

January 18, 2026—“*The Woman & The Dragon*”

If tracking through this portion of the book of Revelation has felt difficult for you, you're not alone! As it's been explained before, this genre of literature makes points and provides teaching through the imagery of visions—through metaphors and symbolism. And, like a great work of art, you actually minimize its greatness when you try to explain it away—and yet, for us today, two thousand years removed from the history, culture, and context of John's revelation, we could sure use some explanation!

Especially when it comes to today's vision in Revelation chapter 12. After two 7-fold cycles (of the seven seals and the seven trumpets), before the third 7-fold cycle of the seven bowls, we enter into seven sub-scenes or “signs” of John. And the first of these signs, in Revelation chapter 12, serves as the central axis and theological centre of the entire book. So, even though we shouldn't really try to explain it, we really need to understand it, so we're going to do our best to unpack this literary masterpiece.

This vision, including the first of these signs, begins in verse 1 of Revelation 12:

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

This first sign, a woman depicted as a composite of Eve, Mary, the nation of Israel, and the church, refers to the people of God. From Israel, it was said, a Saviour would be birthed. And while the crown associates her with Christ's Kingship, the twelve stars represent both the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles who formed the base of the Christian church. This woman represents the timeless people of God.

In addition to this pregnant woman, a second sign appears, described in verse 3:

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.

The dragon obviously represents something bad—red symbolized the murderous colour of blood. The horns represented strength and power, and the crowns were symbols of wealth and affluence. The numbers seven and ten represented completeness—and yet all of these images are set up, as an antagonist to the woman, as false claims. And more than attacking this woman, the dragon's chief concern was the child that this woman would bear. They were fixated on devouring—completely destroying—this child.

Which happens to be the third character introduced in John's vision. Verse 5:

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

I hope this is the easiest character to understand. The reference to Psalm 2:9 explicitly clarifies that the child is the Person of Jesus—the promised Saviour sent from God, "birthed" from Israel, the timeless People of God. It's interesting to note here that, while the woman and the dragon are described as "signs" (a symbol of a greater reality), the child is not—they *are* the greater reality. And the description of the child being "snatched up to God and His throne" is an expedited summary of the birth, life, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus that resulted in Jesus' destiny.

Those are the introductory pieces that get put together in the picture of verse 7:

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Revelation 12 is all about a cosmic battle—a battle foretold as early as Genesis 3:15, between the *seed of the woman* and the *seed of the serpent*, symbolized by the dragon.

Notice that John is now more specific regarding this dragon—not just something representing badness in general, but explicitly described as the devil or Satan, someone who earlier in the book of Revelation was often referred to as “the accuser”. As well, this cosmic battle involves an angel named Michael, as well as other angelic forces. This is a reference to a spiritual agent initially described in the Old Testament prophetic book of Daniel. It’s referring to the *spiritual nature* of this battle. And while the result of this battle is decisive—the great dragon, it says, was “hurled down”, literally “bounced” from heaven—it’s interesting to note that the dragon was bounced *to earth*.

This is precisely the dynamic that the ensuing commentary of this cosmic battle describes—through an interlude John provides to this vision, in the form of a song:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God, day and night, has been hurled down.”

To begin, this victory song credits the Messiah as the reason for the spiritual victory—that Jesus’ death and resurrection on earth won a cosmic spiritual battle in heaven.

And it's this interplay between the spiritual and temporal that the commentary of this victory song continues to develop. In verse 11 of Revelation chapter 12, it says:

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

It's fascinating to see that the victory song lyrics don't credit this angel Michael for victory, but describe a spiritual and earthly contribution to defeating this enemy. On the one hand, John credits "the blood of the Lamb"—reinforcing his earlier comment on the impact of Jesus' sacrificial death to defeat sin and evil once and for all. But notice, in addition, that he also credits "the word of their testimony", suggesting that faithful followers of Jesus—especially when they "don't love their lives so much as to shrink back from death"—also contribute to pushing back darkness in their world. Here, he's referring to martyred followers of Jesus, who, like Jesus Himself, died for Christ's cause.

And then, after explaining that this victory was spiritual *and* eternal, but that it was also the result of both earthly *and* heavenly activity, John focuses on the earthly:

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

What John's commentary of his vision is describing here, are the earthly implications of the spiritual victory of Jesus. Jesus achieved a spiritual victory, even though that victory was accomplished through His life, death, and resurrection on earth. And that victory is not only for Jesus, but shared with those who will live sacrificial lives following Him. But to those still following Jesus on earth—this commentary warns, the victory that bounced the Accuser from heaven to earth will have practical implications on your earthly life!

This, then—returning from the commentary interlude back to the actual vision—becomes the downbeat and ultimate point John is trying to make through it. Verse 13:

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

Metaphorically, after having been bounced from heaven and hurled to earth, the dragon pursues the woman—again meaning the timeless people of God. In the verses that follow, there are a number of symbolic references to the Exodus—like describing the woman fleeing to the wilderness, or the earth helping the woman by swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of its mouth—all these references representing the faithful care and protection that God provides, like He did through the Exodus story.

