

# A STRANGE CHRISTMAS EVE

## REVELATION 12:3-5

Sir Winston Churchill was the prime minister of Great Britain during the tumultuous and challenging days of World War 2. Churchill was one of freedom's heroes.

On Christmas Eve in 1941, he was in Washington, DC as a guest of President Franklin Roosevelt...

France and most of Western Europe had fallen to the German blitzkrieg. The battle of Britain had been underway for over a year. London was reeling from the air assault launched by the German Luftwaffe.

Churchill and England were embroiled in battle.

But on this Christmas Eve a new ally had entered the war. Prior to December 7, America had been reluctant to join the conflict. But Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor forced our hand. Laissez faire was no longer an option.

On that Christmas Eve Roosevelt invited the Prime Minister to join in the lighting of the national Christmas tree... Afterwards, *a battle hardened Churchill - from a battle-scarred England* - shared his thoughts on the night. It was as if he were preparing his American friends for the struggle they were about to enter...

His speech was titled, "[This is a Strange Christmas Eve.](#)" Churchill warned us of the stern years ahead and the rigors of war. He affirmed the purity of our motive to be free nations, and our duty to fight for our children's future. Then he encouraged us to cast aside our cares, and enjoy Christmas Eve "[as an evening of happiness in a world of storm.](#)" For one

night, for the children's sake, "let every home be a brightly lit island of peace."

Here're Churchill's words in his own voice...

Again the title of Churchill's stirring speech was "This Is A Strange Christmas Eve," *but with that comment the great statesman was wrong.* Christmas Eve 1941 was not strange or foreign to Christmas at all. In fact, it was closer in kin to the first Christmas than the Christmases that've been celebrated in times of peace.

The angels greeted the shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem with the words, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men" only because that's what the war-torn world at the time lacked most, and desperately needed. Christmas is many things, but above all, "it is a brightly lit island in a world of storm."

That's certainly a description of the first Christmas...

Jesus entered a world at war.... He came to a world under the boot of a Roman military occupation.

At the time of Christ, the Roman army and its Caesar ruled the world with an iron fist. The *Roman blitzkrieg* had conquered and subjugated everything that stood its way. Individual rights and nationalistic loyalties were stripped from the people. Roman legions stood guard across the empire to put down the frequent uprisings that resulted. It was Rome that invented crucifixion.

But that wasn't the only war raging that first Christmas. While imprisoned on the island of Patmos, *a link in a Roman*

*chain-gang*, the Apostle John gives us a version of Christmas we don't often reference.

Revelation 12:3-5 reads, "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. 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 His throne."

I doubt if you'll receive a Christmas card this year with this picture on the front. We associate Christmas with reindeer not dragons - and giving not devouring.

But John sees past the tinsel, and colored balls, and holly branches, and horse drawn sleighs - and he sees Christmas for what it truly is - **Christmas was the pivotal battle in a colossal, millenniums-old war.**

John saw Christmas from a spiritual perspective...

And the players John saw in the Christmas drama were not the folks we usually associate with Christmas, even the biblical account... *He didn't mention Mary, or Joseph, or the innkeeper, or shepherds, or angels...*

He mentions **a woman with child.**

According to Genesis 39 *the nation Israel* fits this description. Israel was pregnant with the promise of a male Child. This Child would be humanity's King and Savior. Israel was pregnant with this promise for 4000 years... until Mary conceived and gave birth to a Son.

John also sees **a dragon**.

And from cover to cover the Bible identifies this dragon as the devil or *Satan*. In Revelation 12 the dragon brings down some of **the stars of heaven** with him. The stars are angels - and apparently a third of their host followed Satan in his rebellion against God.

Then John notes **the male Child who rules all nations**. This of course is *Jesus Christ*. He survives the dragon's attack - to fulfill His divine mission - and is caught up to God, to sit upon His throne forever.

But notice the startling starting point of John's vision.

In verse 4 when the Child is to be born, John sees the dragon's posture, **"And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born."** *Hey, wait a minute, that's no way to treat a pregnant lady and her newborn!...*

I hope we all agree that pregnant mothers should be given special treatment. Every effort should be made to handle a pregnant mom with tender loving care.

If I were President my first proclamation would be special privileges for all pregnant moms... *They could park in handicap spots... go to the head of all check-out lines... all waiting rooms would be required to have chairs with extra padding just for pregnant women...*

But that's not how a pregnant Israel was treated.

The dragon stalked her until she gave birth; then He tried to pounce on her child... *And as horrible as that sounds, that kind of treatment was nothing new...*

Throughout the 4000 years of Israel's pregnancy Satan tried over and over to snuff out God's people and the promise of a child. At every attack, God spared the Jews, and kept their hope alive. *Israel's history though, was checkered with countless near-misses...*

The Bible teaches that the conflict between the dragon and the woman began as far back as the Garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15, when God cursed the serpent for tempting Adam and Eve, God told the snake, "I will put enmity between you and the woman"

To this day, there are few women who like snakes...

