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THE WAR IN HEAVEN: DISCOVERING THE FINAL EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN AND  
THE VICTORY OF MICHAEL

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# THE WAR IN HEAVEN: DISCOVERING THE FINAL EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN AND THE VICTORY OF MICHAEL

Since the early days of Christianity, the battle between good and evil, Satan and God, has been a question that fascinates and terrifies humanity. In the context of Revelation, that battle gains detail and definition, but there remains a vast amount that scholars have yet to discover if we ever will. The purpose of this paper is to look at Revelation chapter 12 and to understand specifically when the war in heaven took place. From the time I was young, I was taught that there was a single war in heaven, fought between the Devil and God at a time before the creation of the Earth. In the next several pages I hope to present a different point of view. The war spoken of in Revelation 12 happened after the death and ascension of Jesus and concluded the time of limited access that Satan had with heaven after his angel followers and he were expelled from heaven.

## **Background**

The immediate background to this passage is the vision which John (presumably the apostle John) sees; a great sign in the heavens. He beholds a woman standing on the moon with a crown of stars and she gives birth to a male child. The other sign in the heavens is this great red dragon, and it has 7 heads with 7 crowns. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven. Subsequently, he tries to destroy this male child “who is to rule,” and so the woman flees into the wilderness. There is no record of the death of the child, but simply His ascension to heaven. This does not mean that it was not Jesus, but rather that the author does not want to portray the death of Jesus because the chapter focuses on the victory.<sup>1</sup> This is the same fleeing into the wilderness

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<sup>1</sup> A. Pataki, “A Non-combat Myth in Revelation 12,” *Journal of New Testament Studies* 57 no. 2 (2011): 258-272.

in verse 6 as verse 14. There is an interesting parallel between these two verses which outline the two ends of the passage about the war in heaven. The narrative is abruptly interrupted to explain the extra-terrestrial side of the Great Controversy before returning to the battle on this earth. This background gives us a hint at when the events in verses 7 and following occur. They occur before the fleeing into the wilderness.

The audience of Revelation is specifically the 7 churches of Asia Minor. These were churches most likely made up of Jews and Gentiles. This does not limit the reading of the book to them. In Rev 22: 18 it says “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll.” It was written to God’s people (verse 21), both in that age and until history is finished.

The fact that the audience and the authors were Jews greatly affected the symbols that were used throughout chapter 12 of Revelation. Let us assume that the audience is familiar with the Hebrew Canon, as it seems they must have been in order to understand the words of Revelation 12. Verse 5 states, “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron.” Where does this come from? Isaiah 11 it talks about one who will judge righteously and “strike the Earth with the Rod of his mouth.” This chapter is clearly talking about the Messiah based on its usage of the “stump of Jesse” and the other descriptions it gives. Psalm 2 also talks about this “anointed of the Lord.” In verse 7 it states “you are my Son; today I have begotten you.” Here we see the parental language. It connects even more when it says “You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.” (verse 9). Those who studied the scriptures carefully would have understood this child to be the Messiah, but those who had not would miss the reference altogether. In Hebrews 5:5 the author makes it clear by quoting this psalm as applying to Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, the writer does not leave out those who would not have understood the Biblical references as well. They would have been

familiar with the Roman tale of the birth of Apollo, which was a strikingly similar to the story portrayed in Revelation.<sup>2</sup> John artfully brings together Jewish stories and history with Gentile history to directly connect the audience with the story of Jesus, and the Great Controversy.

Next, we will look at the use of the wilderness symbolism. The most noticeable wilderness experience is found in the Exodus, where the Israelites wandered for 40 years, and then 40 more years after refusing Gods offer to deliver the promised land into their hands. It was not a place of refuge, but rather a painful memory. But this begins to change as the story of Israel progresses. Elijah fled to the wilderness to flee Jezebel in 1 Kings 19. In 1 Kings 17, you find Elijah fed by Ravens in the wilderness. Isaiah 40 speaks about clearing the way for the Lord in the wilderness. This is what John the Baptist strives to do, living in the wilderness and preparing the way for Jesus. Jesus himself retreats to the wilderness in and is tempted coming away the victor. The wilderness becomes a place where there is trial, but out of that struggle comes victory. God appointed just such a place in the wilderness for the woman. The audience would have understood that there would be trials for the woman there, but also victory.

