

The Facebook Commentary on Revelation
Jon Paulien

Revelation Chapter 12

Rev 12 Introduction–

From this point on in Revelation, things are going to be different. For the first time, there is a detailed description of a strange beast that is unlike anything in nature. It has seven heads and ten horns. This is going to be an animal story, but an animal story that is not really about animals. It is a cartoon-like parable that uses animals to describe major turns in the course of human history.

This reminds me of the Disney cartoon-movie, *Lion King*, where a pride of lions dominated (usually benevolently) the animals on the plains of Africa. This too was an animal story that was not really about animals. It was more about relationships between people and between groups of people. The book of Revelation was like a *Lion King* for the ancient world. It was not about animals, but about issues, powers, and relationships between groups of people. In Revelation 12 there is a woman, a male child, and a dragon. In chapter 13 there are other animals, each weird enough for us to know that they are not to be taken literally. Revelation 12 and 13 is like a cartoon-parable about life on this earth.

This chapter tells us a couple of very important things about the context in which the New Testament was written. First, the challenges that Jesus faced while He was on earth originated in a heavenly war. Both the ordinary and the unusual events of Jesus' life had a cosmic significance. If Revelation 12 were not in the Bible, we would know a lot less about that. Second, after the ascension of Jesus, the focus of that cosmic war moved from the person of Jesus to His church. In Revelation 12:6 and 12:14 there is a double reference to this shift. In cartoon-parable language, after the man child born to the woman is snatched up to heaven, she comes under attack of the dragon. She is taken to the desert and cared for 1260 days (time, times, and half a time). Since the ministry of Jesus from His baptism until His crucifixion was roughly three-and-a-half years, the woman's experience in this chapter is modeled on the earthly ministry of Christ.

As mentioned previously, the sanctuary stage setting for chapter 12 and beyond is found in Revelation 11:19, the scene of the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly temple. This scene brings at least four themes to light and focuses them on the events that follow: 1) the presence and mercy of God, 2) the ten commandments which resided in the ark, 3) the book of the covenant that resided by the ark, and 4) the Day of Atonement and its services. The second of these themes, the commandments of God, seems to be the most central focus in chapters 12-14. (see comments on Rev 11:19).

There are three main sections in the chapter, but exact divisions are difficult. If one wants to follow the neater separations in the literary narrative, one should follow Stefanovic, who divides the chapter as follows: 1) 1-6, 2) 7-13, and 3) 14-17. If one wishes instead to follow

the implied movements in history outlined in the chapter, then the parallel between verses 6 and 14 needs to be taken seriously. In that case the division of the chapter would be: 1) 1-5, 2) 7-12, and 3) 6, 13-17.

Rev 12:1–

It is the first time the word "sign" has appeared in Revelation. The word seems to mean a striking visual scene (see also Revelation 12:3 and 15:1), but it also refers to demonic miracles at the end-time (Revelation 13:13-14; 16:14; and 19:20). In the New Testament "signs" can also be portents of the last days (Luke 21:11, 25; and Acts 2:19). So the author of Revelation may be using the word to indicate that the second half of the book will focus on the last days of earth's history.

"Appeared" translates a passive verb for seeing, "was seen" (*ôphthê* in the original). This word is used only three times in the book, all of them in a four verse stretch from 11:19 - 12:3. What is striking is that normally visions are introduced by the aorist active, "and I saw" (*kai eïdon*). So this expression stands out to the reader of the Greek. This observation suggests two things. 1) Revelation 12 is closely connected to 11:19, which functions as a "sanctuary introduction" to the vision of chapters 12-14. 2) This is likely to be a major turning point of the book as a whole. It seems to me that in the first eleven chapters of the book, the focus is on the larger sweep of history. But in the latter half of the book (chapters 12-22), the focus narrows particularly to the final events of earth's history, up to and beyond the return of Jesus.

Whenever a new character appears in Revelation (the woman, in this case), the author takes time to describe the character visually and gives some sense of the character's past history before describing the character's actions in relation to the vision that follows. Revelation 12:1-5 introduces three new characters, the woman, the dragon and the male child. The introduction of the woman occurs in Revelation 12:1-2. Her actions in relation to the vision of Revelation 12 occur from verses 5-16.

Here the woman dressed in the sun, moon, and stars represents the continuity of the people of God, beginning with Old Testament Israel. In the OT these images are found in Joseph's dream (Gen 37:9), where the stars bowed down to him and in the description of Solomon's bride, "Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?" SoS 6:10. People in love often exaggerate like that!

Such love language is used to describe God's relationship with Israel, "For your Maker is your husband." Isa 54:5-6, see also Ezek 16:8; Hos 2:14-20; 1 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:25-32; Rev 19:7-8). When Israel was faithful, positive marriage language was used. When Israel was not faithful, the language of adultery, divorce and prostitution can be used (Hos 2:1-13; Jer 3:6-10; Rev 17:1-5, see also Ezek 16 and 23).

So the woman represents the people of God (12 stars recalls twelve tribes and twelve apostles). There is continuity portrayed in this chapter between the Old Testament people of God and the Christian church. While Revelation 12-22 focuses primarily on the final events of earth's history, the stage for that is here set with a brief history of God's people from OT times all the way up to the end.

The woman is the first of seven striking figures in Revelation 12-14: there is the woman,

who represents the people of God, both OT Israel and the Church (Rev 12); three figures representing Satan--the dragon (Rev 12), the sea beast and the land beast (Rev 13); and three figures that refer to Christ--Michael (Rev 12), the Lamb (Rev 13), and the Son of Man (Rev 14). The substance of this section is brought about by the seven mystic figures.

This section of the book makes it clear that the war between good and evil on this earth is playing out a cosmic war that began long before the birth of Christ (Rev 12:3-5). In other words, what happens to the woman (people of God on earth) is determined by what happens in the cosmic war between Christ and Satan. That war has spilled over to earth and Revelation draws back the curtain so we can understand that cosmic war. As people battle with evil in their own lives, they are experiencing the fallout of a much larger conflict.

Rev 12:2--

The woman (people of God) is described as pregnant and in labor. The analogy between a woman in labor and Israel is common in the Old Testament (Isa 26:17-18; 66:7-9; Jer 4:31; Mic 4:10). But while the language of "cried out in pain" reflects Greek words for labor and childbirth, there is an additional phrase that is not always well translated. The woman is "tormented" (*basanizomenê*) in the process of giving birth. Since this is not normal language for describing the birth process in the Greek, Stefanovic suggests that the intensity of the woman's pain is due to the dragon's attempt to destroy her child as soon as he is born (12:4).

Rev 12:3--

A new character is introduced in verses 3 and 4 as a second sign, the dragon. This second sign is closely related to the first sign, the dragon and the woman will interact through verse 16. The dragon acts in the context of the vision from Revelation 12:5 onward in the book. The dragon is further defined in 12:9 as the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan and the one who deceives the whole world. Reference to the ancient serpent reminds readers that the war between the dragon and the woman described here began in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:1-15). That is the primary allusion here. Satan's war against the descendants of Eve is particularly acted out in this chapter through his hostility toward the woman as representing the NT people of God (Rev 12:6, 12-16).

The word "dragon" (Greek *drakôn*) was widely used in the ancient Near East for large mythological creatures. Similar references can be found in the Old Testament with the Hebrew names Leviathan (Job 3:8; 41:1; Ps 74:14; 104:26; Isa 27:1) and Rahab (Ps 89:10; Isa 51:9). In Job 41:1, Psalms 74:14 and 104:26, and Isaiah 27:1 the Hebrew Leviathan (which may at times refer to the whale) is even translated by the Greek *drakôn*.

The dragon here is red in color. But the color for "red" (Greek *purros*) is actually the word for "fire." The dragon is fiery red. This is in contrast with Revelation 17:3, where the beast, which looks like the dragon (seven heads and ten horns) is scarlet (*kokkinon*) in color. The use of fiery red here connects with Revelation 6:4, where the red (*purros*) horse is associated with the lack of peace, killing and a sacrificial sword (see comments on Rev 6:4). Both Greek words for red can be associated with bloodshed (2 Kgs 3:22-23; Rev 17:3, 6).

The seven heads and ten horns of the dragon allude to Daniel 7, where the four beasts

who come out of the sea have seven heads (three beasts have one head each and the leopard has four) and ten horns collectively (Dan 7:4-8). The appearance of the dragon anticipates 13:1 and 17:3. Revelation 17:9-10 suggests that the seven heads of the dragon are probably consecutive rather than contemporary with each other.

There are further and more detailed allusions to Daniel 7 throughout chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation. This is further evidence that the dragon represents more than Satan, it also represents earthly powers in the service of Satan. In Daniel 7 carnivorous beasts represent successive empires beginning with Babylon and ending with Rome. The ten horns of Daniel 7 follow the fourth beast in point of time, representing what would occur after Rome. If the heads of the dragon are consecutive in Revelation (17:9-10), pagan Rome would be one of the seven heads.

At this point it is sufficient to note that in this verse there are crowns on the heads but not on the horns. That situation is reversed in Revelation 13:1-2, which represents a later period in history than 12:1-5.

The word for “crowns” here (*diadêmata*) represents the kind of crown worn by kings and rulers rather than the kind worn by winners in the Olympic games or generals returning from a victory (*stephanos*— usually a garland of leaves or flowers). This underlines the point that these various heads represent kingdoms or empires on earth that dragon (Satan) uses to forward his agenda. While a “diadem” crown, like a throne, represents the right to rule (see also Rev 13:1; 19:12), the *stephanos* crown is often a metaphor in the New Testament for the victory achieved in the gospel (1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; James 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 2:10; 3:11). In this scene the crowns are worn on the dragon’s heads, in contrast to the beast from the sea, which wears its crowns on the horns.

Rev 12:3-5 Introduction—

While the primary meaning of the dragon is Satan, there is an extended meaning in a secondary allusion to Herod’s attempt to destroy the baby Jesus at the time of His birth (Matt 2:12-18). The devil was the power behind the throne when King Herod, representative of pagan Rome, tried to destroy Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:5). This allusion has led many scholars of Revelation, particularly Roman Catholic ones, to apply the figure of the woman in Revelation 12:1-5 to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Such an application seems intentional here, but in the imagery of this chapter the woman clearly represents more than just Mary, she is Israel both before and after the birth of Christ.

Rev 12:4—

Reference to the tail of the dragon recalls the fifth trumpet (Rev 9:3, 10). There the tails of the scorpion/locusts hurt people. How they hurt people is illuminated by Isaiah 9:14-15 where God’s judgment on Israel is exercised against “the head and the tail.” According to Isaiah 9:15, “The elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail.” So the tail is a symbol of deception rather than military attack. The dragon does not pull down a third of the stars by force, but rather by persuasion through lies. This will be strongly confirmed as we move through this chapter. The conflict in heaven is not fought with guns and tanks but

with words and ideas.

All translations I looked at say that the dragon swept or drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw or cast them to the earth. The word for sweeping (*surei*) means to drag someone or something along against their will (John 21:8; Acts 8:3; 14:19; 17:6). The stars were pulled out of heaven and cast to the earth against their will (or perhaps their better judgment).

There is an interesting anomaly here. The “sweeping” is actually present tense (present indicative) while the “casting down” is past tense (aorist indicative). Most commentators, like most translators, do not even notice this shift, much less explain it. It is normal in describing visions to use the past tense (particularly aorist indicative), but sometimes (as we will see in chapter 13) tense shifts within a vision are very significant. In this case it may not be (or at least I cannot think of any reason for it).

There appears to be an allusion here to Daniel 8:10, where the “little horn” threw some of the stars of heaven to the ground and trampled on them. In that context it is an attack on the government of God. So the usage appears to be metaphorical rather than literal in both cases. If some of the stars the dragon casts down were from the twelve in the woman's crown, then this casting down would represent persecution of some of the true leaders of Israel. But stars are defined in Revelation 1:20 as “the angels of the seven churches.” So the casting down of stars in this verse is more likely a reference to Satan’s activity in heaven well before the events of verse 5. According to early Jewish tradition, stars represented heavenly beings who were capable of rebelling against God and thus becoming demonic and evil (see 1 Enoch 86:1 - 88:3; 90:24 and the Testament of Solomon 6:1-3 (26); 8:1 (29); 20:14-17 (114)).

