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Sermon Notes

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War in Heaven and on Earth: The Dragon and the Woman

Revelation 12:1-17

In 1980, Carl Sagan opened a new TV series with these words:

“The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.”

By the word, “cosmos”, Sagan meant the physical universe... the universe of atoms, of matter and energy. This is the view known as MATERIALISM... material stuff is all there is. By his strong assertion, he was denying the metaphysical, spiritual world... the very world we are about to study this morning in Revelation 12... the world of invisible, spiritual beings... the world of God on his throne, of Satan as in intelligent, real, spiritual being; the world of angels and demons... the heavenly realms.

As we turn to Revelation 12, we are about to walk into that world and look around... we will look BACK in history to the time Jesus was born, and see behind the veil of wicked King Herod and his evil command the slaughter babies in Bethlehem—to see that behind it all was a malevolent intelligent being named Satan.

We will also look even further BACK in time to when Satan fell from heaven...

Next week, we will also look AHEAD in time to the final, climactic battle in the heavenly realms when Satan will fall forever from his heavenly access and, filled with rage, will know that his time is short... and he will attack the people of God with a viciousness unseen throughout all of human history

I. The Spiritual Realms Unveiled: Satan’s Power and Defeats

A. Revelation 12: a new section in this amazing book!

1. Revelation 6-11 has roughly covered the punishment of the dwellers of earth for its persecution of the church
2. Satan and his demons have not been entirely absent... chapter 9 touches on the king of the demons from the pit
3. BUT NOW... we come to a whole new section of this book

B. Satan and His Kingdom Unveiled

1. The word “Revelation” means UNVEILING... pulling back the curtain to see things that we cannot see with our physical eyes
2. This amazing book of scripture reveals hidden things
 - a. Revelation 1-3: Christ is unveiled as the glorious Savior, the High Priest, ministering among the seven golden lampstands, representing his active care for all local churches
 - b. Revelation 4: the heavenly throne room of God
 - c. Revelation 5: Christ is unveiled as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Lamb that was slain ... also, Jesus Christ takes the sealed scroll from the right hand of God
 - d. Revelation 6: the first six seals are broken open, initiating great judgments on the earth
 - e. Revelation 7: the redeemed from both the Jews and every tribe, language, people and nation on the face of the earth
 - f. Revelation 8-9: the seventh seal results in the seven trumpets... bringing unspeakable judgments from God on the earth
 - g. Revelation 10: shows an angel with a scroll which he gives to John to eat, and then John is recommissioned to proclaim the truth to the entire world... through this Book of Revelation
 - h. Revelation 11: the Two Witnesses unveiled... who will stand boldly before the Antichrist and testify to Christ
 - i. NOW... we come from a basically earthly perspective to an unveiling of the DRAGON... Satan
3. From Revelation 12-14, we will see the Dragon as he persecutes the people of God, and then the Antichrist, in his world-dominating rule, under the direct influence of the Dragon

C. God Wants Us to See Satan Truthfully and Know Both His POWER and His Defeat

1. The text makes it VERY CLEAR who we are talking about:

Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

2. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors, and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.”

3. I have seen people with an unhealthy interest in the occult... such as earth worshipers (witches) of Salem, MA, and some voodoo practitioners in Haiti. We also see the movie industry more and more fascinated with the occult and the existence of supernatural evil forces.
4. BUT for the most part, I have lived around people who have totally denied the reality of Satan’s existence and that of his demons
5. World’s misunderstanding of Satan... underestimating him
 - a. Mockery... the evil-looking, mischievous figure with a goatee and a red outfit with pitchfork, horns, and a tail
 - b. Misunderstanding of Satan’s relationship with hell... as though he lives there and the fiery subterranean domain is his home and native habitat
 - c. Actually, the Lake of Fire is the punishment for the devil and his angels—the demons...
6. This chapter speaks of Satan’s GREAT POWER
 - a. Satan is the central figure in the general rebellion that is happening both in the heavenly realms and on earth
 - b. Satan’s tail sweeps a third of the stars (angels) and flung them to the earth... meaning he was instrumental in corrupting holy angels to join them in his rebellion against Almighty God
 - c. Satan is said to lead the whole world astray
 - d. He is clearly a VERY POWERFUL BEING
 - e. So, God wants us to know his power and not underestimate him

Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”

For still our ancient foe, doth seek to work us woe
 His craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
 On earth is not his equal
 Did we in our own strength confide
 Our striving would be losing

7. YET, God does not want us to OVERESTIMATE Satan either

Did we in our own strength confide
 Our striving would be losing
 Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing
 Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He!
 Lord Sabaoth His name, from age to age the same
 And He must win the battle!

