

## “A Heavenly Perspective on Christmas” (Revelation 12:1–12)

What does your community think of when they think of Christmas? Presents, Christmas trees, Christmas lights, food. What do you think of when you think of Christmas? You most likely think about many of the same things that those in your community think of. However, you might include Christmas songs, a Christmas service, reading the Christmas story.

Did you notice no one mentioned war? Yes, that’s right—WAR! If we had asked the question: “What does heaven think of when it thinks of Christmas?” I believe the answer would be war. I know what you’re probably thinking: The words Christmas and war don’t go together. I understand how you must be feeling and I recognize that this may be a foreign thought to you. My hunch is you won’t like it, at least not at first. It’s like someone flipping the channel while you’re watching your favorite TV show or someone turning the dial when your favorite song is on the radio. Worse yet, it’s like someone grabbing your plate of Christmas cookies or swigging down your eggnog. We tend to picture the birth of Jesus as a tranquil, quiet and peaceful event. We picture shepherds in wordless wonder gazing at Jesus. We picture animals silently milling about in the stable. Even our songs tell us that when Jesus awakes, “no crying he makes.” It’s a silent night, in which all of creation holds its breath in silent wonder. But in the unseen world all hell breaks out, as God finally seeks to wrestle back creation from the power of evil. The birth of Jesus was the launch of God’s assault on the power of evil. I understand your sentimental ways. This is why I’m preaching this sermon today: Christmas Sunday is six days before Christmas day. This gives you plenty of time to recover from this sermon. But I ask you to consider what I’ve said and will it, because we cannot understand Christmas without it. In fact, all your Christmases will be hollow, phony, sentimental, empty without this picture of Christmas to add to the “traditional” nativity scene. *The birth of Jesus means war.*

I know you don’t want me to potentially ruin your Hallmark Christmas.

You might get nostalgic or sentimental or cozy with Matthew. Our stories/response to the Nativity cannot be reduced to shutting the door against a wintry world, drinking hot chocolate and singing carols. John offers another Nativity story, a story we need—to understand Christmas. But not only to understand Christmas, but to also understand our present world, our future, and our God.

Revelation 12 is really a wonderful Christmas text. But quite unlike the accounts in Matthew or Mark, the intent here is not to give a literal description of an historical event, but to pull back the curtain to see what spiritual forces were at work that night long ago

Let me start by describing the book of Revelation for a minute. The book of Revelation is a written description of a vision that the apostle John experienced while he was in exile on the Island of Patmos. John was one of Jesus’ followers, and he personally witnessed most of Christ’s miracles, his death on the cross, and his resurrection from the dead. John emerged as a leader in the early church, especially among the churches in Asia Minor, which is in modern day Turkey. John was sent into exile for his commitment to Jesus when a horrible outbreak of violence erupted against the Christian faith. The Roman government decided to try to exterminate the Christian faith, and one way to do that was to get rid of the Christian leaders. So John finds himself on a small Island off the coast of modern-day Turkey, totally isolated from other Christians. While the people John was called to pastor suffer and die at the hands of government persecution, John is helpless, powerless to do anything to help. One day while in prayer, John experiences an incredible vision of Jesus Christ—a revelation of Jesus—and ... One of the major purposes of this vision is to help us see suffering and pain from heaven’s perspective. The vision recounted in the book of Revelation also sheds light on the future, as it uses symbols, images and visions to describe the end of human history and the future second coming of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 12 of Revelation, we experience a heavenly flashback to the first Christmas. This flashback lifts the curtain and shows John and us what the first Christmas looked like from heaven's perspective. In 12:1–2, John writes, **“A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.”** John saw “a great sign.” In John's writings, a “sign”<sup>2</sup> is a symbol pointing to something else.<sup>3</sup> The fact that this “woman”<sup>4</sup> is spoken of as “a great sign” emphasizes that John is not referring to a literal woman. Some suggest that it is speaking of the Virgin Mary or Eve. Others have identified the woman as the church. Yet, the best option is to understand this woman as a symbolic reference to Israel. This is evident for the following reasons: (1) Israel is often identified as a woman in the Old Testament and is more specifically called God's wife.<sup>5</sup> (2) The image of the sun, moon, and twelve stars most definitely seems to be an allusion to Joseph's dream in Genesis 37:9–11, where the sun and moon are identified as Joseph's parents and the twelve stars represent the twelve sons of Jacob (ultimately the twelve tribes).<sup>6</sup> (3) The figure of Israel as a woman travailing in birth is found in several Old Testament passages.<sup>7</sup> (4) The verses that follow reveal that the woman will be persecuted in the last half of the tribulation (12:6, 13–17). This is an obvious clue that the woman is to be identified with the nation of Israel, the *source* of Messiah.

