

The Great Escape

Antichrist and the Many Faces of Evil – Part III

Revelation 12:11-17

Introduction

This past month, I was driving my pickup truck down Penny Road when suddenly several walnuts or acorns (I am not sure which) ricocheted off my window. I knew some kids were probably congratulating themselves on a well-aimed throw.

I never slowed down because it took me back many years. I remember my older brother and I, along with some neighborhood boys, going to a house with a yard bordering a two-lane street much like Penny Road. This neighbor's large lawn was encircled by a row of hedges, with one side of hedges running parallel to the street and providing the perfect ambush spot. He also had a peach tree. We would grab some peaches, crouch down behind the hedge, and wait for a car to drive by. Then, we would jump up and let our peaches fly. We usually missed, but sometimes we would hear the gratifying thump that let us know a ripe peach had hit the mark. Occasionally the car would screech to a halt, and we would hear, "Hey you!" We would run to the other side of the yard, dive headfirst over the hedges, and escape. We loved peach season.

As I think back on this scene, it occurs to me that I was there against my will. It was my older brother and the neighborhood boys who threw the peaches – I stood there quoting Bible verses. Well, not quite.

To the people driving by, what we did was certainly irritating and probably startling, and it created a messy spot that they had to clean up when they got home. It was just peaches.

Many people seem to think that Satan is just some mischievous little guy who lobs peaches at them every once in a while as they drive through life. He is not a very good shot and he does not do much harm – in fact, he just gets a charge out of startling them and making sticky little messes every once in a while – like a ripe peach in the wrong place.

Then there are those who believe they are open targets to the spirit world and they have no real tangible protection. Surfing online websites marked by spiritual warfare reveals more than two million sites that tell about the angelic and demonic world –

and most of it is sheer superstition and outside the revealed truth of God's word.

On these sites, there are pictures of demons in clouds, miracle prayers to overcome them, and instructions on how to invoke angelic protection. There are videos from people who died, went to hell, and came back to describe it. This, of course, is rather interesting since hell is not yet occupied – Hades is the place where people without Christ go to await their final judgment. Nonetheless, power is available for purchase, supplying gems that have fallen from heaven. There are pictures of gold dust that has fallen from the heavenly streets of gold. Miracle working water from the Jordan River is also available to buy. And last but not least, there are magic prayers to say that give power over the spirit world.

All of this, of course, ultimately destroys a biblical understanding of the gospel – the fact that it is the power of God unto salvation. This also re-directs a personal focus away from Christ and turns it toward angels and demons. It brings superstition and fear to the hearts of those who believe they are now hopelessly left without any real answers or guidance.

And all of this, of course, ultimately diverts true worship of and trust in a sovereign, personal, caring, victorious Lord, so that even the believer is left to wonder what can triumph over the evil one.

We happen to have the end of the story. We are given a clear description of Satan and his final attempts to thwart the purposes of God.

As John reveals to us the many faces of evil during the last days known as the Tribulation, we are given a clear description of Satan and his downfall.

Satan is a real personality with a real agenda – and it is not lobbing peaches or walnuts. He is not backed into a corner with a crucifix, water from the Jordan River, or a magic prayer. In fact, John will give us the plan of escape – not only for those who face his final assault, but for every believer today who wants to live a victorious Christian life.

Let us return to Revelation chapter 12 and wrap up John's description of the red dragon, and his attempts to hinder the word and work of God.

We will begin by going back to verses 7-8 to get a running start.

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.

As we studied in our last session, the dragon and his angels were no longer granted access to heaven, where they accused the brethren before God – much like we read in Job chapter 1, verse 9.

Continue to Revelation 12:9-10.

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.

Then 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 [His anointed One] have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night."

Escaping the Dragon's Prosecution

Now, for our study today, notice the amazing revelation of what overcomes the enemy. Look at Revelation 12:11.

