

Michael and The Dragon

The Great Story of the Bible

Revelation 12:7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,

⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world-- he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

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

¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

¹³ And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

¹⁴ But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

¹⁵ The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.

¹⁶ But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

¹⁷ Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

(Revelation 12:7-17)

Back to the Story ...

IN A DISSERTATION ON REVELATION 12, one author begins,

There is a young woman, different from other young women because she is about to give birth to a son, and this man is different from other men. Ancient prophecies foretell that a young woman will give birth to him, and she must go through tremendous trials and tribulations to bring him to birth. The young woman's son, after he achieves manhood, will perform miraculous deeds, yet is misunderstood so that, when confronted by his enemies, he must sacrifice his life to save humanity from disaster, but, in a mystery greater than any other in time and greater than his origin, he is raised from the dead for the purpose of reigning in glory over the people and universe he has redeemed. If you tell this story to Christians, they will recognize it instantly as the story of Mary and Jesus. If you tell this story to a science fiction audience, they'll recognize it as the plot of any number of science fiction and fantasy tales in print and on film from *Superman* and *Star Wars* and *Dune* to *The Terminator* and *The Matrix*.¹

I'm going to bring up perhaps more than one thing today that might at first frustrate or disturb some of you.

¹ Cynthia Anne Miller Smith, *Apocalypticism, Eschatology, and Revelation 11:19-12:18: Conquering Chaos and Evil During the Apocalypse*, An MA Dissertation to The University of Georgia (Athens, GA: 2011), 2-3, https://getd.libs.uga.edu/pdfs/smith_cynthia_m_201105_ma.pdf.

My aim for this is to confront such emotional reactions, break them down, and then build you back up with proper thinking on the subject(s). For those who do not react this way, my ultimate goal is the same for the first group—that we can all be better equipped to understand, explain, and defend in and to a generation badly in need of good news (which includes us), the Divine Warrior’s great victory over the dragon and what is happening after it to the church.

Last week I began the sermon on *The Woman and the Dragon* by having us think of **story**. Let’s continue this idea today. Ask yourself a question about the Bible. What is **the main form of communication God uses in his word** to convey who he is to you? Brian Godawa explains:

In the Bible the dominant means through which God communicates his truth is visually **dramatic stories**—*not* systematic theology, or doctrinal catechism or rational argument. A survey of the Scriptures reveals that roughly 30 percent of the Bible is expressed through rational propositional truth and laws. While 70 percent of the Bible is story, vision, symbol and narrative. Sure, God uses words, rationality and propositions to communicate his message [in a note, he says they are necessary]. But modern

evangelicalism has not always recognized how important visual imagery, drama and storytelling are to God.²

In the Bible, Michael and the Dragon, not to mention the woman and the dragon which come before and after it, are not only one such story, they are—as we began to think about last time—“the” story of the Bible.

Let’s recall the connections that Revelation 12 has to Genesis 3:15, which I believe to be God’s thesis statement of Holy Scripture. The curse upon the serpent in Genesis 3:15 says, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” In the verse there are three characters: the serpent, the woman, and the seed, which are themselves divided into two groups—the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Revelation 12 begins with a woman. This woman is pregnant and is about to give birth. This is her seed. Then it moves to the dragon—“that ancient serpent” and a war. In other words, we essentially have the story of Genesis 3:15 before us.

There are several other connections we saw that demonstrate how Revelation 12 is in fact *all about* Genesis

² Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldviews: Watching Films with Wisdom and Discernment*, second ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 12.

3:15. Why is he called the dragon? In the OT, the dragon is **Leviathan**. Why? One reason is that this word links us directly to Leviathan in the OT who had his *heads crushed* by Yahweh, Moses’ “**man of war**” (**Ps 74:13-14**; **Ex 15:3**). The Psalm’s crushing the head is called being “**swallowed up**” by the song of Moses (**Ex 15:12**), which celebrates the Exodus. In Revelation, the earth swallows up the attack of the dragon in the wilderness. A second name for the dragon is **Satan**. In the Targum, the serpent is called the “**enemy**,” a word closely associated to **Beelzebub**, who is Satan. In Revelation, those whom the dragon pursues at the end “**keep the commandments**” of God. In the Targum of Genesis, those who “**keep the commandments**” will crush the head of the serpent. At **the beginning** and **the end**, therefore, Revelation 12 recalls Genesis 3:15. Today, we will see how it does so in the middle through this great war between Michael and the Dragon.