John introduces another character in 12:3: **“Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems”**.<sup>8</sup> The second “sign” John saw was the “dragon” that God later identifies as Satan (cf. 12:9).<sup>9</sup> A dragon is basically a serpent on steroids (cf. Gen 3:1f.). A dragon is an awesome, destructive creature, like the ones portrayed in the old science fiction movies. A dragon may be mythical and not an actual being, but the Bible draws on the imagery of a terrifying, destructive beast to characterize Satan.<sup>10</sup> His “red”<sup>11</sup> color suggests bloodshed and death. The seven heads represent mountains (Rev 17:9) and the ten horns represent kings (Rev 17:12; cf. Dan 7:7–8, 20, 24).

In 12:4, John writes that the Dragon's tail **“swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”** These “stars”<sup>12</sup> are fallen angels who revolted with Satan at his fall (see Isa 14:12–17; Ezek 28:12–14). At that time, one-third of the angels rebelled with Satan and became his servants in his fight and hatred against Israel and the purposes of God. God cast Satan and these angels out of heaven to earth. That is, they were no longer at home in God's presence though they presently have access to Him. John sees past and present events all brought together in a kaleidoscope. He sometimes will visualize events without identifying all the gaps in between.<sup>13</sup>

Verse 4 goes on to say, **“the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.”** Satan knows the prophecies about God's plan of redemption. He also knows that redemption would come through the promised Messiah who would come from the lineage of Israel. So we find him down through time waiting with fangs bared to devour the long-promised Messiah.<sup>14</sup>

In 12:5, we are introduced to the male child of the woman. John writes, **“And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up<sup>15</sup> to God and to His throne.”** This is a one-sentence summary of Christ's birth, life, and ascension into heaven. Since Satan failed to destroy Jesus at His birth, during His life, and in His death, Jesus Christ ascended victoriously into heaven.<sup>16</sup> Satan cannot persecute Him there. This verse also teaches that one day Jesus will rule the world with a “rod of iron” (Ps 2). This is a reference to Christ's rule over the nations of the world, in the establishment of His millennial kingdom, during His second coming (cf. 19:15). The emphasis of this historical review of Satan's opposition to Jesus is Jesus' victory and Satan's continuing antagonism.

Psalm 2 is a Messianic psalm, a prophesy of the coming Messiah. V. 9 of the Psalm reads, "You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Thus the man child is the Messiah, the Lord Christ. We are told as much explicitly in v. 10, "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come. The birth of this child is the fulfillment of the prophesy of Micah 5:2–3. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth. Jesus Christ's birth in Bethlehem is God's victory over the dragon. When we celebrate Christmas each year, we sing 'Joy to the world.'" But we must also remember that Jesus' birth excites more than wonder. It incites evil.

Unable to destroy Christ, Satan turned his attention toward the woman, Israel. In 12:6, we are told, "the woman fled<sup>17</sup> into the wilderness<sup>18</sup> where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days."<sup>19</sup> John saw Israel as having fled into the wilderness where God protected her 1,260 days (three-and-a-half years) during the second half of the tribulation period.<sup>20</sup> The passive verb "prepared" suggests that God, angels (cf. Dan 12:1), and perhaps Gentiles will care for the Jews at this time. This section can be summarized like this: God's chosen people (Israel) are an important part of His program. Even though Satan has had it in for the Jews, God has preserved His people in both the past and present and will continue to do so in the future.

