

# The Snake Crusher - Part 2

Text: Revelation 12:1-17

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 9, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

## INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Dr. Faiz Rahman is the founder of the *Good News India* mission organization. He tells how unknown assailants in Orissa, India gunned down a Hindu priest and four of his attendants.
  - He writes, ***“Immediately the Christians were blamed. The cry rose up, ‘kill the Christians.’ And the horror began. . . . In the past 4 days, we have first hand witness to hundreds of churches being blown up and burned and many, many dozens of Christian have been slaughtered . . . believers have been killed and hacked into pieces and left on the road . . . even women and children.”***
- Why does this happen? The question is even more problematic for Christians. We believe Jesus is alive and reigning over the universe. But if Jesus is the king, why do his people suffer so much?
  - Why do Christian marriages fall apart? Why do Christians struggle with so many things from pornography to depression to disease?
    - Many Christians say their life got more difficult after they became a Christian. Why is this?
- Many answers could be given. Some answers are *psychological*: marriage can be difficult because your personality is different from your spouse’s.
  - Some answers are *political*: Christians get killed because governments can be oppressive.
    - Some answers are *sociological*: you react in anger because the social environment you were raised in modeled this to you.
- All of these are true answers but Revelation 12 says these answers are just the outer layers of the onion. In Revelation 12 the layers are peeled back and we discover deeper answers for the suffering and persecution of Jesus’ people.
  - The answer has everything to do with an enraged dragon and the events of the Christmas story. This is Christmas like you have never seen it before.
    - It is going to take some work to understand this chapter so make sure you have your Bible or insert out. As we work at it I am praying it will enable you to better understand why the Christian life can be so hard *and* how you can be strengthened to live it.
- I am going to divide the message into three parts: Part 1: the dragon’s rage against Jesus (1-9). Part 2: the dragon’s rage against Jesus’ people (13-17). Part 3: the dragon’s rage conquered by Jesus’ people (10-12).

## THE RADIANT WOMAN

- **(SHOW SLIDE 2) Part 1: The dragon’s rage against Jesus.**
  - Revelation 12 is all about a war. It is a cosmic war.
    - There are three main characters in this war: a radiant woman, a raging dragon, and a ruling child. To understand all of this you must see that almost every sentence uses images taken from the Old Testament.
- Let’s begin with **(SHOW SLIDE 3) the radiant woman. READ 1-2 - *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.***  
**<sup>2</sup>She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.**
  - All pregnant women are radiant but this great woman is clothed with the sun. And she stands on top of the moon – a picture of dominion. Who or what is this woman?
    - Notice in verse 1 that the woman is a ‘sign.’ That is, she is a symbol. She points to something beyond herself. So what is she symbolic of? **(SHOW SLIDE 4) The woman represents all the people of God (both before and after the coming of Jesus).**

- The woman first of all represents faithful Israel. Notice that she wears a crown of twelve stars. This reminds us of Joseph's dream of the sun, moon, and 12 stars who represent himself and his 11 brothers. The 12 brothers become the 12 tribes of Israel through whom the Messiah would come.
  - Throughout the Old Testament Israel is many times pictured as a woman in labour longing to give birth to the Messiah who would save them.
    - So the woman is faithful Israel. But she goes on to include all Christians as well. In verse 17 we read of her offspring who **"hold to the testimony of Jesus."**
- Throughout the book of Revelation the number 12 represents all the people of God: 12 patriarchs, 12 apostles, the 24 elders are 12+12. The OT people of God and the NT church are completed together in the 144,000 which is 12x12x1000.
  - So all these numbers are simply meant to show us that this woman represent all the people of God, both before and after the coming of Jesus.
- But suddenly this radiant woman collapses in pain. We see that she is pregnant and she is in labour. She is about to give birth. What will happen next?
  - Before we find out the second character is introduced.