Genesis 3:15 and Revelation 12 Parallels

Genesis 3:15	Revelation 12
Serpent, woman, seed	Woman, seed, Dragon
(Targum) Multiple names: Serpent = “Enemy” is closely related to Beelzebub, who is Satan)	Multiple names: Dragon= Leviathan, Ancient Serpent, Devil, Satan

Head is crushed	Leviathan: In OT, his heads were crushed (Ps 74:13-14)
Head crushed = earth swallowed up (ala Ex 15:12)	Earth swallows up the dragon's attack (Rev 12:16)
(Targum): Keep the commandments	Keep the commandments (Rev 12:17)

An Ancient, Ubiquitous Story

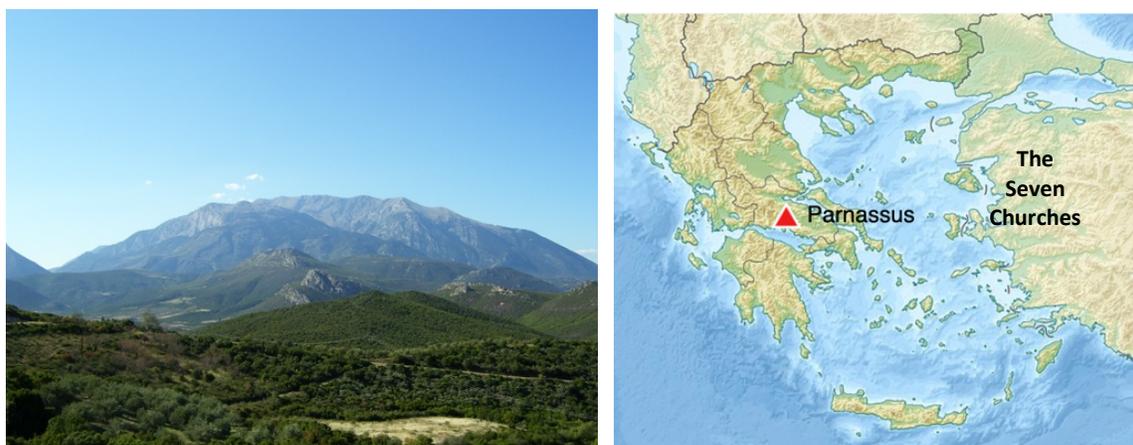
The story of Michael vs. the Dragon is found in **Revelation 12:7-9**. “Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world - he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” It obviously tells us about a mighty war. It is a war in heaven. This war is between supernatural beings: a dragon and Michael, who in the three (and only three) other parts of the Bible he is mentioned is called “First of the chief heads/princes” (**Dan 10:13** YLT), the Prince of Israel (**Dan 12:1**), and the (with the definite article) Archangel (**Jude 1:9**).

Before trying to understand this war, it is important for us to situate ourselves in the mind of the ancient Christian first hearing this story from the Revelator. Recall that John is writing Revelation [to the seven churches of Asia Minor](#). These seven churches are just a long skip of a rock across the sea from Greece. They spoke Greek. Many of them were Greek. And they were absolutely familiar with the stories of their own day.

One such story is [Apollo and Python](#). The Python was a [giant serpent-dragon](#) born to Gaia (Earth). His home would become a cave upon Mount Parnassus—the navel of the earth and center of the known world and site of the prophetic stone and oracle and [temple](#) called Delphi. He was [its protector](#).

One day [Zeus](#) was up to his usual funny business, this time having an affair with one of the daughters of the Titan Phoebe. Her name was [Leto](#). She got [pregnant](#). Zeus' wife Hera discovered their tryst and forbade anyone from harboring her so that she might not give birth. [She used Python](#) to harass Leto to the same end. But she found sanctuary on an island and gave birth to twins, one named [Apollo](#) (we've seen Apollo in the name Apollyon in Revelation 9) and the other, Artemis.

When Apollo was just four days old, he left his mother and found his way to the workshop of Hephaestus, who gave Apollo a bow and arrow as a present. Armed with the weapon, **Apollo sought out Python to kill him** for what he did to his mother. He tracked him down to the high cave on Parnassus whereupon, after a great and terrible battle, he smote the dragon and left his remains outside the temple of Delphi, thereby taking ownership of the temple and its prophetic stone and oracle.



This story has obvious differences with Michael and the Dragon. But it also has a lot of similarities—a **nearly miraculous birth**, a **dragon**, a **supernatural battle** of the **offspring of the woman**, a **casting out of the dragon** from **the high temple**, and so on. As all commentaries that bring this up (which is many) acknowledge, the seven churches would have seen the similarities immediately (especially in Ephesus,

which was home of Artemis worship, who has her own similarities with Revelation 12).³

