

Another Fall from Heaven

Antichrist and the Many Faces of Evil – Part II

Revelation 12:7-10

Introduction

If you ask the average person what they think about the devil, you will get a range of opinions from a seedy little creature with horns and a tail who goes around jabbing people with a pitchfork to an omnipresent creature who is everywhere at all times causing even heaven to worry about the future of the world.

C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Mere Christianity*, and other excellent works, wrote an insightful little book entitled, *The Screwtape Letters*. Lewis imagined a series of letters that were written from an older demon named Screwtape to his nephew – a younger demon who was recently put in charge of a “patient” – which was the term used for the unbeliever he was to keep from the truth of the gospel.ⁱ

In this fascinating little book, C. S. Lewis made clear his underlying belief that the average person does not take the demonic world seriously enough. In fact, in one particular letter, Uncle Screwtape wrote to his nephew that it would be best to keep the patient ignorant of their existence. Screwtape wrote, “Keep alive the modern imagination that demons are comic figures in red tights.”ⁱⁱ

So the liberal scholars and academic circles view the biblical exposure of the fallen demonic world as a lot of make-believe.

Vance Havner, a famous evangelist from the twentieth century, said, “If the devil came to town in a body, you would not find him in a nightclub or casino; you would most likely find him in some pulpit, drawing a salary while denying his existence.”ⁱⁱⁱ

I read about one such minister who was preaching that the word “in” (“i,” “n”) did not necessarily mean “inside”; it means, “close to, round about, or nearby”. He went on to say that the Bible said Jonah was “in” the stomach of the great fish, and “in” simply meant, “close to, roundabout, or nearby”. After the service, a man came up to him and said that his sermon was the most comforting message he had ever heard. It had cleared up so many difficult things to believe in the Bible; like when the three Hebrew young men

were thrown “in” the fiery furnace and were not burned – well, that was because they were really never in there, but close to or nearby. And Daniel was not really “in” the lion’s den, he was just nearby. “But,” the man went on to say, “the most encouraging thing about your explanation of “in” is that even though I don’t believe the gospel, if I’m wrong, I won’t actually be ‘in’ hell, I’ll just be close to or nearby.”

Uncle Screwtape would say, “Now you’ve got it; it’s all make-believe.”

The Bible presents a very different picture – a politically and religiously incorrect, offensive, clear picture.

As John the apostle reveals to us the faces of evil in Revelation chapters 12-14, Satan is the predominant, literal, personal, living, breathing, evil, murderous creature.

When we compare scripture with scripture, we discover that Satan, the highest created angel who fell sometime prior to the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1), has spent thousands of years dividing his time between two primary activities:

1. First, he is unceasing in his attempts to hinder God’s sovereign purposes on Earth.
2. Secondly, he is untiring in his attempts to harm the believer’s secure position in heaven.

In other words:

1. He seeks to hinder God’s sovereignty on Earth.
2. He seeks to harm the believer’s security in heaven.

Theologically, Satan is already defeated. In fact, the believer is already seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:6).

Practically, Satan is roaming the Earth “seeking someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8). Even though Satan has been defeated, Jesus Christ calls him “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2).

Theologically, the believer is sinless before God, having had the blood of Christ wipe the record of sin

clean away. Paul wrote to the Colossian believers that their “certificate of debt” – all the debt of their sin – was “nailed to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

This is theological, finished truth.

However, then there is the practical application of theological truth, which happens to be our daily challenge.

- The believer can walk in the lusts of his flesh.

This is one of the reasons Paul wrote to the Ephesians to stop living in the sensuality, deception, and corruption of their former lusts and be renewed in the spirit of their minds (Ephesians 4:17-24).

- The believer can move to the sidelines and get out of the battle.

This is why Paul wrote to the Corinthians to be steadfast and unmovable, and then reminded them that their toil was not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

- The believer can fall prey to temptation and sin.

This is one of the reasons Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray, “deliver us from evil,” which we can translate: “deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:13).

Wait – we have already been delivered. This is theological truth.

However, we still need daily deliverance and forgiveness. This is the practical application of truth.

