

# The War between Christ and Satan

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Ps. 18: 1, 2, 6, 9

Ps. 17: 2, 3

Hymn 15: 1 – 4

Ps. 2: 1 – 4

Ps. 24: 4, 5

Scripture reading: 1 Cor. 10: 1 – 13; Rev. 12: 1 – 17

Text: Rev. 12: 4 – 6

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In this vision the apostle John sees a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

This woman symbolises the church. She is glorious and crowned with victory.

And yet she appears in a desperate state. She is in birth pangs. She cries out in labour and in pain to give birth.

In front of her stands a fierce dragon, a great and mighty monster, ready to devour her Child as soon as she gives birth.

The dragon symbolises Satan.

The Child is Christ.

When this Child of the women is caught up to God and to His throne, it refers to Christ's ascension into heaven and His enthronement at the right hand of God.

When the dragon sees that Christ is out of his reach, this raging monster turns with great wrath to the woman and persecutes her. Then the woman flees from the fury of the dragon and stays in the wilderness for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

We will see that this time span is from Christ's first coming unto his second coming. For the whole New Testament period the church remains in the desert.

This is the vision. We will now look at its meaning, and we will see that it is not only a very clear and dramatic picture in which all of church history is placed before us, and that we ourselves are part of this warfare, but we will also gain insight in the nature of the warfare. We will come to understand the purpose, the character, and also the battlefield of this war. This vision gives us a better understanding of our place and situation in this world.

It is a vision that makes us sober and watchful. It also strengthens us and gives us hope.

I will now proclaim God's Word to you with the theme:

## **The war between Christ and Satan**

We will note...

1. The history of enmity
2. The victory of the woman's Seed
3. The time of great oppression

In the first place we note...

### **The history of enmity**

We already said that the woman, here in our text, symbolises the church.

This woman, the church, was expecting a Child.

A Child has been promised to her. All the prophets spoke of His coming: the One who will crush the head of the serpent.

As the Lord said to the serpent:

“...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel” – Gen. 3: 15.

These words in Genesis 3 form the background and are the key to the correct understanding of our text. Gen. 3: 15 sets the stage.

The serpent, or dragon, would be defeated by a male Child, the Seed of the woman. And through all the ages of the Old Testament this promised Child, this Seed of the woman, was the hope and the eager expectation of the church.

Now, the dragon, which is called the Devil and Satan, is also portrayed to us. He has seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns on his head.

In the book of Revelation the number seven symbolises completeness. And the horns are symbol of rule and power. It seems then as if the power and rule of this dragon are complete. He is the head of all evil powers and is also called the ruler of this world (John 12: 31).

Here in our text we are told that his tail drew with him a third of the stars of heaven and threw them on the earth. When Satan fell he drew a third of the angels with him. There is a host of fallen angels, demons, following Satan. Our text mentions this to emphasise his power.

It is indeed a fierce and powerful enemy standing in front of the woman.

We see the dragon ready to devour the woman’s Child as soon as she gives birth.

There is a sense in which this desire of the dragon is directed against every believer.

The church is mother of all believers, and Satan wants to devour all the seed of the woman. But our text speaks of one Child only.

It is all about **one** Child – a male Child, a mighty One, in whom the victory was promised.

Let me mention only a few examples of how the dragon directed his plans against the Seed of the woman.

In Ex. 1: 22 we read:

“...Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, “Every son who is born you shall cast into the river, and every daughter you shall save alive.”

Satan tried to drown the promised Seed in Egypt. There you have one example of how the dragon stood in front of the woman ready to devour her Child.

Or think of the history of David, how king Saul tirelessly tried to kill David. Satan tried over and over again to destroy the house of David, for the prophecies were clear that the Messiah will be the Seed of David.

Also in that history we see how the Dragon stood in front of the woman ready to devour the promised Seed.

In the time of King Ahab, his wife, Jezebel, tried to wipe out all the faithful in Israel, until the prophet Elijah reckons that he is the only one left and that he himself will soon also be killed. But even in midst of that terrible persecution the Lord assured His prophet that He has preserved for Himself seven thousand who did not bow the knee to Baal. No matter how hard Satan tried, he could not totally destroy the seed of the woman. Every time his attempts failed.

