

As we've been working our way through the book of Revelation, we've been discovering, it's **not** a 'start to finish' sequence of events – it describes the **same** events, several times, in different ways...

*And as I said over the last couple of weeks, Phillip Jenson uses the analogy of the instant replay that we have with our sporting events, and I reckon that's a really good analogy... In footy, somebody makes a spectacular try, and we don't only see it **once** on the TV – they show it 4; 5; 6 times, from different angles, shot with different cameras... Each time we're seeing something different, but it's recording the one event... And that's what we have in the book of Revelation...*

- The **7 seals** gave us a brief overview, of what's going to happen in the book of Revelation....
- The **7 trumpets** tell us in more detail, about the judgment that is coming upon the world, and it focuses on the impact that it will have on the **ungodly**...
- **Between** trumpets 6 and 7, we had another camera angle. This time it was focused on what the Christians are doing, **while** the wrath of God is getting poured out on the world... And what were God's faithful witnesses doing? They were witnessing – they were preaching – they were calling the world to repentance... And the world **hated** it... And so God's faithful witnesses were being martyred.
- And now, we get a different camera angle again. This time, the camera focuses in on the Spiritual battle. What

lies behind the **hatred** that the word has, toward God's faithful witnesses?

So, let's read it. Today we're reading Revelation 12.

The Woman and the Dragon

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. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. ³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴ 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. 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, 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.

Satan Thrown Down to Earth

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his

angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. 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. 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. 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!"

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. 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. ¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. ¹⁶ 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. 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.

I reckon I need to begin today's message by saying, "If you don't believe that the devil is real, and that Satan is a very real, personal being, you are going to have great difficulty, not only understanding the book of the Revelation, but you're going to have difficulty with the Gospels themselves, and the person and teaching of Jesus Christ... Because Jesus not only taught, about the presence and work of the adversary – Satan – He also demonstrated the battle against, and the victory over Satan....

Sometimes the popular image of Satan revolves around comical caricatures – you know this man in a red suit, with an arrow-pointed-tail, and a pitchfork in his hand – something not to be taken too seriously... But there's nothing comical about Satan.

He's called "the Devil". Now, "devil" literally means "slanderer"¹. Some of the most evil, diabolical work that the devil achieves, is to "slander" God (or to slander God's children) – that means to speak or to spread **untruths** about God, **or** to spread untruths about God's children... And that's why gossip is such a heinous sin... - particularly if the gossip is not true – or if it's only partially true – or if it's only a suspicion... "Slander", is a tool of the devil – it is what he

does... and the lives of many Christians, and the work of many churches, has been destroyed by slander – lies...

So Satan is the slanderer. He is the deceiver. He is the accuser – We're told that he accuses the saints of God **day and night before our God**. That's what he did with Job...

(do you know the story of Job?)

God said, "See my servant Job? See how he fears Me,, and he always does what's right?"

And Satan says, "Well, he wouldn't be so loyal to you, if everything wasn't going so well for him"... Alright, Satan accused Job, and he questions Job's motivation for his faithfulness...

But of course, if you know the story of Job, Job continued to do what was right, and Job continued to fear God – even when he'd lost everything – his possessions; his family; his health; Even when he's lying in the dust, scraping his scabby, pussy sores, with a broken piece of pottery, he continued to fear God, and he continued to do what was right....

And so Satan is the accuser. He accuses **us** before God. *"That Michael Brumpton – he'll never be any good" ... That little church meeting there at _____ – they're not doing God's work – they're weak – they're insignificant... They'll crumble...*

He accuses us before God... And sadly, slander and accusations against God's people, very often emerge from

within the fellowship... All we have to do, is read some of Paul's letters, where he's addressing that very issue ⁱⁱ - people within the church, slandering others of God's children – accusing them of things that are not true, or only partially true. Do you know another name for “a partial truth”? **A lie!!!** And do you know who's really good at partial truths??? The Devil...

And yet, in God's eyes, what power does “slander” or “accusations” have any more???? Because the blood of Jesus, takes away all our sin... When someone repents, and asks forgiveness of God, they are forgiven totally – completely... There's no **point** making an accusation against one of God's repentant, faithful children, because in God's eyes, they're pure; they're holy; they're righteous...

And there would be a lot more love; a lot more unity; a lot more grace,,, shown in the church, if we fully understood the **potency** of the purifying power of Jesus' blood... But we'll come to that a bit later.

Chapter 12 begins with a great sign appearing in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

Who is this woman? Does she represent the church? Does she represent Israel? Is it Eve? Or, is she Mary?

