

The Dragon

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Date: 28 March 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, the Bible teaches us that we live in a world that is under the control of a sovereign God, right? The sovereignty of God, the fact that He is in control of all things that happen.

But if that's the case, then why do we see things that are very obviously evil happening in our world seemingly without constraint?

Why are there murders? Why are there rapes? Why are there atrocities if God is sovereign? And the answer to that, the Bible gives us, is to help us to realize that God is not the only force at work in this world.

It's a very important truth that we need to come to terms with, and I think we all know that there is a force of evil in this world as well. And Revelation now, as we come to this part in Revelation, which is really the central section of Revelation.

And for those who aren't here this morning, I guess you can't hear this, but you should be hearing this, because if you've been following Revelation, you want to understand what happens in the rest of Revelation, you really need to get what chapter 12 and 13 are saying, because it's talking about the great conflict of our age.

[1 : 18] It's talking about the conflict between good and evil. And this chapter we're looking at this morning is the beginning of that section. It's looking at the cosmic aspect of that conflict.

And then chapter 13, which we'll pick up after Easter, looks at the earthly aspect of that conflict. And so let's have a look now at chapter 12 and get a grasp on this cosmic conflict between good and evil that it describes.

Now, we've got a lot of tales in our culture, don't we, of the great battles between good and evil. We've got Luke Skywalker versus Darth Vader, you know, the light side versus the dark side. You've got, what, Harry Potter and Voldemort. You've got, in the Wizard of Oz, you've got Dorothy versus, what is it, the Wicked Witch of the West. And our culture is replete with these stories. We love these stories. We are attracted to these stories of great battles between good and evil, because there's a part of us deep down inside that recognizes that these stories reflect the reality we live in.

[2 : 27] Well, in John's day, when he wrote, there was a very popular tale of good and evil in the Greek culture. And we've got to understand that tale to understand what's going on here in Revelation, which connects to that popular myth that was going around that the original audience of Revelation would have known.

And so it goes something like this. It's the story of Python and Leto, it's called. This is a well-known, popular story in Greek culture. And, in fact, in many other cultures it was transported to.

Now, Python was the chaos monster of the world. Python was the one who brought chaos and disorder into the world. And he, in an oracle, was told that this woman, Leto, was going to give birth to a child who was going to destroy Python.

And so he tracked this woman down. And this child was going to be semi-divine. And he tracked Leto down. But before he could kill her, she was swept away by the east wind.

And she was put on an island in the Mediterranean, which, incidentally, was only about 40 miles away from where John was writing Revelation. So it was really well known in that area, this great tale of good versus evil.

[3 : 43] And she gave birth to Artemis and Apollo. And sure enough, Apollo tracked down and killed Python. And that's how the story ended. Now, the other important aspect of that legend in the ancient culture was that during the Roman times, which is what was happening when John was writing, the Roman Empire was expanding, the Romans used that story as propaganda to promote their empire, saying that they were like Apollo coming and destroying the forces of chaos in the

world by bringing the Roman Empire at the edge of a sword.

They didn't mention that part, that the only way they brought order was to kill. But that was their thing. That was their propaganda. That was their advertisement. They used this legend that many of the cultures knew to place themselves as the restorers of order to the world.

Okay, so then we come to Revelation 12. And what we discover with that background is that Jesus, in giving this revelation to John, is using that well-known idea, that well-known story of good versus evil, to retell the biblical story in terms that the population of the time would understand and would totally grasp and get along with, because they knew this great legend of good versus evil.

So what happens now, in these first few verses of chapter 12, is that the whole biblical story, up to the point that John is writing, is summarized through this myth of good and evil.

But of course we know that the true story of good and evil starts right at the beginning of the Bible, doesn't it? And so we're going to quickly summarize that story and see how it comes out now in this depiction, in Revelation, in this vision.

[5 : 34] Remember, it's symbolic vision that John is getting. These dragon and woman and things, they are symbols of realities that we discover in the Old Testament. And so back in Genesis, in the third chapter already, we meet the origin of evil.