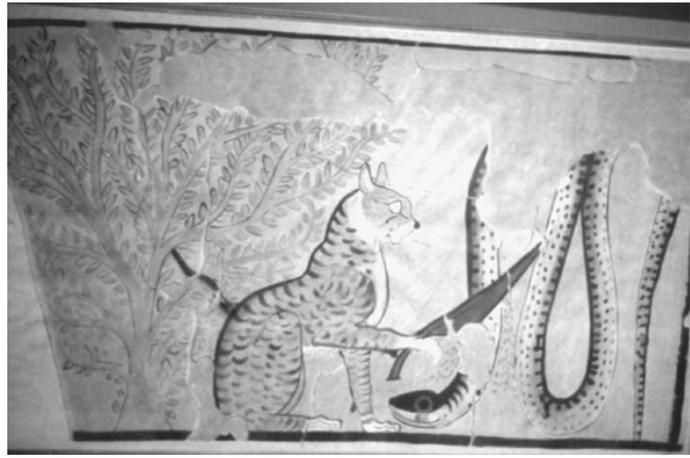
In fact, **versions of this story** are told, with varying purposes, throughout the ancient world. The **Hittites**, the **Canaanites**, the **Babylonians** all had stories of the god-man defeating the supernatural dragon.⁴ Perhaps the closest parallel is found in **Egypt** where the dragon Seth-Typhon pursues Isis to prevent her from giving birth to Horus, who eventually kills the dragon. In another, reminding us even more directly of Genesis 3:15, often depicted in Egyptian tombs we find Ra crushing the head of the serpent near the sacred tree.

³ “Artemis was traditionally born just outside Ephesus in the sacred grove Ortygia. She too was a virgin who protected women giving birth. A second century A.D. statue, now on display in the Ephesus Museum, portrays her as a queen of heaven, with the moon in the background of her three-tiered crown. This symbolism stems from her common identification as the moon goddess. Two other statues of the goddess in the museum show her wearing an extravagant necklace decorated with the twelve signs of the zodiac, which some interpreters link to the twelve stars on the woman’s head. Jews were forbidden to worship the stars (Deut. 4:19), yet later the zodiac was used decoratively in the mosaic floors of a number of synagogues.” **Mark Wilson**, *Revelation*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Hebrews to Revelation., vol. 4, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 319.

⁴ See **Adela Yarbro Collins**, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation*, Harvard Theological Review Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9, ed. Caroline Bynum and George Rupp (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), 57-100. See also **Jonathan Redding**, “Revelation 12 as Combat-Creation Myth,” https://www.academia.edu/864775/Revelation_12_as_Combat_Creation_Myth?auto=download. Most of our good conservative commentaries deal with the Combat Myth and have some good helps on learning to think through this as Christians.



Ra in the form of the Great Tom Cat slaying Apophis under the Ished tree
Tomb of Inherkha (Wikimedia commons)



Tomb at Deir el-Medina
in Geraldine Pinch, Egyptian Mythology (2002), 107.

What are we to make of such similarities? Liberals love to write about them, but in the process, their aim is far too often to conclude that Revelation 12 is just one of many and that there is nothing unique or vital about John's version. For this reason, some Christians do with them what they do with all modern secular stories. They demonize the ancient sagas just like they demonize going to the movies. Even hearing about similarities would be sacrilegious. There couldn't possibly be good reasons, so they would rather just not know. Ignorance is bliss.

But willful ignorance is rarely a virtue, especially when it comes to something God is doing in his word. In this case, it causes us to lose a great part of the purpose of the story. Here are three things to think about.

First, people tell the struggle of good vs. evil like this for a reason—it works **on the level of our soul**. It isn't doing it through propositions but *imagination*. Dragons, sweeping tails, angelic creatures, heavenly places, wildernesses, temples you would not ordinarily be allowed to go into, the personification of the earth and water, and so on. These are things your mind runs with as it creatively gives you the pictures in your head of the story. And it is much different to experience it this way than simply to have some “expert” tell you what it all means first. That has its place, but not before you hear the story. Perhaps this is why the only book in the Bible that gives a blessing for hearing it read aloud is Revelation (**Rev 1:3**), a book full of this kind of storytelling.

Second, the ubiquity of the story teaches us about archetypal truth that God has embedded into humanity. **We all know about good and evil**. We all know about **sin** and that **the world isn't what it is supposed to be**. We all know there has to be a **hero**, that the hero isn't us, and that he needs **to redeem** the world while **crushing evil**. C. S. Lewis has a fantastic essay on this where he argues, “[**If Christianity is true; then it could avoid all coincidence with other religions only on the supposition that all other religions are one hundred percent erroneous.**” But they are not 100% false. In

fact, there is much truth in them, which is why they work their lies so well. Nevertheless,

From these resemblances you may conclude not ‘so much the worse for the Christians’ but ‘so much the better for the Pagans.’ The truth is that the resemblances tell nothing either for or against the truth of Christian Theology. If ... Theology is true, the resemblances fit ... well. Theology, while saying that a special illumination has been vouchsafed to Christians and (earlier) to Jews, also says that there is some divine illumination vouchsafed to all men. The divine light, we are told, “lighteneth every man.” We should, therefore, expect to find in the imagination of great Pagan teachers and myth makers some glimpse of that theme which we believe to be the very plot of the whole cosmic story ... The difference [is] between a real event on the one hand and dim dreams or premonitions of that same event on the other.⁵

