

# Devouring Dragon

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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I missed you last week! But I have to say that I enjoy visiting Seventh-day Adventist churches where I've not been before. It's always a blessing to meet with God's people. On the way, I told my sister Sue that it never ceases to amaze me that on these occasions I will meet someone I know, or someone with whom we share a mutual friend.

I had obtained directions so as to be able to find the church, but we evidently made a wrong turn and became convinced that we weren't going the right way. I made a U-turn and headed back, but wasn't sure where the church would be. Then as I looked in my rear-view mirror, I said to my sister, "There's a guy behind us with a white shirt and tie on. Could it be he's going to church? I'm going to keep an eye on him." Then a minute or two later, I said to Sue, "You're not going to believe it. The man behind us, in the white shirt and tie; he's playing a trumpet. In his pickup. Maybe he's part of a musical group that's going to play in church." I tried to watch where I was driving, watch the buildings and keep my eye on the man with the white shirt, tie and trumpet. Sure enough, he pulled into the parking lot of what was not at first visible to us, the Cloverdale SDA Church of Boise, Idaho.

We made another quick U-turn and drove into the parking lot and thanked this man for his excellent directions in getting us to church. And yes, he did play his trumpet for church, as part of a 6 piece brass ensemble. I thought, "Is there a lesson here? Am I leading people "to church," by the way I look and live? Could anyone guess that I'm a Christian by what they see in me?"

The service was a blessing and afterward who should come up to greet me but my good friend from San Diego Pastor Dale Barizo and his wife Rebecca! It was when Pastor Barizo retired from the Chula Vista Church three years ago that I served for a short time as interim pastor there. Imagine seeing Dale and his wife 1,000 miles away from where we had last seen each other! It turns out that their son and his family live there in Boise. What a small world! Being part of the Adventist family is truly a blessed experience! It reminds me of what heaven will be like.

Of course, we were there because of the tragic accident that happened to my 34-year-old nephew Aaron Fouts three weeks ago. While riding at a very slow rate of speed, sitting backward on the back of an ATV, he apparently attempted to hop off but his legs became entangled and he hit the back of his head on the asphalt walkway. Because of the blessing of the Lord and to the surprise of his doctors, Aaron has survived. But it will take a while to determine to what level his recovery will

attain. Meanwhile, we continue to pray that the Lord in mercy will extend healing so that Aaron can enjoy quality of life.

As we went into his room so many times while I was up there, looking at his swollen head, we gazed intently into his eyes so see if perchance there was recognition and intelligence. How we desperately looked for some response! Then I thought, "This is how heaven is looking at us. We've suffered a terrible 'fall.' We're in the 'intensive care unit' of this earth and God with the holy angels are gazing at us, the patients, to see if we will wake up from the coma of sin and register recognition of His presence and His plan." The interest heaven shows toward us is infinitely more intense than what we showed as we visited dear Aaron, as the stakes are infinitely higher. Heaven is waiting for that response of understanding, that "light in the eye," that response of faith that will show that we are alive to eternal realities; that there's more to us than mere autonomic and reflexive action. Are we awake to God, or are we in a "coma" of spiritual insensibility?

We're studying one of the most interesting and enlightening prophetic chapters in all the Bible: Revelation 12, which in a few short verses, only 17, presents the large-scope view of this earth's history. Last time we studied Revelation 12:7-9, which tells of the beginning of the battle in heaven, in which Lucifer, who became the dragon or devil with his angels initiated warfare against Michael and His angels. The devil did not prevail and was cast out with his angels. In the passage we'll look at today it describes the dragon's tail sweeping a "third of the stars of heaven" into his net. The devil was successful in gaining the allegiance of a third of God's angels.

We discussed what led Lucifer into sin; how pride and a selfish desire to be worshiped as God led him into rebellion. We also spent some time discussing the identity of the One called Michael in this passage and found compelling Bible evidence to determine that Michael is another name for Christ. Jesus is the Word, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Manna; He is also "Michael," the "One Who is like God." He is the "First of the chief heads" in Daniel 10:13; the "Sar," Who stands for His people Israel. Daniel 12:1. He is the "Archistrategos," the Chief Captain of the hosts of heaven. Joshua 5:14. He is the Archangel Whose voice raises the dead. Jude 9; I Thessalonians 4:14. In Revelation 1:1 we're told that this is the "Revelation of Jesus Christ," and so we should expect that He will be in the spotlight of prophecy.

This battle between Michael, or Christ, and Satan that began in heaven was transferred to this earth. Last time we closed with the thought that just as God had to evict Satan from heaven to maintain peace and order, so the devil must be driven from our hearts to obtain peace. Jesus can do that!

This week's study goes back to the first part of Revelation 12. There are important things in this text we need to know. What we'll see is that the chapter begins and ends in the same way: an angry and devouring dragon (Satan) unleashing his wrath at Christ's first coming (the first part of the chapter) and at His second coming (ending of chapter 12). "Now a great sign appeared in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another

sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. And she bore a male Child Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and to His throne.” Revelation 12:1-5.

