

**REVELATION 12:1-17**

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. 7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!" 13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

STRUCTURE

- I. **War on Earth: the historical battle between the seed of the Woman and of the Serpent (12:1-6)**
 - a. First sign: Remnant Israel's "labor pains of the Messiah" (12:1-2)
 - b. Second sign: Satan's wicked reign and persecution of individual believers (12:3-4)
 - c. God protects the Messianic Community in the wilderness and the Messiah through the ascension (12:5-6)
- II. **War in Heaven: God defeats Satan through the Messiah, the Messianic Community, and the Messianic Archangel (12:7-12)**
 - a. The Messianic Archangel defeats Satan (12:7-9)
 - b. The Messiah and His community defeat Satan (12:10-11)
 - c. The death throes of the devil, wrathful over his short time (12:12)
- III. **War on Earth: the continuing battle between the seed of the Woman and of the Serpent (12:13-17)**
 - a. God protects the Messianic Community in the wilderness (12:13-16)
 - b. Satan attacks individual believers (12:17)

GENERAL COMMENTARY:

The Book of Revelation consists of twenty-one judgments, characterized symbolically as seven seals (Rev. 6-8), seven trumpets (Rev. 9-11), and seven bowls (Rev. 16). We might have expected the final sequence of seven "bowl" judgments to immediately follow the seven seals and trumpets. Instead, John stuffs chapters 12-15 into our Revelation Sandwich, saving the bowls for later and forcing his central message to pop: through Christ, all of us can be overcomers. All of us—from the Bible Thumpers of Ephesus to the Sinning Saints of Thyatira to the Lukewarm Lovers of Laodicea.

As unexpected as this three-chapter "Revelation Sandwich" is, it serves an important function, and it is not the first "sandwich" either. In between the sixth and seventh seal, John pauses to address the conflict between God's people and the forces opposed to them (7:1-17); John pauses again between the sixth and seventh trumpet for the

same reason (10:1-11:13). Now, to a fuller extent, John pauses the action to zero-in on our epic conflict, this time magnifying the forces opposed to us by clarifying their identity in Revelation 12-15. Our first enemy—the one behind all the others—is “the Dragon” or Satan (Rev. 12). Next, we have the “Beast of the Sea” (Rev. 13), which represents Antichrist Empires (including, but not limited to, the final one). After that, there is the “Beast of the Earth” (Rev. 13), labeled the “False Prophet.” Finally, we have “Harlot Babylon” (Rev. 14), which represents godless culture. Our epic battle is primarily against the devil and secondarily his human counterparts—antichrist governments, religions, and culture.

Revelation 12 introduces the three-chapter interlude by foregrounding our spiritual enemy, the devil. It consists of three movements: war on earth (12:1-6), war in heaven (12:7-12), and then more war on earth (12:13-17). Within these three movements, we observe three victories: the victory of the Messiah, the victory of Michael the Archangel, and the victory of the Messianic Community.

VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY:

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

—Gen. 37:9: “Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, ‘Behold, I have dreamed another dream. **Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.**’ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? **Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?**”

—This reference strongly points to the “woman” being Israel.

