

"She Gave Birth to A Male Child" Whom the Dragon Wanted to Devour

Psalm 2:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12; Revelation 12:1-17 (text)

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Introduction

In our lifetime, the Book of Revelation has been mostly interpreted by evangelicals according to what current spectacular event in the world was happening, especially in relation to the Middle East, and more specifically to Israel. Which world power is the current threat against Israel's existence? It was the Soviet Union, then Iraq, now Iran. Which countries would figure prominently in Israel's future? It was the Soviet Union, the European Common Market, China, and of course, the United States.

Why this focus on Israel? It is because these evangelicals read John's Revelation through the lens of what will be the future of Israel, especially in these "last days," which usually means the last seven years before the second coming of Christ. Thus, it is all too well-accepted to scan the pages of newspapers and the Internet and watch television news for the latest spectacular event in Israel and the Middle East and see them as the Book of Revelation unfolding before our very eyes today. This is because the book was written for us in pictures familiar to first century Christians, but only we, the "terminal generation," could understand and interpret. Not only is the Apocalypse—but all prophetic books and events of the Bible—are read from this Jewish focus, because these evangelicals still regard present-day Israel as God's "chosen nation."

Historically, this dangerous path of interpreting prophecy through current events has been abused by those who are motivated not only by religious, but also political agenda. The second century false prophet Montanus gathered many followers when he prophesied that Jesus would return in his hometown in Phrygia (present-day Turkey) based on direct revelations from the Spirit. During the 16th century Protestant Reformation, John of Leyden prophesied that the city of Munster in Germany would become the new city of Jerusalem. In Nazi Germany, Hitler and many of his allies dreamed of Berlin as the "millennial city" to lead Germany into a future "thousand-year glory" of the Third Reich.

One of the most ridiculous false teachings regarding prophecy is the "Jubilee of Jubilees" in the Philippines. Recall that every 50 years in Israel is a Jubilee year in which all slaves, land, and debts are freed. According to this false prophecy, 2010 would be the 490th year since Ferdinand Magellan planted the Roman Catholic cross on the Philippine islands in 1521. This period of 490 years is based on Israel's 49 years before the Jubilee Year on the 50th year— $49 \times 10 = 490$. And since 2010 is a presidential election year in which the leader of the prosperity gospel cult promoting this false teaching is a candidate, they prophesy that he would be elected president and then lead the country into its "blessed nation" status. Obviously, after getting only 2 percent of the votes, this cult now blames the electorate for being disobedient and faithless!

How are we then to interpret prophetic and apocalyptic writings? The simple, historic Protestant principle is this: "Scripture interprets Scripture." And in corollary to this, "clear texts

interpret the obscure,” which also means that “the New Testament interprets the Old” because in the New Testament we find all the fulfillment of Old Testament types and shadows. These principles are taught by Scripture itself. Jesus himself said that all the Law, the Prophets and the Writings – the whole of the Old Testament – spoke about him (Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:46). Peter (Acts 15:15) as well as all New Testament writers agree with Jesus because they all interpret Old Testament characters, events and places according to their fulfillment in Christ. We are not to interpret Scripture by any other means, whether by our own inventions or by reading newspapers, but only through its author, the Holy Spirit, thus through Scripture itself (2 Pet 1:20-21). When we add our creativity or new events, we are violating God's prohibition against adding to or subtracting from the God's Word (Deut 4:2; Rev 22:18-19).

The interpretation of the Book of Revelation is not exempted from this principle. In fact, this book is pregnant with allusions to Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic books such as Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. Many evangelicals fall into serious errors for several reasons. First, they ignore the Old Testament references in favor of current events. Second, they interpret the book literalistically even when John obviously uses symbolic, apocalyptic language in describing his dreams and visions. Third, they interpret the different cycles in the book as different events occurring chronologically, when most of these events are obviously parallel, repetitious and recapitulations. This means is that John would describe an event from one vantage point, and then would retell that event from a different perspective and with a different focus.

An infamous example of the fallacy of this literalistic, current-event-focused interpretation is the European Union as the beast with ten horns (Rev 13:1). This beast is usually seen as the Antichrist who would dominate the world and then persecute Jews. The EU's charter members included only six countries, but in 1973, prophecy buffs went abuzz because it expanded to nine member countries. Only one more, and the “ten horns” would be completed, and the Secret Rapture would be at hand! In 1981, a tenth country was finally added, but almost 30 years later, we're still on this planet earth. In fact, today, there are 27 member countries in the EU, with nine more potential members.