Athaliah makes herself queen and murders all the royal heirs to the throne of David. But one little baby boy, Joash, was hidden; and so the royal line of David continues.

We could mention many more examples. Every time the Dragon focused all his attention on this one Child, the promised One, seeking to devour Him, and every time he failed.

And then, after all the ages that the church has been pregnant with the promise of this Child, the Child was finally born – verse 5.

The scene is Bethlehem. It is a bloody scene. All the male children of 2 years and under have been killed. Once more, with cruel hatred the dragon tried to devour this Child, but once more the Child escaped.

The persecution continued from Bethlehem to Calvary until the Child was caught up to God and to His throne.

We note that in the second place...

## **The victory of the woman's Seed**

We read in verse 5:

“She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron...”

These words refer back to Ps. 2 where it speaks of the authority and rule of the coming Christ, saying:

“I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. **You shall break them with a rod of iron;** You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

Christ refers back to this prophecy where He says:

“...he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – **‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;** they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ – **as I also received from My Father...**” – Rev. 2: 26, 27.

Again the reference is to Psalm 2 where it says that **the Christ**, the Anointed of the Father, will rule the nations with an iron sceptre and will dash them to pieces.

**That** Child has now been born.

Our text says further, in verse 5, that this Child was caught up to God and His throne.

This refers to Christ's ascension into heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God.

We see Christ ascending into heaven, and at the same time we see Satan being cast down from heaven.

The victory is Christ's.

Now, the dragon is called Devil and Satan. Devil means accuser. Satan means adversary or opponent. He is the great accuser and opponent. And he is also called here, in verse 10, "the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night".

It is in this capacity as the accuser that he still appeared in heaven during the time of the Old Testament. We see Satan acting in this capacity, for example, in the first chapters of the book Job.

Or think of the vision of Zechariah where he sees the high priest, Joshua, standing with filthy garments before the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to oppose him – Zech. 3: 1.

There are more such examples where we see Satan acting as the accuser.

But now, now through the blood of the Lamb, all accusations have been removed. The great accuser is no longer able to accuse God's people. There is nothing to accuse them of, for they stand before God perfectly clean, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and clothed with His righteousness.

And therefore we see that the great accuser was cast out of heaven; and cast down.

He had no right anymore to appear before God. He had no ground to stand on to come before God as the accuser of His people. He may no longer appear in God's courtroom.

After the victory of Christ has shortly been stated in verse 5 – His ascension into heaven and His enthronement – we read in verse 6:

"Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

Now, that brings us to the state of the church in this world. We will note that in the third place...

## **The time of great oppression**

The woman flees to the desert. It is still the same woman, the church. Before she gave birth to the male Child, she portrayed the church of the Old Testament. Through all the ages of the Old Testament she was pregnant, expecting the Child. Now that the Child is born, now that He ascended into heaven to the right hand of God, she remains on earth. She is now the church in the time of the New Testament. But she is still the same woman. The church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament is one.

Now, her time in the desert starts with Christ's ascension into heaven. It is then, after the Child is caught up into heaven, that she flees to the desert. And she remains there for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The same time span is mentioned also in chapter 11. The church will prophesy for one thousand two hundred and sixty days and then the final judgment will come.

It is clear then that this symbolic period stands for the total time of the New Testament. It starts with Christ's ascension into heaven and ends at His second coming.

This symbolic number of one thousand two hundred and sixty days, or 3 ½ years, has profound meaning. This period of 3 ½ years symbolises the whole New Testament era.

But why 3 ½ years? What is so special about this number of one thousand two hundred and sixty days?

It reminds us of something remarkable that happened in the history of Israel.

It was a most dangerous time in the history of Israel.

King Ahab was on the throne. The apostasy in the church was terrible, and queen Jezebel killed all those who remained faithful to the Lord. It became so bad that Elijah thought that he himself was the last one left and that he will also soon die. And he said to the Lord:

“...I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” (1 Kings 19: 14)

But the Lord said to him:

“...I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” (1 Kings 19: 18)

Now, it was during that time of terrible apostasy and persecution, under the reign of king Ahab, that the Lord sent a drought that lasted 3 ½ years. For 3 ½ years there was not one drop of rain in the whole land! Spiritually and physically Israel was in a desperate state. But in that terrible time in which the whole land of Israel became a desert – spiritually and physically – the Lord was still preserving for Himself 7 000 who did not bow the knee to Baal.

