved Son. This is what Paul teaches in Romans 3:23-26:

**Romans 3:23-26**: – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a

propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. *This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* <sup>26</sup> *It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

The good news of the gospel is that because Christ has taken our sins upon him, and he has given to us his righteousness, there is no person on earth, or angel in heaven-no one-who can condemn God's people united by faith to Jesus Christ! No one can bring any charge or condemn God's people redeemed and delivered by the blood of Jesus Christ!

ESV **Romans 8:32-35:** 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? <sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? 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.

Although Satan continues to accuse the brethren ("already, not yet"), our hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ who died- -who was raised- -who is at God's right hand as a Mediator interceding for us (Rom. 8:34). **IF GOD BE FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?**

*11 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.*

### **The Precious Covenantal Blood of the Lamb**

The victory of Christ was through the shedding of his precious covenantal blood to secure eternal life for his people. That same blood that propitiates God's righteous wrath, covering the iniquities and sins of Christ's people, is the blood on the doorposts that still speaks through the gospel promise that all who believe are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:32-39).

*As G. K. Beale writes: "The single intent [and purpose of chapter 12] is to assure those who meet satanic evil on earth that it is really a defeated power, however contrary it might seem to human experience" (NIGNT, pg. 663).*

### **The Blood of the Covenant**

ESV **Exodus 12:13** The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

ESV **Matthew 26:28** for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

ESV **Luke 22:20** And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

ESV **John 6:56** Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

ESV **Hebrews 9:14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

ESV **Hebrews 9:22** Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

ESV **1 Peter 1:18-21**: knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,<sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.<sup>20</sup> He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake,<sup>21</sup> who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

ESV **Romans 8:31-32**: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?<sup>32</sup> 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?

*"Where O Death is your victory and sting?" As the Apostle Paul says, the sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the Law- -and the Law has been perfectly kept 'for us' in Christ! (1 Cor. 15:55-57).  
Rejoice!!*

Even in suffering martyrdom for the faith (as some of the members of the churches were experiencing in the Book of Revelation), the blood was the seed of the Church, that continued to make the gospel known, and death would not be the final experience- -but resurrection with Christ!

As Jesus' disciples, the paradoxical way we overcome the forces of evil is by trusting in the bloody death of Jesus Christ who laid down his life for his people, as well as conquering by not loving our lives- -even to the point of death or martyrdom.

This again is God's victory through what seems to be folly and weakness in the eyes of the world and the wicked forces of the evil one. As Martin Luther said so eloquently about God's great power in weakness:

*If I had been God and wanted to save the world, I wouldn't have done it that way. I just would have called in the devil, twisted his nose, and said "Let my people go!" But God is amazing. He sends a little baby, as weak as an earthworm, lying in a feed box of a donkey. And that little baby crunches the devil's back and overcomes all the power of hell and sin and death.*

*11 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.*

As Jesus teaches his people this in the gospels; we are called to carry our cross and "lose our lives". As we considered this earlier in the way the devil deceives the world, we must not trust in this world of temporal things, but hope in the eternal. We must not cling to our lives here on earth, but live glorifying God and enjoying him forever!

ESV **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

ESV **John 12:25** Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

*12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! 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!"*

The devil knows that he only has a designated amount of time to deceive and accuse the nations that is set by God's sovereign rule over creation. In Jesus' earthly ministry, the demons acknowledge that they are aware that the havoc they are spiritually wrecking upon mankind is only temporal, and it is only through the permissible will of God that it continues for a season:

ESV **Matthew 8:28-29**: And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. <sup>29</sup> *And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"*

### "Already-Not Yet" Interadventual Period- "Period of Nourishing" (Rev. 12:6, 13)

#### *"The time is short" -v.12*

This short time period describes the "already-not yet" tension we live in as the people of God between the first and second Comings of Jesus Christ (described as the 1,260 days, a time, times, and half a time, and forty-two months earlier in Rev. 12:6, 14; cf. Rev. 11:2- 3; 12:14; 13:5; Daniel 7:21-29; 12:7; More on this in part three).

