

October 15, 2023 by Steve Brandon



Behind the Scenes

Revelation 12

1. The Signs (verses 1-6)
2. The War in Heaven (verses 7-12)
3. The War on Earth (verses 13-17)

There are many things in life where what is seen on the surface is not all that there is. There is often much that is happening behind the scenes that you know little about. For instance, you see someone perform, whether that's a basketball player or a violin player or an actor on the stage, but you don't see the years of practice that went on behind the scenes. You only see the skill of the performance.

Or, take an advertisement on the TV, though you may see some actors play a role of how they need a product, you don't see the countless hours of marketing strategy that went on behind the scenes. Or, take the recently war in Gaza. Our Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, traveled to Israel to meet with Benjamin Netanyahu. They met behind closed doors to talk about what took place when Israel was attacked last week and what their plan is for the future. Then, they delivered a press conference to disclose their commitments to each other. All we know is that was presented to the public, but we don't know all of the conversations that took place behind the scenes.

When it comes to our spiritual lives, and our desire to walk with Jesus, there is much that is going on behind the scenes, of which we are unaware. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:10-11, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil." With these verses, Paul exhorts the Ephesians to "be strong in the Lord." Follow the Lord with heart and passion and determination, trusting in him, in the strength of his might. Paul instructs them to "put on the whole armor of God," because you are fighting a war "against the schemes of the devil."

Then Paul lays out what takes place behind the scenes of our lives in Ephesians 6:12. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." In other words, the battle that we fight, isn't all that it appears to be. We are living on the earth, but there is much going on behind the scenes that we know little about, in the spiritual realm, the strategies and tactics of the demonic world! That's why we are to, as Ephesians 6:13 says, "Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."

In the book of Job we see this very clearly. Job was minding his own business, and in one day he lost it all. He lost his wealth because of fires and marauding bands, he lost his family, all of his sons and daughters to "a great wind," perhaps a tornado (Job 1). Soon after that Job lost his health, and was covering head to toe with painful sores (Job 2:7).

Job knew nothing of what ever took place behind the scenes with the conversation that Satan had with God. Such is life. There is much that happens, "behind the scenes," that we know little about. But it is helpful for us to be aware that there are events taking place behind the scenes that affects our life.

My message this morning is entitled, "Behind the Scenes" It comes from Revelation 12. If you haven't do so already, I invite you to turn there. Let's read all 17 verses of this chapter.

Revelation 12

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

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

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, 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.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. 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. 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. 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!"

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. 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. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 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. 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.

What a story! We are introduced right at the beginning that this isn't to be taken literally in any sense. John tells us that he saw "signs in heaven." Look at verse 1.

Revelation 12:1

And a great sign appeared in heaven: Look at verse 3, 3 And another sign appeared in heaven

These "signs" are my first point.

1. The Signs (verses 1-6)

The first sign that John saw was "a woman." Here's what John saw:

Revelation 12:1-2

...a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

Let's consider this woman. First, we hear about how she is clothed: she is "clothed with the sun." This must mean that her clothes were bright! Her clothes were giving off light, a bright light, as if it were the sun itself. This may also give indication to her size, as she was clothed "with the sun" not being clothed "like the sun." Second, John notes that the moon was "under her feet." Again, this makes clear that this is no mere human woman. She is big enough to have the moon under her feet. Third, she wore "a crown of twelve stars." Again, a cosmic reference. Clothed with the sun, feet on the moon, and stars on her head. Fourth, she was "pregnant." Not only pregnant, but nine months pregnant, ready to give birth. Not merely "ready to give birth," but in the actual process of giving birth.

Then, verse 3.

Revelation 12:3

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

Here, we are obviously in the apocalyptic world. A red dragon! This dragon is unlike any dragon that you have ever read about. It has "seven heads and ten horns." On his heads were "seven diadems." A diadem is a crown, more like an ornamental headband, that is worn to signify royalty or power or dignity. Obviously, this isn't the sort of creature that you want to meet in the back alley someplace. You can see his strength in verse 4.

Revelation 12:4

His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

The woman shines like the sun and has the moon beneath her feet, but the dragon sweeps away a third of the stars in the heaven, and they are cast down to the earth. That's a display of some mighty power. Then comes the conflict of the story.

Revelation 12:4

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

What a horrific scene! The time of birth is not the time to think about the death of your child through someone who comes to devour your child. The time of birth is the time to think about the years that you will have with your child. But such is the evil intent of this dragon. It's as if he is standing outside the delivery room, just waiting until he hears the cry of the baby, ready to break into the room, snatch away the child to kill the baby. No, it's closer than that. He is in the delivery room, next to the stirrups, just waiting for the baby to come out of the woman, ready to snatch up the child. But his plans are thwarted.

Revelation 12:5

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.

All of the plans of this dragon were laid to waste. Rather than destroying the child, this child was "caught up" to God and to his throne. This begins to give some identity to the woman, as this child who is born is destined for greatness. To rule all the nation of the earth! Perhaps that's why the dragon wanted this child, to stop him from ruling and reigning.

