

Lesson 29

We looked last week at Chapter 12, and we talked about the war in heaven in verse 7, the casting out of Satan in verse 9, and the casting down of Satan in verse 10. These are difficult verses, but one thing is very clear — Satan tried to do something but failed.

What was Satan trying to do? I think the simplest answer is the best answer — Satan was trying to do what he always tries to do: corrupt the people of God and cause them to fall. Satan was trying to destroy the church, the promised eternal kingdom that had just been established a few decades earlier. And what was Satan's weapon? Just the most powerful earthly kingdom the world had ever known being run by blood-thirsty rulers who thought they were themselves gods!

The casting out of Satan in verses 9-10 shows us that Satan was not successful. In fact, verse 8 tells us that Satan prevailed not in what he was trying to do. Why? Why did Satan fail? Many reasons, but one is that his target proved to be stronger than he thought, and his weapon proved to be weaker than he thought. The early Christians remained faithful in the face of terrible persecutions, and Satan's terrible weapon of Rome proved ineffective in destroying the eternal kingdom.

So what is the casting down of Satan in verses 9-10? It is not the literal fall of Satan because that had happened much earlier. And it is not the literal defeat of Satan by Christ because that happened at the cross. The casting down in verses 9-10 is happening after the ascension in verse 5. The casting down in verses 9-10 is not the movement of Satan from one *place* to another, but rather the movement of Satan from one *state of mind* to another. Satan thought he was going to win, but as verse 8 tells us, he prevailed not!

What is the message of Chapter 12? Let's turn that question around. What did the church need to hear? What did a new Christian struggling to remain faithful in the face of terrible persecution need to hear? What sort of message did he or she need? A message of comfort and encouragement? Or a message of some remote battle and some remote time that had nothing to do with their present situation? We know that answer to that question!

Yes, this book of Revelation was written for us — but this book was written *first* for them. And you know what? They needed this book's message more

than we do — for which she should be very thankful! We are not suffering the sort of persecution they endured. We do not face the same sort of temptations to walk away from Christ to save their own lives that they faced. If our view of this book has no message of comfort and encouragement for the original suffering audience of this book, then our view is wrong.

But, going back to verse 7, can we really describe the battle against Satan in a Christian's heart as a war in heaven? Two answers to that question.

First, we have discussed why the war is in *heaven*. In this book, all Christians are pictured as already being in heaven even while some of them are still living on the earth, and the Romans are repeatedly described in this book as those who dwell upon the earth. Why? Because that figurative description of the persecuted Christians provided comfort to them and reminded them of where they were literally going if they remained faithful unto death. And if they remained faithful, then their final destination was so certain that God pictured them as already being there!

And is that really a *new* message for the Christian? Didn't Paul describe it in the same way?

Colossians 3:1-3 — *If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God. That beautiful truth is what is shown to us figuratively in this book each time faithful Christians literally living on earth are figuratively described as already being in heaven.

Think for just a moment about what this description of the church says about the false doctrine of once saved, always saved. Calvinists recognize that people struggle to be faithful to Jesus, but they say that the struggle is to determine whether your conversion was genuine. If you fall away, they say that just means you were never really a Christian to begin with. Is that what we see here? Where does the inspired text show these struggling Christians? Already in heaven! They are dead, and their life is hid with Christ in God. Their struggle is to remain faithful, not to prove that their original conversion was genuine. We know it was genuine because of where they are figuratively located in these verses! The church is the body of the saved, and in this book that body

is located in heaven. Those who fall, do just that — they fall away from the body. There are no lost people in heaven.

And didn't we see just such a fall of God's faithful people back in verse 4 — "And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth." I think that verse is confirmation of two things. First, it confirms that faithful people can fall if they do not remain faithful. And second, verse 4 confirms that what we are seeing in this chapter is a personal struggle to resist Satan and remain faithful. Why? Because I am the only person who can keep me from remaining faithful and being saved. If I prove faithless in the end, that will be because of what I did or did not do. I will not be able to blame my condition on anyone else. The fight to remain faithful is an individual fight.

And as for the war in heaven being fought by angels, remember what we saw in Chapters 2 and 3. Each of the seven churches was figuratively described as an angel. I think we are just seeing the same thing here with the individual Christians.

And that's the first reason why the battle in the Christian heart is described here as a war in heaven. What is the second reason?

