

Studies in Revelation 12

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The Book of Revelation takes a major turn in chapter 12. While Satan is mentioned in the messages to the churches, he has not appeared in Revelation since John was called up to heaven in chapter 4. Now in chapter 12 by mentioning *that ancient serpent* we are brought to look at the conflict from the time of the Garden of Eden. Who are the chief opponents (or antagonists) in the battle that was obviously underway long before the days of John? This battle will not be concluded until chapters 19 & 20, but the sides and the venue are clearly delineated.

A few wonderful features are manifest:

1. **The frustration of the devil** Setback has met Satan in his program of countering the Lord in everything that gives glory to God. It is tremendously encouraging to read of Satan having defeat after defeat.
2. **The protection of the Lord's people** The male child was taken safely to heaven. The woman was safe in the wilderness no matter what the devil tried. The paradox will unfold that the people of God are protected right up to: a) the time the beast is allowed wholesale slaughter, b) during such a time, and c) eternally afterwards. Chapter 12 develops the plot; the devil will proceed to do all he can against the church. It is the only target within his reach.
3. **The battleground is this earth** Satan has not only a series of defeats but also a reduced venue for his activity. Within chapter 12 Satan finds himself limited to earth. We are being prepared in chapter 12 to continue the narrative and to understand the final conflict. The war in heaven is over. The remaining conflict is here. Earth is the battleground, and man is the prize each side seeks; one to retain in slavery, and the other to save by the Redeemer. (Salvation is covered in other chapters.)
4. **The original divine agenda** The mention of the woman in this segment of Revelation clearly ties in with Genesis 3:15. The faceoff is God and the devil, one worked deviously through a woman, and the Lord will work victoriously through the woman and her divine offspring. Both Psalm 2, a messianic psalm, and Isaiah 7:14, with the virgin birth come to fulfillment in Christ.
5. **The triumph of the weak** God has chosen to work through His servants. In the prophecy of Daniel and now here, it is especially clear that God's loyal agents in previous battles have been His mighty angels. But the final defeat to be handed to Satan comes through the Son Who became a man. The Lord Jesus died in weakness (2 Corinthians 13:4), and by His blood His weak human people, "our brothers", conquer the devil himself despite the fact that he is so powerful he carried a third of God's angels with him in his rebellion. The weapons include their oral testimony of Jesus as Lord, and their readiness to die for Him.

12:1,2 Two signs appear. Neither description is the real thing; there are no real dragons, and the woman was not really wrapped with the sun. These two images, actually seen by John and truthfully recorded for us, signify something. A *sign* always points to another reality, and is designed to help us understand that reality better. The devil is like a devouring dragon with awesome power, so to present him as the dragon shows his vicious nature. As the ancient serpent we know he is not a recent foe.

Then too, there was a woman/people in the eternal agenda of God through whom the Messiah would enter the world. The virgin mother of Christ had the distinct honor of being God's tool to bring His saving blessing to the nations. Yet it is still so that the woman is Israel. Those hearing Revelation read to them would immediately recognize Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9-11 with its sun, moon and eleven stars. They knew this was the family of Jacob who had become Israel.

Christ would be the offspring of woman. By means of a woman the devil tempted our first parents. He approached Eve, not her husband. Adam was the head of his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3) by God's design for those in His image. Woman has a head; man has a head; and Christ has a head. God's reaction to this Satanic tactic, of circumventing Adam, was that He would bring down Satan by means of woman. The first woman bore children, and Christ is traceable to both Adam and his wife (Luke 3:38). Later a virgin woman gave Jesus birth when the Son of God became man. We should not miss that it is also so that Christ came from a nation. He is the seed or offspring of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), the Son of David (Psalm 110:1; Isaiah 9:7), the true Israel (Isaiah 49:3), and the virgin's son (Isaiah 7:14).

