**The Dragon**

Revelation 12:1-17

Dragons in the Bible video

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/chaos-dragon/>

This is the place where you find a ***huge, red, furious DRAGON in the Bible.*** Very cool. One of my pastor friends came to Christ in college because an equally ignorant friend of his said, “Hey, I heard there are dragons in the Bible,” so they looked it up and found this chapter. It scared him so bad he read the rest of the Bible and gave his life to Christ.

There are dragons in the Bible. But as the Bible Project video shows us, ***those dragons and monsters appear all over Scripture***, not just here in Revelation. The theme of chaos and darkness begins in the second verse of the Bible.

“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Genesis 1:2-3

The Deep, ***the ocean, is the ancient symbol for chaos and death.*** If we dropped you into the middle of the ocean, guess what? You would die. Because humans don’t belong in the ocean. We can’t exist there. God had to create LAND as a place for humans, our place.

But even before God spoke everything into being, the Spirit of God was hovering over the abyss, over the face of the deep, dark waters – meaning even in those ancient times of darkness and emptiness, **God was in control**. And then God spoke: “Let there be light.” The first thing God contained in creation was DARKNESS.

Another fun detail in Genesis 1, on the fifth day:

“And God said, ‘Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.’ So God created the great sea creatures ***[lit. serpents]*** and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:20-21

***Everything God made was GOOD***; including the great sea serpents. This is a thrown in detail to the creation account, noting that the leviathan sea monsters are ***God’s own rubber ducky***. He just threw them in there for fun.

***The serpent shows up*** in Genesis 3 and leads Adam and Eve into the first sin, the first rebellion, with a blatant lie. God said, “You will surely die.”

“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” Genesis 3:4-5

The snake said, ***“You will NOT surely die. You’ll become like God.”*** So instead of ruling over the beasts of the field as they were created and commissioned to do, **they were ruled BY one of the beasts** and deceived into thinking THEY could RULE without God, on their own terms. And darkness, evil and death were suddenly embedded in our world. For one thing, relationships were damaged at their core. Look at the consequence for Eve:

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| “To the woman he said, ‘...Your desire shall be contrary to [*for*] your husband, but he shall rule over you.’” Genesis 3:16 | “The Lord said to Cain, ‘...Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to [*for*] you, but you must rule over it.’”  Genesis 4:7 |

***Who will rule?*** Will the woman gain mastery over her desires and submit to her husband? Will his desires gain mastery over him so instead of serving his wife he rules over her cruelly?

One chapter later we have the Cain and Abel story. God warns Cain about an imminent danger to him called SIN. For Eve it was DESIRE. **For Cain that desire is named SIN**. And it is crouching in the shadows of his own heart like a lion, like a powerful beast, waiting to pounce on him.

Did Cain rule over his desire? No. He was ruled by it. His jealousy turned into anger and his anger boiled over into the murder of his brother. Cain BECAME the lion. He became the beast.

Do you see the point? ***Chaos, evil and sin are crouching in the shadows in the first four chapters of the Bible.*** Sea monsters in the deep darkness of the turbulent ocean waters. Desire in Eve’s heart. Sin in Cain’s heart. Those selfish desires, those prowling sins spread throughout mankind until God had to send a flood to start over. But even after the global reset with Noah, the seed of sin still spread to the point that everyone on earth came together with this grand idea:

“Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” Genesis 11:4

After Noah did the people exercise dominion over the world for GOD? No. They immediately turned it around for THEMSELVES. **Welcome to BABYLON**. The Bible word for Babylon is Babel. I had heard of the Tower of Babel for decades and not connected it to the Biblical teaching on Babylon.

***Beasts and Babylon.*** This is the background for Revelation 12. This scarlet thread runs through the entire Bible. So are there dragons in the Bible? Yes! They are EVERYWHERE!

* **Pharaoh** is a voracious beast who subjugates Israel and must be confronted directly by God.
* **Nebuchadnezzar** of Babylon is such a proud, violent beast God turns him INTO a beast with his hair and nails growing out like a wild animal.
* **Daniel** sees four beasts climb out of the ocean representing different kings and nations after HIMSELF being saved from hungry lions!
* Shockingly, the prophets begin to confront **Israel** for becoming Babylon and acting like the sinful, idolatrous beasts that are the other nations!
* Then **Jesus** appears in Israel, first going to the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Unlike Israel and every other King, ***Jesus resists the enticements of Babylon*** and refuses to become a beast, remaining submitted to the rule and reign of the Father.

Then we arrive at Revelation 12.

“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. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.” Revelation 12:1-3

Do you see what these verses are doing? **It’s like a recap of the Bible**. “Previously on The Word of the Lord,” there was this radiant woman with a crown of 12 stars – Israel! From Israel came a baby, through much painful labor and difficulty. No surprise, the enemy of God and His people, the fierce, cunning serpent who is deceiving and enslaving the beasts and kings and empires of this Babylonian world, appears to try to resist God’s people and plans.

