

TRIUMPH BY THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

Revelation 12:1-13:18

Key Verse: 12:11

“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.”

These days we hear the word “war” in regards to fighting against the coronavirus and economic downturn. However, there is a more serious war that we do not hear much about: spiritual war against the forces of evil. When we are unaware of spiritual warfare, our concerns are bound to the physical realm. I heard that some people are sorry that they cannot buy their favorite kind of latte. But at this time of crisis, we should think about why it happened and what our real battle is. For this, the study of Revelation is of tremendous value. It is life-giving. It gives us true hope and warning.

Thus far, in 6:1-11:19, we have studied the first two cycles of God’s judgments as revealed by the seven seals and the seven trumpets. In chapters 15-16, a third cycle of judgments takes place as seven bowls of God’s wrath are poured out. Chapters 12-14 are a kind of backstory which exposes the deep root of the spiritual conflict between God’s people and this world. The key symbolic characters are a woman, a male child, a dragon, a first beast, a second beast, and the Lamb and the 144,000. Unlike the seven seals and seven trumpets, the visions in this passage are not numbered. Rather, symbolic characters appear who represent forces on both sides of the cosmic spiritual war.¹ Like the preceding two cycles, this passage ends with a vision of the Second Coming of Christ.

As there is a visible world, there is also an invisible world. Anyone can observe the phenomenon of the visible world and come to an objective understanding about what is there. The scientific method works very well in the visible world to explain how things happen. But science cannot explain where this visible world came from, or why many things happen. To human

¹ Poythress, Vern S., *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2000), p 133.

beings, “why” has greater impact on our lives than “how.” The “why” question is answered by one’s worldview--our most deeply rooted beliefs about reality. Revelation tells us what worldview to have as Christians. It is to see that at the root of all the troubles and conflicts in the world there is Satan. Our real enemy is not other people or nations, but Satan who is working behind the scenes. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against...the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” This passage can help us grasp the invisible spiritual reality behind the visible world.

Chapter 12 explains that Satan is the source of persecution of God’s people, and it tells how he was hurled into the world. Chapter 13 portrays how Satan works through beasts to persecute God’s people. While chapter 12 is about war in heaven, chapter 13 is about war on earth.

First, war in heaven (12:1-12). Verses 1-12 tell us the backstory of the spiritual conflict as it took place in heaven. A great sign appeared: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head (1). This reminds us of Joseph’s dream in Genesis (Gen 37:9). This woman is symbolic of God’s chosen people, first Israel of the Old Testament, and also the church--the new covenant community. She cried out in pain as she was about to give birth (2). This symbolizes Israel’s long-suffering patience as they yearned for the coming of the Messiah.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads (3). The dragon’s seven heads and ten horns represent the completeness of his oppressive power and its worldwide effect. The crowns represent the devil’s false claims of universal authority, which is in opposition to Christ. This dragon was so powerful that with his tail he flung a third of the stars to the earth (4a). He stood in front of the woman, ready to devour her child the moment he was born (4b). The woman seemed too weak and vulnerable to resist the dragon’s attack. But God protected the woman and child. Finally, she gave birth to a son. In this way, God sent his Son, born of a woman (Gal 4:4). This child “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter” (5a; Ps 2:7-9). To be the ruler of the nations, Christ suffered and died on a cross for our sins. It seemed that Satan had won. However, an unexpected thing happened. The child was snatched up to God and to his throne (5b). This means that Christ rose from the dead

and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God. He became the Sovereign Ruler. He will come again as the Judge. Until then, what happens to the church? Verse 6 says 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. This means that Satan tries to destroy the church in many ways. But God protects his church until Jesus comes again.

Verses 7-9 tell us who the dragon is, why he was hurled down to the earth, and what he is doing. Verse 7 begins, "Then war broke out in heaven." Revelation does not explain why this war broke out. But we can find some clues in other Bible passages, such as Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:11-19 and Jude 6. Satan was a guardian cherub, an angelic being, created by God. He was adorned with beauty and wisdom to serve the Creator God. However, he admired himself, thinking that all of his privileges and blessings came by his own power. Then he became proud and said, "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isa 14:14). His proud heart caused his downfall. 1 Peter 5:5b says, "God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble." Satan was cast out by God together with the angels who had followed him. They became God's enemies. Michael and his angels fought against these enemies (7). These enemies were not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven (8). 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 (9).

The dragon has several names. One of them is "ancient serpent," which identifies him as the serpent in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:1). He disguised himself as a friend, planted doubt about God's word, inflamed the first humans with pride, and led them to their downfall. He used deception to carry out murder. Another of his names is "diabolos" in Greek, translated "devil," which means "slanderer," "defamer," "false accuser." Still another name is "Satan" which originated in Hebrew, and means "adversary." He wants to oppose God, leading the whole world astray by deception so that they may follow him. He tries to confuse the church with heresies, as he did in John's time, through false teachers at Pergamum and Thyatira (2:14-16,20). Jesus called him, "a liar and the father of lies" (Jn 8:44).