In 12:7, John writes, "**And there was war in heaven.**" The tense of the verb "was"<sup>21</sup> indicates that John is referring to a future war that will take place during the tribulation period (cf. 12:12). The war pits Michael and his angels against the Dragon and his angels.<sup>22</sup> Michael the archangel (Jude 9) is the leader of God's angelic army.<sup>23</sup> In the Old Testament he also had a special role in protecting the nation of Israel (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; cf. Jude 9). The Dragon, of course, is Satan. Satan's angels ; are his demons that were once part of God's angels, but earlier fell with Satan. The number of these demons as mentioned in 12:4 was one-third of the total number of the angelic host. This is clearly a spiritual battle in the realm of heaven.<sup>24</sup>

Fortunately, 12:8 informs us that Satan and his angels "**were not strong enough.**" While the warring was no doubt intense, the Dragon and his angels were not capable of defeating God's holy angels. The end result is, "there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon<sup>25</sup> was thrown down" (12:8b–9a). The later half of 12:9 makes it clear Satan and his demonic horde will be "thrown down to the earth." While Satan and his demons, shortly after creation, fell and were cast out of heaven, Satan still had access to heaven to accuse the brethren (cf. Job 1:6–7; 2:1–2 Zech 3:1–2). Satan today still has access to heaven where he functions as the accuser of believers.<sup>26</sup> However in this future time, when Satan and his demons lose this heavenly battle he will no longer be permitted access to heaven to bring forth those accusations. In fact, as 12:9 says, "the great dragon was thrown down." The verb *ekballo* ("thrown down") is a strong verb denoting a powerful throwing or propelling. It is what Laker's star Shaquille O' Neal does when he gets the ball down low in the paint—he "throws down" *ekballo* (i.e., slam dunks). The word emphasizes that Satan is cast down out of heaven once and for all. Not only Satan, but also his entire demonic force is permanently limited to the realm of the earth from this point on.

Don't miss that this is not a battle between God and Satan, but between Michael and Satan.<sup>27</sup> It is two created angels and their forces battling each other. Satan has perpetuated the lie that he is God's opposite. He is not God's opposite. He is not omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent. He is only a created being. He can't even go one round with God. In our times of discouragement and seeming defeat, we must remember that the powers of good will overcome the powers of evil. Satan and his demonic forces may win some battles along the way but they will ultimately lose the war!

In 12:9, John also gives four descriptive phrases to identify the Dragon. (1) The Dragon is “the serpent of old.”<sup>28</sup> This title stresses his crafty and venomous character (cf. Gen 3:1–5; 2 Cor 11:3). The word “old” (*ophis*) brings to remembrance the first accusation of Satan as the Serpent in the garden of Eden in his temptation of Eve. (2) The Dragon is “the devil.” The word “devil” comes from a Greek verb (*diabolos*) meaning “to slander” or “to falsely accuse.” Satan acts as somewhat of a prosecutor in God’s court of law. His tasks are to arraign men before the bar of the divine justice.<sup>29</sup> (3) The Dragon is “Satan.” The word “Satan” (*Satanas*) is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means “Adversary.”<sup>30</sup> This proper name depicts Satan as the enemy or opponent of God and His people. (4) The Dragon is “the one who deceives the whole world.” The word translated “deceives” (*planon*) means “to mislead, delude, or lead astray.”<sup>31</sup> Who is said to be deceived? The whole world!

As John beholds Satan and his angels being cast from heaven, he hears a loud voice in heaven say, “**Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night**” (12:10). The loud voice is not identified and probably cannot be with certainty. It does, however, seem best to identify it as the voice of the martyred tribulation saints, for they also cried out with a loud voice (cf. 6:10). This is further supported by the mention of Satan as “the accuser of our brethren.”

We learn in 12:11 that these tribulation martyrs (“they”)<sup>32</sup> “**overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.**” This verse imparts three weapons that these martyrs will use to overcome Satan. The first weapon is “the blood of Lamb.” The blood shed on the cross ensures that God will forgive us (Rom 8:31–34). Thus, Satan’s accusations, however true, are rendered null and void in God’s court of law. So how can we practically apply this truth? First, we have to honestly admit the truth of Satan’s accusation: We are sinners! Secondly, we should remind Satan that the blood of the Lamb covers us. Our sins have all been nailed to the cross of Christ and we will no longer be judged or accused by God for these sins.

The second weapon we have is the word of our testimony (see 1:9; 6:9). This refers to both lives and lips. We must be salt and light to our world (Matt 5:13–16). When we share our testimony, we move into Satan’s territory and it’s intimidating to him! Our testimony is powerful and irrefutable.

