

The world is a dangerous place even though it looks pretty beautiful a lot of the time. Take this lovely pink flower for example. It kind of looks like a flower doesn't it. But in fact it is an orchid mantis on the hunt for insects. It appears to blend in with the flowers. But its bright color attracts insects. Apparently insects associate bright color with nectar. So they land on what look like petals which allows the mantis to grab hold of them with its spiked forelegs.

Or take this delightful little cat. It's actually called a margay. It likes hunting monkeys in South American jungles. But monkeys hang out high in the trees. So the margay cat mimics the cries of baby monkeys. When the monkeys hear what sounds like a cry from one of their own, they creep down out of curiosity. Then this cat with 6 times better sight than humans at night, pounces on the monkeys.

Then we have this lovely little fish called an archer. He seems harmless. But he contorts his tongue against the roof of his mouth while compressing his gill covers. Then he fires a burst of water at an unsuspecting insect or small animal perched at water's edge. He hopes his water blast will startle the insect so that it falls into the water where the fish can catch him.

Then there is the harmless looking chameleon who changes colors based on her surroundings. But she actually has an amazing hunting tool in her mouth. Her tongue is actually longer than her own body. Can you imagine having a tongue that was taller than you? So when an insect flies by a chameleon, it thinks it has lots of room away from its little tongue. But the chameleon shoots out her tongue like a bungee cord coated with honey. Then it retracts back into its mouth with prey attached.<sup>1</sup>

The world is a dangerous place. Beware of the orchid mantis, margay archer fish and chameleon. But there's one more creature we need to beware of. To him, we are the prey. He is the devil and he wages war against the people of God.

There is a cosmic battle going on between God, His angels and His people versus the devil, his angels and the people under his influence. This battle is goes on every day.

It can touch us very personally through some of our life experiences, troubles and challenges. If you're a Christian here today, you are automatically part of this battle. Our enemy looks for you. He sets traps and deceptions to try to trip you

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<sup>1</sup> By Jana Howden; <https://cosmosmagazine.com/biology/eight-predators-with-nifty-catch-and-kill-tricks>; accessed May 25, 2018

up. And he looks for your family and loved ones. Today, we are going to learn what is going on with this battle and how we can live without fear in the midst of it.

The Bible talks about this battle from the beginning to the end. But Revelation contains one of the clearest pictures portraying it. We are now more than half way through Revelation. We have actually arrived at the time of the very end. Last time we saw the seventh angel blow the final trumpet. We saw the 24 elders describe the last day as if it had already happened because they were so certain it would happen. We saw the temple of God open to reveal the heavenly Ark of the Covenant indicating a new era of closeness between God and His people. From chapter 11 onward, we deal with the very end. All these chapters describe realities or pieces that need to be put together to draw an accurate picture of the very last days.

Chapters 12-14 set the stage for the final confrontation. They introduce the major actors who have major roles in the last day. They alert us to the reality of this vast spiritual conflict that goes on right now and will continue until the return of Christ.

So today, we're going to Revelation 12 to seek the answers to 3 questions. What is happening in the cosmic battle between God and the devil? How does this knowledge help us today? How do we actually apply it? By the end of our time together, I pray you will be equipped and encouraged to go into this conflict by God's strength.

### **Revelation 12 (ESV) (Page 873)**

**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. <sup>2</sup>She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. <sup>3</sup>And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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,<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup>Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup>but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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!”

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

### **What is happening in the cosmic battle between God and the devil?**

We will discover the answer to this question as we walk through this passage. It breaks down into 3 scenes. Scene 1 gives the account of the woman, the child and the red dragon. Scene 2 describes war in heaven. And scene 3 describes the continuing war on earth. Scene 1 begins with a great sign in heaven – a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of 12 stars on her head. John doesn’t identify her for us. But I think the strongest interpretation is that she represents Israel as the people of God. I get this from the 12 stars in her crown. Some commentators think they represent the 12 signs of the zodiac. But I agree with commentators who see a clear connection between the 12 stars and the 12 tribes of Israel. In fact, back in Genesis, you may have read the story of Joseph and his dream. He dreamt that sun, moon and 11 stars would one day bow down to him. Now in his dream, the sun and moon were his father and mother. The 11 were his brothers who along with him would become the 12 tribes of Israel. But a stronger reason for the woman as Israel, the people of God, comes from the child she bears. We will see this child is clearly the Messiah. He was born out of Israel. In this scene the woman is pregnant and crying out in labor.

