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The Ascension of Jesus Christ and the Fall of the Dragon – Revelation 12

Introduction – One of the main purposes of Jesus' ministry on earth was to be the Son of Man who would sit upon the throne of God and rule the nations. This took place forty days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3) on earth. In John's Revelation we are told what took place in heaven. The Father installed His King on Zion and Satan was cast down. This is critical to understand as we ourselves stand against the Devil. As David Chilton writes, *"The Dragon persecutes the church precisely because Christ defeated him.....The Devil is fighting a losing battle, for he has already been defeated at the cross and at the tomb."*

The Ascension of Jesus Christ (vv1-6) – We understand the events prophesied in the book of Revelation are *"the things which must shortly take place"* (1:1, 22:6), that is, they prophesy of the end of the Old Testament era, the fall of the earthly Jerusalem and its temple and sacrificial system, and the establishment of the heavenly Jerusalem and the new temple of God, which is the church. The center of that change takes place when Jesus Christ comes to the throne of His Father to reign over heaven and earth as Victor over the Devil, over sin, and even death itself.

The story of Jesus is told in summary form. A woman (Israel) labors in pain to bring forth her promised Seed (vv1-2). A great dragon, however, awaits the birth of this promised Son, seeking to devour Him (vv3-4). This dragon is none other than "that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan" (v9) who is revealed to be the power behind the four Beast-empires of Daniel's prophesy (Dan 7:3-7). Despite his efforts, the Son is caught up to God and His throne to rule the nations (v5, Psalm 2:6-9). Finally, the woman flees into the wilderness for 1,260 days. The next section explains why this took place.

The Fall of the Dragon (vv7-12) – As Jesus predicted His death, He said, *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out"* (John 12:31). At the cross, *"having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it"* (Col 2:15). Here, in Revelation, we are shown what happened in heaven. With the ascension of Christ, *"a war broke out in heaven..."* (v7), Michael ("who is like God") as an agent (or symbol) of Christ, cast the devil and his apostate angels (the third of the stars) out of heaven and upon the earth (land, the land of Israel – v9). Remember, Jesus pictures the church, not as a city under siege, but rather as a great army, besieging the capital city and headquarters of the enemy (Matt 16:18). The great accuser (this is what "devil" means) can no longer bring his false-accusations before the throne of God. Satan is a great liar, and therefore he deceives the whole world (v9) to turn against the early Christian church. The loud voice proclaims that he who had accused the brethren before God has been cast down, and the church overcomes by the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore, those who "tabernacle" (not just dwell) in heavens are to join in exultant worship (v12). John has made clear that the Church's worship really and truly takes place before the heavenly throne of God (4:4-11, 5:8-14, 7:9-17), for we have been raised up with Christ to the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Our worship is beheld by the angelic multitude (1 Cor 11:10, Eph 3:10). We understand that we come in worship to this festal assembly in heaven (Heb 12:22-23). There is a sense in which we have come up with the Child in His Ascension (Eph 1:20-22) and have become His tabernacle (Rev 7:15, 13:6).

At War With the Woman (vv13-17) – But this is not the end of the dragon's activity; *"...like a cornered rat he becomes even more frantically vicious, his snarling rage increasing with his frustration and impotence"* (Chilton). This is why the persecuted woman must flee for "a time, and times and half a time" (v14). The woman is delivered out on the wings of eagles, just as in the days of Moses (Ex 19:4). With images reflective of that deliverance from Egypt, water is spewed out of the serpent's mouth but the land swallows the flood and God reveals His constant protection.

The dragon's time was short (v12), and in his failure to devour the Child and then the woman, *"the dragon was enraged...and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ"* (v17).

The Ramifications of Ascension Day for Us – When Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, leaving earth, He did not simply vanish into thin air, never to be heard from again.

Jesus Sits on the Throne of God in Victory – As we sang in Psalm 110, Jesus rules from heaven and will remain there until His enemies are made a footstool. His reign is a reign of victory.

Satan Hates This – so he roams like a roaring lion, still seeking to devour (1 Pet 5:8ff) and therefore we must be sober, watchful and vigilant, keeping our eyes on Jesus. Remember, there is a battle with the Devil because Christ has conquered.

We Have Access to Heaven which is Denied to Satan – He once had access to the Throne, but now the Son of Man and His followers have direct access, even tabernacle there, where the nations are given to the Son (Psalm 2). We participate in this corporately and covenantally as we gather together at His summons on the Lord's Day.

Satan Hates This – While the angels rejoice with us, we must remember that this service and our devotion enrages Satan. Leithart writes, *"That is the double-sided nature of the ascension. Jesus has gone victoriously into heaven to rule all things; but at the same time the dragon is cast to earth, where he makes war on us. The ascension is a victorious conclusion; at the same time, it means the battle is*

just beginning."

We Have a Defeated Enemy – *"Jesus' ascension means the battle is won, and so we live in hope of victory; the ascension means the battle intensifies, and so we cannot relax our guard or lay down our weapons. We fight in hope, but we must fight. Ignoring either is disastrous for the church" (Leithart).*

Our continuing triumph takes place as we imitate Jesus, living by faith in Him. Suffering and humbling leads to exaltation, taking up our cross leads to resurrection. We remain faithful through our testimony to Jesus, keeping the commands of God (Rev 12:17). This leads to the Devil's final end.

Dave Hatcher – Ascension Sunday, May 20, 2007