The third weapon we have is a refusal to love one’s life.<sup>33</sup> These tribulation martyrs were willing to give up anything for Jesus: reputation, status, and possessions. They were even willing to give up their lives for what they believed, even if it meant suffering the violent death of a martyr. They followed the instruction given to the church in Smyrna (2:10) of being faithful unto death as well as the example of the Savior who laid down His life for the sheep (John 10:11, 15). They would rather die than prove unfaithful to Christ. Rather than signaling the triumph of Satan, this shows instead that they have gained the victory over the Dragon by their acceptance of Jesus’ cross and their obedient suffering with Him. This is one of John’s chief themes throughout the book of Revelation (1:9; 6:9; 14:12; 20:4).

The victory of these believers leads to the bittersweet words of 12:12: “**For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.**” Heaven-dwellers can rejoice in view of Satan’s punishment (cf. Ps 96:11; Isa 49:13). He is no longer among them. However, everyone living on the earth, especially believers, must beware because he now moves among them more antagonistically than ever. Furthermore he knows that his time is short. He will have only 1,260 days before Jesus Christ returns to the earth and binds him (20:1–2).

Let me give you the second insight. FROM HEAVEN’S PERSPECTIVE, THE BIRTH OF JESUS BROUGHT THE WORLD’S RIGHTFUL RULER TO THIS EARTH. Jesus was the rightful king from

his very birth, which is why Herod tried to destroy him. Yet Jesus isn't just king of the Jews, the rightful heir to King David's throne in Israel. Jesus is truly king of kings, lord of lords, the rightful ruler of the creator over the entire earth. Until Jesus assumes his rightful throne over this earth, every other ruler and political leader we have will be imperfect and inadequate.

FROM HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE, THE BIRTH OF JESUS SIGNALLED GOD'S INVITATION TO THE HUMAN RACE. You see, evil has infected the human race like a deadly virus. God has the power to destroy the virus, but if he destroys the virus, he also destroys all humans who are infected with it. This deadly virus is called sin in the Bible, and it's a condition of rebellion to God. According to the Bible, all people have been infected with sin, it's worked itself into the very fabric of our lives. God is going to destroy the sin and evil, but first he wants to offer the human race a cure of the virus, so they don't get swept away when he destroys evil. While we focus on things like gift giving, mistletoe, decking the halls and hitting the eggnog, God views Christmas as an invitation. Have you RSVP'd to God's invitation? Have you responded by placing your faith in Jesus, the son given for us. Have you trusted that he lived a perfect life and died a sacrificial death to deliver you from your sins? If you haven't, you're missing the real point of Christmas from God's perspective. Once you respond to the invitation, all the other stuff takes on deeper meaning...the lights, the carols, the trees, the gifts. But if you haven't yet responded to this invitation, you've missed the most important part of Christmas. From heaven's perspective, Christmas signaled an invitation to the human race.

One last insight: FROM HEAVEN'S PERSPECTIVE, JESUS HAS ALREADY OVERCOME THE POWER OF EVIL. Although Satan will have access to heaven until later in the Tribulation, he has been defeated and his days are numbered. Any opposition he gives in the meanwhile is simply an enraged act of desperation by a defeated foe. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ was the only way to overcome Satan and offer salvation to the human race. No other way could do it, not religion, not good works, not trying real hard. Only Christ's work could defeat the power of Satan, and Jesus was willing to do whatever it took to accomplish that goal. Though we may still suffer and see evil active in our world, these are merely the desperate convulsions of a defeated enemy. So we overcome in the midst of such evil, not by striking back with evil ourselves, but by trusting in the power of Christ to finish what he started. We overcome through Christ's death—the blood of the Lamb—and our faithfulness to follow Jesus, even in the face of death. Christmas was the first step Jesus took in overcoming the power of evil in our world. Once CNN journalist Larry King was asked what historical character he'd most like to interview. He said he'd like to interview Jesus. When asked what he'd ask Jesus, Larry King replied, "I'd like to ask Him if He was really born of a virgin, because how He answered that question would define history for me." Larry King is right, that it would change everything.

As Jesus lay in the manger, somewhere in Palestine there grew a tree, straight and strong. One day that tree would be cut down and fashioned into a cross. And thus it would become the ultimate Christmas tree upon which was hung the ultimate gift! John wants us to see the manger through the lens of the cross!