Doesn't this remind you of the birth of Christ? When Jesus was born, Herod heard about the king that was born. So, he ordered the death of all the infants in Bethlehem, trying to destroy this future king. Yet, Mary and Joseph and Jesus escaped to Egypt, and Herod's plans were thwarted. That's similar to what's happening here. When the child was born, this fierce dragon was ready to snatch the child, but, as verse 5 says,

Revelation 12:5

...but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

At this point, we read in verse 6.

Revelation 12:6

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.

In verses 5 and 6, we see the cosmic conflict taking place. The dragon was unable to devour the child, because God intervened, taking the child, and protecting the woman.

There are the signs that John saw. The big question is this: what does it all mean? The best way to begin to answer this question is to seek out the identity of the woman and the dragon and the child. Let's begin with the identity of the dragon. Let's start here because John tells us who the dragon is. Look down at verse 9.

Revelation 12:9

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.

Here, the dragon is identified as the devil, himself. Let's go next to the child, because, again, I believe that there are some clues in the text that give us the identity of this child. We read in verse 5:

Revelation 12:5

She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron,

This is a clear reference to Psalm 2, which we have looked at the past two weeks, because the text in Revelation 11 alludes to this Psalm. Psalm 2 describes the raging of the nations against the LORD and against his Christ. The nations say, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us" (Psalm 2:3). God sits in the heavens and laughs at their feeble attempts to resist God's power and authority. And he installs his king anyway. "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill" (Psalm 2:6).

Psalm 2 then continues to describe his power and reign. "I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel" (Psalm 2:7-9).

This is the same phraseology that is used in Revelation 12:5. This male child was "to rule all the nations with a rod of iron." Thus, the identity of the child is clear: It is Jesus, the Messiah. There are other clues in the text that help us to identify this as Jesus. When the child is "caught up to God," he is caught up to the very throne of God, which is where Jesus is right now, seated at God's right hand, waiting until his enemies be made a footstool for his feet (Psalm 110:1).

So, we have identified the dragon as Satan. We have identified the child as Jesus. Now, who is the woman? At first glance, someone might easily say, "It must be Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus." Yet, there are difficulties in the text that lead us away from this interpretation. First is the appearance of the woman. She is in dazzling strength, shining like the sun with the moon at her feet. This is not how we ever see Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is always seen as a lowly, humble servant of God. Never are there any hints of her true power and glory.

A second difficulty is the focus of the dragon's wrath. We will see later in the text that the dragon pursues the woman, to destroy her. Look at verses 13 and 14.

Revelation 12:13-14

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. 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.

Never in the whole of the Bible do we see Satan's wrath turned against Mary with such vengeance.

A third difficulty is the offspring of Mary. When the dragon is unsuccessful at destroying the woman, he turns his wrath upon "her offspring." Look at verse 17.

Revelation 12:17

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.

It seems as if the physical offspring of Mary here is far too limiting for the scope of verse 17. This whole passage is talking of a cosmic warfare. To limit the rage of the devil simply to the physical offspring of Mary doesn't seem right. Further, her offspring are defined as "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (verse 17). This seems to indicate that the offspring of the woman is the entire believing church!

Thus, I don't think that the woman is Mary. I think that the best way to take this woman is to see her as describing the people of God throughout all time. It was from the Jewish people that the Messiah was born. In the Old Testament, Israel is often referred to as a woman, that God loves. When she goes astray, the LORD anguishes over her like a man does when his wife proves unfaithful. The woman imagery

continues into the New Testament as well. The church is called "the bride of Christ." And in Revelation 19, we will see the marriage supper of the Lamb, when the church and Jesus are "married" if you will.

Further, the people of God today are best described as verse 17 says,

Revelation 12:17

...those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

So, let's step back and see the meaning of these "signs." You have this woman who appears in heaven in all of her glory. I believe this is the nation of Israel, which God loved. You have this dragon, which is Satan, desperately working to destroy the Messiah which is to be born (verse 4). But Jesus, the Messiah, is born and verse 5 takes us through his whole life, from birth to ascension. Then, the woman, the church flees into the wilderness and is nourished by God, and protected from the attacks of the devil!

This is the story of the entire Bible! Back in the garden, when Eve was given the promise that one of her offspring would rise up and crush the head of the serpent. The people of Israel were always longing for this child to come! Satan knew that this child would come. So, he was ready to pounce. But God protected the child, even when Satan tried to kill him at his birth (through Herod in Matthew 2). God protected him even when Satan tried to seduce him to sin through the temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4). God protected him even when he thought he conquered him on the cross. The resurrection of Jesus proved triumphant. Now, Jesus sits at the right hand of the throne of God.

Satan isn't done. He seeks to destroy the followers of Jesus. But, Jesus has promised to build his church, and God protects them in the wilderness. What a comfort this would be to the original hearers! To those who were going through some difficult days of persecution. To know that behind the scenes, Satan's plans have been thwarted. The Messiah came and conquered, and God is now, nourishing her church.

