

Lesson 22: Chapter 12



Revelation 12 marks a dramatic turning point in the book. In **Revelation 11**, John brings us to the end of This Age: the 7th trumpet sounds, loud voices in heaven declare that *“the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ”*, and the 24 elders fall in worship, proclaiming God’s final judgment and reward. Yet that chapter also contained provocative and complex imagery: the *“holy city”* is trampled for 42 months (**11:2**), which, rather than referring to the literal city of Jerusalem (*“the present Jerusalem”*, **Galatians 4:25**), symbolizes the Church (*“the Jerusalem above”*, **Galatians 4:26**)—the New Jerusalem and temple of God—under persecution from the world. By contrast, the place where the 2 witnesses are killed is symbolically identified as *“Sodom and Egypt”*, and more pointedly, *“where their Lord was crucified”*—a direct reference to Jerusalem as the representative of apostate Israel. This *“theological thunderclap”*, as I called it last week, drives home the symbolic nature of Revelation and makes clear that a literal reading is not just misguided, but wrong. **Revelation 11** ends with the final trumpet, the eschatological judgment, and the consummation. But **Revelation 12** abruptly resets the timeline—taking us back not merely to the beginning of the Church, but to the birth of Christ Himself. This kind of timeline reset reminds us that Revelation is not a linear roadmap but a series of interwoven visionary cycles.

This marks a significant tonal shift. **Revelation 1–11** largely depicts the Church’s external experience in the world—its witness, suffering, and preservation. But **Revelation 12–22** pulls back the curtain, unveiling the cosmic drama underneath: a spiritual war stretching from Eden to the end of the age, with Satan raging against the Christ and His Church.

[1] 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.

[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.

(Revelation 12, ESV)

The Birth of the Christ (vv. 1-6)

John opens this vision with a “*great sign*” that appears in heaven: a radiant woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and crowned with 12 stars. This vivid imagery is symbolic, not literal—and it immediately recalls Genesis 37:9, where Joseph dreams of the sun, moon, and 12 stars bowing down to him. In that context, the sun represents Jacob, the moon Rachel, and the 12 stars the 12 tribes of Israel. It is a vision of corporate Israel, the covenant family of God.

The Woman

John draws directly on that imagery to describe this woman—not to point to Mary the mother of Jesus, but to identify the entire covenant community of God’s people, portrayed here in symbolic form. This community exists before Christ’s birth (hence, the woman is pregnant), and it continues after His ascension (she flees into the wilderness). She is not an individual but the faithful Church across redemptive history, from the Old Testament people of God awaiting the Messiah to the New Testament saints preserved by God in the midst of persecution.

Several details reinforce this symbolic identification:

- The grandeur of her adornment (sun, moon, stars) indicates cosmic significance; she is more than a mere person—she represents the covenant people of God.
- Her appearance alludes directly to Genesis 37, grounding her identity in the story of Israel.
- Her ongoing story after the birth of Christ and His ascension shows she cannot be Mary. Mary is not nourished in the wilderness for 1,260 days, and she is not the mother of all Christians.
- Most decisively, Revelation 12:17 identifies “*the rest of her offspring*” as those who “*keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*” That is all believers. Christians are not Mary’s offspring, but they are the spiritual seed of the covenant community—the true children of Abraham by faith (Galatians 3:29).

This also helps clarify a key theological point often missed: the Church did not begin at Pentecost. The Church has always existed as the covenant assembly of God’s people, even from Adam to John the Baptist. The Septuagint repeatedly uses the word ἐκκλησία to describe the assembly of Israel, and Acts 7:38 calls the wilderness generation of Israel “*the church in the wilderness*”. Jesus uses the term ἐκκλησία in Matthew 18:17 without explanation or surprise, suggesting that His Jewish hearers already understood the concept. The Church, then, is not a “parenthesis” in redemptive history—it is the people of God in all ages, both before and after Christ’s coming.

The Dragon

John then sees a second sign: a great red dragon, with 7 heads, 10 horns, and 7 diadems. While many symbols in Revelation require interpretation, the identity of the dragon is certain. In Revelation 12:9, John plainly tells us the dragon is “*that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.*” The dragon is Satan himself, in his fullness of power and malice.

The 7 heads and 10 horns recall the imagery of Daniel 7, where similar beasts represent empires and kings. Here, these traits applied to Satan suggest that he exercises authority through the systems and rulers of this world. The color red, used elsewhere in Revelation for bloodshed, may signify his violent, murderous nature (cf. John 8:44; Revelation 6:3-4).

The dragon’s tail sweeps down 1/3 of the stars from heaven and casts them to the earth. This likely refers to the fall of a portion of the angels—what we call the fallen angels or demons—who followed Satan in his rebellion. While not the primary focus of this passage, it reinforces the cosmic scale of the conflict. Commentators seem divided over which fall of Satan this is: a) initial fall in pre-history, or b) decisive fall when Christ defeated the powers of darkness on the Cross.