ESV **Revelation 11:2-3**: but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for *forty-two months*. <sup>3</sup> *And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.*"

ESV **Revelation 12:14** 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*.

ESV **Revelation 13:5** And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for *forty-two months*.

ESV **Daniel 12:7** And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he *raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.*



ESV **Revelation 20:1-3:** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. <sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Christ has already decisively conquered the devil and all forces of evil, but we await the restoration of all things when our bodies still subjected to death will be glorified with He Who is seated on the throne at God's right hand (cf. Romans 8:18-30). We anticipate nothing less than a new creation, a restoration of all things (creation is spoken of in Revelation 12:12 synecdochally as "O earth and sea").

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 concerning the hope of all the creation and how this future restoration is tied to Christ's victory:

ESV **Romans 8:18-25:** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> *For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> ~~*For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*~~ <sup>23</sup> *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Though Christ showed in his earthly ministry that he was here to heal disease, give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, and to raise the dead, nevertheless, we still live in a time when we can say we are truly now seated with Christ in the heavenly places, but that we must still suffer with him until he returns.

We are citizens of heaven, but we still must undergo patience and suffering with Christ as citizens of the earth as well:

ESV **Colossians 3:1-4:** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

ESV **Philippians 3:20-21:** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

ESV **2 Corinthians 4:16-18:** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

## **Conclusion**

As the Church we must constantly remember that the great and ancient serpent has been disarmed and defeated. We must be reminded of his seeking to devour like a roaring lion in his deception and accusation. The Church must stand on God's truth revealed in Scripture and rest assured in the doctrine of justification by faith alone against the devil's lies and accusations.

*"Who can bring a charge against God's elect?" the Apostle Paul asks in Romans 8:32- 39, and the answer is no one but Christ who loves and died for us!*

As we continue as the Church on the march, we must keep our eyes on Jesus, overcoming by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony, not loving our lives, but remembering to lose our lives as those united to Jesus Christ by faith.

**End Part Two**

**Coming Soon: Part Three: The Church Militant and Victorious**

### III. The Victory of Christ's Bride (12:11-17)

#### Introduction

In the final verses of Revelation 12, we learn of the great struggle and tribulation that the Church must endure and grow through as those united to Jesus Christ. The title of our sermon is "A Christmas Revelation" but now that the season is behind us, it could also be called "A New Year's Revelation" because it is an appropriately important sermon any time of the year to fix our eyes and focus on the conquering Christ who lived and died for us.

Let us meditate upon the imagery that the Apostle John shows to us in Revelation 12:11-17, understanding that the battle has been won but as the Church militant we are still called to march forward storming the gates of hell with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Remember the example of D-Day and V-E Day in parts one and two?

By God's grace, we are to live knowing that we have been cleansed by the precious blood of the lamb, clinging to the testimony of Jesus and his gospel good news for sinners, obeying the commandments of God by the grace that God has given to us in Christ. Because of the work of Christ, we are to be carrying our cross, and faithfully enduring together come what may as the Church of Jesus Christ that knows confidently that the gates of hell will never prevail against God's Church!

A picture is worth a 1,000 words it is said and I hope that after this mini-series on the Book of Revelation that you will meditate more on the images that John gives to you for encouragement as if you were reading a great redemptive pop-up book!

In this New Year of 2008, let us remember the opening hope of the Book of Revelation; may this be a verse we take to heart and better understand this year through the declaration and understanding of God's Word:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. <sup>7</sup> Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

ESV **Revelation 12:11-17:** And they have conquered him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! 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!" <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

Themes: Church as mother (connect with 12:1-6)- -the Church is the woman/ As Satan attacks Messiah (v. 5), so he also attacks his people, his servants (v. 17)/

*11 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.*

### **The Precious Covenantal Blood of the Lamb**

The victory of Christ was through the shedding of his precious covenantal blood to secure eternal life for his people. That same blood that propitiates God's righteous wrath, covering the iniquities and sins of Christ's people, is the blood on the doorposts that still speaks through the gospel promise that all who believe are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:32-39).