If we were beyond the potential of distraction, division, and devious behavior, we would not have been taught to pray for deliverance from evil and the evil one.

Yes, Satan was defeated at the cross, but his sentence has not yet been carried out.^{iv}

Satan is like a guilty criminal who has to appear in court for sentencing, but in the meantime, he is out on bail – free to roam around.

This is the biblical picture of Satan. He is guilty, facing his sentence, but in the meantime, free to roam about. He does this relentlessly, continuing to fight his losing battle against God and God’s people until he is temporarily incarcerated in the abyss (Revelation 20:1-3) and then, permanently incarcerated in hell (Revelation 20:10).

Satan is not in hell . . . in fact, he has never been in hell. He will one day be sentenced before the Great Judge of the Universe who will render him guilty and deserving of hell forever.^v

And by the way, when Satan is cast into hell after the final battle following the Millennial Kingdom (Revelation 20), he will not become the keeper of hell; he will not be the manager of hell running around making everyone even more miserable. No, he will be hell’s chief prisoner, receiving the maximum punishment of God forever.

This one who deceived the world and tried to hinder the purpose of God and incited blasphemy against Christ will pay forever.

This past week I was driving behind a car with several bumper stickers on it. It was an older car and the bumper stickers were equally old and tattered, but one of them caught my attention. The top part of it was scratched out, as if someone tried to remove its message. As the car was turning away from the direction I was headed, I was leaning forward trying to catch the words. And just as the car drove off, it registered to me what the bumper sticker was saying – “He died in AD 33, now get over it”.

Oh the horror of such blasphemy and the tragedy of such unbelief.

The face behind such evil is pictured in Revelation chapter 12 as a red dragon.

Review

In John’s Revelation, he provides in a few verses a condensed view of redemptive history. In chapter 12, he pictures the woman, who represents Israel, as a persecuted, suffering woman giving birth to a male son. The redundancy – “male son” – is used as a term indicating the legal right of the firstborn to occupy the throne.

John pictures the birth of this child – obviously Christ – the heir to David’s throne, born of Jewish kin.

John also pictured for us with figurative language, a dragon. We know John is speaking figuratively by the use of the word, “sign” – a sign in heaven – which is a symbolic personification of someone or something.

So, there is the sign of the woman (verse 1), which is a symbol of Israel, and there is the sign of the dragon (verse 3), which represents the worldwide empire of Satan in these final days.

Notice, in verse 4, the dragon is standing before the woman to devour the child – to destroy this male heir of the throne.

In verse 5 we are told that the child was safely delivered and taken up to God the Father, which is the most condensed summary of the birth, life, death,

resurrection, and ascension of Christ that we will find in scripture.

Again, John's intention in these verses is not to fill in details of Christ's ministry, but to give an overview of Satan's efforts throughout world history.

- We are told that Satan has hounded, hunted, and hurt the Jewish people since the nation was promised that one of their own descendants would be the Messiah – verses 1 and 2.
- We are told that Satan has manipulated the seven major world empires to try to thwart the efforts of God on Earth – verse 3.
- We are informed that Satan will yet create a ten-nation confederacy which he will use to fight against God and ultimately Israel – verse 3.
- We are reminded that Satan fell from heaven with many angels – verse 4.
- We are given the inside view that Satan attempted to kill the Messiah – verse 4.
- We are reminded that Satan failed to destroy the Messiah, who ultimately rose back to heaven – verse 5.
- Finally, we are told that Satan will unleash great persecution upon the Jewish people and those who follow the Messiah for a period of three and a half years – verse 6.

Notice we are told, in verse 6, that the dragon redirects his anger and terror toward the woman who flees . . .

. . . 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 [literally three and a half years].

We can be certain that this woman is not the church or Mary the mother of Christ because of the clear language. She runs to a place where she is hidden from the serpent for three and a half years.

Certainly Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to avoid the decree of Herod to kill the male children aged two and under, but their flight to Egypt lasted only until Herod's death several months later (Matthew 2:16-20).

The church has certainly been hounded and hunted by the dragon, but the church is not running away and it certainly has not been in hiding for two thousand years.