Third, when you understand that there are similar stories out there, you are led to ask, why would one so similar be told here about the central story of the Gospel to a group of people who would obviously have been familiar with the other story (stories)? The answer, as Brian Godawa

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Is Theology Poetry?* Oxford Socratic Club, 1944 (Samizdat University Press, 2014), 8-9, http://www.samizdat.qc.ca/arts/lit/Theology=Poetry_CSL.pdf.

has argued, is **subversion**. “Subversion is the act of retelling a story through the prism of a different worldview or philosophy or theology or politics or take your pick. The nature of subversive storytelling is to work within the cultural memes and received narrative that people are familiar with, but to infuse that narrative with new definitions.”⁶

Subversion is **subliminal**. It works on the subconscious. Most people are not even aware it is happening. Only when you are familiar with the original story can you even see it. A Christian watching recent Hollywood blockbusters on the Bible such as Aronofski’s *Noah* would see that this Noah is nothing like the biblical Noah. But to someone who has never heard the story? The green leftist environmentalist Noah and his “god” which is just voices in his head becomes the real Noah. Or take any of a number of **other leftist memes** unraveling Western Civilization at the moment: The 1619 Project, Critical Race Theory, the introduction of words like non-binary in regard to human sexuality, and so on. Entire generations of people who do not know the history of America, the great works of Western Civilization,

⁶ **Brian Godawa**, “The Subversion of God in Aronofsky’s Noah,” *Thus Spake Godawa: God, Movies, Culture, Blab Blab Blab* (April 2, 2014), <http://godawa.com/subversion-god-noah/>.

or the objective morality given in biblical texts, including its stories, will think these things are just the way it has always been. But in reality, **they are subverting a culture** and way of life into oblivion and people don't even know it's happening to them.

I believe **it is the pagans who have subverted the hero and dragon story** and that long ago this story was told from the perspective that aligned with the coming word of God to be written down in holy Scripture (Christians have argued this from the Zodiac for example, to varying degrees of persuasion). But sin and time and their own forgetfulness and subversive attacks upon the truth have acted upon humanity such that **they perverted the original story**.

I think what John is doing is recasting back to **Genesis 3:15**, so that the Christians in the churches might be able to identify the truth and walk according to its light. He's doing so in a different but complementary way to both Genesis 3:15 and his Gospel where he tells the same story from the earthly perspective of the incarnate Jesus, but much less directly. As someone noticed this week, in John 12 you have **the woman**, Mary, anointing, **the satanic accuser** Judas accusing Mary, and **Jesus commanding Judas to leave her**

alone (John 12:1-7).⁷ All this leads soon enough to his death and resurrection. In Revelation 12, he is doing it from the perspective of the glorified Jesus who has ascended and is in heaven. But both are the same story. So let's move to our story and try to make sense of a couple of important features that we have not yet discussed, or at least have not had time to pursue as we should.

The Stars and Angels of the Dragon

We've read [the basics of this war](#) in heaven. We've seen that there is [a dragon](#) who has [angels](#). We spent a lot of time on the Dragon last time, so we need not repeat that here. But [his "angels"](#) is an interesting term that we have not discussed. I think you can make a case that they relate to Genesis 3:15 as well.

The first thing to notice is that there is a [parallel between Rev 12:4 and 7](#). One reads that the dragon "[swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.](#)" It then says, "[And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child, he might devour it.](#)" The other reads of the war in heaven, "[the](#)

⁷ Great catch from Tim Nehrbass.

dragon and his *angels* fought back.” But “he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven” (8). So we have stars being swept out of heaven by the dragon’s tale. Then you have angels being cast out of heaven by Michael. What’s going on here?

I believe we need to read this in [the context of Genesis 3:15](#) and in the context of the mirror between heaven and earth. Both are clearly in view in Revelation 12. When discussing the [stars](#), a majority of commentaries will talk about others that are like Satan—members of [the heavenly host](#). We might call them the sons of God or the watchers. Stars are heavenly beings throughout the Bible ([Dt 4:19; 17:3; Jdg 5:20; Job 38:7; Ps 148:2-3](#); etc.), and as we have seen, this includes in Revelation ([Rev 1:20; 6:13](#); etc.). Of course, they can also be humans ([Gen 37:9; Dan 12:3](#)), though not unredeemed humans.