According to these prognosticators, a “World War III” will ensue in Israel with the EU, the United States and Russia as the main warriors. China, with 200 million warriors, will join the fray and cross a dried up Euphrates River, perhaps even on horses, into Israel. From where did they get this idea? They read Revelation 16:12 literalistically, *“The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east,”* the “kings from the east” being China and maybe even North Korea. Moreover, according to Hal Lindsey, this world war will involve helicopters, symbolized by the plague of locusts described in Revelation 9:7-11. In his wild speculations, the horses are heavily armed attack helicopters, the “crowns of gold” are the helmets worn by pilots, and the “noise of their wings” are the “thunderous sound of many attack helicopters flying overhead.” No wonder that unbelievers are laughing and snickering whenever the latest prophecy book or movie comes out.

Because their focus is on Israel and their bent on literalism even when it is obviously ridiculous, evangelicals do not ever consider that Revelation 16:12 is symbolic of God's hedge

around his people (the River Euphrates) even when hordes of demonic enemies attack them (the beast, locusts). The book of Revelation was written to encourage the first-century Christians who were suffering from persecution and false teachings. It is not about present-day nations and helicopters and nuclear war, but it is written also for our encouragement as we also suffer from persecution and false teachings 2,000 years later.

In previous sermons, I have pointed out that the series of judgments in the Apocalypse – seals, trumpets, bowls – are cyclical, not chronological, but the succession of these series also intensify. One-fourth of the earth's inhabitants are punished in the seal judgments, one-third in the trumpets, and the whole world in the bowls. These cycles overlap one another, and they all begin with Christ's first coming and end with his return to earth to judge the living and the dead. Jesus described this present age as an age of signs – false christs, wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, persecution, martyrdom, apostasy, false prophets and lawlessness – that will intensify like birth pains with time, climaxing during a short period just before his return (Matt 24:6-14). With the bowl judgments against the whole world, God's wrath is completed (Rev 15:1).

Our text, Revelation 12:1-17, is an interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet judgments, just as there is an interlude between the 6th and 7th seals. Both interludes are not about judgments, but about John's visions of the church triumphant rejoicing in heaven and the church militant on earth struggling against Satan's temptations to sin and persecution. Both of these groups of believers await their vindication on the day of resurrection and judgment when Christ returns.

In the first two verses, we can't help but think of the nativity scene of Christmas. Roman Catholics, in particular, concluded from these verses that the woman – dressed with the sun, standing on the moon, and with a crown of twelve stars – is none other than Mary, the Queen of Heaven, another false teaching born out of unsound exegesis. This "nativity scene" is far from the peaceful, warm nativity scenes we see all around us at this season. Instead of being adored and worshiped by shepherds who have heard the angels' song of peace and joy and by three wise men from the far east who have seen a bright star, the child of the woman was in danger of being eaten by a great red dragon. Instead of a peaceful manger scene of a mother cuddling her sleeping baby surrounded by domesticated sheep and cows, we are taken to a wilderness with wild animals where the mother had fled from the dragon who was bent on killing her.

But in John's vision, the mother and her male child were saved by God from their great enemy, Satan the dragon. The dragon went to war as well against the rest of woman's children, but the dragon was defeated by the male child and all the woman's other children.

This afternoon, our study will be under three headings: **(1) The Child in Peril from the Dragon from Birth; (2) The Child's Mother Pursued and Nourished in the Wilderness; and (3) The Child's Family Conquers the Dragon.**

The Child in Peril from the Dragon from Birth

John sees two great signs in heaven. The first is that of *"a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars."* Who had a dream of sun, moon and stars in the Old Testament? It was Joseph who told his family, *"Behold, the sun, the*

moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me" (Gen 37:9). Joseph was referring to his father (sun), mother (moon), and eleven brothers (stars), and together with him, they were the ancestral family of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Also, the woman was pregnant, about to give birth. Isaiah describes in 66:7-10 how God created the nation of Israel without labor pains, *"before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son."* During her time of captivity in Assyria and Babylon, Israel is described as a woman in birth pains of labor, waiting for her deliverance from foreign oppression (Isa 26:17-18; Mic 4:9-10). Thus, the woman in these first two verses is definitely not Mary the heavenly queen, but Israel, the one from whom the Redeemer will come.

