

The Book of Revelation

Lesson 10: The Woman, the Dragon, and the Child -- Revelation 12:1-17

Pull back the curtain on the whole book of Revelation and this is the scene you find at the very center of the stage. A great sign appears in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She is radiant and royal, and she is also in pain, crying out in the agony of childbirth. Then a second sign appears, and it is monstrous. A great red dragon, seven heads, ten horns, seven diadems, his tail sweeping a third of the stars from the sky, crouches in front of the woman so that he can devour her child the moment it is born. Heaven and horror in the same vision. This is the war behind every other war in the book.

John is not telling us something new here so much as he is showing us the true shape of history. The woman is the faithful covenant people of God, the believing line from which the Messiah comes, Israel narrowing down to Mary and then widening out into the church. The male child who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron is Christ. The dragon, John tells us plainly, is the serpent of old, the devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. For ages the dragon has hungered to destroy the promised seed, and at last the child is born, and the dragon lunges. And then comes the line that decides everything: the child was caught up to God and to His throne.

We need to feel how much is packed into that one sentence, because it carries the entire weight of the gospel. The dragon opened his jaws, and the child slipped past him to the throne. That is Bethlehem and Calvary and the empty tomb and the ascension, all gathered into a single triumphant phrase. The cross looked like the dragon's victory and was in fact his defeat. And so the loud voice in heaven sings, 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. The decisive battle is not somewhere out ahead of us on a future calendar. It has already been fought, and it has already been won.

That leaves us, the living church, in the part of the story John describes last. Cast down and furious, knowing his time is short, the dragon turns to make war on the rest of the woman's offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. That is us, this morning, in this room. We live in the wilderness season, the time when the woman is nourished and protected by God even while the dragon rages. And we are handed the secret of how the saints overcome him: they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. The dragon is loud, but the dragon is beaten. Let us learn how to live as people who already know how the war ends.

Group Discussion: When you imagine the spiritual conflict between God and Satan, do you tend to picture the decisive battle as something still in the future, or as something already settled? How might it change the way you face this week to believe that the dragon was thrown down at the cross and the empty tomb?

Personal Reflection: Revelation 12:11 says the saints conquered the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, loving not their lives even unto death. Where in your own life is Satan pressing you to love your comfort, reputation, or safety more than your faithfulness to Christ?

Read Revelation 12:1–17

Study Questions

1. Look carefully at the three figures in the vision. Who is the woman clothed with the sun (12:1–2), who is the male child who is to rule all the nations and who is caught up to God and to His throne (12:5), and who does John himself tell us the great red dragon is (12:9)? How does identifying these figures from the text keep us from turning this chapter into a coded prophecy of modern headlines?
2. John shows us the covenant people of God pictured as a woman in the pain of childbirth, longing for the promised Messiah. As you read of that long ache for the Savior to come, where in your own life are you waiting in pain for God to keep a promise, and how does the birth of the child in this vision steady you?
3. The dragon stood before the woman to devour her child, but the child was caught up to God and to His throne (12:4–5). How does this single sentence gather up the whole story of Jesus, His birth, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension to reign, and why does it matter that the throne, not the dragon, has the last word?

4. The loud voice in heaven announces that the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come (12:10). Christ reigns now, at the right hand of the Father. How does living as a subject of a King who is already enthroned change the way you carry your fears, your work, and your worship this week?

5. Revelation 12:10 calls Satan the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them day and night before God, and then says he has been thrown down. How does Scripture elsewhere describe this casting down of Satan, and how should we understand the accuser being silenced (compare John 12:31, Colossians 2:15, and Luke 10:18)?

6. The text says the saints loved not their lives even unto death (12:11). That is a costly kind of love, a loosened grip on self. What would it look like, concretely, for you to hold your own life more loosely this week for the sake of Christ and His people?

7. Revelation 12:11 gives the threefold secret of how the saints overcome the dragon: by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and by not loving their lives even unto death. Walk through each part. Why is it crucial that the blood of the Lamb comes first, and not our own strength or worthiness?

8. After the child is enthroned, the woman flees into the wilderness where God has prepared a place to nourish her (12:6, 12:14). How does it comfort you to know that the same season in which the dragon rages is also the season in which God feeds and protects His people?

9. Twice John measures the time of the woman's protection in the wilderness, as 1,260 days (12:6) and as a time, and times, and half a time (12:14). Read in the light of the whole book, does this point us to a literal three and a half years on a future calendar, a coming seven-year tribulation, or something else? What does this symbolic period teach us about the church's protected suffering between the comings of Christ, and why must we resist any future-only or literalistic scheme that pushes Satan's defeat out ahead of us?

10. Look back over the whole vision, the radiant woman, the enthroned child, the thrown-down dragon, the church kept safe in the wilderness, the dragon making war on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:17). Name one specific way the Lord is using this chapter to form you into a person who lives as though the war is already won.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: John 12:31, the ruler of this world cast out at the cross; Colossians 2:15, Christ disarming the rulers and authorities and triumphing over them; Luke 10:18, Jesus seeing Satan fall like lightning; Genesis 3:15, the promised seed of the woman crushing the serpent's head; Romans 16:20, the God of peace soon crushing Satan under our feet.