This is the message of Revelation: Though Satan schemes and attacks, God is with his people, protecting them from the schemes of the devil, strengthening and nourishing them in the wilderness. In this, you can trust! You can trust that God will nourish you through the trials and tribulations that come your way,

Now, there is question about the meaning of the 1,260 days. It is only 3 ½ years? Does God only nourish his people for 3 ½ years? Or, is this symbolic? Is it symbolic of the entire church age? When is God nourishing the people of God? All in the background. All behind the scenes.

2. The War in Heaven (verses 7-12)

Revelation 12:7-8

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

What a scene John must have witnessed! An angelic battlefield. I'm not sure how angels and demons fight each other. We fight with swords and guns and tanks and missiles. I'm not sure how they fight. But the war was great with Michael, the archangel, leading his army of angels against Satan and his army of angels.

One can only imagine the firepower of such a fight! If the dragon can sweep away a third of the stars with his tail, how much can he wage war? Yet, Michael and his angels proved victorious! Just like any war, the defeated are either killed or banished. In this case, Satan was defeated and banished from heaven. We find in verse 9 where Satan was sent.

Revelation 12:9

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.

Defeated in heaven, Satan wages his war upon the earth! Not only Satan, but all of his fellow angelic followers as well. The world is filled with Satan and his demons! But we need not fear, because he is a defeated foe! That's the point of the proclamation of victory given in verse 10.

Revelation 12:10

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.

This sounds a lot like Revelation 11:15. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever!" Here in Revelation 12, the proclamation of victory is that

Revelation 12:10

...the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come.

This gives us a time frame of when this war happened. It wasn't before the foundation of the world. It wasn't during the days of the Old Testament. It appears to be soon after Jesus conquered Satan on the cross, by rising from the dead and taking away the sting of death. All of this happened, "Behind the Scenes." This cosmic warfare took place, and Satan was defeated.

The result was that Satan was thrown down to earth. In verse 10, he is described as "the accuser of our brothers," because he "accuses them night and day before our God." But our advocate is better than the accuser! "Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea, a great High Priest whose name is "Love," who ever lives and pleads for me." When Satan accuses the brothers, our advocate, Jesus, responds every time, "I died for that sin!"

"My name is graven on His hands; my name is written on His heart; I know that while in heav'n He stands, no tongue can bid me thence depart; no tongue can bid me thence depart. Even the tongue of the accuser cannot cast us away from the love of Christ for us!"

As Martin Luther wrote, And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us, We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, For lo! his doom is sure, One little word shall fell him. The word is the testimony of our faith in Christ. Look at verse 11.

Revelation 12:11

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.

The picture of verse 11 is the picture of persecution and martyrdom! This is what the early church was facing. For the first 250 years of the church, she faced tremendous persecution! Many faithful followers of Jesus lost their lives.

You know that colosseum in Rome? They didn't watch football games there! They watched Christians burn at the stake. They watched Christians being fed to the lions because they refused to worship the emperor, and because they refused to renounce Jesus! They loved their Savior, rather than their lives.

Revelation 12:11

...they loved not their lives even unto death.

Their testimony was their victory!

Revelation 12:11

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.

It didn't look like victory any more than the dying of Jesus on the cross looked like victory. But this is how God wages war against the devil. The same way that Jesus did, by entrusting ourselves to the Lord.

Peter wrote to a persecuted people. Listen to his advice: "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creature while doing good" (1 Peter 4:19). Peter gave this advice because this is what Jesus did on the cross. "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23).

Death and destruction may come to us in this world. Certainly it comes by human hands, yet behind the scenes, it is the devil and his demons with whom we wage war!

Again, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). What is going to help you in this unseen fight is to realize that Satan is a defeated foe! Michael and his angels have defeated Satan and his angels!

Revelation 12:12

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!"

Satan is like a prisoner on death row. He has nothing to lose. He will do all his can against the brothers. But don't fear, because he is defeated and his time is short! In verse 13, we see the focus turning to earth.

3. The War on Earth (verses 13-17)

Revelation 12:13

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.

Again, it makes no sense that this is simply Mary. Rather, the woman is representative of the people of God. Satan pursues us. As Peter says, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). This is Satan's posture today. He is a roaring lion. He is seeking to devour us!

Peter's counsel is this: "Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world" (1 Peter 5:9). This is the comfort that those who received this letter would have. Suffering for Jesus is to be expected, and others are experiencing it. They are overcoming!

So, press on and overcome and conquer through Jesus. He will give you the strength! Look at the strength given to the woman:

Revelation 12:14

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.

This is an allusion to Israel in their time of trouble. "While Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:3-4). God sustained them through the trial of the plagues.

This is the promise of Isaiah 40:30-31. "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." God will sustain us in all of our weaknesses! We simply need to trust him.

We see in verse 15 another testimony of deliverance.

Revelation 12:15-16-17

The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 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. 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.

Who is Satan after? He is after those who obey the Lord. Those who submit themselves and obey and follow after him. Those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus. The dragon standing by the sand of the sea is an illusion to chapter 13, which we will see soon.

But all of this spiritual warfare is happening behind the scenes. When you're at your most vulnerable time, just like a woman giving birth, remember that God will come. God will help and protect. He protected Jesus. Even if it means their death, God protects people. He is still obtaining the ultimate victory as he works behind the scenes.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 15, 2023 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.
