

Revelation 12 War in Heaven

Tim Anderson 23/08/20

I wonder if you've read this fairy tale.
There's a kingdom with a king and a queen.
And it's a happy kingdom.
The subjects of the kingdom love their liege.
But there's a problem.
The good king and his lovely wife have struggled to fall pregnant.
They have no heir.
The closest living relative is an evil nephew,
and he will assume the throne should they be unable to have children.
So there is much rejoicing when the queen falls pregnant.
But the day he is born,
the evil usurper makes an attempt on the baby's life.
The young prince is snatched away to safety
and taken away to grow in secret.
And when he comes of age,
he returns to the kingdom and puts the evil usurper to death.

Revelation 12 is a variation on that theme.
There's a pregnant woman who represents the people of God.
Not just the church.
Not just Old Testament Israel.
But all God's people wherever they find themselves in time.
She has a crown of 12 stars, one for each tribe of Israel,
one for each apostle –
so she represents all of God's people.
And the baby she is about to bear is the Lord Jesus.
The Lord Jesus,
the prince of God's kingdom,
was born into God's people,
and his birth spelt doom for the evil usurper, the devil.

The devil is represented by the red dragon.

He has seven heads with seven crowns and ten horns.
Seven heads with seven crowns: the ruler of the earth.
Ten horns: the complete power of evil.
The dragon tries to eat the baby the moment he is born.
This represents the efforts the devil made
to have Jesus killed by king Herod.
Remember the story of Herod
having all the children in Bethlehem under the age of two killed?
Remember how Joseph was warned in a dream
and took his family to Egypt in the nick of time?
But God protected Jesus,
and Jesus did the mission that his Father gave him to do.
And when he had finished,
God snatched him up to his throne.
That represents the ascension of Jesus to heaven
at the end of his earthly ministry.

Then the woman fled into the desert
where God would take care of her for 1260 days.
When the devil recognises that because of Jesus death and resurrection,
he has been beaten,
he is madder than a cut snake.
He can't wage war on Jesus any more,
so he takes out his frustrations on God's people.
God knows that his people are in danger.
So he prepares a place of refuge for them in the desert.
This represents the way that God spiritually protects his church.
The devil will try every trick in the book to deceive us,
to accuse us, to tempt us.
But God will protect us.
The protection lasts for 1260 days.
Which I'm guessing sounds like a funny length of time.
If you make the rough approximation that there are 30 days in a month,
then 1260 days is three and a half years.
Why is three and a half years a significant length of time?

Three and a half is half of seven.
And seven is a number of completeness.
If we were protected for seven years,
that would be forever.
But we are protected for three and a half years,
which means a strictly limited period of time.
God will protect us for a strictly limited period of time.
Why would God protect us only for a limited period of time?
It's not because he would abandon us to the devils attacks after that.
It's because after that limited period of time,
the devil will be finally defeated.
God won't need to protect us any more
because there will be nothing to protect us from.
God's victory will be complete.

That is the picture of what is happening on earth.
A few times in the Scriptures,
we are told that there are events in heaven
that are a response to events on earth.
After telling his followers the story of the lost sheep,
Jesus tells them that there is more rejoicing among the angels in heaven
over one sinner who repents,
than over 99 righteous people who don't need to repent.
So if a sinner repents on earth,
there is rejoicing in heaven.
The action on earth causes an action in heaven.

Jesus death and resurrection happened on earth.
But the event on earth caused an event in heaven.
War broke out.
Those angels loyal to God,
headed by Michael,
fought against Satan and those angels loyal to Satan.
And Michael won.
Satan lost.

The outcome was a foregone conclusion.
Jesus' victory on the cross had already made the outcome sure.
The devil and his angels were booted out of heaven.
They were forced to take up residence on the earth.
The devil is forced to turn his attention from deceiving angels
to focus entirely on deceiving human beings.
Back in verse 4,
where it says
that the dragon's tail swept one third of the stars from the sky,
and flung them to the earth,
it probably refers to angels
whom the devil deceived into turning from God to follow him.
But now, the devil and his angels are removed from heaven.

What are the implications of this for us?
Picture yourself as part of a struggling and tiny church
seeking to live faithfully in a hostile culture.
That was the situation of the church when John saw his vision.
And increasingly today, that is our experience too.
Once we held a privileged position in our society.
We were the arbiters of right and wrong –
the moral compass of the nation.
But we sit increasingly on the fringes.
What can we take from the vision?

I think there's great comfort in the three and a half years.
The time of our enduring evil is limited.
God has set the limit and then he will bring us home.
Often when we look around,
it seems like the contest between good and evil is one sided.
Those who do evil in the world seem numerous and powerful.
Those who do good seem few and weak.
It can be quite depressing to watch the news
or read the newspaper
because the bad news overwhelms the good news.