Because there are no unredeemed human stars, it makes the most sense that [the stars are members of the heavenly host](#) who have followed the dragon. But [when](#) were they swept down? This is one of those probably impossible to fully answer questions. I think you could make an argument that some fell [in the Garden](#) (ala the “[trees of Eden](#)” that hid our first parents; cf. [Gen 3:8; Ezek 31](#) suggests they were

heavenly beings). Obviously, Satan fell then, but did he take others with him? This is unclear, and I've never seen anyone use that as their argument which is the only one rooted in non-speculation that I can find. You could possibly argue that this refers to the fall of the watchers in [the days of Jared](#) as they attempted to root out the seed of the woman through the nephilim, as recorded in 1 Enoch. There was very clearly a fall of heavenly beings to earth at this time. You could also argue that this comes from [Daniel 8:10](#) where some of the stars are thrown down to earth and that it thus refers to [Antiochus Epiphanes](#) and his evil war-band.

But the context of Revelation is clearly [the birth of Jesus](#). One thinks of the satanically inspired Herod who tried to kill the true Seed of the woman in Bethlehem. But suddenly, we have moved from supernatural beings directly involved to evil human beings supernaturally inspired to do evil. But that is precisely [the mirror](#) of heaven and earth. What happens in heavenly places happens in the earthly counterpart, as Daniel learned in his 21 days of fasting on earth while Gabriel was delayed 21 days by the prince of Persia ([Dan 10:2; 13](#)). Whatever the case, it is clearly not talking about the future.

I think that the reference to “**angels**” rather than stars makes this idea of inspired satanic evil come to life a bit more. Yes, the angels are cast out “of heaven” and these are clearly the hordes of heavenly host that followed Satan and fought with him. But the word “angel” means “messenger,” and it seems to me that these evil messengers come to earth precisely at this point **to inspire human men** to prevent the birth of Messiah and/or to attack the woman and her other offspring. And isn't this related to why Jesus says that the Pharisees are sons of their father—the devil?

Who Is Michael?

We move next to one of the great questions of the Bible. **Who is Michael?** There are two options. Michael is a powerful, perhaps the most powerful created angelic person in heaven. But he is still a created being. The other is that this is a proper name for the Angel of the LORD. Many Christians today reject even the possibility of the latter due to their knowledge that the Jehovah's Witnesses teach that Jesus and Michael are the same person, and since they are the same person but believe Jesus is a created being, they reject the association of the two out of hand.

What many Christians do not know is that historically speaking, many perfectly orthodox Christians have taken the view that Michael is in fact Jesus, and long before Jews even existed. In the early church, while it was rare, we find the idea embedded in the Shepherd of Hermes.⁸ In the Reformation, “Nearly all [commentators on Daniel] acknowledge that Michael is the Son of God.”⁹ Calvin said, “I embrace the opinion of those who refer [Michael] to the person of Christ, because it suits the subject best to represent him as standing forward for the defense of his elect people” (*Commentaries on Daniel*). Melancthon said, “I understand him to be the very Son of God, the Logos” (*Commentary on the Prophet Daniel*). Andrew Willet said, “This Michael was none other than Christ, the Son of God, the prince and chief of the angels” (*Sixfold Commentary Upon Daniel*).¹⁰ And there

⁸ Hannah writes, “In the second and third centuries at least one author did indeed make such an identification of Christ with Michael ... Moreover, other more ambiguous texts ... may indicate that Hermes’ Michael-Christ Christology was by no means unique.” (p. 186). See Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 109 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 186-95. Caesarius of Arles (470 – 542) also takes this view saying, “We understand Michael to be Christ and his angels to be holy persons” (*Exposition on the Apocalypse*). In *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, 85.

⁹ Carl L. Beckwith, Timothy George, and Scott M. Manetsch, eds., *Ezekiel, Daniel: Old Testament*, vol. 12, Reformation Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), lvii–lviii.

¹⁰ Others include Johann Wigand (*Brief Exposition of the Prophet Daniel*), Giovanni Diodati (*Pious Annotations*), and Johannes Oecolampadius (*Commentary on Daniel*). See Beckwith on Daniel 10:21 and 12:1.

are many more over the centuries on up to today that take the same view.¹¹

Perhaps the chief (no pun intended) objection to this view comes from **Daniel 10:21**. The ESV reads that he is, “**Michael, one of the chief princes.**” If he is merely *one of many* chief princes, then he certainly couldn’t be the Angel of the LORD, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. While this sounds like a powerful argument, it doesn’t hold much water for me, because it can just as easily be translated, “**Michael, first of the chief heads [angels]**” (YLT). This is precisely how Willet is translating it when he says he is “**the prince and chief of the angels.**”¹²

I believe this is a very important question for properly understanding and seeing the true power of Revelation 12, and so I want to pursue it more. I agree with this position, and the more I look into it, the more convinced I become. Here are some of my reasons.

First, **his name: Michael**. Michael means “**Who Is Like God**” and is either a statement or a question. Either way, it

¹¹ These include **Lightfoot, Gill, Henry, Bullinger, Glasgow, Scott, Russell, Hengstenberg, Terry, Clark, Milligan, Carrington, Metzger, J. J. Collins, Kline, Gentry, Chilton**, and others. For many of the bibliography references see Gentry, 2:165. These do not include the many theologians who did not write commentaries per se.