But that's where the plot thickens. God adds, "and between your seed and her Seed;" A woman doesn't have a seed. Obviously, the seed comes from the man.

And throughout the centuries Bible scholars have interpreted this idiom, "*the seed of the woman,*" as Mary's virgin birth. Jesus was born without a man's help. He is *the woman's seed*. And there'll be a running hostility between Jesus and the serpent, or Satan.

In fact, Genesis 3 goes on to predict that the battle will reach a climax. It reads, "(Jesus) shall bruise the serpent's head, and he shall bruise (Jesus') heel."

The long-brewing conflict between the Devil and the Savior will be bloody and violent. The serpent will harm Jesus. He'll draw blood, but it won't be a fatal wound.

In the end, it'll amount to nothing but a heel bruise.

Jesus will wield the decisive blow. He'll stomp His heavy sandal, and crush the serpent's head. In the end, Jesus shatters Satan's power. This is why Satan tries so hard to wipe out the Savior before His birth...

Immediately after the Garden of Eden, Satan went to work corrupting human hearts with lust and wickedness, hoping God would get so frustrated with His own creation, that He'd destroy mankind Himself...

I'm sure Satan squealed with glee when he heard of God's plan to destroy the world with water.

The devil thought he had drowned out any hope of God's King, and salvation for the world... But God spared a man of faith named Noah, and rekindled the hope of salvation for a world enshrouded in darkness.

When God narrowed the promise to a splinter of Noah's family - to Israel, the heirs of Abraham - Satan again went to work to try and extinguish the promise.

*And he thought he'd succeeded...* The Red Sea was on one side - the Egyptian army on the other side...

Surely, the people of the promise were goners now. But God worked a miracle and rolled back the sea. Moses and Israel walked to safety on the dry ground.

After God narrowed the promise to the lineage of David, numerous attacks were launched by Satan.

If Goliath had won the contest against the little boy the promise of a Savior would've died with David - or if Saul's

spear had struck its target our hope would be lost... *And the same was true of David's royal family...*

Once, a wicked queen, Athalia, nearly wiped out the promise when she tried to kill all of David's heirs. She didn't know one of the boys was secretly hidden. He later was brought to power in a priestly coup d' that.

Israel's history tells of numerous attempts by Satan to wipe out the ancestry of the coming King. Satan wanted to kill the promise before He could be born.

Yet Satan failed. And on that first Christmas an heir of Abraham - a distant granddaughter of King David - a virgin named Mary - birthed the promised Son.

But still Satan was undaunted, and on the attack.

The dragon was right there... He was in Bethlehem, with claws drawn, ready to devour the Savior Child.

The wicked King Herod first tried to coax information out of the wise men. He wanted to know the Child's whereabouts so he could assassinate Him. The wise men smelled a rat and returned home another way...

But this time the bloodthirsty Herod paints with a broader brush. He slaughters all Bethlehem's male toddlers - two years old and under. By slaying them **all** he figured to knock off the **One** - the infant King.

This is why the original Christmas carol was sung by Bethlehem's grieving mothers. The first song to spring from the Christmas story is found in Matthew 2:18...

“A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Like Christmas Eve 1941, the first Christmas also occurred in a world ravaged by war. Because of the combat, moms were grieving the loss of their sons.

But this was just the beginning of travails...

The battle continued... *In Nazareth, a mob of angry legalists tried to push Jesus off a cliff... Demons stir up a storm at sea with the intent of drowning Jesus...*

*Jealous religious leaders try to have Him arrested...*

*Another King Herod beheads Jesus' friend, John...*

*Eventually Jews and Romans conspire to flog and crucify Jesus... Afterwards they even seal His tomb...*

Yet the last line of verse 5 is the great push-back.

None of Satan's assassination attempts succeed, for John declares, **“Her Child was caught up to God and His throne.”** *Satan failed and King Jesus prevailed.*

Prior to Jesus' birth God thwarted all of Satan's plans... After His birth, Jesus sidestepped His traps...

And even when Satan had Him in the crosshairs of the cross Jesus still managed to escape... On the third day, He rose from the dead. John reports that 40 days later the **“Child was caught up to God and His throne.”**

But now that Jesus has ascended to heaven and God's throne, has Satan given up the fight? *Has the dragon become*



*docile? Is he now peace-loving, and willing to let bygones be bygones? **Not hardly!***

Satan now turns his attention to Jesus' followers.

He no longer aims for the upper-cut. He knows he can't take Jesus with a single knock-out punch, so *now he takes countless body blows. He attacks the body of Christ - He ambushes the Church... you and me.*

The Bible says that Satan is a robber. His desire towards us is three-fold... *to steal, kill, and destroy.*

Perhaps this Christmas you find your faith under attack. Your family is under the gun. You're in a battle.

Your whole world feels like you're at war.

