



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Revelation 12:1-17

“Unholy War”

Revelation

TRANSCRIPT

Our text this morning is Revelation chapter 12. We'll look at the entire chapter, verses 1 through 17.

“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;

and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

I’m not going to make mention of this in the text, but what we have described in this chapter are two falls of Satan. This second one we just read is a future event in which Satan will be cast out of heaven permanently. I think verse 4 probably refers to his original fall, when iniquity was found in him and he fell. That happened ages ago. What is described in verse 7 through 9 is yet to happen. But that gives you a sense of what’s described here; a war that Satan is making on heaven, and his fall from heaven. Verse 10:

“Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.’

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.

But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for this time we have together, in which we can read Scripture and study it, and seek to understand the text that perhaps at first blush is not all that clear to us. But through the ministry of the Spirit we hope to have an understanding of it, and to have it applied to our hearts and give direction to our lives. And so we look to you to do that.

Fortunately, we’re not dependent upon men to make your Word known to us. We have the ultimate teacher, the Holy Spirit, within us, and we pray for his ministry this morning, that it would not be hindered by us, but that he would open our hearts to receive the truth and make things plain and applicable to us. So build us up in the faith in that way, Father. May this be a rich time of learning and fellowship and worship.

And we pray, Lord, for our material needs as well. We pray that you would bless us and provide for us. We have many among us who are sick, and we pray for them. We pray that you would give health and encouragement. And we pray that you’d give all of us a sense of your presence and an appreciation for all that you have given us and will give us. You will always provide for us.

We sometimes, Lord, come to very difficult places in our lives, and wonder what the future will hold. You know the future, and you know the future not simply because you’re prescient, because you have insight into it, because you know all things, but you know all things because you planned all things. So our future’s already been worked out.

And we’ve been promised that it’s going to be glorious for us, and that even the hard times will be for a good purpose. Help us to rest in that. Help us to trust you always, and know that you are always with us, and you will bless us. Encourage those who need such encouragement, and give all of us great appreciation for your goodness and grace.

Father, we pray for our nation, that you’d bless it. You’ve raised up a great land in this land in which we live, and you have made it great, and yet it’s a nation that needs much prayer. We pray for our leaders, that you give them wisdom at a very difficult time. We pray for the people, that you bring revival. And we pray for

ourselves, that you’d use us in that, and equip us this morning for being witnesses for you in the week to come.

May it be a time of learning and worship, and a time of joyful fellowship. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] People have a natural fascination with the devil. I think that’s a fair statement. But I think it’s also true that their ideas today are often confused. John Milton, the great Puritan poet, is probably responsible for some of the popular myths about the devil that are common today. His epic poem *Paradise Lost* opens with Lucifer and his comrades cast down to hell and lying on a burning lake.

He is fallen and defeated, but unrepentant and defiant. He declares that “it is better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,” so he assembles his army of fallen angels, determined to continue his war on God and oppose his will in every way that he can. Now, the idea of Satan reigning in hell is false. Today he occupies the air and patrols the earth, but his destiny is the lake of fire, which will be his eternal prison and place of punishment.

But I do think Milton put his finger on the spirit of Satan in that line “better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.” It expresses his great pride and implacable determination to oppose God. And he does that – he and his fellow demons are always at work, day and night, to frustrate God’s will and expand his kingdom of darkness on the earth, but he’s doomed to failure.

We see that in these next chapters in the book of Revelation, chapters 12 through 14. They picture Satan making war against the angels, and war against the saints, and then his final attempt to gain world dominion through the antichrist and the false prophet. These chapters give the background and the reason for the bowl judgments recorded in chapters 15 through 19. They show the necessity of such judgments.

And these chapters give us an important look behind the scenes, so to speak. There are powerful unseen forces at work in the events of history. There is a great spiritual war taking place around us, in which Satan is attempting to thwart God’s purpose on earth. But again, he cannot succeed; God is almighty, and he cannot be frustrated. “The devil, as Luther said, “is God’s devil.” God controls all things, and he even controls the machinations of the evil one.

We are reminded of all of that in these chapters, which begin in chapter 12 with a spectacular vision of a woman in heaven, clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet. This is obviously symbolism. I say obviously from just the reading of it, but if you

have questions, John makes that very clear in verse 1, where he says that he saw “a great sign.” So this woman is seen as a sign.

