

THREE REASON FOR CONFIDENCE BEFORE A RAGING DEVIL

12 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. ⁴His tail swept a third of the stars out of heaven, and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she delivered her child he might devour [him]. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who *is destined* to rule all the nations with an iron scepter. Her child was carried away to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness, where *there* is a place for her prepared by God, so that they may take care of her there for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. ⁷And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels waged war against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought [back]. ⁸But they could not prevail, [and so] they lost their place in heaven. ⁹The enormous dragon was flung down—the ancient serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was flung down to the earth, and his angels were flung down with him. ¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren, he who accuses them before our God day and night, has been flung down! ¹¹They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the confession of their *faith*; and they did not love their life even when faced with death. ¹²Therefore, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! [But] woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has come down to you. He is filled with fury, because he knows that he has only a short time.” ¹³When the dragon saw that he had been flung down to the earth, he persecuted 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 to *the place prepared for* her in the wilderness, where she is *protected* from the face of the serpent for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵The serpent spit water like a river out of his mouth at the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the torrent. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman; the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the river the dragon had spit out of his mouth. ¹⁷The dragon was enraged against the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep the commandments of God and maintain their profession [of *faith*] in Jesus.* (Rev. 12:1-17)

*Literally, “*and hold the testimony of Jesus*”

Introduction

One day a missionary and a local pastor in Tahiti were walking through waist-high grass towards a small house they wished to visit. They had not gotten very far when they heard a low, throaty growl coming from the hidden depths of the grass. Stopping to listen, they each felt a chill of fear run up their spine.

Suddenly, a Doberman pinscher leaped up and began bounding toward them, his sharp teeth bared in a formidable snarl. The missionary could see every detail as if it were all taking place in slow motion—he stood directly in the dog’s path, paralyzed by fear. As the Doberman made its final leap, so close that the missionary could smell his foul breath, the dog’s head was violently twisted to the side. Savagely slammed down on his back, he lay stunned, feet waving in the air like an overturned beetle.

“Thank You, Lord,” the two men breathed in unison. Then they saw what they had failed to notice before: the Doberman was on a chain, and he had simply run out of chain.

As you picture that Doberman pinscher lying flat on his back, at the end of his chain, picture the devil in the same position—at the other end of the chain is the Lord, holding it fast in His strong, unyielding grip. (*POWER*, 4/7/91, pp. 4-5)

Although the devil is a vicious and vindictive adversary, he has been defeated by Christ at every point. Even though he may yet vent his rage and perpetrate his demonic activity in the world, as Christians, let us be confident that our adversary, the devil, is a defeated foe and that the victory belongs to Jesus. Let us consider Revelation 12 from this perspective as it presents to us “Three Reasons for Confidence before a Raging Devil.”

I. The First Reason for Confidence:

The Devil Could Not Prevent the LORD’s Work of Redemption

Verse 1 reports, “*a great sign appeared in heaven.*” In other words, what is about to be revealed are spiritual realities of cosmic proportion; the events played out on earth have their origin and significance in these great spiritual realities.

John now sees “*a woman.*” She is “*clothed with the sun,*” indicating her position of honor and glory as the beloved of God, sharing in His glory. What is depicted here is the status originally bestowed upon man by virtue of his creation: “*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*” (Gen. 1:27.) John further observes, “*the moon was under her feet;*” indicating the exercise of dominion over the creation, the role God ordained for man at the time of his creation: “*And God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’*” (Gen. 1:28.) The woman is seen wearing “*a crown of twelve stars.*” The stars represent the twelve tribes of Israel and identify the woman specifically with the Old Testament covenant people of God. The woman whom John sees represents the people of God extending back beyond the nation of Israel all the way back to Adam, but especially focusing upon the Old Testament nation of Israel from whom the Messiah would come into the world.

In verse 2 we learn that this woman was pregnant, and she cries out in pain for the delivery of her child. The Old Testament people of God (the nation of Israel) “gave birth” to the promised Messiah. The emphasis on the woman’s pain (literally, she was *“being tortured to give birth”*) points back to Genesis 3:15-16a and the original promise of the Messiah. Addressing the serpent, the LORD declared: *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel. ¹⁶To the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing: in pain you shall give birth to children”* (Gen. 3:15-16a)

Verse 3 reports, *“another sign appeared in heaven.”* John now sees *“an enormous red dragon.”* Verse 9 identifies this dragon as the devil, possessing awful power and potential for evil and terrible destructiveness. Speaking of the devil, the Lord Jesus declared,

He was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature], because he is a liar and the father of lies. (Jn. 8:44)

The dragon is seen to have *“seven heads and ten horns,”* and there were *“seven crowns upon his heads.”* Revelation 13:1 introduces us to a beast of a similar description: *“And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on his heads were blasphemous names.”* Revelation 17:11-12 identifies the beast as a world empire with its allied satellite nations:

The beast that [once] was, but [at present] is not, is also an eighth king. He belongs to the seven, and he will go into perdition. ¹²The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. (Rev. 17:11-12)

What is the significance of these visions and how do they fit together? Revelation 13 will focus on the earthly kingdom, or, empire, that is under the control of the devil, whereas Revelation 12 focuses on the devil himself as the power behind the throne of that earthly kingdom.

