**Revelation 12-14 What do you see? The costly victory of God’s people**

**Introduction**

Do you remember the Kaleidoscope as a child? It was a simple toy where you turned a handle and looked at the patterns created through the tinted plastic window. If you did that for a while you could become familiar with the available patterns of shapes that you might see. There is much complexity and variety in the details, but the general outlines are clear. The pattern of the visions in Revelation at first glance can seem totally confusing, but slowly over time you can see a glimpse of what is going on. The overall message is one of assurance that Christ and His Church will be victorious over the evil one and those that follow him. Revelation chapter twelve is the beginning of the second block of chapters, 12-22. The main theme is the same, but whereas in chapters1-11 the outward struggle between God’s people and those that oppose the Lord was highlighted; chapters 12-22 focus more on the spiritual battle between Jesus Christ and Satan the adversary pictured in the visions as a dragon. This message will focus on chapters twelve to fourteen. In summary, chapter twelve begins with the unsuccessful attempt of the devil to destroy Jesus (12:1-12); then he similarly fails in the persecution of the woman who brought forth the Messiah (12:13-17a), prior to waging war on the spiritual seed of the woman (12:17b). Chapter thirteen in symbolic form points to the means the devil uses in an attempt to harass and destroy the Christian Church. Chapter fourteen verses 1-16 portray the triumph of the Church of God with another reminder of the Final Judgement of the wicked in 14:17-20.

1. **The battle plans of Satan** (Revelation12:1-6)

*A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.****2****She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.****3****Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.****4****Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.****5****She 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.****6****The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

What is going on here? The radiant woman represents the Church of Jesus Christ or the Old Testament people of God (Isaiah 50:1; 54:1; Ephesians 5:32).The number twelve is the complete number of God’s people associated with her. The people of God are insignificant in this world’s terms. But are precious to God and portrayed here as glorious- *clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet*. Can she accomplish anything down the centuries? Her supreme accomplishment was the birth and arrival of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 9:5), *who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre,* a quotation of Psalm 2:9, a Psalm that is a prophetic statement about the coming Messiah and His reign in glory. Did the evil one manage to destroy this child? Absolutely not! There was the massacre of the little children in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18) and the death of Jesus on the cross (Luke23:46), but God the Father raised Him from the dead and He ascended to heaven, until the set time for His return in glory. That second coming is near. Revelation 12:10 declares: *Now have come the salvation and power and kingdom of God and the authority of His Christ*. God’s plans and purposes for His people are on track.

 The dragon is the symbol of Satan. The image of him *with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads* is intended as a description of his power and influence in this world. Paul, in Ephesians 2:2 spoke of people who were outside of Christ and dead in their transgressions and sins who: *followed the ways of the world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient*. The crowns represent a claimed authority to which he is not entitled to possess. The ten horns represent his destructive power attempting to undermine God’s plans for His creation. In other words, Satan worked to destroy the preparation for the coming of the Messiah in the Old Testament. ***4****Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.* This refers back to the fall of Lucifer when he was expelled from heaven with the other heavenly beings that joined in his rebellion against God. Isaiah 14:12-14: *You said in your heart ‘I will ascend to heaven. I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned … I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.*  The references to this in the Bible are few and it is unwise to speculate beyond what is stated, but the spiritual battle between Lucifer and the fallen angels against God and the heavenly beings that remained loyal to Him have been in the background of the story of human history on earth. In this conflict God wins and Jesus Christ will come to reign in His eternal kingdom. In this latest vision of the apostle John we have some glimpses ‘behind the scenes’ to remind us of the spiritual battle going on. Sometimes our confusion over the significance of events on earth might be eased by taking this into account. **What is the bigger picture here**?