She is symbolic, and the first of the three main characters in the chapter: the woman, her child, and the dragon. It is a complicated passage that can be confusing, and you probably puzzled over it a little bit just as we read through the text, and wondered what all this is about, so I think it would be helpful to first identify the characters, and then give a summary of the chapter before going into it in some detail.

In verse 2, we read that the woman gives birth to a male child, who is described in verse 5 as being a son who will rule all the nations with a rod of iron, and that you probably recognize is taken from Psalm 2. He is not described as a sign, so this person is to be understood as that – as literally a person. And from the description of him and the connection with Psalm 2, it’s very clear that this is the Messiah; this is Christ.

This is the one who is the subject of and fulfills the psalm, Psalm 2. So because this is Christ, the child is Christ, some have identified the woman as the virgin Mary, for obvious reasons. But this is a symbolic woman. This is not a literal person. And long after Mary was gone from the earth, this woman continues on the scene, to the end of history, and here is persecuted in the great tribulation to come.

So this can’t be Mary. Others identify the woman as the church, but the church did not give birth to the Messiah. Just the opposite – Christ said in Matthew 16, “I will build my church,” so the church is the product of Christ. The better interpretation is that the woman is Israel. That’s suggested I think by her crown of 12 stars that represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and the sun and moon, which probably allude to Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9.

The dream that angered his brothers so, because they understood that he was saying he’d be preeminent. In his dream, you may remember the sun, the moon, and the stars bow down to him, indicating that he would have great authority, which he did. He didn’t understand where that authority would be at the time, but as the story unfolds, he has great authority when he becomes prime minister of Egypt, and rules over his brothers, and rules over the world, for that matter.

Well, that picture, taken from Joseph’s life, is adapted here to Joseph’s people to indicate that in the future Israel will have great dominion, great authority, great power, in the Messianic kingdom. That idea, that interpretation, I believe, is supported from the

context, because chapter 11, which we looked at last week, emphasizes God’s commitment to the nation. That’s really how the chapter begins, and that’s how the chapter ends.

At the very end, in verse 19, heaven opens up, and there is seen the ark of the covenant in heaven, which is a symbol representing God’s presence with his people. The ark is the throne of God. It’s symbolically where he dwelt among the people. And for that to appear in heaven was a symbol of God’s commitment to his people, to Israel. So the vision carries that on somewhat.

The vision here indicates that the nation’s future is glorious, the nation’s future is secure, but that seems doubtful in the next verses of chapter 12, where she, where the nation Israel, is seen in great danger. The woman is described in verse 2 as being in labor and in distress, and the reason for her distress is not simply that she’s in labor, but it’s seen in the next verses, in verses 3 and 4, because a great red dragon is standing before her.

Like the woman, this is another sign, John says, but the dragon is clearly Satan, and that’s interpreted for us later, in verse 9. The identification is made. And here he is attempting to prevent the birth of her child. So the three parties of this passage are Israel, Christ, and Satan. The chapter falls into three parts. Verses 1 through 6 describe Satan’s attempt to destroy Christ at his birth, his failure to do it, and then his attempt to destroy the nation.

Verses 7 through 12 describe war in heaven. They explain events that are yet future that occur between verses 5 and 6, when Satan attempts a kind of *coup d’état* and storms heaven to regain his place there. Verse 4 indicates his first fall, this primeval fall, this fall that occurred so long ago when iniquity was found in him. This fall in verses 7 through 12 is yet future. Well, this attempt to storm heaven and regain his place there fails, and Satan is thrown back to earth.

Verses 13 through 17 then describe what happens after he comes to earth, when the devil persecutes the nation. This is an expansion on verse 6. Verse 6 gives us a brief statement of that, and then describes this warfare in heaven that will lead up to the events of verse 6. And then in verses 13 through 17, the event of verse 6 is expanded; it’s developed. It tells us what will happen to Israel during the tribulation.

So chapter 12 is about Satan making war on Christ, making war on the angels of heaven, and making war on the saints on earth; it is about unholy war, waged against God and his people. Well, that’s something of a summary. And now let’s look at the vision in

some detail. The first part of it has Israel, the woman, in labor with the Messiah, and the dragon standing before her. He’s described as great and red.