### **Translation**

I have included in this paper a personal translation of Revelation 12:7-15 which encompasses the main arguments regarding the war in heaven.

“7. And war was in heaven, Michael and his angels warred against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels battled back.” Although the English Standard version translates the *Kai* at the beginning of the sentence as “now,” the conjunction does not seem to make any statement as to the time of the event taking place. An argument could be made that it be translated as “then,” since it is following a completed statement of time. Nevertheless, I think a simple translation is

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<sup>2</sup> Tremper Longman III, edit., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* Volume 13 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 692-698.

better in this case, and so I translated the conjunction simply as “and.” The *kai* works to connect the previous statement (the woman fled to the wilderness to escape the dragon for 1260 days) with the current verse, even though the two have different topics. Verse seven functions as the transition into a new “scene” in what appears to be a continuous flow of events.

The word, “Michael,” occurs only 2 times in the New Testament, the other time is Jude 1:9 which is speaking of the time after the death of Moses. Michael is closely associated with the title of archangel.<sup>3</sup> This is one who is close to God, even on the right or left side of God. That is the same place occupied by Christ when he is seen by Stephen in Acts 7. If Michael is Jesus,<sup>4</sup> it makes sense for him to become the driving force against Satan since Christ is the victor over death.<sup>5</sup>

“8. And he [dragon] was not able nor was place still found for them in heaven.” The place referred to could be his home, that he was no longer able to reside in heaven. It could also represent the access that Satan had to God and to other beings in the universe in Job 1.

“9. And the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one who is called Devil and Satan,<sup>6</sup> the one deceiving the whole world [specifically the people]. He was cast to the Earth and his angels were thrown with him.” The word οἰκουμένην, which I translated “whole world,” can mean house, dwelling, or even temple. It could be interpreted as “house of the Earth.” In this passage, the participle is used as a noun and is specifically referring to the inhabitants on the earth. It is

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<sup>3</sup> George Buttrick, edit., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* Volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 372-373.

<sup>4</sup> Name also means “who is like God,” the prince of princes in Daniel 10:13, and equated with God himself Joshua 5.

<sup>5</sup> Because of the passive voice of the aorist verbs, it would tell you that the angels and Satan were not cast out by Michael, but rather by God. Here you may see evidence that Michael is God.

David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary* Volume 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 691-696.

<sup>6</sup> With all the names listed in verse 9 we can safely say that this being, the dragon, is the one who was formerly known as Lucifer in Isaiah 14, Serpent – Genesis 3:1; Devil – Matthew 4:1; Satan – Matthew 4:10, Mark 3:23, 1 Corinthians 5:5, Zechariah 3:1-2, Job 1:6-12; Deceiver – John 8:44, 2 Corinthians 11:3, Daniel 8:25.

used as a substantive participle 45 times in the LXX. In Luke, it stated that the emperor ordered the *world* to be registered. This may, in fact, be referring only to the Roman Empire. Some scholars believe that every time this word is used in the New Testament it is referring solely to the Roman Empire since it is often used in this manner in Luke and Matthew.<sup>7</sup> “The world” is frequently used to describe all the inhabitants of the known world. In Jesus’ temptation, Luke chapter 4, this same word is used to describe what Satan showed Jesus.<sup>8</sup> It does not seem to be speaking specifically about the Roman empire in this case, but rather all the world which was known to be inhabited at the time of John, and maybe even beyond this. It is this interpretation of the word that I have chosen to use.

