

The Relentless Red Dragon

Antichrist and the Many Faces of Evil – Part I

Revelation 12:1-6

Introduction

If there were words that we could use to describe the character of Satan, the choices would be words like corrupt, defiant, sinister, evil, and proud. One word that will stand out in our new series of studies in Revelation is the word “relentless”.

If we were to choose a symbol or figure to describe Satan, we could choose from: a crafty serpent, a deceiving angel of light, a roaring lion on the hunt for fresh victims, or a lesser known symbol of a red dragon, which John the apostle will describe. In fact, the description is of a relentless red dragon.

If we were to describe one desire of this dragon that seems to drive every other passion in his fallen, corrupted state, we could easily choose one word – hatred – especially for the Jewish people.

However, this is more than hatred of the Jew, it is hatred of their election as an ethnic nation of God – being known as God’s chosen people. Satan hates the covenant established by God with Israel; hates the coming kingdom and coming King – the God-man who will one day sit on David’s throne.

One of the greatest proofs to me that a dispensational interpretation of prophecy is correct – which is just another way of saying a literal approach to the meaning of scripture – is the ongoing persecution of the Jew. If the church simply absorbed the promises of the Israel; if the covenant promises to Israel of a land and a nation and a throne did not matter anymore; if the church voided the future of ethnic Israel in the land of promise, then why is there ongoing hatred and persecution of the Jew that can only be explained in terms of a demonic agenda?

Why have there been long, historical attempts on nearly every continent to wipe out the Jew? Why are the pages of history footnoted with atrocities against the Jewish people?

In the second century, Jews in Egypt and the Mesopotamian region were sold into slavery so much so that the price of an able-bodied slave dropped to that of a horse.

The crusades that began in the eleventh century would slaughter hundreds of thousands of Jews.

A thousand years ago, Jews were banished from England; in France and Germany, they were blamed for the black plague and treated viciously.

You might say, “But that was the thirteenth century. That’s ancient history.”

The same year that Columbus discovered America, Spain had driven all the Jews from their country.ⁱ

“But that was the unsophisticated fifteenth century. People thought Jews were animals, and also thought the earth was flat.”

I read just this past week, an interesting footnote regarding the late 1780s. As France was in the upheaval of its revolutionary blood bath, Thomas Jefferson had taken the place of Benjamin Franklin as the foreign hero and diplomat from America. As the power of the monarchy was slipping into the hands of the people, he was asked by the National Assembly of France to help write their own Declaration of Independence. Jefferson had already been mentoring Lafayette and together they worked on the preamble. Without any reference to a Creator, the first article simply declares that “all men are born and remain free and equal in rights.” However, burrow into this original constitution and discover that civil rights were denied to three specific categories of people: actors, Protestants, and Jews.ⁱⁱ

Being an actor is an occupation that can be changed. A Protestant is a member of a religious sect that they can leave. A Jew cannot change who he is, and as a result, the great revolution of France left one race of people without the protection of the constitution, much like our own country refused to protect the African race.

“But that was the 1780s. Surely things would change for this race of people after centuries of persecution.”

About 130 years after the French ratified their constitution, a young man stood in the Hofberg Library in Vienna – standing, as he often did, before the encasement of what many believed to be the spear that pierced the side of Christ. He hated Jesus Christ

and he hated the Jewish people. In his early twenties, he had overheard a tour guide at this library say to his group, “This spear is shrouded in mystery and whoever unlocks its secrets could rule the world.” This young man would later say, “Those words changed my life.” Standing before that spear, this young man made a pact with Satan, inviting the powers of the spear that pierced Christ to invade his own life. Another man, by the name of Walter Stein, who befriended this young Adolph Hitler, wrote that as Hitler stood before that spear, “he stood like a man in a trance . . . the very space around him seemed enlivened with some kind of [strange] light. He appeared transformed, as if some mighty Spirit inhabited his very soul, creating within and around him an evil transformation.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I found it interesting to learn that when Hitler victoriously marched through Vienna, he went into this library and took the spear for himself. He then said, “I now hold the world in my hands.”^{iv}

Without question, this demonically inspired and empowered man would one day march through much of Europe, triumphant in victory. While millions were raising their hands toward him shouting, “Heil Hitler,” at the same time, millions of Jews were being burned to death in ovens deep inside concentration camps.