It is an image, a description of his character, of his violent, murderous character. Dragons are found in the Old Testament as representations of Israel’s enemies, and in Psalm 75 and Isaiah 27 we read of Leviathan, which is described as a twisted serpent with many heads. Here, the dragon is described with seven heads and ten horns. It’s a description that suggests universal power.

Heads often represent governments, and so this speaks of his authority in human governments, and much of Satan’s power that has been used against God’s people operates through human government, as it did in the first century with the governments of the Caesars and the emperors, and has down through history, through the persecutions that have been caused by tyrants.

The dragon is described as having a massive tail, in verse 4, that swept away a third of the stars. As I already mentioned, probably refers to the rebellion when he originally fell from heaven. It’s what John Milton describes in his poem. But more importantly, it’s what is described by the prophets; what’s described in texts like Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, where Lucifer’s rebellion and fall are recorded.

It’s seen here in a hostile position before the nation, having fallen from heaven originally, having been on the earth, he’s now positioned before the nation with hostility, doing what he has done since sin was first found in him – opposing God’s plan of salvation by attacking God’s people. Down through history, he has done this. You can trace it through the Scriptures.

Beginning with the temptation of Eve in the Garden, the murder of righteous Abel by his brother Cain; always trying to destroy the righteous line. The conflict between Isaac and Ishmael, the conflict between Jacob and Esau, Pharaoh’s drowning the Israelite boys in the Nile, and many others, all attempts by Satan to prevent the birth of the Messiah. But he failed. Christ was born.

Still, Satan didn’t give up. He continued his warfare even after our Lord was born. He tried to kill him through King Herod’s slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem, and then later, having failed, tried to bring our Lord under his domain, his power, through the temptations in the wilderness. But again, all of that failed. Ultimately, Satan always fails to overthrow God’s purposes.

Now, he comes very close sometimes, and he works hard at it, and things seem very tenuous at times, and you find numerous examples of that in Scripture, but Satan fails. And that’s represented here, his failure, in verse 5, where John writes that after the Lord’s birth, he was caught up to God and to his throne. So John moves quickly in that verse from our Lord’s birth to his ascension, without mentioning the cross or the resurrection.

But the essential point that John is making is that Satan was thwarted, and Christ triumphed. He is exalted and enthroned at God’s right hand. The woman is still here, though, and the devil, having failed to destroy Christ, turns his rage against her. But in verse 6, we read of her escape. “Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.”

This is a depiction of God’s providential care for the nation in the future, in the events of the tribulation, but we’ll look at that in more detail in the last verses, verses 13 through 17, where verse 6 is developed more fully. In verse 7, the scene changes, and we read of war in heaven. Now, there’s always conflict in the heavenly realm. In verse 10, Satan is described as the one who accused the brethren before God day and night.

In verse 9, he is called “the great dragon,” but his names are given as the devil and Satan. Devil means slanderer, and Satan is the Hebrew word for adversary, or enemy. That’s what he is, and that’s what he does, and this is what is happening now. He is slandering us by accusing us of crimes before the throne of God. The devil is like a prosecuting attorney bringing charges against God’s elect.

We see a picture of that in Zechariah chapter 3, where Satan accuses Joshua, the high priest. We get a sense of it or a picture of it again in Job, chapters 1 and 2, where Satan appears before God, and he attacks the character of Job. He is a liar, our Lord tells us that, but he doesn’t always need to lie about us. We’re sinners. We continually fail to live up to the standing that we have as saints.

We continually in our conduct fail to meet our position as God’s holy ones, and Satan is always there to call attention to that, call attention to our failures. And he’s unrelenting in that. That is what he is – an unrelenting enemy, always accusing us before God, and I think we should say also to our conscience. The attacks that he makes before God on us also are made on our conscience.

He is always there to remind us of our failures and our guilt, and we read that he does that day and night, reminding us, reminding God of our continual sin. So what that tells us is we have an enemy that never sleeps, that never stops. Most people work in the day, stop for the night. If they work at night, they sleep in the day. This one works 24 hours, 7 days a week, constantly opposing us.