- But does “Israel” exhaust the meaning of this image? If so, then the third movement in Revelation 12 portrays the eschatological persecution of Jews (12:13), their protection in a literal wilderness (12:14-16), and the fate of her spiritual offspring, a believing remnant of Jews (12:17). Many interpret it this way.
- I do not think that “ethnic” Israel exhausts the meaning of the image, however. The “woman” continues to have offspring after the resurrection who hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:5, 17). This creates a problem for the “ethnic Israel” interpretation since ethnic Israel is not continually churning out disciples of Jesus. Far from it. Until the end of the age, most Jews reject the gospel (Rom. 9-11).
- Some have seen Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the woman in this passage, since she is the one who literally gave birth to Jesus. This is unlikely for two reasons: (1) The woman has other offspring, against whom Satan makes war. This makes sense if the woman is spiritual Israel, but it makes no sense if she is Mary. Would the devil really make an all-out eschatological war on the offspring of literal Mary? (2) The woman is referred to as “a great sign” in heaven. In other words, we should not understand these images literally.
- Some have understood the woman as Eve. Eve is relevant in our interpretation (for the reason I will soon state), but we can’t limit our interpretation to Eve because it ignores the symbolism of the twelve stars, which points to Israel. Furthermore, many of Eve’s descendants were wicked like her son Cain, which contrasts with Revelation 12, where the woman’s offspring are all righteous.
- How is Eve relevant? Because right after the “serpent” deceives her—the same serpent identified in Rev. 12:9 as the devil—God speaks to the serpent: “*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel*” (Gen. 3:15). This language is strikingly similar to Revelation 12, where we have the serpent at war with a woman and her offspring—Christ and His followers. John wants us to see in this woman not only a reference to Israel but also to this epic battle between Satan and God’s people (Jew and Gentile alike), which has endured for all human history.
- Using the same imagery as Revelation 12 of a “woman” and her “offspring” warring with the “serpent”, Genesis 3:15 introduces the storyline of the Bible: the battle between family trees. The woman and her children represent the tree of faith; the serpent and his offspring form the tree of unbelief. We can trace the righteous branches through Eve’s son Seth, to Enoch, Noah, Shem, Israel, and ultimately, “the Branch”—Jesus (Jer. 23:5). The serpent’s line runs through Eve’s son Cain, followed by Tubal-cain, Lamech, Nimrod, and ultimately, all God’s enemies. In John 8:44, even some Jews have become Satan’s seed: the tree was never limited to biology. It was always spiritual. Likewise, the “Woman of the Apocalypse” (Rev. 12:1-2) is spiritual Israel, the Messianic Community, and the mother of all who believe (cf. Gal. 6:16; Rom. 9:6-8). Through her sanctified womb came

One who would redeem multitudes of individual believers (12:17). Preserved in the wilderness (12:6, 14) and the inner courts of the temple (11:1-2)—by the seal of the living God (7:3)—John's panoply of images less predicts geopolitics than it inspires the church they symbolize. The Serpent will not prevail because he did not prevail. The Messiah conquered; so will the Messianic Community.

- In sum, the woman of 12:1-2 emphasizes Israel, but it goes beyond literal, ethnic Israel to include the entire messianic community dating back to Eve and God's entire "family tree"—the tree of faith.

—The fact that these celestial bodies adorn her as garments and a crown speaks of her heavenly origin, reinforcing the spiritual interpretation of the woman as spiritual Israel.

—Now, compare 12:1, 3 with 15:1:

- 12:1: *"A **great sign appeared in heaven**: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars..."*³ *"**Then another sign appeared in heaven**: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems..."* 15:1: *"**Then I saw another sign in heaven**, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished."*
- This "bookend" between chapters 12 and 15 shows the unity of this section as an interlude between the trumpets (Rev. 8-11) and bowls of wrath (Rev. 16).
- In chapter 12, we see the dragon making war on the woman and her offspring, but in chapter 15, we see the saints winning that war. The connection shows that the intervening section, chapters 12-15, is intended to explain how the saints defeat the devil and his proxies, even when it looks like the opposite is happening.

—"crown": judging by how this is used throughout Revelation, it speaks of the victory God's true people receive for their victory over opposition.

—Beale: "That the woman represents the faithful covenant community is shown also by the numerous parallels to Isaiah's prophecies concerning Israel. According to Is. 7:10-14, a sign will be seen as high as heaven, the virgin will be with child and bear a son. In Rev. 12:1-2, a sign appears in heaven: a woman is with child and gives birth to a son."

—Mary is not the meaning of the symbol, but she is relevant because through her womb, the Messianic Community branched out into all the earth.

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

—The woman's birth pains occur before the resurrection of Christ, which we know from 12:5. Thus, it refers to spiritual Israel's suffering as she prepares to bring forth the Messiah.

—The persecution of God's people began with Eve's first unbelieving son. I am reminded of Jesus's words in Matt. 23:35: *"so that on you may come **all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah**, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar."*

—The persecution heated up in the final six hundred years before the coming of Christ, when Israel was handed over to one global empire after another.