The dragon’s tail *“swept a third of the stars out of heaven, and flung them to the earth”* (vs. 4a.) In his rebellion, the devil drew after him a great host of the angels of God—as the Apostle Peter writes, *“God did not spare angels when they sinned”* (2 Pet. 2:4a)—and he now rules over them as the prince of the demons.

The enormous red dragon is seen standing before the pregnant woman, desiring to devour her child (vs. 4b.) The devil, using King Herod—a ruler under the authority of the Roman empire, which itself was a first century form of “the beast,” the demonically-controlled and inspired empire of man in opposition to God—

sought to destroy the Messiah at the time of His birth: *“When [the Magi] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. ‘Get up,’ he said, ‘take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him”* (Matt. 2:13.)

According to verse 5 the woman safely delivered her child, who is identified as the One *“who is destined to rule all the nations with an iron scepter.”* Here is an allusion to Psalm 2; a Psalm that describes the nations joined together against the LORD (vs. 1-3,) but the LORD and His Messiah shall triumph and rule (vs. 4-9):

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ²The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against Jehovah and against his Anointed One. ³“Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.” ⁴The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶“I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.” ⁷I will proclaim the decree of Jehovah: He said to me, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father. ⁸Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.” (Psl. 2:1-9)

We learn further that the woman’s child *“was carried away to God and to his throne”* (vs. 5c.) Here is a reference to our Lord’s ascension and His place of pre-eminent authority at the right hand of God the Father, after having successfully accomplished the work of redemption.

Although the devil may yet vent his rage and perpetrate his demonic activity in the world, as Christians, we may be confident—and the first reason for such confidence is this: The devil could not prevent the Lord Jesus from accomplishing His work of redemption. The Lord Jesus declares to His disciples, *“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33.) The Lord gained the victory by means of His crucifixion, followed by His resurrection and His ascension.

II. The Second Reason for Confidence:

The Devil Cannot Prevail against the LORD’s Church

Verse 7 informs us that a mighty spiritual battle was waged in heaven, before the very presence of God and His throne. The angel Michael, as the defender of God’s people and the conqueror of their enemies, is an angelic representation of Christ Himself.

Verse 8 reports the outcome of this spiritual warfare: the dragon did not prevail; neither did he and his hosts have any place in heaven any more. In Zechariah 3:1 we read of Satan standing in the presence of God, serving as a spiritual “district attorney” bringing charges against God’s people: *“Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Jehovah, and Satan standing at his right*

side to accuse him.” Note: Joshua the high priest represents all of God’s people. Now Revelation 12:8 tells us that Satan no longer has a place to stand—that is to say, he can no longer bring charges against God’s people that demand the Lord to execute His righteous judgment against us, the reason being the victory won by Christ at Calvary:

When you were dead in your sins ... God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Col. 2:13-15)

From verse 9 we learn that the great dragon was violently thrown out of heaven and *“flung down to the earth.”* Although he has once for all lost his position of authority in heaven—his ability to bring charges against God’s people that require God to enact judgment against them, that judgment being once and for all enacted against Christ upon the cross of Calvary—the devil has not yet been thrown into the lake of fire. The carrying out of the final sentence of condemnation awaits the return of Christ and the Final Judgment at the end of history. Consequently, throughout the remainder of the New Testament era, right up until the end of the age he seeks to wreck havoc on the earth (vs. 13.)

John now hears *“a loud voice in heaven,”* the voice of the angels of God. They are praising God for His victory over the devil:

Now has come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren, he who accuses them before our God day and night, has been flung down! (Rev. 12:10)

They are describing the Christian’s participation in that divine victory: *“They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the confession of their faith; and they did not love their life even when faced with death”* (vs. 11.) They also pronounce a word of warning to the earth: *“Therefore, rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! [But] woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has come down to you. He is filled with fury, because he knows that he has only a short time”* (vs. 12.)

Although the devil may yet vent his rage and perpetrate his demonic activity in the world, as Christians, we may be confident—the second reason for such confidence is this: The devil cannot prevail against the Lord’s church. Christ has won the victory on our behalf and we share in His triumph:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... ³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ... ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—

more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us ...³⁸I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons ...³⁹ ... shall be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:1,31,33-34,38-39)

III. The Third Reason for Confidence: The Devil Cannot Destroy the LORD's People

In verse 13 we read that when the devil saw that he had been *"flung down to the earth* [i.e.; when he recognized his spiritual defeat], *he persecuted the woman who had given birth to the male child."* That is to say, the devil unleashed his vengeance against the nation of Israel, exhibited in the destruction of Jerusalem (70 A.D.) and the dispersion of the Jews.