The verb “cast” is a powerful movement of throwing or propelling. It often is translated as a resolute separation from what entices humans to sin.<sup>9</sup> The verb is found just 60x in the LXX. It can be used to mean throw into hell, can refer to the devil casting a thought into someone’s mind, or putting a moral stumbling block in the way of a person.<sup>10</sup>

One identification that the war mentioned here in verse 9 did not occur before creation is the present participle translated “deceiving.” The present means that the action is happening in the current time. If John wanted to portray Satan as deceiving the world only after the war, he would have used the future tense.

“10. And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying: now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of Christ himself has come, because the accuser of

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<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Kittel, edit., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 156.

<sup>8</sup> Colin Brown, edit., *International Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 469.

<sup>9</sup> Gerhard Kittel, edit., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 526.

<sup>10</sup> Colin Brown, edit., *International Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 458.

our brothers [and sisters] has been thrown [down], the one who accuses them [during] day and night before our God.” *Shamayim* and *raqiyah* are synonyms of the Greek word for heaven used here. In the Hebrew language they can be used to both describe the physical heavens or the place in which YHWH dwells. God does not strictly reside in heaven although that is a place of residence, he also resides in the temple, ark of the covenant, etc.<sup>11</sup> In relation to this verse, the use of heaven is not geographical or cosmological, but theological. Angels are in heaven and return to heaven, it is the battleground of the Great Controversy that we cannot see.<sup>12</sup>

Several pieces of evidence for the post-ascension war of chapter 12 come from this verse. The first is that the Devil is called the accuser of the brethren. The brethren were not in existence before creation because this term refers explicitly to human beings.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the accusing is an ongoing tempting of humanity. The Devil not only tempts the brethren but has continued doing it for an extended period of time (*hemera*). To the Greeks “a day” could mean a time like time of your youth. Time is characterized by its content, not duration in this case.<sup>14</sup>

“11. And they have overcome him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because the word of their testimony; and they have not loved their life unto death.” This states that they *have* overcome. That means that the victory is already won for those who believe in the blood of the Lamb. The lamb is a symbol of Jesus, and although His sacrifice is not expressly stated here because it is not the focal point of the chapter, it is not forgotten.<sup>15</sup> Although the plan of salvation was laid out from the foundation of the world for Jesus was “the lamb slain before the

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<sup>11</sup> Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 5, 515.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, *International Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 3, 565.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eardman’s Publishing Company, 1987), 155-158.

<sup>14</sup> Gerhard Kittel, edit., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 948.

<sup>15</sup> David Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Volume 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 871-872.

foundations of the world,”<sup>16</sup> it was not completed until the cross. He then completely defeated death by rising again.

“12. On account of this, rejoice (imperative of command), o heavens (vocative) and those dwelling in them! Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil comes down to you, possessing a large amount of fury, knowing that he has a short time.” This is a much clearer picture of what the “casting out” from verse 9 and 10 is referring to. The heavens are now rejoicing because Satan can no longer enter them. It seems that all the universe understands from this point the battle has been won.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the Earth is cursed because the Devil has come “knowing he has a short time.” The Devil was not insured defeat until the cross. Throughout Jesus’ life the Devil tempted him to sin; even the very night before he would be tried and crucified. Once Christ died and rose again, ascending to heaven, the Devil understood his time was short.

“13. And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown to the earth, he persecuted the woman who had produced (not given birth but more as a tree produces fruit) the male [child].” The direct persecuting of the woman, and later her seed was Satan’s persecution of the Church.<sup>18</sup> This is not the persecution of the Jews that had happened previously, but a persecution that was to come.<sup>19</sup> The woman was a recognized symbol of the church,<sup>20</sup> and her seeds were those who had become Christians. This group of people only came to exist after the death and resurrection

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<sup>16</sup> Revelation 13:8

<sup>17</sup> Eugene Boring, *Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1989), 150-160.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Dubis, *Messianic Woes in First Peter* (New York: International Academic Publishers, 2002), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> James Hamilton, “Suffering in Revelation: The Fulfillment of the Messianic Woes,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 17 no. 4 (2013): 34-47.

<sup>20</sup> David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Books of Revelation* (Fort Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 297.