—I believe the persecution will ramp up again at the very end of the age when the nations converge upon the church in Armageddon (cf. Rev. 13, 14, 16, 19, and 20).

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

—We know that this "dragon" is Satan, because it is directly stated in 12:9.

—This is the second consecutive "sign" appearing in "heaven." The epic battle that will ensue is part of the divine plan. This foreshadows and ensures our ultimate victory.

—"red" probably reminds us of the blood of the saints, which the dragon will spill (cf. 6:4: the red horse, which symbolizes men slaying one another).

—Old Testament references to the dragon:

- Is. 27:1: *"In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing **serpent**, Leviathan the twisting **serpent**, and he will slay the **dragon** that is in the sea."*
- Is. 51:9-11: *"Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who **pierced the dragon**? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."*

- Ezek. 29:1-3: *"In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; speak, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, **Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon** that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, 'My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.'"*
- Ezek. 32:1-3: *"In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, raise a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him: 'You consider yourself a lion of the nations, but you are like a **dragon in the seas**; you burst forth in your rivers, trouble the waters with your feet, and foul their rivers. Thus says the Lord GOD: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet.'"*

—All of these serve as allusions. In the passages about Pharaoh, he is portrayed as a dragon in the sea, which is exactly what we see in Revelation 12:17. Thus, Pharaoh is a "type" of Satan, who oppresses God's people. Furthermore, this continues the Exodus theme, prevalent in chapter 12 and elsewhere, of God's people being guided and protected and nourished in the wilderness as we escape the wrath of our "Greater Pharaoh," Satan. Finally, the close relationship between antichrist governments and the devil, which John teaches explicitly, is reinforced by these OT allusions.

—The closest allusion is from Isaiah 27:1 (part of Isaiah's "mini-apocalypse", Isa. 24-27). Here is what Michael Heiser says about it in his book, *Demons*: *"The metaphor of violent untamed monsters was common in both biblical and ancient Near Eastern literature. These chaos beasts hailed from the sea (Leviathan, Rahab) and land (Behemoth). These monsters 'represented the forces of chaos held in check by the power of the creator deity'... Unlike the mythological stories of struggle between Ba'al and Yam or Marduk and Tiamat, Yahweh and Leviathan are not both divine creatures and equals. Yahweh is the sole creator, and Leviathan is mere creation... the rhetorical point [is] that only Yahweh is powerful enough to keep the forces of chaos in check... The metaphor [also] communicated the fearful (and often fatal) struggle with earthly and heavenly rebellion and chaos."*

—If Isaiah 27:1 is the closest allusion, then it comes on the heels of Isaiah 26. The immediately preceding context to "on that day" in 27:1 is the resurrection of the dead in 26:19, and the final judgment of 26:20-21. There is also reference to Israel in labor pains in the same context (26:17-18). There, however, no offspring came forth. Israel was discouraged over her lack of fruitfulness, but God promised it wouldn't always be so. Revelation 12 fills out that image. One day the believing community would issue forth many offspring! One day, every tongue, tribe, and nation will worship Jesus!

—The reference to Isaiah 27:1 reminds us that Satan is merely a created thing. He thrives on chaos, but he will be pierced by God's "hard and great and strong sword." This will occur in consummate form at the final judgment, when God punishes "the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity" (26:21), and Satan, the dragon, the serpent, the Leviathan, for leading them astray (27:1). In other words, this battle is a sure battle.

—"seven heads and ten horns":

- This alludes to the four beasts of Daniel 7, where each beast represents the evil empire of its day. The four beasts of Daniel 7 together had seven heads and ten horns—the same head-and-horn count as Satan in John's vision.
- Daniels' four beasts represented Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. John's "Beast of the Sea" resembles a mutant mixture of all four (Rev. 13:1-2). John portrays the "Beast of the Sea" as the offspring of the Dragon (Rev. 12:17-13:1).
- From Babylon to Rome and Nebuchadnezzar to Nero, the enemy behind Israel's enemy has always been the same: a seven-headed, ten-horned dragon. Satan is the inspiration for every godless empire.
- Revelation 12 introduces us not only to the enemy behind the enemy but also his weapon. Satan's primary weapon, maximized for the destruction of human flourishing, is to gain a foothold in the power of the state. In the coming chapters, John will show how Satan achieves this eschatologically; in Revelation 12:1-6, we observe how he did it historically. Past or present, Satan's tricks are the same. He attacks, accuses, and deceives all people, but with a special focus on government. Politics is nasty for a reason. It is the devil's home turf.