We meet Satan. We don't know a whole lot about Satan. We don't know his origin story that well. But what we do know, right at the beginning, is that he is real.

He is a real spiritual being. He has fallen and he is in opposition to God and to God's plans for this creation. And his objective, we discover in Revelation, is to break the bonds between God and his creation.

Satan, specifically the pinnacle of his creation, human beings. And Satan does that successfully by getting us to sin, by getting us to want to live without God.

And getting us to want to rule our own lives and our world our way, rather than our job, which is to rule God's world God's way. And he succeeds in that.

[6 : 43] He succeeds in breaking this bond between God and humanity. And that should have been the end of the story. Genesis chapter 3.

Our Bible should have been three chapters long if it wasn't for God's grace. And the fact that God is not done. And we read in Genesis 3.15, that last verse that was read earlier, God talking to Satan, basically telling him, I'm not done, buddy.

I will put hostility between you and the woman. This is Genesis 3.15. And I will put hostility between your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head. And you will strike his heel.

And now that's the hint right at the beginning of the Bible that God has a plan. We don't really see what that plan is until later. But there's a hint right here.

Just as humanity have fallen, there's this hint that God has a plan to defeat Satan. And to get his plan back on track. And as we read the Bible and we get to Genesis 12, we meet Abraham and we realize that God has chosen him.

[7 : 53] And through him, he is calling a people from whom the Messiah will come. That's God's plan. And that's what the Old Testament is about and looks forward to. The coming of the Messiah.

And Satan knows right from the beginning that the Messiah will be his downfall. So throughout history, what does he do? He does everything he can to try to destroy Israel before the Messiah comes.

And Israel, of course, is the woman in this story in Revelation. And Satan is the dragon. The dragon wants to destroy the woman.

And we read the Old Testament. We read books like Daniel. We look at the history of Israel. And what we realize is that the whole time, Satan has been trying to get to Israel.

Trying to get them broken. Trying to get in and get them to sort of distribute amongst the nations. And get caught up in paganism and lose their distinctiveness as Israel.

[8 : 53] And he uses earthly kingdoms. Time and time again, he uses earthly kingdoms to try to do that. So as we read here in Revelation 12, look at verse 3 to 4.

There's a weird description of this dragon. I mean, try to picture this in your head. There was a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns.

And on its heads were seven crowns. It's not very symmetrical. I mean, seven heads you would expect. Seven horns or ten heads if there's ten horns. Why this weird number?

Well, actually, it makes sense again if we go to the Old Testament. We use our decoder. And we go to Daniel 7. You don't have to go there now. But in Daniel 7, Daniel predicts to Israel at the time, which was hundreds of years before Jesus, that great kingdoms would arise.

And they would come and invade Israel. And this political turmoil will go on around. And he was predicting something that happened in between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.

[9 : 56] Sort of around 200, 150 B.C. The rise of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great. The rise of the Persian Empire. The rise of the Syrian Empire under Antiochus Epiphanes.

And these are historical things that Daniel correctly predicted. And he described each of these empires as beasts with horns. Different horns with the different leaders. Alexander the Great was the big horn.

And so you get this description of earthly kingdoms. Things that happened on earth in our politics described as beasts and horns. And if you add up all of those in Daniel, all the beasts and the horns, what you get is seven with ten horns and seven crowns.

So basically the dragon here is the culmination or the bringing together of all of these earthly kingdoms that he has used so far in trying to destroy Israel. And then you read on and it says, Its tail swept away a third of the stars in heaven and hurled them to the earth.

What does that mean? Well, actually that's a reference to the king of the Syrian Empire, Antiochus, who was also said in Daniel 8, he was said to cast the stars of Israel out.

[11 : 10] They were the saints of Israel, which were described as the stars. And so all of this comes from the Old Testament. It's not a weird language if we know our Bibles. But the point that it's saying, the point that these horns and these heads and casting the stars is telling us, is that Satan throughout history and still uses earthly kingdoms and structures to achieve his goals.