The red dragon of Revelation 12 does not come out of nowhere. We know this guy. We saw you back in Genesis 3. We’ve seen your shadow throughout history. And guess what? We see his shadow and hear his whispers every day, don’t we?

* “***Did God really say***, ‘You’re a boy,’ or ‘You’re a girl,’? Why don’t YOU decide what you are!
* “***You won’t surely die!*** Just have another sip. Just take another look. Just run the numbers a little differently. Just indulge yourself a little bit, you deserve it!”
* “Look out at the kingdoms of this world, ***all of this could be yours*** if you will just bow down to me. Just a little compromise here; a little adjustment there.”

This is **the devil’s playbook**: question God’s Word, downplay the danger and exaggerate the benefits of sin. That ancient serpent, the devil, is out causing chaos wherever he can. But we can overcome him because JESUS has already overcome him. In this chapter we will see ***three keys to conquering evil***, three strategies for standing firm in the Lord. First.

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

1. Take **Refuge** in His protection

“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.” Revelation 12:1

There is some ***debate over who this woman represents***, whether it is Israel, Mary the mother of Jesus or the Church. The twelve stars to me indicate Israel. And the birth of the child definitely indicates Israel and / or Mary. But by extension the visuals also apply to the church. And, as we have seen already in Revelation, it’s not so much about cracking the code to find a 1 to 1 interpretive clue as it is to use these passages as a lens through which to see God and Scripture and history in a new light.

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

1. Take **Refuge** in His protection

* The way God protected Israel, Mary and Joseph is how He protects all of His people: **Adorning** us with His glory

“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.” Revelation 12:1

***God gave HIMSELF to the people of Israel!*** He chose them to be His people. He walked with them. He lived among them. His glory dwelt in the tabernacle, and He went ahead of them in battle, symbolized by the ark of the covenant. The Creator of the sun, moon and stars, the God of holiness, righteousness and justice, the maker of the Covenant, the One who is slow to anger and abounding with steadfast love and mercy – set Israel aside to be His own possession, His treasure. His glory. This is the picture in verse one.

Do you see how this certainly **applies to Israel**; and it also ***applies to Mary*** as the one through whom the blessing to Abraham and the promise to David came to fruition. But it is also a picture of US! God has filled us with His own Holy Spirit and adorned us with the righteousness of Christ Himself!

***Is this how you see yourself?*** Clothed with the sun, standing on the moon as your elevated platform – seated with Christ in the heavenly places – wearing a crown on your head of 12 stars?

It should be! **This is how God sees** all who belong to Him by faith in Jesus. We are dressed in the righteousness of Christ, united forever with Him and filled with His glory! This is how God protects His people: He adorns us with His own glory and presence; and:

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

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* The way God protected Israel, Mary and Joseph is how He protects all of His people: **Adorning** us with His glory, strengthening us in our **Suffering**

“She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.” Revelation 12:2

Again, this applies beautifully to Israel, Mary and the Church. Israel in Jesus’ day was in labor. A new day was dawning, but the people were in turmoil, divided; conflicted. They were suffering under the yoke of Rome and under the yoke of religious leaders who had lost sight of the heart of Torah. They were not about the love of God but just about their own rules and traditions.

***Mary was obviously pregnant literally*** and had to give birth like all women. We sing the song at Christmas about baby Jesus, “The little Lord Jesus no crying he makes,” which is completely wrong. Jesus cried. It’s the only way a baby can communicate. Come on. But nativity plays and movies always gloss over the actual giving birth.

Ladies, any of you want to travel 60 miles on foot / on a donkey when you are nine months pregnant? And then go through your labor on a pile of hay? Give birth in a stable? Good times, right? Was it hours of labor and a long time pushing? Those details don’t matter. But we can assume there was pain involved. Jesus came to reverse the curse of Adam and Eve. But the curse was still active, including those pesky birth pains.

But Israel and Mary’s labor pains were largely **symbolic of the world** that continues to be in labor, groaning (as it says in Romans 8) until the Sons of God are revealed. In other words, until Jesus comes back and makes all things new, uniting heaven and earth once and for all.

***Do you feel the labor pains right now?*** Do you feel the groaning of life in this dark and broken world? God is with you and is holding you up!

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“And 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.” Revelation 12:6

There again is **the 3.5 years**. Time, times and half a time. Lots of believers want to take that to mean the rapture, either at the start of the tribulation or at the halfway point when God’s wrath begins to fall. I’m skeptical on both of those points, though I do appreciate the creativity and optimism. The point of 3.5 years is that the time is LIMITED. God is gracious and will not let His people suffer forever. ***He strengthens us for WHATEVER time we have to struggle***, we have to groan. Until the new world comes and we get our new bodies.