When Satan and his followers were hurled to the earth, there was a great celebration in heaven. A loud voice said: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah” (10a). When Satan was cast out, it marked a decisive victory. Now salvation has come as power and authority are restored to the Messiah. When Jesus suffered, died and rose again, Satan’s head was crushed. He will never recover; only a vestige of power remains for a short time. We can compare this to D-Day in World War II. When Allied forces took the beaches at Normandy, it was the decisive battle which gave assurance of victory. But they still had to defeat the vestige of Nazi power that remained in Europe before achieving the final victory, that is called V-Day. Spiritually speaking, V-Day comes when Jesus comes again.

Verse 10b tells us why God’s people rejoiced: “For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” They emphasize that Satan was the accuser. His full time job is to accuse people, and he works day and night without any vacation. He never fails in finding the weaknesses and sins of God’s people and prosecutes them relentlessly before God. God is holy and never condones sin. So he cannot ignore the accusations, but must condemn sinners to death. No one can stand against Satan’s accusations. Condemnation by others is hard to bear. Self-condemnation is more unbearable, causing us to lose sleep and feel torment day and night. Satan’s accusations against believers might be as follows: 1) Your sin is too terrible--you are unforgivable; 2) You failed again in your sin--give up struggling; 3) Your words and deeds are not mature--you don’t deserve to be in Jesus’ fellowship; 4) Your ongoing doubt makes God angry--God will not love you; 5) Your ministry has been unfruitful--you are useless; 6) Your parenting has failed--you are a loser. How can we be free from Satan’s accusations? By doing good work? By torturing ourselves? By trying to forget about it? No matter what we try, it does not work. But there is a way.

Let’s read verse 11: “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.” First of all, we triumph over Satan by the blood of the Lamb. Satan’s purpose is to destroy sinners by accusing us of our sins, which deserve the death penalty. But if someone pays the price for us, we can be released from the death sentence and eternal condemnation. Who can pay

this price for us? If a good and upright person is willing to die for us, salvation may be possible. The problem is that no one is righteous, not even one (Ro 3:10). All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and must die for their sins (Ro 3:23; 6:23). No one has credit to share with another. Only Jesus, the sinless Son of God, can pay the price of our sins. Jesus willingly gave his life as a ransom for us. Jesus became the Lamb of God who was slain for the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). His blood has power to nullify all of Satan's accusations.

How can we be sure of this? It would not be possible to prove that he died for our sins if Jesus was not raised from the dead. But through Jesus' resurrection, God proved that he is living and almighty, and his promises are trustworthy. Romans 4:26 says, "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1). Apostle Paul proclaimed: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died--more than that, who was raised to life--is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Ro 8:33-34). So we have no right to condemn others, or even ourselves. Jesus took all the condemnation in our places. This is great news. Thank you, Jesus!

Secondly, we triumph over Satan by the word of our testimony. Though Jesus paid the full price of our sins by shedding his blood, if we do not respond with faith it is not effective for us. If someone offers us a great gift, but we refuse to accept it, we cannot enjoy the benefit of the gift. This gift is not a small gift; it is the gift of eternal life, free from condemnation. When we respond with faith, we receive this gift free of charge. The evidence of faith is that we testify to Jesus as our Savior and Lord in the midst of trials and persecution. Jesus' gift is so precious that we are willing to do anything for him, even give our lives as his witnesses. We no longer fear death, but we become more than conquerors as we overcome the power of death. 1 John 5:5 says, "Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." This is the true triumph. Jesus' great victory causes heaven and all who dwell in it to rejoice (12a). But the devil's expulsion from heaven brings woe to the earth and the sea. Satan is filled with fury because he knows his time is short (12b). Now he focuses all his power to make war on earth until Christ returns in power and great glory.

Second, war on earth (12:13-13:18). In 12:13-17 we find images that tell the story of conflict between Satan and God's people on earth. When the dragon was hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman (13). This means that having failed to destroy Christ, Satan tried to destroy the church. But God protected his church. As he carried his people Israel on eagle's wings in the wilderness, so he carried his church to safety and cared for and provided for her (14). God would strengthen and nourish the church for a time, times and half a time. Referring to Daniel 7:25, this measure of time tells us that the saints' suffering will be brief and the persecutors' power will end. However, the serpent did not give up. He spewed water like a river from his mouth to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent (15). This river symbolizes false teachings and lies devised by Satan to try to make the church stumble. Throughout history false teachings and lies have flowed through educators, orators, politicians, religious leaders, and the like via books and other media. They have tried to destroy the church by any means. But it did not work. As a flood swallowed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea, so God causes the devil's lies and false teachings to be swallowed up and disappear (16). The French philosopher Voltaire wrote against Christianity and the Bible, and predicted in 1776, "One hundred years from my day, there will not be a Bible on earth except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity-seeker." Yet, one hundred years after his death the French Bible Society set up headquarters in Voltaire's old home in Paris. The same printing press Voltaire used to attack Christianity was used to print Bibles. The Bible is still the number one bestseller. Having failed to destroy the Messiah and his mother, the frustrated dragon makes war on the rest of her offspring--that is the church down through the ages (17).