### THE RAGING DRAGON

- The second character is **(SHOW SLIDE 5) the raging dragon.**
  - **READ 3-4a - And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. <sup>4</sup>His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.**
- Seven heads symbolize great power. The ten horns recall the kingdoms in Daniel. The seven crowns represent the dragon's claim to rule.
  - That he swept a third of the stars out of the sky refers to Daniel 8:10 which pictures an enemy that **"caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down."** It is debated whether these stars refers to angels or people. It is probably both.
    - The point is that this dragon is powerful.
- Notice once again though in verse 3 that the dragon is a 'sign.' So, who or what does the dragon represent? We do not have to guess for we are told in verse 9.
  - **READ 9 - that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.**
    - **(SHOW SLIDE 6) The dragon represents the devil.** He is the ancient serpent from Genesis 3 who deceived Eve and led the world astray.

### THE RULING CHILD

- The last character is **(SHOW SLIDE 7) the ruling child. READ 5 - She gave birth to a male child.**
  - Notice carefully now that John does not use the word 'sign' in reference to the child. The woman is a sign. The dragon is a sign. But not the child. You will not find a literal woman clothed with the sun or a literal dragon but you will find a literal child.
    - Who is He? It is very clear that **(SHOW SLIDE 8) The ruling child is Jesus, the promised Messiah.** How do we know this? Look at verse 5. **READ 5 - one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.** That phrase is taken directly from Psalm 2, which speaks of the promised Messiah who will rule all nations with a rod of iron. So Revelation 12 is all about Christmas.

### THE DRAGON'S FAILED ATTACK ON THE CHILD

- The characters have been introduced. The drama now unfolds. What we see is almost too disturbing to speak of. **READ 4b - And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.**
  - This is very graphic. It is worse than any horror movie. The pregnant woman is giving birth but the dragon stands right in front of her. The second the baby comes out, he intends to rip it to shreds.

- Why? Why is the dragon seeking to kill the child? Because of that great promise we saw last week. In Genesis 3:15 God said to the serpent: **“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.”**
  - God promised that he would send a superhuman male who would fight a decisive battle with the dragon. In this battle the man would be greatly harmed but he would ultimately crush the head of the serpent.
    - Satan believed this promised. He knew this snake crusher would be born from the people of God but he did not know who he would be or when he would come. And so the dragon sought to kill men and boys who were part of God’s people. Cain killed Abel. Pharaoh tried to kill every boy who was born in Israel. Queen Athaliah slaughtered all of David’s sons.
      - No birth equals no battle. No battle equals no defeat.
- We learn something valuable here. There are many reasons why events happen in history but here we learn that:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 9) History is the story of God fulfilling his promise to destroy evil through the promised male child. As a result, history is also the story of the devil’s attempts to devour the child.**
- It all comes to a dramatic climax at Christmas 2000 years ago when the angels proclaimed, **“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”** He is here. The snake-crusher is about to be born. But the dragon is there between the woman’s legs seeking to devour the child. He incites King Herod to kill every baby boy under the age of two within the entire vicinity of Bethlehem. It all comes to this moment.
  - The child’s head is coming out. The defeat of evil is about to take place. But wait, the dragon is also there. He lunges. He will devour the newborn. We cannot watch. What will happen?
    - **READ 5 - She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.** Here we see Jesus’ entire life, death, resurrection, and ascension collapsed into one moment. In the big story, the serpent tried to devour Jesus but in the end Jesus was exalted to God’s right hand.