The dragon, then, dragged and threw down (*ebalen* in the Greek) a third of the angels from heaven to earth. The “dragging” implies that the dragon was not going down willingly and took a third of the angels with him when he went. This event would be earlier (prior to the birth of the male child) than the events of 12:7-9, which occur in connection to the ascension of Christ (12:5, 7, 10-11). The eviction of a third of the angels took place at the beginning of creation (see Rev 13:8, see also Jude 6 in light of Job 1:6 and 38:7).

In the context of the woman and the dragon/serpent (see Rev 12:9 and comments on 12:3), the great hostility of the dragon toward the male child recalls Genesis 3:15. It is prophesied there that the serpent would bruise the heel of the “seed” of the woman. That prophecy was fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which was part of the “male child’s” experience alluded to in Revelation 12:5, although not symbolized in that verse (the cross is clearly alluded to in 12:11).

Rev 12:5–

Who is the male child? At this point the author of Revelation breaks a bit with a long-standing practice of introducing a new character with both a visual description and a bit of the character’s history before the time of the vision (see Rev 11:3-6; 12:1-2, 3-4). In this case there is no visual description and the “history” is actually a description of what the “male child” will do in the future, rule the world and ascend to heaven (not necessarily in that order!). Being “snatched up to God” is clearly a reference to Jesus Christ.

If the child in this verse is Christ, the woman giving birth to him would be Old Testament

Israel (the twelve stars in her crown recalls the twelve tribes) which was the people from which the Messiah would come. Ruling with an iron scepter recalls Psalm 2:7-9, where the Davidic king is destined to rule the nations. This text is applied to Jesus Christ also in Hebrews 2:6-9. Psalm 2 is alluded to also in Revelation 2:27-28, where it is a reference to the destiny of the church. There may also be an allusion to Micah 5:2-4, where the Messiah comes from Bethlehem (including a reference to the pains of childbirth). Jesus is portrayed as the ideal king in the line of David, which God promised would never end (see 2 Sam 7:8-16).

The male child ruling with an iron scepter and being snatched up to God is a clear reference to Jesus Christ. He rules the earth in principle now, but will do so completely after the conclusion of the cosmic war described in 12:7-12. But Jesus Christ will also share his rule with those who follow Him (Rev 2:27-28)!

In Revelation 22:16 Jesus is defined as “the bright morning star.” This echoes the description of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12. It classes Jesus, along with the dragon and the stars the dragon dragged down, as a heavenly being in nature. When He ascends to heaven at the end of 12:5, He is returning to the place from which He came. The story here is that the commander of heaven became a vulnerable baby, but after His time on earth resumed His position in heaven (Rev 12:7-12).

While this verse mentions only three aspects of Jesus’ experience; His birth as a human being, His rule over the earth and His ascension to heaven; the whole Christ event is implied in Revelation 12:5: His birth, temptations, earthly ministry, death, ascension, and rule over the earth. The cosmic side of the conflict between the dragon and the male child clearly began long before in heaven (Rev 12:4). In the Garden of Eden and at the birth of Christ that war was clearly brought to this earth. After the ascension of Jesus, a brief, final clash occurs in heaven (Rev 12:7-11— no doubt metaphor is being stretched by reality in all of this), while the faithful people of God on earth face the brunt of Satan’s wrath (Rev 12:6, 12-17). Jesus Christ was born to die (12:11) and now is enthroned in heavenly places (Rev 12:10).

Note that in the historical equivalent of this text there is a gap of 33 or so years between the birth and ascension of the male child (Jesus Christ). Fulfillment of prophecy can move through large sweeps of history in a few words or even a “comma.”

If one recognizes the second coming of Jesus in Revelation 14:14-20, one could say that Revelation 12:6 through 14:13 describes the events on earth between the time when Christ was here to His triumphal return in the second coming.

Rev 12:1-5 Summary—

There is a strong allusion to the Garden of Eden in this passage. There is the woman, the serpent (“that ancient serpent” in 12:9) and the seed (male child) of the woman. The serpent’s attempt to destroy the woman’s seed is foiled. The “bruising of his heel” (Gen 3:15) is not described in verse 5, but the allusions to the birth and ascension of Christ encourage the reader to incorporate the missing elements of suffering, death and resurrection.

This passage introduces the actors who will be at the center of the drama from this point on in the book. The woman represents the people of God, who are also called remnant (12:17), 144,000 (14:1), saints (14:12), the kings of the east (16:12), those who keep their

garments on (16:15) the called, chosen and faithful followers of the Lamb (17:14), and the great multitude (19:1). Though called by many names, God's end-time people will be one.

The dragon represents Satan in his war or words against heaven (12:4, 7-12). It also represents earthly powers through which he attacks the people of God, the beast from the sea (13:1-7), the beast from the earth (13:11), Babylon (14:8), the Euphrates River (16:12), the kings of the earth (16:14; 17:2), the great prostitute (17:1-5), the scarlet beast (17:3) and its ten horns (17:12-14). While these agents represent many powers in the course of human history, at the end they are all part of a coalition that seeks to destroy the work of Jesus Christ on this earth (16:14;17:1-14).

The male child represents Jesus, who is also known by many names in the book of Revelation; Michael (12:7), Christ (12:10), the Lamb (12:11), Jesus (12:17), one like a son of man (14:14), Lord of Lords and King of Kings (17:14), Faithful and True (19:11), the Word of God (19:13), the Alpha and the Omega, etc. (22:13), the offspring of David, and the bright morning star (22:16). Now that these characters are introduced, the action begins!

The book of Revelation is not about animals, although on the surface that might appear to be the case. Rather, it is about relationships and conflicts at both the cosmic and earthly levels that have consequences for every individual on earth. The characters in this chapter play out that conflict as a battle between the male child/Michael and the dragon/serpent. There will be much more to say about these symbols as we explore the rest of this chapter. In the process we will learn things about the universe that we would not know from any other source.

Being truly secular leaves you uncertain about the universe--you have no idea where you came from, where you are going, or what is going on beyond the atmosphere of this earth in the starry universe. The one who understands and believes the book of Revelation knows that what is happening on earth is part of a much bigger sequence of events. This is intended to impact the way we think and act every day. Ordinary people can be filled with a sense that they are part of something really big.

Rev 12:6-16 Introduction--

With verse 6 the story of chapter 12 moves to a double stage. The woman and the male child head in different directions and the dragon appears to follow both. The male child ascends to God's throne in heaven. In verse 7 the dragon is seen in heaven battling Michael and his angels. Meanwhile, the woman flees into the desert (Rev 12:6, 14), where she is attacked by the dragon/serpent (12:12-15) and rescued by the earth (12:16).

From this double stage we learn that the struggles Jesus and His people have faced on earth originated in a heavenly war (also 12:4). The focus of that war on earth moves from Jesus to the woman/church after His ascension. It is meaningful to know that everything we do is significant in a universal sense. The small decisions we make everyday have cosmic implications.

The experience of the woman in the desert for 1260 days is paralleled in chapter 17. There a woman is in the desert sitting on a scarlet beast that is covered with blasphemous names and has seven heads and ten horns, which relate the beast to the dragon (Rev 17:3). That woman is dressed like Israel's High Priest (Rev 17:4-5), so you have a conflation of positive and negative images. On the one hand, the two women are both in the desert and bear imagery

related to God and His people (Eden, Exodus, High Priest). On the other hand, the woman of Revelation 12 is attacked by the dragon, while the woman of Revelation 17 is in league with “the kings of the earth” and the beastly agent of the dragon and joins them in making war with the Lamb. Her name is Babylon, which is the enemy counterpart of the New Jerusalem. No wonder John is astonished by the vision of prostitute Babylon (Rev 17:6)! It is a forecast of the dark turn that the Church would take in the course of its history. The greatest enemies of the true worship of God have tended to be inside the house rather than outside!

In another sense, the two women are not so much representing complete opposites as two sides of the same coin. The church of any stripe is at one and the same time apostate to the degree that it embraces political and economic power and the home of faithful followers of God.

Rev 12:6–

From the imagery of Eden where the woman is described as an Eve giving birth to her child who is threatened by the serpent (Rev 12:5), there is movement to the imagery of the Exodus (Rev 12:6 and 14). The church (woman) is in the wilderness of Sinai between the Red Sea and the Jordan River. The Exodus (which was like a baptism– 1 Cor 10:1-6) through the “Red Sea” represented deliverance from sin for the early Christians. The later crossing of the Jordan was like the second coming, bringing them into the “promised land.” So the church’s wilderness experience is lived between the cross and the second coming.

After the male child is snatched up to God’s throne, the woman flees into the desert, where she is taken care of for “1260 days.” This verse is virtually repeated in verse 14, which refocuses the story on the woman after the powerful war in heaven interlude of verses 7-12. There are a few differences between verses 6 and 14.

In verse six the mechanism by which the woman flees into the desert is not mentioned. In verse 14 it is the “two wings of a great eagle.” Verse 6 mentions that God prepared a place to take care of her, God’s intervention is not mentioned but is implied in verse 14. Verse 6 describes the time period as 1260 days, verse 14 speaks of “a time, times and half a time.” The two time periods are clearly the same, so the “time, times and half a time” should be understood as three and a half years. The last point of difference is the addition of “out of the serpent’s reach” in verse 14. The two verses are parallel and need to be read together in order to fully understand the woman’s “desert period.”

If the woman represents the people of God after the ascension of Christ (the church), this fleeing into the desert represents a period of obscurity and peril in the church’s experience after NT times.

In the book of Revelation, whenever a time period is phrased 1260, it is positive and refers to God's side of the conflict. In Revelation 11:3 it is used in relation to the two witnesses and in Revelation 12:6 it is used in connection with the flight of the woman. On the other hand, whenever the time period is phrased as forty-two months, it is negative and refers to the enemies of God. The gentiles trample on the holy city (Revelation 11:2) and the sea beast dominates humanity (Revelation 13:5) for that period of time. On one hand, the people of God are oppressed, dressed in sackcloth, and fleeing to the wilderness while surviving under the

protection of God, and on the other hand, there is a period where evil dominates. The time periods are exactly the same and these two themes are like two sides of a coin.

When I was last in the Sinai desert I noticed only two places with anything green at all--a monastery near a spring and a small reservoir near the top of the mountain--and otherwise I did not even see a blade of green grass or even a weed. The Sinai area is completely void of vegetation and is not a place to find much food! A host of people camped in a place like that for about a year so it is easy to see why a miracle was necessary for food. Modeled on that experience, this passage portrays the church on earth as passing through a spiritual desert nourished spiritually (and sometimes physically) by God.

Rev 12:7-12 Introduction--

In this passage the action of the chapter moves from earth to heaven, returning to earth in verses 12 and 13. The strong parallels we have noticed between verses 6 and 14 indicate that the story on earth is broken off after verse 6 and taken up again in verses 13 and 14. So there is an earth-heaven-earth movement in the chapter as a whole (since the woman and the dragon are first seen in heaven, one could say there is a heaven-earth-heaven-earth pattern).

There are a couple of conclusions that arise from this. First, verses 7-12 function like an interlude that interrupts the story of the dragon's pursuit of the woman. Second, the rapid movement back and forth between earth and heaven indicates a close connection between the two in the book of Revelation. The purpose of the book is to show that events and experiences on earth are closely tied to events taking place in heaven. The book of Revelation draws a curtain aside to show us this larger picture.

Rev 12:7--

When last seen the dragon was on earth attempting to devour the male child that was born to the woman. But the male child ascends to heaven and is not mentioned again as such. So the battle between the dragon and the male child on earth is transformed into a battle between the dragon and Michael in heaven. The question arises, therefore, whether Michael and the male child are one and the same. A related question is the timing of this heavenly war. Is it at the time the male child ascends to heaven or some other time?