In 1 Timothy 6:12, Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith. **What did that fight involve for a first century Christian living under Roman persecution?** Let's put ourselves in the position of a new convert living under Nero or Domitian, and ask ourselves if we think that person was in a great spiritual war. The fight of faith — what might that fight have been like for a Christian in the first century?

To begin, this person had a family, had a career, and had social position. He worshipped the Roman gods, he went to the Roman banquets at the false temples, and he offered incense to Caesar, whom he considered a god.

But then something happened. He was walking down the street, and he heard a commotion. Someone was shouting over the crowd. He listened to the message, and how preposterous it seemed at first — who was Christ and him crucified? Why would anyone follow and serve a criminal? And yet the more he listened, the more the message struck home with him. After awhile, he believed the message, and he was baptized into Christ. Now what?

His family? They thought he had gone mad. They tried all they could do to talk him out of this new life. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his own family for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that

Christ must come before his family. Eventually, his parents disowned him, his wife divorced him, and his children walked away from him.

His friends? They also tried to talk him out of this new life. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his friends for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his friends. Eventually his friends all turned away from him. They accused him of being unpatriotic to Rome and to Caesar.

His career? To practice his trade, he had to be a member of the local trade guild, and everyone in the local trade guild was required to burn incense to Caesar once a week and to confess Caesar as their lord. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his job for him?** The night before, he had struggled with what to do. What would he do if he lost his job? In the end, he decided that Christ must come before his job. He was thrown out of the trade guild.

One day there was loud knock on his door. It was the authorities. The trade guild had done more than just expel him; they had reported him to the authorities. He was accused of insulting Caesar, and he was brought before the Magistrate and commanded to deny Christ and confess Caesar as lord. If he did that, he could walk away free. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his freedom for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his own freedom. He was thrown into prison.

At his trial, he was given an opportunity to walk free or face execution — all he had to do was deny Christ. By now he had lost almost everything for his crucified King. **Did Jesus really expect him to give up his life for him?** He struggled with what to do, but in the end he decided that Christ must come before his own life. “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it” (Luke 9:24).

And what happened to him? I’ll let the Roman historian Tacitus answer that question for us: “And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts’ skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night.”

Here’s the question for us — **did that child of God experience a great battle?** Do you think the battle in that Christian’s heart to remain faithful could figuratively be described as a war in heaven fought by the angels against the powers of darkness? Or is that an overstatement of his struggle? It is no overstatement!

At each step he struggled to make the right decision. The temptation was so great to turn his back on Christ — to focus on the seen rather than the unseen — but he remained steadfast to the end. He lost his friends, his family, his job, his freedom, and his life — but he gained Christ! Can anyone say that personal struggle (repeated many times over by many faithful Christians) was not a great war?

Here is a question for anyone who studies this book of Revelation: does your interpretation have a message for that first century martyr? Would your interpretation have given him encouragement to remain faithful? Would it have given him comfort in the face of all that he had lost? Would it give him a promise of victory over his persecutors? Would it give him a blessed assurance that Jesus knows all about his struggles? If not, then that interpretation is wrong.

This book is not about a great cosmic war in heaven divorced from what is happening down here on earth. This book is not about a war in Palestine with 200 million Chinese soldiers and atomic weapons. This book is not about the end of the world. Instead, this book is about our brothers and sisters in Christ who were persecuted by Rome and who died with a prayer on their lips.

The person we just described is, of course, fictional, but we know from the Bible and from secular history that his story was repeated over and over again in the first century. We need to keep those fellow Christians in mind as we study this book. Their persecution and their suffering and their faithfulness must ground us in our interpretation of this book. If we ever leave that ground, then we have gone astray.

Revelation 12:12

12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Who are the people who dwell in the heavens and who are told to rejoice in verse 12? Remember that this book has divided everyone in the world into either one of two groups — those who are on God's side, and those who are

not. And, of course, the book of Revelation is not the only book of the Bible to make that division. Jesus made the same division in Luke 11:23 — “he that is not with me is against me.”

The interesting thing about Revelation is not that it makes this same division, but rather *where* it symbolically depicts those two groups. Those who are on God’s side in this book are pictured as being spiritually *safe* in heaven, even while many of them were physically *unsafe* living on earth under Roman persecution. And those persecuting Romans are repeatedly referred to in this book as those who dwell upon the earth, which is what the very next sentence in verse 12 calls them: “the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea!”

Later in this book, after Rome is figuratively cleared out of the way, we will see the church, *not ascending* into heaven as it will at the end of time, but rather *coming down* out of heaven to live in a world in which Rome is no more.