Then John describes a second great sign: a red dragon, which he later identifies in verse 9 as *"that ancient serpent, the devil and Satan"* (cf Rev 20:2). It is the ancient serpent in the Garden of Eden *"with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems."* His grotesque features actually imitates God's attributes: head equal wisdom, horn is power, and diadem means authority. Seven and ten are numbers representing God's perfection and completion, so the dragon is a counterfeit God. The beast of Revelation 13 is a mirror of the dragon, with ten horns and seven heads. John alludes back to the four beasts in Daniel 7:3-8, which symbolize the great empires which dominate the world – Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and their successors – until Jesus returns. The dragon will give his power and authority to the bestial kingdoms of this world in its quest to destroy the child.

The dragon was so powerful and influential that when he rebelled against God before the creation of the world, he cast a third of "the stars of heaven" down to the earth." Who were these "stars"? Some believe they were the Jewish believers who were martyred by the wicked Antiochus IV during the Jewish rebellion around 170 B.C., because the "stars" represent saints on earth (Dan 8:24). Others say that these are the fallen angels based on 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. This may be a moot point, because John now extends Daniel's prophecy to Satan's evil scheme against Christ and his saints. The dragon must have thought that he had enough power even to destroy the woman's child at birth. Didn't God prophesy that the serpent would bruise the heel of the seed of the woman? (Gen 3:15) Maybe he could preempt God's prophecy that the child would crush his head by destroying the child the moment he was born.

So beginning with Adam and Eve's firstborn son, the serpent set out to destroy whoever came from the womb of the woman through his human servants. His wicked servant Cain killed righteous Abel. Pharaoh of Egypt, whom the prophets later called a sea dragon at the Exodus (Isa 51:9; Ezek 29:3; 32:2), tried to kill all the Hebrew babies at birth, including God's prophet Moses, whom God appointed to rescue Israel from Egypt. The conquering Babylonian empire was also called a dragon or a sea monster (Jer 51:34). All throughout the Old Testament, God's enemies tried to destroy his chosen nation Israel: Egyptians, Canaanites, Philistines, Assyrians, Babylonians, Medo-Persians, Greeks, and finally, Romans. As the Judean king serving under Rome, Herod in his jealous wrath tried to destroy the newborn King of the Jews by executing all the infants in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16), for it was prophesied by the prophet Micah, *"for from [Bethlehem] shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel"* (Matt 2:6; cf Mic 5:2).

But this powerful Ruler would also be a kind Shepherd, his royal scepter being a shepherd's staff, which he would use not only to shatter all his enemies like pottery (Rev 12:5; 2:27; 19:15), but also to guide and discipline his own sheep. A thousand years before this child was born, King David prophesied that his descendant, God's Anointed Son, *"shall break [the kings of the earth] with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"* (Psa 2:9).

Using God's enemies, Satan the great red dragon has tried to prevent the Seed of the Woman, God's Anointed One, the Ruler of the Nations, from being born. But he of course miserably failed in all his evil schemes, for immediately after the child was born, he *"was caught up to God and to his throne."* This verse is a very concise summary of the child's mission: to be born as an infant, complete his mission on earth, and then taken up to heaven and sit on his throne (Rev 3:21).

Within this one verse is the untold story of the child's life as he accomplishes his mission in this world. Later in verse 11, John reveals that this child is Jesus, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and by the blood of this Lamb shed on the cross, the child's followers would conquer the dragon. This was the mission that God assigned him to accomplish. When the Lamb's blood was poured out, the dragon thought he finally devoured the child of the woman, not knowing that child's death was only temporarily fatal, only a *"bruise [on the child's] heel."*

The Child's Mother Pursued and Nourished in the Wilderness

Now that the child was safe on God's heavenly throne, what happens to his mother? Verse 6 tells us, *"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."* This is another concise summary of how the war between the woman and the dragon continued. The woman fled into the wilderness where God nourished her for a time. After an interlude in verses 7-12, John gives us details, or as the saying goes, the rest of this bizarre story, replete with weird and strange symbols.

After his failure to destroy the woman's child, the dragon was furious and turned his wrath against the woman. He pursued the woman, but God gave her two wings of a great eagle so she might flee from the dragon into the wilderness. And in the wilderness, God nourished and protected her from the dragon. What similar Old Testament stories do we recall from this dramatic escape?

For one, the Israelites' escape from Egypt is described in similar language, *"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"* (Exod 19:4). Then, when they were in the wilderness for 40 years on their way to the Promised Land, God nourished and protected them from foreign enemies like an eagle protecting its young ones, *"He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him... Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions..."* (Deut 32:10-12). In the wilderness, God provided manna, quails, water, a cloud to shield them from the heat by day and a pillar of fire to guide their way at night. God's mighty providence miraculously prevented their clothes and shoes from wearing out (Deut 29:5).