### **Carrying Our Cross: "For they loved not their lives even unto death"**

As we live as those freed from our sins by His blood (Rev. 1:5), let us faithfully carry our cross daily, victoriously following Jesus!

As Jesus teaches his people this in the gospels; we are called to carry our cross and "lose our lives". As we considered this earlier in the way the devil deceives the world, we must not trust in this world of temporal things, but hope in the eternal. We must not cling to our lives here on earth, but live glorifying God and enjoying him forever!

Jesus calls us to follow him, and that means carrying a cross of suffering; this is the true meaning of discipleship according to Jesus:

**Matthew 16:24-26:** Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?"

ESV **Luke 14:26** "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, *yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.*

ESV **John 12:25** *Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

ESV **Luke 9:62** Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

*12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! 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!"*

### **The rejoicing of the heavens**

This is the only time in the Book of Revelation that heaven is plural as "heavens" (the word heaven is used in Revelation over 50 times). The rejoicing of the heavens is a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy when God's Kingdom shall be firmly established and there is a judgment of the wicked (see Beale, pg. 666). The heavens in these prophecies witness God's oath of blessing for faith and obedience and curse or judgment for those who do not believe and who disobey

their Sovereign Creator.

ESV **Deuteronomy 32:39-43:** "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. <sup>40</sup> For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, As I live forever, <sup>41</sup> if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me. <sup>42</sup> I will make my arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh- with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired heads of the enemy.' <sup>43</sup> ***"Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."***

ESV **Isaiah 49:13** ***Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! for the LORD has comforted his people and will have compassion on his afflicted.***

ESV **Psalms 96:11-13:** ***Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;*** <sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy <sup>13</sup> ***before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.***

This instructs us as to how to rejoice in all things as the Church of Jesus Christ as the Apostle Paul teaches in Philippians 4 without anxiety or worry. The heavens rejoice, God's people are to rejoice knowing that God has conquered his enemies and the judgment of the wicked is imminent- -God's witnesses are the heavens, but they are also his people:

ESV **Philippians 4:4-7:** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Two attitudes to have as the Church because of what Jesus has done for us:** 1) Confident trust in Christ's blood and a hearty understanding and strong belief in his gospel of grace for sinners; 2) Rejoicing in His victory *for us!!*

As we rejoice in the accomplished work of Christ in heaven, we should notice at the same time that a great woe is pronounced upon the earth because this is where the devil will wreak his havoc having lost his access to the heavens where he accused the brethren day and night, but now has been thrown down (v. 10b). Yet the great news is that he is not able to wreak havoc for long, for -

**"His time is short"- All Creation Must Endure Until the Restoration of All Things!**

The devil knows that he only has a designated amount of time to deceive and accuse the nations that is set by God's sovereign rule over creation (we will look at this further later in our sermon).

Christ has already decisively conquered the devil and all forces of evil, but we await the restoration of all things when our bodies still subjected to death will be glorified with He Who is seated on the throne at God's right hand (cf. Romans 8:18-30).

We anticipate nothing less than a new creation, a restoration of all things (creation is spoken of in Revelation 12:12 synecdochally as "O earth and sea").

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 concerning the hope of all the creation and how this future restoration is tied to Christ's victory:

ESV **Romans 8:18-25:** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> **For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.** <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> **For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.** <sup>23</sup> **And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.** <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Though Christ showed in his earthly ministry that he was here to heal disease, give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, and to raise the dead, nevertheless, we still live in a time when we can say we are truly now seated with Christ in the heavenly places, but that we must still suffer with him until he returns.

We are citizens of heaven, but we still must undergo patience and suffering with Christ as citizens of the earth as well:

ESV **Colossians 3:1-4:** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

ESV **Philippians 3:20-21:** But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

ESV **2 Corinthians 4:16-18:** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

As the Church we must know our identity as those truly raised and hidden with Christ in God; we who are more than conquerors in him, yet called to endure "momentary affliction" as we walk by faith anticipating Christ our Savior's return for us! *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory!*

**13** *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.*

### **The Church Militant's Struggle and Tribulation until Christ Returns**

Here the woman is again Israel, who gave birth to Mary, who gave birth to Jesus Christ in Bethlehem's manger, who builds his Church and prepares the Bride for the Wedding Supper of the Lamb; this is a multi-faceted revelation of God's salvation in Jesus.