Within Revelation this identification of Israel is well supported. Based on the repeated use of *twelve* in chapters 7 & 21, v.1 signals that the woman is Israel. The Virgin Mary was part of that nation. In most mentions of woman in Revelation 12 we must interpret "*woman*" as representing the nation or people, not an individual. Of course the male child was born to an individual woman, but no individual can fit the picture of the majesty in v.1, the protection of God for her in the desert (v.6), which God did for the *nation* delivered from Egypt, and further, her corporate offspring in v.17. Her offspring is a vast number from every nation not limited to Israel. It is the entire church. Thus I conclude that the woman throughout chapter 12 is the people of God, *within which* there was one uniquely privileged woman chosen by God, a virgin named Mary, to be the mother of our Lord (Acts 1:14). This fits the interpretation in chapter 11 that the two witnesses signify the church. The woman's obedient offspring in v.17 is the church. Of this there is no doubt. Later in Revelation an additional feminine image for the corporate people of God is the bride of 19:7; 21:2,3,9.

The vision in chapter 12 begins with her in heaven, and then gives a record of her affliction. The linking of security and vulnerability is common to the NT. We have trials on earth. We also have a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1), a heavenly citizenship (Philippians 3:20), and a heavenly home (Ephesians 2:6, plus Revelation 13:6, to be discussed later). When the assault on the people of God comes to a climax, it will be severe and bloody, but brief, because the devil's time is short.

The glory of the woman in v.1 shall be eternally retained. Her pain was brief and worth it, as is the case with all who are the Lord's (John 16:19-22). The woman so hated by the dragon is so cherished by Christ that she is His bride eternally. The dragon could not consume either of them.

12:3 The sign that befits the devil so appropriately is that of a devouring dragon. This shows bluntly the murderous nature of God's great opponent. He is not God's *opposite*; there is no other who was and is and is to come. God alone is eternal. The devil is recent, not eternal, powerful, not almighty; venturesome, but a failure; deceitful, but his fabrication is thin and shall be exposed as false. The *heads* reveal his self-professed royalty, and *seven* heads fit his claim of complete sovereignty, especially when all seven heads are crowned with seven *diadems*. He knows his pretense is not true, and that he will soon be exposed, stripped, removed, and punished. He parades the insignia but lacks the reality. Rejoice that he will lose his kingdom (16:10) and his grip on all he has sought to control. He just does not want you to know that. The ten *horns* fit common Biblical imagery to show strength. (See Psalm 75.)

He is also red. In the second seal, the red horse of 6:4 is the cause of much killing. The woman who drinks the blood of the saints (17:6) is clothed in scarlet and sits on a scarlet beast (17:3,4). In retaliation the Lord Jesus will appear as one whose garments are red with the blood of those he has crushed in vengeance (19:13). It may be that the red color of the dragon indicates his penchant for spilling blood.

12:4 His influence in heaven is a surprising accomplishment and a resounding defeat. Anyone who can bring down a third of God's angels with him is an amazingly successful devil. Note that a third is a minority, but it is a large minority. V.4 says he cast them down, and v.9 enlarges on this feat with a fuller explanation. If the dragon can do that, the appearance is that he could consume the child about to be born. But this is Revelation, where the narrative oscillates from Satan's apparent successes to frustration and defeat. He does not get the child, for that Child has the divine assignment to destroy the destroyer (11:18). This verse shows Satan's priorities. His focused hatred is against Christ. He craved but was denied the worship of Christ (Matthew 4:9,10), and now the apocalyptic imagery is vivid: it was not the woman he sought to devour first but the Child. Only after being frustrated in his prime target did he pursue the woman.

12:5 She gave birth to a male child. The Greek is a *male son*! Emphasizing the gender ties woman and son to Isaiah 7:14. "*One who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron*" is clearly from Psalm 2. It is so close to that text that it is almost a quotation. The dragon with seven heads to claim all the nations thought he might consume the One Who is God's anointed for that very purpose. That the Son is the Anointed of the Lord in Psalm 2 is one of only two places where the OT refers to the coming Savior as *Messiah*.