“But that was the early 1900s. The world knows better now.”

Oh no. This hatred for Christ and the Jew has not gone away, for the devil has not retired from his primary passion. Even though at the moment he lacks a global crusader, he is still fomenting, organizing, and luring people into his crusade.

An article in the *New York Times* reported, a number of years ago, on the popularity of particular video games in Germany and Austria. There were more than a hundred different video games categorized as “KZ Manager” – “KZ” is shorthand for the German words “concentration camp”. The games allow a player to run a concentration camp, complete with a castle topped by a swastika. The player manages the camp and earns points for gassing prisoners and selling gold fillings, taken from the victims. He needs to earn money by also selling a series of products crafted by prison labor in order to buy more gas to operate the gas chambers – all of which he must do, by the way, without raising the awareness of people outside the camp. A Jewish watchdog organization, called the Wiesenthal Center, reported the popularity of the games among European youth. In fact, Austrian newspapers announced that

polling students in one city alone found 61% of the students either knew about the games or had played them.^v

“But that was seventeen years ago. Surely Satan has tired and people are now tolerant of all religions and races. This has been going on for centuries and by now, the persecution of this one particular race should have stopped.”

Not quite. A *CNN* report dated this year announced in bold headlines, “Anti-Semitism on the rise globally”. It went on to report that current anti-Jewish incidents have been documented in Argentina, Australia, Canada, South Africa, Russia, France, Germany, England and, of course, in the Middle East during 2008, and these incidents are increasing in number and volatility.^{vi}

One of the greatest proofs that God is not finished with Israel is that the devil will not leave her alone.

One of Satan’s premier passions is the extermination of the Jew. And Satan will try to destroy the Jew long after the church has been established; in fact, even after the church is raptured. Why? Because Satan also interprets prophecy literally.

As a result, Satan must get rid of the Jew and if he can, erase the possibility of God’s covenant with Israel from coming to pass. And if God cannot keep His covenant promises of the coming land, the coming kingdom, and the coming King, then God is less than God; in fact, God then becomes a liar – He promised something He cannot produce.

Furthermore, Satan fully understands the ramifications of this book of Revelation that we are studying. If 144,000 Jewish evangelists are going to comb the Earth for converts, and multiplied millions from every tongue, tribe, and nation will believe in Christ, then he must stamp out the Jew so that it cannot happen in the future. If Israel will one day be called back to Jerusalem, then the devil must keep Jerusalem out of the hands of the Jews.

Satan will attempt to thwart the plan of Christ and to kill the Jews until Christ banishes him to hell forever.

This, ladies and gentlemen, is the reason behind the headlines; the red dragon is the reason that the pages of history are literally stained with the blood of the Jewish people.

It will not be just the red dragon in the headlines of the Tribulation. We are about to also be introduced to the antichrist and his false prophet.

Chapters 12 and 13 of Revelation, in fact, are primarily devoted to introducing to us the key players, or what I am going to simply call “the many faces of evil,” as we continue toward the final days of the Tribulation and the Battle of Armageddon. A new global killer of Jews is about to make his appearance.

Many Faces

Before we are introduced to this new killer of Jews, however, John has several other introductions to make.

1. The woman.

Let us begin with Revelation chapter 12, verses 1-2.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;

and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

The wonderful thing about interpreting prophecy literally, is that we literally interpret every metaphor, simile, and figure of speech whenever the text informs us that this is the intention.

We are clearly told in verse 1 that this is a sign. The Greek language calls this woman a “*semeion mega*” (σημειον μεγα) – a great sign – which immediately tells us that the woman is not an actual woman but symbolically represents some other person or entity.^{vii}

John writes,

A great sign appeared in heaven . . .