Revelation 21:2 — And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

So back to our question — who is rejoicing in verse 12? The church is rejoicing in verse 12! And isn’t that exactly who we would expect to be rejoicing in verse 12?

But not everyone is rejoicing in verse 12 — those who dwell on the earth have a woe pronounced against them — why? “For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.”

In Revelation 6:16 we saw the wrath of the Lamb. Here in verse 12, we see the wrath of the devil, but unlike the wrath of the Lamb, Satan’s wrath is not a righteous wrath. And another difference is that Satan is mad at everybody, including his own followers here in verse 12! Even though the Romans are on his side, Satan has no concern for their welfare. Instead, Satan will use them and discard them as he sees fit in his attempts to thwart God’s plans.

But Satan’s schemes are not working, and it certainly can’t be his fault! So Satan blames his minions here in verse 12. Why? Because Rome had failed to accomplish what Satan wanted Rome to accomplish!

Can we point to a specific first century example of Satan’s failure to destroy the church using Rome? Yes, we can point to the Emperor Nero, who was a terrible persecutor of the church. Peter and Paul were martyred under Nero, as were countless other Christians. Satan wanted Nero to destroy the church, but that did not happen because Nero died without having destroyed the

church. And what do you suppose was waiting for Nero when he showed up on Satan's doorstep having failed to accomplish that task?

And what happened to Rome after the death of Nero? Chaos and civil war followed the death of Nero. When Nero came to power in AD 54, there were six other males who traced their heritage back to Augustus or Claudius. These men all died during Nero's reign. Nero's death left a political vacuum that many rushed to occupy.

Initially, the leader of the Spanish rebellion, Galba, was the accepted replacement. But the sole basis of his regime was his soldiers' support, and when they turned against him in January AD 69, he was murdered. Nero's friend Otho attempted to take Galba's place, but he was immediately challenged by the legions on the Rhine, who wanted their commander, Vitellius, installed as emperor. The German legions invaded Italy and toppled Otho in April. In Palestine, the war against Jewish rebels was coming to an end, and the troops there proclaimed their general, Vespasian, as emperor. Another invasion of Italy followed, Vitellius was removed, and Vespasian became emperor in December 69, thus becoming the fourth Roman emperor in twelve months. This chaos is a result of the wrath of Satan directed against the Romans in verse 12.

Revelation 12:12 — *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

That verse gives us another reason for Satan's wrath — Satan knows that his time is short. What does that mean?

The first thing it means is that the time frame for this book is still very firmly in place. We saw that time frame in the opening verse of the book, and we will see it again in the closing verses of the book. Here we see it in the middle of the book. If we are ever tempted to toss our time frame out the window, we need to remember just how often we are being reminded of that time frame all throughout the book. That time frame is our rudder; let's not toss it overboard!

The second thing the short time in verse 12 tells us is that Satan is frustrated. Why? Because Satan is having trouble destroying the church, and that failure is very frustrating in view of the incredibly powerful weapon Satan is wielding — the mighty Roman empire. From Satan's perspective, he is having trouble killing an ant with a bazooka! But things are not what they seem! Even to

Satan! And Satan knows that his opportunity to use Rome as a weapon is coming to an end. Satan knows that his opportunity to attack the church through Rome will not last forever. That door is closing, and that is why Satan is filled with wrath and frustration in verse 12.

Revelation 12:13-17

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Satan's wrath was directed against his *own* people in verse 12, but they are not the only ones who received that wrath. Verse 13 tells us that Satan's wrath is once again directed at the woman, who we know (after the birth and ascension of her child) represents the church. What we see in verse 13 is a **renewed** persecution of the church. (More on that in just a moment.)

In verse 14, the woman is given wings with which to escape the pursuing dragon by flying into the wilderness. We know what these wings symbolize

— they show the church being protected and preserved by God. Wings are often used in the Bible to symbolize God's protection:

***Exodus 19:4** — Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.*

***Deuteronomy 32:11-12** — As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the Lord alone did lead him.*

***Psalms 36:7** — How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.*

***Isaiah 40:31** — But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*

This time in the wilderness lasts three and a half years (a time, and times, and half a time). And, as with the symbol of the wings, we also know what this symbol means. It is a **broken seven**, which is the most either Satan or Rome can bring against the church. God rains sevens down on Rome; Rome can bring only broken sevens against the church. This period of flight into the wilderness will be temporary — that is what the symbol of the broken seven means.