To be caught up to God is certainly to be safe. To be caught up to God's throne shows the full right of this human Child to that throne. This is also seen in 22:1 & 22:3 where the throne is the throne of God and of the Lamb. Earlier Revelation 5 had the heavenly multitude cry out. "*Worthy is the Lamb*" (5:12) to receive a seven-fold honor; then honor is repeated in 5:14 "*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!*" There is no ambiguity about the deity of Christ. What belongs to the One seated on the throne, also belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. That the Child was snatched to the throne of God is not condescension but recognition.

He was *snatched*, or *caught up*. The Greek verb is the same as in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, "*Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...*" The verb usually indicates very deliberate seizing. This is so in both of these texts. One aspect of the Second Coming is that Christ appears "*to save those who are eagerly waiting for him*" (Hebrews 9:28).

12:6 With the main prize safely back on His throne, the dragon goes for a secondary target, the woman. For all of chapter 12, the woman is out of his reach, not in heaven but on earth. Just as Israel could breathe relief after their flight from the Egyptian army, the woman has a place prepared by God. Like the original exodus, she is both safe and fed. Israel had manna from heaven; the woman is nourished for 1260 days. The timeframe of Daniel 7:25 appears again, just as in Revelation 11:2 & 3. In its repetition in v.14 this woman is "*nourished for a time, and times, and half a time*". In this time the nations trample the people of God (11:2), and the witnesses proclaim the message of God (11:3). In this same time the woman is nourished in a place prepared by God (12:6). Later in 13:5, it will include that during this same time the beast exercises his oppressive authority. To some this may seem contradictory, but a battle does have contrary efforts which are simultaneous. We must not confuse the sustaining grace of God during the entire time of our persecution with the ultimate deliverance coming only at the Second Coming. Only then will conflict be forever over. To preach successfully while being trampled (chapter 11) and nourished while being murdered (as in chapter 13), is one of the great paradoxes of Revelation. God's people are never deserted to the dragon, though they may be so engaged that in their death they conquer. This does not contradict the promise that the Lord is constantly with us to the very end of the age, that is, throughout the 1260 days. The Lord did use the word *always* in Matthew 28:20.

Revelation does not downplay our danger, while it uses various images to set forth our security: sealed, marked & counted in chapter 7, measured, or marked off as inside His property line in chapter 11, and now in chapter 12 the woman is in a place of divine care. In chapter 13 will come our discovery that our names have always been written “*in the book of life of the Lamb*”.

The Structure of Revelation 12 Verses 1-6 introduce the dragon and his attempt to devour the loyal agents of God. Within the entire chapter the devil's only success is taking with him a third of God's angels. The Lord never tried to save them. In the remainder of the chapter we have a recapitulation and enlargement of much that appears in 12:1-6, except Satan has no opportunity to assault Christ directly. His only recourse is to attack those who belong to Christ. Much more detail on that subject lies ahead. This segment returns to the dragon who once carried on his seduction in heaven. That Revelation recapitulates is one of the keys for interpreting the book. It should be no trouble to see that in v.7 John goes back to a theme already addressed.

12:7-9 We now know why the devil swept a third of the angels and cast them to the earth. He persuaded them to join him in his attempt to take over the position of God. I pause to point out what an absolute horror it would be for God to be replaced by the devil. I add how proper and even wonderful for us it is that God defends His glory as God. The Lord will not give His glory to another (Isaiah 42:8; 48:11). The Lord has His loyal servants: Michael and his allied angels fought against the dragon. The Lord in His infinite wisdom ordained that there should be an issue to make manifest among the ranks of these spiritual beings whether each one truly loved the Lord his God with all his heart. Michael's beautiful name means “Who is like God?” His joyful reply to his name is “no one”. That an imposter, the Serpent, dared to have a different answer has been the essence of a great battle. The challenge to obedience, faith, loyalty, faithfulness, etc. began before man was ever created. The sides, for or against, have been settled for every intelligent being except man. To whom shall man's allegiance be given? Our salvation requires that we confess that “Jesus is Lord” (Romans 10:9). Satan is relentless that man may have any other lord but Christ.