In this symbolic vision, John sees a woman in labor, dressed in light, with the moon under her feet and wearing a crown with stars.

This is not the first symbolic woman to appear in Revelation, by the way.

- In chapter 2, we discover a literal woman named symbolically as Jezebel because she was leading the church into error and sin.
- Later, in chapter 17, we are introduced to a harlot who symbolizes the false religion of the antichrist.
- In chapter 19, we see another woman who symbolizes the wife of Christ – she is called the bride of the Lamb.

Then, in these verses in chapter 12, we see another symbolic woman. This one is in the pain of

childbirth – dressed very differently than your wife when she went into the delivery room to deliver your child – there were no crowns and stars and moon.

The question then becomes, “Who does this woman represent?”

In my research I found at least five different opinions. I will give the four wrong views and then the correct view – you do not have to believe me, of course, you can choose to be wrong, and you will get a bad grade on the final exam.

Mary Baker Eddy believed she was the woman herself and the child she bore was the Christian Science movement that came into being in 1879. Unfortunately, she now knows she was not the woman.^{viii}

The Roman Catholic Church believes the woman is Mary, whom they often refer to as the Queen of Heaven and believe was taken to heaven without dying. The problems with this view are many, not the least of which is the virtual deification of Mary to equal status with Christ. More specifically, however, as it relates to this text, Mary is already crowned in heaven, but still carrying Jesus, who has yet to be born, crucified, resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

A third view holds that the woman represents God Himself. This would leave unexplained how God brings forth God and then has to flee from the dragon, as we will see later.^{ix}

A fourth view is that the woman is the church. Though the church is certainly represented as a woman – the bride of Christ – keep in mind she is the bride of Christ, not the woman giving birth to Christ.

The church did not give birth to Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ gave birth to the church.^x

The view that fits the context of this chapter, as well as the rest of scripture, is that this woman represents Israel. This is so because Christ was born of the seed of Israel; the God-man was of Jewish kin. In fact, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both use the imagery of Israel being a woman in labor.

Israel was under the heel of Rome when Christ was born, and the added persecution by Satan to wipe out the Christ child is one of the underlying dramas of the Christmas story. The anguish of Israel was heard as Herod had all the Jewish boys the age of two and under in and around Bethlehem killed in order to destroy the one who was born, King of the Jews (Matthew 2:16).

Notice again, in verse 1, that the symbolic appearance of this woman is clearly tied to Israel as well, with the sun, moon, and twelve stars.

In fact, there is only one other place that we find all these symbols clustered together in the Bible and that passage is a wonderful commentary for John's vision. The one other place is Genesis 37 when Joseph describes his dreams to his brothers and father.^{xi}

In this there is the sun, the moon, and twelve stars representing the nation Israel.

When we parallel the symbols in the first book of the Bible with the last book of the Bible, we have:

- Israel clothed with the sun – an allusion in Genesis 37 to Jacob who stood in the lineage to inherit the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant;
- the moon – referring to Rachel, who was Jacob's wife and the mother of Joseph;
- the twelve stars – representing the twelve tribes of Israel, and from them comes the birth of the Messiah.^{xii}

And now the introduction of what we will simply call the first face of evil.

2. The dragon.

Notice who is lurking about in Revelation 12:3-4.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

Now you might be thinking that this is where it starts to sound like a monster movie, right?

This is why we stay away from Revelation – horned, multi-headed dragons waiting to eat newly-born babies.

Well, before anyone thinks of this as pure fiction or worse yet, envisions the devil in a red suit with a tail and horns, remember this is yet another "semeion" (σημειον) – sign. This is a symbolic scene that represents an invisible drama.

If we take one step at a time, we will easily discover what this sign intends to represent.

This sign appearing to John does not tell us what Satan looks like; this tells us what Satan acts like.

Let me give four descriptions from this sign given to John.

a. First, Satan is seen as a destroyer.