The name Michael has a Hebrew origin and bears the meaning of "Who is like God?" (There is a meaning parallel in Rev 13:4) In Jewish tradition Michael is one of the seven archangels who serve God in heaven (along with Gabriel and others). The name Michael is found five times in the Bible, three of them in the Book of Daniel. In Daniel 10:13 Michael is "one of the chief princes" who helps Daniel against "the prince of the kingdom of Persia. This suggests that the latter prince is a demonic counterpart to the archangels, probably Satan himself. Daniel 10 portrays a cosmic war going on over the mind of Cyrus, king of Persia. So there is a strong thematic parallel between Revelation 12:7 and Daniel 10:13. In Daniel 10:21 Michael works along with the glorious figure of Daniel 10:5-6 to battle the "princes" of Persia and Greece. In Daniel 12:1 Michael is described as the "great prince who stands for or has charge of your people." So Michael in Daniel is a leading angel that wages cosmic war in behalf of the people of God.

In the New Testament, the name Michael appears twice, one of them here. In Jude 9 Michael is clearly called an archangel and he contends with the devil over the body of Moses, who was apparently raised from the dead and taken to heaven. So the appearance of Michael in Revelation 12 is coherent with the other four uses of the term in the Bible. He is the commander of the heavenly army who battles Satan in behalf of the people of God on earth. Many scholars have concluded, therefore, that Michael is another term for Jesus Christ, especially in light of 12:10 where the term “Christ” is used for the dragon’s heavenly opponent.

The role of Michael is another indication that the war in heaven is not so much military as a war of words over the person and character of God (see the role of the dragon’s tail in 12:4 and his “accusations” in 12:9-10).

As a rule, whenever a new character appears in Revelation the author pauses to give a visual description and something of that character’s history (see Rev 1:13-16; 11:3-6; 12:1-2, 3-4) before going on to describe that character’s role in the specific vision. That does not occur here in regard to Michael. Nor is there a typical introductory description when the “male child” appears in verse 5. This suggests that neither is a new character, but is another way of describing a character that has already appeared in the book. That character would be Jesus Christ, the son of man (Rev 1:13), the Lamb (5:6) and likely the angels of Revelation 8:3-5 and 10:1-2. So Revelation 12:7 describes the cosmic war between Christ and Satan in apocalyptic symbolism.

The central figure of Revelation 12 is the dragon. He appears in every scene. He battles the woman and the male child in 12:1-5. He pursues the woman into the desert (12:6, 13-16). He battles Michael and his angels in heaven and is thrown down from there (12:7-12). Then he “goes away” to make war with the remnant of the woman’s seed in 12:17. So the dragon appears in every scene of the chapter and there is a sense of a sequence of events in time. He appears with the pregnant woman, then attacks her child after he is born, then he battles Michael in heaven at the time the male child ascends, then he pursues the woman into the wilderness and then makes war against the remnant. So the figure of the dragon in the story helps to provide a sequence and time frame for the events in chapter 12.

While this verse follows on from the ascension of the male child in verse 5, there are aspects of the verse that don’t fit with that timeline. The Greek verb *egeneto* (usually translated “was”) literally means “came to be.” It is used for creation in John 1:3 and the Greek of Genesis 1, implying something happening that was not there before. So the ESV helpfully translates “Now war arose in heaven.” I have translated it (following R. H. Charles) “And war burst forth in heaven.” So this verse focuses on the beginning of the war in heaven.

But the language of the verse echos the Greek (Theodotion) of Daniel 10:20 (literally the somewhat awkward “Michael and his angels in order that they might fight the dragon. . .”) In Daniel the heavenly war is already being pursued by the heavenly being who appears to Daniel. Elsewhere in this passage there are also echos of Genesis 3 (“that ancient serpent”) and Zechariah 3 (“the accuser of the brethren”). And the figure of the devil and Satan is already active in heaven in the accounts of Job 1 and 2, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. So while the narrative timeline of Revelation 12:5, 9 and 10 sets the war in heaven at the time of Christ’s ascension to heaven (in parallel with Revelation 5), there are clearly strong references back to the beginning

of the cosmic conflict, well before New Testament times.

So the language here develops a deliberate tension between the timeline of the chapter (ascension of the male child) and echos of a much earlier and continuing conflict. When that cosmic conflict actually began is the topic of the next post.

In Revelation 1:16, 20 the stars in the son of man's right hand represent the "angels" of the seven churches. If this is a guide to the meaning of stars as a symbol in the book, the stars in 12:4 represent angels. The dragon dragged and threw down (*ebalen* in the Greek) a third of the angels from heaven to earth. The "dragging" implies that a third of the angels did not go with him by conviction, they were deceived. That event (casting of angels from heaven) would have been earlier (prior to the birth of the male child) than the events of 12:7, which occur in connection to the ascension of Christ (12:5, 7, 10).

When did that earlier battle occur? Revelation 13:8 tells us that the Lamb (Jesus Christ) was slaughtered "from the foundation of the world" (*apo katabolês kosmou*)." So in some sense the cross (and the battle it represents) goes all the way back to the beginning of creation. Revelation 12:4, then, indicates that the cosmic conflict began among the angels around the time of the original creation. The battle in 12:7-9 occurs in the context of the cross and the ascension of Christ (12:5, 10-11, see also 5:6-14) but contains echos of that earlier battle in the cosmic war.

The original battle was a battle over the allegiance of heavenly beings. Would they maintain their original allegiance to God or would they accept Satan's lies about God and assert their freedom to run their own lives? This verse indicates that in the original battle the dragon (Satan according to 12:9) succeeded in gaining the allegiance of a third of God's angelic associates. Outside of the Book of Revelation the Bible does not say nearly as much about this heavenly battle and its relation to all earthly conflicts.

Rev 12:8–

This verse tells us that the dragon was not strong enough to defeat Michael and that he and his angels lost their place in heaven. This is an echo of 12:4, where the dragon and his angels were physically cast out of heaven. But the cross and the enthronement of Jesus cast Satan out of heaven in a new, more spiritual sense (see comments on 12:10). He is no longer permitted there as an "accuser of the brethren." In the words of Tonstad, Satan was in the beginning cast down from innocence and at the cross he was cast down from influence.

The theme of the dragon not being "strong enough" lies in the background of the entire story of Revelation 12. The dragon fails to devour the male child (12:5), he fails in his war with Michael and heaven's angels (12:7-8), and the earth frustrates his attack on the woman in the desert (12:14-16). All of this failure sets the stage for the final episode in the conflict, which is introduced in 12:17. Based on 12:12, he fears losing his place on earth as well as in heaven.

Rev 12:9–

The "thrown down" (or hurled down, cast out = *eblêthê* in the Greek) is identical to the same word in verse 10 and both are passive. The dragon is thrown down against his will, presumably by God/Michael/Christ. The same word occurs in the active form (*ebalen*) in verse

4. There the dragon is the agent and throws down a third of the stars (angels). The respective language implies that the dragon is cast out of heaven against his will and drags down a third of the angels with him against their will (they would have preferred to stay in heaven, but by aligning with the dragon that freedom is lost to them).

The dragon of 12:3-4 is here further defined as the old or ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan. “Devil” is rooted in the Greek and means accuser or slanderer. “Satan” is rooted in the Hebrew and means opponent or adversary. The two roles are combined in Zech 3:1. So while “the dragon” is clearly a reference to ancient Rome in its attempt to destroy the infant Jesus (Rev 12:3-5; Matt 2:12-18), the focus here goes beyond the earthly mask to see the form of Satan himself lurking behind the actions of an earthly power. This parallels what was going on in the Michael passage in Daniel 10. There a distinction is made between the “prince” of Persia and the “kings” of Persia. The prince of Persia is the demonic power beyond the earthly thrones of Persia.

Although the language of devil and Satan is not used, the descriptions of Lucifer in Isaiah 14 and the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 flesh out the personality of this figure, as we will see when we summarize Revelation 12:7-10.

The phrase “ancient serpent” is an allusion to the Garden of Eden narrative in Genesis 3. This clarifies what is not so obvious there, that in the serpent that confronted Eve lurked a cosmic character who was originally an angel of heaven. But he was not just any angel, he was the commander of the rebellion in heaven. He was then cast out of heaven to earth and attacked first Eve (Gen 3:1-12), Jesus Christ (Rev 12:5) and the church throughout history (12:13-16). So behind every conflict on earth there lurks a much bigger conflict at the cosmic level. Behind every earthly story is a much bigger story.

Just as the serpent deceived Eve regarding the true character of God, the dragon (who is the serpent, the devil, and Satan) is the one who leads the world astray. According to chapter 12, the lies of Satan are the root of all earthly deception throughout history and particularly as the end approaches (12:17).

Rev 12:10–

The concept of a “loud” voice occurs frequently in the book of Revelation and the uses cluster at certain points. The phrase also occurs in the seven seals (Rev 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10), the seven trumpets (8:13; 10:3), the three angel’s messages (14:7, 9, 15) and finally at the second coming itself in Revelation 19:17. It is often used at decisive turning points. There is clearly a strong connection between this verse and the scroll scene of Revelation 5. These loud voices normally occur in heaven itself or in the sky in relation to the earth. Revelation 10:3 and possibly 6:10 are exceptions in the location of the loud voices.

John doesn’t identify who in heaven produce the loud voices, but the phrase “accuser of *our* brothers” (12:10 in all manuscript traditions) suggest the 24 elders, who represent redeemed humanity in heavenly places (see comments on Rev 4:4). In Revelation 6:11; 19:10 and 22:9 the “brothers” are clearly aligned with John in contrast with the angels and divine beings.

The word “now” (Greek *arti*) expresses something occurring in the immediate present

(Matt 26:53; John 13:37; 1 Cor 13:12), or immediately after something else (Matt 9:18; John 9:19, 25). The use here indicates that the events of this verse occur at the same point or in the instant after Satan is cast down out of heaven (note that the phrase “thrown down” is repeated in this verse). The casting down of Satan in this verse is in the context of the establishment of God’s kingdom through the enthronement of Christ. This is the same moment as the enthronement of the Lamb in Revelation 5.

At the point in time when Satan is hurled down, the kingdom of God and the authority of Christ is set up. On the one hand, Christ is exalted, and on the other, Satan is cast down. When in history did this occur? The answer is in verse 5, when the male child is snatched up to God and His throne (Rev 12:5). It seems to be a reference to the point in time after Jesus death on the cross when Jesus ascended to heaven and took His throne, somewhere around 31 A.D. This tells us that in the the cosmic conflict, the decisive event is the one that took place at the cross (see Col 1:20). It was at the cross that Satan was cast down and Christ was exalted.

An important parallel text for this is John 12:31-33. It is another "now" text, although a different Greek word is used (*nun*). "'Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out (*ekblêthêsetai*). But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die." John 12:31-33. Christ's death is the decisive event in both human and cosmic history. It results in the casting down of Satan and in Christ’s assumption of the throne. He has the right to rule because of the cross (Rev 5:9-10).

Further light is shed on the casting down in the latter part of this verse. Satan is cast out of heaven as “the accuser of our brethren” (KJV). In some sense it is the accusations of Satan that are cast out of heaven in this verse. This contains an allusion to the book of Job. In Job 1 and 2 (1:6-12; 2:1-6) Satan appears in heaven and accuses Job, in the first place, of being faithful to God only because God has protected him and blessed him with great wealth (Job 1:9-11). In other words, Satan accused Job of serving God for what he could get from God. God allows Satan to reverse Job’s fortunes but Job remains faithful (Job 1:12-22).

In Job 2:4-5 Satan then accuses Job of the ultimate selfishness. The loss of family and wealth still left him life and health so he had no reason to complain. Satan asserted that if he was allowed to take that away, Job would curse God to His face (Job 2:4-5). God allows Satan to take away Job’s health but not to touch his life (which would invalidate the evidence for the challenge anyway). Still Job remains faithful (Job 2:6-13).

From the background of Job we learn that in Old Testament times Satan still had access to the throne room of God as representative of earth. He used this access to place accusations against God’s people on earth. But with the cross and enthronement of Jesus in this verse, those accusations are silenced in heaven. Satan is banished to the earth, where those accusations still have currency.

From this we learn that there were two casting downs of Satan in the course of the cosmic war. The first occurred at “the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8) when Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven physically (12:4). They could no longer have their dwelling there. But from then until the cross, Satan himself still had access to the heavenly throne room, there to accuse and attempt to continue his deceptions. But something happens at the cross

that silences these accusations forever. The cosmic side of the controversy is settled. Heavenly beings no longer extend Satan's lies any credibility.