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* The way God protected Israel, Mary and Joseph is how He protects all of His people: **Adorning** us with His glory, strengthening us in our **Suffering**, and **Fighting** our greatest enemies for us

“Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon.” Revelation 12:7

We should be greatly encouraged by this. ***It is not for you and me to go toe to toe with the devil.*** Praise the Lord! Michael, the archangel and all the other angels are much better equipped to fight the spiritual battle. Our job is to pray. We fight on our knees.

But **this is how God has always protected His people** and how He still does today. Our job is to trust in Him, to stand firm in faith. His job is to fight the bad guys. Remember the Exodus from Egypt. God told Moses, “Just stand firm and see the deliverance I will accomplish for you today. You need only to BE STILL” (Ex. 14:14). This is what Caleb and Joshua argued for when they reached the promised land. Yes, there are giants in the land and strong, fortified cities. But the Lord will fight for us! If God is for us, who can be against us???

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

1. Rest in the **Finished** Work of Christ

“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.” Revelation 12:5

So, first, we stand firm through persecution and suffering by taking refuge in God’s protection. Second, we rest in **the primary protection God has provided: in Christ**. The dragon is positioned to pounce, crouching over Mary and Israel. But God protected Mary and Joseph from King Herod, directing them to flee to Egypt. And God protected Jesus as he grew up in Nazareth, and through his three-year ministry – even though lots of people opposed him and started looking for ways to have him killed.

Ruling the nations with a rod of iron is a reference to **Psalm 2**, we will come back to at the end, which is all about the power, authority and victory of the Messiah and the foolishness of all people and nations who oppose Him. Then, isn’t it fascinating that it goes directly from the baby being born to being caught up to heaven!?

***From the nativity straight to the ascension!*** But that’s the point: it’s the whole life and ministry of Jesus in two snapshots. The baby is born. The risen Christ ascends back to the Father in glory, where He reigns forever over the universe. The whole work of Jesus is clearly intended here if you look down at verses 10 and 11.

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

1. Rest in the **Finished** Work of Christ

* Jesus **Triumphed** over sin, death and the devil through His death and **Resurrection**

“For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down… And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb…” Revelation 12:10-11

Six times in this chapter it says the devil and his demons were ***defeated and “thrown down.”*** Verse 11 shows us how. The decisive battle was there on the cross. Jesus conquered the devil by surrendering His life for us. We overcome by trusting in His finished work, resting in it.

The devil is a defeated foe, but ***he is still dangerous.*** He knows his time is short, so he is all the more furious to take as many with him as he can. Think about it. The devil is the accuser, the Satan. How can he accuse people? First by deceiving them, tempting us to sin and rebel against God. Then he immediately turns around and accuses us for our sin, covering us with guilt and shame.

***So, the only weapon the devil really has is SIN.*** And Jesus took that weapon from Him when He died and rose again. Disarmed. **A toothless dragon**. The fire has gone out in his belly. Oh, he can rage and fume and growl and make shadow puppets.

But the devil can’t hurt you if you belong to Jesus. Look at the visual picture at the end of the chapter. The dragon somehow poured water in a great flood to try to sweep the woman away.

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“But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river.” Revelation 12:16

***The flood was a global judgment against sin.*** But afterwards God promised to never again flood the whole world. So here the dragon tries to send a flood of judgment to sweep away God’s people. But the earth itself, the land simply swallows up the flood.

The only other time in Scripture that the earth opens its mouth to swallow something was in Korah’s rebellion. When a Levite and some sons of Reuben challenged Moses and Aaron it didn’t end well for them. Korah and his whole family were swallowed up by the earth.

But here it isn’t a person that is swallowed up: **but JUDGMENT itself**. Death was swallowed up. Because Jesus allowed Himself to be swallowed by death, ***death cannot swallow you!*** The flood of God’s wrath fell upon Jesus in full strength, so you are protected from it! The dragon can scratch and roar, but he can’t actually hurt us.

One more way we can stand firm in the Lord. Go back to verse 3.

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

1. Resist the world, your own sin and the devil by **Trusting** in Jesus and **Testifying** to His grace and power

“Behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns and on his heads seven diadems.” Revelation 12:3

We know from Daniel that **huge scary beasts with horns and crowns represent kings and kingdoms**. This red dragon stands for the devil, but the heads and horns almost certainly represent kings and kingdoms that serve the devil.

So this chapter and the next one that introduces the beast, the antichrist, are about the final ***confrontation between the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this world.*** The whole book of Revelation builds to that final battle of kings and kingdoms.

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“His tail swept down a third of the stars in heaven and cast them to the earth.”