Satan is referred to as a red dragon – a red beast that kills and maims his victims. Only in the book of Revelation is Satan referred to as a dragon.

How do we know for certain that this dragon represents Satan? John answers this later in verse 9 of this same chapter, when we are told,

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

He is described in verse 3 with the color red – **the red dragon**. This word appears only one other time in the Bible, and we saw it in chapter 6, verse 4, when the horseman rides upon a red horse to bring war to the planet.

So Satan is seen in these verses as a destructive beast, destroying all who oppose him.

b. Secondly, Satan is seen as a dictator.

Notice verse 3 again.

. . . behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.

Let us break down these symbols one at a time. The seven heads of Satan are the seven consecutive world empires that we have observed in history beginning with Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylon, conquered by Medo-Persians; then Greece became the world power, then Rome ruled the Western world. The final, seventh kingdom will be the kingdom ruled by the antichrist.^{xiii}

This kingdom will be made up of ten horns, John tells us. Daniel chapter 7 clears the fog away by letting us in on the fact that these ten horns are ten kings who create a confederacy under the sway of the dragon and his puppet dictator, the antichrist (Daniel 7:24).

So Satan is pictured as a destroyer of all who oppose him and secondly, as a dictator of a new confederation of ten nations. This ten-nation union will be studied more closely later, but this coalition of nations will be ruled by the antichrist, who is empowered by Satan himself.

c. Thirdly, Satan is pictured as a deceiver.

Notice the first part of verse 4 again.

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. . . .

When Satan fell, both Isaiah and Ezekiel inform us that many angels fell with him, having conspired with him to unseat God and place Satan on the throne of heaven.

John informs us in this verse that Satan was able to deceive one third of the angels into following him, believing he would succeed. Since this time they have been confirmed in their unholy state and await their sentence in an eternal hell.

We are never told how many angels God created before the creation of the universe (Job 38:7), but we have been told in Revelation 9 that at least two hundred million demons terrify the earth in the judgment of God and we are given the impression that this is not the total number of demonic beings.

Imagine, if two to three hundred million demons represent only one third of the angelic host created by God, then there are approximately one billion angelic beings, at least.

It is no wonder that when Elisha asked God to open the eyes of his servant so that he could see they were protected from enemy soldiers, his servant was stunned to see the heavens literally filled with angelic beings in chariots of fire (II Kings 6:17).

We have no idea. However, we do know,

. . . greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (I John 4:4)

The evil one is a vicious destroyer, a world dictator, and a persuasive deceiver.

d. Finally, Satan is described in John's vision as a devourer of the seed of Israel.

Notice again the graphic picture of Satan's all-consuming desire in the last part of verse 4.

. . . And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

In other words, he wants to do anything to kill the Messiah as soon as He is born.

Herod was merely a pawn in the talons of the dragon as he sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the Jewish boys two years old and under (Matthew 2:16).

Now notice what happens, in verse 5, as the male child is delivered.

3. The Son.

Look at Revelation 12:5.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

Notice the way John's vision skips everything between the incarnation and the ascension of Christ. The gospel of John will fill in the details.

Of course, the failure of the dragon to kill the seed of Israel only infuriates him, so, as verse 13 tells us, he wages war against the woman who bore the child. In other words, he could not kill the Jewish Messiah, so he vents his hatred, and still does to this day, against the Jewish people.

It will require the unique, supernatural protection of God to keep any Jews alive at all, as we will study in our next session.

World news informs us that anti-Semitism is growing. The President of Iran is open about his desire to exterminate Israel and push her into the sea. Countries around our world are registering anti-Jewish sentiment and ridicule.

The Muslim world is currently personifying much of the murderous hatred. They are so bent on killing Jews that they sacrifice their own sons and daughters as suicide bombers.