So in Revelation 12:9-10 a second "casting down" is described. In OT times, while Satan and his angels no longer had residence in heaven, their activities on earth still resonated with some of the unfallen beings in heaven. In the context of the cross, Satan is cast out of heaven in a spiritual or philosophical sense. His ability to influence beings in heaven ended with the enthronement of Christ.

The reference to "day and night" recalls Revelation 4:8 and 7:15, where praise and service to God are the constant activity of faithful creatures in heaven. Here Satan's accusations ring out in heaven "day and night." This clearly locates Satan's accusations in the heavenly council, where Satan was once a faithful participant, but has gone over to the "dark side" and accuses the government of God in the persons of those on earth who honor and serve Him. The parallel underscores the fact that God is the ultimate recipient of these accusation, as He was in Job. Satan accuses believers as a way to implicate the government of God Himself. See further comments on 12:10-11.

Rev 12:7-10 Summary—

While there are no strong verbal parallels between these verses and Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, it is hard to imagine the original readers of Revelation reading this description of the war in heaven without remembering the cosmic implications of two Old Testament taunts against Babylon (Isa 14:4) and Tyre (Ezek 28:1). While these passages are primarily directed toward earthly enemies of Israel, the prophet in each case echos the language of the cosmic conflict. The language of Isaiah 14:12-19 and Ezekiel 28:12-19 goes way beyond the local situation to echo the cosmic battle between Christ and Satan back at the beginning. As is true elsewhere in Revelation, the two casting downs of Satan in Revelation 12 can most fully be understood in light of the Old Testament. Genesis 3, Job 1-2, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 all provide important context for this passage.

While it is clear that the casting down of 12:9-10 is different and at a later time than the one in 12:4, it is less clear how to understand verses 7 and 8. While the timeline of the chapter suggests these verses describe events just after the ascension of the male child, the evidence of the text suggests the battle before creation (Rev 12:4 in light of 13:8).

The Greek verb *egeneto* implies the beginning of the war rather than its resumption. Echos of Daniel 10, Genesis 3, Job 1 and 2, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 29 and Zechariah 3 all point back to the beginning of the cosmic conflict, well before New Testament times. So verses 7 and 8 create a deliberate tension between the timeline of the chapter (the ascension of Jesus and the battle that occurs in heaven at that time) and language echoing the war in heaven that occurred before the creation of the world. So in the context of the narrative of the chapter, the primary reference of 12:7-10 is to the conclusion of the heavenly war in the context of the cross, but verses 7 and 8 also remind the reader of the beginning of that war.

This is probably the best time to note the strong parallels between the war in heaven theme in chapters 12 and 13 and the heavenly throne room scene of Revelation 4 and 5. While there is no mention of Satan or his "accusations" in the earlier scene, the activities of the

heavenly court in chapters 4-5 make the most sense in light of what we have learned here. It is almost as if chapters 4-5 are an antithetical parallel to the war-filled heaven in 12-13. Notice the parallels between these two parts of Revelation.

First of all, there is the contrast between two trinities. There is the dragon, the sea beast (13:1-10) and the land beast (13:11-18) in the latter scene in contrast to the true trinity in Revelation 4:8 and 5:1-6 (the One sitting on the throne, the Lamb and the “seven spirits”). Both the Lamb (5:6; 13:8) and the Sea Beast (13:3) are “slaughtered” (Greek: *esphagmenon*, *esphagmenên*, *esphagmenou*) and then raised back to life to receive universal acclamation (Rev 5:9-12; 13:3-4). The Lamb receives power from the One sitting on the throne (Rev 5:7, 12), the Sea Beast receives power from the dragon (13:2). Both the Lamb and the Sea Beast are agents of another with the authority to function in their stead (Rev 5:1-6; 13:1-2). Both the visions of the Lamb and of the Sea Beast are to be read in the light of the cosmic conflict between God and the dragon.

There is an additional parallel between the war in heaven (and its earthly elaboration in chapter 13) and the throne scene of Revelation 4-5. The image of the throne itself is concerned with the right to rule. The cry goes out “who is worthy?” to take the scroll and sit on the throne (see also Rev 3:21). The war in heaven takes place in the context of the throne and the heavenly court (Rev 12:5). So at the core of this war is a dispute over who has the right to sit on the throne with God, the dragon or Christ? Who is the true witness to God’s character, the one who wishes to dominate or the one who sacrifices Himself for the unworthy? The background in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 certainly comes to mind here.

In a world free of sin the throne clearly belongs to God and to the Lamb (Rev 22:1-3). This outcome reminds us of the universal unity of acclamation at the conclusion of the throne scene in chapter 5 (verses 13-14). The transition from the time of war to the time and peace and unity is described in Revelation 20:11, when all opposition in heaven and earth “fled away” in the face of the great, white throne. In contrast with this is Revelation 13:2, where the Sea Beast receives the dragon’s power, “throne,” and great authority. So while “throne” is not as central in Revelation 12 and 13 as it is in 4-5, it is mentioned at crucial points in the narrative of 12-13 to make sure it is not forgotten by the reader. The heavenly court scene of Revelation 4-5 is the necessary context for the war in heaven of 12:7-10.

Rev 12:11–

This key verse is roughly in the middle of the book of Revelation (Rev 12:10-12). In Revelation, all the promises are offered to those who overcome and this verse contains the key to overcoming. The believer overcomes by three things: The blood of the Lamb; the word of their testimony; and a state of mind that would rather die than sin (see also Rev 2:10). The overcomers would rather give up their lives than their relationship with Jesus. To put this in other words, the believer's authority to overcome is rooted in the testimony about the cross of Christ. The cross is the foundation for Christ's victory over Satan and for our victory in Christ. This verse in the context of 12:10, 12 is some of the deepest theology in the whole book of Revelation.

Something to think about. We live at a time in history when most followers of Jesus

don't have to face the issue of dying for their faith. So a text like this may not make a lot of sense for many. But there is an underlying truth regardless of one's situation. If a faith is not worth dying for, it is not worth living for either. The faith of the martyrs tells one that life without Jesus is not a life that is worth living. One is better off dead than being forced to live without Jesus. That is the kind of faith that will get one through anything. That is the kind of faith that Revelation was designed to generate.

Thanks to this verse in context it is clear that the great theme of Revelation is not military and political history, but the great controversy over the character of God. When believers learn to trust God (that is what the word "faith" is all about, trust), they are not only brought to salvation, but affirm the kind of God who rightly rules the universe. This affirmation is the key to the outcome of the conflict (see Rev 15:3-4 also).

Rev 12:10-11 Summary–

In what sense was Satan cast down at the cross (as the accuser of the brethren)? The accusations of Satan against Job were really accusations against God ("People serve You only because You are manipulating the outcome"). Satan brought these accusations against God to earth in the Garden (Gen 3:1-6). These accusations were further acted out through the religious leaders who accused Jesus at His trial and on the cross. But those accusations were refuted at the cross. Satan's real character was revealed– he was a liar and a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44) but that was never more clearly seen than when he goaded the religious leaders to send Christ to the cross.

The larger picture behind these verses is that sin has thrown the universe into turmoil because of Satan's accusations against God. According to Satan, God is unjust, He gives people laws they can't keep, He forces or manipulates people to serve Him, etc. Of course, the God of the Bible is powerful enough to seize control of the universe at any time, but that is not the way He works. Instead He patiently allows Satan time to act out his character so that the truth about God's character will become clear to all. The "war in heaven" was not God's desire, but He permitted the conflict as a revelation of both His character and Satan's.

God could have ended the sin problem at any time by force. But then the inhabitants of the universe would have served Him out of fear. Instead, He allows things to play out so that the acclamation of the universe will one day be freely given (Revelation 5:9-14). What happened at the cross wins the hearts of all who understand it and causes the entire universe to worship God and the Lamb Who joins God on the throne.

Desire of Ages, 760-761. "The principalities and powers of darkness were assembled around the cross, casting the hellish shadow of unbelief into the hearts of men. . . . Those who mocked Christ as He hung upon the cross were imbued with the spirit of the first great rebel. He filled them with vile and loathsome speeches. He inspired their taunts. But by all this he gained nothing.

"Could one sin have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the terrible torture, the enemy of God and man would have triumphed. Christ bowed His head and died, but He held fast His faith and His submission to God. Revelation 12:10.

"Satan saw that his disguise was torn away. His administration was laid open before the

unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had revealed himself as a murderer. By shedding the blood of the Son of God, he had uprooted himself from the sympathies of the heavenly beings. Henceforth his work was restricted. Whatever attitude he might assume, he could no longer await the angels as they came from the heavenly courts, and before them accuse Christ's brethren of being clothed with the garments of blackness and the defilement of sin. The last link of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.

"Yet Satan was not then destroyed. The angels did not even then understand all that was involved in the great controversy. The principles at stake were to be more fully revealed. And for the sake of man, Satan's existence must be continued. Man as well as angels must see the contrast between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. He must choose whom he will serve."

The Bible contains a human illustration of the contrast between power and right in resolving issues of government. King Darius of Persia was forced by law to send his best friend, Daniel, into the lion's den (Daniel 6). He paced back and forth, talked to lawyers, and read law books trying to figure a way out. He was the king and powerful enough to do anything that he wanted. So why didn't he ignore his law and rescue Daniel? Because if he broke the laws of his kingdom, his authority would be destroyed. So, for Darius, it was not an issue of power but a larger issue--that of being right.

"Might makes right" is a worldly slogan but with God, it is "right makes might". God does not choose to force anyone to serve Him or believe in Him. He respects the freedom of His creatures and desires that their love would be freely given. The issue in the heavenly conflict is not about who is powerful but who is right. At the cross it has become clear in heaven that God is not only right but that he has the right to rule.

The enthronement of Jesus Christ in heaven happened around 31 A.D. but in a real sense that enthronement has not yet happened on the earth. Too many citizens of earth still believe Satan's lies about God. They do not understand that the cross has truly accomplished everything that ultimately matters. God has left the clarifying of these issues to those who follow Jesus. It is the preaching of the gospel that lifts up the cross so that its implications can be clearly seen. When the character of God is clearly revealed on earth, people will respond in the way heavenly beings have already responded. Both the book of Revelation and experience make clear that the gospel proclamation is certainly a work in progress.

Rev 12:12--

"Earth and sea," when mentioned as a pair, is one way the ancients described the whole earth. In this verse the earth/sea pair expresses the universal dimension of the dragon's intentions. This expression sets the stage for Revelation 13, where the allies of the dragon come up from both sea and earth. Later in this chapter (12:16), however, the earth takes on a more positive role, it helps the woman to escape the dragon's flooding attack.

The dragon is humiliated by his dismissal from heaven (12:9-10). Like most bullies, he takes out his humiliation on those around him who appear weaker and more vulnerable.

Heaven rejoices because the dragon is gone, never more to threaten or accuse. The earth and sea now have his undivided attention. Satan's defeat was assured at the cross but he

still seeks to attack Christ by tormenting His people. There is an interesting dichotomy implied in this text. On the one hand, with the cross behind them, believers have never been stronger. They have tools to overcome the dragon in the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony (Rev 12:11). On the other hand, they have never been more vulnerable than they are now, as they have Satan's undivided attention. He is angry because the decisive battle of the war has been lost, and he knows that his end is just a matter of time (12:12, 17).

An analogy that theologians of the New Testament have often drawn is taken from World War II. After the Nazi defeats in Stalingrad, North Africa, and Normandy, their ultimate defeat was assured, nevertheless, they didn't stop fighting. Some of the most brutal engagements of the war were in the final two years after the outcome had already been decided. So believers are encouraged to take hold of the strength they have available in the cross, knowing that ultimate defeat may still seem likely when they take their eyes off the vision of Revelation.

Rev 12:7-12 Summary–

In this passage war breaks out in heaven. But what kind of war is it? Is it fought with jets and missiles, tanks and AK-47 rifles? That's the kind of language being used (particularly in verses 7-9). But what kind of weapons are being used in chapter 12? The military language here is clearly metaphorical. The war in heaven is a war of words, not a war centered around harming people physically.

To begin with verse 4 references the tail of the dragon, dragging a third of the stars out of heaven. In Isaiah 9:15, the tail represents prophets telling lies. The tail in 12:4 represents deceptive words which persuade many of the angels to follow Satan when he is cast out of heaven.

