

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. Today we will introduce Revelation chapter 12.

REVELATION CHAPTER 12 AND 13 teaches that **the real reason for the struggle between the Christian churches and the world is the warfare between Christ and Satan.**

Part 4 of the book of Revelation consists of chapters 12-14. Revelation chapter 12 describes *the conflict of Satan against Christ, the Church and Christians*. The real reason why there is so much opposition to the Church, Christians and the message of the Bible is because Satan opposes Christ. Satan brings the powers of hell as well as the evil powers on the earth together to make war against Christ, against Christ's Church and against Christians. Although Christ's Church and the individual Christians are protected and cared for by God, they live on earth as in "a desert". Revelation chapter 13 describes *the conflict of Satan's antichristian political and religious powers against Christians* until the life of Christians is made impossible during the days of the last antichrist. Five symbolic pictures reveal the underlying reason of the conflict against Christians on earth.

First. The symbolic picture in Revelation 12:1-6 is concerning the conflict between the dragon and the male child.

One. The symbolic picture of the woman.

"The woman" is a symbol representing *the Church consisting of God's true people in both the Old Testament period* (12:1-2; Isa 50:1; 54:1; Hos 2:2) *and the New Testament period* (12:6-17; 19:7; 21:2,9-10; Eph 5:32). The Bible emphasises the fact that God's people from the creation up to the recreation are one! The Bible speaks of one vineyard and one kingdom (Mt 21:33-44), one flock (Jn 10:16), one olive root and one olive tree (Rom 11:17,24), one Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-13), one family of God (Gal 3:26-29), one new man (Eph 2:11-18), one household of God (Eph 2:19-22), one chosen people, one holy nation, one people belonging to God (1 Pet 2:9), one bride of the Lamb (Rev 21:1-2) and one New Jerusalem, which is the Church (Heb 12:22-24; Rev 21:1-2,9-14).

From the viewpoint of heaven, the Church is glorious! The woman is clothed with "the sun", a symbol that she is *glorious and exalted*. She has "the moon under her feet", a symbol that she *exercises dominion*. On her head she has "a wreath of twelve stars", a symbol that she is *victorious through the Messiah, who would be born from Israel* and crush the head of Satan (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4). She is "pregnant", a symbol that *her task is to bring forth the Messiah*, Jesus Christ "according to his human nature" (Jn 4:22; Rom 9:5). She is "about to give birth", a symbol that the vision points to *the first coming of Christ*.

Two. The symbolic picture of the dragon.

"The enormous red dragon" is a symbol representing *Satan* (12:9; 20:2). "The seven crowned heads" are symbols indicating *Satan's world-dominion*, that is, his dominion only over those people in the world who do not belong to Christ (Lk 4:5-7; Jn 12:31; 16:11; Eph 2:2; 1 Jn 4:4; 5:19; Col 1:13). His "crowns" are symbols of his *arrogant assumption of his authority* and not wreaths of victory. "The ten horns" are symbols indicating his *destructive power* (Ps 22:21; Ezek 34:21). When Satan fell into sin at the beginning of history, he swept "a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth". These are symbols of *a vast number of angels that fell with him* and became demons or evil spirits on earth (Job 38:7; 2 Pet 2:4; Jud 6). "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." From the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, Satan has been aiming constantly at preventing the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, because he knew that Christ would crush his head. But Satan failed!

Here is a summary of the conflict between Christ and Satan during the Old Testament period.

One. The conflict from Seth to Noah. The first man and woman had two children, Cain and Abel. Cain murdered Abel. A third boy was born, called Seth, whose family was predestined to bring forth the coming Saviour. It seemed as if the devil wanted to destroy the descendants of Seth, so that the promised Saviour would not be born. In Genesis 6:1-10 we read that the sons of Seth, who followed God, began to marry the daughters of Cain, who followed only man. The result was that the wickedness on earth became exceedingly great. God decided to destroy *the whole human race* with a flood and it seemed as if Satan had triumphed. However, there was one family who feared the Lord. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. God saved Noah and his family.

Two. The conflict from Noah to Jacob. The promise concerning the coming Saviour was now given to Abraham and Sarah. Humanly speaking that promise could not be fulfilled, because they were childless. Satan almost triumphed. But then a miracle happened in their old age. God gave them a son, Isaac! The promise concerning the coming Saviour was then given to Isaac. In Genesis 25:21 we read that Rebecca was also barren. Again Satan seemed to triumph. However, God gave her children, Esau and Jacob.

The promise concerning the coming Saviour was then given to Jacob. Because Jacob had tricked his brother out of his rights as the first born, Esau wanted to kill Jacob. However, Satan did not succeed to destroy Jacob.

Three. The conflict from Jacob to Moses. Satan had failed to destroy Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So he turned his attack on the Israelites or Jews, who were the descendants of Jacob. In Exodus we read how the king of Egypt ordered the killing of all the male babies of the Israelites. Again Satan seemed to triumph. But God raised up Moses and used him to lead Israel out of their slavery in Egypt.