He is an implacable, unrelenting enemy, but we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. He is our defense attorney, and he points to the blood that washed us clean. The sins of every believer have been atoned for; paid for at the cross. God’s justice is fully satisfied, and every believer has been clothed in Christ’s righteousness.

As John said of the saints in 7:14, “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” And Christ as our defense attorney points to that, points to his blood, and we are exonerated. But that’s the warfare in heaven today. That’s the warfare that we experience on the earth. But the warfare that’s going on in heaven today is a court battle.

What’s revealed here in verse 7 happens in heaven as well, but it’s still future, and it happens in between verses 5 and 6. So often in biblical prophecy, there are gaps in time; thousands of years may elapse between verses and events. The events are telescoped in a verse. That means they’re compressed so that they appear to be one event.

But as we understand later through revelation, there are two events, and there’s time in between those events, and that’s what we have here, with verse 5 and 6. Verse 5 is about the past, with Christ’s first advent, from his birth to his ascension. Verse 6 is about the future, when Satan persecutes the nation Israel. Verses 7 through 12 fill in the gap.

They tell us what will happen at the end of history; the event that will lead up to or bring about this persecution of Israel, when Satan makes war on heaven in an attempt to regain the privileged place that he lost in his original fall. It has been called a cosmic prelude to the consummation. It’s a prelude. It’s not the devil’s end, but it is one more defeat that foreshadows his final destruction.

Verse 7: “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great

dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”

Well, as I said, this is Satan’s second fall from heaven. This seems to be what Christ saw prophetically when his disciples were preaching the gospel throughout the land and casting out demons. That foreshadowed something in our Lord’s mind, and in Luke 10:18, he said to them when they returned, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.”

Here is where that happens. He speaks of that as a past event, but that’s what we may call a prophetic perfect – a past event put in the present or the past tense. And he sees from the things they were doing that Satan’s doom was sure, and he sees this event at that moment. This is the beginning of Satan’s end. He’s now at this point confined to the earth, expelled from heaven.

So the victory that Michael and the angels achieved is answered with a sudden outburst of praise from heaven. Verse 10: “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.’”

And they will overcome him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life, even when faced with death. In that day, when Satan is thrown down from heaven forever, there will be a shout of victory. But the saints have always had victory over the devil’s attacks, over the devil’s accusations.

We’re reminded of that in verse 11, in the statement “and they overcame him,” meaning the brethren, the saints, overcame the dragon, because of the blood of the Lamb. That’s the basis of our victory. That’s the basis of our righteousness, and our acceptance with God. It’s not anything in us. It’s not our valiance, our bravery, our faith, our effort, our works – anything.

The basis of our victory, and righteousness, and acceptance with God is the blood of Christ. It’s his atoning work, and it is permanent. Nothing can annul that. And so clothed in Christ’s righteousness, equipped with the Holy Spirit, and armed with the Word of God, the testimony of the gospel, we are more than sufficient for Satan’s attacks. He cannot prevail against the gospel and the sacrifice of Christ.

Even when believers are killed for their testimony, they – we – triumph through death. Satan already is a defeated enemy. So for this reason, the voices will say, “Rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell on the earth.” In that day, heaven will be cleansed of the devil’s presence. His doom will be sure, and the kingdom will be about to come on the earth.

Now, that’s reason for great joy, for those in heaven and for those who are suffering on the earth. The kingdom is about to come. The end of the trials is about to come. The beginning of the glory is about to appear. So that’s reason for joy, for the heavenly hosts and for those on earth, the people of God on earth. But this is also reason for woe on the earth, because the devil has come down and he is enraged.

“Having great wrath,” John writes, “knowing that he has only a short time;” that tells you that these events are yet to occur; that these events are right at the end of history, right before the Lord comes, because the devil has only a short time. The short time that he has is defined in verse 6 as 1,260 days, or time, and times, and half a time in verse 4, which is 3-1/2 years.

This is the last half of the tribulation period, also called the great tribulation by our Lord in Matthew 24:21. It’s the time when the beast reigns on the earth, and the two witnesses minister in Jerusalem. It’s a time of intense evangelism, and intense persecution. It’s intense because the devil knows that his time is short; that when he is thrown down to the earth, Christ’s return is near at hand.

