

Charts: The Third Parenthetical Visions: Chart #15 (with reference to Chart #16)

PREFACE

Our last session, two weeks ago, concluded with Satan and his angels being “thrown down to the earth” after losing the war initiated by Satan against the holy angels of heaven ([Revelation 12:7-9](#)). This will be the second and last time Satan and his angelic minions will be punished and demoted by God: the first time resulting in Satan losing heaven as his official residence, but not losing his access to it; this second time resulting in Satan losing all connection with the precincts of God. His next place of residence will be the abyss for one thousand years; after that, his eternal residence will be the lake of fire.

I have posited that vv7-17 of Chapter Twelve comprise an amplification, a fleshing out, as it were, of vv1-6. In v4, for example, we are told that “[the dragon’s] tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.” With the additional details of vv7-9 we learn that this is because of the war in heaven, and that the “stars” swept by the dragon’s tail are in actuality the demonic angels being collected up for accompanying their master to their new home on earth.

Sidebar: Permit me to interject at this point a note about that perennial question which has been raised both in this class and beyond, almost certainly since time immemorial. To wit, *Why does Satan do it? He knows He must lose—he’s read Scripture; why does he attempt something so futile as to attack the holy angels of God?*

In a comment I found enlightening, Joseph Seiss, responding to the phrase in v8: “they prevailed not” (NASB: “they were not strong enough”), wrote, “[Satan] might have known that this would be the result. **But pride, depravity, and malice have wonderful power to blind the mind to reason and truth, and to give brazen hope even where there is not the slightest ground for hope.** Satan has ever been so successful in the past, both in heaven among the angels, and on earth with the human race, and his proud daring is so unbounded, that **he does not hesitate to believe that he can break even the decrees of Almightyness. So he attempts it.**” (emphasis added)

That is a possible explanation that we can hang our hat on. Don't we see it every day in, for example, politicians? Without naming names, the party will issue a statement that is empirically a lie; their people then repeat the lie ad nauseam until even *they* begin to believe it.

By the middle of the Tribulation, after thousands upon thousands of years of hate and intrigue and duplicity, the mind of Satan may be so twisted and perverted that He may actually believe he *can* win against God. That is, after an entire career of lying to man about God, that venom has successfully corrupted *his* mind even more than man's.

Now, to our text. At this point a victory celebration of sorts rises in heaven.

Read Revelation 12:10-12a.

v10

Then 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, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night."

We cannot identify with certainty the owner, or owners, of this "voice"—note the plural "*our* God"—except to conclude that it is essentially a *human* voice. For later in this verse is the phrase "the accuser of our brethren," and angels do not refer to humans as their "brethren"—fellow *servants*, yes, but not brethren. Thus we conclude that this "loud voice in heaven" is the voice of praise coming from the redeemed saints in heaven, and quite possibly the voices of those previously martyred in His name, individuals who have vocally cried out for retribution and vengeance.

Read Revelation 6:9-10.

Note in that passage that these were slain, "for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." We will see this again in v11 of our text. But at this point I need to confess that for me this extended passage—vv7-12a—is *very* confusing. Let me put it this way: If I were an editor and a writer submitted this paragraph to me, it would be handed back covered with blue pencil marks, and I would tell him to rewrite the whole thing, making it more coherent. The problem here is not just the standard obstacle in The Revelation of prophetic language and fantastical imagery; in this passage—and especially vv10-12a—the use of vague pronouns leaves the reader at a loss to know who is doing what, and where—and when.

Verses 7-9 make it crystal clear that this war during the Tribulation but taking place in heaven, is an *angelic* war, and has just been won by the good guys: “And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war... And the great dragon was thrown down...” (vv7, 9a). There is no mention of any participation in this war by human beings.

Verse 10, not unexpectedly, then follows immediately with a song of praise for the victory. But then the text gets very confusing, because, for one thing, it is predominantly by and about humans—not the angels who have just won the victory against Satan. *Let’s work our way through it.*

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven,

The apostle John hears a loud voice, and we gather from the plural pronouns that follow that this is probably an instance of myriad voices praising in unison. But who do the voices belong to?

saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come,

So far so good; our question is not yet answered (from this the voices could be either angelic or human, or both) but we can take this to be a standard *proleptic* (or *prophetic*) *aorist* reference to the kingdom to be established after the Tribulation, yet so certain that it is spoken of as having already occurred.

for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”

Here we learn that the “our” refers to humans: only humans, not angels, would speak of “our brethren,” and it is, and always has been, humans accused “before our God day and night” by the great “accuser” (Job 1:11; 2:5; Zechariah 3:1).

Up to this point we have human beings—i.e., redeemed, glorified saints in heaven—rejoicing that Satan (“the accuser of our brethren”) has been thrown down. Within this verse the angels did the work, and the humans are rejoicing that the work was done. But things go sideways in v11.

“And they overcame him...”