Very important truth that we've got to get. We see it in history and it's happening today as well. Satan uses things in the world, kingdoms and nations and power structures to achieve his evil purposes.

Things in this world have supernatural causes behind them. The things we read in the newspapers and on the internet and on our news feeds and the politics of overseas and the rising of nations and kingdoms and governments and the fall of government.

That is inspired and it is caused by supernatural things that we can't see. And that's what the Bible teaches us.

It's kind of like if you go to a play. I don't know if you've, certainly not recently, but if you've been to a play at Artscape or whatever, what happens is that you've got a set with props and the actors are doing their thing and then the curtains close and like a few seconds pass.

[12 : 42] And then the curtains open and suddenly the whole set's changed. It's weird, isn't it? And you know, it seems like it's changed by itself, but you know it hasn't. You know that there's people in the background, the backstage crew, who've moved the set and moved the props, but you just, you don't see them, but you know they're there.

You might catch a glimpse of them from time to time, dressed in black as they're like passing. But the really good ones, if they're doing their job well, you never see them, but you see the effects. You see the changed set.

Well, in the same way, we look around in our world and we see things that are going on and those who have eyes to see and ears to hear and who understand the Bible realize that there are spiritual forces behind those things that move them around and cause things to happen.

We can't see them because they're doing their job well, but they're there. Things in this world have supernatural causes behind them. Anyway, we continue the story.

Satan tries to, this dragon tries to defeat Israel. The woman fails. And so what does he do? He gets ready to kill her child.

[13 : 52] Verse 4. And the dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that when she did give birth, it might devour her child.

The Messiah is coming. Satan has failed to destroy Israel and so he gets ready to destroy the Messiah. Jesus is born. We know the story.

Christmas. In a manger. Mary and Joseph. What we don't often hear in the Christmas story is the atrocious massacre of the babies in Bethlehem.

Not long after Jesus is born, Herod sends a death squad to wipe out the babies to try to kill the Messiah. But Mary and Joseph are warned to flee to Egypt supernaturally. And they manage to escape. Pretty much like this vision is saying. Before the dragon can kill the child, the mother is spared.

[14:54] And she's taken away. And then, of course, we see that Satan continues his modus operandi to use earthly kingdoms to try to kill the Messiah.

As he grows up and does his ministry, the Jews and the Romans, two kingdoms, both conspire to kill him. But they ultimately fail.

Look at verse 5. She gave birth to a son. A male who is going to rule all nations with an iron rod. Her child was caught up to God and to his throne.

That one line is a summary of the entire life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Which ended in and culminated in him being resurrected from the dead and ascended to heaven to rule with his father. And it's at that point in the story that there's a pause and the perspective shifts from earth. And what the dragon is doing with these kingdoms to try to take down the Messiah.

[15:56] And it shifts to heaven. And we now have a heavenly perspective in the next few verses. And we discover how Satan is defeated. We discover God's plan to defeat Satan.

And how brilliant it is. In the next few verses. From verse 7. Let's read it. And see this heavenly perspective of what the work of Jesus on earth achieved in heaven.

Okay. That's what we're reading. From verse 7 to 9. Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon. The dragon and his angels also fought. But he could not prevail. And there was no place for them in heaven any longer.

So the great dragon was thrown out. The ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan. The one who deceives the whole world. He was thrown to the earth and his angels with him.

Okay. So as a result of what Jesus did on earth that we can read in the gospels. You know him coming and teaching and his miracles and his death and his resurrection. As a result of what he did on earth there was a battle in heaven.

[17:05] Now John probably has this vision as he's given this vision symbolically. He probably sees this great cosmic battle going on. I don't know fireballs and lightning bolts and all kinds of things.

And that's what we would think of when we think of a cosmic heavenly battle. Something from a fantasy movie. But what kind of battle was it? In what way was Satan defeated?

Well one commentator interestingly says it was probably the real conflict between Satan in heaven. The real conflict between Satan and Satan in heaven. And that's what we would think of a cosmic legal battle to take place.

You know those courtroom dramas you see on TV? I don't know if you like courtroom dramas. But there's some great movies. There's just these conflicts of good and evil in the courtroom.