In Genesis 37, in Joseph's dream, the sun and the moon represent Jacob and his wife, and the stars represent his children (the tribes of Israel). And so we're meant to identify the woman with Israel. And of course the child she gave birth to, is obviously Jesus, because He's described as **one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron**, which is a quote from Psalm 2, which is talking about Jesus...

And so the woman represents Israelⁱⁱⁱ, and of course, Jesus **was** born as a child of Israel... It was His lineage – it was His heritage – He was born into the line of David, of the tribe of Judah... But later on, the woman is obviously representing the church^{iv}. The dragon goes off to make war against her offspring, and her offspring are described as **those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus** (So, it's describing the church)....

And so the woman represents "spiritual Israel" – She represents the community of God's faithful people... Out of this community, was born Jesus Christ. And this community **now**, is the faithful disciples of Jesus.

The **next** sign that appears, is a **great red dragon**. And I don't think we should have too much trouble working out who that represents – not only because the image is very clear, but because we're **told** who it is – it's Satan – the Devil – the deceiver – the accuser....

His 7 heads (each with a royal crown) means that he is the ruler of the earth. The 10 horns, mean he's very powerful...

You know, when Satan tempted Jesus, and he took him up to a high mountain, and ^{Matthew 4:8...} showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." That was true. Satan was – currently is – the ruler of the world... But not for long. That's all going to change.

The dragon's tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.

That's most probably an image of fallen angels – his demons... And something that I haven't said already (and I probably should have), is quite often, the book of Revelation will mention 1/3. And that **may** represent a literal 1/3, but as most numbers in the Revelation are highly symbolic, 1/3 more **likely** represents "a significant minority"^v.

The Bible seems to indicate that Satan (and his demons) are fallen angels – angels who rebelled against God... And their number – we're not given their number, but it is a significant proportion, but a minority... And so we should never be afraid of Satan or his demons, because although they are strong, The Lord our God, and His heavenly armies, are far, far stronger...

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

The Devil did everything that he could, to kill Jesus – to disrupt Jesus' mission on the Earth... What evil, would cause a King (King Herod), to slaughter every baby boy (under the age of 2), in the town and region of Bethlehem??? Could a human be so worried that an unknown baby would rise to power and steal his throne??? Who was behind that attempt to kill Jesus??? Satan...

A number of times, people sought to take hold of Jesus, to kill Him, but it wasn't time yet ... Who was behind those attempts on Jesus' life??? Satan.

In 3 different ways, the devil tried to tempt Jesus, and to turn Him from His God-given mission... But he failed...

He tried to devour the child, but the child was caught up to God and to his throne...

Now, I think we've got something important to learn here, about the protection of God: The whole life and ministry of Jesus here, is summed up with "He was born" "He was caught up to God and to his throne". But we know He suffered and died, don't we? Well, of course we know that, and of course that's very important... But where is He now? He's ascended to heaven...

And here's the lesson: The salvation of God, is not necessarily protection from death – it's resurrection **from** the dead – it's being taken up to heaven, and being with God in

His glory. We've seen this in Chapter 6, and we've seen it in Chapter 11, where God's faithful are killed, but they are taken straight to the glory of God. And this should not be seen as a failure of God's protection. Nor should it be seen as God's plan and purpose being thwarted... This is **exactly** God's plan and purpose... - that His faithful disciples witness unto death, and they are taken straight to glory – these are the overcomers... and we'll see this a bit later...

^{v6} 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.

Last week we heard that number a fair bit didn't we. 3.5 years; 42 months; 1260 days – it's the same period of time. If 7 years represents a complete time, 3.5 years means it's a time cut short – a definite period of time, but a time that will come to an end...

But what does it mean, that the woman fled into the wilderness? Does that mean that the church is running scared, out into the desert? Of course not. Biblically, the wilderness is a place of ever-present danger – a place of lawlessness, a place where bandits and marauding armies and wild animals can strike with impunity... **But** the wilderness, for God's people, is always a place of God's provision. It's a place where His faithful come into the very presence of God. It's a place of prayer and meditation...

So what's the image? Well, the church may be in the world – a place of danger, but by faith, we know that The Lord is with us, and that The Lord provides. And sometimes we may feel,

that we're going through the wilderness... What's going on? Where is God? Well, He's right here with us, and we draw near to Him, and he draws near to us...

V7. In V7, we're seeing a war in heaven... If your view of heaven is laying back and peacefully resting on bouncy clouds, well your image is probably going to be shattered by v7. There is war in heaven. Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

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.

And that's why it then goes on to describe "that's why we need to put on the armour of God"... And of course, if you read the description of the armour of God, there's nothing mysterious or mystical about it – it's how we live... To put on the armour of God, is to live in righteousness and obedience, as Jesus' faithful disciples...