The Battle of Heaven is over. The Battle of Earth will take center stage and hold it hereafter. To grasp the magnitude of the battle we need to know that it was not limited to the sphere in which we live. It began with a rogue angel, and has enveloped mankind from the days of our first parents. It has not ended yet. The dragon was thrown down and all who followed him. That pattern will follow on earth.

That *there was no longer any place for them* in heaven (v.8, also v.14) is the opposite of God providing a *place* for the woman (v.6). To have a place or to be denied a place is important imagery in Revelation. In the Judgment Day the scene is so daunting the earth and sky cannot flee, there was no place for them (20:11). Not just in heaven but also on earth, the harassed woman (i.e., the people of God) has a place provided for her. The wicked spirits may be held in the abyss (9:1-11), or they may wander through waterless places seeking rest; they find none (Matthew 12:43). They are homeless, because they gave up their original place (Jude 6). They have no place except the gloom of utter darkness forever (Jude 13).

V.3 says the dragon cast down these stars (angels), but v.9 says he and they were thrown down. V.3 speaks of the effect Satan has had on those who sided with him. He cast them down in the sense that he has been defeated in heaven, and his conspiring angels share his defeat. In that way he brought them down.

The Devil Described V.9 is very helpful to gather choice descriptions of the devil. (See also 20:2.) He is the devouring **dragon** (1 Peter 5:8), and the deceiving **serpent**. His name **Satan** means *adversary*. He is first the adversary of God, opposing the Lord's sovereign right as Creator to reign

over His subjects. Satan prefers himself as Lord of all. He is also the adversary of all who remain loyal or become loyal to the Lord our God. He is the **devil** (diabolos in Greek) who casts aspersions on God (Genesis 3:5), and blasphemes those who live in heaven (13:6). He tempts people to sin, rejoices in his success, and then betrays those he has deceived by accusing them before God. He hopes then for the consequences of sin to fall on them. He delights in the suffering of all those he has seduced. He loves to destroy anything that is good. He is especially frustrated and continuously defeated when we resist him (James 4:7) by delighting in Christ our Mediator Who shed His blood for us. At the same time we live with forgiveness from God and temptation from the devil. He cares nothing for forgiveness, only that those who trust him should suffer in their guilt eternally. Completely unlike Satan, God not only forgives but cleanses (1 John 1:9), even His enemies who repent (Romans 5:10). Having no saving motive ever, the devil relishes uncleanness and darkness. This adversary also has an Adversary, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall destroy him (Hebrews 2:18). In v.10 it adds "*accuser of our brothers*". Maybe at one time, Satan was assigned in his duties as the *anointed guardian cherub* of Ezekiel 28:14, to bring charges against anyone who might rebel against the Lord. This is conjecture, except that Ezekiel 28 does speak of a high position and hints at a role. It is even greater conjecture to suppose that when he had fallen, he would still be a prosecutor. Some accept this idea. If it was once so, then perhaps the accusations (undoubtedly before God) were a carryover from his role in an earlier time of loyal service. What we do know is that Satan tempts to sin AND then accuses the sinners he deceived. Christ endured our temptation and underwent the justice a true accusation would have brought on us. Since Christ is the reason for our justification, He refutes every one of Satan's accusations that he raises against every soul joined to the Lord Jesus by faith. Satan can accuse away, but concerning those who belong to Christ, he is wasting his breath.

In what we are told of this warfare in heaven, it is especially significant that there is no mention of the direct involvement of Christ. The Lord loves his angelic and human servants. He has been pleased to assign such agents as Michael and other angels to resist and defeat the dragon. This, of course, shows the limitation of Satan's success among God's holy angels. He never won a majority. God's election of angels (1 Timothy 5:21) preserved them from sinning. Satan snared only a third. The role of God's loyal angels is not passive. They do not just sit around twiddling holy thumbs. At times they have high and responsible service (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1), including service to us lowly creatures (Hebrews 1:14; Daniel 6:22). Their service, genius, and initiative is not independent from their Lord; it is active service in the interests of God. When the scene changes to earth, our Lord's human servants defeat the dragon. Quite a surprise! That victory involves the blood of Christ. But first we need to discover who speaks this praise of God in vv.10-12.

