

Revelation 12:1-14:5 The Unholy Trinity

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So far in our study of Revelation we have seen a lot of focus on Jesus and the Church. We've also seen some of the judgments that will be poured out on the earth and those who insist on living apart from God.

This morning we finally meet the one who, in a sense, is responsible for it all and that's Satan.

He started everything by tempting Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and now we find him at the end of time leading yet another rebellion against God. By the time we're done this morning we'll see that everyone is either forced by Satan to be with him, or protected by God from him. There won't be any other categories.

We're going to jump right in because there's a lot to understand and discover this morning:

Revelation 12:1 Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. **2** Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

It's important to note: John says what he's about to describe was a sign – in other words, this isn't what literally happened, but this helps us understand what did.

If you've been with us, you know there are a lot of symbols in the book of Revelation, and a lot metaphors and similes – a lot of poetic storytelling. But as we've said many times, that's not because these things aren't real, it's just because it's all so hard to understand from our current perspective so God uses a lot of impressive imagery to capture our attention and convey ideas.

Which is one of the amazing things about the Bible – it applies to everyone on earth and everyone throughout history, so it's written in a way that anyone can read it. It talks about the most important things in life, but it does so in a way that has always seemed accessible to anyone, anywhere, at any time.

So, what does the sign represent? Well, most people believe the woman represents the nation of Israel, and the child she gives birth to is Jesus. You'll see why as we go along.

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

Notice again, this is a sign Satan is not a literal seven-headed dragon; this is just a way of telling us some things about him.

A dragon with seven heads would be hard to kill because if you cut off one, there are still many others alive. And a bull with two horns can be pretty scary if it's running at you and it's mad – the dragon has ten. Horns in the Bible are always a symbol of power and strength. So, he's got a lot of power, and he's hard to kill. He's also got a lot of influence among men and the kingdoms of this earth –he has seven diadems, or crowns. We'll learn more about that as we go on.

4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

This is often thought to be a reference to the angels that sided with Satan in the rebellion against God – angels that have become known as demons today.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. 5 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.

Satan has always tried to destroy the lineage of Israel because He knew God promised to use them as a source of blessing to the rest of men. So, Satan used Pharaoh to destroy all the Jewish children in Israel, but Moses survived. Haman had an edict signed to kill all the Jews, until Esther got involved. Herod killed all the little Jewish boys under two years old in Bethlehem when he heard Jesus had been born. Hitler tried to exterminate the Jews. Saddam Hussein famously offered to do it if his neighbors would just give him a road through their borders. And of course, Iran continues to threaten to wipe Israel off the map and refuses to recognize their right to exist. Behind all of this, ultimately, is Satan. He hates Israel because he hates God.

But notice: he could not overcome the Child. That's interesting, isn't it? That a dragon like this couldn't harm a new born infant? It reminds us that Satan has no real power over God, does he? Jesus came to earth, lived and taught and even died according to His own terms, and then He was resurrected and finally caught up to heaven where He remains today waiting for the time when He will return to rule the earth with a rod of iron.

Psalm 2 makes reference to that day, and we'll see it fulfilled in Revelation 19 when Jesus returns to Earth as a conquering king riding out to battle on a mighty white horse (Rev 19:5) **“Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”**

But before that day some other things have to happen first.

6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

In one verse we just skipped over a couple thousand years of history. But that's because this is all a sign, not a detailed chronology. So suddenly, we find ourselves reading about how God will protect Israel during the last days – they flee to a place in the desert prepared by God.

Some believe this is a reference to the rock city of Petra in Jordan, which you may remember from the movie Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade – it's full of these enormous, beautiful buildings carved into the walls of a tight canyon. For thousands of years it has been a fortress of sorts occupied at different times by various nations. It's estimated you could fit 250,000 people in there. Wherever it happens though, the point is God will protect Israel from the wrath of Satan.

And now look with me at verse 7 and we'll see why Satan is angry – our view suddenly shifts up into Heaven and we get a flashback to what happened before Israel had to flee.