- a. We know that at the Cross, Jesus Christ destroyed the devil and his Kingdom

Hebrews 2:14 ... by Christ' death he destroyed him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil, and freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death

- b. This chapter portrays Satan as a five-time loser!!
 - i) The dragon tried to devour the male child who will rule the whole world, but God snatched him up to his throne
 - ii) The dragon fought against the archangel Michael and his angels, but lost and was thrown down to heaven
 - iii) The dragon pursued the woman, but God prepared a place for her in the desert
 - iv) The serpent wanted the woman to drown in a torrent he spewed from his mouth, but the earth swallowed the river
 - v) Satan sought to destroy the woman's children left on earth, but they continued to obey God's commands and hold onto the testimony of Jesus

So... in this chapter, we will peer behind the veil of the physical world to see the invisible spirit world behind it... and here especially the wicked forces of evil that have assaulted the people of God in every era

We will see Satan's great power, but also his great defeats

II. Failed Assassination: The Dragon Tries to Kill the Woman's Son (vs. 1-6)

A. The First Battle: Satan's Attempts to Kill Jesus Before His Time

- 1. There are three figures in this first drama: the glorious woman in the heavens, the dragon, and the male child she gives birth to

- a. The dragon is clearly Satan—identified as such in verse 9
- b. The male child must be Jesus Christ, for he will rule all the nations with an iron scepter
- c. BUT WHO IS THE WOMAN who gives birth to the male child?
- d. And what is the significance of the 1260 days in which she is protected?

B. The Opening: A “Great Sign” Appear—A Glorious Woman

Revelation 12:1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.

- 1. “Great and Wondrous Sign”: Signs are symbols using representations to teach literal truths...
- 2. This sign appeared “in heaven”... so even though most of the events of this chapter are on earth, with powerful earthly implications, the sign of the woman and the dragon appear in heaven
- 3. The woman is GLORIOUS... with awesome symbols and trappings of glory
 - a. “clothed with the sun”: radiant, gloriously bright
 - b. “the moon under her feet”: she is exalted, in a powerful position
 - c. A “crown of twelve stars around her head”: the stars may be the key to the interpretation of who this woman is... the number twelve is usually associated with the Twelve Tribes of Israel or the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb
- 4. Who is the woman?

Revelation 12:2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

- a. Look who she gives birth to

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

- b. Jesus’ mother was Mary... there’s no doubt she gave birth to Jesus
- c. However, so many other things happen to the woman in this chapter that never happened to Mary... it’s impossible to see this woman as Mary
- d. It cannot be the church, for it is hard to see how the church is like a mother giving birth to Jesus

e. Most likely it is an idealized form of Israel, who is often depicted in the Old Testament as the wife of Yahweh

i) So the woman of Revelation 12 is like the Jerusalem that is above... or the heavenly Zion

Paul, writing to the Galatians, Gentile believers in Christ, of the metaphor of two women represented by Abraham's two wives – Sarah and Hagar

Paul speaks of a physical Jerusalem, the literal city down below; and a spiritual Jerusalem (ZION) up in heaven

Galatians 4:25-28 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

So the woman represents Israel as the idealized heavenly Zion, giving birth to children for God... the people of God on earth

f. This would fit into the 1260 days and the prophecy of Daniel as well as Jesus' statements about the Abomination of Desolation and the Jewish people running for their lives in Matthew 24

g. The woman flees from the Dragon and is kept safe in the desert for 1260 days... this is code language for the 3 ½ years of the final phase of human history...

5. The LABOR PAINS refer to the agony that the nation of Israel had to endure before the time the Messiah was to be born

C. The Second Sign: The Dragon

Revelation 12:3-4 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. ⁴ His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

1. Another sign IN HEAVEN...

2. John is giving us the behind the scenes look at Satan's activity in redemptive history

3. How is he described?

a. A dragon

- i) Obviously, Satan is not a dragon, but an angel
- ii) Also, evidence from the Old Testament implies that Satan was a spectacularly glorious and beautiful angel

Ezekiel 28:12 “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.”

Ezekiel 28:17 Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.

- iii) Also, Satan presents himself with radiant beauty

2 Corinthians 11:14 Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

- iv) So, Satan was beautiful and still can APPEAR beautiful, but his true nature is horrible
- v) Thus... the DRAGON sign...
- vi) Many nations have heroic tales involving dragons... both China and England/Scotland have depictions of winged beasts that look like reptiles
- vii) St. George is the most famous of the dragonslayers... the patron saint of England
- viii) In Tolkein’s *The Hobbit*, the main adversary is Smaug, a flying, fire-breathing dragon
- ix) The creature Leviathan in Job describes a fire-breathing powerful creature:

Job 41:13-33 Who can strip off his outer coat? Who would approach him with a bridle? ¹⁴ Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? ¹⁵ His back has rows of shields tightly sealed together; ¹⁶ each is so close to the next that no air can pass between... ¹⁸ His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. ¹⁹ Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. ²⁰ Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. ²¹ His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth... ²⁵ When he rises up, the mighty are terrified; they retreat before his thrashing. ²⁶ The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin... ³³ Nothing on earth is his equal-- a creature without fear.