12:10 The loud voice in heaven is a corporate voice. Many are praising in unison. The word *voice* is singular, but the voice speaks of *our* God and *our* brothers, so this is the corporate speech of redeemed human beings. Only humans have brothers enjoying salvation who are freed from all accusation of sin. (There are no forgiven angels.) They praise God that the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down. This just might be an apocalyptic way of saying that Satan's accusations were invalid and ineffective, as well as unwelcome. It is disgusting to God to charge any sinner with sins that have been forgiven. Satan's accusations are devilish, for they seek to countermand the Father's gracious justification which the sinner enjoys in Christ. Satan cannot grasp the sincerity of the Lord, or His divine joy in forgiving. Micah 7:18 says: "*Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.*" Thus we sinners shall forever sing, "Who is a pardoning God like Thee, and Who has grace so rich and free?"

12:10-12 The devil has been thrown down from heaven. Mighty God-serving angels did this, led by Michael, a great prince (Daniel 12:1; Jude 9). The human voice (v.10) is in heaven, rejoicing in the great victory by brothers on earth who have conquered the devil by the blood of the Lamb. When believers on earth battle the evil one, it is a matter of the weak fighting far superior strength. This human victory has two important factors. What is seen is the persecuted church at some point lying dead on the ground (11:7-9), because they did not love their lives in order to preserve them. By rejecting the devil's messiah, they defeat him. He failed to get them to repudiate Christ in favor of the ugly replacement. In the case of every elect person (13:8), Satan fails to get them to deny the Lord. In the vortex of temptation, our natural weakness and compromising character will be defended against by the intercession of Christ (Luke 22:31,32). He will deliver us.

The first feature of this victory is that God's witnesses lay dead, yet it was by their death that they defeated the dragon himself. It is embarrassing and infuriating to Satan that these despised Christians defeated his superhuman power. In heaven the devil had won over a large number of angels superior in strength to us. For this he could gloat. The second feature is that the throwing down of this accusing devil has behind his defeat a power not seen by the eye. It is *the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ* (v.10). Here lies the strength that enables the weak to frustrate the proud wicked angel. In all of history, Satan has had a string of victories until the forty days he met Jesus in the desert. There was one man on earth he could not break (Matthew 4:1-11). Salvation, might, divine prerogative, and wise ruling all combine in Christ.

There follows now one of the central statements of Revelation. "*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*" (12:11). We have seen before in Scripture that there are saints of God who did not love their lives, but laid them down for Christ willingly. (See Hebrews 11.) Conquering by faithfulness to God's Word is not a new doctrine in the Bible. Paul tore down false arguments (2 Corinthians 10:3,4). He said the Word of God is not bound (2 Timothy 2:9). God's word brings a fruitful result (Isaiah 55:10,11). In Jeremiah 23:29, God's Word was like a hammer breaking the rock to pieces. So this was a well-developed truth made clear in previous Scriptures, but conquering by the blood of the Lamb is a new revelation of God's agenda. In some remarkable way we are to join the blood of the Lamb with the death of His martyrs.

In chapter 11 the open scroll includes explicit new revelation sealed from the time of Daniel. This new material is very closely tied to the revelation that the nations will repent and glorify the God of heaven (11:13). This rapid and worldwide conversion is directly linked to the death, resurrection, and ascension of the witnessing church. We would naturally expect at this point that reference would be made to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, since that is the foundation of salvation. This fusion of events, a fusion of two distinctly different sacrifices, indicates that the death and vindication of believers is a tool in the hands of God to bring about the conversion of the nations. In chapter 11, we have the conversion event; in chapter 12 we find an explanation, namely that this conquering of the devil by our brothers is by the blood of the Lamb. The challenge before us is what that statement means.

