

# The Dragon versus Christ and His church

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'd like us to read verses 4 to 6 once again. We'll start in the middle of verse 4. The dragon stood in front of a woman who was about to give birth so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.

She gave birth to a son, a real child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

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.

You know there are some people that you can't put together but that there is bound to be conflict. Folks of a certain temperament, if you put them together, sparks are bound to fly.

Folks with different opinions, so contrary to one another, so strongly held, put them together and there is bound to be conflict. And that is why this passage here speaks to us of conflict.

[ 1 : 11 ] Because you see, we've seen the parties that are involved in this matter. And when you see who they are, you realise that they cannot exist in peace. There must be conflict, warfare between them.

We've seen the three parties here. This, on the one hand, this woman that gives birth to Christ. And that we understand is being the Old Testament church from whom Christ emerged.

She's depicted in the most glorious way. Clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars in her head. Speaking of the power and the authority and the glory that belongs to the church because it's united to Christ.

And then there is, on the other hand, this enormous red dragon. That is an animal, a beast of great strength, a terrifying creature that also has great authority and power, demonstrated by the heads and the horns and the crowns that it wears.

But this is a destructive power. Because the dragon represents the power of evil in all its awful, fearful, destructive power.

[ 2 : 28 ] And then, the third person involved here is the male child who is born of a woman, who will rule the nations with a rod of iron. And that clear here, as we say, is our Lord Jesus himself, who was born of a woman.

Now then, just think of these three parties involved here. The church, the dragon and Christ. There cannot be anything but conflict and warfare involved here.

The dragon and Christ cannot be at peace with one another. The church and the dragon cannot exist except in conflict. And that's the theme of this chapter in these chapters here.

The conflict between these forces and the ultimate outcome. And that's something that must concern us. Because, obviously, the church in the world today is opposed by the world around it. The conflict is real today. The church needs but to speak powerfully and relevantly to the problems of the age. And the world will be opposed to its testimony.

[ 3 : 46 ] The church just needs to speak about the Lord's day as being the one day in seven set apart. And the world will raise its voice in protest. And they accuse us of bigotry and prejudice.

The church needs to say that the unborn life has to be protected. And different folks with different philosophies of life will say that we are imposing our morality upon them.

When the church speaks relevantly there will be conflict. So we are interested then in the nature and in the outcome of the conflict that is portrayed here.

Well, we see it portrayed here just in outline. Later on, the details will be sketched in. But at the moment, he's still, as seems to me, setting the scene.

I'm just referring in outline to the conflict that is involved here. The conflict between Satan and Christ. The conflict between Satan and the church of Christ.

[ 4 : 51 ] Now let's look at how this matter is described in these verses. First of all, the conflict between the dragon and Christ.

We've got it in the second part of verse 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.

Here is Satan waiting to destroy Christ as soon as he would make his appearance in the world.

Well, surely there cannot be any difficulty in identifying what is spoken of here.

Jesus was to be born from the womb of the Old Testament church. But he was actually to come specifically from Mary. And this is the scene that's involved here.

Jesus about to be born into the world. The Son of God in human flesh. And the devil immediately waiting a moment to destroy the Son of God immediately after his birth.

[ 6 : 06 ] Now, we shouldn't think of the conflict between Christ and Satan as simply taking place during the ministry of our Lord. Yes, there he suffered temptation directly by Satan engaging in conflict with him.

There, Peter was the voice of Satan to him, seeking to divert him from the course of action that he needed to be right. There in the garden of Gethsemane, he had got to wrestle so as to bring himself into full, so as to embrace wholeheartedly the will of God for him.

In all this, the conflict with Satan was very real. But here, it goes back beyond that, before that, to the very time of his birth, when Satan was seeking the destruction of the child that was to be born.

And it's easy for us, I think, to assign a specific historical event to this description that is given here.

The wise men came, having seen the star in its rising, seeing in Jerusalem a king has been born, where it's born.