Also see Isa 54:5; 2 Cor 11:2; Gal 4:26; Eph 5:25-27.

There is also some evidence that the woman here is also the woman in Revelation 17 who is riding on the dragon.

Davidson Razafiarivony, “Is the Woman of Revelation 17 the Same Woman of Revelation 12?” *The American Journal of Biblical Theology* 17 no. 48 (November 27, 2016): 1-12.

of Christ. The seed of the woman is also a direct connection to Genesis 3:15, where God foretold the salvation of the seed of the woman through the one who would come to crush the serpents head. This is another evidence that Revelation 12 is the fulfillment of this prophecy. The war could not then have happened before the promise was given.<sup>21</sup>

“14. And two wings of the great eagle had been given to the woman, in order that she could fly into the deserted place, into her [appointed] place, where she is fed [nourished, brought up] there for a time and times, and a half-time from the face of the serpent.” There are many complicated understandings of this period of time. In the Historicist interpretation of Revelation it has come to stand for the persecution of Christians, mainly those of the middle ages under Nero, Domitian, Diocletian. This time followed the death of Christ in historically.<sup>22</sup>

### **Intertextual References**

Before I look at the conclusions of this study, I should add several intertextual connections which clarify a little more the Biblical understanding of the Great Controversy.

#### Isaiah 14

Of course, the other major passage we look at when talking about the conflict in heaven between good and evil is Isaiah 14. Here you see several main connections. First, it talks specifically about the casting down of an evil individual, which is spoken of prominently in Revelation. He seeks to take the position of the Most High, which is eluded to in Revelation when it speaks about Michael the archangel and all his armies fighting against the Devil as well as his followers. We also find in Revelation 12 that this individual is considered weak by the end of the struggle. Isaiah 14 make reference to this same thing in verse 10.

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<sup>21</sup> J. A Rand and Y.M. Song, “A Partial Preterist Understanding of Revelation 12-13 Within an Intertextual Framework,” *Acta Theologica* no. 1 (2004): 25-44.

<sup>22</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 391-392.

The differences here are also important. While in Isaiah the changing of the heart of Satan is detailed, in Revelation that change has already happened. While Isaiah speaks about the root of the war, Revelation speaks only about the effects and end of the war.

#### Ezekiel 28

Ezekiel 28 has many connections with Isaiah 14 as well as Revelation 12. It speaks about one who seeks to be God and take the place of God. This is once again speaking about the root of the war in heaven, the very beginning of Evil. In Ezekiel, the position that Satan held is described as the “guardian cherub, on the holy mountain of God.” I think the most compelling connection is found in Ezekiel 28: 16, it says, “so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,” and again in verse 17, “I cast you to the ground.” This is the first casting down, the beginning of the war. In Revelation 12, it is the final “casting” or confinement of the Devil to Earth.

Another very important intertextuality comes from Revelation 12: 4, speaking about the tail which swept one-third of the stars from heaven. The number 3 throughout the bible signifies perfection and completeness. The Trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit are 3. Peter denies Jesus 3 times and is restored after three responses of surrender. Christ was raised in 3 days. The idea of 1/3 as an incomplete or part of a whole is found elsewhere in Revelation. In chapter eight, four of the trumpets are listed. Each one is accompanied by the limiting agent “a third.” The numerical values are portraying simply a partial amount of people, most likely not the specific number. So, the Devil may not have convinced a literal third of the angels to follow him, but rather a part of them. This leads to an interesting conclusion.

If Revelation 12 verse 4 and verse 7 were speaking about the same event you would expect both to include some mention of the angels being convinced to follow the Devil. But,

what you find is that in verse 7 the angels have already committed themselves to a side, and now are ready to do battle. Furthermore, sandwiched between the two conflict accounts you find the birth of a child, which is largely considered to refer to the birth of Jesus Christ. This has led me to believe that the first part of verse 4 is speaking about the first conflict, the beginning of which is detailed in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 26. This phase of the conflict ends at the resurrection of Christ. Verse 7 then details the result of Jesus victory, and the battle which ensues between the Devil and the followers of Christ. In neither war did Satan become victorious, and this dual failure is brought to the forefront.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The theology of the Great Controversy is the real focus of Revelation 12, specifically the war which happens between God and Satan. When did it happen? Was it before creation, after creation? Did it come after the ascension?