I must interject at this point to reaffirm that the sacrifice of Christ is atoning, reconciling, propitiatory, redeeming, delivering, substitutionary, and is as well the conquest of Satan. Since we face the same foe, one (and only one) of the functions just listed is replicated in us. Ours too is a death that conquers by the voluntary giving up of our lives.

Naturally the two witnesses in chapter 11 preached the gospel. No gospel preaching omits the blood of the Lamb. Christ is the One Who *“loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood”* (1:5). Preaching alone throughout the 1260 days did not produce the sudden conversion shown in 11:13. Revelation is showing that when the truth of the God of heaven is combined with the death of those who did not love their lives, that God has chosen to use our death as a means to snatch the nations from Satan. No longer will the world be able to say, *“Who is like the beast and who can fight against it?”* (13:4), for the simple reason that the God of heaven will reverse all that the beast does to His saints. Suddenly it will become exceedingly clear Who can make war with the beast. All this happens before the watching eyes of the nations. In 11:9,10 the observers of these deaths and God’s reaction are the people of this planet. God has acted in a very public way.

Our deaths cannot be an atoning death for sin. Only the blood of the Lamb removes sin. The question now is what will produce repentance. When God produces repentance upon the display of His power (12:10), He has at hand our unyielding refusal to worship the beast. In other words, He has added the **testimonial** blood of His people to the **atoning** blood of Christ. The Lord Jesus bore His unique cross, and we take up ours as instruments for the salvation of our neighbors. The blood of the Lamb on Calvary is the basis of salvation. The blood of His dead saints is the setting for God to vindicate them and thereby broadcast His power. By it God smashes the glory of the idolatrous beast. This is like the showdown on Mount Carmel, when the prophets of Baal cried to a false god to consume their sacrifice. That day the God of Elijah was shown to be the true God. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah prayed *“that this people may know that you, O Lord, are God.”* The people fell on their faces and confessed, *“The Lord, he is God...”* That scene is a small foretaste of conquering the devil by the blood of the Lamb at the end of the age.

Previous Scriptures Before the churches of our Lord ever had the Book of Revelation, Scriptures already in their possession joined the sacrifice of Christ and the death of His saints. This is not a new doctrine. The following texts show this:

- “The cup that I drink you will drink ...” (Mark 10:39).
- “... 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...” (Colossians 1:24).
- "The Son of Man must suffer many things and ... be killed, and on the third day be raised...if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:23,24).
- “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27).
- “For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too” (2 Corinthians 1:5).
- “... always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10,11).
- “... The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:23-26).

I must repeat that I am saying that the unique and unrepeatable sacrifice of Christ is the only atoning sacrifice (Hebrews 9:25-28). The death of His many saints is joined to it as testimonial and is made

by God to be very fruitful. What Revelation opens to us is that those washed in the blood of the Lamb show more than the saving benefit of the Lamb's blood in their own salvation. God uses their death to seize the attention of the world to His quick response to their murder. By means of their widespread death, the Lord shows His truth (they testified), His salvation of His saints (by making them stand up), and the falseness of Satan's deception. By it (and that is the key), God induces godly fear, bringing the "rest" of mankind to an arresting fear to give glory to the God of heaven (11:13). 12:10-12 shows that this strategy of God was known in heaven; the redeemed there rejoiced to see the devil conquered by such a means as the loyal death of their fellow saints still on earth. That praise anticipates what is coming. The saints in heaven know this because "*The Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets*" (Amos 3:7). Before all the seals were broken open, we know of the deaths of our brothers. And now that we have the scroll fully opened by Christ, we have knowledge of God's strategy. The Son received the scroll from the Father (1:1) and He the Son declared His policy: "... *All that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you*" (John 15:15).