King David repeatedly alludes to this Exodus motif of an eagle carrying Israel on its wings when he prays or praises God for sheltering him from his enemies, *"in the shadow of your*

wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by" (Psa 57:1; also Psa 17:8-9; 36:7; 63:7; 91:4). When he fled into the wilderness from Saul's jealous anger and Absalom's rebellion, God upheld him under his wings,

My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fear and trembling come upon me, and horror overwhelms me. And I say, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest; yes, I would wander far away; I would lodge in the wilderness; I would hurry to find a shelter from the raging wind and tempest" (Psa 54:4-8).

Who else was nourished in the wilderness? It was the prophet Elijah – despairing of Israel's unbelief and unrepentant hearts, and wanting to die – to whom God sent ravens to feed him while he was on the run from the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 17:6; 19:5-8).

The flight of the woman into the wilderness – where she is nourished by God until her children conquers the dragon – marks the change in those whom she represents. Before her child was born, she represented Israel, but now she represents all those who *"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"* (v 11). But before they conquer the dragon, *"the rest of the children"* of the woman will be subjected to the fury of the dragon's war against them (v 17).

Did the serpent give up his wicked schemes? No, for he followed the woman into the wilderness, where she is protected by God. What was his next scheme? *"The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth"* (vv 15-16).

The dragon never stops! He is persistent! But God is more tenacious, and nothing could prevent him from protecting and nourishing the woman. The flood scheme was a failure as well, because God opened the earth up in order to swallow the river of water pouring from the mouth of the dragon. Again, this is another motif from the Old Testament. Fleeing from Egypt, the Israelites were trapped before the Red Sea, for behind them was the mighty army of the Pharaoh in hot pursuit. What would they choose: death by drowning or by the sword? But God protected his people, opening up the sea by a great east wind, allowing Israel to escape on dry ground. So instead of the Israelites, the Egyptians were the ones drowned – *"swallowed by the earth"* (Exod 15:12) – when the raging waters closed up as they tried like the Israelites to cross the sea.

Again, King David uses the imagery of overwhelming flood as his persecutors when he prays for deliverance. His enemies are *"torrents of destruction"* (Psa 18:4), *"waters up to his neck"* (Psa 69:1), *"many waters"* (Psa 18:16; 144:7), and a flood, a torrent and *"raging waters"* that *"would have swallowed us up alive"* (Psa 124:4-5).

This story also recalls Israel's days in the wilderness when Korah, Dathan and Abiram wanted to arrogate the special priesthood of Aaron and Moses to themselves, but the earth swallowed them, their tents and their households (Num 16:31-33). In the same way that God protected Israel from the lies of these false priests, God swallowed up the dragon's evil schemes to protect his people.

Satan's strategy was a very old, but still a present strategy of destroying God's people. We see this from the river of water pouring out of the mouth of the dragon. In Revelation, power and words proceed from the mouth: a sharp sword proceeds from the mouth of the Son of Man (1:16). He is called the Word of God (19:13), and this Word is the sword from his mouth that he uses to conquer his enemies (19:15).

If God's Word proceeds from the Son's mouth, what proceeds from the dragon's mouth? It is his lies and deceiving demonic spirits like frogs (16:13-14). So the water from the dragon's mouth symbolizes lies, deceptions, false teachings and heresies that would destroy the church.

This lying and deceiving flood was present in the Garden of Eden, when the serpent deceived Eve. It was present in the early church, throughout church history, and continues to the present in the countless false teachers promoting prosperity gospel and false prophecies, and denying the true gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Because of false teachers, a big majority of evangelicals believe that all good people even from other religions are bound for heaven. Many evangelical missionaries teach that Christians need not go to church on the Lord's Day, and having personal devotions at home is enough to receive God's grace. Some pastors and elders even teach that Christian liberty give warrant to public drunkenness and coarse jesting.

This is why John warns that throughout church history, there will be many antichrists and false teachers. But God promises us safe passage through the waters of evil and suffering, *"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you"* (Isa 43:2). As God fulfilled his promise to his people Israel, David and Elijah that he would protect and deliver them from their enemies, in the same way, he will protect and deliver the church not only from physical harm and persecution, but more importantly from the spiritual forces of evil led by Satan, who prowls around the whole world seeking those whom he will devour and shooting flaming arrows to destroy the faith of the elect, if possible.