In Exodus 32 we read how the Israelites constantly backslid into idolatry. They built a golden calf in the desert and worshipped it. God was angry and wanted to destroy all the Israelites (32:10). Again Satan seemed to triumph. However, Moses interceded with God and pleaded for forgiveness. *Moses is here a "type" of Jesus Christ, the Greatest Intercessor, who not only prays for us, but gave his life for us.*

Four. The conflict from Moses to king David. The promise concerning the coming Saviour was then given to the family of David in the tribe of Judah. In Jeremiah 23:5 we read, "The days are coming", declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." Therefore, the aim of Satan was to destroy David. In 1 Samuel 18 we read how Saul tried to kill David twice with a spear. Again Satan failed to prevent the promised Saviour from being born on earth.

Satan even used David's own wife and sons to try to destroy him, but he failed. *The Bible teaches us that no one can prevent God from carrying out his eternal plan!*

Five. The conflict from king David to king Ahaz. In 2 Kings 11:1-3 we read how Athaliah, the wicked mother of the deceased king, decided to destroy the whole royal family of king David, because she herself wanted to have all the power. All the royal princes were murdered! Again Satan seemed to triumph. But again the sovereign God prevented Satan and his allies from having success. Jehosheba, the sister of the deceased king, had stolen away one of the royal princes and had hidden him for six years in the temple before he was made king.

In 2 Kings 16 we read how the kingdoms of Israel and Aram made a plot to destroy the kingdom of Judah. However, in Isaiah 7:14, God gave a promise to king Ahaz of Judah, "The Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." God promised that whatever the difficult circumstances in history, no one will be able to prevent the coming Saviour to come into the world. The coming Saviour will be called "Immanuel", which means "God with us". Again Satan failed to triumph. The Bible teaches that no evil nation or leader can prevent God from carrying out his plan on earth!

Six. The conflict from king Ahaz to Esther. During the fifth century B.C. the Jews lived under the rule of the Medo-Persian Empire. The wicked Haman had tricked the king to sign a decree ordering the murder of all Jews in the empire. In Esther 3:13 we read, "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews - young and old, women and little children - on a single day ... and to plunder all their goods." All the Jews in exile were threatened by extinction. If Haman had succeeded, then Satan would have triumphed and God's plan of salvation would have been prevented. When you read the whole book of Esther, you will see how God prevented this catastrophe. Satan did not triumph!

Seven. The conflict from Esther to Bethlehem. When finally the time arrived for the Saviour of the world to be born in Bethlehem, Satan made one final attempt to prevent this to happen. In Matthew 2 we read how the wicked king Herod was afraid when he heard that the coming Saviour had been born in Bethlehem. He thought that the Saviour would threaten his earthly kingdom and so he ordered the murder of all male babies under the age of two years in Bethlehem. But God's eternal purpose could not be frustrated. In Matthew 2:13 we read how an angel came in the night to Joseph and told him to flee to Egypt, because Herod intended to kill the child, Jesus Christ. Joseph, Mary and the child Jesus stayed in Egypt until Herod had died (Mt 2:15).

Revelation 12:5 says that the woman "gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." "The male child" (12:5) is a symbol representing *Jesus Christ*, because the prophets predicted that he would be born of a woman (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4) and that he would rule all the nations with an iron sceptre (Ps 2:9; Rev 2:27; 12:10). Through his life, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement, Christ conquered Satan and 'bound' Satan, that is, curtailed Satan to the extent that he could no longer keep the preaching of the gospel and salvation away from the nations in the world (Mt 12:29; Lk 10:18; Jn 12:31-32; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8; Rev 12:5-10; 20:1-3). Because Satan failed to destroy the man-child, a symbol of *Christ*, he aimed at destroying the woman, a symbol of *Christ's Body or the Church*.

Revelation 12:5 summarises the birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and enthronement of Jesus Christ at his first coming to this earth. It says, "Her child was snatched up to God and to his throne".

Revelation 12:6 is a summary statement of what is elaborated in Revelation 12:13-17.

Second. The symbolic picture in Revelation 12:7-12 is concerning the dragon defeated.

The effect of Christ's birth, death to make atonement, ascension and enthronement was to defeat Satan. The picture is of "a battle in heaven", in which the angel Michael, the leader of the good angels and defender of God's people on earth (Dan 10:13,21; 12:1; Jud 9), attacks Satan, the leader of the evil angels and opponent of God's people on earth. Satan was strong, but "not strong enough". Satan and all evil spirits "lost their place in heaven". They were "hurled down to the earth". The picture is not to be understood literally, because Satan is hurled out of heaven in the sense that *he has lost his place as "the accuser of God's people"* (12:10). After Christ's death had made atonement for the sins of God's people, Satan lost every semblance of justice for his accusations against them. Although Satan continues to accuse Christians today, he can no longer point to the unaccomplished work of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:33). Jesus says the same thing in other words, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18; cf. Jn 12:31).