What happens next? In verse 15, the serpent or dragon attacks the woman with a **flood**. But in verse 16, the **earth** helps the woman by swallowing up the flood. What does that mean?

As with so many of the images in this book, this image takes us back to the exodus from Egypt. While the people of God were escaping the great dragon of Egypt (Ezekiel 29:3), God held back the water to allow his people to cross the Red Sea on dry ground, and then he led them through the wilderness.

***Psalms 106:9** — He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness.*

Here we again see a flood threatening God's people, but once again that flood turns out to be an empty threat. God protects his people!

What sort of flood had Satan unleashed on God's people?

- He had unleashed a flood of delusion and deception.
- He had unleashed a flood of false religion.
- He had unleashed a flood of idolatry.
- He had unleashed a flood of false charges.
- He had unleashed a flood of false philosophies.
- He had unleashed a flood of immorality.
- He had unleashed a flood of temptations to compromise.
- He had unleashed a flood of perversion.

Satan may not have had much luck with this flood in verse 15, but that has not kept him from trying again and again. We still see these same Satanic floods today.

What does it mean that the **earth** swallowed up the flood waters? Isn't the earth in the enemy's camp? **Why is the earth helping the woman?**

First, we should note that the concept of water being absorbed by the sands of an arid wilderness would have been familiar to John's initial readers. The rivers that flow eastward from the Lebanon mountains disappear into the sands of the eastern desert. We recall that Job accused his friends in Job 6:15-20 of being like a deceitful brook that vanishes away — "when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place."

But is that all that is involved here, or is there a **symbolic** meaning behind this flood being swallowed up by the **earth**? Is there some sense in which the earth did come to the rescue of the woman? Hailey says yes:

In the same way the earth, that is, the unregenerated earthlings, helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing up the lies of the dragon. In doing this the earth established a clear distinction between the world, satiated with its false religions and philosophical teachings, on the one hand, and the church, clothed with truth and righteousness, on the other. From the viewpoint of Satan and the world, the earth's help was incidental and unintentional: but from the viewpoint of the church, it was providential. As long as the world absorbs the river of Satan's lies, and the church drinks from the fountain of divine

truth, the separation between the two will remain clear and distinct. But when the woman begins to compromise with Satan and his lies, becoming submerged in his river of falsehood, tragedy follows.

The church is distinctive. We are different. We stand out and stand apart. The most common attack on the church from **within** is a call for the church to lose its distinctiveness — to just blend in with the rest of the religious world. They use instruments in worship; why don't we just blend in? They disregard what the Bible says about male leadership in the church; why don't we just blend in? And we could go on and on, but we must never heed those calls to compromise. We must never let the church lose its distinctiveness. Perhaps that is how the earth helps the church — by highlighting the difference between the two! Was that perhaps what Paul told us about?

1 Corinthians 11:19 — For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Perhaps we should be thankful when the earth swallows that flood of falsehood. Why? Because it helps those who are searching to locate the Lord's church in a sea of confusion and falsehood. It makes us stand out even more when we are the only people who don't swallow Satan's flood. And perhaps the first place to start in not swallowing Satan's flood is to turn off the **spigot** in our own homes. And what is Satan's spigot? It can be the TV or the Internet if we don't watch we see and hear.

Yes, the earth helped the woman. And that means that Rome was turned on itself as it both helped the church and persecuted the church. In that sense, we have two Romes. We will see that very thing again later in this book, and Daniel told us about it six hundred years before Revelation was written when he told us that Rome would have feet of iron and feet of clay.

Remember the sequence of events here. We started off with the dragon on earth trying to devour the child. We then moved to heaven, where Satan was defeated and cast out. We now see Satan back on earth again and being defeated again — and the earth is helping to defeat him! What is the message? The message is that God can defeat Satan anywhere he happens to be. God can defeat Satan on God's turf in heaven or God can defeat Satan on Satan's turf on earth.

What happens next? In verse 17, the dragon is angry with the woman and wages war “with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” If the woman is the church, then who are the remnant of her seed? They are also the church, but I think that they are the part of the church that remains physically alive on earth suffering under the Roman persecution. Why?

First, we know they are faithful Christians — verse 17 tells us that they keep God’s commandments and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. But second, we also know that the woman represents the church for the many reasons we have discussed so far in this chapter.