—"seven diadems": this contrasts with Jesus, on whose head are "many diadems" (19:12).

—Although Satan uses government for evil, this does not point to anarchy as a solution. The government is also God's instrument for good (Rom. 13).

4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

—Many make this out to be Satan's rebellion with a third of the angels, and they use it to explain the source of Satan and demons—that they were once heavenly, and they rebelled.

—While I think that's a true statement, it's not what Revelation 12 describes.

—Stars can be symbolic of angels, but they can also represent people. When we use the Old Testament as our guide, we find a better match for this verse. Daniel 8:8-12: *"Then the goat became exceedingly great, but when he was strong, the great horn was broken, and instead of it there came up four conspicuous horns toward the four winds of heaven. Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land. 10 It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. It became great, even as great as the Prince of the host. And the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was overthrown. And a host will be given over to it together with the regular burnt offering because of transgression, and it will throw truth to the ground, and it will act and prosper."*

- Daniel 8 was originally fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who foreshadowed a greater Antichrist who was to come. The wording of this passage is almost identical to Revelation 12. Very clearly, Antiochus did not somehow throw angels down to the ground or convince them to rebel with him. The stars in this passage are God's people, which is consistent with elsewhere in Daniel (cf. 8:24; 12:3), not to mention the immediate context in Revelation 12:1.
- Thus, the trampling of a third of the stars speaks of Satan's trampling of the saints. In the sequence of Revelation 12, this takes place before the birth of Christ.

— *And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.*

- The "birth" in this scene is probably not the literal birth of Jesus but rather His resurrection, after which He becomes king. I say this for four reasons:
 - First, immediately after being born, He is caught up to the throne in heaven. This comports well with Jesus, who, after being resurrected, ascended into heaven to sit on His throne.
 - Second, the Messiah in Psalm 2 was considered "God's Son" at the moment of His enthronement (Ps. 2:6-7). This is not to say that Jesus hasn't eternally been the Son of God—He has! But kings in the ancient near east were considered "sons of God," and Israel viewed their monarchy the same way. Thus, even though Jesus has eternally been the Son of God, there is a special sense in which He filled this role after His enthronement—as the God-man; as the descendant of David; as the fulfillment of prophecy.
 - Third, Psalm 2 is clearly in view, for there are multiple references to it in the surrounding context (Rev. 11:15-19; 12:5).
 - Fourth, the literal translation of "child" is "man-child," suggesting that Jesus was an adult when this prophecy was fulfilled.
- Although the "birth" most likely refers to Christ's enthronement, every attempt on Jesus's life from his birth to His enthronement is summarized by these verses, since any premature death would have prevented Christ's ascension to the throne. This would include Herod's attempt to destroy Jesus in Bethlehem (Matt. 2).

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

—This reference to Psalm 2 corroborates my interpretation above.

—Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron at the final judgment, when He crushes the nations. We see this in Rev. 11:18, where Christ returns to judge the nations in wrath, a clear reference to Psalm 2, where He crushes them with an iron rod.

—We also see this in Rev. 19:15: *"From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty."*

—Some understand this "male child" to be the church instead of Jesus. They say this because (1) the literal translation indicates that He is a "man-child," so it must be more than baby Jesus, and because (2) the church is said to rule with a rod of iron in Rev. 2:26-27.

—I am not convinced of this interpretation. There are better explanations for (1)—see above. And (2) is not decisive, since Jesus is also said to rule with a rod of iron (19:15).

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

—The wilderness can be a symbol of evil, where demon spirits haunt. We see a hint of this in the way Jesus is tempted in the wilderness by the devil and also in Matthew 12:43, where Jesus says demons wander through “waterless places” until they find a *host*.