Look at verses 13-14 for even more clarity.

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time [this is Daniel's phrase representing three and a half years], from the presence of the serpent.

This woman will be nourished and protected from the dragon for three and a half years.

We will look at this flight to safety in our next session.

Names for the Serpent of Old

As Revelation chapter 12 opens, the apostle John describes for us the faces and forces of evil behind the global rebellion against God during the Tribulation.

1. First and foremost is this serpent of old that John refers to, in verse 3, as the "red dragon".

This title is a reference to his bloodlust and murderous intentions.

2. In verse 9, he is called the "serpent of old," which is a reference to his crafty, deceitful ways.

This is one of my favorite titles for him – "the serpent of old," or "the old serpent".

The word for "old" is "archaos" (αρχαίος), from which we get our word "archaic".^{vi}

No one likes to be told they are getting old, and certainly not archaic!

I find it fascinating that in Genesis 3, we are introduced to him as "the serpent," but now, thousands of years later, John cannot resist and calls him literally, the *old* snake!

Martin Luther, the reformer, was perhaps right when he once said that Satan, who loves to be worshiped, is infuriated by being jeered at and cannot bear scorn.^{vii}

In this text, John seems to do just that when he calls him nothing more than an old snake.

3. Later, in verse 9, John refers to him as "the devil".

This word is translated from the Greek word, "diaballo" (διαβαλλω).

This means to defame and to slander. It also carries the idea of one who seeks to slander in order to separate.^{viii}

In other words, one of the devil's primary objectives is to so slander God before the believer as to separate them from the confidence of God's love and redemption. He constantly defames the character, integrity, and trustworthiness of God before the believer to ultimately rob God of the faithful worship of His children.

The devil is certainly busy defaming and dividing the church as well. I am convinced the devil typically does not try to destroy a church outright – he most often joins it. Then, he encourages division and happily provides ammunition to both sides. This is why the most devastating challenges a church faces is never from the outside, but from the inside.

This was Paul's warning to the Ephesian church when he warned them of those who would rise up from within and would harm and hurt the flock (Acts 20:29).

One of the chief aims of the enemy is to distract, deceive, and divide the church, thus destroying not only her unity, but her effectiveness for the gospel.

4. Another name that is attributed by John to this slanderer appears later in verse 9, "Satan".

This term refers to his role as adversary and opposer.

5. Finally, in verse 10, this old serpent is called the "accuser".

We will come back to this in a moment, but for now, this title implies the rather chilling intention of our chief enemy.

This word means to bring a legal charge or accusation against another.^{ix}

We are told in verse 10 that Satan,

... accuses [the brethren] before our God day and night.

His agenda is to cause the God of heaven to turn His back on His erring children. And he does so because he has legitimate grounds of accusation. Daily we offer to Satan more ammunition to use against us – and surely God will reject us after all – sinful, disobedient, wayward, self-centered sons and daughters that we are.

However, the accuser will not succeed.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians of their security, and ours,

In [Christ], you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

(Ephesians 1:13-14)

Charles Wesley wrote it well and we sing it often,
No condemnation now I dread;

Jesus, and all in Him is mine!

Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine

Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown, through Christ my own.^x

The Serpent's Fall from Heaven

Now, much to our surprise, John reveals to us that a future battle will take place in heaven. It takes place within the context of the Great Tribulation. It is probably one of the most overlooked battles in the book of Revelation, yet its implications are so exciting.

Look at verses 7-8.

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

Before we move on to the end result of this battle, notice that we have just been introduced to another angel. He is evidently the captain of the Lord's host who wage war against Satan. His name is Michael.

Let me hit the pause button long enough to make some comments about his name. I find it absolutely fascinating that God named all of His angels – and we know there are at least three hundred million of them.

You had trouble naming three kids, right? Some of you are in the thick of it right now – you are having conversations about what goes well with your last name; what family member you might honor; what the meaning of the name is; what rhymes with what.

My mother happened to name three of us – two of my brothers and me – with middle names that all began with the same letter – Duane, Dale, and Dean –

three “Ds,” which looked a lot like my report card as a kid growing up. She should have given us names that started with an “A” – it would have helped me avoid tremendous suffering and anguish!