¹² He notes long ago, “**The word *achad* here used, signifies as well *the first*, as *one*: as the word *achath*, of the same sense is taken, Dan. 1. 21. *He was unto the first year of Cyrus*. Christ then, was not one, but the first or chief of the Princes, that is, the Angels**” [spelling modernized].

points that **Michael is the one like God**, and many of the Reformers argue this point.¹³ The words for this name are played around with in several passages that relate directly to the Angel of the LORD. For example, **Exodus 15:11** says, “*Who is like you among the gods, O LORD? Who is like you ... working wonders?*” The LORD here is the “**man of war**,” the Angel of the LORD (**vs. 3**). Later, this idea of **wonders** is associated with the Angel directly. Manoah asks him, “*What is your name?*” (**Jdg 13:17**; see also Jacob in **Gen 32:27** when he wrestles with God). He replies, “*Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?*” (**Jdg 13:18**). Of course, “wonderful” becomes the very name of the Messiah in **Isaiah 9:6** when “**his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor...**” But in the LXX, this becomes, “**His name is called Angel of the Great Council.**”

Another point is that in **Daniel 12:1** Michael is called **the prince of Israel**. “Prince” here is the same term being used of the princes of Persia and Greece (**Dan 10: 13, 21**). In other words, these are **the sons of God put over the nations**. But in **Deuteronomy 32:9**, just after the sons of God inherit the nations, it is the “LORD” who inherits Israel (compare this with **Ps 2:8** and **82:8**). **Sons inherit** things. Thus, the LORD

¹³ **Diodati, Willet, and Wigand** all make this connection to the name.

there is the Angel of the LORD. Are we to think that Israel has two princes over it, one God himself and another a lesser angel?

This idea of Israel's prince and the Angel of the LORD returns in **Joshua 5:14**, where the great General of Israel comes face to face with "The Commander of the army of the LORD." Literally, that is "Prince of the LORD's Host." This is precisely the meaning of archangel where "arch" means "head" or "ruler" of the angels. So, Joshua takes off his sandals and bows down because he was standing on holy ground (**15**). But this is a direct connection the Moses doing the very same thing in the presence of the Angel of the LORD. The two are the same. In light of this title we should ask, what does Michael have charge of in Revelation 12? Is it not **the armies of heaven**?

In **Jude 9**, Michael is called the Archangel. In the Bible, he is the only mentioned archangel. And yet, when the LORD Jesus returns, he comes "with the voice of the archangel" (**1Th 4:16**) and the sound of the trumpet. This is highly reminiscent of the battle of Jericho, which the Angel of the LORD fought for Israel as the trumpets blew. The verse concludes, "And the dead in Christ will rise first." But John has a parallel, and in it Jesus is not coming back with

someone else shouting, for we read in **John 5:25**, “The dead will hear *the voice of the Son of God*, and those who hear will live.” And as we have seen in Revelation, it is Jesus who has the voice like a trumpet (**Rev 1:10, 17**). And his voice alone raises the dead.

In the same verse in Jude, however, those who take Michael to be a created being will point out that it continues that **Michael was contending with the devil** over the body of Moses. It then says, “**He did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you.’**” Certainly, this shows that Michael is inferior to the Lord. Besides pointing out the obvious that just like Revelation 12, Michael is contending with the devil in both passages, this language “**the Lord rebuke you**” actually comes from **Zechariah 3:2**. But in that passage, it is *the Angel of the LORD* saying the very same thing ... *to Satan*. If the Angel of the LORD is saying this to Satan, the logic would be that the Angel of the LORD is inferior to the LORD. But the Angel of the LORD *is* the LORD! What’s going on here? It’s very simple for a Christian to answer. Christ is calling upon his

Father to rebuke Satan in both cases, for he has not yet come into his full authority and power.¹⁴

I think that is plenty of reasons to see Michael as Christ. But people still object because in Revelation we see Michael battling the dragon after Christ has ascended to heaven. They think they can't possibly be the same person. But it never actually calls the child "Christ" or "Jesus," does it? And isn't it interesting that it isn't until the child is taken up to heaven that **suddenly in heaven Michael attacks** the dragon?

Here, I want us to remember again how closely related this entire chapter has been to **Genesis 3:15**. I want to ask, why should this part be any different? Now, it would, of course, be different, if Michael were not Christ. But **if Michael were Christ, then we would have the seed of the woman crushing the head of the dragon**, precisely what is predicted in Genesis 3:15! Notice, again, it is **Michael who instigates** this attack, not the dragon. And because Michael is fighting, the war is won. This was exactly what it was like in Daniel 10 when Gabriel could not withstand the prince of

¹⁴ For more arguments, see the excellent discussions in **David Chilton**, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Ft. Worth, TX: Dominion Press, 1987), 311-13, https://www.garynorth.com/freebooks/docs/pdf/days_of_vengeance.pdf and **Gentry**, *Revelation* 2:167-70.