After his triumphant ascension and enthronement into heaven (1 Pet 3:18-22) Christ continues his triumphant rule over every authority in the universe until his second coming (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-23; 1 Pet 3:22)!

Satan's defeat has three results:

One. God's salvation, which he worked through Christ, becomes manifest; God's sovereign power is vindicated; God's kingship or rule in the hearts of people is established and the authority of Christ in heaven and on earth is revealed (12:10).

Two. God's people triumph over Satan by relying on Christ's completed work of salvation on the cross, by testifying about their faith in Christ and by proving that their faith is genuine, because they persevere unto death (12:11).

Three. Satan is filled with fury, because he has been defeated and he knows that he has little time before his final defeat at the second coming of Christ (12:12; cf. 20:10).

Third. The symbolic picture in Revelation 12:13-17 is concerning the dragon persecuting the woman and her offspring.

This picture elaborates Revelation 12:6.

One. "The dragon pursued the woman on earth, because she had given birth to the male child. Satan's attempt to destroy Christ's Body or Christ's Church is another phase of his wrath against Christ. However, God gives the woman "the two wings of a great eagle" (Ex 19:4) and protects her in "the place prepared for her in the desert" (Dt 1:29-33) for "a time, times and half a time" (Dan 7:25). The New Testament Church is depicted in terms of the Old Testament Church (Judg 20:2) or Israel during their exodus from Egypt, their sojourn in the desert for 40 years and their oppression by the Satan and his antichristian instruments between the first and second coming of Christ. This picture is an Old Testament 'type' of the New Testament Church in its journey towards the heavenly Canaan. The exodus typology is particularly pervasive in the New Testament (Mt 2:15; Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7-8; 1 Cor 10:1-12). God carries his New Testament Church safely through the New Testament period of persecution (Rev 12:14) and nourishes her (Eph 5:29).

The number "a time, times and half a time" equals $3\frac{1}{2}$ and is based on an Old Testament period during which Israel was religiously oppressed by the godless Ahab and Jezebel, the country suffered drought and famine and the prophet Elijah powerfully proclaimed God's Word (1 Ki 17-18; Lk 4:25; Js 5:17). Daniel used this biblical number as a symbol for *another period of affliction* that lasted from the desecration of the temple by king Antiochus IV in 167 B.C. to its rededication in 164 B.C. This wicked king Antiochus IV had tried to change the times set by God for things to happen and to change the laws, but he failed (Dan 7:25; 12:7). Now Jesus uses this biblical number as a symbol signifying *the New Testament period of affliction* that seems to extend itself endlessly and yet abruptly and unexpectedly comes to an end. It signifies the apocalyptic period of time during which Satan and antichrist persecute the Church while the Church is proclaiming the gospel. The number "3½ years" is a symbol for *the whole New Testament period between the first and second coming of Christ* and is parallel to the number "42 months" during which the Church is protected (11:2, cf. 13:5) and parallel to the number "1260 days" during which the Church proclaims the gospel (11:3, cf. 12:6). While the number "3½ years" is a symbol for *the long period of gospel proclamation amidst persecution* (11:3-6), the number "3½ days" is a symbol for *the very short period of persecution just before the second coming* (11:7-12). Both are periods that seem to extend itself endlessly, but the number "½" shows that they both abruptly come to an end!

The woman is "kept out of the serpent's reach" is a symbol of *the fact that Satan could not reach her in order to destroy her*. This means the same as the symbol of the dragon being "bound" (20:1-3). "The serpent spewed water like a river". The symbol is not explained, but signifies *the lies, delusions and deceit issuing from the mouth of Satan* by which he tries to seduce the Church and Christians (cf. 16:13-14; Jn 8:44). Satan employs every possible means in the world to entice Christians away from Christ (cf. Mt 13:7,22). "But the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river". This symbol is not explained, but shows that *the worldly powers are divided*, so that they cannot work together to destroy the Church. They

work against each other and break one another's power and schemes (cf. 1 Sam 23:26-28). Whenever "horns" that scatter God's people arise, God brings "craftsmen" that chop them off (Zech 1:18-21)!

Two. "Then the dragon went off to make war against the rest of her offspring - those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus". "The rest of her seed" is a symbol representing *individual Christians*, because they obey God's commandments (Mt 28:19) and hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:11). The dragon failed to destroy Christ. Throughout the New Testament period he is frustrated in his continual attempts to destroy Christ's Church. God will only permit him to destroy the Church as an organised institute at the very end of the New Testament period (11:7-10; 20:7-9). In the mean time he directs his fury against individual Christians. That is why individual Christians are oppressed, persecuted, imprisoned and even killed.

"And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea" possibly refers to Satan causing the beast out of the sea to appear. Satan still exercises very much power on earth, but God has sovereignly limited him on the shoreline of his decisions.

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Read Revelation 13-14. Tomorrow we will introduce Revelation 13-14.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".