Imagine the obvious care and personal connection that the Triune God would name their personal creations – the angels.

Now we are told in verse 7 that Michael was at war with the dragon, with angels and demons involved in this skirmish as well. In verses 8-9, we read that,

... [the dragon and the demons] were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

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.

Let us ask and answer two key questions. First, “Who is Michael?” And secondly, “When did this battle take place?”

At first glance, it might seem as if this is a reference to verse 4, when Satan and his angelic followers are cast out of heaven before the creation of mankind. I will tell why this cannot be the case with this battle.

However, let us answer the first question.

1. Who is Michael?

The name Michael is from the Hebrew “Mik-ay-el,” which means, “Who is like God?” What a great name!

We first read about Michael in the Old Testament book of Daniel. He is called the great prince who protects the people of God – specifically, the Jewish people (Daniel 12:1).^{xi}

We are told in Daniel chapter 10 that Daniel has been praying for insight into the revelation of God regarding these final days of Tribulation. After three weeks of praying, he is visited by the archangel Gabriel. Gabriel informs Daniel that he would have arrived earlier with the answer from God, but a demonic prince hindered him for twenty-one days.

Let me read what Gabriel says.

... “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.

“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

“Now I have come to you to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”

(Daniel 10:12-14)

Wow – what a text!

For twenty-one days, the demon simply known as the one working in the kingdom of Persia intercepted Gabriel and started a tug of war. God eventually sends another angel, Michael, to help release Gabriel, which he does. So Gabriel now stands before Daniel with the answer. We are not told any more than this.

While this is a study on its own, and it is not our present purpose, it is almost unfair to read something like this without providing some explanation. Let us make several observations about this text.

- First, conflict between angels and demons is a reality.
- Secondly, demons make a habit of losing.
- Thirdly, this battle involved two angels and one demon, but did not include Daniel.

This is a critical point to consider in order to maintain a balanced view of the demonic world and the believer’s role in spiritual warfare. So many have missed this point and taken their imaginations off the cliff.

Do not miss the point that God never asked Daniel to pray for more angels. In fact, He did not even give Daniel a sense that an angel needed assistance – or that one was on the way. Furthermore, God did not have Daniel identify the demon by name so he could bind him – and only then would God send help.

Ladies and gentlemen, God did not require Daniel to be involved in any part of this battle scene. And even though Daniel was a godly, faithful prayer warrior, Daniel did not even know about the conflict until it was over.

Daniel 10 is in no way a suggestion that Christians need to start binding territorial demons, praying down more angels, or casting demons out of every potted plant. Nowhere in God’s word are we told to command demons to give up territory before we can influence neighborhoods, cities, or even foreign countries.

Our power is not in ourselves – our words – but in the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). Nowhere in the Bible is the believer told to name demons and bind them in order to win the battle.

Frankly, many people today would rather pray for thirty minutes against some demonic stronghold than spend three hours studying to teach a class. How boring is that? It is a lot more exciting to walk around the neighborhood casting down the demon of the subdivision than it is to prepare and pull off a Vacation Bible School for the neighborhood kids.

Our clear commission from Jesus Christ is not to go out and *bind demons*, but to go out and *make disciples* (Matthew 28:19).

We are not told to pray for more *angels*, we are commanded to pray for more *laborers* (Matthew 9:38).

However, at the same time, we ought to be aware that there is an invisible, powerful dimension of warfare *behind* the warfare that we can see – a warfare that influences, incites, and manipulates the things that we battle.

Our real battle is spiritual – the ultimate battle, behind the battle, is unseen. This is why Paul would remind us that the ultimate conflict,

... is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

- One final observation that can be made, fourthly, is that Satan has organized his demonic forces to hinder the purposes and plans of God.

These observations might make you feel a little smaller in the cosmic scheme of battle, which is probably a good thing.

God did not need Daniel to overcome the Prince of Persia. And in Revelation 12, He does not need the believers who are already in heaven to help cast Satan out of heaven. The angel Michael and some of his comrades were sufficient.