—The wilderness is different here, however. It is a place of preservation, where God protects His people from the onslaught of Satan. This reminds us again of Israel’s Exodus. As God’s people, we have been rescued from our Greater Pharaoh—Satan—and we are preserved and nourished in the wilderness by God until Jesus comes back for us.

—In this way, the wilderness matches the temple/sanctuary of 11:1 and 13:6. All three are attacked by Satan, but they become places of preservation.

—The attack and preservation motifs of the wilderness can be seen in Deut. 8:15-16: *“He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with fiery serpents... He fed you manna... to do good for you...”*

—But what about the 1260 days?

- This three-and-a-half year period is replete throughout Revelation:
 - **1,260 days:** the two witnesses prophesy (11:3); remnant Israel cared for in the wilderness (12:6).
 - **Time, times, and a half time:** remnant Israel rescued and cared for in the wilderness (12:14).
 - **Forty-two months:** Jerusalem and the outer temple courts are trampled (11:2); the beast is given authority over the nations and to make war on the saints (13:5).
- Many interpret this period as a literal three-and-a-half-year span at the end of human history called the Great Tribulation (cf. Rev. 7:14), where Satan wreaks havoc on the earth through the Antichrist.
- Others interpret 3.5 years symbolically of the “kind of time”—a time of evil—that does not necessarily reflect an exact number of years. These interpreters typically understand 3.5 years as equivalent to the entire church age, spanning from Christ’s ascension to His return, in which evil prevails upon the earth.
- The literal interpretation has in its favor that it is straightforward. However, we must consider the genre of literature. Revelation is apocalyptic, which routinely employs symbolic numbers. Dr. Leon Morris comments: *“numbers were often employed symbolically...The apocalyptists loved schematism, and the constant use of numerical patterns is a feature of their system. Symbolism and significant numbers, then, abound. Whether they explain them or not, the apocalyptists use their bizarre symbolism and their curious numerology consistently. Any student of these writings must make an effort to grapple with the phenomenon.”*
- Considering what Morris says about apocalyptic numbers, we cannot discount the symbolic interpretation offhand. It makes contextual sense, for instance, of Revelation 12:5-6. Here, John describes a three-and-a-half-year tribulation beginning not with the final days of history (as literalists interpret it) but with the first day of Christ’s ascension, implying that the entire church age is “the wilderness” (12:6)—the tribulation. Furthermore, three-and-a-half appears again in Revelation 11:11 in a way that fits the symbolic interpretation. Finally, the pattern suggests symbolism. The doubling (time, times) should have led the last number to equal “four times” (for a total of seven years, which is God’s number of completion), but instead, it went backwards to “half a time,” as if to declare symbolically, “evil will not reach completion; it will be cut off at the knees.” All these reasons explain why I believe three-and-a-half years symbolizes a “time of evil,” encompassing the entire church age.
- But now is the time for you to accuse me of having my cake and eating it too. I also believe that three-and-a-half years telescopes most pointedly to the very end of the age when things get really bad. I say this because God literally fulfilled the prophecy of three-and-a-half years twice in history. First, in 168-164 BC, the Greek tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes IV slayed a “great multitude” of Jews and desecrated the temple. Second, in AD 66-70, the Roman commander Titus killed 1.1 million Jews and re-desecrated the temple. If “time, times, and a half time” has been fulfilled twice literally, it seems reasonable to expect the same for its eschatological consummation.
- In sum, I believe the three-and-a-half-year period symbolizes the entire span of time between the First and Second Advent, which is characterized by “tribulation” (Rev. 1:9; Acts 14:22). At the same time, I believe it might be literally fulfilled at the very end of the age, just as it was literally fulfilled twice in history.

- George Ladd agrees: *"We must conclude that the forty-two months (1,260 days) represent the period of satanic power in the world, with particular reference to the final days of the Antichrist. All that God's people are to suffer at the hands of satanic evil throughout the course of the age is but a preview of the final convulsive oppression by Antichrist in the time of the end. In this sense, the entire course of the age may be viewed as the time of the end."*

—NT Wright: *"The church needs to know that its present struggles and sufferings are not a sign that God has gone to sleep on the job. They are the sign that a great, cosmic drama is being staged, in which they are being given a vital though terrible role to play."*

—"a place prepared by God": Satan has no more place in God's dwelling (12:8) but the woman—the Messianic Community—does have a place prepared for her by God (12:6).