Persia until Michael came. But once Michael came, the battle was quickly over. I believe this is why, as soon as the victory is won and Satan is cast down, the loud voice in heaven says, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser ... has been thrown down” (Rev 12:10). It doesn’t praise Michael, but Christ for the work of throwing down Satan by his authority.

Here, it is also important to remember what the NT says about who defeats Satan. Is it Michael? Recall our parallel in the Gospel of John. It was identical to Revelation 12. Here, when the baby is brought up to heaven, Satan immediately falls to earth. In John, the ruler of the world is cast out as soon as Jesus is lifted up on the cross (John 12:31-32).¹⁵ And what are we taught that the ascension of Jesus does? Jesus is now “at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him” (1Pe 3:22; cf. Mt 12:22-29; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-15; 1Jo 3:8). Gentry is on point when he asks, “Why would such a strongly Christ-exalting (Rev 1:1; 5:5), redemption-centered (1:5; 5:6; 7:14; 12:11) book like Revelation

¹⁵ Gentry makes this very argument even though he does not understand the chiasmic parallels here between the two books.

present an angel performing Christ's great work in defeating our greatest enemy?"

Can you see **why this matters**? It's for the same reason that I've tried to drill it in our heads that Revelation 12 is interpreting Genesis 3:15, that it gives **a birth narrative of Christ**, and the **very center of the book** upon which everything hinges. If Michael is not Christ, then Christ is not the one casting out Satan. And if that is true, even if Christ commissioned Michael to do this, *which it does not say*, his glory is diminished. But **if he is Christ**, then it fits with everything else in the chapter. The war of Michael and the Dragon taking place in heaven is the equivalent in spiritual places of Jesus' death, descent, resurrection, and ascension. This is the defeat of Satan, the casting down of he who accuses us, **the crushing of the head of the serpent** at the hands of the seed of the woman. Her Seed does it. Jesus. Not some created angel. And that is the essence of Gospel of his Gospel.

The War in the Wilderness

Of course, this is not the end of the chapter, **or the end of the dragon**. We saw last time that the dragon **went after**

the woman and chased her into the wilderness where a place had been prepared for her by God. I want to spend our remaining time in this chapter thinking about this wilderness and not letting us romanticize the place. For it is a wilderness, not an oasis. I recently reread Tolkien's description of the desert before Mordor and was struck by the way he described it.

The marshes were at an end, dying away into dead peats and wide flats of dry cracked mud. The land ahead rose in long shallow slopes, barren and pitiless, towards the desert ... The remainder of that journey was a shadow of growing fear in which memory could find nothing to rest upon ... The air, as it seemed to them, grew harsh, and filled with a bitter reek that caught their breath and parched their mouths ... Before them dark in the dawn the great mountains reached up to roofs of smoke and cloud. Out from their feet were flung huge buttresses and broken hills ... loathsome far was the country that the crawling day now slowly unveiled ... here neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were choked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about. High mounds of crushed and powdered rock, great cones of

earth fire-blasted and poison-stained, stood like an obscene graveyard in endless rows, slowly revealed in the reluctant light ... even the sunlight was defiled ... a land diseased beyond all healing - unless the Great Sea should enter in and wash it with oblivion (“The Passage of the Marshes,” *The Two Towers*).

This is what you are to think of when you think of the wilderness. For in the Bible, it is “a site of danger and death, rebellion, punishment and temptation ... the dwelling place of evil spirits” where people “are driven against their will.”¹⁶ With the same Greek word (*erēmos*) that John uses, the LXX says of Babylon that God will make it “desolate” and destroy sinners out of it (**Isa 13:9**). He says, “The measuring line of desolation (*erēmos*) shall be cast over it, and satyrs (demons) shall dwell in it” (**34:11**). Now, Satan is dwelling in it and he is inciting his messengers of evil (human and non) against the church. “Woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath” (**Rev 12:12**).

Remember, the wilderness is the very same place that God sent Israel when they were tempted and tested so severely for 40 years. The wilderness is where the Holy

¹⁶ Leland Ryken et al., “Wilderness,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 949.

Spirit sent Jesus when he was tempted and tested so severely for 40 days. The wilderness. It is not meant to be a picture of happiness, but one that you have a deep longing to leave! Is this your longing?

The stunning thing here is that after Michael has defeated the dragon and the battle in heaven has been won, **God is doing the same thing again to his church**. Not that he is directly leading her here, but that in his providence he allows the dragon to continue to go after his Bride so that she would flee into this place. Search the Scriptures and you will know it's true.