- Belt of truth
- Breastplate of righteousness
- Shoes readiness of the Gospel
- Shield of faith
- Helmet of salvation
- Sword of the Spirit

Alright, so there's nothing mysterious or mystical about it...

So, there is a war in heaven, which (by the way), is also foretold in Daniel 12.

12 "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Who is this Michael? No, it's not me. My parents named me Michael, because I was so angelic (At that stage, they'd known me for a whole minute).... They'd probably have named me as something else, if they'd first taken the time to get to know me... Although Robyn's known me for a while, and she still calls me "Michael". Maybe she thinks I'm angelic....

Michael, is the chief angel, or the archangel... He is an angel, who fights, in the protection of God's people... And here in Rev 12, Michael and his angels are fighting against Satan... **But spoiler alert:** although Satan and his demons fought back, Satan was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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.

Now, when did this happen? Has it happened yet??? And this is what we don't know...:

- A logical answer could be, "Satan was defeated and thrown out of heaven, when Jesus was raised from the dead."
- An experiential answer could be, "No, it hasn't happened yet, because both Daniel, and the Revelation, both describe a terrible time of persecution and torment for God's people, such as has never been..."

And so my answer today has to be "I don't know if Satan has **yet** been cast out of heaven or not." But the Bible speaks so categorically that he has, that we can be sure, that if it hasn't happened yet, that it **will** happen.

And I suspect that it hasn't happened yet. Why?

1. Firstly, it was **after** the resurrection that Paul told us about the spiritual battle in heavenly places. (but of course, that could just mean "in the spiritual realm, here on Earth")
2. Secondly, I don't believe we are yet seeing the terrible persecution that will come at the end of time. There is definitely going to be an increase in Satan's destructive activity, such that has never been seen before... And I don't believe we're seeing that just yet.
3. Thirdly, disciples of **Jesus**, have a part to play, in Satan's defeat in heaven

How was Satan defeated? If this is what happened spiritually (Michael and his angels, fighting against Satan and his demons), what happened physically?

And it might surprise you to find, that you have a part to play in conquering Satan... How do we conquer Satan? Prayer? Yeah, but that's not the answer given here. Brothers,,, Christians,,, those who are getting accused by Satan, **have** conquered him:

1. by the blood of the Lamb; and
2. by the word of their testimony

They conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus died for us. What accusation can stand? When we repent of our sin, and ask for forgiveness, we are forgiven – such is the potency of the blood of the Lamb. Satan has no power over us. His accusations are meaningless... Unless of course we don't repent... But the faithful **do** repent...

And we conquer Satan by the word of our testimony... We conquer Satan by witnessing unto death. The Devil battles against our bodies – but he cannot hurt our souls. He's already **lost** the battle for our souls – that's the triumph of the cross...

And every time, we have an opportunity to be a witness for Jesus Christ, and we're undecided, this is the spiritual battle... Michael and his angels are battling in Heaven, for us to be faithful witnesses... And Satan and his demons, are battling for us to capitulate – to wimp out – to go underground – to be a secret Christian....

Did you know that the persecutions against the early church actually made the church grow. Christians had to flee Jerusalem; they had to flee Rome; They had to flee the Jews; they had to flee the pagans.... And every time they moved, they took the Gospel with them, and they were witnesses for Jesus Christ, right across the land. And the Gospel spread across the known world, faster than it ever would have, if there hadn't been any persecution.

And so every moment God's faithful disciples are covered by the righteous, gracious, forgiveness that comes through the blood of the Lamb, and every time God's faithful witnesses tell the world of the good news of Jesus Christ (even at the treat of death), Satan is being conquered. Michael and his angels are giving him a jolly good flogging...

Let's move on:

When the dragon was conquered, he was thrown down from heaven (along with his demons), and when he sees that he's been beaten, he unleashes a great fury... He's a real spoilsport – this devil. There's no gracious capitulation – he's like a spoiled kid who upends the Monopoly board, ruining it for everyone else, because he's losing... Once Satan is thrown out of heaven, **he knows that his time is short!** And he unleashes all of his fury.

Who's his target? Well, first of all he targets the church – the place where Christians gather...

V¹³ 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. 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.

It is only by a miracle of God that the church has survived... In the Old Testament, being carried by God, and “eagles wings”, are an image of God’s miraculous protection^{vi} and provision...

The church always survives.

- God’s faithful witnesses are never stamped out.
- The Sanhedrin weren’t able to do it;
- Rome wasn’t able to do it;
- The communist revolutions weren’t able to do it.
- The rise of Islam hasn’t been able to do it.
- ISIS can’t do it.
- The secular media (opposed to God) won’t be able to do it...