The prophetic declaration of Genesis 3:15: *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel* was fulfilled through the outworking of this conflict in history. Satan wants to prevent the Messiah being born. The first setback is Cain murdering his brother Abel, jealous that God had accepted his brother’s sacrifice, but thankfully it is a descendant of another son Seth from which the Messiah will be born (Genesis 4); then prior to the Great Flood, only one man Noah and his family remain faithful to the Lord (Genesis 6:9,12). The promise is then passed to Abraham, but he and Sarah and then his son Isaac and his wife Rebekah struggle to conceive a child. In the next generation of the family Esau threatens to kill his brother Jacob in a family feud- all recorded in the book of Genesis. Eventually, the nation of Israel is formed and brought out of Egypt under Moses. But incredibly the people make themselves a golden calf to worship while Moses is encountering God and receiving the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. This caused God to be angry and contemplate destroying them until Moses interceded for them (Exodus 32:1-14). The Messiah was promised to be of the line of David (II Samuel7:11-13), but an evil spirit influenced King Saul to attempt to assassinate David. A few generations later, Queen Athaliah, wicked daughter of the infamous parents King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, tries to wipe out the royal household (II Kings 11:1-3),but once again the messianic line is down to one survivor, but little Joash survives! The plans of the evil one are thwarted again. In the eighth century BC, the forces of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel threaten to overwhelm little Judah. The prophet Isaiah says God will give him a sign of deliverance, but the godless King Ahaz declines to listen, but Isaiah declares anyway: …*the Lord will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and* *will call Him Immanuel* (Isaiah7:14). Three centuries later the wicked Haman, Prime Minister of the Persian Empire proposed carrying out genocide of the Jewish people (Esther 3:13) which God over ruled. We come to the Christmas story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, but even there the child is not safe. King Herod wanted to be sure he would kill the Messiah, so ordered to murder of all boys aged under two in the Bethlehem district (Matthew2: 16-18). God spoke through the wise men that persuaded Joseph to take his family and flee to Egypt until Herod had died. The evil one tried his worst, but Jesus was born. Jesus died in our place on the cross to reconcile us to God. Had Satan triumphed when His body was in Joseph’s tomb? Absolutely not! We rejoice in Resurrection Day on Easter Sunday AD33! Forty days later, Jesus ascended back into heaven. Here in Revelation 12:5 it states: *And her child was snatched up to God and to His throne.* God has triumphed over the evil one. His plans are on track. Human beings saw and experienced the events described above without knowing the bigger picture. It is a costly victory as evil came so close to being triumphant, but our God is greater. His plans will never be thwarted for His people on earth. But is there a bigger picture of what is going on?

2. **The defeat of Satan** (Revelation12:7-12)

***7****Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.****8****But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.****9****The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient snake called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.* ***10****Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.* ***11They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.******12****Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.’*

The second symbolic picture in Revelation 7-12 portrays the spiritual battle between the Archangel Michael and the angels in heaven, the defenders of God’s people against the devil and the fallen angels who oppose God’s plans and over human history up to the second coming of Jesus will do everything in their power to stop God’s plans from taking effect. At every stage outlined in the previous section, those who had wicked plans on earth and the evil forces in the heavenly realms were defeated. In Luke 10, there is an account of Jesus meeting with a group of seventy-two disciples who had returned rejoicing after a successful mission trip. *The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name. ‘He replied: ‘I saw Satan fall like lightening from heaven.’* (Luke10:17-18) What did Jesus mean with this response? It was a reinforcement of the clear message that is found in the Bible concerning the whole of human history that the evil one and all who behave in ways that support his plans will fail. In the present time, Satan is a defeated foe, but until the return of Jesus the people of God will endure struggles and setbacks that can discourage and deeply disappoint us at times, but the costly victory of God’s people, following in the footsteps of our Lord and Saviour is assured. On the cross before He laid down His life Jesus declared: *Finished* (John 19:30). The launch of the Christian Church a matter of weeks later, was the increasing and continuing reminder that Jesus had won the victory. *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.* ***11****They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony*;You are on the winning team as a follower of Jesus.

3. **The response of Satan to his defeat** (Revelation12: 13-17)

***13****When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.****14****The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the snake’s reach.****15****Then from his mouth the snake spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.****16****But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.****17****Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring – those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.* The third symbolic picture here is a reminder that the devil, although he knows he has failed, continues to harass the people of God. But God will give us the assistance we need to come through our times of trial. Here the language used is: *The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of…* It is not difficult to understand where in the Old Testament this imagery can be found. In Isaiah 40:29-31: *He gives strength to the weary  and increases the power of the weak.****30****Even youths grow tired and weary,  and young men stumble and fall;* ***31****but those who hope in the Lord   will renew their strength.* ***They will soar on wings like eagles****; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.* In other words, do not expect an easy time as a follower of Jesus. Do not assume that if you lead a God-honouring life that you will be spared the heartaches and struggles that other people experience. It doesn’t work like that! In some countries or cultural contexts, making a commitment to follow Jesus will result in facing bigger challenges and having a tougher time in this life. The *time, times and half a time* (12:14) or *forty-two months* (13:5) *1,260 days* (11:3) are all understood as approximately three and a half years. In I Kings 17-18 in one of the most difficult times of Israel’s history for the people of God Elijah prophesied in front of the royal court that as a result of turning from the living God to worship the Baals, the pagan gods, there would be neither dew nor rain until Elijah spoke again on the subject. James 5:17-18 tells us: *Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land* ***for three and a half years****.****18****Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.* In other words, for the limited time the trial endures, God will provide for our needs. What God promises is never to leave us nor forsake us and to equip and empower us by the Holy Spirit for the work He has called us to do.