—After the Messianic Community brought forth the reigning Messiah, God protected, provided for, led, and preserved her through the wilderness of Satanic affliction that continues to this day. Satan did not destroy the Messiah; he cannot destroy the church.

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

—After the first movement highlights our angelic enemy (12:1-6), the next one foregrounds our angelic defender (12:7-12). Satan is not the opposite of God (as in dualism) but Michael the archangel. According to Daniel 10-12 and Jewish tradition, Michael serves as Israel's guardian angel; according to Revelation 12, he protects us too.

—While "Ideal Israel"—Jesus—wrestled tyrants on earth, Israel's guardian angel engaged the one who had entered Judas at the Last Supper (Jhn. 13:27). Jesus and Michael battled simultaneously in different theaters, one on earth (Rev. 12:1-6) and the other in heaven (12:7-12). The first movement on earth (12:1-6) and second movement in heaven (12:7-12) are, to use NT Wright's words, "umbilically joined."

—I have portrayed Michael's victory in association with Calvary—past-tense. However, not every interpreter agrees. Futurists claim that Michael won't play heaven's bouncer until the final few years of this age. They say this better explains the persecution in the third movement (12:13-17), where Satan's heavenly ejection leads to hell-on-earth in the end.

—I sympathize with this view because the greatest expression of earth's tribulation is its final one. I believe the futurist interpretation fails, however, for two reasons. First, it creates a multi-thousand-year break between the first (12:1-6) and second movements (12:7-12). Second, it violates the timing of 12:10, which follows Michael's triumph, reading thus: *"And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'"*

—Only two moments in history could possibly justify such superlatives: the First Advent (already a heavy favorite because it fits the context of 12:1-6), or the Second Advent, when Christ returns and consummates the work of the Cross. We know this can't refer to the Second Advent, however, since Satan's expulsion results in "great wrath, because he knows that his time is short" (12:12). When Jesus returns, Satan won't have a "short time" to torment God's people; instead, he'll have a very *long time* to suffer torment in hell. Therefore, Michael's victory occurs in conjunction with the First Advent.

—This is good news. If we must wait for some future event where "the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down" (12:11), as futurists claim, then logical consistency requires us to conclude that Satan still holds the power of accusation. This defeats the purpose of Revelation 12, damming the cascade of victory flowing from Christ (12:1-6) to Michael (12:7-12) to us (12:13-17). Only a past-tense victory ensures that we can be present-tense overcomers.

—By placing the story of heavenly victory in the center, we can fathom God's perspective on these godless empires and this seeming constant defeat and this searing wilderness heat and these ceaseless Satanic attacks. God's perspective is that (1) We are nourished and protected, (2) Satan cannot destroy God's church, and (3) We will overcome!

—NT Wright: *"Michael has won, and the dragon has lost. This loss means that he is thrown down to the earth, ejected from heaven altogether. But wait a minute. The song of victory which follows this great event gives credit for the victory, not to Michael, but to God's people on earth... So who defeated the dragon? Was it Michael, or was it the martyrs? Well, in a sense it was both. The heavenly reality of the victorious battle is umbilically joined to the earthly reality of the martyrs' deaths."*

—*that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world*

- "serpent" reminds us of Satan's deceiving characteristics, which we are reminded of again at the end of this verse.
- "devil" means accuser/slanderer
- "Satan" means adversary
- Thus, Satan is a liar, slanderer, and general adversary to God's people. He lies to us and slanders us before God. He brings accusations against us, like he did against Job, and these accusations carry some weight when we have sin in our lives. But there is a remedy for this—the blood of Jesus.

—This section should be understood as explaining the heavenly counterpart to what happened in 12:1-6. It also reminds us that despite the challenges we will face in vv. 13-17, our victory has already been won.

—Beale: "Rev. 12:1-5 has explained primarily what has occurred on earth in the person of Jesus, whereas Michael reflects Jesus' earthly victory as His representative in the heavenly sphere... Christ's resurrection and the beginning of His rule are immediately reflected in heaven by the defeat of the devil and his hosts by Michael and his angels. Michael's engagement in heaven was a direct, inexorable reflex action put into gear by Christ's redemptive work on earth."