7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

There are a couple of things we ought to notice here. First, Michael and his angels fought the dragon and his angels. Satan is not the equal of God, he is a created being, a high order of angel that fell, perhaps the equal of Michael, but he's not the yin to God's yang, he's a lesser being and can be fought, and beaten, by another lesser being.

Second, this describes a future event – one that will most likely occur around the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation. But right now, as we see in the book of Job and other places in the Bible, Satan has access to God and apparently it's like a bad courtroom drama there at His throne because we know Satan is always accusing us, but Jesus is always interceding for us.

You need to know that. You need to know the difference between condemnation and conviction. Satan accuses and condemns you – he points out all the sin in your life and rubs your nose in it and you feel condemned, hopeless, defeated, worthless and it smothers your relationship with God.

Conviction on the other hand, comes from God – it's that sense deep down that something is wrong about what you've done or are doing and you know it – the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin. So here's the big difference between the two: conviction comes from God and drives you to the cross where you can confess your sins and find forgiveness, a new start, and strength for the fight; condemnation comes from the enemy and makes you feel like shouldn't pray or worship or even come to church because, what's the use?

Friend, you're not the one who's condemned - Satan is. It's a trite little saying, but it's true: when Satan reminds you of your past, you just remind him of his future. Soon he's going to

be kicked out of heaven and his accusations will never be heard again. All we'll hear is worship, worship of the God who forgives and saves us through Christ. We've seen a lot of worship in Revelation, and we're about to see some more:

10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. 12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

How was Satan overcome? By the blood of Lamb and the word of their testimony. Friends, this is how you defeat the work of Satan in your own life. The blood of the Lamb provides forgiveness and cleansing from your sin and we share that through our testimonies – not just the stories of what God *has* done, but also sharing what He *is* doing in our lives.

Friends, we need to share our testimonies and let them be an encouragement to others. Share with people the impact the blood of the Lamb has had for you. And don't cling too tightly to the things of this life – our hands are only so big, and if they're full of the things of this world we won't be able to hold on to our Lord.

But also notice now that Satan is thrown out, he's going to launch an all-out offensive on earth – making one last stand and using everything he's got to try and rally the earth and it's people against God. He's full of great wrath because he knows his time is short.

Which makes us ask the question: then why does Satan attack? If he knows his time is short, if he knows he's been defeated, why doesn't he just give up? Well, because the greatest deceivers are themselves often deceived. They've bought into their own lie. They think they've really got a chance.

13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*. 14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

Now that he's been thrown down to the earth, the dragon makes a beeline for the nation of Israel and seeks to persecute them. Now remember, this is all symbolic, there's not going to be an actual woman running away from an actual dragon. It's symbolic, but it's real. The people of Israel really will seek refuge somewhere in the wilderness – maybe Petra as we said.

Notice they escape the dragon's wrath in an interesting way – by two wings of a great eagle.

Exodus says God delivered Israel from Egypt “on eagles’ wings” (Ex 19:4). Deuteronomy says God cared for Israel in the desert, as an eagle would tend to her young (Deut 32:11-14). And Isaiah famously notes that:

Those who wait on the LORD
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint (Is 40:31).

Fans of The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings might remember that there are several times in the books when the eagles show up to rescue the heroes. They only appear when all hope seems lost, when there seems no other way out. Tolkien was a Christian, and while he didn’t write intentionally Christian stories, the ideas of his faith slipped in all over the place and it’s possible he got the idea here.

15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

This is, most likely, a reference to Christians who have accepted the gospel during the time of tribulation. As Christians, we are birthed out of the work God began with Israel. We hope to keep the great commandments of God – to love Him and love others, and we have the testimony of what Christ has done for us.

So Satan tears off in a rage to make war, and now we meet his two main generals – the Antichrist and the false prophet.

Revelation 13:1 Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. 2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. 3 And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. 4 So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”

5 And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. 6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. 7 It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.