One commentator quoted from an article that was first published in *Harper's Magazine*. In this article, a Muslim mother was interviewed after she learned of her son's death in a suicide bombing that not only killed her son, but ten Jews as well. She said, "Because I love my son, I encouraged him to die a martyr's death for the sake of Allah. Jihad is a religious obligation encumbered upon us and we must carry it out. I sacrificed my son as a part of my obligation. I asked Allah to give me ten Israelis for my son, and Allah granted my request. My son made his dream come true, killing ten Israeli settlers and soldiers. Our God honored him even more in that there were many Israelis wounded."^{xiv}

How tragic this is.

This summarizes the difference well, does it not? We happen to be living in a world where the gospel of Jesus Christ is desperately needed – and more and more obvious.

Islam is a religion in which its sons are called to die for God; Christianity is a religion in which God sent His Son to die for us.

Muslim extremists are sacrificing their lives so others will die; Christians are to sacrifice their lives so others will live.

Casper ten Boom, the godly father of Corrie, was finally caught by the Gestapo, along with his family, for hiding Jews in a secret upstairs chamber of his home. I have had the privilege of walking upstairs in this home and into the room with the fake wall and the entrance through the bottom of the linen closet. They were finally caught and the entire family was arrested. Before being separated and taken away, Casper ten Boom, who would not survive the concentration camp, said, "If I die in prison, it will be an honor to have given my life for God's people."^{xv}

Muslims are not our enemies, by the way, but are our mission field. In fact, so are Jews. A Jew living in this age of grace must come to faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Messiah if they ever hope to inherit the kingdom of God.

Nicodemus came to Jesus Christ one night, as you may remember, believing the kingdom was his simply because he was a son of Abraham; simply because he had been born into a Jewish family. However, Jesus Christ told him,

“. . . unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:3)

“How are you born again?” Nicodemus asked.

Jesus answered in their private conversation,

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Now we are told in Revelation 12:6 that,

“. . . the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

This just happens to be three and one-half years. This is the last half of the Tribulation when Israel flees, after the antichrist has desecrated the temple and begun to kill the Jewish people.

Many believe Israel will flee to Petra, a city cut into a mountain of rock, where God will protect them and provide for them. We will explore this in our next session.

Notice, however, the phrase we just read in the middle of verse 6,

“. . . a place prepared by God . . .

The only other time this phrase appears in the New Testament is in John 14. The disciples are

promised that they will be taken to a place prepared for them – the same expression – where they will be protected and provided for – a place called heaven.

Application

If we can draw an analogy from the chosen nation of Israel to the chosen bride of Christ, it would be this:

Just as God will keep every promise to Israel, He will keep every promise to you and to me.

Jesus Christ promised:

“. . . “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5b)

“. . . “My grace is sufficient for you . . .” (II Corinthians 12:9a)

And He gave this ultimate promise to those who believe in Him:

“. . . I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:3)

These are His promises to you and to me. Count on them, lean on them, depend on them, hang onto them, and rest in them. These are His unchanging promises to us. And He will never fail to keep His word.

ⁱ John Phillips, Exploring Revelation (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 156.

ⁱⁱ Jay Winik, The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World, 1788-1800 (Harper Collins, 2007), p. 230.

ⁱⁱⁱ Erwin Lutzer, Hitler's Cross (Moody Press, 1998).

^{iv} Ibid.

^v The New York Times (May 1, 1991).

^{vi} Report: "Anti-Semitism on the rise globally,"

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/US/03/14/anti-semitism/index.html>, March 14, 2008.

^{vii} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 119.

^{viii} Sam Gordon, Worthy is the Lamb (Ambassador, 2000), p. 259.

^{ix} Thomas, p. 120.

^x Edward Hindson, Revelation: Unlocking the Future (AMG, 2002), p. 137.

^{xi} Ray Stedman, Understanding Revelation: God's Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 231.

^{xii} Thomas, p. 120.

^{xiii} John MacArthur, Because the Time is Near (Moody Press, 2007), p. 201.

^{xiv} Adrian Rogers, Unveiling the End Times in Our Time (Broadman, 2004), p. 146.

^{xv} David Jeremiah, Escape the Coming Night (W Publishing, 1990), p. 169.