- x) SO, Satan is likened to a mighty dragon, overpowering in his strength, terrifying... thoroughly evil

- b. Enormous: the size of the Dragon heightens the terror one feels when seeing it... surely this is no ordinary adversary
- c. Red: the color of fire, the color of war
- d. Seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns on his heads: this represents the TOTAL DOMINATION OF THE WORLD that Satan has achieved... he claimed to Christ that the whole world was his and he could give it to anyone he chose

Ephesians 2:2 the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

1 John 5:19 ...the whole world is under the sway of the evil one.

So this Dragon is in charge of the WHOLE WORLD, with its rulers under his dark, secret sway... he is the PUPPET-MASTER, the invisible king of kings and lord of lords

- 4. With his tail: SWEPT A THIRD OF THE STARS OUT OF THE SKY and FLUNG THEM TO THE EARTH
 - a. As we shall see, these stars represent other angels whom the Dragon (Satan) persuades to follow him in his rebellion against God... they fall with him into sin... we call these fallen angels DEMONS
 - b. The one third number shows that a vast number of demons fell, but the greater part of holy angels remained true to God
- 5. Ready to MURDER the Woman's Child the Moment He is Born

Revelation 12:4 The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

- 6. This reminds me of the evil attack of Pharaoh on all the boy babies of Israel born in captivity... the consistent pattern of Satanic hatred for the JEWS... of Anti-Semitism throughout history
- 7. But even more, it was repeated as an attack on Christ, the Savior of the world

D. The Male Child

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

- 1. There can be little doubt that this male child is Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords

Psalm 2:7-9 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."

2. The IRON SCEPTER is an image directly from this Psalm... it means Christ's rule is Almighty and Unbreakable
3. It will also be quoted at the end of the Book of Revelation... in Revelation 19, which describes the Second Coming of Christ

Revelation 19:15-16 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

E. The Failed Assassination Attempt

Revelation 12:4-5 The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

1. Satan is pictured as ready to assassinate Jesus the moment he is born
2. This gives the background to one of the most tragic moments in all of redemptive history... the slaughter of the innocent babies of Bethlehem
 - a. Evil King Herod was troubled by the visit of the Magi
 - b. He found out from the scholars where the Christ was to be born, and found out from them the answer was Bethlehem
 - c. He tried to trick the Magi into telling him where the Christ child was
 - d. But God moved before Herod could
 - i) He warned Joseph to leave immediately for Egypt, and Joseph got up during the night and took the baby Jesus and his mother Mary and fled immediately
 - e. Herod's reaction was utterly evil and despicable

Matthew 2:16-18 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted ..., he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under... ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: ¹⁸ "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great

mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

3. Revelation 12 gives the spiritual background, the invisible spiritual world BEHIND that slaughter of the innocent babies of Bethlehem... Herod was absolutely responsible for his evil actions... but Satan was behind him, pushing him to kill all those babies
 - a. Both Satan and Herod were jealous of Jesus and his prophesied future
 - b. The Magi said to Herod that Jesus was born King of the Jews; but that was Herod's title and he was willing to kill a baby—actually many babies—to jealously protect his evil rule
 - c. Satan knew that Jesus was the male child who had come to be the ruler of all the kingdoms on earth; but that was Satan's title, and he was willing to kill a baby—even many babies—to protect his evil rule
4. Satan is a ravenous beast, bloodthirsty for human blood... slaughtering babies in Egypt in the time of Pharaoh, and slaughtering babies in Bethlehem in the time of Herod... to try to kill the serpent slayer that God had predicted in the Garden of Eden

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

F. Continued Attempts to Kill Jesus Before His Time

1. The Dragon was not done trying to kill the male child who will rule the world
2. Having missed on Jesus at birth, he sought to kill Christ again and again during his lifetime
 - a. When Jesus began his ministry in his hometown in Nazareth, his fellow neighbors were so incensed at what he said that they drove him out of the town and were ready to push him off a cliff... but Jesus just passed through the crowd and went on his way
 - b. When Jesus was teaching in the temple courts in John 7, they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him "because his time had not yet come"
 - c. The same thing was said in the next chapter... people sought to arrest him but his time had not yet come
 - d. At the end of John 8, Jesus said "Before Abraham was born, I am" and they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself and slipped away from the temple grounds