Greedy pharmaceutical companies making excessive profits,
while actively spreading misinformation about cheap remedies.
Pornography companies doing their bit
to assist with managing the coronavirus pandemic
by offering their products for free while everyone is locked down.
Sailors who aren't able to leave their ships
being forced to work for free when their contracts run out.
The devil is depressingly active in the world.
But he's even happier attacking the church from the inside.
He will poison the relationships between members of congregations.
He will divide ministers from congregations.
He will stir up division between denominations.
He will try to tear apart marriages of church leaders.
I found out this week
that a minister I studied with at Ridley recently separated from his wife.
He will make us greedy or grandiose.
It's not just Donald Trump
who wants to build a monument to himself on Mt Rushmore.
Church leaders, congregations: both have been known
to build themselves monuments to their own importance.

Does it seem like the devil is winning?
Only for three and half years.
Then his time is up.
His time is strictly limited.
You sit down for a 3 hour exam.
You write what you can in that three hours.
Then it's pens down.
Anything you haven't got down in that time,
It's too late.
Time is up.
The day will come when Jesus returns
and then the devil's time is up.
There will be no more evil.

When you look at the world,
the contest between good and evil seems one sided.
It's true.
It is one sided.
Just not the way you might think.
The outcome is certain.
Good will triumph.
When Jesus rose from the dead,
the great dragon was hurled down out of heaven.
His fate was sealed.
Everything you see that's evil –
it's a temporary aberration.
We don't want to gloss over evil –
pretend that it doesn't matter.
But we can be encouraged that it is destined to end.

When I go for a run,
sometimes my body is telling me it can't go any further.
I feel like I'm going to have to stop.
But when I see the finishing line,
suddenly all the feelings of tiredness drop away.
I can run to the end.
This vision is giving us a view of the finishing line.
When the evil in the world presses in on us,
and we feel like we will have to stop,
this vision helps us to go on
because we know that the end is in sight.

John hears the voice in heaven cry out,
“Now have come the salvation
and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.
For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.”

You might think that the salvation, power and kingdom of God might be revealed when Jesus returns.

But No!

It's now.

When Jesus' death and resurrection have hurled the devil down to the earth.

God's victory is now.

His salvation is already here.

Jesus already rules.

And what of us?

Are we ruling now?

Do we have victory?

The voice from heaven says,

“God's people overcame the devil 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.”

So on one hand we do have victory.

We have overcome the devil.

In two ways.

By the blood of Jesus.

That is, by placing our faith in Jesus' death in our place, we have put the devil out of a job.

His job is to accuse people before God day and night.

See it there in verse 10.

But he can't accuse God's people.

The blood of Jesus has paid the price for our sin.

There's nothing left to accuse us for.

The devil has been beaten.

He's out of a job.

The second way we've overcome him is by the word of our testimony.

It's easy to say,
I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins.
But if someone were to say to you,
"Deny Jesus or you will be sent to the lions den!"
Would you still confess Christ?
That was the situation for many Christians in John's day.
That is the situation for many Christians today also.
Just substitute the end of a gun for the lions den.
And that is the signal of the devil's defeat.
When Christian people are prepared to face death
rather than deny their Lord,
then the devil has no more shots in his locker.
What else can he threaten them with?
Often we get resentful of how much other people control our lives.
Lots of people are resentful
about having to wear masks or not travel more than 5 kms.
Resentful about not being able to open their businesses.
Well of course we abide by the rules
because Christians are called to respect our civic leaders.
But if they ask us to do something that dishonours Jesus,
then of course we are perfectly free.
There is nothing they can do to us.
Nothing they can threaten us with.
The worst they can do is send you to eternal paradise.
That's not such a bad option.
And so the Christian has overcome the devil,
because the devil has nothing to threaten us with.
We do have victory.
Though it's a paradoxical victory –
we do not love our lives so much as to shrink from death.

Even though we have won the victory.
The devil has lost.
He's been thrown down from heaven.
That doesn't mean he's going pack his bags and give up.

v12. "He is filled with fury".

When he knows that he's lost the battle,
then he just aims to do as much harm as he can in the time he's got left.

12:13 "When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth,
he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child."

That is, the devil goes after the people of God.

The woman is the people of God.

The male child is Jesus.

Jesus has died and risen again.

He's escaped the devil and gone back to heaven.

The devil can't touch him there.

So he goes after us.

But what happens to us?

12:14 "The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle,
so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness."

This is not the first time God has protected his people
by carrying them away from danger on eagles' wings.

After the Exodus, God said to his people, Ex 19:4

"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt,
and carried you on eagles wings and brought you to myself."

The devil was attacking the people of God
through the harsh persecution of Pharaoh.

But God carried them away to a place of refuge as on eagles wings.

And the promise of Revelation 12 is that same care
that God had for the people of Israel will be applied to us.

We will be borne as on eagles' wings

to be protected from the assaults of the devil.

Let me encourage you to embrace your victory over the evil one.

Remember that the devil can't accuse you before the throne of God.

Whatever makes you ashamed

has been overcome by the blood of the lamb.

Embrace your victory by not fearing death.

Not fearing death makes you free.
The devil has nothing he can threaten you with.
You are free to be exactly the person God made you to be.
And if the devil is filled with fury,
throwing everything he's got at you.
And remember that his time is short.
Three and a half years –
a time, times and half a time,
1260 days,
and his time is up.
The finishing line is in sight.
And then evil will be no more.