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Who are "they" that overcame Satan? The antecedent to "they" is the "brethren" – both those who have already been martyred in the horrific days of the Tribulation and those who will still be killed in the final days of the Tribulation. However, this can also include every believer who has ever been accused by Satan before the presence of God – "our brethren," which includes you and me, whom, according to verse 10,

... he ... accuses ... before our God day and night.

What overcomes Satan? What strips him of his legal accusations against us? What disarms him of lethal power?

We are given the answer in three powerful statements that will not only be true of believers in the Tribulation, but of every believer throughout redemptive history.ⁱ

1. First, and foremost, believers rested in their perfected forgiveness.

Notice again the first phrase of verse 11.

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb . . .

Satan is not overcome by holy water from the Jordan River or a heavenly gem dangling from a rear view mirror.

The victory of the believer is not in binding Satan with some incantation or rebuking him with some magic prayer.ⁱⁱ

The victory is through and by means of the life-giving, blood-shedding sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who died to take away our sin.

Peter wrote,

. . . you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers,

but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

(I Peter 1:18-19)

Satan and his fallen angels, conspiring together with your fallen flesh, whisper with the prosecutorial inner voice saying, "Just what right do you have to call yourself a Christian? Look at all your sins . . . look at all your failures . . . look at the mess you've made again. How could God ever love you? How can you ever dare to say you belong to Him?"ⁱⁱⁱ

What must we say to the accusing serpent? How about, "You're right! We are sinners. We have made a mess of things again. We have lied . . . we have acted out of anger . . . we have focused on self . . . we have had impure thoughts . . . we have mistreated others . . . we have demanded our rights. You're right!"^{iv}

"It is all true! However, Satan, you are forgetting something."

. . . the blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us from all sin. (I John 1:7b)

"You seem to have forgotten, and you want us to forget that our . . ."

. . . lawless deeds have been forgiven, and [our] sins have been covered. (Romans 4:7)

“You have forgotten that all our sins – past, present, and yet future – was, 2,000 years ago, . . .”

. . . nailed . . . to the cross [of Christ]. (Colossians 2:14b)

This means that when Jesus Christ saved you and me, He knew every sin we would commit throughout our lives, and He forgave them all!

So remind the accusing old serpent of the truth – you are not just a sinner, you are more than that; you are not just a flawed and flimsy vessel of clay, you are more than that – you are a sinner redeemed and placed in Christ, your redeeming Lamb, and . . .

. . . there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)

A believer in Ray Stedman’s church once wrote a poem, tying many of these verses together.

I sinned, and straightway, posthaste, Satan flew

*Before the presence of the Most High God,
And made a railing accusation there.*

*He said, “This soul, this thing of clay and sod,
Has sinned. ‘Tis true that he named thy Name,
But I demand his death, for Thou hast said,
‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die.’ Shall not
Thy sentence be fulfilled? Is justice dead?
Send now this wretched sinner to his doom.
What other thing can a righteous ruler do?”*

*And thus he did accuse me day and night,
And every word he spoke, O God, was true!*

Then quickly One rose up from God’s right hand,

Before whose glory angels veiled their eyes.

*He spoke, “Each jot and tittle of the Law
Must be fulfilled; the guilty sinner dies!*

But wait! Suppose his guilt were all transferred

To Me, and that I paid his penalty.

Behold, My hands, My side, My feet! One day

*I was made sin for him, and died that he
Might be presented faultless at Thy throne.”*

And Satan flew away. Full well he knew

That he could not prevail against such love,

For every word my dear Lord spoke was true!”

. . . they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb . . .

For the victorious believer, their forgiven status is the root of their victory from which everything else grows and flourishes.

Now, we see believers resting in their perfected cleansing, and we hear yet more.

2. Secondly, believers resonated with a public confession.

Notice verse 11 again.

And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony . . .

So there is, first of all, the principle of perfected cleansing, which ultimately defeats the enemy. Then, there is the principle of public confession, which daily defeats the strategies of the enemy.

“. . . the ‘logos’ of their testimony . . .” – we might read this text and think that all of a sudden it is up to you and me – our faithfulness to deliver the testimony.