This is yet another perspective on the Devil's pursuit of God's people during the time of Christ's first and second Comings, or interadventual period. The Greek word that is translated "pursued" (NIV, RSV, ESV) in verse 13 can also be translated persecuted (KJV, NASB). Because Satan had been thrown down to earth in Christ's victorious resurrection and ascension, he pursues the woman who is the Church through persecution and attempting to frustrate God's purposes. If he cannot threaten Christ and his rule, he will threaten Christ's people.

***If he cannot stop God's sovereign purposes in the redemption of His people by threatening their souls through deception and accusations, he will threaten their bodies through persecution!***

ESV **Matthew 5:11-12:** "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

ESV **Matthew 10:21** Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

ESV **John 15:18-22:** "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' ***If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.*** <sup>21</sup> ***But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.***

As John wrote the Book of Revelation, he too was experiencing persecution and tribulation for his stand for the truth of Christ's Church:

ESV **Revelation 1:9** I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Despite the pursuit of the serpent, the woman is protected and safe under God's mighty wings--in the shadow of the Almighty (cf. Psalm 91).

<sup>14</sup> ***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.***

As we learned in verse 6, God protects and nourishes the woman, his Church:

ESV **Revelation 12:6** and the woman fled into the wilderness, ***where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.***

### **The Church is Protected by God's Sovereign Power in the Wilderness-Desert**

Israel was protected by God in the wilderness-desert and this was pictured as an eagle. Israel and the covenant people of God throughout redemptive-history can still trust that God will

protect them, and ultimately deliver his people no matter how difficult a situation seems to be in our life:

ESV **Exodus 19:4** You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

ESV **Deuteronomy 32:10-15:** "He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. <sup>11</sup> *Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,* <sup>12</sup> *the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.* <sup>13</sup> He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock. <sup>14</sup> Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat- and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape. <sup>15</sup> "But Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.

Many times the Psalmist trusts in God's power and protection against his enemies, and finds restful protection "under God's wings".

ESV **Psalm 17:8** Keep me as the apple of your eye; *hide me in the shadow of your wings,* <sup>9</sup> from the wicked who do me violence, my deadly enemies who surround me.

ESV **Psalm 36:7** How precious is your steadfast love, O God! *The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.* <sup>8</sup> They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

ESV **Psalm 57:1** TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO DO NOT DESTROY. A MIKTAM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM SAUL, IN THE CAVE. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; *in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.*

David's prayer to God in the Old Covenant in Psalm 55 is foundational for better understanding the hope of God's protection found in Revelation 12:14:

ESV **Psalm 55:1** TO THE CHOIRMASTER: WITH STRINGED INSTRUMENTS. A MASKIL OF DAVID. Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy! <sup>2</sup> Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I moan, <sup>3</sup> because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me. <sup>4</sup> *My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.* <sup>5</sup> *Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me.* <sup>6</sup> *And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; <sup>7</sup> yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; Selah..*

David finds a protection from the persecution of God's enemies by flying away and resting far away in the wilderness where God will protect and nourish. David closes his Psalm with words of encouragement for the saints in both the Old and New Testaments that God is faithful to his righteous people, and that he will judge the wicked; we can trust him for this imminent judgment (Psalm 55:22-23):



- .Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved. <sup>23</sup> But you, O God, will cast them down into the pit of destruction; men of blood and treachery shall not live out half their days. But I will trust in you.