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> When I preached this message, I passed around a handheld microphone and received responses from the congregation. Some of the responses are included in my introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Usually John uses the word “sign” (*semeion*) to describe something miraculous that points to some deeper spiritual significance connected with an event or object (cf. John 2:11, 18, et al.).

<sup>3</sup> While no signs appear in Rev 1–11, seven signs are mentioned in chps 12–19 (cf. the seven signs in John 1–11). Three signs are in heaven (12:1, 3; 15:1) and four are on earth (13:13–14; 16:14; 19:20). Only one is a sign of good (12:1); the others are omens of evil or judgment from God.

<sup>4</sup> There are four women mentioned in Revelation. These are (1) Jezebel (2:20), a woman who claimed to be a prophetess in the church of Thyatira, and who stands for false teachers within the church in the church age; (2) the harlot (17:4), the false religious system of the last days, apostate Christendom; (3) the bride (19:7), the true church, glorified and returning with Christ; and (4) the woman (12:1), the nation Israel.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Isa 54:5–6; Jer 3:6, 8; 31:32; Ezek 16:32; Hos 2:16.

<sup>6</sup> This identifies the woman with Israel and the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

<sup>7</sup> Evidently this represents Israel’s pain before Jesus Christ’s appearing at His first coming (cf. Isa 26:17–18; 66:7–12; Hos 13:13; Mic 4:10; 5:2–3).

<sup>8</sup> Diadem crowns were a type of crown used as a symbol of the highest ruling authority in a given area, and thus often associated with kingship. See NET notes: [www.bible.org/netbible/](http://www.bible.org/netbible/).

<sup>9</sup> The word “dragon” (*dragkon*) occurs twelve times in Revelation and nowhere else in the NT. In every instance it refers to Satan (12:3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2).

<sup>10</sup> Tony Evans, *The Battle is the Lord’s* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 123.

<sup>11</sup> The term “red” (*purros*) means, “fiery red.” It denotes either “flame-colored” to depict destruction or “blood-red” to denote murder.

<sup>12</sup> The Scriptures often use the term “stars” for angelic beings and specifically of Satan (e.g., Rev 9:1; Job 38:7; Isa 14:12; Luke 10:18).

<sup>13</sup> See also Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Serpent of Paradise* (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 169.

<sup>14</sup> Beginning in the book of Genesis, we see Satan’s numerous attempts to devour the future Messiah’s line.

- Satan motivated Cain to kill Abel (Gen 4:1–8). But God raised up Seth as the seed and the lineage continued (4:25).
- Satan caused such evil to pervade the earth that God destroyed everyone but eight people in the flood (Gen 6:17).
- Next, Satan motivated Esau in an attempt to kill Jacob, Isaac’s son of promise (Gen 27:41).
- After that, Satan gave Pharaoh the idea of killing every Hebrew male baby. Again, the plan failed (Exod 1:16; Acts 7:17–19).
- Satan also tried to have Saul kill David because it was prophesied that the Messianic line would come through David (1 Sam 18 ff.).
- Later, Haman tried to kill all of the Jews in the kingdom. Instead, Haman was hung on his own gallows (Esther 3–9).
- One of the most amazing accounts is found in 2 Chron 21–22. Here we read that the entire royal seed of Israel was completely wiped out except for one, Joash, who was hidden for six years. All Messianic hope was one baby away from complete obliteration! But God preserved the seed.
- After the Jesus was born, Satan tried to kill the child directly using Herod (Matt 2:3–8). But God intervened as he had so often in the past, and protected the infant Jesus by warning Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt beyond the reach of Herod (2:13).
- In Luke 4, people tried to kill Jesus; in Matt 4, Satan himself attempted to kill Him, telling Jesus to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple.
- After all of these failures, Satan still persists in afflicting Israel because God promised He will reign from there. Throughout history, we have seen Satan’s attempt to wipe out God’s plan in the persecution of the Jews. It is Satan-inspired anti-Semitism.

<sup>15</sup> The phrase “caught up” (*harpazo*) means, “to suddenly seize or snatch away.” This Greek word is used in reference to the rapture in 1 Thess 4:17, in describing Paul’s being caught up to Paradise in 2 Cor 12:2–4, and in reference to the Spirit of God catching up Philip in Acts 8:39.