[ 7 : 23 ] And Herod is filled with envy and jealousy. He consults the scribe to say, in Bethlehem. And he tells the wise men to come and bring him news of this king that was born.

The wise men, being warned by God, did not return to Herod. But that doesn't stop Herod from displaying his envy and jealousy in the most ferocious and wicked of forms.

And therefore he commands that all the children in Bethlehem, from two years old and under, should be destroyed. And in that way he was seeking to snuff out the young life of the man-child that was born immediately after he came into this world.

And that is the event, surely, of which this passage here speaks in this very pictorial fashion. The dragon was using Herod as his instrument.

He was whipping up the natural envy and jealousy of Herod, so that it manifested itself in this particular violent fashion against the newborn king.

[ 8 : 34 ] And there you see, was the dragon seeking to wage warfare against the offspring of the woman immediately after his birth.

So there you see, battle has been joined. Not when Jesus went to the desert to be tempted, but already the dragon is active, seeking to destroy the child.

But what happens? What is the outcome of this conflict between the dragon and the child? Well, that is what is told us here at the end of verse 5.

Her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. Now, you may say, well, that's a wee bit difficult to see.

When did this happen? And of course the answer must be, at the resurrection and at the ascension of Jesus. But then the question is, but why did he not mention anything about Jesus' ministry?

[ 9 : 41 ] Why go to that event only? Well, I think you'll discover that this is one of the main difficulties in dealing with this sort of passage in the scriptures.

The time scale that is involved. Things are telescoped together. Things that are separated by a period of time are put side by side as if they were together.

That commonly happens in this type of prophetic message. We've just got to recognise that. That's the way it is. You see, the writer here, or the vision here, is concentrating upon the main events.

And so he passes from the initial arm slot of the dragon on the child to the final act of victory on the child's part.

And therefore he is speaking here of the resurrection and the ascension of Christ. Now notice this. He was snatched up to God.

[ 10 : 46 ] The father's hand delivered Christ even from the presence of Satan and brought him to himself. This was what the father was doing throughout the earthly life of Christ his son.

He warned the wise men not to go back to Herod. He told Joseph to take Jesus down to Egypt. He was protecting his son from the dragon's violence.

Throughout his ministry, God the father supplied grace to Jesus Christ so that he might resist the devil's working. He gave him the experience of glory at the mountain of transfiguration to strengthen him and encourage him for the suffering that lay ahead of him.

In the garden of Gethsemane, he sent angels to minister to him as they had ministered to him too on the mountain of temptation. God the father was looking after his son, supplying him with all that was necessary that in his human nature he might resist the devil's work and power.

And the climax of it comes when God the father raises his son from the dead and presents him in glory before him.

[12:16] Jesus had power to lay down his life and to take it again. But the scriptures also speak of being raised by the right hand of God and placed in the place of power and authority.

So then he was snatched up to God. Speaks of the father's care and the father's protection and the father's deliverance of Christ even from the presence of Satan.

It speaks then of that but it speaks of more than that. He was snatched up to God and to his throne. Now is that the throne of Christ or the throne of God? It doesn't really matter. He was snatched up to the place of authority and glory and splendor and power.

He was clothed with all authority endued with divine standing as a human being exalted to heaven. That was what the father did and that was because the outcome of this trouble was the time and the victory of our Lord.

[13:32] So here you see no wonder he concentrates upon this particular event to indicate what was going to happen or what did happen in the struggle between the dragon and Christ.

It resulted in Christ being crowned with all honour and glory at the right hand of God seated on his throne. There you see is the wonderful climax to this dreadful conflict between the dragon and the child.

In other words here is the display of victory. Here is a clear declaration that victory belongs to Christ.

He has triumphed. He has fought the battle. He has engaged in conflict with this dragon that sought to destroy him and the end result is the glory and the majesty with which Christ was invested at his ascension to heaven.