***Though satanic persecution would come, God would never leave nor forsake his people:***

ESV **Psalm 91:1-4:** He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. <sup>2</sup> ***I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."*** <sup>3</sup> For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. <sup>4</sup> He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

***ESV Isaiah 40:31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.***

**"Nourished for a time, and times, and half a time."**

As we have learned in parts one and two, the time, times and half a time of verse 14 is the length of time described by Daniel as the last days great tribulation; it is the length of time from the resurrection-ascension of Jesus until Jesus returns to formally judge the living and the dead.

**Daniel 7:25-27:** He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and shall think to change the times and the law; ***and they shall be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.*** <sup>26</sup> But the court shall sit in judgment, and his dominion shall be taken away, to be consumed and destroyed to the end. <sup>27</sup> ***And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; their kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey them.'***

In Jesus' earthly ministry, the demons acknowledge that they are aware that the havoc they are spiritually wrecking upon mankind is only temporal, and it is only through the permissible will of God that it continues for a season:

ESV **Matthew 8:28-29:** And when he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs, so fierce that no one could pass that way. <sup>29</sup> ***And behold, they cried out, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?"***

**"Already-Not Yet" Interadventual Period- "Period of Persecution/Period of Nourishing"**  
(Rev. 12:6, 13)

***"The time is short" -v.12***

This short time period describes the "already-not yet" tension we live in as the people of God between the first and second Comings of Jesus Christ (described as the 1,260 days, a time, times, and half a time, and forty-two months earlier in Rev. 12:6, 14; cf. Rev. 11:2- 3; 12:14; 13:5; Daniel 7:21-29; 12:7).

This short time is also described as the forty-two months, the 1,260 days, and a time, and times, and half a time. This is the end time struggle between the enemy of God and the persecution of God's people. But as we learn from verses 6 and 14, they people of God rest confident in God's nourishing protection.

ESV **Revelation 11:2-3:** but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for *forty-two months*.<sup>3</sup> *And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.*"

This describes visually preaching throughout the gospel age and how this is what continues to pronounce Christ's defeat over all the principalities and powers in the heavenly places!

ESV **Revelation 12:14** 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*.

ESV **Revelation 13:5** And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for *forty-two months*.

This describes a limited time of authority given by God: This should remind you of Jesus' statement to Pontius Pilate as he was awaiting his sentence: "You would have no authority over me unless it had not been given to you from above!"

ESV **Daniel 12:7** And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; *he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.*

***When Jesus, the King of the Kingdom returns, the people's tribulation will be finished!***

ESV **Revelation 6:9-11:** When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.<sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"<sup>11</sup> Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

This is also the time period spoken of in Revelation 20:1-3:

ESV **Revelation 20:1-3:** Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain.<sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,<sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

Hendricksen wrote insightfully here: "The expression 'a time, and times, and half a time' occurs first in the book of Daniel (7:25; 12:7). It is the period of the antichrist. Now, John emphasizes the fact that the spirit of the antichrist is in the world *already* in 1 John 4:3.

Hence, in the Book of Revelation this period of three years and a half refers to the entire Gospel age" (*More than Conquerors*, pg. 174).

G. K. Beale wrote: "The allusion to the period of tribulation from Daniel, the three and a half years, is again applied to the entire time of the church's existence" (pg. 669).

We should also focus our attention on other Old Testament teaching on this time period spoke of here in John's Revelation. We should compare this passage with the three and a half years of Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 17; 18:10-13; James 5:17).

During the time of Elijah the Prophet there was a great heightening of God's powerful works. At the same time, was great satanic opposition represented by Ahab and Jezebel.

ESV **1 Kings 18:10-13:** As the LORD your God lives, there is no nation or kingdom where my lord has not sent to seek you. And when they would say, 'He is not here,' he would take an oath of the kingdom or nation, that they had not found you. <sup>11</sup> And now you say, 'Go, tell your lord, "Behold, Elijah is here.'" <sup>12</sup> And as soon as I have gone from you, the Spirit of the LORD will carry you I know not where. And so, when I come and tell Ahab and he cannot find you, he will kill me, although I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. <sup>13</sup> Has it not been told my lord what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD, how I hid a hundred men of the LORD's prophets by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water?