<sup>16</sup> Jesus Christ was born of Jewish descent (Matt 1:1–2; 2 Tim 2:8). Despite Satan’s efforts to destroy Israel and the messianic line, Jesus’ birth took place as predicted by the prophets.

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<sup>17</sup> Those Israelites who flee (Rev 12:6, 16) will be protected by God, but those who stay will come under Satan's attack. This is why in Matt 24:15–18 Jesus warned Israel to flee Jerusalem when they saw the abomination of desolation in the temple. Evidently many Israelites will flee from Jerusalem into desolate places to escape Satan's persecution (cf. Zech 14:1–8; Matt 24:16; Mark 13:14).

<sup>18</sup> Throughout Scripture a wilderness often represents a place of desolation, safety, discipline, and testing. It is unclear exactly what wilderness area that those from Judea will flee to. Most suggest the areas of Moab, Edom or Ammon, which all lie east of Israel and will be spared from Antichrist's attack on Israel (cf. Dan 11:41).

<sup>19</sup> Rev 12:1–5 has been somewhat reflective, however 12:6 is somewhat anticipatory of what will be described in 12:13–17.

<sup>20</sup> This destructive time is called the great tribulation or the time of Jacob's trouble. This flight into the wilderness is predicted by Christ in His Olivet Discourse in Matt 24:16 ff. and takes place immediately after the abomination of desolation mentioned in 24:15. So the flight takes place at the mid-point of the tribulation and God will protect those who flee during the remaining 3½ years.

<sup>21</sup> It is at this point that we are told that there was war in heaven. The verb "was" (*egeneto*) is in the aorist and as it is used here carries the force of "came to be" or "arose." There came to be a war in heaven or there arose a war in heaven. This is best translated as it is in the NKJV, "And war broke out in heaven."

<sup>22</sup> This is not Michael's first encounter with Satan: He overcame Satan when an angel was battling Satan for twenty-one days (Dan 10:13) and he disputed with Satan over the body of Moses (Jude 1:9). But the conflict in view here evidently takes place just before the last half of the tribulation.

<sup>23</sup> Michael's name is a composition of: *mi*, "who," and a preposition, *ke*, "as or like," and the noun *El*, "God."

Michael means, "Who is like God?" Of course the answer is, "No one!" It is interesting that God sends Michael to defeat Satan whose boast in Isa 14:14 is, "I will make myself like the most High."

<sup>24</sup> It is unclear exactly how these two forces will battle each other since our human picture of war is strictly material.

<sup>25</sup> Satan is called "the great Dragon" because he is fierce and cruel in nature.

<sup>26</sup> Paul tells us in Eph 6:12 that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood . . . but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." It's so important to realize that other people are not really our problem. Our real opponent is the Devil and his army of wicked spirits who manipulate people and events. Where are the Devil and his allies? In the heavenly places—they still have access to heaven.

<sup>27</sup> "Let us not forget that at one time Michael and Satan (previously called Lucifer) were colleagues, they served the same master and had essentially the same responsibilities. Since it is likely that Michael at one time served under Lucifer, the loss of this battle was especially painful for the Devil. He was thrown out of heaven by one who at one time had been his underling." See Lutzer, *The Serpent of Paradise*, 170.

<sup>28</sup> The identification of Satan as a serpent occurs five times in the New Testament (cf. Rev 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2; 2 Cor 11:3).

<sup>29</sup> This is best evidenced in the book of Job as Satan acts as Job's accuser before God (cf. Job 1:9–11; 2:1).

<sup>30</sup> The Aramaic corresponding to originally meant "one lying in ambush for."

<sup>31</sup> Satan causes people loved by God to miss the plan and truth of God by (1) lying against the truth; he is the father of lies (Gen 3:1–5; John 8:44); (2) denying the truth (1 John 4:3 with 2 Pet 2:2); (3) counterfeiting or imitating the truth (2 Cor 11:3–15); and (4) perverting or distorting the truth (1 Tim 4:1–5 with Gal 3:1–3). He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14) and masks his true identity in order to deceive the nations.

<sup>32</sup> The pronoun "they" (*autoi*) refers to believers whom Satan formerly accused before God.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Rev 2:10; Matt 16:25; Luke 9:23; 17:33; John 12:25; and Acts 20:24.