

# The Conquering Christ

Message 7

## *Beauty and the Beast*

Revelation 12:1-17

### *The Characters*

Do you understand Revelation better now than you did two months ago? Or do you feel more confused than ever? It is an amazingly dense book. The more you probe its depths, the deeper it becomes. But remember the lesson of the little boy who read Revelation and grasped its message. The message is that Jesus wins! Do not let confusion about the details distract you from the overall message. Revelation is not about end times, or first century times, or the anti-Christ, or the beast. It is about Jesus! Jesus is wonderful, magnificent, fearsome. Jesus is at war with Satan, and we are absolutely confident that He will win. The primary application of this book is to worship Jesus, and remain faithful to Him to the end.

So far we have seen visions of many events. The events are presented in three groups of seven – seven seals outlining the period of the end, seven trumpets warning men to repent before the judgment, and seven bowls revealing that judgment. We have studied the seals and trumpets. Now before we study the seven bowls, we shall see a series of visions which provide more detail about these events. In particular we shall be introduced to the characters and the roles they play in this cosmic drama. We have already seen some characters. The most dominant is known variously as the Terminator, Lion, Lamb, Mighty Angel, and Faithful Witness. This is Jesus. We have seen Wormwood, also known as Abaddon and Apollyon. This is Satan. Last week we met two witnesses, which we understand to represent the church. And there are numerous other figures: the cherubim, angels, elders, etc. Now coming up we shall meet two women, two beasts, the dragon, and the knight in shining armor.

### *The Beauty*

Chapter 12 contains three visions. The first character we meet tonight is a woman. She gives birth to a child who is caught up to heaven and rules the nations. Anyone who knows something about Christianity will immediately guess that the woman is Mary and the child is Jesus. Jesus claims universal authority, Mary is His mother, and His birth is the center of history. But this is not correct. The woman is not Mary. I say this not because I am a Protestant. Catholics tend to worship Mary too much, and Protestants revere her too little – but what we have here is not a woman, but a sign. Did you forget our interpretive principles? Revelation is a picture book, not a book of history. And verse one reminds us, the woman is a sign. So we must discover what she signifies. While we are at it, what are the other two interpretive principles? The symbols are interpreted by the rest of scripture. So we shall go there to find out who the woman is. And Revelation presents a heavenly perspective. It shows us the earth as God sees it.

Are you becoming more comfortable with the symbols of Revelation? Remember what we said about symbols and language-learning? This type of literature communicates in its own vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. Like any language, you will never learn anything if you constantly challenge its forms. To learn a language you must submit to its conventions. Only when you become fluent are you able to make legitimate evaluations. So I urge you, look up the references we provide and others as you are able. Let the Bible teach you its symbol language.

Back to Revelation, what will this woman symbolize? She bears a child who becomes a ruler. Before that He is attacked by a dragon. The sun, moon, and stars make her a glorious figure. There are twelve stars. Twelve is frequently used as a symbol for Israel, after the twelve tribes that constitute that nation. And when we look into the scripture, Israel is often presented as a woman, particularly in the prophets. Isaiah opens his prophecy calling Israel the “daughter of Zion” (1:8), and in her sinful condition a whore (1:21). In chapter 54 Israel is commanded to sing, though she is a disgraced, barren woman – for

she will have many children. God declares that He will become her husband. He will visit her in the desert of her sinfulness and shame and make her glorious. Jeremiah takes up this theme. In chapter 2 God says,

I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride,  
how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. (2:2)

The prophet Hosea dramatized the relationship between God and Israel by marrying an unfaithful woman. So the best way to understand the woman is as a symbol for Israel – the people of God. Backing up to the beginning, we can see that this symbol began in the Garden of Eden, when God predicted that the serpent would attack the offspring of the woman. Eve had children, and her godly offspring made war against the serpent through all the ages. Then at the end of the ages, the woman bore an offspring that would win a decisive victory. That woman is the people of God.

In rushing to identify the woman, we neglected to note the visual impact of this vision. Clothed with the dazzling sun, resting on the moon, a blazing crown of stars on her head – this is a wondrous woman. She is beautiful and glorious. This is the heavenly view of God’s people. Even with all her sins, in spite of the real ugliness in her midst, with all her failures – the church is God’s beloved. God is not star-struck. Read the Bible. He knows best of all how miserable the church is. But God loves her, and so He also sees her in all the splendor of her potential.