Then in verse 3, John tells us of another sign in heaven. A great red dragon with 7 heads, 10 horns and 7 crowns on his seven heads appears. This dragon resembles a beast talked about in the Old Testament book of Daniel. The 7 crowns symbolize royalty and power. The 10 horns symbolize great strength maybe in the form of 10 nations. The image of the dragon also resembles a creature in the Old Testament who was portrayed as the enemy of God and His people – Leviathan. In Psalm 74:14, Leviathan is Egypt which enslaved the Israelites. In Isaiah 27:1, Leviathan is Assyria and Babylon, two nations that conquered portions of Israel and carried away her people into captivity. Against this background, the dragon of John’s vision would immediately be understood as the archenemy of God and His people.

In verse 4, the dragon sweeps one third of the stars out of the sky with his tail. This could indicate his power over kings because kings sometimes were thought to have stars rise like the star rising in the Christmas story. Or a third of stars could refer to angels who followed the dragon in his opposition to God.

In the second half of verse 4, the woman and dragon come together. The dragon stands before the woman who is about to give birth with a devilish purpose. John tells us he stood there “so that when she bore her child he might devour it.” So imagine a mother in a delivery room. And this dragon stands in the place where the doctor would stand or sit. It seems like a pretty hopeless situation. The woman appears powerless to prevent the dragon from accomplishing its diabolical aim.

The dragon is hostile towards a child before it’s even born. It kind of sounds like that part of the nativity story we don’t really focus on much at Christmas. Do you remember the earthly king Herod who was troubled as soon as the wise men asked “where is he born king of the Jews?” When Herod found out the wise men had not returned with the child’s whereabouts, he sent his soldiers to kill all infant boys two years old and younger. It looks like we’re set up for something like this here.

But in verse 5, a miracle happens. The woman gives birth. A male child is born who will rule with a rod of iron. Yet we think his life will quickly end. But suddenly her child is caught up to God and to his throne. The child is snatched up to heaven before the dragon can devour it. Jesus’ ascent and return to heaven meant the dragon had no more opportunity to devour him. So the dragon had Jesus’ whole lifetime on earth to try to catch him. But God intervened and protected Him. And Jesus resisted the temptations set before Him. So the dragon fails in his quest to get the child.

But he also fails to capture the mother. In verse 6, she flees into the wilderness to a place prepared by God. That sounds very similar to Jesus words to the disciples the night of the last supper. “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” Here in Revelation, a place has been prepared for the woman – the people of God. It is in the wilderness where she must depend on God. He looks after her for 1260 days – 42 months – 3 and a half years – that apocalyptic number for the time of trial or intense tribulation. It is a significant time yet a relatively short time compare to 1000 years and eternity. Scene 1 gives us the first answer to the question

“What is happening in the cosmic conflict between God and the devil? **God rescued the child from the dragon’s mouth and protected the woman in the wilderness.**

Then comes Scene 2, verses 7-12. This scene talks of a war in heaven and its aftermath. We’re not totally sure when it took place. Does this describe a war before time when Satan first fell? After all, Satan already exists in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. So there must have been some sort of rebellion in heaven before that moment. Or is this a war in heaven that occurs as a result of the child’s successful ascension to heaven? I favor the interpretation that this war occurred after Christ ascended. It seems to follow what happened in verse 6. Verse 7 states “Now war arose in heaven.” That could refer to a rebellion before time. But it could also refer to a war that happened as a result of what came before.

This war occurs between Michael, God’s archangel and God’s angels against the dragon and his angels. In verse 8, the battle is suddenly over. “But he (the dragon) was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.” Then John clearly identifies the dragon for us. Verse 9 – And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” So there’s four identifiers for the dragon. The ancient serpent which brings us back to Genesis 3 where the serpent tempted Eve. The devil. Satan. Now the word satan actually means “adversary (opponent, enemy).” In the Old Testament, satan always appears with a definite article – the satan. Later on Satan becomes a personal name for the devil. So Satan is the enemy of God and His people. Then John calls him “the deceiver of the whole world.” Jesus affirmed this. He said “when the devil lies, he speaks out of his own character for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).” Through these continual lies, he deceives the whole world. But back in Revelation 12:9, he and his angels are thrown down to the earth.

So here we see another answer to our question – What is going on in the cosmic conflict between God and the devil. **Michael and his angels defeat the dragon and his angels and throw them down to the earth.** In celebration of this triumph, a victory chant echoes out from heaven. These words in verse 10 lead me towards the conclusion that this war in heaven occurred after the ascension of Christ. Verse 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 Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.” He’s obviously talking about the devil.