### THE CHILD’S VICTORY OVER THE DRAGON

- But Jesus’ birth does not result in Christmas cards and carols. It results in a great war in heaven. **READ 7-9 - Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup> but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup> 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.** How is the war in heaven won? The war in heaven is won by an event on earth – by the coming of Jesus into the world and his subsequent life, death, and resurrection.
  - Notice the note of victory. In verses 9-13 we read six times that the dragon was thrown down. Why is the dragon defeated? Because of the big message of Christmas. 1 John 3:8 says that **“the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”** Through his life, death, and resurrection Jesus won the battle. He defeated the dragon.
    - And because of this all heaven is called to rejoice. **READ 12a - Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them!**

### THE DRAGON’S RAGE AGAINST JESUS’ PEOPLE

- This is good news but on the other hand it only intensifies our original question. If the dragon has been thrown down and Jesus reigns why do God’s people face so many troubles?
  - Here is where it all gets really practical. Having looked at the dragon’s rage against Jesus we turn in the second place to look at **(SHOW SLIDE 10) the dragon’s rage against Jesus’ people.**
    - We see that the dragon is enraged against Jesus’ people for two reasons.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 11) First, the dragon is enraged because he is defeated.**

- **READ 12b - 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!**
  - Because of Jesus' work, the devil is defeated. But let me ask you something: what does a wounded rattle snake do if you back it into a corner and try to finish it off with a big stick? Does it just put its head down and give up?
    - No. It's rage increases. It knows it only has a few seconds left to live and so it uses every last ounce of energy to attack: **"the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"**
  - Darrell Johnson writes, (SHOW SLIDE 12) **"The suffering of the church in the world is not a sign of Satan's victory. It is a sign of his realization of his defeat . . . since he cannot get the child, the dragon goes after what is dearest to the child. He goes after the woman."**<sup>1</sup>
- This explains why the Christian life can be so hard. Before you were a Christian you just followed the ways of the serpent. There was no fight. But when Christ saves you, you find that you suddenly have three big enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil.
  - It should not surprise you that it is hard to live the Christian life. You switched sides. The devil is enraged at his defeat. He knows his time is short. He cannot get at Jesus anymore and so he attacks what Jesus loves and that is his church.
- (SHOW SLIDE 13) **The second reason why the dragon is enraged at Jesus' people is because God protects His people.**
  - **READ 6 - the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.**
  - **READ 13-17 - <sup>13</sup>And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. <sup>14</sup>But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. <sup>15</sup>The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. <sup>16</sup>But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. <sup>17</sup>Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**
    - All the images here are from the book of Exodus. The people of God are taken into the wilderness. The wilderness represents two things: God's provision for his people and difficult trials. God provided manna and water from the rock. He protected them. But life in the wilderness was hard. So it is for us who live between the first and the second coming of Jesus.
      - But this time limited. First century believers would have recognized 1260 days as a symbolic number to represent a time of limited, but intense, persecution.
- And so the dragon pursues us but notice God's protection. The woman is given wings of an eagle to fly away. This recalls God's protection in Exodus 19:4: **"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."** The dragon spews out water to drown the church, an image of the Red Sea. But just as God split the earth and saved Israel from the waters so he protects his people from the flood of attacks that Satan spews over us.
  - This does not mean Christians do not suffer. What it does mean is that we the church will ultimately prevail. Jesus said, **"I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it."**
    - So here is what you should expect. Expect your Christian life to be difficult but also expect God to work in powerful ways.

---

<sup>1</sup> Darrell Johnson, *Discipleship on the Edge*, 225.

- We are seeing this take place in our day. In the last 150 years more people have become Christians than in the previous 1800 years combined. At the exact same time, more Christians have been killed for their faith in the last 100 years than in all previous centuries combined.
  - Persecution *and* revival. Floods *and* escape. We are on our way to the Promised Land but we must pass through the wilderness.