The dragon stands ready to devour the child the woman is about to bear. This is an unmistakable reference to Satan’s attempts to destroy Christ at His coming, most directly seen in Herod’s slaughter of the infants in Matthew 2. But beyond that moment, it symbolizes Satan’s hostility to the entire mission of Christ—to destroy Him, derail the incarnation, and stop redemption at its source.

The Male Child

The woman bears a male child, described as *“one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.”* This is a direct allusion to [Psalm 2:9](#), a Messianic psalm that speaks of the LORD’s Anointed ruling over the nations. There can be no doubt: this child is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

But instead of describing His life in detail, John compresses the entire earthly ministry of Christ into two moments: His birth and His ascension (*“her child was caught up to God and to His throne”*). Revelation is not a biography; it is a theological vision. What matters most here is not chronology but significance. Christ came, triumphed, and ascended—and now He reigns from heaven.

Meanwhile, the woman—the covenant community—is driven into the wilderness, where God nourishes her for [1,260](#) days. This number, which we have seen repeatedly ($3\frac{1}{2}$ years = 42 months = [1,260](#) days), represents the entire Church Age—a symbolic period of tribulation and preservation, echoing Israel’s time in the wilderness and Elijah’s exile. It is a time of suffering, but also of divine provision. Notice the rich symbolism: the woman, protected in the wilderness, represents the people of God which, after the ministry of Christ, are Christians, while her offspring, also Christians, are subject to the dragon’s attack. This is a both/and symbol, not an either/or.

The War to End All Wars (vv. 7-12)

After the dragon fails to devour the male child, John sees another scene—this time of war in heaven. Michael and his angels fight against the dragon and his angels, and the dragon is defeated and cast down. Though it may seem like a shift in setting, this is not a new episode so much as a heavenly counterpart to the earthly conflict already in view. Just as Satan stood poised to destroy Christ on earth, so also his defeat is paralleled in heaven.

War in Heaven

Michael, the archangel mentioned in [Daniel 10](#) and [Jude 9](#), appears here as the leader of God’s angelic host. Importantly, it is not Christ who fights the dragon in this scene—Christ has already triumphed. The victory here is the application of Christ’s redemptive work in the heavenly realm: the accuser is thrown down because the cross has disarmed him.

[Revelation 12:8](#) explicitly states that the dragon was defeated and that *“there was no longer any place for them in heaven.”* This does not suggest that Satan had equal standing with God in heaven, but rather that he had access to it as the accuser of God’s people (cf. [Job 1:6-12](#); [Zechariah 3:1-2](#)). That access is now revoked. The work of Christ has forever barred Satan from appearing before God to lay charges against the saints. Heaven is permanently cleansed of the accuser (cf. [Romans 8:31-39](#)).

The Identity of the Dragon

If there were any remaining ambiguity, [Revelation 12:9](#) removes it entirely: *“the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”* This identification ties the dragon directly to [Genesis 3](#), where the serpent deceives the woman. The continuity from Genesis to Revelation is deliberate—this is the same enemy, now fully revealed. His tools? Accusation and deception. Both answered by the work of Christ and the witness of His people.

The Loud Voice from Heaven

In [Revelation 12:10](#), a loud voice declares the meaning of the event:

“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come.”

This does not mean that Christ has only now begun to reign, but that the effects of His victory are now manifest in a new and definitive way. Satan has been cast down; his accusations are silenced. The declaration continues:

“For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.”

That title—*“accuser of our brothers”*—is the very definition of Satan’s role throughout redemptive history. But now, through the work of Christ, that accusation is answered.

How the Church Conquers

Revelation 12:11 is one of the most powerful in the chapter:

“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.”

Satan is not defeated by force of arms, political influence, or cultural power, but by the blood of Christ and the faithful witness of His people. The cross disarms the devil’s accusations, and the saints conquer by holding fast to their confession—even at the cost of their lives.

This verse provides a summary of the Church’s posture throughout the age: faithful, sacrificial, unashamed. The Lamb’s blood secures our status; our testimony confirms our allegiance. And when we do not shrink back from death, we prove that our hope lies beyond the grave.

Rejoicing and Warning

Heaven rejoices—**Revelation 12:12** calls on the heavens and those who dwell in them to celebrate. But the earth and sea are warned:

“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.”

This verse acts as a hinge between scenes: the dragon’s defeat in heaven leads to intensified rage on earth. He is still active—though defeated—and he turns his fury toward the Church. His time is short, and he knows it. That explains the sustained opposition the Church faces: not a sign of God’s absence, but of Satan’s desperation.