We must always treat such a holy thing as the blood of the Lamb with humility and judicious caution. Between the death of Christ and ours there stretches an infinite gap when it comes to satisfying divine justice. His was the substitutionary death of the only Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). When it comes to producing the fruit of His passion, then we do share His sufferings (Philippians 3:10). Ours is a participatory fellowship. This is beyond having truth and agreeing with it, and even beyond disseminating it. Since it is a working together of God and His human agents (2 Corinthians 6:1) in the preaching, and the sharing of His suffering (2 Corinthians 1:5), we have a bonding with Christ that is more than an abstract principle. The atonement was fully accomplished apart from our participation at the cross. Since then that atonement is being graciously applied by the Lord, Who has chosen to employ the suffering and the blood of His saints.

Revelation 5 and the Opening of the Scroll In chapter 5 we find a close connection between the sacrifice of the Lamb on one side and His worthiness to open the sealed scroll on the other. This is not a coincidence where two subjects happen to appear in the same context. Not at all, for they are explicitly linked. This makes it appropriate to expect that the sacrifice of the Lamb slain has some bearing on the message within that sealed scroll. I think that what emerges is that His conquering by His death means He is worthy to open the scroll, and this scroll will reveal that His saints will conquer by *their* death, with the result that the dragon and beast are conquered. Observe the connection:

V.5 The Lion has conquered, *so that* He can open the scroll. It does not give as a reason that He can open the scroll, because He is the Son of God. There is a stated reason why His conquering gives Him a specific right to do so. This is repeated in v.9, "*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals [why?], for you were slain...*" In the texts which appear after the messages to the seven churches, we find that conquering usually involves killing, or in the case of the Lord's people, it is conquering by being killed. Note the way this verb is used throughout Revelation:

- Faithful saints conquer by obedience, always in the face of duress (chapters 2 & 3).
- The rider on the white horse conquers by killing (6:2).
- The beast conquers the saints by killing them (11:7).
- The saints, loving not their own lives, conquer by the blood of the Lamb (12:11), choosing death over the horror of false worship.
- The beast makes war on the saints and conquers them (13:7); that means he kills them (13:15).
- By refusing to worship the beast and dying because of it, the saints conquered the beast (15:2).
- Christ conquers the wicked kings in 17:14. Since this was in response to them making war on the Lamb, it is simple to conclude that in wrath He killed them (6:16).

- In the end of the book, the one who conquers inherits. The earlier use of this word makes it clear that these saints conquered by rejecting the worship of the beast (21:7). Their deaths were precious, and their end was glorious.

In chapter 5 the Lamb's worthiness to open the scroll is that He was slain, and thereby He ransomed people for God (5:9). The scope of the ransomed people is from every tribe, language, people, and nation. The paradox is that the beast had authority over every tribe, people, language and nation (13:7), and in that bondage a multitude from the peoples, tribes, languages and nations rejoiced at the death of the witnesses (11:9). After a mere remnant of the wicked were slain in divine judgment (7000), "the rest" had fear and gave glory to the God of heaven (11:13). The precious death of His saints (Psalm 116:15) is combined in Revelation with the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:19) to bring salvation to the nations. The scroll declares the effectiveness of the death of His saints, and that it would be the key tool at the end of the age by which God will take back man to be His again. The opened scroll reveals God's strategy. We overcome by the blood of the Lamb, when we willingly carry in our bodies the death of Jesus, being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Corinthians 4:10,11). The result of this privilege is the conversion of the ones ransomed by the blood of Christ from every nation, people, language and tribe.

For all this, the saints in heaven rejoice (12:12). From heaven Satan has been cast down to earth. This means the war between God and the devil will be waged to its bloody end right here where we live. Satan is a very frustrated devil. Chapter 12 shows a string of defeats. His time is short, and his wrath is great. There is only one avenue of attack left to him. In some way he will attack the saints on earth.