Yet, in spite of that faithful protection, the image of Revelation 12 ends this way:

Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Where the woman represented the timeless people of God—the nation of Israel before Jesus, and the church after Jesus—now the focus of this frustrated and defeated dragon is concentrated on her “offspring”. This is in reference to the current, existing generation of people of God—the very people to whom John was writing and sharing this revelation. He’s saying that, because of the spiritual victory Jesus achieved through His life, death, and resurrection, His spiritual enemy was defeated once and for all but, for a time, would live out an era of desperate frustration on earth, specifically targeting those seeking to faithfully and obediently follow Jesus today. Things in their lives on earth would be difficult for them, because of the spiritual battle Jesus already won.

Think about that: things in their lives on earth would be difficult, *because of* the spiritual battle Jesus *already won*. Through metaphor, imagery, and masterpiece art, John has described for his readers why a life following Jesus is so hard. In John's day the Christian church experienced all kinds of hardships—slander, lies, persecution, and temptation—and many followers of Jesus would have wondered, *because things were so difficult*, whether Jesus actually reigned supreme. Through these signs, John helps them appreciate that it's precisely *because* Jesus reigns supreme that things are so difficult. He explains that there's a difference between Jesus *achieving* victory over sin, death, and evil, and the time when Jesus will *fully claim* that victory. In that "already-but-not-yet" interim period, there is a spiritual enemy desperately unleashing their frustrated wrath on followers of Jesus, but also a faithful God looking to care for and protect those who would overcome through not giving in to the enemy's attacks. This vision is intended to be an encouragement to faithfulness, appreciating that earthly hardship isn't because Jesus is losing; it's because Jesus has already *fully won*!

Now for these images to impress into our hearts today, a few things need to happen. First, we need to awaken to the spiritual realities of our lives on earth:

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Because heaven and earth are designed by God to be intimately connected, our earthly lives are deeply affected by spiritual realities we don't see, with an enemy antagonizing us but a victory Jesus won. This cosmic battle plays out in our earthly lives every day.

Then, we need to appreciate the “already-but-not-yet” dynamic to that spiritual victory of Jesus—that there’s a difference between what He’s fully *accomplished* and what He’s fully *claimed*, and that we find ourselves in the era of human history between those two. Other New Testament authors describe this, including in 1 Corinthians 15:

The saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you.

Death and evil and sin have been defeated. But, in our lives and world, death and evil and sin continue to be realities—if not heightened realities. So, in this interim, God intends to strengthen and support those seeking to remain faithful, to overcome the enemy’s attacks. And every time we make choices to resist the enemy’s antagonism—in the form of their slander, lies, persecution, or temptation—we push back evil too.

This is the ultimate goal of this passage: to encourage believers to remain faithful, and to overcome the spiritual antagonism of the enemy by pushing back evil:

God’s commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Just like John’s original audience, when we refuse to accept the enemy’s slanderous accusations, when we resist buying into their lies, and we remain faithful in spite of persecution, and when we deny their temptations—through the spiritual strength that the Risen Jesus desires to provide—we, like Jesus, push back and win victory over evil.

When I think about how this passage applies to me, I immediately think of all the ways I immediately bristle when people over-spiritualize things. Someone shows up late because “God wanted them” to sleep a little longer, or someone spends recklessly because “God loves them” and would want them to have that item, or someone tries to convince someone to date them because “God told them so”, or someone excuses bad behaviour because “the devil made them do it”. I’m not a fan of over-spiritualizing!

What today asks of me is whether I’ve actually been *under-spiritualizing* too much—whether I’ve actually appreciated the intimate linkage between Jesus’ work both on earth *and* in heaven, and whether I’m sober about the continued spiritual antagonism that exists in the “already-but-not-yet” period in God’s story where we find ourselves.

The truth is: we all face challenges in our lives. We all have people who slander us. We all have lies we can believe. We all experience degrees of persecution—relational, economic, and otherwise. And we’re all tempted. But do we live with the spiritual mindedness that recognizes the origin of all that? When life gets hard, do we feel like God’s *not* worth following—because God’s not big enough or powerful enough?

What’s interesting about Revelation chapter 12 is that the only practical application is to “Look!”—to see differently. Can we see that the existence of hardship and challenge in our lives and world isn’t because Jesus is absent, but because of the “already-but-not-yet” era we find ourselves in? Can we see that greater hardship isn’t evidence of God’s disinterest or Jesus losing, but actually, an indicator of Jesus having already won? What if instead of giving up on faith when it seems like evil is winning, we found courage to remind evil that it has already lost? Can we see that, with Jesus’ strength, when we overcome challenges, we push back and win victory over evil too?!