## THE DRAGON'S RAGE OVERCOME BY JESUS' PEOPLE

- The dragon's rage against Jesus. The dragon's rage against Jesus' people. In the last place we must look at **(SHOW SLIDE 14) the dragon's rage conquered by Jesus' people.**
  - In verses 10-12 we see three ways the dragon attacks Christians and three ways that we, through Christ, can conquer him.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15) First, the dragon attacks through accusation. READ 10b - the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.** The title 'Satan' means "the accuser."
  - When Satan tempts, he comes as a friend who is just trying to help you to be happy. But it is all a set up. As soon as you sin, your friend becomes your accuser.
    - ***"How can you possibly call yourself a Christian? A Christian obeys Jesus. You really aren't much of a Christian are you? You don't pray as you ought. You are a complete failure at witnessing to others and then there is the sin that you just keep committing even though you said you have repented."***
  - It is right here that Satan has many of you defeated. You see if he can get you to believe his accusations you will feel that God can no longer loves you. If you are not secure in God's love then you will lose your joy. If you lose your joy then every part of your Christian life will fall apart, for the joy of the Lord is our strength.
- But here is the good news. Verse 11 says that Jesus' people have conquered the accusations of the dragon. How do they do it? **(SHOW SLIDE 16) Jesus' people conquer him by exposing the lies in his accusations.** We see this in verse 11.
  - **READ 11a - And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.** Follow this closely now: before Jesus came, Satan had an airtight case to accuse. Why? Because we have all sinned and we are all guilty. But with the coming of Jesus into the world that all changed. On the cross Jesus took the punishment that was due to sinners upon himself. All our crimes were punished in Jesus when he shed his blood.
    - Therefore, when Satan, the prosecuting attorney brings up one your sins to accuse you before God, Jesus stands up and says, ***"Objection Your Honour! This sin has already received its full punishment."*** God the Father says, ***"Sustained. Satan you have no case."***
  - So when the lying accuser floods you with accusations you look him straight in the eye and say, ***"Satan you are right that I have sinned but you have no grounds to accuse me because Jesus was punished in my place. 'My sins not in part but the whole were nailed to the cross and I bear them no more.' 'There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.' You have no case against me. Shut your mouth and be gone!"***
    - Conquer him by exposing the lies of his accusations.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 17) Second, the dragon attacks through deception.**
  - We see this in verse 9. **READ 9 - the deceiver of the whole world.** The dragon enslaves the minds of unbelievers by not letting them see the truth of Christ and attacks believers by leading us into false ways of thinking about God, ourselves, and the world. But Jesus' people overcome this. How? **(SHOW SLIDE 18) Jesus' people conquer him by standing on the truth. READ 11b - and by the word of their testimony**
    - Overcome by seeking truth. God's word is your sword – your one offensive weapon against the dragon. Jesus defeated the dragon because he knew scripture, understood what it

meant, and knew how to use it. Follow in his footsteps. Arm yourself. Read your Bible. Learn it. Study it. Memorize it.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 19) Third, the dragon attacks through persecution.**
  - He tries to drown the woman. That the dragon is red points to murder. This has always been the devil's tactic. If he cannot get our souls then he will attack our bodies. How do Jesus' people overcome persecution? **(SHOW SLIDE 20) Jesus' people conquer him by loving Jesus more than their own lives. READ 11 - for they loved not their lives even unto death.**
    - This was Paul's attitude – ***“For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*** Paul is saying, ***“Go ahead kill me. You will just give me what I long for most - Jesus. But if you let me live then I will just keep living for what I love most – Jesus.”*** How can you stop such a man?
      - Jesus' people conquer the devil through loving Jesus more than their own lives.

## CONCLUSION

- There you have it. The reason it is difficult to live the Christian life is because we are in a war. The message of Christmas is that Jesus is the promised snake crusher who was born to defeat the devil.
  - The reason everything is so difficult is that the dragon is enraged. He has been thrown down. He knows his time is short. And so he attacks Jesus by attacking what Jesus loves, which is his people.
    - Do not be discouraged when evil and suffering seem to overwhelm you. Jesus has won the battle and one day he shall return to win the war.
- Listen to the words of Martin Luther's great hymn:
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 21) *“And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God hath willed  
his truth to triumph through us.  
The Prince of Darkness grim,  
we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure,  
for lo, his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.”***
    - A day is coming when Jesus will return and with but a word will finally crush the head of the serpent. Therefore, we sing,
  - **(SHOW SLIDE 22) *“let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also,  
the body they may kill,  
God's truth abideth still,  
His kingdom is forever.”***