The dragon is Satan. The different heads and horns represent the earthly powers through which he has worked. The questions we address in this passage include, Who is the woman and Who is her Child? What does it mean when it says the dragon stood ready to devour her Child? What is the significance of this story and how does it affect me? There are actually 5 different applications that can be made from this story. But let’s start with the woman.

Throughout the Bible a “woman” has been used symbolically to represent a church; a virtuous woman representing God’s true church; an immoral woman representing an apostate or fallen church. Christ presents Himself as the heavenly Groom, asking for the hand of His church. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, “I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.” II Corinthians 11:2. In his letter to the Ephesians Paul encourages fidelity and love between a man and a woman in marriage, stating, “‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, but *I speak concerning Christ and the church.*” Ephesians 5:32. In Ezekiel 16 God reveals His love to Israel within the imagery of marriage. The prophet Jeremiah adds, “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman.” Jeremiah 6:2. There are literally scores of passages in which the church is symbolized by a woman.

This woman, a church, is “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.” Clothing in the Bible represents spiritual condition. Being clothed with filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6, the high priest Joshua presented in Zechariah 3:3 or the returning prodigal son) or being naked, as Adam and Eve in the Garden, represents a condition of sinfulness, the state of being unrighteous. But this woman is clothed with the sun, representing the righteousness of Jesus, the “sun of righteousness.” Malachi 4:2. This is a godly woman, or righteous church. Question: are you clothed today with Christ’s righteousness?

Her feet rest upon the moon. What does that signify? The moon has no light of its own, but reflects (quite brightly) the light from the sun. Since we know (jumping ahead for just a minute) that this “woman” represents the church at the time of the birth of Jesus, the “Child” Who was born and caught up to heaven, we can understand the symbolism of her standing with her feet resting on the “moon.” This represents aptly the Church being “founded” upon the system of types and ceremonies that “reflected” the themes of salvation as given to Israel. In the sacrificial system the death of Jesus was “reflected” and gave light to those seeking understanding. The twelve stars represent the twelve tribes of Israel, God’s original arrangement.

Is it possible that there was a “righteous church” at the time of Jesus’ birth? Doesn’t it seem that all of Israel, especially its leaders, were against Him and His mission? Didn’t the “church” condemn

Jesus to death and put Him on the cross? Yes, but there were some, a remnant who were seeking truth and the fulfillment of God's promise. This picture should encourage us greatly. As the Lord told a discouraged prophet by the name of Elijah, who thought he alone was left to serve the true God, "I have reserved to Myself 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

There were some who composed God's true church at the time of Jesus' birth. There was Simeon and Anna, who witnessed to Him when He was brought to the temple for dedication. There was Nathaniel, an "Israelite indeed," who quietly prayed for the coming of the Messiah. There were certainly nameless others who followed God and were seeking for His coming. These represented the woman who was about to give birth.

Throughout Scripture the lesson is faithfully given; there is no "deliverance" without "travail." After sin, God spoke directly to Eve and said, "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children." Genesis 3:16. Every great movement in Scripture has seen the application of this principle. Israel was birthed from Egypt in pain. The birth of the church of the last days to immortality will be accompanied by birth pangs. Jeremiah 30:5-7. The Messiah's birth would be accompanied by travail.

This is the first and most obvious application of this picture. It vividly portrays what happened when Jesus was born. The devil is a student of prophecy. He knew the "due time" had come. He plotted how he might destroy the plan just as it got started. What did he do? He inspired the wicked Herod to attempt to rid the Rival to his throne by killing all the Bethlehem babies. You remember the story: the wise men, the magi from the east came, following the mysterious star that had led them to Jerusalem. When they made inquiry, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" Herod learned about it and told them to report back to him the location of the new King's birth.

Of course, after the magi had visited the Baby Jesus, they were warned by an angel to go back another way and not tell Herod. After a period of time, when Herod figured out that they weren't coming back to tell him, he gave command to kill all the babies "two years and younger" in Bethlehem, the village specified in prophecy. By that time, Jesus, Mary and Joseph were on their way to Egypt for safety.

The writer Matthew, under divine inspiration, applied an incident from Israel's past to this experience. He took the story of the babies that were slaughtered by Nebuchadnezzar at the time of Jerusalem's destruction centuries before and the bitter wailings of their mothers as they watched their infants bashed against the rocks and applied it to the anguish of the Bethlehem mothers as Herod's soldiers came and did their deadly work. The song of the angels joined by the counterpoint of wailing mothers! Oh, the cruelty of Satan!

Jeremiah, addressing the grief of Judah's mothers almost six centuries before Christ's birth reported, "A voice was heard in Ramah (the place where these destructive activities took place, where those too young, too old or too weak were killed before the captives were marched to

Babylon), lamentation and bitter weeping, Rachel (representing the mothers of Israel), weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted for her children because they are no more.' Thus says the LORD: 'Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded,' says the LORD, 'and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future,' says the LORD, 'that your children shall come back to their own border.'" Jeremiah 31:15-17. Even in tragedy there's hope and promise!