Is your church a glorious bride for Jesus? Yes, she is! You may think your pastor has flaws, your elders are inept, your outreach weak and your worship lame – but you are looking with the wrong eyes. The only opinion that matters is God’s and He is thrilled with your church. There is always room for improvement, but there is no room for a critical attitude. See your church as God’s glorious bride. Then love your church the way Christ loves her.

### ***The Beast***

The second character is easier to grasp, because he is identified for us. Verse nine tells us that the dragon is Satan. He is also the devil. And in case you missed the point, he is the ancient serpent – the snake who tempted the woman in the garden. You see how symbols work? They are designed to evoke a response and to carry connotations. Some of us completely misunderstand Revelation because we try to make it speak a language foreign to it. If you are trying to figure out the difference between the serpent, the dragon, and the beast, you miss the whole point! They are all variations of the same symbol. Each works best in its own context, but they are all the same creature.

The dragon is great and red – an awe-inspiring figure. He has seven heads and ten horns – but these are different than the heads and horns of the beast we shall encounter in chapter 13, for that is a different creature. The head is a symbol for authority, and the horn is a symbol for power. Here the seven heads indicate complete authority and the ten horns indicate massive power. The dragon rules everywhere and with unsurpassed power. If the dragon is Satan, the stars he swept from heaven must be the angels he persuaded to rebel against God.

Satan is supremely intelligent and diabolically cunning. He knew that the woman would bear a child who would attempt to crush his head. God’s promise to Eve was no secret. He discovered the angel’s announcement to Mary. So he waited. He planned to exterminate the child as soon as it was born. He had his chance when his servant, Herod the Great, learned from the magi that a king had been born in Bethlehem. Herod killed all the babies in the region in an attempt to kill the child, but God sent Jesus to Egypt for protection. It is not necessary to recount here the battles between Jesus and Satan while Jesus was on earth, so the picture leaps to Jesus’ ascension to heaven and session on the throne. Meanwhile God protected the woman, the people of God, by sending them into the gentile wilderness for a time.

### ***War in Heaven***

The first vision is over. We have met the woman of heaven and the great red dragon. Now a new vision opens up – a war in heaven. Michael appears to be the chief angel. He is the archangel who turned the tide in the war with the demons of Persia in Daniel’s day (Daniel 10:13) and fought Satan for the body of Moses (Jude 9). Now he attacks Satan and his demon army. Michael wins, and Satan is expelled from heaven with all his evil angels.

There are two important errors to avoid regarding Satan. Some people give him too little credit, and some people give him too much. It was fashionable during the modern era to sneer at the idea of Satan. It seemed so Medieval, so unscientific. From the Enlightenment until the present, educated people have scoffed at the possibility of a devil. Sadly, many churches got caught up in this foolishness. It is plainly evident from scripture that there is a devil, he hates the church, and he would love to torment us. But others have taken Satan so seriously they practically give him more attention than Jesus. If you look at the art of the middle ages, certainly superstition ruled, with Satan as the chief antagonist of mankind. Today some Christians fear Satan and are on the alert for demonic activity. Revelation will have more to say about Satan, but for now we should remind ourselves that Jesus plainly declared His authority and power over Satan. In His earthly ministry Jesus demonstrated complete control over Satan by casting out demons at will. Before He left earth Jesus claimed *all* authority in heaven and on earth, and that would include authority over Satan and the demons. The apostle John reminds us that “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). And Jesus directly told us to fear God, and nothing else (Matthew 10:28). Satan is real. He hates God, he hates the people of God, and his greatest pleasure is to ruin God’s creation and torture His people. But God controls Satan.

Why does God allow Satan to continue to attack the church? Surely God could destroy Satan at any time. I do not know what God’s purpose is with Satan. But it appears that God even allowed Satan to enter heaven. There is a vivid account of this in the first two chapters of Job. The heavenly court assembles, and all the angels take their place. Satan is right there among them, and holds a conversation with God. He had been roaming the earth. God asked Satan if he had noticed Job, and Satan had. So here we see this evil angel with free access to all heaven and earth. Does this seem bizarre to you? It does to me. But although strange, the picture is unmistakably clear. This scene also reveals one of the chief activities of Satan. “Devil” means “accuser”, and “Satan” means “adversary”. Satan is our enemy who accuses us to God. He accused Job of hypocrisy – serving God only for personal gain instead of out of devotion. Satan also accuses you. It is a very effective attack, because we are guilty of many failures. Satan attacks, torments, and cripples people by constantly reminding them of their miserable failure to live up to their ideals.