—We have seen already that Satan "makes war" on the two prophets (11:7), and we will soon see that he "makes war" on the church (13:7). All of this reflects the defeat of the saints in Dan. 7:21, but now the language is applied to the saints' victory over the dragon.

—"there was no longer a place for them in heaven." This alludes to Dan. 2:35: "not a trace of them was found" after Jesus' kingdom becomes the rock that fills the earth. This was initially fulfilled at the First Advent. The wording is repeated in 20:11 at the Second Advent, where the kingdom is consummated on the earth.

—Beale: "The place the devil lost was his hitherto privileged place of accusation, formerly granted him by God as a temporary privilege."

—Just as Satan threw down a third of the stars and trampled them, now he is thrown down from heaven. It's the principle of retribution.

10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

—"loud voice" occurs nineteen times in Revelation. It is associated with proclamations of divine authority, judgment, or worship. It serves to emphasize the urgency, power, and importance of the message being conveyed. These voices are typically either from heavenly beings, angels, or even God Himself, marking key moments in the narrative of the book.

—"now" emphasizes the present inauguration of Christ's kingdom and authority.

—Because of Christ's past-tense victory on earth and Michael's umbilically related past-tense victory in heaven, believers can share in Christ's victory—"now"—on earth.

—Although Michael's victory is foregrounded, there are three conquests in this brief section:

- The victory of Michael (Rev. 12:8-10)
- The victory of God/Christ (Rev. 12:10-11a)
- The victory of the Church (Rev. 12:11b)

—"rejoice O heavens... woe to you, O earth and sea": The addition of "sea" makes it clear that we should not understand these statements geographically. It's not like the Pacific Ocean needs to be afraid Satan's persecution. "Earth" and "Sea" point forward to the "beast rising out of the sea" (13:1) and the "beast rising out of the earth" (13:11). Together, these are the Antichrist and False Prophet. Because of Michael's victory in heaven (12:7-10), the saints will have victory on earth through the blood of Jesus (12:11), but it will be a hard-fought battle against monsters raised up by a furious dragon (12:12).

—Because of Christ, Satan's accusations lost their force. In the Old Testament, it would have seemed that Satan had a case against God's people, like he did against Job. No one was without fault, and Satan could continually stand before God with a correct charge of sin, which meant worthiness of death. But at the Cross, God placed the judgment upon His own Son, so that no charge of the enemy might stand (Rm. 3:23-25).

- "Who can bring a charge against God's elect? Neither angels nor demons nor rulers..." (Rm. 8:33-34, 38).
- Beale: "Now the devil has no basis for his accusations, and he is evicted from the heavenly courtroom and counsel of God."

—Jesus said when He was lifted up on the Cross, the ruler of this world would be cast out (Jn. 12:31). Again, Beale: “The decisive and legal defeat of Satan occurs as the kingdom of God is inaugurated on earth, the final and complete destruction of the enemy will occur when the Lord returns to establish His kingdom in its completed or fulfilled state (Rev. 19:20-21; 20:10-15).

—Beale goes on to say, “Now the decisive victory of Christ on earth (vv. 5, 10) and of Michael in heaven (7-9) is identified as the basis of the victory which suffering Christians on earth win over the serpent throughout history.”

—“they did not love their lives unto death”: this certainly includes death but also any suffering for the sake of Christ that precedes that too. As Paul tells the Corinthians, “I die daily,” and as our Lord says, “Take up your Cross.” To follow Christ is to die unto self.