The emphasis in this verse is not on the words “their testimony,” but on the words “because of the word” or “logos”. In fact, we could literally translate this, “And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of God to which they have borne testimony.”

Do you see the emphasis? We overcome the dragon because of who we are related to and because of what He has revealed to us in His word.

As a result of this, we can joyfully testify to its truth.

So the victorious believer lives in light of their forgiveness – claiming it and rejoicing because of it. The victorious believer lives by the truth of the word of God, which they share – the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation.

- We have defeated the serpent through salvation – this is theological truth.
- We defeat the serpent as we deliver the gospel to our world – this is practical truth.

A few Sundays ago, I told you the story of the faithful witness of Mr. Jenner, who, for forty years, on George Street, in Australia, passed out tracts. Not once did he have anyone receive Christ in his presence, and he never heard of anyone accepting Christ because of his witness until a few months before his death. He then learned from one pastor

that people on several continents had come to faith in Christ by reading one of his tracts.

I received such a response from people in our assembly that we decided to print small tracts with our church phone number and web address on the back. It is a tract that is easy to pass out to people because of what it says on the front – “How to Get to Heaven from North Carolina.” It simply includes key texts and principles that someone can read and grasp the primary thrust of the gospel – and they can call the phone number on the back and find us if they want to know more. All we need to do is leave one with our tip at a restaurant or hand one to someone and let the title give us an easy opening.

The average Christian in America has never handed anyone a gospel tract in their life. I have been convicted in my own life – and believe the Lord wants us to step up to a fresh challenge of witnessing.

So, we have ordered thousands of these little tracts for anyone to pick up a handful for free at the bookstore in our lobby this Sunday, or any Sunday afterward – we will keep the supply coming.

You might say, “I’m not clever enough – what if I get stumped with their questions?”

Let me assure you – you will! None of us are walking Bible encyclopedias. The primary method, however, is not answering all their questions, but simply testifying to the truth of the gospel.

Dr. Charles Feinberg was a brilliant Jewish Bible scholar and seminary professor for many years. He had been raised in an orthodox Jewish home that hired a woman to come into their home on Saturdays. She was referred to as a Sabbath Gentile because she came on Saturdays to cook and clean so the family did not have to “work” on the Sabbath.

Over time, however, her quiet testimony was appealing and even unnerving. Finally, wealthy, sophisticated, educated Charles went to his cleaning lady and said, “I’ve got to know what you have that has given you such peace and joy.”

This woman told Charles the gospel story, and he placed his faith in Jesus Christ as his Messiah.^{vi}

There is:

- the foundation of perfected forgiveness;
- the practice of public confession.

And there is one more.

3. Thirdly, believers focused on permanent glory.

These victorious believers focused on their permanent glory. Notice the last part of verse 11 and the first part of verse 12.

. . . and they did not love their own life even when faced with death.

For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. . . .

Let me quickly review these three principles of victory for the believer.

1. In the first point – *the blood of the Lamb* – there is the principle of permanent cleansing;
2. In the second point – *the word of their testimony* – there is the principle of public confession;
3. In the final point – *they did not love their life* – there is the principle of personal concentration.

Believers focused on eternal glory.

John Phillips wrote, “What can Satan do with the likes of these? Lock them up in prison and they convert their jailors; torture them and they become partakers of Christ’s sufferings and heirs to a greater reward; martyr them and they go straight to be with Christ; turn them loose and they evangelize the world.”^{vii}

Good point! This is the outworking of the dragon’s downfall.

This is like missionary Karen Watson, that I read about recently, who was martyred for her faith just a few years ago. Before going to serve Christ in Iraq, she left a letter with her pastor, with specific instructions. The letter began, “You’re only reading this if I died.” The letter included gracious words to family and friends and then, a closing summary of her concentration. She wrote, “To obey was my objective; to suffer was expected; His glory is my reward.”^{viii}

Escaping the Dragon’s Persecution

The Dragon’s Fury

Even though Satan knows the book of Revelation better than any of us, he is not about to take this lying down. In fact, notice the last part of verse 12.

. . . Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.

He knows his time is short at this point. Verses 6 and 14 use prophetic language to inform us that the dragon only has three and a half years left – the latter part of the Tribulation period.

One author wrote of Satan’s disbarment from heaven, when he can no longer accuse the brethren, with these vivid words, “Satan is now like a caged lion, enraged beyond words by the limitations now placed upon his freedom. He picks himself up from the dust of the earth, shakes his fist at the sky, and glares around, choking with fury for ways to vent his hatred and his spite upon humankind. He has been checkmated and mastered by the One he hates most of all.”^{ix}

So what does he do? Look at verse 13.

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

In other words, the dragon persecutes the nation which delivered a Jewish Messiah and heir to David’s throne. But even here he is stymied once again. Continue to verse 14.

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, from the presence of the serpent.

This is Daniel’s terminology for three and a half years (Daniel 7:25).

The revelation continues to use figurative language in these verses – John goes back to referring to Israel as a woman and thus figuratively speaks of her rescue on the wings of an eagle.

The Woman’s Flight

This picture of deliverance has already been used in the Old Testament when God spoke through Moses saying,

You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. (Exodus 19:4)

John is now referring to the midpoint of the Tribulation when Jews once again face a holocaust and flee. Jesus Christ spoke in His Mount Olivet Discourse of this moment in the future when Jews would flee after the antichrist desecrates the temple in Jerusalem. It is a moment referred to as the

“abomination of desolation” – in other words, an act by the antichrist that desecrates the altar and renders the temple meaningless.

Jesus Christ said in Matthew 24,

Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet . . .

. . . those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in the house.

Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. . . .

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world . . .

(Matthew 24:15-21)

John informs us that once the Jewish people reach this particular destination, those who were able to escape will be nourished and protected by the Lord.

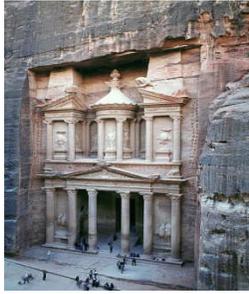
We are not told exactly where the Israelite remnant flees for safety.



Many Bible scholars conjecture that this place of safety is the ancient city of Edom. It is a city carved out of rock, known as Petra. Petra comes from the word which means “rock”.



Many of the buildings in this ancient city are literally carved out of the sandstone. The development of this amazing city began at least a thousand years before the birth of Christ.



Petra's buildings were not just primitive carvings dug into the sides of the mountain, but were intricate and beautifully crafted. These buildings have stood now for centuries.

Evidently an earthquake in A.D. 551 caused the city to be abandoned in fear that the mountains might collapse and the buildings with them. Petra was rediscovered in 1812 and excavation since then has been intense.

What makes this city all the more fitting to the scene in Revelation is the fact that much of it can be protected.



Many of these buildings can be accessed only by riding a camel or donkey or by walking between huge sandstone cliffs.



As a result of being surrounded by sheer cliffs, many of the buildings of Petra are easy to guard; relatively easy to protect.

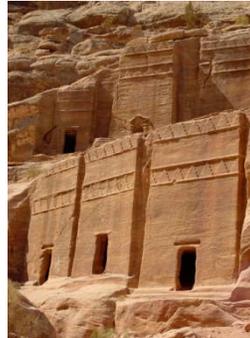


It is in Petra, perhaps, that a believing remnant of Jews will be protected as the dragon unleashes unbelievable fury upon them.

Verse 15 informs us that,

. . . the serpent [will pour] water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.

In other words, he may very well try to flood them out by diverting a river of water. The language seems to indicate that a literal destruction by water is the enemy's attempt.^x



By the way, from sources I read, in this underground city built into the rocky sandstone mountains, at this point in time, not even 10% of the buildings have been excavated or even discovered.

However, we know enough about Petra to know that a river of water would be the perfect way to end the resistance.