[8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.](#)

[9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear. 10 He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.](#)

You can't calculate how much time and effort people have poured into trying to identify who this man is. There has been all kinds of speculation and so far, every one of them has been wrong. So, we're not going to get into any theories about who it might be or whether he's alive today – though he may be.

Instead I want to point out two things to you. First, notice that he will rule, which is what Satan has always wanted – to be in charge, and he'll rule over every tribe, tongue, and nation – this one man will rule the entire world. And second, notice that he'll receive worship – ALL who dwell on the earth will worship him – and that's what Satan has always wanted – to be worshipped.

It's entirely possible that the man accomplishes all of this because Satan himself takes possession of this man.

That's what happened with Judas. John's gospel tells us that on the night before He was crucified, in the Upper Room, Jesus told the disciples that one of them was going to betray Him. Peter told John to ask Him who it was, and Jesus told John, it's the one to whom I give the piece of bread. So He took a piece of bread, dipped it, and gave it to Judas who had already made the arrangements to sell Jesus out [John13:27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly."](#)

So, it's quite possible that Satan will enter the body of another man so he can rule and receive the worship he's always wanted. And it will work, for a time. But it's a team effort, there's one more member of the unholy trinity: the false prophet.

[11 Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13 He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. 14 And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.](#)

One of the main things the Holy Spirit does is to glorify Jesus – to point people toward Him, this beast does the same thing for the Antichrist. He leads people toward the Antichrist and compels them to worship him.

When Jesus was on earth the Jewish religious leaders were always asking Him for a sign to authenticate Himself and He repeatedly told them no, He wasn't just a magician there to do parlor tricks. But this false prophet is happy to do all kinds of signs to attract people.

Never forget that the enemy and his associates have the ability to work some signs and wonders. So don't just go blindly following after whatever seems to be drawing a crowd. It may look like a lamb, but speak like a dragon. And sooner or later, you'll find yourself being enslaved – look where all of this headed:

15 He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. 16 He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, 17 and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

18 Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666.

Probably no other verse in the Bible has been more closely examined and pondered than this one – people have sought all kinds of explanations for what this number means. And since people are still fighting about it, we're going to leave it alone for now and focus instead on verses 16 and 17.

Here we see what the false prophet has been up to all along – we see His real intent – he wants to be able to control. He causes everyone to take the mark, and without it, you cannot buy or sell.

It reminds of the chorus of that famous Bob Dylan song – Gotta Serve Somebody. The whole song is him making a list of all different kinds of people – people with power and people with nothing – ordinary people and extraordinary people and the chorus tells us over and over again – it doesn't matter who you are – you've gotta serve somebody:

it may be the devil, or it may be the Lord
But you're going to have to serve somebody

None of us have the freedom we think we do. The false prophet seems so compelling and amazing at first, look at all the great things he's doing, but it turns out he's really just lulling everyone into a trap – he's going to control everything they buy or sell, and in effect, everything they do and he's going to demand who and how you worship.

Isn't that the way sin always works? It seems so good in the beginning – it seems so right, so freeing, so fun. But slowly, almost undetectably, it enslaves. Your sin demands that you make sacrifices to it. Sacrifices of time, of money, of character.

You started doing things because they seemed fun or easy, and as time goes on you find yourself less and less able to say no to them. You're trapped. And that's the ultimate goal of the beast.

Fortunately, there is a much better master to serve. One that freely invites us into His service – He never forces or traps us. Look now at the alternative to taking the mark of the beast, and that is having the mark of the Father:

1 Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. 3 They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. 4 These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being* firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.

We'll talk more about this group next week. But I wanted to end our time together this morning by seeing the contrast between those who serve the dragon and his unholy trinity and those who serve God.

Our culture is rapidly dividing between those who align with Christ and those who do not. What side are you on? What mark would you take? What are you going to bow down to?

We might not know exactly who the antichrist is by name or exactly what the mark of 666 looks like, we might not see a seven headed dragon chasing a woman through the desert, but we understand what all of this about, and that's one question – the question: who are you going to serve? The answers have eternal consequences my friends.