All our common versions place all three verses (except for the setup in v10) within quotation marks; that is, all three verses are stated by the same voice—i.e., humans in heaven. There are no close-quotes at the end of v10. That being the case, who are “they” who “overcame him” (i.e., conquered)?

- It is a pretty safe assumption that the “him” would be Satan (the accuser), and if we stopped here we might sensibly assume that “they” refers back to the angels that defeated Satan in the recent war.

- A second assumption might be that “they” refers to “the brethren” (“them” in the previous verse). But the brethren received the *benefits* of the war (retribution, vengeance), not the victory itself; they were not the victorious warriors in the battle.

Further leading us toward a human “they,” however, is the rest of the verse.

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 is clearly speaking of those for whom “the blood of the Lamb” would mean their “salvation” (v10) and atonement—i.e., humans, not angels. Verse 11 seems to paint a picture of earth-based followers of Christ. But who? and when?

It becomes necessary at this point to determine a time frame so as to correctly identify these who have (or will) overcome the adversary. To be precise, knowing the time frame will make it possible to determine **who** these faithful martyrs are that are spoken of in v11, **when** did they, or will they, “overc[o]me” Satan, and **how** they gained the victory.

Historical

A remark made by the *least* of my handful of commentators for this study seems at first to be easily dismissed—yet, it also opens up a can of worms that just may challenge some of our preconceptions. Alan F. Johnson writes, “At the time of Christ’s death on earth, Satan was being defeated in heaven by Michael.” By this (and subsequent text), Johnson is saying that this war between good and evil, between Michael and Satan, was concluded at the cross, when Christ died as the atonement Lamb, in approximately AD 26. Johnson continues,

In times past, Satan's chief role as adversary was directed toward accusing God's people of disobedience to God. The justice of these accusations was recognized by God, and therefore Satan's presence in heaven was tolerated. But now the presence of the crucified Savior in God's presence provides the required satisfaction of God's justice with reference to our sins (1 John 2:1-2; 4:10). Therefore, Satan's accusations are no longer valid and he is cast out.

Based on the position that this war and Satan’s ejection from heaven takes place during the Tribulation, my immediate response to this was that Christ has remained our Advocate against the accusations of Satan even till now. How, then, can Johnson’s position be valid?

Then I realized that if one takes the position that this passage in Revelation narrates the fall of Satan at the cross, *all of our references for Satan being there before God in heaven, accusing the saints, are from the OT* (e.g., Job, Zechariah). This reference in Revelation 12 would not count, since it is describing something that happened at the outset, prior to the NT being written.

Now, it is always possible that I simply could not find what I was looking for, but after considerable searching and cross-referencing I came up empty in my effort to find NT—i.e., post-Ascension—evidence for Satan accusing the saints in heaven. So maybe we should not quickly dismiss Johnson’s position—which is that all the references to Satan’s defeat at the cross are literal, rather than positional or prophetic, that our Savior’s advocacy before the Father is accomplished by His presence alone—not that He is literally, today, arguing against the accusations of Satan before the throne.

The standard dispensational, pre-trib, pre-mil position would be that our passage in Chapter Twelve speaks of Satan losing a war and being ejected from heaven some time during the Tribulation, which would disengage the literal act from Satan’s *positional* status since His defeat at the cross. These are heady, profound considerations, but we must move on to consider two other possible interpretations of this passage—actually just one, but one which can be assigned to either of two different time frames.

Tribulation/Millennium

It helps us understand this passage if we separate the practical *physicality* of this angelic war and its immediate result (Satan banished from heaven), from its more cosmic, salvation- and kingdom-oriented ramifications. Doing so frees us from the seeming confusion introduced by vague pronouns and discovering humans where we might expect angels. For example, if we consider this passage from that perspective, we see that it is *all* about humans—i.e., mankind—and *for* them. Stripped down to the essentials, why do Michael and his angels engage in this war with Satan and his angels? Is it for *their* ultimate benefit? Or is it for man’s, and the purity and sanctification of the eternal kingdom? I contend that, as is usual with angels, Michael and his angels fight the war on behalf of humans, mankind.

There is a poetic symmetry to this as well: at the same time that the earth is being purified of all sin and rebellion by those in opposition to God and His Christ, heaven itself is being purified of the very same thing—all opposition to God.

With this in mind, we should not be surprised that the joyful hymn of praise is offered by... a chorus of redeemed men and women in heaven. It is *their* victory!

Taken as a whole (vv7-12), this passage demands that we set it in the environment and time frame of the Eschaton. That being the case, we can take v10 as speaking in the practical present tense; that is, “the accuser of our brethren has been cast down” *right now*—not two thousand years ago, and “he who accuses them before our God day and night” has been stopped *right now*—not two thousand years ago.

because of the blood of the Lamb...