However, I do hope these observations will help you rest a little more in the sovereign control of God over this unseen, invisible world.

Consider the fact that when Satan is cast into the abyss for a thousand years while the Millennial Kingdom is enjoyed on Earth, it only takes one unnamed angel to cast Satan down and lock him up.

Even Satan, the great dragon, will be overpowered and temporarily confined by only one anonymous angel – who happens to be empowered by the will and command of our sovereign God! And this will be all that is necessary to take the dragon down.

In the same way, in chapter 12, it is Michael and a handful of angels who defeat Satan and his demons and kick them out of heaven.

This begs another question.

2. When did this battle take place?

Some would say this battle took place when Satan was expelled from his high position within the ranks of heaven after he coveted the throne of God.

However, this would not fit the context of these verses, for Satan is clearly kicked out of heaven and then he battles against Israel for three and a half years.

Notice verse 13 again.

And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child [for three and a half years (verse 6)].

Some would say that this was a reference to Satan's defeat as Christ died on the cross and then rose again. Certainly this is the foundation of our victory, but Satan, since the cross, has had access before God's heavenly throne where he accuses the brethren day and night.

Remember in the book of Job that Satan came before the presence of God and accused Job's character? Job was not the first to be accused and he was not the last.

It is clear that this war takes place at the midpoint of the Tribulation. Following this battle, Satan is literally refused any further entrance before the throne of God and he is barred from further opportunities to accuse the believer and rail against the throne of God.

Verse 10 of Revelation 12 informs us that we are being accused before God. Satan and his invisible forces shout their accusations about us in the presence of God and whisper accusations about God that they bring before us. They have been unceasing and untiring in their tirade against God and against us, His redeemed.

Are your ears burning? They should be! You are being spoken of in the heavenly court right now. It will not be until midway through the Tribulation that

God will say, “Michael, Satan’s time of accusation is up. That’s enough – no more!”

It is no wonder that a loud voice shouts as Satan and his demons are permanently barred from any more legal accusations against the beloved. Notice as this voice bursts out with joy in this announcement, in verse 10.

. . . “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.”

The prosecutor of all the redeemed is exiled to Earth. He is forever banished from the court of heaven – he is disbarred from the court. He cannot make one more accusation against you or against me.

The last lingering sound from his accusations would be the intercession and defense on the part of our Savior, who, even now, is defending us and interceding on our behalf.

So Paul would write,

who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God . . . interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)

And one day, yet future, revealed for us in Revelation chapter 12, there will be this brief battle where Satan will be sent packing.

The hissing serpent who has accused us – and rightly so – of being undeserving of God’s grace and forgiveness; who even now brings before the throne of God daily news of our failure and sin; who glories in our stumbling and our disobediences and says to God, “Have You not yet seen again . . . have You not exhausted Your store of grace? Is justice dead?”

However, our Lord stands, with nail prints in His hands, to remind the old serpent without a word. By His wounds alone He testifies – we have already been judged and forgiven in Him.

Charles Wesley added a stanza in his hymn that I quoted earlier:

*He left His Father’s throne above
So free, so infinite His grace!
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!
Amazing love! How can it be*

That Thou, my God, should’st die for me?

This says it all:

Amazing love! How can it be

That Thou, my God, should’st die for me?^{xiii}

ⁱ C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters (The Macmillan Company, 1961), p. 7.

ⁱⁱ Ibid., p. 32.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Jeremiah, What the Bible Says About Angels (Walk Through the Bible Publishers, 1995), p. 58.

^{iv} John MacArthur, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 2000), p. 15.

^v Ibid., p. 14.

^{vi} Fritz Rienecker and Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 839.

^{vii} Lewis, p. 5.

^{viii} Robert L. Thomas, Revelation: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1995), p. 131.

^{ix} Rienecker and Rogers, p. 839.

^x Charles Wesley, “And Can It Be that I Should Gain,” (1738).

^{xi} Ray Stedman, Revelation: God’s Final Word (Discovery House, 1991), p. 236.

^{xii} Wesley.