Now there is a conflict on which we have to set our eyes and there is a victory that we should have constantly before our attention.

[14:47] The battle has been fought and won. The victory is secure and certain because already Christ has been taken from the presence of Satan to the place of all honour and glory.

And we who are hard pressed in battle and feel perhaps very strongly the forces of evil around us and the destructive power of the dragon today we can fill our minds with this glorious thought Christ seats in the throne above.

That was the outcome of the conflict with Satan. And that of course is something that ought to be very real and very vivid and meaningful to ourselves personally.

Because you see we are united to Christ by faith. if we belong to Christ then he was fighting that battle in our name and on our behalf.

And it seems to me therefore impossible to think that Christ should be victorious and his people defeated. It's impossible to think that acting in our name Christ should triumph and that we should not triumph.

[16:06] If the conflict between Christ and Satan results in the triumph of Christ it's impossible that the conflict between Satan and the church should have any other outcome because the church are united to Christ.

And that is why then we can go on from here and already suppose that the outcome of the other conflict that we're going to look at will be positive.

If Christ is triumphed his people will. And therefore that would lead us to suspect that what is displayed here about the dragon and the woman is a picture that is given of the safety and security and triumph of God's people in Christ.

So then let's turn to the second conflict here. We're seeing the dragon standing in front of the woman waiting for the child to be delivered that he might destroy it. We're seeing the outcome the child taken to the place of a party in glory at the right hand of God.

Now let's see the rest of the story here. Verse 6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

[ 17 : 31 ] Now it seems to me that here we've got the woman's reaction to the dragon's power. She's seen as it were the dragon standing before her in all its awesome destructive power and here I think we can legitimately say it's her reaction faced with the devil's destructive power.

her. She flees into the desert to a place prepared for her by God where she is provided for. Now in plain language what exactly does that mean?

Desert what picture does that conjure up here? Well there's various ways in which we might think of a desert. Obviously a place of withdrawal from the world.

The hermit went into the desert separated himself from all worldly activities to be in isolation there.

The prophet might go into the desert for contemplation and meditation.

The desert is thought of as a place of hardship and poverty and suffering and deprivation. There's various pictures that could be conjured up into our minds but by the symbolism of a desert.

[ 18 : 54 ] Now I suggest that none of these things that I've mentioned up to this point are what is in mind here. It's not that the church retreats from the world to be concerned only with its own spiritual affairs.

It's not that the church is situated in a place of deprivation and hardship and poverty. That's not the picture of the harrow of the church. It's not the picture of a church that can do nothing but meditate and reflect.

That's not what's suggested here by the idea of a desert. The desert was a place of refuge and safety. In the immensity of the desert landscape a person could go and seek refuge from his pursuing foes.

And that it seems to me is the idea that is conveyed here by this picture. The woman fled into the desert means the church seeks a place of refuge.

As a person as Jesus himself with Mary and Joseph went into the desert of Sinai, down to the desert land of Egypt and found refuge there. In a similar way the church spiritually speaking seeks a refuge from the destructive forces of the evil one.

[ 20 : 11 ] It frees from this force of evil into a place where it might find refuge. And it finds that place. It finds that place because there is such a place prepared by God for his people.

Flees into the desert to a place prepared for her by God. God has provided his church with a refuge and a shelter.

water. God has supplied for his church a place where it might find relief and deliverance from the attacks of the devil.

God has supplied a hiding place in which his people will be safe and nothing can touch them. Under the shelter of his wings they remain secure and the devil cannot do anything to them when they are in the place of refuge.

that God has prepared for them. And moreover they are amply provided for to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of.

[ 21 : 24 ] Her needs will be met. Her weaknesses will be supplied for. Her foolishness will be supplied for by the wisdom that God will give.

will be saved. She will know everything that she needs for her life in this world free from the destructive forces of evil through the grace that God supplies for her in the place provided.