Then in verse 9 the dragon is defined as "the ancient serpent." This recalls Genesis 3 and the "battle" between the serpent and the woman (Eve), which was a "war" of words with the serpent telling lies about God and the woman in the end believing them and acting upon them.

Verse 10 makes it clear that Satan is being cast out not as a general at the head of armies, but as the accuser of the "brothers." Once again the weapon of choice is words. The language and role here recall Job 1 and 2 and also Zechariah 3, where Satan accuses believers and by implication God Himself.

Those who resist Satan in this passage do so by the "word of their testimony" (12:11). The collective evidence summarized here points to a battle of words over the character of God and who has the right to rule the universe. It points back (verse 10) to chapter 5 and the acclamation of the Lamb on account of the cross (see also 12:11). So the war in heaven is fought with words and concerns the claims of Satan, the character of God and His right to rule the universe. By their behavior in the controversy, the respective characters of God and Satan become clear to the onlooking universe.

Rev 12:7-12– (spiritual lessons)

(1) Something happened at the cross that wins the hearts of all who understand it, the incredible sacrifice God made to win our hearts to Him. Its implications were understood in

heaven in the aftermath of the cross. Satan's accusations have no more standing there. But on earth it is not yet so. The great and final gospel proclamation (Rev 14:6-7) must go forth in order that Christ's sacrifice on the cross might be more clearly understood here on the earth.

(2) Satan is the accuser of the brethren. The sins of God's people give Satan all the arguments he needs before God's throne and also within our hearts. But the gift of the gospel, the righteousness of Christ, not only frees us from the burden of sin but also frees us from the accusations of Satan in our own hearts, unless we allow him otherwise. The freedom of the gospel includes freedom from a sense of accusation and condemnation.

A corollary idea, when we accuse each other we are doing Satan's work, we are moving over to his side of the controversy rather than the Lord's. In this context I find it helpful to remember James 2:13. In the judgment we are treated the way we treated others. In a sense we get to set our own standard of judgment. The one who judges others harshly is usually even more harsh on themselves. The gospel frees us from both the accusations against us and the accusations we tend to throw at others. The two are related.

(3) In questioning the rule of God, Satan also questions the laws that undergird God's government. So it is not surprising that the commandments of God are a major emphasis in the context of this passage (see note on Rev 11:19). In the immediate context of this passage are references to the ark of the covenant (11:19), the "commandments of God" (12:17; 14:12), the first table of the law (Rev 13) and the Sabbath command (14:7). While the language of metaphor and analogy is no doubt in play here, all systems of government known to us (except arbitrary, absolute dictatorships, which are rare) operate on the basis of laws and judgment. So Satan's verbal attacks against God's government imply also questions about the validity and fairness of God's laws as part of that government. The laws of God are an expression of His character, so in questioning the character of God, Satan also questions God's law. So a characteristic of those who will vindicate the character of God here on earth is that they will manifest a spirit of obedience to God, including obedience to the spirit as well as the letter of God's commandments. Any implication that obedience to any of the commandments is irrelevant for Christians plays into Satan's hands in the cosmic conflict. On this I highly recommend Sigve Tonstad's book *"The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day."*

Rev 12:13–

There is a parallel here to when Satan sought to seize the male child (Rev 12:5). That attempt triggered an interlude in heaven (12:7-12). Now we pick up the story of verse 6 with Satan back on earth, but now he is no longer pursuing the male child who went up to heaven, he is pursuing the woman into the desert. This is a new detail in the story. In verse 6 the flight of the woman is mentioned, but not the pursuit of the dragon. That pursuit now becomes the central feature of the story in the verses that follow (12:14-16). Because Satan cannot touch Christ (in heaven), he takes out his anger against the church on earth.

Rev 12:14–

See comments on verse 6, which is closely parallel. In ancient times, the people of Israel fled to the desert to escape from the Egyptians. It was a place of trial and testing, but it was

also a means of escape from slavery. So being carried on “two wings of a great eagle” makes this a replay of the Exodus experience (Exodus 19:4, see also Deut 32:11-12 and Isa 40:31). The wilderness place is especially prepared by God for the woman.

Revelation portrays a God who is never taken by surprise no matter what the circumstances. While persecution and suffering is the common lot of those who believe, God puts limits on the power of the enemy. While there is no direct allusion to the Corinthian letters in this verse, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 also uses the Exodus to make a point. So it is possible that Revelation 12:14 reminded the original readers of 1 Corinthians 10:13. No temptation is to come upon believers that is greater than they can bear. God always provides a “way of escape.” And that is exactly what happens in Revelation 12:14.

So the basic theme of this verse is that God takes care of the woman in this story like He did the Israelites in the desert. He provides here with food and shelter just as He did for Israel during the Exodus.

It is interesting that translators have had difficulty with the phrase “wings of THE great eagle” at the beginning of this verse (see NASB translation). The Greek phrase actually uses the definite article in relation to the eagle reference. Since there is no prior reference to this eagle in the Book of Revelation itself (in context the “eagle” of 8:13 is more likely a vulture, the term in Greek can go either way), virtually all translations, including the King James, use the indefinite form in the English translation. The best explanation I can come up with so far is that the definite article is a pointer back to the specific eagle’s wings referred to in the Exodus story (Exod 19:4). An indefinite article would weaken the connection of this verse with the Exodus. So while the definite article makes for an awkward translation, it was purposeful on John’s part, communicating overtones that draw the reader’s imagination to that earlier scene.

It says in this verse that the woman would be taken care of in the desert for “a time, times and half a time.” In the parallel to this verse (12:6) the time period is described as “1260 days.” So the two periods of time would appear to be the same. If the word “time” refers to a year, it would be a year, two years and a half of a year, which is roughly 1260 days. This reasoning is confirmed in 13:5, where the period of time is described as “forty-two months.” So 1260 days, 42 months, and a time, times and half a time are three ways of describing the same period in history. See also comments on verse 6. Is this period of time to be taken literally or is it symbolic in some way? See comments on Rev 1:1 for reasons that favor a symbolic interpretation.

One possible symbolic use would be to connect this period of time with the earthly ministry of Jesus. In the Gospel of John, if the unnamed feast in John 5:1 is a Passover, there are four Passovers that occur during the public ministry of Jesus, which would span about three and a half years.

The use of the phrase “time, times and half a time” is a clear allusion to the book of Daniel, where the phrase is used twice (Dan 7:25 and 12:7). The allusion to Daniel 7 is also supported by the seven heads and the ten horns of the dragon. See comments on Revelation 12:3. In Daniel seven the time, times and half a time refer to a period in which the little horn of the chapter will be allowed to “oppress the saints.” In Daniel twelve it is a period when the power of the saints will be broken or shattered. So the core meaning of the phrase in Daniel

concerns a period of time when the people of God (the “saints” or “holy ones”) will suffer greatly from hostile earthly powers or institutions. In the next post (tomorrow, God willing), I would like to briefly explore the historical implications of the last sentence in Daniel seven itself.

While Revelation 12:7-12 does not (as far as I can tell and I have not seen commentators suggest it) allude verbally to Daniel 7:9-14, the multiple references to other parts of Daniel 7 and the fact that both passages describe activity in the heavenly council suggest the reader should keep Daniel 7:9-14 in mind when reading Revelation 12:7-12. In Daniel 7:9-14 there is a scene of judgment in the heavenly council room. Books are opened and the powers of evil are judged. There is also a scene in which the “son of man” is elevated to great power and authority. So the enthronement of the Lamb in chapter 5, which is referenced again in 12:10, recalls elements of the heavenly throne vision of Daniel 7.

In this context it is helpful to note that all the major hymns of Revelation take place in the heavenly council chamber. Revelation 4:8-11 and 5:9-14 are associated with the enthronement of the Lamb and allude to the scene of Daniel 7:9-14. Rev 7:9-12 also takes place before the throne (7:15-17). Similarly, Revelation 11:15-18, 12:7-12, 15:1-4 and 19:1-8 place hymns in the context of the heavenly council room. So the reader should be aware that all scenes related to the heavenly council have overtones of God’s government, judgment, and God’s ultimate victory over evil.

Since there is a clear allusion to Daniel 7:25 in this verse (“time, times, and half a time”) I would like to explore some of the historical implications of Daniel seven in this context. In Daniel 7 there are four wild and carnivorous beasts (three are somewhat recognizable from nature) which represent four “kings” or kingdoms which would dominate history from Daniel’s time forward (Dan 7:17). Early church fathers understood these four to be Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, which ruled the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin from the sixth century BC until the fifth century AD. They anticipated that the fall of Rome as a political power would give way to the AntiChrist.

According to Daniel 7:24, the fourth beast (Rome) would be divided and followed by ten kings (represented by the ten horns on the fourth beast, the ten horns are contemporary, not consecutive) which would be followed by another king of a different kind (represented by a new horn, a little one according to Daniel 7:8) who would subdue three of the ten (uproot the horns from the head of the beast– Dan 7:8). That king of a different kind would “speak great things” (Dan 7:8) “against the Most High” (Dan 7:25) “wear out the saints” and think to change appointed times and the law (Dan 7:25). This sounds like a power with a more direct religious focus than the previous ones who were concerned with earthly dominance rather than heavenly. The “time, times and half a time” is the period when this power is speaking, acting and oppressing the saints.

The Adventist pioneers, along with most interpreters until the 19th Century, understood the fourth beast to be the pagan Roman Empire, the ten horns to be the powers into which the Empire broke up when it collapsed in the fifth century, and the little horn to be the papacy, which became the dominant political as well as religious force in Europe and the Mediterranean

world for more than a thousand years. These interpreters understood the “time, times and half a time” to be a period of 1260 years during which the papacy had its dominant role, running from 538-1798 AD.

From around 800 AD through the middle of the 19th Century most Christian interpreters of Revelation understood the 1260 days of Daniel and Revelation in terms of the “year-day principle.” The year-day principle was first applied to the books of Daniel and Revelation around 800 AD by the Persian Jewish scholar Nahawendi. According to the year-day principle, “In Bible (apocalyptic) prophecy, whenever a period of time is described in days, its fulfillment is counted in years.” In other words, the 1260 days of Revelation 11-13 should be interpreted as 1260 years. Since this “principle” has been largely abandoned by scholars of Daniel and Revelation since the 1840s, an excursus will follow here to evaluate the evidence for and against the year-day principle before continuing the commentary on chapter twelve of Revelation.

Rev 12:14– (Excursus on the Year-Day Principle)

Simply stated, the “year-day principle” asserts as follows: “In Bible (apocalyptic) prophecy, whenever a period of time is described in days, its fulfillment is counted in years.” The immediate problem with this assertion is that it is found nowhere in the Bible. The two best candidates, Numbers 14:34 and Ezek 4:6, do not address Bible prophecy as a genre, nor do they assert anything about a consistent principle that can be applied to other situations. In fact, they go in opposite directions, Numbers applied a year’s penalty for each day of Israel’s rebellion, and Ezekiel suffers a day for each year of Israel’s rebellion. So at an exegetical level (what the text actually states), the principle is not stated anywhere in the Bible.

Having said that, if we limited ourselves to what the Bible actually says, we would not believe many things that we do, and the Bible would have little to say to an internet world. We often draw theological principles from Bible texts that applied differently in ancient contexts. For example, the Bible nowhere makes a direct assertion concerning the “Trinity” (nor is the word used in the Bible— except a very questionable phrase in the KJV version of 1 John 5:7, a phrase not found in any Greek manuscript before the 16th Century), yet most Christians believe it based on a theological approach to Scripture. (For a detailed outline of the difference between exegesis and systematic theology see chapter three of my book *The Deep Things of God*.) Likewise, the “year-day principle” is based, not on a direct statement in the Bible (exegesis) but on larger principles drawn from the Bible and elaborated by history, philosophy and experience.

Seventh-day Adventist interpreters do not base the year-day principle on direct, exegetical statements in the Bible but on two theological convictions at a systematic level (which considers the wider evidence of Scripture as well as evidence from outside Scripture, such as science, history and experience).

The first conviction is that God knows the future and shares that knowledge with the biblical prophets. What God knows about the future and how He knows is widely debated among theologians today, and many options are offered. The Adventist pioneers committed to the idea that the future could be known through Bible prophecy (though there are human

limitations on that knowledge— see 1 Cor 13:9) because it was known to a God who reveals Himself.