And so knowing that his time is short, he turns his anger against the woman, the nation Israel. Verse 13: “And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.” Now, this is a resumption of verse 6. John now expands on the devil’s attack on the nation Israel, and its rescue, in verses 13 through 17.

The reason for Satan’s attack on the nation is not given. It doesn’t explain why he turns his wrath against the nation Israel. It may be a tactical reason. Perhaps this is some attempt by him to frustrate the coming of the kingdom; that’s not said. That’s speculation. So it may simply be the expression of his cruel and violent nature; he’s a murderer, Jesus said in John 8:44.

And so angry because his time is short, he may seek to destroy as many people as he can in the short time that he has. That’s how he will vent his rage, because that’s the way he is. It’s a reflection of his character to be a murderer. He hates Israel

for God’s choice of it. Israel is called “the apple of God’s eye” in Zechariah 2:8, and so he hates Israel for that reason.

He hates God, so he hates God’s people. He hates Israel for its election, because God chose it out of all of the nations, and made it the channel of salvation. It is the means, the channel, through which the Messiah and the kingdom come, and he hates it for that reason. So he makes it his purpose in these last days on the earth, the short time that he has, he makes it his purpose to exterminate the Jews. That’s what he will do.

He’ll do that in the future, but he’s done that down through history, from Haman to Hitler. But it will become even more intense at the end of history. Again, though, he will fail. Verse 14: “But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

“And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.” Well, how are we to interpret all of this? The eagle’s wings, the flood of water, the wilderness – is this literal or is this symbolic?

It’s not an easy passage to interpret; not an easy passage to teach, so there are a wide variety of interpretations. Some who understand it as symbolical interpret this of the church being persecuted down through history, but surviving due to God’s protection. Others who interpret it literally understand this to refer to an actual escape of the Jews of Jerusalem in that future day to a place of safety.

And some have even located that place of safety as east of the Jordan River in the land of Jordan, in Petra, the Rose City in the mountains there. Well, as I said, this is not an easy passage to interpret, but I think we should remember that this is a sign, a symbol that John saw. So it’s not intended to be taken altogether literally. There are examples in the Old Testament of God literally delivering his people like this.

I mean actually delivering his people to a place of safety – in a time of famine, Elijah, you remember, was led by the Lord to the brook of Kerith, east of the Jordan River, and there God commanded the ravens to feed him. And when the brook dried up, the Lord led him to Zaraphath, near Sidon, where a widow provided for him.

God can provide for us in any number of ways, in a supernatural way, or through people, in a natural way. And God can certainly provide for the nation in a literal sense. We could see reason for taking this literally, and perhaps he will do that by taking the nation to a place east of the Jordan River. That is a possible way for God to do that.

He can do anything, but some of the language used here is used to describe God’s deliverances in a figurative way, as when he delivered Israel from Egypt. He literally, physically, historically delivered Israel from Egypt. In Exodus 19:4, though, Moses tells the people that God delivered them from the Egyptians on eagles’ wings, and he rescued them from Pharaoh through the sea.

Well, he didn’t literally deliver Israel on eagles’ wings; they didn’t fly out of Egypt. They marched out of Egypt. But he describes that deliverance in a figurative way, on eagles’ wings. And here the escape is described as being on eagles’ wings, and from a flood of water from the devil, which reminds us of that crossing of the Red Sea. The picture of a flood is often found in the Old Testament as a picture of overpowering evil.

For example, in Psalm 18:4, David speaks of torrents of ungodliness that terrified him. The ungodly, their attacks on him, are like floods of water that threaten to sweep him away. So I’m inclined to interpret this of a literal deliverance of the nation in the future, but a deliverance that is described symbolically, in language that is familiar in the Old Testament.

Taking figures of speech from the Old Testament and applying them to this, the wilderness was the place where God led and fed the nation for 40 years, after the exodus. The picture of the woman in the wilderness is a way of describing God’s providential care for the nation in this world, which is like a wilderness, a hostile place; doing that for the nation for 1,260 days, or 3-1/2 years.

Now he will do that is not clear from the text, but the assurance it gives is clear. It’s the assurance that he will do it, and Satan’s attempts to exterminate the Jews will again fail. God has a purpose and a future for them, and his plan for the nation cannot fail. So because he will again fail, we read in verse 17 that he will again be enraged, and turn his attention to the rest of the woman’s children, or seed.