The Church in the Wilderness (vv. 13-17)

Having been thrown down from heaven, the dragon now turns his fury toward the woman who gave birth to the male child. This is a key interpretive moment: it confirms that the woman is not Mary. She is still present in the narrative—still the object of Satan’s hatred, still protected by God. The child is now ascended, but the woman remains. She represents the Church—the covenant community preserved through judgment, sustained through tribulation, and pursued by the enemy.

The Dragon’s Earthly Rage

Revelation 12:13 makes clear that the dragon, knowing his time is short, channels his wrath into persecuting the woman. This begins a new stage in redemptive history. With the accuser cast out of heaven and unable to challenge the saints before the throne, he now works to destroy them on earth.

But once again, God intervenes. The woman is given *“the two wings of the great eagle”* so she can fly into the wilderness. This evokes the Exodus imagery of **Exodus 19:4**: *“I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”* The wilderness, as throughout Scripture, is a place of both testing and provision. It is not a pleasant refuge—but it is a divinely prepared one.

She is nourished there *“for a time, and times, and half a time”*—another form of the 3½-year symbol that recurs throughout Daniel and Revelation. This is the same period as the **1,260** days and **42** months. It symbolizes the entire Church Age: a fixed, God-ordained span of tribulation, restrained in duration and intensity, during which the Church is sustained even under threat. This is the earthly side of the millennium described in **Revelation 20**: the Church on earth, persecuted yet preserved, while Satan is bound and the Gospel goes forth conquering (cf. **Revelation 6:1-2**).

The Flood and the Earth’s Help

The dragon—now called *“the serpent”* (reminding us again of **Genesis 3**)—tries to sweep the woman away with a flood from his mouth. The exact nature of this flood is symbolic and debated. Some see it as false teaching or spiritual deception. Others see it as persecution or chaos. Perhaps we are not meant to draw a hard line; Revelation often uses multivalent images. What matters is that Satan seeks to destroy the Church by overwhelming her.

But creation itself resists him: *“the earth came to the help of the woman”* and swallowed the river. The precise imagery is mysterious, but the theological point is clear—Satan is not sovereign, even over the forces of nature or chaos. God governs all things, and even the earth—subject to futility since the Fall—serves the purposes of redemption.

This recalls how God restrained Pharaoh’s pursuit, swallowed Korah in the wilderness, or silenced the storm at sea. The Church will be pursued, but she will not be drowned. The dragon cannot overcome her because her preservation is secured by divine providence, not human strength.

The details might be fuzzy, but the main point is sharp and crystal clear: the dragon will do all he can to destroy the Church, but his attack will not fully succeed, because God’s provision (eagle’s wings) and protection (earth swallowing) ensure her survival and ultimate victory (through Christ).

The War on the Offspring

Revelation 12:17 brings the drama into sharp focus: *“Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring.”* If there were any doubt about the woman’s identity, this verse removes it. The offspring are those who *“keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus”*—that is, believers. Christians. The Church. Every saint is a child of this woman and, therefore, a target of the dragon’s wrath.

This verse explains the entire age of tribulation. Satan rages because he knows he is defeated. The Church suffers—not because she is failing, but because she is faithful. The persecution of the saints is not a sign of divine absence, but of Satan’s fury.

This is the normal Christian life in this age: preserved yet pursued, sealed yet suffering. And the hope of the Church is not that the dragon will grow tired—but that his time is short.

Conclusion

Revelation 12 pulls back the veil on history and reveals what has always been true: the real war is not geopolitical or cultural—it is spiritual. The great conflict of the ages is not between nations, ideologies, or institutions, but between the serpent and the seed of the woman. From Eden to Babel to Canaan to Egypt to Sinai to Canaan (again) to Jerusalem to Babylon to Bethlehem to the Church in the wilderness, the dragon has raged. But from the beginning, his defeat was certain.

This chapter helps us see clearly: Satan has already lost. Christ has been born, triumphed, and ascended. The accuser has been cast down. His time is short. But in his remaining time, he lashes out—not aimlessly, but specifically at the people of God. The Church does not suffer *in this vision* because she is flawed or faithless—though she often is—but because she is joined to Christ, whom the dragon hates and cannot reach. Though she does undergo divine discipline at times, her *tribulation* is due to Satan attempting to harm Christ by attacking His bride.

What we find here is not only theological explanation but pastoral comfort. The Church is not adrift in a sea of chaos. She is pursued, yes—but also nourished. The serpent strikes, but the earth swallows his flood. The dragon makes war, but the Lamb has already conquered. And so do His people—by His blood, by their testimony, and by not loving their lives even unto death.

This is the Church’s story. This is *our* story. And this is the lens through which we must view our suffering, our witness, and our hope. **Revelation 12** is not just a cosmic drama—it is a call to endurance and a declaration of victory.