The second conviction is that in apocalyptic prophecy the future is revealed as a comprehensive sequence of historical events moving from the prophet's day to the end of time. Once again, the validity of such an assertion is debated among Bible scholars today and is worthy of careful study on its own, but the Adventist pioneers were committed to this view and it laid a foundation for a view of prophecy that came to include the year-day principle.

Both convictions are vital to the validity of the year-day principle, as we will see. And while scholars are rightly engaged in questioning the assumptions that we all make regarding God and spiritual things, the above Adventist convictions are consistent with the world-view of the Bible writers and of most interpreters of the Bible up to the 19th Century. So Adventists who continue to hold these two convictions today have lots of company in the course of human history.

As we have seen in the previous posts, the SDA view of the year-day principle is grounded, not in a direct biblical statement, but on two theological convictions at the systematic level. 1) God knows the future and shares it with His prophets, and 2) Apocalyptic is the prediction of a comprehensive sequence of historical events. Seventh-day Adventists do not primarily read Daniel and Revelation exegetically (what the text meant in its original situation), they read them with the perspective of time passed. An Adventist reading of Revelation cannot be limited to exegesis, but considers the deeper divine intention of the text, which goes beyond what the original human writer might have intended or understood. The extended meanings that come with the passage of time and the consideration of history, experience, science, etc., will not contradict the original intent of the author, but are a natural extension of that meaning. To put it in other words, God's purpose in the production of a biblical text uses the original words and intent of the human writer to express extended meanings that become evident in the context of Scripture as a whole and with the passage of time and further revelation.

So the year-day principle does not need to be exegetically compelling to be true. But neither should it contradict the plain meaning of the biblical text. The year-day principle needs to be exegetically defensible rather than exegetically compelling. To be exegetically compelling means that the topic is so clearly and intentionally dealt with in a Scripture passage that no honest mind can fail to see it. Exegetically defensible means that the interpretation can be defended as at least an option, based on the original writer's intention.

In light of the previous the question arises, *What exactly is exegetically compelling about the Bible's handling of the time prophecies?* This is clear, there is year-day correspondence or year-day "thinking" throughout the Bible and the ancient world. In other words, the ancients often saw correspondences between days and years. For example, there is the sabbatical principle: The weekly cycle with its seventh-day Sabbath corresponds to the agricultural cycle, where six years of planting and harvesting are following by a seventh year in which the land lies fallow (Exod 23:10-12; Lev 25:3-8; see also Lev 26:33-35; 2 Chr 36:20-21.

Similarly, outside the Bible, the Hammurabi Code (1762 BC) describes a grand party to celebrate the thirtieth year of King Hammurabi's reign. The party was to last thirty days, one

day for each year of his reign. This is not a statement of the year-day principle, but it demonstrates year-day thinking or correspondence. Likewise, in Numbers 14:34, the Israelites are required to spend another 40 years in the wilderness, corresponding to the 40 days that their rebellion against God lasted. In Ezekiel 4:4-6 the prophet is commanded to lie on one side for 390 days, one day for each year of Israel's rebellion. As noted earlier, neither of these texts is a statement of how prophecy should be interpreted, but they clearly illustrate year-day correspondence in the Bible.

Proponents of the year-day principle have often pointed to Daniel 9 as a clear statement of the principle. Nevertheless, from an exegetical perspective, it falls far short of such a universal statement. It seems to me that the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24-27 are intended to be understood as years because they are based on the seventy years of captivity in Babylon (Dan 9:2). The 70 years of Babylonian captivity were sabbatical years (Lev 26:33-35; 2 Chr 36:20-21), representing 420 years of disobedience to God (roughly the period of the monarchy, see 1 Sam 8:5-20). Thus the 70 weeks of Daniel 9 offers Israel a new probationary period of 490 years, roughly the same length as the period from Saul (1025-30 BC) to Cyrus (539 BC).

Unfortunately, from an exegetical perspective, no New Testament text clearly quotes or alludes to Daniel 9 with the purpose of telling us it was fulfilled in Jesus. The NT does refer to Daniel 9, but not in relation to its time significance (abomination of desolation texts). It also makes time references like "the time is fulfilled" but does not allude to Daniel 9 at those points. So from an exegetical perspective, we don't have absolute biblical confirmation that Daniel 9 was understood in the first Christian century as a prophecy of Christ's ministry and death.

But does it at least offer an illustration of year-day thinking? That all depends on the meaning of the Hebrew word translated as "weeks" or "sevens." If Daniel 9:24-27 used the normal Hebrew word for "weeks" there would be the strong implication of days in that terminology. Thus a "day-year correspondence" could be established. And the implication of a prophecy expressed in days, but understood in years would come close to an illustration of the year-day principle, though falling short as a statement of it. Unfortunately, for proponents of the year-day principle, the Hebrew word translated "weeks" is a different one, without the normal specification of "weeks of days." It is a more general unit of seven, with its meaning determined by the context. Thus when Daniel uses the term to describe weeks of days (Dan 10:3) he uses the whole phrase to define it in contrast to the weeks of years in the previous chapter (Dan 9:24-27).

In conclusion, Daniel 9 *may* be an illustration of year-day thinking in ancient times, but the evidence falls short of certainty. At the least, the use of the same Hebrew term for both days and weeks (Dan 9:24-27; 10:3) is consistent with year-day thinking.

Having said the above, it is possible to tie the 70-"weeks" prophecy of Daniel 9 with the vision of the 2300 evenings and mornings in Daniel 8:13-14. While on the surface, the prophecy could be understood as 2300 literal days (2300 combinations of an evening and a morning—language drawn from Genesis 1) or 1150 literal days (if one counted the evenings and the mornings separately as part of the total), Daniel 8:26-27 suggests a symbolic interpretation extending far into Daniel's future. This is supported by analogy with Daniel 2 and 7, where the

visions run from the prophet's day to the End (Daniel 8 begins with the Persian period and presumably moves to the end or near it). If this is so, a literal reading of the "evenings and mornings" of Daniel 8:13-14 would not fit. If the 70 "weeks" of years are "cut off" (from a Hebrew word often translated "decreed" in 9:24) from the larger time period in the vision, there would be an implied year-day correspondence between the vision of Daniel 8:13-14 and the one of Daniel 9:24-27. This deduction, as attractive as it is to proponents of the year-day principle, is based on a number of judgments regarding obscure Hebrew words and phrases, making it fall short of being exegetically compelling. But I share it as a piece of potential evidence.

Outside the Bible, the clearest illustration of the year-day principle can be found in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Qumran community seems to have operated with something like the year-day principle in that they used the language of "weeks" to express periods of time that we know required at least seven years to take place. Again, the Dead Sea Scrolls nowhere explicitly state a year-day principle, but they clearly exhibit year-day correspondence or thinking in the New Testament world, just as the Old Testament does for its time.

So how does one come to a "year-day principle" when such is not explicitly stated in the biblical text? At the level of systematic or practical theology (again, see the third chapter of my book *The Deep Things of God* for the details) which allows the interpreter to see expanded meanings in the biblical text in light of the passage of history, experience, science, philosophy and later revelation.

For starters, the language of Revelation (as with the apocalyptic portions of Daniel) is clearly symbolic. This is affirmed explicitly by the use of the term "signified" (*esêmanen*— the KJV translates this one right) in Revelation 1:1. If the language is largely symbolic (there are exceptions, such as "Jesus" [Rev 12:17; 14:12; 17:6]), then the numbers in the book are largely symbolic as well. The year-day principle certainly uses numbers in a symbolic way; "A day in apocalyptic time periods represents a year."

A second signal for the application of a year-day principle is the use of unusual numbers. No doctrinal principle is grounded in the symbolic use of "a day," "an hour," or "five months." The crucial time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation all use very unusual numbers to signal their presence: "1260 days." "42 months" (who would say their child is 42 months old? We'd normally say "three and a half years"). "A time, times and half a time" (try that one on your friends!). 2300 evenings and mornings. The key time signifiers of prophetic interpretation are all very strange numbers.

The one exception to this rule is Revelation 9:15, where "the hour, day, month and year" have been applied to 391 years of Ottoman history. But in the Greek of Revelation 9:15, that series of time signifiers actually describe a point in time rather than a series of time periods. So that application of the year-day principle seems based more on a mistranslation of the Greek text than on the original author's intent.

In Daniel and Revelation, there are several unusual numbers which express periods of time. I am suggesting that these periods of time make the most sense today when interpreted in terms of years. In Daniel 7, for example, if one reads in a historicist fashion, as most

Adventists do, each of the beasts represents an empire that lasted hundreds of years (or a bit less than a hundred in Babylon's case). After the four empires pass off the scene comes one that is fiercer and more frightening than all the others, clearly the climax of the story. And that one rules for only three and a half years? If the little horn is the chief opponent of God's agenda in the chapter, reading the "time, times and half a time" as 1260 years fits the perspective of the whole chapter. The time of the little horn is proportional to the reign of the earlier empires (at least as seen with the passage of time in history).

Not only so, each of the time prophecies (Daniel 2, Daniel 7 and Revelation 12 are fairly clear on this) runs from the prophet's time to the last period of earth's history. If one reads historically, the 1260 days must be years because otherwise there would be a huge empty gap between Roman times and the times in which we live. The year-day principle allows the key prophecies of Daniel and Revelation to be a full sequence running from the prophet's time all the way to the end. To read them as literal days does not. Reading the prophecies through the lens of history has its challenges, but the outcome does make coherent sense when read in light of the whole.

To summarize, the "year-day principle" is not based on direct statements of Scripture, but on the larger perspective of systematic or practical theology. In that larger perspective, the passage of centuries helps one to see perspectives in the text that would not have been visible when the texts were first written. And for Adventists, these perspectives are confirmed by the visions of Ellen White. This Excursus should have demonstrated, however, that the principle does not require Ellen White's support to be accepted at the level of systematic theology. And, in fact, for centuries it was accepted by nearly all Christians, and even some Jews like Nahawendi, as the standard way to look at the text.

Having said that, applying the year-day principle to John's writings in the First Christian Century would not have made any sense. Revelation 1:1 says that the book concerns "things that must happen soon." Revelation 1:3 says that "the time is near." The clear anticipation of the soon coming of Jesus would incline original readers not to see year-day significance in the time periods of Revelation. It was only with the passing of eight centuries that Nahawendi, and after him Joachim of Flores, began to consider the possibility that the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation only make complete sense historically when read in light of the passing centuries. So the year-day principle was not a concept that could have been stated exegetically (compelling in First Century terms) in Bible times, but could only be drawn from the texts of Daniel and Revelation after the passing of many centuries.

When one accepts the year-day principle (at a theological level) one can see how the hand of God could take the language, time and perspective of a human writer like John, make perfect sense in that time and place, yet plant seeds in the text that would sprout only after the passing of many centuries. Reading the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation according to the year-day principle does not have to make sense exegetically, but faithful interpretation requires that it be consistent with an exegetical reading of the text. The extended meaning must be a natural extension of the original human writer's intention. Thus God's intention for the text is grounded in the human author's intention even though it takes the interpreter places

the original writer was not able to go.

Historically, looking at Christian history, was there ever a 1260-year period when, on the one hand, the Bible and true Israel were in obscurity and, secondly, a great religious/political power persecuted them? In terms of years, there was only one time--the Middle Ages (it is roughly 1260 years from 500 A.D. until the French Revolution). During that period the Bible was often in obscurity and those who followed the teachings of the Bible were often persecuted. To say this is not anti-Catholic prejudice, it is simply to observe a reality of history that was also expressed at times by a number of medieval saints (Bernard of Clairvaux, Eberhardt of Salzburg, and Francis of Assisi). These had very pointed things to say about church leadership in the Middle Ages, how the church of those years was more interested in economic gain and political power than in spirituality. But God is never caught by surprise. If we have rightly understood this chapter, He clearly foresaw that the church would become an oppressive power and that His true people would at times have to withdraw themselves from everyday society and hide in the "desert."

I don't claim to be a specialist in medieval history, but the larger picture of the 1260-year period is not difficult to see. While the rise and fall of papal power in Europe does not easily lend itself to specific dates, the best "tipping points" are probably 538 AD for the beginning and 1798 for the end.

