

Revelation Bible Study #31

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Revelation 12:7-12

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And 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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

Introduction

When St. John began seeing signs in Heaven, two identifiable figures were introduced. First there is the woman, best understood to be the Church as represented by Mary. Second, there is the dragon, which represents the devil. Wearing the sun and stars while standing on the moon, the faithful receive blessing and inheritance from our Lord. The devil on the other hand attempts to *take* that which does not belong to him, namely in the appearance, authority, and actions which belong to God alone. The contrast is stark; the woman stands and trusts in our Lord, while the devil gathers diadems and glory *for himself*. Naturally then, the two will be found in opposition to one another, and after Christ's Ascension the arc of history becomes a recounting of persecution of the Church.

But before history takes that long turn, St. John receives further vision about how it got to such conditions. There was a conflict in Heaven which immediately precedes the Incarnation, and the devil was cast to earth. With an understanding that he is unable to stop what is coming, nor to accuse those who were soon to be redeemed by the Christ, he begins his campaign of wrathful persecution against Jesus even before He is born. When this fails, he turns his wrath on the Church (and mankind in general).

Vs.7-9

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Exegetical Reminder

In the first verse of the twelfth chapter, St. John recounts that he is seeing *signs* in Heaven. Thus, we are not to take everything in this passage as having a literal correlation with spiritual entities. So we know that there was a *conflict* in the heavenly realm, but we do not know its nature, scope, length of time, or any other detail outside of what the Apostle writes. All we know is that there was a *conflict* between Michael, the devil, and each party's respective angelic hosts, which results in satan's loss and the events of the first six verses. The woman's flight to the wilderness for 1,260 days is

recapitulated (that is, shown again) in verse 12 on account of this. We are given no permission from Scripture to speculate on anything further, and must work with what we are given; that this war, including the victory of the saints with Christ against the devil, occurs *before* the Incarnation.

Michael

The first party in this conflict is identified as Michael the archangel. His name means “who is like God?”¹ He is spoken of elsewhere in Daniel and Jude,² where we learn that he is an angelic prince set over the children of Israel and has had conflicts with the devil in the past. He appears to have charge over more than just the Old Testament saints, since he prosecutes the war against the devil; but this does not permit us to assume that he has some “second-in-command” position in Heaven, or that since the New Covenant was established that he became the patron angel over the Church. He is simply shown here as having charge over a certain group of angels.

It is also worthwhile to note that Michael and his angels are apparently the *initiators* of the war in heaven. The text shows the devil and his angels *fighting back*, as though put in a defensive position. This is consistent with the reading of Ezekiel 28:12-19, in which the king of Tyre is compared with the devil. Of note in that passage is the fifteenth verse, in which the prophet writes “you were blameless in your ways, from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.” The closest we could surmise as the cause of this celestial war, with Michael being the aggressor (and presumably ordered to act by God), is that it was begun the moment satan was found to have sin within his heart. Since God is Omniscient, He is not the one who found unrighteousness in satan: He already knew about it. It is more likely that Michael discovered wickedness in the devil, and obtained permission from God to wage war, whereas previously when fighting over the body of Moses he refused to step beyond his authority.³

When did this war happen?

Attempts have been made to connect this passage to the seventy-two disciples that Christ sent to preach and heal throughout Judea.⁴ When they return, they rejoice to let our Lord know that demons submit to them. Christ replies with:

“I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.”⁵

While at first glance this might appear to be the moment in which the devil was sent to earth, such a position does not remain coherent after further investigation. If the devil and his angels' fall in Revelation is connected to this moment from Luke's Gospel, then the reason for his fall would not be Michael and his angels' efforts, but the actions of disciples – who spent their time casting out demons that *were already on earth*. This would also negate the connection in the first six verses to Mary and the Incarnation, since it would presume that the dragon did not actually attempt to kill Christ when He was *en utero*.

Regarding the time in which this happened, it is more reasonable to assume that it happened before the Incarnation, perhaps close to its beginning. Given the devil's presence in the Throne Room at the first two chapters of Job and in the third chapter of Zhechariah, it is unlikely that the war occurred any earlier than the third century BC. When Christ tells the disciples that He saw the devil fall from

1 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4317.htm>

2 Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1,4, Jude vs.8-10

3 Jude vs.9

4 Luke 10:1-12

5 Luke 10:17-20

heaven like lightning, He was saying that it was on this basis of satan's fall that the disciples are given authority to trample on them. As the devil and his company had fallen already, Christ raises up the disciples as a new kind of army for dispelling them further in service to the proclamation of the Word.