One that came to mind was A Few Good Men. Remember that scene with Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson as he's bringing the truth to bear against this criminal.

[18:04] And it's really intense. And there's this battle between them with words. And that essentially was probably more like the battle going on in heaven when Jesus was doing his work on earth.

Why? Because of who Satan was and what his legal role was. I don't know if you know. Satan had a legal role in heaven.

And we see that implied by his name in verse 9. Look at how he's described specifically. The great dragon was thrown out. The ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan.

That's Greek and Hebrew. Diabolos and Satan. Hasatan. The Satan. Okay. And what that means, both of those, in both of those languages, is accuser.

Accuser. That's his name. His title more like. Satan. Diabolos means accuser. Essentially, it seems as if the devil, the accuser, had a legal position in heaven of a prosecutor.

[19:07] You know, like a prosecutor in a courtroom. And we see him carrying out that role in, for example, the book of Job. Remember at the beginning of Job? He is in heaven.

And he is accusing Job. He is bringing legal reasons as to why God can't love Job. Or God can't do good for Job. Why Job must be punished.

He is prosecuting as a lawyer in heaven against Job. And his job, it seems, throughout history, has been to tell God that people are not good enough for God's kingdom.

Satan's job is to tell God and to lay down the case in heaven that you are not good enough for the kingdom. That Israel was not good enough to be saved.

And on he goes. And the disturbing thing is that he's right. That's why he gets to do his job.

Because he's right.

[20 : 13] You are not good enough for God's kingdom. And he uses God's own law to accuse God's people. That's what he's been doing as the accuser.

But because of what Jesus did on earth, he loses his power to accuse in heaven.

Essentially, Satan is disbarred because of Jesus. How? Well, look down to verse 11 in this song, the celebration of the defeat of Satan. Look at what they say in verse 11.

They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. That's talking about Christ and his people. They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb. You see, the blood of the Lamb, as you know, describes the death of Jesus on the cross.

And it's described as the blood of the Lamb because the Lamb was the sacrificial Lamb of the Old Testament who would, in the Old Testament, temporarily pay for or cover over sins, which was all pointing towards the ultimate Lamb whose death, uniquely in the history of the world, was able to pay for the sins of others.

[21 : 24] And because of that, God's law was fulfilled. His wrath was exhausted on Jesus as Jesus paid the price of sin for his people.

And therefore, because the law was fulfilled, Satan loses his power to use the law to accuse. And that's where he lost his position in heaven, because of what Jesus did on the cross.

Because for those in Christ, there is now no accusation anymore. There is no accuser for those who are in Jesus. Turn with me to Romans 8.

It's beautifully explained there. Keep your finger in Revelation, because we're coming back.

Romans 8, from verse 31 to 34.

I want you to see these words in your Bible. So, have a look with me as I read Romans 8, from verse 31. What then are we to say about these things?

[22 : 27] If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not even spare His own Son, but offered Him up for us all.

How will He not also with Him grant us everything? Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. Who is it that condemns?

Christ Jesus is the one who died. But even more, He has been raised. He also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. You know what these verses are saying? In reflection of what Jesus did.

That if you're in Him, if you have trusted in Christ, your accuser in heaven is gone. You have no accuser in heaven anymore. No one can accuse you. In heaven, let alone on earth.

If you're in Christ. God has made sure of that. Now, think about that. That is one of the most deep and profound benefits of the gospel to Christians.

[23 : 25] The knowledge that your accuser is gone. And so, if God has gone to that length to make sure that your accuser in heaven is gone, what right do you have to accuse yourself?

I mean, think about how often we do that. As Christians, we come and we share the Lord's Supper. And we hear God's promises. And we take it in. And we go, Jesus has died for my sins.

The price has been paid. God sees me as He sees Jesus. Clothed in white. And then we go home.

And we, throughout the week, we say to ourselves, I'm not good enough to be one of God's people. I failed again. God can't accept me. I've got to make up for it somehow. I've got to do good stuff to impress God. And we get all self-pitying about how pathetic we are.