I would think the illustration of Elijah is a fitting one to have in mind here. There's Elijah and he's announced by the authority of God's word there's going to be no rain for a good long period of time. And this means that Elijah has got to seek nourishment and he's got to seek safety from the wrath of the king. And God says go there to the brook of Kerith.

And east of the Jordan in that desert country you'll find this ravine with the stream still running.

There in that place prepared for him. God supplies for all his needs.

[ 22 : 33 ] He's fed and he's watered in that place of security in the desert. Later on he's guided elsewhere and God still supplies for him because he's in the place prepared by God in which provision is made for him.

There's victory for God's people as surely as there is victory for Christ. As God raised them up and took them to glory as surely as that has God laid his hand upon his people and are sheltered in the hall of his hand and no one, no one can ever take them out from there.

The church is established and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. So there you see is the picture of the security and refuge of the church sheltered from the wrath of the dragon in the place that God has prepared for it.

What a wonderful picture of comfort and strength and hope for us today. There's one final thing and it's the time scale involved in this. Now don't be put off by these 1260 days.

He might be taken care of for 1260 days. Now this is one of these numbers that often occurs in scripture. It doesn't always occur in this particular form.

[ 24 : 02 ] If you count 30 days in a month then you'll discover that 1260 days are 42 months. And that's a time scale that is found in different parts of scripture.

42 months of course are three and a half years. And that's another time scale that is often found in scripture. And that strange expression times, no, that strange expression a time, times and half a time.

That means three and a half years as well. So you see all these numbers really mean the same thing and they refer to the same period of time. Now what is this period then that is designated by 1260 days?

Well it seems to me to mean the long period of the gospel age in which we now live. The period from the ascension of Christ to heaven when he was taken to glory until the end of time begins to come into being if we might put it that way.

The gospel age of blessing in which we live is I think indicated by this period of 1260 days. In the previous chapter for example the same length of time is mentioned and what is connected with it then is the prophetic witness of God's church.

[ 25 : 27 ] The two witnesses were prophesied for 42 months or three and a half years and that means that what will go on in that period is that the church will be given peace and security to pursue its prophetic witness in the world.

Similarly here the same period is referred to but the thing connected with it is that during this time the church will find refuge from the attacks of the dragon who will not be permitted to torture.

So then the picture is in this gospel age here is the position that the church occupies faced with the assault of the dragon let it but flee for refuge to the promise of God to the place provided for it and it will find ample provision and safety and security from the devil's working.

In this gospel age in which we live this is the victory that belongs to the church of God. A roaring lion yes but one that cannot touch the church when it seeks refuge on the throne of grace and on the basis of God's promises.

So here there is victory. Victory for Christ victory for his people. If we do not know this in experience if we do not realise it in practical daily life let's seek to fill our minds with this picture.

[ 26 : 53 ] Christ sits enthroned we are in Christ therefore we must have victory too protected by his grace and if we hold on to that picture we'll find it increasingly to be a reality.

But woe betide anybody who is outside of Christ woe betide anybody who isn't sheltering under that protection and cannot flee to Christ or has not fled to Christ for refuge.

There is no protection for you for the dragon. There is nothing to stop his destructive power in you until you come and find refuge in Christ. In him victory is secure.

That I think is the glorious message that's brought to our attention here. the victory of Christ and in Christ the victory of his church. May God bless to us this meditation in his word.

Let us pray. we praise you O Lord for the way in which you have met our needs in Christ Jesus. We thank you that he is the rock to whom we can go to find refuge.

[ 28 : 01 ] That he is the one in whom all the promises become real to us. That he is the one who provides us with refuge in time of need, a present help in time of trouble.

May we discover this increasingly, especially when we feel the powers of evil around us. May we rest secure in the shelter that he provides us with. And grant O Lord that anyone not yet sheltering in Christ might see the danger in which they stand and might recognize that there is no protection for them until they come to rest under the shadow of your wings.

We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.