



Satan (Revelation 12 & 13)

Revelation 12 & 13 constitute the center of the entire book; in it we plumb the depths of why there is so much suffering and evil on earth. Satan, a fallen angel, leads an insurrection against the Holy Triune God of heaven and earth. Satan is an accuser, a liar, and deceiver. He is an agent of chaos and wants to destroy all that belongs to God. Before reading about Satan, note where the discussion about him takes place: "A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven." Heaven is the safest place in the universe to discuss the most dangerous fiend in the universe. Already, the reader is alerted to the fact that our sovereign God is in control. As Martin Luther once said, "The devil is God's devil."

Who is Satan?

This chapter is a great illustration of how a biblical author draws on stories from the world at large to communicate Christian truth. There are three important symbols in Revelation 12—the pregnant woman, the man-child, and the dragon. These were familiar symbols to John's world. In Greek mythology, the dragon Python sought to kill the goddess Leto because Python learned that Leto would bear a son who would grow up to kill him. Python failed to kill her and Leto gave birth to Apollo, the sun god. Apollo then destroyed Python and inaugurated a golden age among the gods, full of celebration and music (Davis 2000, 252). Brilliantly, John takes this well-known myth about Apollo and uses it as a vehicle to communicate to his world the truth of Christianity. As Tolkien put it, "In Christ myths become reality in human history."

The red dragon is Satan (v. 9), "who leads the whole world astray." The man-child is Jesus Christ, who "rules the nations with an iron scepter." The woman is **not** the virgin Mary! Note how she flees to the desert, a place prepared for her by God for 1260 days.¹ Rather, the woman represents the people of God from both the Old and New Testaments—the messianic community. Satan attempted to slay the Son of God in order to thwart the plans of God. Savagely, he takes his position like a mid-wife between the open legs of the laboring woman. His intent is to eat the child! He is a liar and murderer! This explains why Herod murdered all boys age 2 and under (Matthew 2:13-18). In Revelation 12:8, John fast-forwards the reader from the birth of Jesus straight to His ascension. John skips over Jesus' temptations, ministry, teaching, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection because his readers already know about those things. The point is that Satan's mortal wound came through the Cross! He and his rebel angels were expelled from heaven having been decisively beaten on the battle field of the Cross.

¹ 1260 days, or 42 months (13:5), or a time, times and a half of time (12:14) are synonymous; they refer to the 3 ½ year period of Jewish persecution and suffering by the tyrant Antiochus IV, who was finally defeated by Judas Maccabaeus in 164 BC. Thus 1260 days = an intense but limited period of persecution.

Having no power over the Son of God, Satan now sets his sights on the people of God. He (v. 13) pursues the woman, making war on her and her offspring! But God's people are secure! The two wings of a great eagle (v. 14) are Old Testament references describing God's provision (Isaiah 40:31). When the dragon tries to flood the woman, God allows the earth to swallow the river (v. 16).

Revelation 12 ends with the dragon on the shore of the sea. To land-lubbers, the sea was a symbol of chaos and darkness. Satan is reinforcing himself for another attack.

What does Satan want?

Satan wants to deceive and destroy the people of God. The key to understanding Revelation 12 & 13 is to see that Satan apes or parodies² the Holy Trinity. Satan the dragon, Satan the sea beast, and Satan the land beast set themselves against the triune God. Satan imitates God's reality.

- God, the Creator is parodied by Satan the Dragon.
- Christ the Lamb is parodied by the sea beast. John describes this beast using images from Daniel 7:1-8. The sea beast represents political evil which persecutes God's people for 42 months—an intense but limited period.
- Both Christ and the Spirit are parodied by the land beast—a religious imposter. This beast offers counterfeit religion and calls all to worship Satan. The land beast represents religious persons who support the political authorities that are allied with Satan against Christ and His people.

At some point you have to choose your Master. Jesus or Satan. "Holy, Holy, Holy" or "666." There's no middle ground.

How Does God want me to respond?

- We overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb! (12:11)
- We overcome Satan when we refuse to shrink back! (12:11)
- We overcome Satan when we love Jesus more than our lives! (12:11)
- We overcome Satan when we keep Jesus' commands and testify about Him! (12:17)
- We overcome when we endure and exercise patience! (13:10)
- We overcome when we are wise! (13:18)

"It is as if two people were playing chess. At a certain point, one of the players rises from the table, leaving his opponent to ponder his next move. The opponent struggles with all the possibilities because he is determined to win. What he has not realized is that there are only a limited number of moves that he can make, and not one of them can change the outcome of the game. No matter what he does, he will lose.

Just so at the Cross, the outcome of the chess game between God and Satan was decided. God will certainly win. Satan, however, is presently playing out every conceivable option, imagining that somehow his rebellion will triumph. It will not." (David Wells 1997, 67)

² A parody is a weak imitation of something else.