Satan hasn’t managed to do it... God’s faithful witnesses will **never** be stamped out, because of God’s miraculous provision and protection.

You know, some people say to me, “The church – it’s a thing of the past – I don’t need a church. I can be a Christian now on my own”... No; No; No... The church is God’s creation, it is God’s will, and the church has a purpose.

V¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.

Satan spews forth a flood of evil, to try and destroy the church... We've been warned that in the end times, there will be false teachers; false prophets.... And we can see it happening in the church today – whole denominations being hijacked by false teaching, and ungodly principles... Who's behind it all??? Satan, pouring forth a flood of evil, to try and overcome the church...

V¹⁶ 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.

I don't know what that means. I suspect it's reminding us that God intervenes into the natural world, to preserve His church – just like when he swallowed the Egyptian army in the Red Sea.

Exodus 15:¹² You stretched out your right hand;
the earth swallowed them.

V¹⁷ 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.

Well, if the devil couldn't defeat the church by false teaching and false prophets – if he couldn't defeat it with a flood of

evil, the only thing left for him, is to make war on those individuals who have stayed faithful to Jesus.

We are about to enter into a section of the Revelation where it's going to be revealed just how dreadful the persecution is going to be, against God's faithful... By the way, at this stage, how are the disciples of Jesus being described?

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

That's what it means to stay faithful. The overcomers are those who keep the commandments of God, and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

It doesn't matter what age we live in – there is always the great temptation – a great pressure – to compromise... And this is part of the flood of evil – to try and get us to feel that compromise just doesn't matter... Well, it **does** matter!!! We're not saved by doing good things, but we are saved, to be obedient. Because we have been saved, we are now free to keep the commandments of God.

And once again, it doesn't matter what age we live in – there is always the great temptation – a great pressure – to **not** hold to the testimony of Jesus... What does that mean? I'll tell you what that means. The testimony of Jesus – His life; His sacrifice on the cross; His commandments; His miracles; The Gospel – what it means to be saved..... The testimony of

Jesus, has been passed down from the Apostles, from generation to generation – it's recorded in the Scriptures... And somebody shared that testimony with you... It is this testimony, that has led you to faith. For us to hold on to that testimony of Jesus, means to believe it; live it; and to pass that testimony on...

The Gospel today, is as new and fresh as it ever was,,,, and yet it continues to be the same old story... A testimony is something that's shared.

The Greek word used here for “testimony”, is μαρτυρίαν (martyrian) from which we get our word “martyr”. It is someone who bears witness – it is someone who testifies...

If there's 2 things the devil hates, it's when God's children live obedient, faithful lives for God, and it's when they bear witness to Jesus Christ...

Why does he hate it so much? Because that's how he's defeated. And his defeat is sure...

Revelation 12, helps us to understand the spiritual battle, especially the battle that lies behind the persecution of Christians. ... But I want you to understand, “This is **not** written to scare us.” It has been revealed to us, for quite the opposite – it is to give us confidence. Because we've got the spoiler alert – Satan is defeated. Jesus is victorious... And we can overcome the evil one, by standing strong in the faith... We can overcome the evil one, because Jesus has **already** overcome the evil one...

As history draws to a close, and as we see God's faithful children, being persecuted; starved; killed... We can have every confidence, to continue as Jesus' faithful witnesses, because the worst the devil can do, is kill our bodies. Isn't that wonderful? The worst the devil can do, is kill our bodies, and kill the ones we love... And just like Jesus, we'll only be dead a little while... and then we'll be raised victorious...

Next week, Revelation 13, is going to tell us **how** Satan is going to take it out on the Christians... And it's going to be very sobering, but because we know that he's already lost, we can approach it in faith, and in confidence.

ⁱ **διάβολος** G1333 (*diabolos*), adj., slanderous; noun, slanderer, the devil; **διαβάλλω** (*diaballō*), accuse, bring charges with hostile intent

Bietenhard, H. & Brown, C., 1986. Satan, Beelzebul, Devil, Exorcism L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.

ⁱⁱ 2 Cor 12:20; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 6:4; 2 Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3; 1 Pet 2:1; Rom 3:8; 1 Tim 3:11; 1 Cor 4:13; 2 Cor 6:8;

ⁱⁱⁱ Isaiah 26:17-18

^{iv} Galatians 4:²⁶ **But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.**

Isaiah 54

^v Morris, L., 1987. *Revelation: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^{vi} Exodus 19:4; Deut 1:29-33; Deut 32:10-12; Isaiah 40:29-31