Perhaps you're a soldier, or a police officer, or a first responder, and you literally go to war every day... Or maybe your battle is more symbolic: you're combating financial struggles, or a terrible illness... Or it could be your war is spiritual: you suffer from depression, or your heart has been broken, or you're a slave to some sin... In multiple ways Satan tries to destroy our faith.

And perhaps you're viewing this Christmas as **a strange Christmas Eve**. You were hoping for a holly, jolly Christmas. You were thinking of pristine settings, and idyllic family gatherings, and peaceful celebrations.

You wanted cocoa and eggnog, not cod liver oil.

But you've forgotten what Christmas is really about.

*Why would you think it strange that a battle rages at Christmas? It's all about a battle. Recall, the first Christmas was the pivotal battle in the war of the ages.*

Think of Christmas as a decisive beachhead. It was the launch of a crucial invasion. The baby born in Bethlehem was the first of the liberators to move behind enemy lines. Christmas is a spiritual Normandy.

As one author put it, “The nativity was not a passive event; it was an aggressive assault. It was an all-out invasion on enemy-occupied territory. Every bow in the arsenal of darkness was bent in the little baby’s direction, yet He still triumphed.” If Satan had thwarted Jesus’ birth, he could’ve turned the tide forever.

If the devil had kept God from invading his turf, his gains would’ve been made permanent. But for Satan, Christmas turned out to be the beginning of the end.

After Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem it was only a matter of time for God in Christ to ultimately triumph. The dominoes began to fall: *Jesus’ crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the growth of His Church, His second coming...* it all leads up to John’s inevitable outcome... “the male Child will rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the prolific American poet (*who we’ve honored with a stamp*) - once found himself in a Christmas struggle. It was 1862 - the Civil War was underway and the conflict troubled him.

In addition, the year before, Longfellow had lost his wife. A candle had tipped over, igniting her clothes. His beloved bride had burned to death... Longfellow’s grief was compounded

when his son, Charles, a soldier, returned home from the frontlines with severe injuries.

Both Longfellow and his nation were in a battle...

Henry Longfellow was despondent and depressed. *How could he celebrate anything at Christmas time?*

But in the midst of his struggle he wrote a poem. The first stanza reads, "I heard the bells on Christmas day. Their old familiar carols play. And wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, goodwill toward men."

The second stanza gets left out of most versions, yet in it the poet describes his immediate circumstances - the horrors of war... "Then from each black, accursed mouth. The cannon thundered in the South. It was as if an earthquake rent; the hearthstones of the continent."

The nation was at war and it grieved Longfellow.

The third stanza reveals his disillusionment and wobbly faith. "In despair I bowed my head: 'There is no peace on earth,' I said. 'For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth goodwill toward men.'"

He squints to see, as we often do, God's purpose in the pain and evil He allows. *He's asking God why.*

That's when the Christmas bells chimed again, and God lifted Henry's faith once more. He wrote, "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: 'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill to men.'"

And as he absorbed the message of Christmas - as it sank in - he ended, "Till, ringing, singing on its way, the world

revolved from night to day. A voice, a chime, a chant sublime, of peace on earth, goodwill to men.”

Tonight, I'm not arguing that the battle is fierce - that you're not troubled by cares and dangers. I don't deny that a stern task and formidable years lie before you.

But hear the Christmas bells - let them sink deep into your soul - let their message of hope remind you that your situation can change. Victory is on the horizon.

Christmas was the first sign the battle would turn.

That's why we should use tonight and tomorrow, to prepare ourselves for the challenges we'll face the day after. You can get a jump on the battles of the new year by reminding yourself of the meaning of Christmas...

*The first victory has already been won.* Jesus is our beachhead. His invasion is underway. When He came to earth He showed us He wanted to get involved in our problems. He proved that He was willing to meet us where we're at - and become a part of our solution.

Yes, there'll be tough years ahead, and difficult obstacles to overcome. But understand that Christmas means you'll not have to fight your battles alone.

Remember what the angel called Jesus, “Immanuel,” or “God with us.” Listen again to the Christmas bells...

Let Longfellow's message ring in your ears... “Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on earth, goodwill to men.’”



As Winston Churchill suggested why don't we make tonight and tomorrow, **"a brightly lit island in a world of storm."** For the next 24 hours let's set aside our cares, our fears, our worries. Let's forget the battles we face for one night - **"let the children have their fun."** Refresh yourself with the people you love and that love you.

Perhaps this Christmas Eve you'll rediscover why the battle you face is worth fighting. You'll remember that God's Word is true - and that His promises never fail.

### ***This is not a strange Christmas Eve...***

Christmas is the calm in the storm that God designs for everyone who is in a fight and wants to prevail...

Sharpen your faith on the anvil of Christmas. Find in the Christmas' bells a new hope. God is with you. Jesus has come, and He's not afraid of a fight...

Christmas means that even in the midst of the battle you face, Jesus wants to fight with you and fight for you. ***"So in God's mercy, a happy Christmas to you all."***