During the century before 538, the papacy began to amass political power in the Empire's West while the center of gravity of the Empire shifted east to Constantinople. But within Italy the Papacy's political ascendancy was hindered until 476 by the western remnants of the Roman Empire and then the Heruli under Odoacer (until 490-493) and then the Ostrogothic kingdom (493-553). But papal rule in Rome had freed itself from Ostrogothic control by 538.

At the other end (1798) papal political rule was largely ended by Napoleon's chief of staff (Berthier), who took the pope captive and established a "roman republic." The papacy retained some control over the shrinking Papal States until 1870, but was a minor player in the politics of Europe after 1798.

Assuming God foresaw the church's medieval reign of terror (ever hear of the Crusades and the Inquisition?), the question arises, why then did God allow the papal system to win the battle for control of the church in the period between the emperors Constantine (died 337 AD) and Justinian (died 565 AD)? (here I owe a debt to my dear friend Ed Dickerson) What good could possibly come out of this?

The reason God allowed the papacy to control the church, I think, is that, for all its shortcomings, they got the most important thing right. What is that? The New Testament canon of 27 books. If you get the canon right, everything else is fixable. Without the New Testament as we have it, there would have been no Protestant Reformation and no Wesleyan Revival. And there would have been no Seventh-day Adventist movement.

In the earliest centuries there were five or six different versions of Christianity, all based on aspects of New Testament teaching, all vying to provide the best form of Christianity (Gnostics, Monastics, Montanists, Marcionites, Jewish Christians, orthodox Christians). If any of

the other five versions of Christianity had become dominant, the New Testament would have ended up very different. For example, the Marcionite NT was portions of Luke and ten of Paul's letters. That's it. The Montanists, on the other hand, believed every Christian was as inspired as the apostles. That canon would be huge.

So we see God doing "rear-guard actions." He is very practical. He often accepts the lesser of two or more evils as the best practical outcome of the human condition (not the best imaginable outcome). Have you thanked a Roman Catholic neighbor for the New Testament canon lately? Things could have been worse.

Rev 12:15–

The mouth of the serpent is an allusion to Satan's deceptive words in the Garden of Eden. There have been multiple references to the Eden story and the first pair in this chapter, beginning with the woman who battles the serpent in 12:1-5. Just as the battle in heaven is a "war of words," so on earth one of the key ways that Satan seeks to gain advantage is through the mouth; deceptive words.

The verbal nature of the image is underlined in 13:5-6, where the beast from the sea uses his mouth to blaspheme God's name and his tabernacle. Also, in Revelation 16:13-14, the three frogs come out of the mouths of the unholy trinity, to do their work of persuasion on the kings of the whole inhabited earth. So the flood that comes out of the dragon's mouth here is not a flood of literal water. It primarily represents the lies by which Satan seeks to persuade humanity to his side, although persecution may also be implied (see 12:13-14).

In Revelation, the concept of water can be used in three different ways, two of them positive and one negative: 1) nourishment; 2) cleansing; and 3) destructive power (flooding). 1) Nourishing springs of fresh water are featured as part of the reward of the saved in 7:17 and 22:1. That this language of nourishing water is intended to be metaphorical for the gospel seems evident from 21:6 and 22:17. The reverse of this metaphor is found in 8:10-11, where the "springs of water" (see 7:17) are poisoned by the falling star of the third trumpet and those who seek nourishment in these embittered waters die as a result (see also 16:4-7). See comments on Revelation 8:10-11.

2) While the Greek word for water is not directly associated with cleansing in Revelation (as it frequently is elsewhere in the New Testament), the concept of washing is frequently found, although water is replaced by the "blood of the Lamb" (7:14; 22:14, and in some translations also in 1:5).

3) The concept of flooding and destructive water is the key idea in this verse. It is also implied in 16:12, 17:1 and 17:15, where the destructive power of the Euphrates River represents the political and military powers of the world in their opposition to the "called, chosen and faithful" followers of the Lamb. In 16:12 and 17:15 the destructive waters are "dried up" by the sixth plague. In this passage they are "swallowed up" by the earth (12:16).

The concept of flooding water has a long history in the Old Testament. It represents the military conquest of the promised land in Isaiah 8:5-8, Jeremiah 46:6-7 and 47:2.

On the other hand, flooding can also be personalized, where ridicule and lying words are

represented. This is clearly the case in Psalm 69, where the Psalmist suffers opposition and ridicule from people he knows and uses the metaphor of flooding water to describe it (Psa 69:1-2). In Psalm 124:1-8 the threat is also personal, but seems more physical in nature.

Rev 12:15-16–

The purpose of the flooding water here is to destroy the woman. Since the woman represents the faithful people of God after the time of the cross, the flooding water is a metaphor for persecution. Satan attempts to destroy God's faithful people through force and coercion. Since the entire 1260 year period is covered in just a few words, the main character of that period is described in these two verses.

The image of a great flood of water being swallowed by the earth, the desert where the woman fled, is not limited to the world of fantasy. In the Kalahari Desert of Southern Africa, you can see an amazing thing, the Okavango Delta. The river pours into the desert, the water splits up into a delta full of plant and animal life, and then the area is so dry that the water is evaporated into the air and absorbed into the ground. Beyond the delta the land is as dry as a bone.

In the ancient world, flooding rivers and dragons with wings are often spoken about together. The meandering path of a river through the countryside looks like a snake (serpent) from an elevation. But in flood season the river overflows its banks. From an elevated position the flood waters spreading out from the river look like wings. The dragon is a serpent with wings! Thus the symbolism of an overflowing river runs parallel to the symbolism of a dragon with wings. Note the imagery in Isaiah 8:5-8 and Isaiah 26:20 through 27:1.

The serpent's (dragon's) attack on the woman in this passage, therefore, has a double meaning. The reference to the mouth of the serpent in the Garden of Eden suggests that the flooding waters mean powerfully deceptive words. On the other hand, the natural meaning of flooding waters would, in this situation, represent persecuting force, the threat of destruction that the dragon holds over the woman.

In the Book of Revelation Satan is portrayed as having two main ways of attacking people: 1) deception and persuasion; and 2) force, threats, and persecution. Both of these methods are very much in view in chapter 13 as well as here (13:7, 10, 14, 15). See comments there.

The exodus motif is clearly basic to this chapter and the earth helping the woman may be an allusion to that experience. In Exodus 15:12 it uses the interesting expression "the earth swallowed [the Egyptians]." Here the earth swallows up the flooding water, which represents persecuting powers.

In the original story, the desert put distance between the Israelites and Egypt and the flooding waters of the Red Sea saved Israel and drowned the Egyptian forces. But here there is a thematic reversal: the drying up of the flood saves the new Israel in the wilderness. The terms desert and earth here are parallel and positive concepts.

Rev 12:16–

In this verse it is the “earth” that helps the woman by swallowing up the flood of water the serpent/dragon spews out of its mouth after her. In the book of Revelation “earth” is a somewhat ambiguous concept (1:5; 5:6; 6:4; 11:6, 18; 13:12; 14:15-19; 18:1-3; 19:2). When contrasted with heaven, it is a negative concept (9:1; 14:3, except 21:1 of course). “Those who live in heaven” are always positive in Revelation (13:6; 19:1, 14), whereas “those who live on earth” is always a reference to opponents of God and His people (6:10; 8:13; 13:8; 17:8).

On the other hand, when earth is contrasted with sea or flooding waters, the earth is positive rather than negative (13:11; 21:1), as is the case here. The earth helps the woman, who represents the faithful people of God. The relatively positive history of the beast from the earth (Rev 13:11) may lie in its contrast with the beast from the sea (13:1-7). So 12:16 and perhaps 11:4 would seem to provide a positive setting for the reference to earth in 13:11.

Rev 12:14-16 Summary–

This passage portrays God's faithful people being rejected by the dominant powers of the earth for 1260 years. The Waldensees would be one example of this in medieval history. They were a group of people from northern Italy and southern France who copied and studied the scriptures faithfully through the Middle Ages and often faced threats and destruction from armies sent out by the mainstream Church. They were persecuted because wide distribution of the Scriptures in native languages were too great a threat toward the mainstream system.

Historically, toward the close of 1260 years, many forces came together to end this broad persecution of the faithful and elevate the Scriptures: the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the American Revolution, and the missionary explosion that began in the 1790s. Together, these forces brought freedom of worship to the western world around 1800 and seem the best historical fit for “the earth helping the woman.”

Rev 12:12-16– (spiritual lessons)

(1) In the final days of earth's history, prayer will be a vital protection to God's people. Note how this passage builds on the language of Psalm 32:6-7: "Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance." Psalm 32:6-7, NIV. See also Psalm 124:2-5, NIV: “If the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, the raging waters would have swept us away.” The final days of earth's history will be a time of great threat from the religious and political powers of the world, represented here by flooding waters. At such times prayer is a spiritual and physical protection, although physical safety is not a guarantee, as God allows evil to exhibit itself as part of the cosmic conflict.

(2) The rulership of Christ is effective for those who acknowledge Him. Note the language of Psalm 124:1-5: "If the LORD had not been on our side--let Israel say--if the LORD had not been on our side when men attacked us, when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over

us, the raging waters would have swept us away." The rescue of God's people in Revelation 12 was effective because of their relationship with God. When this is our daily experience, it carries over in the truly challenging times.

The bottom line is a relationship with God that is based on trust ("trust" is the best or closest definition for the word "faith"). When we learn to trust that God has our best interests at heart, that he is truly what Jesus has made Him out to be, we will truly, openly allow Him to work His way in our hearts. Allowing God such free rein in our lives also means there are times when He can intervene in dramatic ways that otherwise might not be possible.

(3) Behind earthly conflicts is a cosmic conflict of which we would know little without Revelation. Believers have never been stronger (because of Christ's blood) or more vulnerable (because of an angry dragon) than now. We live between the times of Christ's rulership and domination and the time of the great final threat from the dragon (Rev 12:17; 13:1-18).

The core issue in this cosmic conflict is the character of God. Is He angry, judgmental, punitive and severe (as Satan has made Him out to be, transposing his own character upon God), or is He the way Christ made Him out to be? When you have seen Jesus you have seen the Father, patient, kind, gracious, selfless, and longsuffering toward all, including Satan, and Judas, and Peter, and Mary Magdalene, and David, etc., etc., etc. How we relate to this issue is crucial as we become like the God we worship.

Rev 12:17–

The dragon is described as angry in this verse (Cf. Rev 12:12). He is frustrated by his repeated failures in chapter 12. He attacks the male child and fails (12:4-5). He was not strong enough to last in heaven (Revelation 12:8). He attacks the woman in the desert and also fails (Rev 12:16--"the earth helped the woman"). In this verse he goes off to make war with the remnant of her seed, but retains the memory of these early failures. In the words of Ranko Stefanovic (1: 398): "Satan's realization that he has failed too many times makes him angry and cautious."

The language of this verse makes it a clear parallel to the earlier war with the first offspring of the woman, Jesus. The offspring in this text is not Jesus, He ascended to heaven in verse 5. The offspring here is called the remnant, which represents here the end-time people of God, also called the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1 and the saints in 14:12.

What is surprising is not that the dragon here desires to make war with the remnant of the woman's offspring, the surprise is that he "went away" to make war (nearly all Greek manuscripts have this reading, the King James Version, based on a single Greek manuscript reflects a reading without the prefix for "away"). Remembering his repeated history of failure (as described in chapter 12 as a whole), the dragon pauses in his attacks to gather allies in chapter 13 before continuing the conflict.

In chapter 13, the dragon calls up a beast from the sea (13:1) and another beast from the earth (13:11). Together they make up a total of three. What is interesting about this is that in the book of Revelation, God is spoken of in terms of threes– The one who is and was and is to come (1:4, etc.); the one sitting on the throne (4:2, etc.), the Lamb and the seven spirits (5:6); in

other words, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So in Revelation 13 we have a counterfeit of the holy three. It is with this counterfeit trinity that the dragon makes war with the remnant at the end of time.