- e. Many times, Jesus would become aware that the chief priests and Pharisees were plotting to kill him, but he would withdraw from them and escape, “because his time had not yet come”
- 3. Now, Revelation 12 does not mention all these attempts that failed... nor does it mention Jesus’ death on the cross, or his resurrection
- 4. But Jesus made it plain that Satan was in no way triumphant over Jesus

John 10:18 No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

John 14:30 ... the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me

- 5. It is true that Satan inhabited Judas and led his enemies to Gethsemane to arrest Jesus... but when that happened, Jesus merely spoke his name and Satan (inside Judas) fell to the ground before him
 - 6. Actually Jesus said by his death, Satan, the prince of this world was driven out from his place of rulership
- G. God’s Protection of Christ was Sufficient to Get Him to the Cross... and then to Heaven

Revelation 12:5 And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

- 1. In this way, Satan FAILED to kill Jesus when Satan wanted to... Jesus died when and exactly how he wanted to
- 2. Then, he ascended to heaven far beyond Satan’s reach

Ephesians 1:20-21 God raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

H. The Protection of the Woman

Revelation 12:6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

This period of time refers to the final phases of human history... during the reign of Antichrist

We will discuss it more next time!

III. Failed Revolution: The Dragon Tries to Conquer Heaven (vs. 7-12)

Revelation 12:7-9 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him

The hardest part about these verses is to discern if this is referring to Satan's original fall from heaven, when he tried to take over heaven's throne from God... or if it refers to a future battle in which he is thrown down forever, thus losing access to heaven

Two key passages in the Old Testament speak of this: Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

The word "morning star, son of the dawn" in this English translation is "Lucifer" in the KJV... wickedly ambitious to conquer heaven

Isaiah 14:13-14 You said in your heart "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. ¹⁴ I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." ¹⁵ But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit

This PRIDE, this UNHOLY AMBITION seems to be the start of all evil in the universe...

As we saw earlier, in Ezekiel, it was caused by Satan's self-love, self-worship, caused by his estimation of his own beauty and power

So... both Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 say that God THREW SATAN DOWN TO EARTH:

Isaiah 14:12 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

Ezekiel 28:16-17 I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. ¹⁷ Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.

This implies that Satan's fall, and that of his evil, rebellious angels (called demons) happened long ago

BUT Revelation 12 may well be discussing a yet FUTURE fall of Satan from the heavenly realms...

We'll talk more about that next week, as well as verses 13-17 in which Satan, thrown finally to the earth, turns in rage to assault the woman and her children... the Christians who are alive in that final phase of human history

IV. Applications

A. Flee to Christ and Find Refuge in Him!

1. Carl Sagan was WRONG... the material universe NOT all there ever was, is, or ever will be... God, the invisible spirit, created all the material things

Hebrews 11:3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

2. By faith we also understand that there are spirits—demons—that assault our souls; and Satan is the king of the evil spirits
3. Satan is the destroyer of souls... he has crafted a wily and powerful world system to allure human beings to destruction
4. By his craft and power, fuel by his cruel hatred, he assaults the souls of every single human being on planet earth
5. We cannot resist his temptations unaided... and once we have sinned, we cannot answer his truthful and vicious accusations that we have sinned... he is RIGHT, we HAVE SINNED and fall short of the glory of God
6. But in Christ, we have the only possible answer: Jesus Christ lived a SINLESS LIFE, so Satan could not accuse him of anything; and Christ died under the wrath of God as our substitute, taking our place... by faith in him, we have full forgiveness of sins

Romans 8:33-35 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

7. So, come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins! You cannot fight the devil alone... you cannot answer his accusations without Christ's atonement... trust in Jesus and all your sins will be forgiven

B. Christians: Be Aware of BOTH the Power and the Defeat of the Devil

1. In this chapter, the veil hiding Satan and his demons is pulled back

2. Scripture makes us AWARE of how real and powerful the devil and his demons are
3. And Paul says we are “not unaware” of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11)... his evil plans to allure us to sin
4. We should be humble and realize we are vastly out of our depth when fighting Satan and his demons...

“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing”

5. But we also have to be aware of Satan’s infinite weakness against Almighty God, and his defeat by Christ at the cross... Satan is portrayed as a five-time loser in this chapter
6. We need to put on our spiritual armor and FIGHT

Ephesians 6:10-13 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

C. See the Evil Power Behind Current Events

1. Satan was truly behind King Herod’s command to slaughter the babies of Bethlehem
2. He is just as active today; all the martyrs who are dying now by Isis and other evil people are really being attacked by Satan
3. The resistance of India to having Christian missionaries proclaim the gospel is motivated by hidden powers of evil
4. The roving bands of murderous Muslim men under Boko Haram and other forces in the horn of Africa are driven by demons
5. Let us not be materialists, thinking there are no spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms

D. Let us Therefore PRAY!!!

Matthew 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'