—Heiser: *“The ‘accuser of our brothers’ (Rev. 12:10) remains active in the world until the final judgment... but he has no accusation to bring against those who belong to Christ. His rightful claim over their lives in the realm of the dead is nullified through the resurrection of Christ and the union with Christ for all who believe the gospel. In the final judgment, Satan’s domicile, the realm of the dead, is transformed into his place of torment”*

—Keener: *“Jewish people often talked about the fall of angels in the distant past; now John relates this event specifically to Christ’s triumph (12:7-11). Satan’s fall here clearly refers to a past event; salvation and God’s kingdom (12:10) are completed at Christ’s return, but were begun at His death, resurrection, and enthronement.”*

—Keener: *“Based on Daniel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1), Jewish people recognized that Michael was their guardian prince, who would defend them from the angels of the other nations who sought to oppress them. Michael could single-handedly ward off angels of other nations. Yet there were limits to Michael’s power. He could not overstep his own authority, hence could not act against Satan himself without God’s permission (Jude 9); moreover, he would be ordered to stand out of the way so that Israel could experience the Final Tribulation (Dan. 12:1; perhaps 2 Thess. 2:7). Here, however, Michael and his forces cast down Satan’s forces because Michael and his allies represent the heavenly victory won by Christ on earth.”*

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

—This continues the thought that finished in 12:6, just before the heavenly interruption of 12:7-12. It read: “the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1260 days” (12:6).

—Whereas 12:7-12 gave us the heavenly scene, this continues the earthly one.

—As we saw earlier, the scene moves from earth (12:1-6)→heaven (12:7-12)→earth (12:13-17). The two earthly scenes are more-or-less chronological, moving from Satan’s historical dominance to Christ’s coming to the church’s protection and nourishment in the wilderness. This final scene reveals Satan’s attack upon the church in its wilderness years, in the last days. This is paradigmatic for our general wilderness wanderings, between the two advents. It could also be prophetic, regarding the final 3.5 years of this present age.

—“two wings of a great eagle... fly to the wilderness”: Hal Lindsey understood this to mean the United States, protecting Israel. This is far from the mark. It is a reference to the Exodus, where God cared for Israel in the wilderness:

- Ex. 19:4: *“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”*
- Just as God cared for Israel in the wilderness, He will care for New Israel, which is the church—consisting of Jews and Gentiles—all who believe.

—“time, times, and a half-time” clearly matches the “1260 days” of 12:6, both of which speak of the woman fleeing to the wilderness. See comments there.

—While Daniel speaks of a Great Tribulation where God’s people are trampled by an Antichrist for three-and-a-half years.... And while John speaks of precisely the same thing in Rev. 13:5-7.... Revelation 12 depicts the same thing, differently. It says that even though the church is persecuted and martyred during this season, it is also cared for and nourished.

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

—"make war": this is the same language used to depict how the beast from the abyss kills the two prophets (11:7), and how the beast from the sea murders the saints (13:7). Behind these murders, Satan is at work.

—"furious": Satan has emotions. He is an intelligent being, not just a force or symbol of evil.

—The "woman" has more "offspring." This means that the "woman" cannot be merely ethnic Israel, as 12:1-6 might have led us to believe. Ethnic Israel is not continuing to birth Jesus-loving offspring. This means that the "woman" must be the Messianic Community, as she is portrayed both before and after the resurrection.

—The distinction between the woman and the individual offspring is difficult, since they would all seem to speak of Christians. The most common interpretation, which I favor, is that the woman speaks the entire Messianic Community.

—This sheds light on how the woman can be "nourished" and protected in the wilderness: no matter how hard Satan tries, and no matter how successful he is, he will never, ever, ever be able to destroy the entire church. As a whole, God's church will be nurtured and protected during the Great Tribulation. The Antichrist will not be able to snuff out every trace of light. But it will get dark. And many individual believers will die for their faith.

—"He stood on the sand of the sea" leads right into "And I saw a beast rising out of the sea" (13:1). Satan empowers Antichristian empires.

—Keener tells the story of Perpetua: *"Shortly before Roman officials in Carthage ordered Perpetua's execution as a Christian, the young woman had a vision of a ladder leading to heaven with a dragon at its foot. 'He will not harm me,' I said, 'in the name of Christ Jesus.' Then she stepped on his head and climbed up the ladder.; she understood this vision as the Lords assurance that she would triumph through her martyrdom."*

—FF Bruce: *"Their only means of resisting the enemy's attack... is patient endurance and faithful confession. This may mean suffering and death; but it was precisely by suffering and death that their Leader had conquered."*