13-16 The encouraging word here is seen in this pattern: the dragon pursued, but the woman was given ... the serpent poured, but the earth came to the help of ... Revelation 12 is a message that speaks of the loyalist vs. rebel conflict from inception to resolution. In heaven it is over. The final battle scene is earth. Later it is spoken of as "*the battle*" (16:14; 19:19; 20:8).¹ We must not miss that the devil is losing; his kingdom is crumbling. He knows his time is short. He is frustrated and angry (12:17). If we think he is in real control, we buy into his propaganda. Coming from him, any scenario is automatically false. The truth is: he is losing.

He could not consume the woman. The woman of v.13 has been Israel. The ancient covenant people when delivered from Egypt were safe in the wilderness from the army that drowned in the Red Sea. Note the security in the Lord's words describing the Exodus: "*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself*" (Exodus 19:4). Jews hearing Revelation for the first time would connect the words of 12:14 to that deliverance. There the woman is cared for, just as God fed the Israelites with manna in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:16). She would be nourished during the entire time identified as the 3½ years. [There will be an **Appendix 12A** concerning this timeframe in Revelation and Daniel.] The woman, seen more clearly later, as the people of God, is maintained during the entire time. During this time the nations trample, and the witnesses prophesy (11:2,3), and the people of God are maintained until the prophetic testimony is complete (11:7). God's restraint of Satan should be obvious.

The devil's modified strategy is to drown the woman he was not allowed to destroy directly. From his mouth comes a river to sweep her away. But those God has deigned to protect will indeed be

¹ The definite article "*the*" is present in Greek in all three of these verses, but it is omitted each time in the ESV. The NIV includes the article in 16:14, but not in 19:19 or 20:8. The Greek noun for *war* or *battle* appears in Revelation nine times. The first six have no article, which tends to make the last three with the article more significant. I say the last three point to the same event, the last battle of all.

protected. If anything comes from the serpent's mouth, it will be deceit. Note that the imagery changed from dragon to *serpent*. The ancient serpent is the deceiver of the whole world (12:9). As "the father of lies" deception is his very nature (John 8:44). It is always part of his strategy (2Thessalonians 2:9,10). The true church will not believe him. Those who know not the Lord will fall for his convincing words (Mark 13:22). The beautiful hymn has it right:

The Church shall never perish! Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish, Is with her to the end:
Though there be those who hate her, And false sons in her pale,
Against both foe or traitor She ever shall prevail.

Though with a scornful wonder Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed:
Yet saints their watch are keeping, Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song!

The imagery of a personified earth in v.16 is Revelation's vivid way to show yet another defeat for Satan. His lies do not work. That means his standard tool is ineffective with the church. No one joined to Christ, and therefore indwelt by the Spirit, and having the words of God in the heart will accept Satan's error. So he has another strategy, one spelled out in chapter 13. It will be a display to the eyes, composed of false wonders and the coercion of the sword. This time his efforts through the beast and the false prophet will have every appearance of being a great success, but by this time in the reading of Revelation, we should expect it to fail.

12:17 The woman up to this point stands in the tradition of Israel. The imagery of protection refers to Israel's exodus from Egypt. But what appears in v.17 is not another woman, but her offspring. It must be Israel's offspring. Isaiah 54 predicts that Israel would be unable to bear children. Her chances compare to the ability of a barren widow – no offspring expected there. But Isaiah 54 predicts God's almighty intervention that her children will be so many they possess the cities of the nations. Isaiah 54:7-9 makes a promise which cannot be applied to Israel in its unbelief and rejection of the Lord Jesus at His first coming. Thus the woman in Isaiah, just like Revelation 12, is the church. The rest of her offspring includes "*those who keep the commandments of God*". This cannot apply to anyone in unbelief who rejects Christ, because Revelation 12:17 becomes even more explicit. The offspring "*hold to the testimony of Jesus*". The description of the woman's offspring fits the church. No Gentile believer hearing v.17 would conclude that this excluded him. The words describe every believer.

Revelation 12 ends without telling us that this specific Satanic agenda will fail. Of course it will, but we are at the point where what Revelation said so briefly of the killing beast in 11:7, will be expanded in chapter 13. The dragon stood on the sand of the sea from which the beast will emerge (13:1).