We accuse ourselves. What right do we have to accuse ourselves? If God and Jesus has done everything, if Jesus died to remove your accuser? You see, He wants you to know you can't be accused.

[24 : 31] And so stop accusing yourself. Rest on what Jesus has done for you. And realize that God loves you. And nothing can change that if you are in Christ. And that is how Satan has been defeated.

But also, by the word of their testimony. Look back in Revelation 12. They conquered Him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. That's talking about the people of Christ.

And how not only was Satan defeated when Christ was on earth and when he died and rose again, but Satan gets defeated generation after generation as Christ's people continue to tell that gospel

and continue to share that gospel.

That continues the defeat of Satan in every generation. The witness of God's people to make the gospel known. Satan is defeated in communities where churches are planted.

And Satan is defeated in individual lives where Christians share the gospel. But that will always take a certain amount of sacrifice to defeat Satan.

[25 : 37] It did for Jesus and it will for us. If Jesus went through and had to go through the ultimate sacrifice to defeat Satan, then his people are not above their master.

They too, if they are to defeat Satan in their communities and in the lives of the people around us, in the lives of the people out there who are not at church now, and are being influenced and drawn away from God by Satan, if we're going to defeat Satan in Plumstead, in this community, it requires sacrifice from us as well, as it requires sacrifice from Jesus.

Look at verse 11 again. Look at what it says. They conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

That's how they conquered Satan. By not loving their lives so much that they clung to safety and security so that they become ineffective. It's because the witnesses are willing to make sacrifices that Satan is defeated.

Satan is defeated where Christians are making sacrifices. Satan is not being defeated where Christians are too cushy and comfortable to want to make sacrifices. But where Christians are making sacrifices, you can go anywhere in the world.

[26 : 50] When you find Christian communities making sacrifices, often in the most persecuted countries, that's where Satan is being defeated. That's where the power is. Where Christians are making gospel sacrifices.

The sacrifices of money, for example, to grow kingdom work in the communities that they live. And sacrifices of reputation and safety to proclaim Jesus to the people around them.

When they make those sacrifices and do not love their lives to the point of death and are willing to make those sacrifices for Jesus, because that's where Satan gets defeated. And he can't answer that.

He can't stop that. But now, okay, so this is good news, right? Satan is defeated. And that's what this is telling us. And it tells us how Satan gets defeated, even though he tries to stop it.

The Messiah comes. The Messiah defeats him. He's cast out of heaven. But if he's defeated, like the Bible says, then why does evil still reign?

[27 : 51] Why does evil still have so much effect in our world? Isn't that a good question? If Satan is lost, why are evil things still happening? Well, read on.

Look at verse 12, where we discover Satan's revenge. Look at what it says. It says, therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you who dwell in them, but woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you with great fury, because he knows his time is short.

It's quite scary words, isn't it? It's great in heaven now, because Satan's not there. He's here. So it's not too great for us.

He's beaten. He's lost his power. He's been disbarred and stripped of his authority, but he's not destroyed. He is still around. He only gets destroyed later at the return of Christ, and we read that in Revelation.

Thank goodness. But we're not there yet. And until that point, until Satan is destroyed, he's doing as much as he can to stop us. Look at the description of that from verse 13 to 17.

[29 : 03] Again, highly symbolic language, but it's very important. From verse 13. When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had given birth to the male child.

The woman was given two wings of a great eagle so that she could fly from the serpent's presence to a place in the wilderness where she was nourished for a time, times, and half a time. From his mouth, the serpent spewed water like a river flowing after the woman to sweep her away with a flood.

But the earth helped the woman. The earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon had spewed from his mouth. So the dragon was furious with the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep the commands of God and hold firmly to the testimony of Jesus.

Okay, so this is describing this age we live in. The time, times, and half a time. That we've seen before comes from the Old Testament and it describes the period of time between redemption and the ultimate arrival at the promise.