What is going on? How could the devil have a place in heaven? How can Satan accuse the brothers before God day and night? Well the Old Testament gives us this image. It describes “the satan” who accuses God’s people before

some sort of court of God. The most famous example of this is the book of Job. Remember the sons of God come to present themselves before God and “the satan” was among them. He accuses Job before God claiming that the only reason Job serves God is because he’s blessed. So you may know the story of how God allows “the satan” to strike Job’s family and prosperity. Then God allows “the satan” to strike Job’s health. In the end, God vindicates Job before the adversary revealing that Job’s faith is real.

Then there’s another account of the accuser in Zechariah 3:1. Zechariah writes “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and the satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, “the Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not his brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments. Behold I have taken your iniquity away and I will clothe you with pure vestments (or priestly clothes).”

So we get the image of Satan accusing God’s people in God’s court in the Old Testament. In a way, he had the right to do that at that time. God’s people failed God again and again just as we do today. Their sin had not been covered. The price had not been paid. But what happened because of this child born to the woman? He went to the cross and paid for our sin with His blood. So that anyone who puts their trust in Christ is now covered. They are declared not guilty. We are not guilty because of what Christ has done. So after the cross, resurrection and ascension, Satan had no more grounds to accuse God’s people in God’s heavenly court. He lost his place. He didn’t want to give it up. So there was a war which he lost. He was cast down to the earth.

This brings us to scene 3. I love how this scene starts. “When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to earth – That is not a description of someone who is in control. That does not describe someone who planned to be thrown down to the earth. It’s like he woke up and discovered he had lost his place in heaven. So what happens in the end of verse 13?

“He pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.” He can’t get the child so he’s going after the mother. Somehow she is again at risk. If she is the people of God, she could now be the church. He will go after the church. John writes to 7 churches. But she now experiences rescue. Verse 14. “But the woman was given 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, times and half a time.” Now the eagle is not the United States coming to the rescue though the symbol of their country is the eagle. The eagle is God. He describes himself as the eagle that looked out for his people while they were in the wilderness in Exodus 19:4. This is a beautiful picture of rescue. If you can’t fly and are completely surrounded by the enemy, there’s nowhere to go. But if you suddenly receive eagles’ wings, you can fly out of that trouble to a safe place. Again, it is the wilderness – a place prepared – for same time frame - a time, times and half a time – a year, plus 2 years plus half a year – 3 and a half years; 42 months; 1260 days. Here’s another answer to the question – “what is happening in the cosmic conflict between God and the devil?” **God provides eagle’s wings to the rescue the woman from the dragon.**

But the dragon does not give up. Notice he has morphed into the serpent in verse 15. He opens his mouth and spews out a river of water in an attempt to drown the woman. Now if she is the church and the river is words, this could be a river of deception – or a river of slander. But this attempt also fails. The earth rescues the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river from the dragon. This is another piece in the ongoing conflict between God and the devil. **The earth swallows up the water from the serpent’s mouth to protect the woman.**

This is not the first time the earth swallowed up an enemy of God’s people. Remember the story of the Exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea? Pharaoh’s army is caught in the water and drowns. But the victory song composed to commemorate this event states in Exodus 15:11-12. “Who is like you, O Lord among the gods? Who is like you majestic in holiness; awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? Then later, a man named Korah and some others lead a rebellion against Moses. And 250 chiefs of the congregation join them in this rebellion. But Moses instructs the rest of the people to separate from these rebels. Then listen to Numbers 16:31-32 – And as soon as Moses finished speaking, the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.”

So by the end of Revelation 12:16, we see a pattern. Four conflicts have occurred between God, His people and the devil. What happens? God wins every time! **God continually defeats the devil.** God and His forces continually frustrate the devil and his angels. This is not a death match where we’re unsure of who will ultimately triumph? We know the end of the story. The devil and his angels have already lost.

But though the war is won, the battles are not yet over especially for us. Look at verse 17. “Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring (you and me). On those who keep

the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” The dragon makes war against her offspring – literally her seed. This reminds us of something that God declared to the serpent right after he had successfully tempted Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:15 – This is God to the serpent – “I will put enmity (or hostility) between you and the woman between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel.” He is Christ the offspring of the woman who defeated Satan through the cross, resurrection and ascension. Yet Satan continues to bruise Christ’s heel as he strikes against the church and Christians.