The word “remnant” (*loipôn*) appears eight times in the Book of Revelation. Of these three refer to a positive grouping of people who take God’s side in the issues described in the book of Revelation. Besides the usage here, the remnant (*loipois*— usually translated “the rest” in English) are those in Thyatira who have not followed Jezebel and learned the deep things of Satan (Rev 2:24). In Revelation 11:13 the remnant (*loipoi*) of the Great City give glory to God, as is commanded in 14:7, so they transfer over to God’s side in the conflict. On the other hand, the term “remnant” can also be used for groupings that oppose God (Rev 9:20; 19:21; 20:5).

The root meaning of “remnant” has to do with the survivors of a disaster. In the case of a tsunami or genocide a tribe may be in danger of being wiped out forever. But as long as a few survive (a “remnant”), they can reproduce and the tribe can reconstitute itself once more. So it is not surprising that the first time a Hebrew word for remnant occurs in the Old Testament is in the Flood story. Noah and his family were the remnant of the human race which was the means of restoring the population after the flood (Gen 7:23— “only Noah was ‘left’” [remained]).

The spiritual equivalent of such a literal remnant would be those who remained faithful when a larger group was in apostasy. In this verse “the remnant of the woman’s offspring” would be those out of a larger group of professed followers of Jesus who remain faithful to God in the time of the end.

Who are the remnant? They have two identifying marks in this verse: 1) those who obey God’s commandments and 2) those who hold to the testimony of Jesus (who have a prophetic gift like John had when he received the revelation— Rev 1:1-2). Coming at the end of chapter 12, they are the end-time people of God. Since chapters 10-14 primarily concern the end-time people of God, there are a number of other characteristics of the remnant that could be listed. They preach the everlasting gospel (10:7; 14:6). They have a message drawn from the books of Daniel and Revelation (10:6, 11). They also have something to say about the heavenly sanctuary (11:1-2). They warn the world of end-time deception (13:1-18). And, finally, they have a living relationship with Jesus (14:1-5), pronounce the hour of God’s judgment (14:7) and have a special message concerning the fourth commandment (14:7). The message of the remnant is a unique package of ideas that are designed to fit the context of the end of history. It is the everlasting gospel expressed in a way that uniquely fits the setting of the End-time.

There is a rich spiritual history for the term “remnant” in the Old Testament. At every point in history the term remnant could be used in three different ways. First, when you look to the past, there is always a historical remnant, sometimes more than one. Each historical remnant is identifiable in history, and can be named and counted. The historical remnant is a living witness to a mighty act of God in the past. But historical remnants are not necessarily faithful to God, they are simply descendants of a community that was formed in honor of one of God’s interventions in the world. Examples of such historical remnants (when viewed from a later time) were Noah and his family after the Flood, the Israelites of the Exodus, and those who returned from Assyria and Babylon.

The second type of remnant is usually in the present tense. Such a remnant can be called the faithful remnant, that portion of the historical remnant who are faithful to the original mission and message of that historical remnant. But unlike the historical remnant, the faithful remnant is usually invisible and uncountable, known only to God. It is only God who knows for sure who is faithful and who is not. One of the classic examples of a faithful remnant is Elijah and the 7000 in 1 Kings 19:14-18. Even though Elijah is a prophet, he doesn't know about 6999 other faithful ones in Israel. He thinks he is the only one.

The third type of remnant is the eschatological remnant. That is always in the future from the perspective of the faithful remnant. The eschatological remnant is bigger, more international and truly surprising in nature, including elements of the pagan nations beyond Israel (Isa 66:19-20; 19:23-25). From the perspective of John's day, the remnant of 12:17 is an eschatological remnant, but from the perspective of the end-time, the remnant of Revelation will no doubt prove to have the same three possibilities as was consistently the case in OT times.

The phrase "remnant of the woman's seed (or offspring)" is a bit puzzling, as up until now the people of God have been represented by the woman only. Before the birth of the male child (12:5) she represented Israel, from whom the Messiah was to come. After the ascension of the male child she represented the Israel of the New Testament, the church made up of followers of the Lamb on earth. But she mysteriously vanishes in this verse, to be replaced by the "remnant of her offspring." If the offspring of the woman is the male child, the remnant of her offspring would be the true followers of the male child (Michael/Lamb/Christ— 12:5-11) in the final conflict of earth's history. What happened to the woman? She vanishes, perhaps to appear in chapter 17, transformed into a hideous caricature of the woman who once was (17:1-6). This suggests that the greatest enemies of the church at the end of time will be inside the house rather than outside.

One of the marks of Revelation's remnant is that they keep the "commandments of God." This reference builds on 11:19, where we find the only reference to the ark of the covenant in the Book of Revelation. The ark in the Israelite sanctuary contained the "testimony," another way of describing the ten commandments (Exod 25:16, 21; 32:15; 34:29; 40:20; Deut 10:1-5).

There is a parallel reference to the commandments of God in 14:12. As we will see, there are also numerous allusions to the ten commandments in chapters 13 and 14. So at the center of the book of Revelation is a strong focus on keeping the commandments of God. The end-time remnant is known for its faithful obedience to all of God's commandments.

The phrase "testimony of Jesus" can be read in two ways in the Greek, subjective and objective. As subjective, it would be the testimony that Jesus Himself gives. As objective, it would be our testimony about Jesus. Fairly consistently in the New Testament, a phrase like this would be understood as subjective. In other words, this is a testimony from Jesus rather than a testimony about Jesus. Having said that, in both the Gospel of John and in Revelation one can make the case that this particular author often works from a "both/and" perspective.

What is the testimony of (from) Jesus? The clearest explanation can be found by

examining Revelation 1:2. There the testimony of Jesus is “what John saw.” It is part of a chain of revelation in Revelation 1:1-3. God gives Jesus “the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:1). Jesus gives John “the testimony of Jesus” (1:2). And John writes out “the words of this prophecy” and passes them on to the church (1:3). So the testimony of Jesus is not the book of Revelation itself (Rev 1:3– “the words of this prophecy”), it is the visionary, prophetic gift that Jesus gave to John (Rev 1:2). This is confirmed by a comparison of Revelation 19:10 with 22:8-9.

So a characteristic mark of the end-time remnant is the possession of a visionary, prophetic gift like the one John had. But in this case the setting is not John’s day, but the final battle at the very end of time.

This verse as a whole is probably an allusion to the enmity between the serpent and the woman in Genesis 3:15. There the offspring of the serpent would bruise the heel of Eve’s offspring. In return, the woman’s offspring would crush the serpent’s head. The picture involved is of a serpent inflicting a wound on the sandaled heel of a man, after which the man uses his sandal to crush the serpent’s head. This language lies in the background of the war between the dragon and the remnant in this text.

See note to come on the chapter as a whole, which expands this insight to the relationship between the entire chapter and Genesis 3.

Rev 12:1-17 Conclusion—

In a real sense, Revelation 12 sets the stage for everything that follows in the second half of the book. Revelation 12 takes us from the original war in heaven, through the decisive events of the birth, death, ascension, and enthronement of Christ, the persecution of the church (by a dragon who could no longer continue the war in heaven), and to the final battle of the dragon and his allies with the remnant of the woman's seed.

From this point on in the book of Revelation, the focus is almost entirely on the final events of earth's history. The same dragon who fought the heavenly Christ (Michael) fought the earthly Christ (the male child of the woman) and the woman (those who overcome by the blood of Christ). He mounts his final attack on the remnant of her seed (Christ's last day people) through allies he obtains in chapter 13.

This chapter brings together the three major actors in the drama that will make up the second half of the Book of Revelation. The first and central actor is Jesus Christ. He has been known by many names in the first half of the book; Jesus Christ of course, one like a son of man (1:13-16), the Lamb (5:5-6, etc.), and perhaps the angels of chapters 8 (3-4) and 10 (1-7). In this chapter some of these names are repeated and He is also known as the male child, Michael, and the seed of the woman.

The second major actor is the church. It too is known by many names in the book of Revelation. In the first half of the book the church is described as church and churches (of course), the 144,000, and the great multitude. In this chapter it is represented by the woman and the remnant. In later chapters it is represented by the 144,000 (Rev 14:1), those who follow the Lamb (14:3), the saints (14:12), those who keep their garments (16:15), the called, chosen and faithful followers of the Lamb (17:14), and the bride of the Lamb (19:8).

The third major actor in the drama is the dragon, who is further defined in this chapter as the devil, Satan, and the ancient serpent. He too, obviously, is named by many names in the book of Revelation. He appears in earlier chapters as the fallen star (8:10; 9:1), and as Apollyon and Abaddon (9:11). He appears at great length again in chapter 20 (verses 1-10), where he is first confined in chains to the earth and later on leads the resurrected armies of earth against the holy city, only to be destroyed by fire at the very end.

In a real sense the entire chapter is an apocalyptic interpretation of Genesis 3. The author of Revelation uses allusive hints to Genesis 3 (particularly verses 14 and 15) that create a backdrop to the entire vision. In both accounts we find a woman (12:1-2), a serpent (12:9), the concept of seed or offspring (12:5, 17) and consistent enmity between the serpent/dragon on the one hand and the woman and her offspring on the other. The middle part of the chapter (12:7-12) outlines the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15. The seed of the woman (male child/Michael/Christ) defeats the dragon/serpent and expels him from heaven. The wounding of the woman's offspring (3:15) is not explicitly mentioned, but is alluded to in the "blood of the Lamb" (12:11).

From the perspective of Revelation, then, the fulfillment of Genesis 3:14-15 is centered on the cross and the enthronement of Jesus. Here is where "the serpent's head is crushed." Later on in chapter 20 comes the full and final destruction of the dragon/serpent/devil/Satan (20:2). Although there is not a hint of an allusion to Genesis 3 anywhere in chapter 20, it is clear that the same adversary is in view and the same battle is being fought and drawn to its final conclusion. In the Book of Revelation, the author often uses different terms to describe a single entity (see previous comments above).

Rev 12:1-17– (spiritual lessons)

(1) According to verse 10 of this chapter, Jesus has been enthroned in heavenly places (a summary of chapter 5) since His ascension. But the rulership of Christ is effective on earth only for those who acknowledge Him. To them His rule is very real. It is the presence of the future, the reality of what prophecy continues to point to. But it is limited largely to the spiritual level, in physical experience life in Christ today is a mixture of the now and the not yet. There is suffering in the midst of joy.

(2) Behind all earthly conflicts, whether those conflicts are between nations or between neighbors, is a cosmic conflict. Were it not for the Book of Revelation we would know very little about the cosmic conflict. The material in Revelation 12 provides the big picture that pulls together multiple hints in the Old Testament; passages such as Genesis 3, Job 1 and 2, Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28 and Zechariah 3; and other hints in the New Testament, such as John 12:31-32; Ephesians 1:3-13; and Colossians 1:15-20.

(3) In this chapter the key characteristic of Satan (besides being angry a lot of the time—12:12, 17) is that he is the "accuser of the brothers" (verse 10). This concept is based on the Old Testament accounts in Job 1 and 2 and Zechariah 3. But if Satan is the accuser of the brothers, does that make God the encourager of the brothers (and sisters)? When we are tempted to criticize, judge and accuse in the name of God are we unwittingly (sometimes) taking on the

spirit and character of Satan? We may feel the end justifies the means, but when we exhibit the character of Satan in our work for God, are we not speaking badly of God? Are we not undermining His reputation?

It seems to me that the more we speak in behalf of God the more we need to be aware of the subtle messages about God's character that people pick up when we speak in His name. It's a heavy responsibility. But it is also a relief. We can leave the judgment in God's hands and do all we can to encourage people to trust in Him no matter what they have done. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin, it is not ours (John 16:8-11).

(4) This chapter tells us that, thanks to the cross, believers have never been stronger. They have the power of the blood of Christ and clarity on issues of God's character that was not possible before the cross. At the same time, they have never been more vulnerable. Since his final expulsion from heaven, believers on earth are the focus of the dragon's undivided attention. This is a reminder of the two ages concept that is widespread in the New Testament (see my book *What the Bible Says About the End-Time*). On the one hand they are in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6), on the other hand they groan with the agonies of the present age, their bodies not yet delivered from their corrupted state (Rom 8:22-23).

(5) Something happened at the cross that wins the hearts of all who understand it. The greatest clarity on this revelation of God's character is found in the portrayal of the cross in the Gospel of John (John 17:1-5 and other places). The full revelation of God appeared in heaven in the context of the war in this chapter. Such a revelation needs to happen also on earth in the context of the final proclamation of the gospel.