Chapter 13 reveals how Satan persecutes those who keep God's commands and hold fast to the testimony about Jesus. He uses two beasts. The first beast may represent powerful nations. The second beast may refer to false religions. These beasts work together to force the world to worship Satan. The first beast comes out of the sea. It has ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name (1). It resembled a leopard, but had feet like a bear and the mouth of a lion (2a). Its monstrous mixture of features, like an amalgamation of the beasts in the book of Daniel, shows its fierceness and repulsiveness (Dan 7:1-8; 17-27). This beast has power, a throne and great authority that came from the dragon (2b). This

beast symbolizes a powerful empire which will oppose God and persecute his people. In verse 3, one of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but was healed. This supernatural healing counterfeits Jesus' death and resurrection. It symbolizes the fall and rise of demonized regimes or world systems, such as fascism, communism, and any other which is opposed to God and oppresses his people. Especially in the time of John, the Roman Empire seemed to survive all threats, implying that it was eternal and attracted more worship than ever. The whole world was fascinated, and worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?" (4) Actually, they were deceived by Satan, whose purpose was to make the whole world worship him.

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for 42 months (5). The beast's counterfeit character comes out clearly in its blasphemies against God, his name, his dwelling place, and those who live in heaven. Its power is considerable, but limited. It was given power to wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them (7a). This is happening even now. At the beginning of 2020, China struck a "final blow to religious liberty" with new administrative measures that require total submission to the Chinese Communist Party.² It made an example of Wuhan by destroying the church. Then the coronavirus outbreak started, beginning in Wuhan, China. The beast aspires to universal control of an alliance of people from every tribe, language and nation (7b). The beast compels worship from all inhabitants of the earth (8a). At that time, no one can be neutral. Everyone will be allied either to Christ or to the beast. People say that there are many ways to the truth, and criticize Christians who believe that Jesus is the only way. They call us narrow- minded, exclusive trouble-makers. But spiritually speaking, there are only two ways: worshiping God or worshiping Satan. Those who worship God have their names written in the Lamb's book of life. Some will be killed for not worshiping the beast. Those who worship Satan may survive for a little while, but they will be eternally condemned because their names are not written in the Lamb's book of life (8b). John added the phrase, "the Lamb who was slain before the creation of the world." This contrasts the Lamb's final victory through his death with the beast's oppressive, temporal power to compel worship. The Lamb protects God's people from Satan's

² <https://www.foxnews.com/world/china-imposes-harsh-new-rules-governing-religious-groups-in-2020>

deception and spiritual death and gives them assurance of victory, even in those horrible circumstances. Verses 9-10 exhort believers who may go into captivity or be killed. We are called to patient endurance and faithfulness which means never yielding in our faith in Jesus. In the time of great conflict and crisis, we Christians should be ready to testify about Jesus at the risk of our lives.

Verses 11-18 tell us about a second beast, which is called the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). It functioned as a propagandist for the first beast. This second beast came out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon (11). As the first beast is a counterfeit of Christ, this beast is a counterfeit of the Holy Spirit. It received authority from the first beast and promotes worship of the first beast (12). It is able to perform great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people (13). In this way it deceived people. This deception is a very effective weapon--more powerful than atomic bombs. Then it compelled them to set up an image in honor of the first beast (14). It energizes the beast and puts to death anyone who refused to worship the image of the beast (15). It forces people regardless of any human distinctive to put a mark on their right hands or their foreheads (16-17). This mark is the name of the beast or its number: 666 (18b). It denotes the beast's ownership and their allegiance. It is also a counterfeit to God's seal, the Holy Spirit, which indicates God's ownership and his people's willing loyalty and faithfulness to him. There have been many attempts to interpret the mark of the beast and the number. This easily distracts from the main point of this passage. The number 666 appears only here in the Bible. This suggests that triple 6's are intended as a contrast with the divine 7's throughout the book and signify incompleteness, imperfection and falling short. Revelation does not call for cleverness, but for spiritual insight and discernment (18a).

In this passage we have seen spiritual warfare. The main cause of all evils and trouble in the world is Satan. Though he was decisively defeated by Christ, he is still very powerful. He spreads lies and accuses God's people. But God already gave us victory. We triumph by the blood of the Lamb. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus, but only freedom, peace and victory. With a sense of victory, let's fight the good fight of faith and testify about Jesus in this time of trial.