ESV **James 5:17** Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

The three and half years of this struggle in the Old Covenant is extremely significant for the New Covenant struggle with the evil rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this present darkness. As Elijah struggled in the Old Covenant with persecution, so those united to Jesus Christ by faith in the New Covenant also suffer with persecution but also are confident of God's sovereign protection.

As the Apostle Paul teaches the Church in Ephesians 6:12:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

How are they nourished in the wilderness? By the presence of Christ's loving and strong presence with his people. As the Resurrected-Ascended Christ is shown in chapter one as the One who walks among the churches, so Christ is the manna from heaven who makes his presence known to his people during their sojourn in the wilderness. As Jesus promises in Hebrews 13:5: "I will never leave you nor forsake you". Jesus also promises:

***"And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."- Matthew 28:20***

***<sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup> 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.***

The imagery of the flood waters being poured out to sweep away the woman is battle and warfare imagery that would be also experienced in times of persecution by God's enemies. As John writes, the serpent is set on destroying the church as he says that the purpose of the water from his mouth is to "sweep her away with a flood."

It is significant that this "water like a river" or flood waters comes from the serpent's mouth. Out of the serpent's mouth comes ***deception and falsehood***.

King David especially used this kind of imagery of waters being the great flood that was threatening to destroy him as king of God's people, describing his enemies and the enemies of God in a metaphorical way as those with powerful hands and deceptive mouths:

ESV **Psalm 144:7-11:** *Stretch out your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of foreigners,<sup>8</sup> whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*<sup>9</sup> I will sing a new song to you, O God; upon a ten-stringed harp I will play to you,<sup>10</sup> who gives victory to kings, who rescues David his servant from the cruel sword.<sup>11</sup> *Rescue me and deliver me from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.*

ESV **Psalm 32:6** Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

ESV **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10:** The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,<sup>10</sup> and *with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.*

Satan is one who specializes in deception (see part two of sermon; he is called "the devil" which means deceiver or slanderer). His mouth here in this imagery represents his deceit, and part of his pursuit or persecution of the church is through false teaching (see Revelation 2-3). We should remember from other Scriptures that the devil is constantly threatening the Church with his deception:

ESV **Matthew 24:24** For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

ESV **Luke 22:31** "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat,

ESV **2 Corinthians 2:9** For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything.<sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ,<sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

The Book of Revelation is addressed to the seven churches of Asia Minor. These were real historical churches and congregations of God's people. The messages that Jesus speaks to them are also the messages he continues to speak to his congregations during the period of 1,260 days, or a time, times and half a times, or the last days. The message to three of the congregations concerns their already being deceived by false teaching and allowing behavior to be practiced and accepted in the congregation that is against God's Word:

#### **To Pergamum**

ESV **Revelation 2:14** But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.<sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.<sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

### **To Thyatira**

ESV **Revelation 2:20** But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works -

### **To Laodicea**

ESV **Revelation 3:15** "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. <sup>17</sup> For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

G. K. Beale comments: "Chapters 2-3 [of Revelation] have revealed that the churches to which John was writing had already begun to experience the devil's flood of deception (2:2, 14, 20), false accusations (2:9; 3:9), temptations, and persecution (2:10, 14). It is beyond coincidence that wherever chs. 2-3 mention these problems, the devil is mentioned as having his "synagogue" (2:9; 3:9), "throne" (2:13), or "deep things" (2:24) in those cities" (pg. 673).

This should be sobering for the American Church. We may not yet experience the suffering-persecution compared to the rest of the world, especially in countries full of unbelief and false religions, but we have our hands full here with deception and blatant immorality in the Church!

If Satan is not able to deceive Christ's people with false teaching, and his people remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ, then he will persecute them (cf. 12:17; 13:10).

Yet God's people can trust in the Lord, Maker of Heaven and Earth, come what may! God's people have God's truth to guide them, God's faithfulness to encourage them, God's covenant promises to rely upon- -no matter how great the persecution and suffering, no matter how much the evil one uses deception and lies against us.

