

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Church's Conflict and Comfort: Warfare and Wayfaring in the Wilderness (Revelation 12)



I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen 3.15)

1. Review of Revelation 1-11

2. Revelation 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.

⁷Now 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.

3. Overview of Revelation 12

- a. “A Great Sign”: The woman and her offspring (Christ and the church)
- b. “Another Sign”: The great fiery dragon (the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan)
- c. Warfare and Wayfaring (comfort and conflict)

4. The Woman, Her Son, and the Dragon (12.1-6)

- a. **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. (12.1-2)**
 - i. The woman is a symbol of God’s people, who experience agony despite heavenly adornment and identity (cf. Gen 3.15-16; Gen 37.9; Is 26.17-18; 52.2; 54.1-6; 61.10; 62.1-5; 66.7-13; Gal 4.26-27; 2 John 1, 5; 3 John 9)

Isaiah 54:1-6 “Sing, O barren one, who did not bear; break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married,” says the LORD. ² “Enlarge the place of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. ³ For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left, and your offspring will possess the nations and will people the desolate cities. ⁴ “Fear not, for you will not be ashamed; be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced; for you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is

called. ⁶ For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off, says your God.

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD; my soul shall exult in my God, for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation; he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 66:7-13 “Before she was in labor she gave birth; before her pain came upon her she delivered a son. ⁸ Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. ⁹ Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth?” says the LORD; “shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb?” says your God. ¹⁰ “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹ that you may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast; that you may drink deeply with delight from her glorious abundance.” ¹² For thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream; and you shall nurse, you shall be carried upon her hip, and bounced upon her knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

Galatians 4:26-27 But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”

John 16:20-22 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

- b. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. ⁴His 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. (12.3-4)**

- i. The Great Red Dragon: the great enemy of God and his people (cf. Ex 1; Matt 2; Ps 74.12-14; Job 26.12-13; Is 27.1; Is 30.7; 51.9; Ezek 29.3; 32.2-3)

Psalms 74:12-14 But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. ¹³ It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. ¹⁴ It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.

Job 26:12-13 By his power he stilled the sea; by his understanding he shattered Rahab. ¹³ By his wind the heavens were made fair; his hand pierced the fleeing serpent.

Isaiah 27:1 In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.

Isaiah 30:7 Egypt's help is worthless and empty; therefore I have called her "Rahab who sits still."

Isaiah 51:9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?

Ezekiel 29:3 Speak to him and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying among your streams."

Ezekiel 32:2-3 "Son of man, take up a lament concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him: "'You are like a lion among the nations; you are like a monster in the seas thrashing about in your streams, churning the water with your feet and muddying the streams."³ Thus says the Lord GOD: I will throw my net over you with a host of many peoples, and they will haul you up in my dragnet."

ii. The Stars of Heaven (cf. Dan 8.9-14, 24, 28)

Daniel 8:9-12 Out of one of them came a little horn, which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the glorious land.¹⁰ It grew great, even to the host of heaven. And some of the host and some of the stars it threw down to the ground and trampled on them. (cf. Dan 8.24: stars = saints)

c. **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. (12.5-6)**

i. The Ascension and Rule of Christ

Psalms 2 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill."⁷ I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you."⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

ii. The Church sojourning in the wilderness (a place prepared by God where she is nourished) (Ex 16.32; Deut 2.7; 8.3 [cf. John 6]; Deut 8.11-17; 1 Cor 10)

Exodus 16:32 Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.'"

Deuteronomy 2:7 For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you. You have lacked nothing.”⁶

Deuteronomy 8:3 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (cf. John 6; 1 Cor 10)

5. War and Worship in Heaven (12.7-12)

a. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸but 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. (12.7-9)

- i. War in heaven: Michael executes Jesus' victory (analogy of field officer and staff officer)
- ii. The great dragon thrown down (4 times 12.9 [twice], 10, 13)
- iii. Ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver (Gen 3.1-6; Job 1.6-12; 2.1-6; Zech 3.1-5; John 8.44)

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Zechariah 3:1-5 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.² And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?”³ Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.⁴ And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.”⁵ And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

b. ¹⁰And 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. (12.10)

i. No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! (Rom 3.21-26; 8.1, 30-39; Col 2.13-15; Hebrews 2.14-15; John 12.31-33; Luke 10.17-20)

Romans 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. ²⁶ It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Colossians 2.13-15: And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Hebrews 2:14-15 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

John 12:31-33 Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

Luke 10:17-20 The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” ¹⁸ And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Romans 8:1, 30-39 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus ... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor

height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- c. **“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.” (12.11)**

Matthew 16:24-26 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

- d. **“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!” (12.12)**

6. The Church in the Wilderness: Warfaring and Wayfaring (12.13-17)

- a. **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. (12.13-14)**

- i. The New Exodus and Wilderness Sojourn (Ex 19.4-6; Is 31.15; 35.iff; 40.3; 41.18; 43.18-20; 51.3; Jer 31.2; Ezek 34.25)

Exodus 19:4-6 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

Isaiah 40:1-5, 29-31 Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. ² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. ⁵ And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.” ... He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. ³⁰ Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; ³¹ but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Deuteronomy 1:30-33 The LORD your God who goes before you will himself fight for you, just as he did for you in Egypt before your eyes, ³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place. ³² Yet in spite of this word you did not believe the LORD your God, ³³ who went before you in the way to seek you out a place to pitch your tents, in fire by night and in the cloud by day, to show you by what way you should go.

Deuteronomy 32:10-12 “He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.¹¹ Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions,¹² the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him.

Deuteronomy 8:3, 11-17 And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD ... “Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today,¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them,¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied,¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery,¹⁵ who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock,¹⁶ who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.¹⁷ Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’

John 15:18-21 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.

Psalms 23 *A Psalm of David.* The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

- b. 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. (12.15-16)**

Exodus 15:11-13 “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?¹² You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.¹³ “You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

- c. 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. (12.17)**