Revelation 12:4

Many who want to find a code for interpreting Revelation have taken this verse to mean that the devil took a third of the angels in a great rebellion. But it is ***more likely that these stars are human people***; children of God made in His image. You can go study Isaiah 14 and tell me if you think differently. But Tim Mackie of the Bible Project makes a strong case, I think, for this referring to humans, especially with the crown of stars reference just three verses earlier. People made in God’s image were supposed to rule over the earth and all beasts, including dragons.

Regardless of whether the fallen stars are humans or angels, ***it’s a WARNING to not follow the devil***. Anyone who follows the dragon or the beast will share in their fate: eternal suffering in the lake of fire. Don’t be among those foolish earth dwellers who reject the kingdom of God and instead choose Babylon.

**How to Stand Firm in the Lord:**

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“That ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth.” Revelation 12:9

Whatever the devil’s backstory, he rejected God’s rule and reign and was condemned to the earth, outside of God’s heaven. The great dragon was defeated and cast down.

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“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.’” Revelation 12:10

The devil is a defeated enemy. ***His kingdom is crumbling under his feet.*** Any evil rulers and dictators are grasping at sand. As Princess Leia told Grand Moff Tarken: “The more you tighten your grip, Tark, the more star systems will slip through your fingers.” (She could never quite decide if she was British.)

**The kingdom of Jesus arrived in the person of Jesus**, and it was inaugurated at His resurrection. Jesus is building His church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The devil is fighting a losing battle. It is already lost. We are just in the mopping up stages.

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“For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down… And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 12:10-11

This whole book is **a call to stand firm in the Lord**: trusting in Him and His finished work. We don’t overcome by our own strength or wisdom or cleverness. We conquer the devil by resisting the siren song of this world and remaining devoted to King Jesus. We prevail by trusting in the Lord with all our hearts and loving Him above all.

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“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.” Revelation 12:10-11

Here is how we win: ***we trust in Jesus, and we TESTIFY that He is worth it***. We proclaim His victory. We celebrate His glory and grace. We tell as many people as we can so we can rescue as many as possible from the lies of the devil and his impending doom.

Brothers and sisters, it is an apt analogy, that **we live in the days of Noah**. A great flood of judgment is coming – not of water but of fire. The place of salvation is available for all who will come to Jesus in faith. Now the door to life stands open – but it is up to us to call people in! To go out to the highways and hedges, to find the least and the lost and bring in the remaining lost sheep of God’s people. Time is short and the task is big.

Or flip it the other way. **We are on the Titanic.** This world is a giant sinking ship. It’s a luxury ocean liner, and many people are quite comfortable on it. But we have hit the iceberg, and God is sounding the alarm. It won’t be much longer before the ship goes under.

***But God has provided a LIFEBOAT!*** His name is Jesus and everyone who calls on that Name will be saved! It’s not enough to know ABOUT the lifeboat, you have to be ON the boat. It’s not enough to know ABOUT Jesus, you have to commit to Him in real, personal faith.

1. Resist the world, your own sin and the devil by **Trusting** in Jesus and **Testifying** to His grace and power

* We should expect fierce **Opposition** to our message, since Jesus **Divides** the good from the evil

“Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring…” Revelation 12:17

Here in the end game, in these last days, it’s not going to be a nice little coast to the finish. It’s going to be an all out sprint. It’s going to be a battle to the last man and woman. The devil is raging because he knows he has been defeated, he knows his time is short and he knows – very well, he knows – that the lake of fire is waiting for him.

So he is not going to let up. He is going to put all the pressure on. It’s going to get worse – a lot worse – before it gets better. How did they treat Jesus? How did they treat the apostles? How did they treat the prophets before them? Why should we expect anything different?

But our calling remains to stand firm in the Lord, trusting in Him and testifying about Him to any and all who will listen! So here is our summary:

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* The way God protected Israel, Mary and Joseph is how He protects all of His people

1. Rest in the **Finished** Work of Christ

* Jesus **Triumphed** over sin, death and the devil through His death and **Resurrection**

1. Resist the world, your own sin and the devil by **Trusting** in Jesus and **Testifying** to His grace and power

* We should expect fierce **Opposition** to our message, since Jesus **Divides** the good from the evil

First, take refuge in God who is our refuge and strength. Second, rest in the finished work of Jesus. The devil has been cast down. He is defeated. Jesus prevailed. So resist the devil. Resist the temptations of this world by trusting fully in Jesus. And stand firm - overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of your testimony!

Your homework today is to read Psalm 2 and see what the reference to ruling with a rod of iron means.

“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed.” Psalm 2:1-2

Psalm 1 and 2 are a dividing line. Will we be the blessed ones who resist evil and wickedness? Or will we be the cursed ones who reject God and His Anointed Messiah? The kings of the earth, those terrifying heads on the dragon, have taken their stand.

What about you?

Let’s pray.