In fact, here in Revelation 12 where the Apostle John describes the serpent pouring out the waters of affliction and persecution upon God's people, the people should be reminded of the victory of God over his enemies in the Exodus from Egypt.

***16 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.***

The imagery of the "earth swallowing" the river is based on the great Old Covenant redemptive event of the Exodus. As God was faithful to his Old Covenant people in the Exodus, so he will be constantly faithfully to his covenant and redeem his people once again. We read in 'The Song of Moses at the Sea' in Exodus 15:

ESV **Exodus 15:10-12:** You blew with your wind; the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. <sup>11</sup> "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? <sup>12</sup> **You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.**

As God showed forth his great redemptive powers in the Exodus, so he has shown forth his great powers in the Person and Work of Christ, and particularly his great power of raising

Christ from the dead in the resurrection.

In Deuteronomy 11, Moses speaks of the earth opening its mouth in judgment to defeat God's enemies at the Red Sea as well as the rebellion against Moses' leadership in Korah, Dathan and Abiram recorded in Numbers:

ESV **Deuteronomy 11:4-6:** .and what he did to the army of Egypt, to their horses and to their chariots, how he made the water of the Red Sea flow over them as they pursued after you, and how the LORD has destroyed them to this day, <sup>5</sup> and what he did to you in the wilderness, until you came to this place, <sup>6</sup> ***and what he did to Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, son of Reuben, how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households, their tents, and every living thing that followed them, in the midst of all Israel.***

Our hope is in Christ's victory that just as God judged the Egyptians (the enemies of God and his people), and just as he judged the sin and deception within the visible Church, or congregation of the people of God (in Korah and company), so he will judge all the threats against his Church, and one day bring purity and perfection to the congregation that has struggled in this present age.

We may look around us sometimes in the visible church and see all kinds of divisions, sins, and temptations to give in to lies (false teachings, heresies, etc), but nevertheless, God is committed to his Church to purify and make her spotless as a bride on her wedding day! As the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5:24-27 (cf. Revelation 21:2)-

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. <sup>25</sup> Husbands, love your wives, ***as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, <sup>27</sup> so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.***

ESV **Revelation 7:13-14:** Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" <sup>14</sup> I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Our hope as a Church is in Christ's victory in the past as well the victory Christ's people will experience on the day that Christ shall return for us (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Thess. 1:4- 8). Although in this present age we will experience persecution for standing for the truth of the gospel, and although we will be tempted to deception by the devil, we are more than overcomers and conquerors when we walk by faith and not by sight, keeping our eyes on Jesus. For the truth is *nothing* can separate us from God's love and protection- - not even our greatest enemy which is death:

Nothing can separate God's people from the love of God in Christ:

**Romans 8:38-39:** <sup>38</sup> ***For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

**17** *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.*

Larger context of Revelation 13:

ESV **Revelation 13:4-10:** And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

<sup>5</sup> And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. <sup>6</sup> It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup> Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, <sup>8</sup> and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain. <sup>9</sup> If anyone has an ear, let him hear: <sup>10</sup> If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. ***Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.***

### **The Church Triumphant in Jesus Christ**

The Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15-16 is corporate as well as individual. The Seed of the Woman first in the Old Testament refers to Israel, the Old Covenant Church. The Seed of the Woman revealed fully in the New Testament refers to Christ, the only True Israelite. From verse 17a, we can also say that the seed or offspring of the woman is also the people of the New Covenant Church ("rest of her offspring").

Whether Israelite or Gentile, all those who are united to Christ, the "Seed or Offspring" of the woman, we will suffer persecution and tribulation, but we should be of good cheer for Christ has overcome the world. Paul brings the two ideas of the corporate idea of the woman being united to the individual seed of the woman who is Christ:

ESV **Galatians 3:16, 26-29:** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. . . <sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 3:26-29:** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

ESV **John 16:33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

This passage teaches that all Christians will suffer persecution and onslaught from the evil dragon in some ways. The rest of the woman's seed or offspring is described in v. 17 as "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" which means all true Christians united to Jesus Christ by faith. **How** we experience this persecution and furious anger of the dragon is different for each congregation, for each individual, perhaps even for each family. However, God's people must be prepared by

understanding the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the truth of God against all deception-lies and accusations.