How did the Lord do that? We read for example that Obadiah had hidden one hundred prophets of the Lord in a cave and sustained them there with food and drink.

The Lord sent Elijah to a hiding place and commanded the ravens to feed him there with bread and meat. And during that same 3 ½ years He also sent Elijah to a widow who had nothing left to eat but a handful of flour in a bin and a little oil in a jar. The bin of flour was not used up, nor did the jar of oil ran dry, until the day the LORD sent rain again.

In a wonderful way the Lord sustained all those who feared Him, and gave them food and drink.

In that time of severe famine and persecution, the faithful ones were hiding in caves and in the desert. And the Lord sustained them and fed them there in a wonderful way.

It lasted three and a half years.

The exact time span is confirmed by the apostle James where he says:

“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months” – James 5: 17.

That the period of 3 ½ years, or 42 months, does indeed refer to that remarkable time in the history of Israel becomes abundantly clear when we read in Revelation chapter 11 that the two witnesses of the Lord will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, that is: 3 ½ years, that they will do this while they are in sackcloth **and:** that they “have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy”.

In the history of Israel there was only one prophet who did this: Elijah. And the heavens were shut so that no rain fell for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

The evidence is abundantly clear that our text refers to that time of terrible drought and persecution in which the Lord, in a most wonderful way, preserved those who feared Him.

That is the meaning of this symbolic number.

And now we see that it is applied to the total time of the New Testament, which is also called the last days, the last hour, the end of the age, and so forth.

It is the whole New Testament era from Christ’s ascension into heaven until His second coming.

So then, what is the conclusion? That the entire New Testament period will be characterised by such persecution and tribulation as in the days of Elijah, but that the Lord will also show His faithfulness in preserving those who fear Him, as He has done in that time of great oppression.

The church of the New Testament finds herself in the desert where she has a place prepared by God. Verse 14 says that she flees “into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time”. Again it refers to the same thing.

There, in the desert, God sustains the woman, the church, and feeds her and provides for her in a wonderful way, just as He also did in the time of the exodus, when He fed His people for 40 years in the wilderness.

Actually, these forty years in the wilderness also becomes a picture of the New Testament church. It starts with the exodus and ends with Israel’s entry into the Promised Land. We

read 1 Corinthians chapter 10 where the apostle Paul takes the exodus and the 40 years in the wilderness as a picture of the church in the New Testament and says:

“...all these things happened to Israel as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.” – 1 Cor. 10: 11.

The history of Israel in the desert becomes a picture of the church in the New Testament. She has been delivered from Egypt, from the house of bondage, but she has not yet entered the Promised Land. It is still a time of trials and temptations in a wild and desert land.

Brothers and sisters, we have not yet arrived. Instead, the church is sorely tempted and suffers many trials.

But what is the driving force behind all the hatred and strife against the church? We read that...

“...the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” – verse 17.

Dear congregation, this is the time and the context in which we live. We have not yet arrived. Let us not seek to enjoy heaven on earth while we are still in the desert, or seek our comfort in the prosperity of this world, or imagine that we have already entered the Promised Land. Instead, this prophecy calls us to be sober and watchful, as the apostle Peter also says:

“Be sober, be watchful; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5: 8)

This vision of Revelation chapter 12 pulls the curtain away so that we may see behind the scene what is going on in the spiritual realm. Our struggle, as the apostle Paul says, is not against flesh and blood, but:

“...against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” – Eph. 6: 12

Brothers and sisters, we see and experience the struggle of the church in this world, but we also know that this is no human struggle. It is not simply a struggle between people with different personalities, or a struggle between the different opinions of men. Ultimately it is the struggle between God and Satan.

And therefore we may also fight the good fight of faith with confidence, for the victory belongs to God and to His Anointed. No matter how the nations rage, no matter how much the dragon stirs them up against the church, our Lord Jesus Christ will dash them to pieces with His iron sceptre, and will keep and preserve His church against the fury of the dragon and all his host.

The victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. He will keep and preserve us to the end.

Amen.