With both the woman and the remnant of her seed being the church, there are really only two identifications that are possible. One is that the woman represent Jewish Christians, and the remnant of her seed represents Gentile Christians. About the only thing going for that view is that prior to the birth of her child, the woman represented faithful Jews under the old covenant. But other than that, there is no particular reason for us to see different symbols for Jewish and Gentile Christians at this point in the text.

The only other identification that is possible is that the woman in verse 17 represents those Christians who have gone to their reward, and the remnant of her seed represents those suffering Christians who remain alive under the Roman lash. That view fits the context very well. Satan is angry with the woman in verse 17, but the suggestion of verse 17 is that the woman is out of Satan’s reach. That is why Satan attacks the remnant of her seed instead.

If that view is correct, then the woman in Chapter 12 symbolizes three things at various points in the chapter. First, she is the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Second, she is the faithful people of God under the new covenant. And third, she is the faithful people of God under the new covenant who have died and who are now with Christ.

We will find more support for this view in the next chapter, which will provide more details of the attack that is mentioned here in verse 17. Chapter 13 will introduce us to two of the weapons that Satan will use in his battle against the church — a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth. As we will see, these beasts represent Rome, but they do so from different perspectives. Just as we see the church from many different perspectives in this book, so do we see Rome from many perspectives.

Please look at the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com. What we see here in Chapter 12 is Satan's defeat as to his attack against the church using the mighty Roman empire as a weapon. But can we be more specific than that? I think we can.

What we see here in Chapter 12 are **two** periods of persecution. The first period is shown in verses 6-9, with the woman fleeing into the wilderness and the war in heaven. That first period ends with Satan being cast out into the earth at the end of verse 9. The victory of the church over Rome with regard to that first period of persecution is described in verses 10-11.

But that first period of persecution is followed by a second period of persecution in verses 12-17. The devil, after being cast down, knows that his time is short, so he again persecutes the woman in verse 13, and she again flees into the wilderness in verse 14. And Satan once again wages war in verses 15-17.

Why do we see everything **twice**? Wait! Notice the word "twice"! We have been on the lookout for uses of the number two, and here we see it. Chapter 12 describes the same basic sequence of events **twice** — why? What is that two-fold repetition depicting?

Remember what we have said about the number two so far in our study of this book. It usually represents something about Rome — Romulus and Remus (the twins raised by a beast), the military might and false religion of Rome, feet of iron and feet of clay, Greek culture and Roman might — and one other example that we have mentioned: Nero and Domitian, the evil "twins" of the two evil Roman dynasties of the first century. When each died, his dynasty died with him. Nero was the last emperor of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and Domitian was the last emperor of the Flavian dynasty.

Were there two periods of persecution involving Nero and Domitian? Yes. In fact, Tertullian called Domitian "a limb of the bloody Nero," and Eusebius said that Domitian was "the second that raised a persecution against us." A rumor spread during the reign of Domitian was that Domitian was Nero raised from the dead, the so-called Nero Redivivus. Later we will discuss why Domitian is represented by the number 8 in this book, and we will see it is because 8 is the number of renewal, which in this case points to Domitian's renewed persecution of the church.

So with those thoughts in mind, please look at the timeline for Chapter 12 shown on the handout available at www.ThyWordIsTruth.com.

The first period of persecution in verses 6-9, with the woman fleeing into the wilderness and the war in heaven, corresponds to the persecution of the church under the Emperor Nero (which had already occurred by the time this book was written) and the church's fight to remain faithful to Jesus.

The casting down of Satan at the end of verse 9 corresponds to the death of Nero in AD 68. That victory of the church over Nero is what is described in verses 10-11. And verse 11 ("And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.") would then be describing Peter and Paul, along with many other faithful Christians who died under Nero's persecution.

After Nero's death, verse 12 shows the church rejoicing and the earth filled with woe. That verse is describing the year AD 69, right after Nero's death, when Rome had four emperors (three of which died in that year) along with civil wars. Satan's frustration in verse 12 about having only a short time would be his frustration in having failed with Nero, and his realization that he needs to find someone else to attack the church.

The second period of persecution in verses 12-17 is the renewed persecution under Domitian (which had not yet started when this book was written, but which would begin very soon). The persecution repeated, which is why much of the description is repeated. It is this renewed persecution under Domitian upon which the next chapter will focus.

As we will soon see, this book was written in the reign of Vespasian, who ruled between Nero and Domitian. The Christians had overcome Nero — could they do the same with Domitian? The persecution under Nero had come to an end — was there really going to be another round of such persecution under Domitian? Yes, that was coming — but God was on the church's side! The church would once again be victorious!