**How does this help us today?** How does knowing that God continually defeats the devil, help us? **Because God defeats the devil, we can conquer him with God’s help.** Yes the devil wages war against us. But just as the child and the woman received all sorts of help and protection from God in this story, we have access to the same resources.

**But how do we actually apply this?**

**1) Take this spiritual conflict seriously.** Recognize this is a reality in the world. In your world. The devil is out to get you. He makes war on the rest of her offspring. Don’t think that you’re too cool for him; too refined to believe such nonsense; or that you’ve got everything under control or think that’s only for the super-spiritual or hyper-Christians. The devil wants you to think that he’s no big deal. The devil wants you to underestimate him. Then you will be an easy target. 1 Peter 5:8 states “Be sober-minded and watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” Take this seriously.

**2) Don’t let this reality scare you into paralysis.** Some people give the devil too much credit and power. They believe he’s behind everything that goes wrong in our lives – every mosquito bite, every cold, every stubbed toe is evidence of the devil. I doubt it. He’s not omnipresent – he’s not omniscient – he can’t read your mind or know all your thoughts. It seems he’s a very good study of character and can read us and discern our weaknesses. But he’s not equal with God. He was defeated at the cross. We do not need to walk in fear that one misstep will result in our falling into his clutches. Christ has got a hold of us and no one can snatch us from His hand.

**3) We must rely on God to resist and overcome our enemy.** 1 Peter 5:9 - Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of sufferings are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. Ephesians 6:10-11 - Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to

stand against the devil's schemes. James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

**4) Stop accusing yourself or listening to the dragon's accusations.** Though he has been cast out of heaven, he may still try the accusing strategy with you. He can no longer make a case against you. Romans 8:1 – There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**5) Conquer him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony even if it costs you your life.** Are you covered by the blood of the Lamb? Have you received Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you given your life over to Him? Have you turned away from going your own way and turned towards going Christ's way? If you haven't, you are defenseless against the devil's attacks. But if you are covered, then Rev. 12:11 can be true of you. "And they (the brothers and sisters) 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." This voice from heaven seems to be talking about people who remained true to Christ through to their death. Some may have died naturally but in Revelation, true witnesses are killed for their faith.

Revelation teaches us that our goal in the end is not to escape suffering. It is to proclaim Christ even at the cost of our lives or at least our comfort. Many of the people we encounter unknowingly serve the enemy. They are losing even though it may seem like they're winning. They need release from the oppression of the enemy. We need to proclaim the hope that comes through the blood of the Lamb.

Now I want to give us an opportunity to apply all of this right now. I invite you to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal one area where the devil might be troubling your life today. It might be an accusation that keeps going around in your brain or raises its ugly head every once in a while. It might be a specific temptation or sin that you're struggling with. It might be some area of unbelief. Maybe he's convinced you that he's not real and you don't have to worry about him. Maybe he's planted seeds of doubt about the God's character so you now find yourself doubting or disbelieving God.

Now with that in mind, bring it before the Lord. Bring it into the light. Bring it before your loving Savior. Ask Him to speak truth to you about this. Maybe you need to memorize Romans 8:1. There is therefore now no condemnation for me who is in Christ Jesus.

Maybe you need to confess that sin. You've been harboring it and petting it and going back to it thinking it will provide you with soul comfort you need when times are tough. But it's destroying you or it's hindering your walk with God. Confess it. Repent of it. Turn away from it by asking for the Holy Spirit's help.

Maybe you need to acknowledge your doubts about God or your struggle with His character. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Ask Him to remind you of what He has done in your life. Ask Him for perspective that puts the hard things in your life into this greater picture of conflict between God and the devil. .

Maybe you need to acknowledge you have not been in God's Word. You've cried out to hear from God but you've ignored His book that gathers dust on your shelf. Jesus used Scripture to fight off the devil's temptations. There's so many excuses why we supposedly can't go to God's Word. Yet we make time for that which is most important to us.

Or maybe God has revealed to you in this moment that you have never actually come to Christ. You are not covered by the blood of the Lamb because you have never given up the Lordship of your life to God. You have held onto it and remain lord. Today, He calls you to stop trusting your life to yourself and start trusting your life to Christ.

Whatever God is saying to you right now, I pray that you will spend these next moments responding to it. Come to your loving, all-powerful victorious Father who welcomes you with open arms. After we have had a time of prayer, I will close this time together.