In v11 we get hung up on the vague pronoun “they” in “And they overcame him...” ; if angels, the rest of the verse makes no sense; if humans, how could they overcome Satan? But Henry Alford points us in the right direction with his thoughts on this verse.

Alford: And they conquered him on account of the blood of the Lamb (i. e. *by virtue of that blood having been shed*: not as in E. V., “by the blood.” The meaning is far more significant; their victory over Satan was grounded in, was a consequence of, His having shed his precious blood: without that, the adversary’s charges against them would have been unanswerable.

It is Christ in His sacrifice that has brought the victory—for angels? No, for us. Wars and battles, winners and losers, victory and defeat—all pale when set against that which has come: “the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ.”

Sidebar: And even though our time frames do not agree, Johnson is right about at least one thing: Do we really believe that with Satan accusing believers to Father God, he requires Christ, at His right hand, to literally *argue* the point, as two attorneys might in court? No, the very *presence* of the Lamb that was slain is sufficient, and far more eloquent than any spoken words.

and because of the word of their testimony...

Let us get some help again from Henry Alford.

Alford: and “on account of the word of their testimony.” It is because they have given a faithful testimony, even unto death, that they are victorious: this is their part, their appropriation of and standing in the virtue of that blood of the Lamb. Without both these, victory would not have been theirs: both, together, form its ground.

We need to expand on this for a moment, lest we begin to think Alford is suggesting that our *performance* is somehow part of our victory over Satan. Not fearing to give testimony for Christ in the face of persecution and death is really all about our *perseverance*.

Read Matthew 10:22.

We know that that verse means that if one *is* saved, one *will* endure to the end. That verse is small consolation, however, without knowing where that endurance, or the ability to “stand firm,” comes from. The apostle Paul wrote to the Romans,

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, **so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement** grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,
(Romans 15:4-5; emphasis added)

It is all of God; our ability to overcome Satan begins with the atoning blood of Christ, and is played out, through faith, through the perseverance God grants His children to stand firm—even against the horrific trials and persecution of the Tribulation—and give testimony for the gospel.

and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Even unto death, for we know that whatever life we would be trying to save by denying Christ is utterly worthless compared to the life we have—and *will* have—in Him.

The setting for this hymn of joyful victory is expansive. Let us not be so self-indulgent to imagine that its opening words speak of our own personal “salvation,” and the “power” we each have in Christ. This is a joyful hymn of praise to the Creator-God for His ingenious idea that all things—from the creation of the first atom to the creation of the last thing to be created—all things culminate in the glorious kingdom of Christ. For,

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him **all things** were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—**all things** have been created through Him and for Him. He is before **all things**, and in Him **all things** hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile **all things** to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.
(Colossians 1:15-20; emphasis added)

Verse 11 speaks of those who have persevered through the trials of the Tribulation. They have been equipped to “conquer” Satan because of the atoning blood of Christ, and their steadfast testimony for Him. Verse 10, using standard *proleptic aorist* imagery, announces that because of that victory, the kingdom has arrived.

We typically—and accurately—assign that kingdom to the Millennium, because it is then that Christ Jesus will reign, on earth, upon His throne. True. Quite true. But those thousand years are not the end of all things. Though Satan will have been locked up in the abyss, and Christ will be reigning as King over the entirety of the earth, sin and rebellion will not have been expunged. This will *not* be the pristine “eternal state.” During the Millennium there will be one last army organized from those who still hate God; when Satan is released, they will be ready and eager to join him in this final battle against righteousness.

So while it is true that Christ’s kingdom (or, “the kingdom of our God”), spoken of in v10 and myriad passages elsewhere, will be inaugurated when Christ returns in judgment to end the Tribulation, the full and glorious realization of that kingdom must wait a thousand years for that perfect, eternal state in a new Jerusalem on a new earth.

All this joy and praise in vv10-11 are based on the defeat of Satan. So v12 begins with a call to rejoice over this defeat of the adversary.

“For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.”

Please note the limitations of this: “...rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.” That limitation is there because this is certainly *not* an occasion for rejoicing on earth, which has just received, as new residents, Satan and his cohort who are, because of their recent defeat, madder than wet hens. No, the rest of v12 ([which we will examine in our next session](#)) makes clear that instead of rejoicing, this will mean “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.” The second part of v12 is, as it were, the gateway opening onto the very worst of the Tribulation period.

CONCLUSION

It would seem that at the very least this passage is guilty of an inartful and confusing transition from heaven to earth. But it also may employ an inartful transition from the narrative timeline to either a point in the past, or one of two possible points in the future—that is, future to the narrative timeline, roughly the middle of the Tribulation.

Or we can look at this in a different way, that the Spirit of God has written these verses intentionally vague so as to leave it for us—with His help, of course—to make the connections and suitable application on our own.

It is no bad thing to be forced to dig in and dig deeply in Scripture to ferret out what the Lord God is telling us. I know *I* won’t be soon forgetting the truth we have discovered buried here.