But, according to verse 14, *"the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness."* In Exodus 19:4 the LORD reminds Israel, *"I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."* Thus the woman's escape into the wilderness is an act of God's covenant mercy, designed to preserve "the woman" (i.e.; the people of Israel) from complete annihilation by the dragon. Verse 14 is speaking of the people of Israel being dispersed into *"the wilderness"* of the Gentiles; that is to say, being scattered throughout the Gentile world. In one sense, the people of Israel are dispersed because of the unbelief of their forefathers. When Pilate presented Jesus to the people, they cried out, *"Let his blood be on us and on our children!"* (Matt. 27:25.) But, at the same time, they are preserved because of the faith of their great forefather Abraham. Writing to the Gentile Christians concerning unbelieving Israel, the Apostle Paul says, *"As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved for the sake of the patriarchs, ²⁹for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable"* (Rom. 11:28-29.)

In the wilderness the woman *"is protected from the face of the serpent for a time, and times, and half a time"* (vs. 14b.) Throughout this present New Testament era the people of Israel are dispersed among the Gentile nations as a means of preserving them from total annihilation and extinction by the devil.

Seeing the woman's escape into the wilderness, the serpent now employs another tactic: *"the serpent spit water like a river out of his mouth at the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the torrent"* (vs. 15.) The devil recognizes God's protective plan for Israel; namely, to have them dispersed among the nations so as not to be subject to mass annihilation. The devil's tactic now is to undermine this divine plan by having Israel drowned by his torrent—his aim is to have Israel become assimilated into the Gentile nations and thus lose her distinct identity and hope for the Messiah. Assimilation was precisely the threat that the Old Testament covenant community faced throughout the time of the theocracy. Through Moses, the LORD warned His covenant people:

Do not intermarry with them [the Gentile nations]. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, ⁴for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and Jehovah's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you ... ⁶for you are a people holy to Jehovah your God. Jehovah your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. (Deut. 7:3-4,6)

A Jewish leader, Ephraim Zuroff of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, spoke of “the damage inflicted upon us [Jews] by the two major scourges of the 20th century in Jewish terms: anti-Semitism and assimilation” (*The Sheboygan Press*, October 10, 1998.)

But verse 16 informs us, “*the earth helped the woman,*” by opening its mouth and swallowing the river. Referring to Pharaoh’s pursuing army, Exodus 15:12 says, “*the earth swallowed them up*” when the Lord “*stretched out his right hand.*” In other words, throughout this present New Testament era the LORD preserves exiled Israel from the cunning attacks of the devil, by preventing her from becoming totally assimilated into the Gentile nations and thereby losing her distinct identity and Messianic hope.

At present exiled Israel continues in their rejection of Jesus the Messiah, and therefore remains in their state of sin and condemnation. The Lord Jesus declares of the unbelieving Jews, “*I told you that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins*” (Jn. 8:24.) Yet, the LORD is determined that Israel maintains her distinctive identity and keeps alive the expectation of the Messiah; as the Apostle Paul informs the Gentile believers with regard to Israel:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins. (Rom. 11:25-27)

Verse 17 concludes by reporting that the dragon also wages war against “*the rest of [the woman’s] offspring.*” These offspring are identified as “*those who keep the commandments of God and maintain their profession of faith in Jesus*”—here is a reference to the Christian church. As Revelation 11 indicated, the church of Christ will suffer intense persecution from the world, a persecution incited by the devil himself. We may note again the word of warning the Lord Jesus to His disciples while He was still present with them during the time of His earthly ministry:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to

the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. (Jn. 15:18-19)

Although the devil may yet vent his rage and perpetrate his demonic activity in the world, as Christians, we may be confident—the third reason for such confidence is this: The devil cannot destroy the LORD’s people. If the devil cannot destroy Israel, even in their present state of unbelief, how much more is it true that he cannot destroy those who are in the state of grace and redemption in Christ Jesus!

All whom the Father gives me will come to me; and he who comes to me I will by no means reject; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, [namely,] that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰My Father’s will is that every one who looks to the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (Jn. 6:37-40)

Conclusion

In this present New Testament era, the devil does rage, because he knows that he has “*only a short time*” before he is thrown into the lake of fire forever—but there is a limit to what he is permitted to do. Revelation 12 presents us with three things of which we as Christians may be confident: 1) we may be confident that the devil cannot prevent the accomplishment of Christ’s work of redemption; 2) we may be confident that the devil cannot prevail against Christ’s church; and 3) we may be confident that the devil cannot destroy the LORD’s people. When we look at Revelation 12 we see a raging devil; but we also see here three great reasons for confidence. There is victory in Jesus, let us trust in Him and abide in Him.