The time of tribulation of God's people. The time where there's this kingdom overlap, where there's this conflict. And in this age, between the first and the second coming of Christ that we live in now, Satan tries and tries to defeat the church, the woman, God's people, Israel.

[30 : 31] But time and time again, he fails to do that. He tries to get her, she's swept away. He tries to drown her in a river, it's swallowed up by the earth. He can't defeat the church.

And that's exactly what Jesus said to Peter. Remember? Remember? He said, Peter, he commissioned Peter as the foundation of the church. And he says, on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.

Jesus said that. And here we see it. And we see it in history. Despite many close calls, the church has survived through the last 2,000 years. Despite all the rivers to try to sweep her away.

In the first century, this church was weak and powerless under the great Roman Empire that wanted to destroy it and didn't.

Couldn't. They could destroy nations. They could destroy the whole of France, the whole of Europe, Germany. They could take over Constantinople, the Mediterranean basin, the whole known world.

[31 : 29] But they couldn't destroy the church. That says something, doesn't it? And then you get the 13th, 14th, 15th centuries, pre-Reformation. The church is becoming so corrupt, if you look at church history, that the fear is that it will lose the little light it has.

And it will become so corrupt that it will just cease to be the church. And yet the Reformation came just at the right time. And the church was saved. And then today, you see again, more and more threats to the church.

We live in a post-Christian society that is more and more, not only seeing the church no longer as a good thing, but starting to see the church as a positively bad thing for society.

And the enemies are rising. And that's when we've got to remember this. That God, throughout history, preserves His church. He loves His church. And He's not going to let the devil take it down. He never has. The earth helped the woman. The earth opened up its mouth and swallowed up the river that the dragon had spewed from its mouth. God will go to any extent to keep His church safe.

[32 : 36] And we know that Christ is ruling. Christ, the Lord of the church, is ruling with all power from His throne. The church is safe. But then, given that, what does the dragon do?

Well, he attacks you and me instead. He attacks our lives and our work for Jesus. Look at verse 17 again. The dragon was furious with the woman because he couldn't beat her.

He just couldn't get to her. Every time he tried, God did something to stop him. So what did he do? He went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring instead. Satan is here on earth and he is furious that he can't defeat the church.

So he is making our job as hard as it can possibly be. For example, he is using structures in our world and society to make it more and more difficult to preach the gospel, isn't he?

He has made it so that if we say anything from the Bible, someone is going to get offended. Satan is behind this snowflake offended generation that we live in because it makes it difficult to preach the gospel when people can be offended for using the wrong pronoun to address them these days.

[33 : 55] I mean, this is unprecedented in the history of the world that people are so offended. But Satan is behind it because it makes it difficult to preach the truth.

And he doesn't only make our job hard with the way society is going, but he inspires opponents around the world, people who have this demonic desire to kill Christians. I mean, you just look at the persecuted church, you just go to websites like Open Doors and you look at how the church is being persecuted for no reason.

Nice people in communities helping their communities and you've got Boko Haram coming and slaughtering them, burning churches, killing people. You've got ISIS in the Middle East just taking Christians who have done nothing wrong to beaches and slitting their throats.

This is demonic. demonic. And the church, the Christians have always been the most persecuted religion in the world because Satan doesn't care about Muslims or Buddhists.

No, he's not furious with them. He's furious with Christians. And in multiple other ways, he's at work in this world and we see that in the next chapter. But it's in those times that we see the opponents of the church doing their thing and we see this resistance against the church and we see society

moving against the church and shutting us down.

[35 : 14] It's in those times we must remember that this is Satan's death throes. He is beaten. And this is him lashing out before his end. Because Christ is raised and Christ is coming back and Satan knows his time is short.

As God promised in Genesis, his head will be crushed even though he is biting the heel. Of God's people. And he is disarmed.

He has lost his power to accuse you and that should be something you cling to every day. Because that power to accuse has been broken through the blood of the Lamb. And as long as we are willing to make the sacrifices that are needed in making that gospel known to our communities and to our friends, Satan will keep losing.

And we can be assured of that. Amen. 112 Kingdom analysis 8 pleThese Bowers 10