But after he was born, the Seed of the woman fulfilled God's promise to turn the raging waters of destruction and death into a river of living water of eternal life that satisfies the thirst of the people of God for righteousness. Instead of the dragon pouring out a flood of lies to deceive God's people, God himself *"will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants"* (Isa 44:3). So Jesus now invites everyone, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'"* (John 7:37-38).

In the dry and thirsty wilderness, God nourishes his people. How long would God protect and nourish his people from the dragon? John uses three distinct but equal time referents: 1,260 days (Rev 12:6; 11:3), 42 months (Rev 11:2; 13:5), and "a time, times, and half a time" (12:14; cf Dan 7:25; 9:27). These three time periods are equal time spans, if "a time" is one year, "times" is two years, and "half a time" is half a year for a total of 3½ years. Both 1,260 days and "a time, times, and half a time" are periods of nourishment and protection while boldly witnessing, while 42 months is a period of "trampling" by and suffering under the "haughty and blasphemous" authority of the dragon and the beast. As well, these three time referents encompass the same period – the church age – since they all start when the Child comes and end when Satan is finally defeated at the return of the Conquering Warrior- Lamb. Thus, this period, in which we are now

dwelling, is one of both nourishment and protection, suffering under and being attacked by the dragon, bold testimony and martyrdom.¹

3. The Child's Family Conquers the Dragon

Revelation 12:1-17 can be divided into three main parts: verses 1-6 introduces the passage, with the woman and her male child as the protagonists and the dragon as the antagonist; verses 7-12 is a vision of a war in heaven between good and evil angels; and in verses 13-17, John shifts his focus back to earth in expanding the details of the war between the woman and the dragon.

While the first and last parts focus on the earthly battle between good and evil forces, the middle part takes us to what was happening concurrently in heaven. John reveals more details about the victory of the child – now called the Christ – over the dragon who continually attempts to destroy Christ's family. This time, John's primary source is the prophet Daniel, who spoke about Michael, the prince and guardian of God's people, who fight against the princes of Persia and Greece. In this war, Michael represents God's people and the princes of Persia and Greece represent Satan (Dan 10:13, 20-21). During the time of Daniel in the 6th century B.C., the small Jewish remnant who returned to Israel faced great opposition and persecution from neighboring countries in their effort to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

John uses Daniel's vision to encourage the first-century Christians who also face terrible persecution from both the Roman empire and unbelieving Jews. He tells them that the dragon and his angels fight back, but they are no match against Michael and the heavenly host because they were not "strong enough" (NIV, NASB), so they "prevailed not" (ASV) and were "defeated" (ESV).

Moreover, all Christians throughout church history, including us, are encouraged by these words as we face temptations, false teachings and persecution by Satanic forces. At the time of the end when there will be a great time of trouble, Michael the great prince will arise and take charge of God's people (Dan 12:1). At first, Daniel saw that Satan and his forces will appear to have the upper hand in the war, "[he] made war with the saints and prevailed over them" (Dan 7:21). In the Greek Septuagint, the words of Daniel 7:21 are very similar to the Greek of Revelation 12:7-8 (see also Rev 11:7; 13:7). To all Christians then and now, these are words of comfort. John reverses Daniel's vision: instead of Satan and his angels prevailing over the saints, Michael and his angels now prevail over the weak evil forces of the dragon.

When does this war occur? To be sure, there must have been a primeval conflict before Adam's fall in the Garden when the serpent of old poured out his flood of lies against our first parents. At that time, Satan and all other angels who were all good and beautiful creations, willfully but incomprehensibly rebelled against their Creator. Satan and his fallen angels must have already lost their place in heaven, since there is no place for sin in heaven. But Satan still had access to the presence of the Lord to accuse the people of God in the heavenly court (Job 1:6,

¹ For a detailed analysis of these time referents, please see my unpublished paper, "Will Moses and Elijah Come Back? The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11:1-13." Other excellent sources are: Dennis E. Johnson, *The Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 182; Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case for Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); and G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 1122-6.

12). He accused Job of being just a fair-weather Christian, challenging God, *"Touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face"* (Job 1:11). He accused Joshua the high priest because he was wearing filthy garments of sinfulness unbecoming of his office. But God rebuked Satan because the Branch his Servant will remove Joshua's filth and give him pure garments by forgiving him of his iniquity (Zech 3:1-5).