Perhaps the enemy, through some sort of engineering feat, taps into an underground river – which are common in this region. Then, perhaps, he is able to divert this water source and cause it to rush toward Petra, by which he hopes to drown the Jewish people. They would not have any way out – water would fill every crevice and cavern.

However, God provides a miracle by doing something He has already done several times in the past in the Old Testament (Exodus 15 and Numbers 16). He causes the earth to open up and literally drain off the water. Notice verses 16-17.

But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children . . .

Obviously, this woman cannot be Mary because we are told the dragon goes off to fight with her

children; her offspring. The sons and daughters born to Mary and Joseph after Christ, according to Matthew 13:55-56, are certainly not alive or in view at the time of these events.

Furthermore, this woman cannot be the church because the church did not give birth to Christ – Christ gave birth to the church.

This woman is Israel who delivers the Messiah – a Jewish descendant of David – and the dragon, having been disbarred from heaven and stymied at Petra, now turns his final fury upon the children of Israel – the offspring of the woman. Satan, now through his puppet antichrist, unleashes a final holocaust against the Jewish people.

I would agree that his target is broadened beyond the Jew simply because John also implies such. He says, in the latter part of verse 17, that the dragon makes war with all . . .

. . . who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

This would include not only the believing Jew who did not make it to the safety of this city, but also the believing Gentile who lives throughout the world holding to the testimony of God’s word and the living Word – Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

So Revelation chapter 12 concludes with an amazing description of this first and foremost face of evil – the dragon.

Evidently we need to not only be aware of the dragon’s fury and failure, but also how to resist him, even in this dispensation of grace. We need to be able to recognize who he is and how he operates, as well as which weapons can be used against him – the blood of the Lamb and the word of God.

I remember being at the airport on one occasion years ago when my twin sons were about six years of age. We had gone to pick up their maternal grandmother who was coming to visit for the Christmas holidays. It was 1991 and our country’s war against Iraq – known as Desert Storm – was under way.

As I was standing at the terminal with my boys on either side of me, Nanny’s plane arrived. The first to deplane were soldiers dressed in fatigues and boots, with guns strapped to their sides. As this rather impressive retinue filed directly in front of us, my boys were rather awestruck. One of them said, “Daddy, look at those army men.”

One of the soldiers stopped in his tracks, looked down at my son, and said, “Boy, we’re not army, we’re marines.”

Recognize who you are – you happen to be, right now, in a war. Do not forget it. Revelation 12 is not your conflict, but the enemy has not changed. Ephesians 6 tells you to get dressed for battle.

Your enemy is ruthless, bloodthirsty, and unmerciful. He does not throw ripe peaches – he goes for the throat. He hurls insults and accusations against you before God and about God before you.

How do you overcome? Remind him of the blood of the Lamb – blood for sinners slain. Remind him of the word of God and your testimony that it is true. And love Christ more than your own life.

While you are at it, remember that Satan has already read his future. Do not let him keep you pinned down in defeat in the meantime with his empty threats and accusations.

- Claim the blood of Christ daily in your life – you are forgiven;
- Confess your faith publicly before others – you are an ambassador;
- Focus on your everlasting future with Jesus Christ, your Lord – you are on your way to heaven.

ⁱ Thomas Constable, “Notes on Revelation,” <http://www.sonlight.org/constable/notes/pdf/revelation.pdf>, 2008 ed., p. 112.

ⁱⁱ John MacArthur, *Revelation: Volume 2* (Moody Press, 2000), p. 22.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ray Stedman, *Revelation: God’s Final Word* (Discovery House, 1991), p. 237.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 238.

^v *Ibid.*, p. 238.

^{vi} R. Kent Hughes, *Romans* (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 196.

^{vii} John Phillips, *Exploring Revelation* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1991), p. 161.

^{viii} “Missionary Slain in Iraq Mourned,” *Los Angeles Times* (Mar. 17, 2004).

^{ix} Phillips, p. 150.

^x Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation: Volume 2* (Moody Press, 1995), p. 140.