But there came a day when Satan’s picnic in heaven came to an end. When Jesus ascended the throne of heaven it was time to cast Satan out for good. Before this Satan had a valid point to make. All people were in fact guilty. Everyone sinned. The people of God offered sacrifices for their sin, but nothing about the blood of animals was able to cleanse them from sin. Generation after generation of guilty people died in the hope of salvation, but until Christ there was no effective sacrifice. Now Jesus has died for us. The perfect Lamb of God took the guilt of all our sins – all people who believe in Him in all time – and died in our place. That means we are acquitted! We are legally innocent. Even when we sin in the future, our sins are covered by the sacrifice of Jesus. So there is no condemnation any more for those who believe in Jesus. Satan no longer has any valid accusations against man. Furthermore, now a man is enthroned in heaven. Not only is the guilt of man’s sin removed, man now rules! Satan’s day in heaven is over, so God threw him out.

### ***War on Earth***

Satan has been exiled from heaven. The third vision of chapter 12 shows him in his rage tearing after the people of God. Continuing the exodus imagery, God led the church into the wilderness. Moses told the Israelites, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings

and brought you to myself.” (Exodus 19:4) Scripture speaks of the wilderness wandering as the honeymoon of God and the bride in whom He delights. Returning to Jeremiah 2:2,

“Thus says the LORD,  
‘I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride,  
how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.’”

Our passage says the woman will be nourished in the wilderness. This reflects Psalm 78:23-25:

...he commanded the skies above  
and opened the doors of heaven,  
and he rained down on them manna to eat  
and gave them the grain of heaven.  
Man ate of the bread of the angels;  
he sent them food in abundance.

Let us pause briefly here to make another observation about how scripture uses symbols. Get a concordance sometime or go online to BibleGateway.com and look up references to wilderness. You will find that most of the references are simple geographical indicators. When wilderness is used symbolically, it most often refers to a spiritual wasteland. But there are several places like this where it is a symbol for the fresh love between God and His people. Out there, away from the distractions and temptations of the world, God and his people fall in love again. Look for yourself, if you are dubious. The lesson is that symbols often do not have one simple meaning. They can have several dimensions. But you cannot just make up any meaning to suit your interest. The scripture controls how we interpret biblical symbols.

The dragon was thrown out of heaven. Enraged, he pursued the woman to persecute her. But God flew the woman into the wilderness where she would be safe, fed, and loved. Satan changed tactics and poured a flood of water after the woman to sweep her away. But the land swallowed the water. This enraged the dragon even more, so he went off to attack the woman’s children. Next week we shall see that the dragon mounted this new attack by raising up two other beasts. But for now, what is the flood of water?

The source of the water is the mouth of the dragon. This is the poison water of Wormwood – the false salvation coming from a temple infiltrated by Satan. It should be easy to see that this indicates words, a message from the dragon. It is a message which is eagerly absorbed by the land. Now we have learned that the land represents the Jews. What is the teaching that could have destroyed the church, but was absorbed by the Jews? The New Testament tells us in many places. It is the message of salvation through Jesus *and* the law. You may be thinking, “Come on! That sounds like a pretty mild problem. And are you saying that Satan was promoting belief in Jesus?” Yes. I most certainly am. Because belief in Jesus plus the law will send you to hell. By including Jesus, the great deceiver masked the deadliness of his false gospel. And if you cannot see how deadly this message is, that is proof of how dangerously insidious it is.

The gospel is that salvation comes through Jesus, and Him alone. Read the gospels. Did Jesus ever say, “Believe in me and keep the law”? Read the epistles. Did the apostles ever say we are saved through faith in Jesus and in keeping the law? No! In fact, they denounced this very doctrine with utmost vigor. Many Jews believed, and they were incorporated into the woman, the people of God. Many refused to believe in Jesus, and they spread the doctrine that anyone must keep the law in order to be accepted by God. “Its fine that you believe in Jesus,” they said. “Now you need also to keep the law, beginning with circumcision.” Listen to Paul as he attacks this teaching in his letter to the Galatians.