4. **The people Satan uses to harass the Church** (Revelation 13:1-18)

**The beast from the sea** (Revelation13:1-10) The sea in biblical imagery, especially in Revelation, was a place of danger to be avoided. That danger could take different forms, but it is almost certainly here used of hostile nations and their governments. In a prophecy against the feared enemy in Damascus (Syria), Isaiah used this language in Isaiah 17:12: *Woe to the many nations that rage – they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the peoples who roar –they roar like the roaring of great waters!* ***13****Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when He rebukes them they flee far away.* In the Old Testament various empires were oppressors, for example, the Assyrians or the Babylonians. In New Testament times, and most prominently when Revelation was written, state persecution from the Roman Emperor Domitian was the big threat. However, it was most probable that John had the Daniel 7 vision of Empires represented by various beasts in mind. History has recorded many nations and Empires that acted in this way.

**The beast from the land** (Revelation13:11-18) This beast on the surface looks less threatening, but such a perception would be a mistake. This beast represents persecution and oppression from a false religious source. This is a more subtle attack by the evil one seeking to lead people away by false religious leaders. Jesus in Matthew 7:15 spoke of such figures as: …*false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.*

In II Corinthians 11:14, Paul expressed it this way: *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light*. In the last days, Jesus declared that this would become a bigger issue: *For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect – if that were possible* (Matthew 24:24). It is not our place to speculate on who this Beast might be, but the impression is given that anyone seeking to resist the pressures to conform to worshipping this figure that they and their families will have a very hard time surviving through those years.

5. **The triumph of the Church** (Revelation14:1-16)

(a)**The eternal blessings of the redeemed** (Revelation14:1-6) *Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.****2****And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.****3****And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.*

We have mentioned earlier in our studies of the number twelve or its multiples referencing the complete number of the people of God, none of them will be lost. The devil and his supporters have done their worst to pressure these believers to give up their faith, but they have endured to the end. The sound John hears in his vision is a majestic one of the glory of God and His exaltation by the people of God. Their hearts and minds are pictured as overflowing in worship and adoration of their great Redeemer and Saviour. This is what we look forward to in our lives beyond the grave. They are not afraid of encountering their Lord and Saviour because their salvation is assured through His wonderful sacrifice for them. His perfect righteousness has been credited to their account. Or as Paul expressed it in II Corinthians 5:21*: God made Him* (Jesus) *who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the rightousness of God.* This is why Charles Wesley in his hymn ’And can it be’ can write: ‘Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own.’

(b) **The warning of judgement for the wicked** (Revelation 14:6-11) No-one can stand on the Day of Judgement before Jesus and claim they knew nothing of God’s revelation. Undoubtedly, a proportion of them will be able to say that ‘I never had a clear gospel presentation of what Jesus did for me’, especially before the last two centuries. Paul, in Romans 2:14-16, explains that such persons will be judged by God in the light of their conscience. Did they seek to live in the light of the moral standards they knew in their consciences? Of course, there is no certainty in such a context compared to the knowledge of a child of God who has put their faith and trust in God through Jesus. Here in Revelation 14:6-7 a gospel appeal is heard: ***6****Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air, and he had* ***the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth****– to every nation, tribe, language and people.****7****He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.’* Have you put your faith and trust in Jesus? If not, why not do so today? Those who devoted themselves to ‘the beast’, the false religious leader referenced in Revelation 13, will face severe judgement for the wicked choices they have made. God alone knows what awful things such people will do, but observing what ISIS did in the Middle East to anyone who did not practice their extreme version of Sunni Islam, especially Yazidis and Christians, it is not too hard to contemplate what misplaced religious zeal might look like in that context. There are hints –but not more than that- that rewards for the righteous and punishment for the wicked are proportionate in eternity for the choices made here on earth, but we may safely say that *the Judge of all the earth will do what is right* (Genesis18:25).

(c) **The future prospects: (i)** **for faithful followers of** **Jesus** (Revelation 14:12-13) ***12****This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep His commands and remain faithful to Jesus.* ***13****Then I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write this: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.* The final two sections contrast the eternal consequences of the choices made in this life. For the believer a picture of tranquillity where the strife and troubles of this life will be over. Remember David’s vision in Psalm23 of bliss as *lying down in green pastures* and being beside *the still waters.* This was a picture of heaven for sheep with no predators present! All the stresses and strains of this life all gone. Is that not an attractive thought to you and me? It certainly is to me. (ii) **for evil followers of the beast** (Revelation14:17-20) Justice would catch up with them. In this life, too often the wicked who are rich and powerful escape accountability for their actions. That day will come when God catches up with them and deals with them appropriately. Our future prospects will depend on the choices we make here- will you and I choose wisely and follow the Lamb of God who once gave His life for sinners like us on the cross, but who one day soon will come to reign in glory? The Christian way can be a very difficult path to follow but this costly victory of following Jesus will be worth it all on that day, Amen.

**Questions for Reflection**:

Q1. Has the potential cost of following Jesus held you back from committing your life to Him? This passage reminds us that God will give us the grace to endure for Him.

Q2. *This calls for faithful endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints* (Rev.13:10b). What might this mean for you and me as followers of Jesus?

**Song for Reflection**: ‘Salvation belongs to our God’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aTaguk_Mz88>