I believe that the Old Testament is quite clear in speaking of the Devil being cast out of heaven. The Devil (Satan) sought to be like God and so he sinned in his pride. He then was cast to Earth and purposed to demonstrate that God was unjust, and that Satan's own kingdom was the one that humans would choose to follow. This is the the event referred to in Isaiah and Ezekiel. Satan continued to make accusations about the character of God in front of the whole universe. This is what we see happening in the book of Job. Satan walks the Earth, functioning as a usurped prince representing the earthly kingdom in place of Adam who gave over his position to Satan when he submitted to the will of Satan rather than God. Obviously, Satan could return to heaven and communicate with God at this time. And this is not the only time that the Devil

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Nichol, edit., *SDA Bible Commentary* Volume 7 (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), 809-811.

stands and accuses one of God's followers. In Zachariah, Satan stands to accuse Joshua of his unworthiness before God.

What we conclude from the Old Testament stories of the Great Controversy: Satan was cast out of heaven when he sought to take God's place, and convinced angels to follow him.

Was this the war talked about in Revelation 12? Through careful study I have come to believe that this passage describes the battle between God and Satan, and between Satan and the followers of Christ, after Jesus death and resurrection. The most compelling argument for this is the structure of the chapter. It begins by showing a woman, who gives birth to a child. That child is Christ. He is taken to heaven which corresponds with His ascension. Up to this point, the chapter seems to be moving chronologically. Directly after the child is removed from the earth, we see the woman travel into the wilderness to escape the Devil. Then comes verse 7, "there was war in heaven..." This would indicate that this war happened after Jesus resurrection and ascension. In the following verses we see the effects of this war.

"There was no longer any place in heaven for them" (verse 8). That statement would seem to say that after the Devil and his angels were defeated they were not allowed to live or even enter heaven. We already specified that Satan had entered heaven and been in contact with the leaders of the universe after he was initially cast down to the Earth. But after this war, that access what cut off completely.

“Now salvation has come from our God” (verse 10). Jesus provided the means of salvation through His death and resurrection. He demonstrated before the universe God's faithful love and provided a way for humans to be saved through Jesus (verse 11). This plan was established from the foundation of the world, but made final through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

“the accuser of the brethren was cast down” (verse 10). Satan is described here as already accomplished in his work of accusing, specifically humans. Both of these point not to the war before creation on the fall of mankind, but after.

“When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child...and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring” (verse 13, 16). The women's offspring represent the followers of Christ, who were organized after Jesus resurrection and ascension.

How does this conclusion inform the theology of the Great Controversy? First, we recognize that Satan was not as cut off from the universe as we often think. Jesus coming was necessary not only for the salvation of those on earth, but also as an example of His character to the universe in answer to Satan's accusations.

Second, the Great Controversy was not just one battle, and as a result of that battle the devil and all his demons came to earth and God remained in heaven. No, this was and is an on-going war, a war waged for the hearts and minds of the universe as well as human beings.

Third, we can better understand the depth of what Jesus accomplished, and recognize when Satan's demise was sealed. After the ascension, there was no more bargaining, no more pleading with the universe. That is why verse 11 says, "rejoice you heavens, and you who dwell in them." All the universe can rejoice because they have seen that God is just and that the Devil is wrong. But here is where it gets close to home here on Earth. "Woe to the Earth, and sea, because the devil has gone down to you." All that remains for the Devil is to cause destruction to humanity.

In Revelation 12 we find the victory of Jesus over Satan, and we find the desperate Devil turning all his focus to destroying those on earth. But the Great Controversy in Revelation does not end with chapter 12, there is still more to learn and understand.

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