These may be the 144,000 of chapter 7, the servants of the Lord who are busy throughout this time across the world spreading the gospel. It may also refer to

believing Gentiles during that time. All believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, are the seed of Abraham. Paul tells us that in Galatians 3:7. It’s those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. There will be multitudes of such sons of Abraham during the tribulation.

In spite of the hostile opposition from Satan and the antichrist, there will be many people who come to faith in Jesus Christ. There’ll be great opposition to them. It will be an extension of the hostility that we read about from the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 3:15 – the conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This will be a continuation of that, what we’ve seen all through history.

But this will be more intense; the most intense attack that Satan has made against God’s people. The dragon will know that his time is short. He will be increasingly enraged by his failures. So the chapter ends on an ominous scene, with the dragon standing on the sand of the seashore. From there, he will call up the beast. Things, as I said, will become more intense in those final days before the Lord returns.

But really, nothing will happen then that is not happening now; not essentially. It will be more intense, but what will happen then is happening now. Satan’s goals and stratagems are the same as they’ve always been: to oppose God’s will and destroy God’s people. Ultimately, he is behind all of the acts of persecution and opposition to God’s people.

We live in a spiritual as well as a material world. We need to understand that. We need to know that there is an unseen spiritual dimension to life that assaults us with temptation, and that Satan is accusing us before God, and accusing our consciences. And he’s doing that day and night. We need to know that so we will be on guard, will not be taken unawares, will not be surprised.

We’ll be able to interpret the situation around us; we’ll be able to understand that this is really not all that surprising, that we’re going through hardship; that we’re going through opposition. We’re in a spiritual war, so we’re to be aware of that, to know our circumstances, and that we be looking to the one who can strengthen us and keep us from falling, as Jude describes the Lord God in Jude 24.

“Who is able to keep us from falling,” able to keep you from stumbling – only he can do that, and we’re to look to him. We are well equipped, though, for the

conflict. John said in 1 John 4:4, “Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.” Well, he who is in the world is a dragon.

He’s mighty, he’s powerful, but the one that is in us, the Lord Jesus Christ, specifically the Holy Spirit, through whom Christ dwells, he is greater than the evil one. And as Paul tells us in Romans 8:14, “These are the sons of God, those who are led of the Spirit of God,” or “being led of the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.” The sons of God, the children of God, are constantly always being led by the Spirit of God.

He never stops leading us. We may resist his leading, but he’ll never let us go, and he will deal with us to get us back on track. That’s who’s in us. That’s who has equipped us. So we walk by the Spirit, and we are to make every effort to walk obediently by the Spirit, because when we are living in obedience, we are living safely. We are following the will and the direction of our Lord.

Our Lord told us that we can expect opposition. “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too,” and we can expect all kinds of opposition. But as we walk in obedience, and trust the Spirit, and live in obedience to God’s Word, we’ll be protected. We will put our hope and our faith in that, and on him. Well, may God grant us the desire and the diligence to do that; to live in obedience.

And if anyone is here without Christ, may God grant you the faith to turn to him and believe in him. He’s God’s only-begotten Son, and man’s only Savior. Everyone who believes in him lays hold of the cross where he paid for all our sins, and those who do, those who trust in him are saved at the moment of faith.

Their sins are forgiven, past, present, and future, completely. You’re clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and you’re absolutely secure in him; secure against all of the accusations that the devil may make, and you have a glorious future that will certainly come. Well, may God help you to believe; help all of us who have to trust in him, and to rest in him, and to live obediently. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your Word, and thank you for this text of Scripture that at first reading may seem a bit obscure. But if we can get this, we get a lot, and that is that you cannot be frustrated. Satan cannot triumph over you. The day is coming when he will be cast out of heaven altogether. It will bring great woe upon the earth, but that will be short-lived.

The end will come. Christ will triumph over him, and the kingdom will be established. That’s our future. In Christ, we are ultimately invincible. Not because of anything in us; it’s all because of you, your grace and your power, and it’s all grounded in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending him to die for us. May we live lives that please you and honor his name, and we pray these things in Christ’s name.
Amen.