We must overcome in Christ by standing firm spiritually in Christ, knowing who we are as the people of God united to Jesus Christ, knowing that we are being identified with Christ and thus the reason why we suffer in this present age. We must have a good and sound theology of this so that when the "evil day" comes as Paul describes it in Ephesians 6:12ff, we will be able to stand strong.

Revelation 12:17 is also a verse that shows the unity of God's people together in Christ whether Jew or Gentile, and argues vehemently against any notion or interpretation of the Book of Revelation that separates the destinies of Jew and Gentile. In fact, the Book of Revelation, particularly in v. 17 makes no national distinctions, but describes believers whether Jew or Gentile as the rest of the woman's seed or offspring, those who keep God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (also Beale, pg. 679).

It is through obedience to God's commands, as we hold to the testimony of Jesus that we overcome as people united to Jesus by His precious Spirit. The call for the Church today as throughout the time called the last days is for faithfulness to Jesus' gospel, and endurance, perseverance and patience as we endure tribulation.

We may as individuals and as congregations be tempted to give up sometimes, realizing the difficult work of carrying our cross behind, Jesus but we must endure, drinking deeply of God's grace that comes through the Word of God, Sacraments and prayer.

Remember this:

ESV **Revelation 14:12** Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

### **The Unity of the Church and Jesus Christ**

The unity of Christ and his church is so close that to persecute the church is to persecute Christ and when the Church is persecuted, it is joining in the sufferings of Jesus Christ to whom she is united.

**Acts 9:4-5, 15-16:** And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"<sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "***I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.***"<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 9:15-16:** But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."<sup>16</sup> ***For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.***"

**Colossians 1:24-26:** *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.



The "Seed of the Woman" is Israel; the "Seed of the Woman" is Mary; the "Seed of the Woman" is Jesus Christ; the "Seed of the Woman" is the Church, made up of all Jews and Gentiles united to Jesus Christ by faith.

The Apostle Paul surprises us with the fact that the Church at Corinth made of Jews and Gentiles united to faith by Jesus Christ fulfills the ancient curse upon the serpent that God was to fulfill in the future. He ends the Epistle to the Romans with a warning against the dragon's deception and slander in the visible Church. The Apostle Paul writes:

ESV **Romans 16:17-20:** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. <sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive. <sup>19</sup> For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.

Here the Apostle Paul ends the Book of Romans set with a protological-eschatological focus in the Garden of Eden. Paul uses language of Genesis 3 to describe the present reality of the visible Church. In the visible Church we have the place where God "walks" with his people and he is worshipped. Until all things are restored, we must be wise concerning the serpent's deception from within the Church; in Genesis 3:5-6, the serpent says:

ESV **Genesis 3:5-6:** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Paul is teaching God's people that obedience is the Church's way of overcoming the deception and lies of Satan.

<sup>20</sup> ***The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.***

It is interesting to note that in a rabbinic interpretation of Genesis 3 in the crushing of the serpent's head (*Targum Neof.*) the "seed of the woman" is rightly interpreted corporately: "When the sons of the woman keep the commandments of the law they will smite you on the head; when they abandon the commandments you will wound them in the head. In the days of King Messiah (see Sweet, *Commentary on Revelation*, pg. 205; Beale, pgs. 679-80).

The grace of the Lord Jesus is that he has crushed the serpent's head in his death and resurrection, but because we are united to him, in some way beyond our full understanding, but through faithful endurance by God's grace and the obedience of our faith to his commandments, we also as his church united to him by His Spirit, also do/will crush Satan under our feet.

## Conclusion

In this Christmas and New Year of 2020 let us as pilgrims on the way in exile and in the wilderness be reminded of the overcoming victorious Christ *for us*. Let us be reminded of God's faithfulness to us in Christ, and let us respond with a deeper faith and obedience to his gospel and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that is revealed in it!

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