I've often pondered on this story. The Bethlehem babies, slaughtered by a cruel and despotic king who became martyrs for Jesus. I picture these infants, as they are brought by the angels to the waiting and joyful arms of their mothers on the day of the Resurrection, as they return from the "land of the enemy," wearing their scarlet trimmed robes of immortality as an emblem of the sacrifice they made in His name. What a day that will be! The tears of anguish of those mothers will be converted to tears of unending happiness!

The devil stood ready to kill the Messiah as He was born, picturing Herod's attempt to kill the Infant Jesus in Bethlehem. That is certainly the most prominent application of this story. But let's think of some other times when this scene has been played out; the devouring dragon attempting to bring God's plan to an end. It's happened many times in this world's history.

The first time you might think of this picture being enacted was when God birthed a new world. God made a perfect world, didn't He? But Satan was there to attack and derail God's plan. The dragon stood ready to devour. When did the attack of the devil take place in Revelation 12? "As soon as it was born." At his first opportunity, Satan tempted Eve to disobey the express command of the Lord and destroy what God had made. I don't think much time had elapsed between the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall. The devil knew his best chance would be as soon as possible. He stood ready to devour "as soon as it was born."

The devil "stood ready to devour" when God birthed a new nation, calling Abram from Ur of the Chaldees to Palestine. Satan tried to abort God's plan by tempting Abraham, in a moment of weakness, to lie about Sarah being his wife. This was the devil's plan to corrupt the holy seed, to make God's promise doubtful by having Sarah becoming a part of Pharaoh's harem. If she were to become pregnant, the question could be raised, "Who is the father of this child, Abraham or Pharaoh?" God put a stop to the devil's plan instantly, and caused Sarah to be restored to her husband.

Satan stood "ready to devour" when the Lord birthed a new church 160 years ago, which was brought into existence to share special truths for these last days. Think of the other movements that came into being at that time. If you believe that this church has been given a special, unique message to "prepare a people for the coming of the Lord," then think of the other movements which came into being about that same time, and how they represent the strategy of the enemy to confuse and befuddle.

About the time this church was forming, proclaiming the day which is God's memorial of creation, the Sabbath, the theory of evolution as taught by Charles Darwin and others was taking root.

About the time this church was forming, placing an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring new life and the importance of holding to the truths of Scripture, modern spiritualism had its beginnings in 1848 in Rochester, New York. About the time this church was forming, placing an emphasis on healthful living and the ministry of prophecy, Joseph Smith was led to believe that further revelations which contradicted the Holy Bible were from God.

In its infancy, the devil sought to introduce into this church different forms of fanaticism and extreme views that would hinder God's message, but through His blessing the church was protected. Not only did the movement suffer the attack of the devil "as soon as it was born," the leaders found themselves the objects of his wrath. Elder James White suffered at least 5 strokes of paralysis and succumbed to a premature death. His dear wife Ellen suffered a list of ailments too long to recount. On May 23, 1854, they planned to go on a train leaving from Michigan to visit a company of church members in Wisconsin. James confessed to his wife that he "just didn't feel right" about making the trip, but felt they had to go. They knelt in prayer for God's protection before they left. When they boarded the train and took their seat, Ellen said, "I can't stay here," and they moved to the last car in the train.

During the trip there was a terrible jolt followed by screams as the locomotive hit an ox on the track, derailing the engine which then fell back on the tracks, causing the cars to come crashing into it. The seat on which Ellen had been sitting was crushed. But the car to which they had moved was not part of the train when the wreck took place; it was uncoupled and coasted up quietly to the wreckage a few moments later, untouched by the disaster. The coupling pin was found, unbroken, sitting on the track. The brakeman was praised for his quick thinking in separating the car from the others, but he confessed he knew nothing about it. Who uncoupled the train car? (See "The Coupling Pin Mystery," Junior Guide, April 11, 1956.)

The devil stood "ready to devour" when Christ was born in Bethlehem; when this world was born; when this church was born and when anyone is re-born. As soon as the seed of the Gospel takes root in someone's heart; as soon as the new birth experience begins to transpire; as soon as Christ is formed within a person's heart then Satan is "ready to devour" and put an end to the whole thing. You've seen it happen. A person makes a commitment (or re-commitment) to the Lord, and then it looks like their life is coming apart. Bad things happen like never before. This is Revelation 12 translated into real life.

Have you found this to be true? Don't be surprised! God has revealed to us these things for our encouragement! Have faith and take hope, because these are indicators that you're on the path to glory! Jesus is coming soon! The anger of the dragon unleashed against the church when Christ came the first time will be repeated, according to Revelation 12:17, before He comes the second time. What should we do? Turn to Jesus every day, throughout the day for help and guidance. Even though the devil may attack you, God is with you and will allow nothing to come into your life for which He has not made provision.