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we

preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-9)

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?... Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (Galatians 3:1-2)

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. (Galatians 3:10)

But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! (Galatians 5:11-12)

Do you see how upset Paul is? What would cause him to curse his adversaries and wish they were castrated? It is because this doctrine of salvation by Jesus plus works is an extremely dangerous plot to destroy the church. "Believe in Jesus and keep God's law" sounds so good. But as Paul said, the law kills. Jesus alone saves. You cannot trust in Jesus and something else. You cannot serve two masters. You will hate the one and love the other. If you seek salvation in anything plus Jesus, Jesus will have nothing to do with you.

Revelation shows us the heavenly perspective on this great battle. On earth it was a struggle between the apostles and the Jews. But from the throne we can see that it is a war between the dragon and the woman. Paul was so upset about this false doctrine because he saw that it was demonic. It was an attempt by Satan to destroy the church by corrupting the only means of salvation – the gospel. This is a battle that Paul and the apostles won. But the Jews eagerly drank in this demonic false gospel. To this day Judaism proclaims salvation by keeping the law, and so persists in advancing a demonic false gospel.

### ***The Key to Conquest***

The persistent application in Revelation is to conquer. The promise to all seven churches was conditioned upon conquering in the face of overwhelming opposition. This chapter tells us how to do that. Return to verse 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." You see here three components to conquering. First is the blood of the Lamb. Second, the word of testimony. Third is the desire to die.

Jesus is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last. Salvation begins with Him. Nothing happens apart from Jesus, and the key turning point in the battle with Satan was Jesus' death on the cross. There, where Jesus hung in agony, He took upon Himself the sins of mankind. God vented His righteous anger on Jesus. God killed Him to set us free from the guilt, power, and pollution of sin. If you believe in Jesus, you are innocent, free, and clean from sin. Satan's grip over the human race was broken. Until Jesus, Satan terrorized earth and disturbed heaven. Jesus kicked out the lion's teeth. Satan is now a pitiable foe. You can conquer because Jesus conquered first. His victory on the cross paves the way for you to be victorious over Satan.

The second component in your conquest is your testimony. When you tell others about Jesus, you wage spiritual war. Your testimony to others is a direct attack upon Satan. Your success is not dependent upon your skill, knowledge, or eloquence. Jesus is the faithful witness, and He speaks through you. Words matter! The schoolyard rhyme is false. Sticks and stones may break your bones, and words do hurt. The word of the gospel kills unbelief and puts Satan to flight. This is not to say your actions do not matter. They matter greatly. Your life must match your words. But actions are not enough. Occasionally you hear someone quote the saying, "Preach the gospel; use words when necessary." This suggests that the gospel can be communicated without words. This is false. Words are necessary. That does not mean you must fill every

minute of every encounter with a gospel message. It is just to say that when you tell people about Jesus, Satan flees and sin withers.

You can trust in the blood of Jesus and tell others about Him, yet still fail to conquer – if you love life. The gospel calls us to love Jesus, and nothing else – not father or mother, wife or children, property or life. If you follow Jesus you may incur the anger of your parents. Your husband or wife may leave you. You may lose your job. You may become poor. And you may die. If you fear these things, you do not fear God. If you protect your family, your marriage, your career, your property, and your life by softening your witness, you will lose the war. You may get through life a success by the world's standards, but you will be a spiritual failure. You may look like a good Christian on the surface, but underneath you will be a traitor. You may contribute to the work of the church, but in the decisive moments where the war is won or lost, you will turn on Jesus in order to save your life.

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian dissident who was sent to the gulag, said, “You only have power over people so long as you don't take everything away from them. But when you've robbed a man of everything, he's no longer in your power – he's free again.”<sup>1</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn conquered the Soviet state because he lost everything. That made him more powerful than his captors. When you lose everything, Satan cannot touch you. When you have nothing, he cannot hurt you, because you have nothing to hurt. But as long as you hang on to family, career, property, and life – you cannot win. When the decisive moment comes in the spiritual battle, you will surrender to protect what you hold dear.

Will you be a winner or a loser? Anyone can conquer. You do not have to be intelligent, or popular, or skilled, or knowledgeable, or strong. All it takes is the desire to die for Jesus. If that is your life goal, you will enter heaven a mighty warrior and a conqueror – no matter how insignificant you appear here on earth. Do not be a coward. Die to this life so that you might conquer with Jesus. Help us, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Solzhenitsyn, <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/11419.html>, accessed 3/9/2007.