Let us return once more to Ezekiel 28:15, which says “you were blameless in your ways, from the day you were created, till unrighteousness was found in you.” One might object that the curse placed on the serpent in Genesis 3:15 *is* that moment, either prior to or after the war in Heaven, that he is barred from going up. But his appearances in Job and Zechariah refute such a notion. It is more likely that Ezekiel is using the prophetic perfect tense (that is, speaking of a future event with grammar suggesting it already happened) to tell us that the devil had not been completely barred from the celestial realm yet; in the book of Zechariah, written after Ezekiel, satan is shown accusing Joshua the high priest *in Heaven*, whereas St. John tells us that “there was no longer any place for them” in Heaven after the conflict. A consistent reading of the verse shows that the devil, at some point after the Exile but before the incarnation, was barred from ever entering the Throne Room again.

Vs.10-12

10 And 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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. **11** And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. **12** Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

The voice makes this proclamation at one of two moments. Either he proclaims it when the Incarnation occurs, since salvation is now guaranteed to be accomplished, or it is at the same time as the celebration of Christ's entrance into the Throne Room in the fifth chapter. When Christ approaches to open the seven seals, the twenty four elders proclaim that He is worthy, has made people to be a kingdom for Himself, and has brought salvation.⁶ Since the devil attempts to destroy Christ before His birth in the first few verse of the chapter, it is more likely that the Apostle hears this declaration at the start of the Incarnation. The praise offered may be understood to be saying “Now that satan is gone from heaven, we rejoice: this means that the incarnation is going to happen, and Christ shall accomplish salvation for mankind.”

Note the *soteriological* emphasis. The devil is shown to be an accuser of the brethren, constantly attacking men by assaulting them with guilt and (before his expulsion) acting as a kind of prosecutor in the Heavenly court to incur the wrath of God against sinners. He did the same in Zechariah's vision, accusing Joshua the high priest so as to have him destroyed.⁷ He is thrown out of Heaven, not *only* on account of his wickedness, but also as a gesture which asserts that he may no longer accuse humanity before God. The redemption of mankind, starting with the Incarnation and being completed with Christ's death and Resurrection, leaves him unable to lay a case before our Heavenly Father's feet.

The devil

Thus far we have highlighted the devil's penchant for appropriating Divine matters to himself. He wishes to *be* God but cannot, and so in lieu of being Divine he pretends as though he were wearing a costume. The unrighteousness found in him was apparently this very covetousness of the Godhead, as Isaiah writes in comparing him to the king of babylon:

⁶ Revelation 5:9--14

⁷ Zechariah 3:1-5

“You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’”⁸

For Satan, it was not enough to merely be the prosecutor of mankind. At some point, he earnestly desired to be the ultimate judge of humanity. Being thrown out of Heaven for all time is the final answer to the devil's selfish desire for deification; his great rage is thus set against all the earth and mankind. Being so cast out means that the devil's days of “playing God” are numbered; so, if he cannot claim humanity as their judge, he works through endless deceit to lead men astray so as to bring them to damnation. Thus the proclamation rings out that he goes to earth “in great wrath,” for he has only a limited time to pretend he is the judge of all. He does not cease to be the one “who accuses them day and night before our God,” but he does so now from *earth* with the intent of ensuring that as many as possible are damned.

The Saints

St. John writes of the saints, that “they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.” This statement is an interjection which highlights the role of the Church Militant – that is, Christians fulfilling the Great Commission – as the primary means of opposing the devil here on earth. Though there is a message of *fear* for all the earth on account of the devil's wrath, this clause is intended to strengthen the resolve of Christians everywhere. To remain in the faith, proclaim the Gospel, and to stay loyal to Christ even when faced with immanent martyrdom, *these* are the tools which dispel the devil's power and counter his persecutions.

The proclamation appears to flow better without the eleventh verse:

“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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

But when it is inserted in the sense of a parenthetical, the intent becomes clearer:

“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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

(And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.)

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

It appears that St. John himself, writing under inspiration, includes this parenthesis to keep the reader from fear. The devil indeed has great wrath, and the world does right to be afraid. But the Body of Christ must not fear, first because the Apostle has written elsewhere that “perfect love casts out fear,”⁹ and second because we are not left powerless in our militant state. By bringing the Gospel out into the world, by God's help we make an end to the devil's angry flailing and end up conquering him.

⁸ Isaiah 14:13-14

⁹ 1 John 4:18