In the aftermath of Satan's defeat in the heavenly war with the archangel Michael and his angels, Satan and his fallen angels were thrown down to the earth, losing their access to God in heaven. He lost his position as prosecutor of saints in the heavenly court. No more will he be able to accuse us day and night before God when we fall into temptation. Satan's status in heaven as *persona non grata* marked the end of the war in heaven and the coming of salvation and the kingdom of God, *"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come"* (v 10).

When was salvation and the kingdom of God inaugurated? It was when Jesus was born of a woman, suffered and offered himself as a bloody sacrifice on the cross for our transgressions, rose from the grave, and caught up into God's throne in heaven where he now sits at God's right hand (v 5). This is why Jesus started his ministry by proclaiming his inauguration of the kingdom, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel"* (Mark 1:15). He said that the kingdom of God came when he dwelt among his people (Luke 17:21), cast out demons (Matt 12:28), and healed the sick (Luke 10:8-9). When his disciples said that even demons were subject to them in Jesus' name, he told them, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"* (Luke 10:18). And when he is lifted up on the cross, Satan will be cast out from heaven, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out"* (John 12:31).

Not only is his whole life – birth, preaching, miracles – and death, but his resurrection and ascension are connected with the casting out of Satan from heaven. After three days in the tomb, Jesus would be raised from the grave and be caught up into heaven. The dragon, sin and death are conquered! *"Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* (1 Cor 15:54-55). At his death and resurrection, Christ *"disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him"* (Col 2:14-15). When Jesus ascended to his throne in heaven, Satan the accuser and deceiver was thrown down to earth in defeat. Daniel 12:1-3 also anticipates the resurrection of all the dead after Michael the archangel defeats Satan, with the righteous *"[shining] like the brightness of the sky above... like the stars forever and ever."*

Thus, the war in heaven between the heavenly host and the demonic forces of evil is not the primeval war in heaven before creation. Instead, it was a war that was fought on earth when Jesus offered his body and blood on the cross, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven, resulting in the permanent expulsion of Satan and his angels from the heavenly court. What John describes is the spiritual struggle between Christ, represented by Michael, and Satan, represented by the dragon, seen from a heavenly vantage point.

With Christ's victory and ascension, heaven rejoices, for God has redeemed, glorified, comforted and had compassion on his people (Isa 44:23; 49:13). This is why at the birth of the male child Jesus, all the hosts of heaven rejoiced, and the psalmist as well:

*Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it!
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
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 (Psalm 96:11-13).*

But down on earth, Satan is even more wrathful, knowing that the last days have come, and his days on earth are numbered. Having failed to prevent the male child from being born, the dragon *"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"* (v 17).

These brothers and sisters of Christ, having been redeemed by his blood, will be nourished and protected by God in this wilderness of sin and will be preserved until they are "caught up" to God's throne in heaven (see 1 Thess 4:17; 2 Cor 12:2). For *by the word of their testimony [martyrias]... they loved not their lives even unto death*--a martyr's death (v 11). Instead of being conquered in death by the dragon through the beast (Rev 13:7), the woman's child, representing Christ, and the woman's other children, representing the church on earth down through the ages until Christ returns, have now conquered the dragon.

Conclusion

Beloved Christians, if these words from Revelation 12:1-17 were written to first-century Christians, why even bother to study them? Because these words were written for us too. Since God knows that the church will be tempted and persecuted by Satan until Christ returns from heaven, he wants to assure you that he will always be with you to nourish and protect you from the devil's wicked schemes. Until the last day, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ: not *"tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword... neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers."* He promises that you *"will be more than conquerors"* of Satan (Rom 8:35, 38-39).

We also saw that God will nourish and preserve you in your pilgrimage through this wilderness of sin. He nourishes your souls when you read and hear the preaching of his Word and when you partake of the Lord's Supper. These are your weapons against Satan's raging flood of wicked lies and deceptions through false teachers and others who would destroy the church.

Since Christ has conquered Satan when he paid for all of your sins on the cross, sin has no more hold on you. No more can the devil accuse you before God, because when you fall into temptation, his blood is sufficient for your forgiveness. And since Christ has also conquered death in his resurrection, you are not to fear death, whether by age, sickness, accident, or even martyrdom. After death, you will be caught up to heaven and there wait for the resurrection.

Therefore, in this Christmas season, remember that Jesus, the male child, was born so that he can conquer Satan the devil by his life, death and resurrection. In spite the devil's rage, he cannot conquer you because of Christ! Emmanuel has come and ransomed us from captivity to Satan and the darkness of sin and death and hell, the real reason to rejoice this Christmas!