Yet, **we all know implicitly** that God *has* led his church into the wilderness in this time after Jesus' ascension. In fact, I think that's one of the things that gave rise to **Rapture theology**. No one *wants* to continue living here! For, as Tolkien has now captured our attention of the place, this is a habitation you **willingly run from**, not to. Only when you must, because circumstances prohibit any other option, do you, like Frodo and Sam, go willingly to such a place. And so, if there were some way we could find that would lead us to believe that God wasn't going to keep us here, that he never really wanted us here, then we would all take that. I remember **my grandfather** the last time I saw him. He had

spent his entire life enthralled by that idea of the Rapture, waiting expectantly for it to occur. But it never did. And he was sorely disappointed about it at the end. Why would God just leave me here my whole life, nearly 90 years on this planet?

Do we not all **feel the pains** of living such an inhospitable land, filled with sin, filled with evil (including our own?), filled with blasphemy, filled with discouragement and doubts, with disease and death and, with emptiness and want? That's the unredeemed world; that's the wilderness. And like Israel, God has left his people here. But why? In part, to **test** their metal, to **try** their quality.

In the heat, will they **complain**? In the dusty windstorms, will they **grumble**? When they grow tired and sick, will they **murmur**? When the torrential downpour comes and all becomes slippery such that they be swept away by the desert flood, will they flee to the **Rock** that is higher than they? When they hunger, will they beg for meat? Will they long for the good ol' days of leeks and onions and melons which was actually brutal slavery and harsh taskmasters in a foreign land? Or will they graciously accept the gift of **Manna** from heaven? When their throats are parched for lack of water, will they strike the Rock, or will

they humbly ask God for help and worship as the Rock pours forth **Living Water**? Do you feel *the story*?

Do you remember that for forty years **God gave them their food**, all they needed, every single day? Do you recall that **he opened the rock and waters gushed out**? Do you recollect that in those hot, rocky paths **their sandals never wore down**? And must you be reminded that **their clothes were as good** forty years later as they day they left Egypt?

Do you see what I'm doing here? It's the last piece of the puzzle that is Revelation 12. For here, **in this land of discouragement** and disillusionment, though God says that the woman would be forced into this place for a predetermined period of time, a period of three and a half that emulates her Husband's time ministering in Israel until he should die and be raised from death to newness of life in his glorified body, *he does not leave her alone here*. That does not mean the wilderness is less than what we have described. It does not soften its harshness. It shows you God's grace in it. In fact, it is in remaining in it that such grace is magnified. The bleaker the landscape, the more glorious the green or the sun. The greater the sadness, the happier the joy. The greater the evil, the more grace abounds.

Look at the language one last time. After the child goes up into heaven, the woman flees into the wilderness, “Where she has a place prepared by God.” God *did* send her here after all, for she is going to the place *he has prepared* for her in this time between times—between the First and Second Comings. Here, it says, “She is to be nourished” (Rev 12:6) for the entire length of time God has her in this wilderness. The means of grace, all that you need to make it through without complaint, without grumbling or murmuring. The Word of God; the Supper, Baptism, Singing spiritual songs, prayer, fellowship with his people.

He does not nourish for part, but for all of it. Christ has nourished his bride since the day he ascended to heaven. He has never left or forsaken her. But he has nourished her in the most brutal of habitats, through many dangers, toils, and snares.

But again, as soon as the dragon is cast down to earth by Michael and the songs go up to the throne of God about the salvation and power and kingdom of God and the authority of his Christ which has now come, as soon as this happens, the dragon pursues the woman. But God gives her two wings of the great eagle. Tolkien again has those fabulous eagles that sweep Sam and Frodo away from the wilderness

back home to safety. What a story! But God gives this woman eagles wings so that she might fly from the serpent *into the wilderness*. What an even more amazing story! Why? **So that she may be nourished here**, for a time, until she has been made ready to enter and enjoy her eternal Promised Land.

Our old songs sing of **this patient, expectant longing**, not for Egypt, not for mere escape, but for heaven, not in complaint, but in worship. **“Beulah land. I’m longing for you and someday on thee I’ll stand. There my home shall be eternal. Beulah land. Sweet Beulah land.”** **“A wonderful land is waiting, just over Jordan’s tide. Remember victory is on the other side.”** **“Deep River, My home is over Jordan. Deep River, Lord. I want to cross over into campground.”** **“Roll, Jordan, roll. I want to go to heaven when I die to hear Jordan roll.”**

My prayer is that you would hear the story and be swept up in it once more. I pray that it would work on you in unseen places, where only the Word of God can go. Only until that happens—through the Story—will you know what it means to be nourished in these difficult days in the wilderness. But once you do, you will know why these saints loved not their lives even unto death and why, though the

dragon raged, they kept the commandments of God and held fast to the testimony of Jesus. Michael, the Divine Warrior, has defeated the dragon. But there is still no other way to heaven than through the wilderness, which he taught through that very victory on the cross.

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