

The Terrible Trio Revelation 12—13

Revelation 12 –13 introduces us to the three key characters in the drama of the last half of the tribulation: Satan the dragon, the false Christ, and the false prophet. These three are, in a sense, an evil trinity, opposing the true God and His people on earth. While these events will be of significance to God’s people at that time, the message of these two chapters can encourage suffering saints during any age.

Satan is the great enemy of the church, and he fights against God and His people by accusing the saints in heaven and attacking them on earth. However, Christ has overcome the old serpent, and He gives victory to his people.

The adversary always works through human means, in this case, “the beast” (false Christ or Antichrist) and the false prophet. Satan is an imitator, a counterfeiter, and seeks to control men by means of deception. “The beast” is the future world dictator who promises to solve the pressing problems of the nations; the false prophet is his “propaganda minister.” For a time, it appears that the satanic trio is succeeding, but then their world empire begins to collapse, the nations assemble for one final battle, Jesus Christ appears, and the battle is over.

God has permitted His people to suffer under the despotism of rulers, like Caesar, Hitler, a Stalin or an agnostic humanist, but He has also enabled His people to experience great victories, even in martyrdom.

1. The Dragon (Rev. 12)

John’s vision opens with *two wonders in heaven* (**Rev. 12:1-6**). The first is a woman giving birth to a son. Since this child is identified as Jesus Christ (compare **Rev. 12:5** with **Rev. 19:15**), this symbolic woman can be none other than the nation of Israel. It was through Israel that Jesus Christ came into the world (**Rom. 1:3, 9:4-5**). In the Old testament, Israel is often compared to a woman, and even a woman in travail. The apostate world system is compared to a harlot (**Rev. 17:1ff.**), and the church to a pure bride (**Rev. 19:7ff.**).

- a. The son is born and is then caught up to the throne of God (**Rev. 12:5**). We have symbolized here the birth of Christ and His victorious ascension but nothing is said about either His life or His death.
- b. The woman with child is the first wonder; the great red dragon is the second. **Revelation 12:9** makes it clear that this is Satan. The color red is associated with death (**Rev. 6:4**), and Satan is a murderer (**John 8:44**). The heads, horns, and crowns will appear again in **Revelation 13:1** and **17:3**. The heads represent mountains (**Rev. 17:9**), and the horns represent kings (**Rev. 17:12**). We shall study more about the meaning of these symbols in more detail later.

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- c. The dragon was cast out of heaven (**Rev. 12:9**), and he took with him a third of the angels (**Rev. 12:7,9**). They are spoken of as “stars” in **Revelation 12:4** (see also **Dan. 8:10**). This is evidently a reference to the fall of Satan (**Isa. 14:12-15**), when he and his hosts revolted against God. However, the casting out described in **Revelation 12:7-10** is yet future.
- d. Just as soon as the child was born, Satan tried to destroy Him. This conflict between Satan and “the woman” began soon after man fell (**Gen. 3:1**). Throughout Old Testament history, Satan tried to prevent the birth of the Redeemer. There has always been a “dragon” standing by, waiting to destroy Israel or the ancestors of the Messiah (Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar). At one critical point, the royal line was limited to one little boy (**2 Kings 11:1-3**).
- e. When Jesus Christ was born, Satan used King Herod to try to destroy Him. Satan thought he had succeeded when he used Judas to betray the Lord and hand Him over to be crucified. But the cross was actually Satan’s defeat!
- f. Even today Satan has access to heaven, where he accuses God’s people, but he cannot dethrone the exalted Savior. His strategy is to persecute God’s people and devour them if possible (**1 Peter 5:8**). He has a special hatred for the Jewish people and has been the power behind anti-Semitism from the days of Pharaoh and Haman to Hitler and Stalin. Finally, in the middle of the tribulation, there will come a wave of anti-Semitism such as the world has never seen (**Rev. 12:6**). But God will protect His people during those three-and a-half years (1,260 days).

Apart from the 144,000 (who are sealed and protected), a believing remnant of Jews will survive this very troublesome time. We are not told where God will protect them or who will care for them. **Matthew 24:15-21** will take on special meaning for those believing Jews who live in the end days.

You and I are involved in a similar conflict today (see **Eph. 6:10ff.**). Satan is out to destroy the church, and our victory can come only through Jesus Christ. The next scene in this cosmic drama is a *war in heaven* (**Rev. 12:7-12**). Scripture makes it clear that Satan has access to heaven even today (**Job 1—2**).

- a. Once he was the highest of God’s angels, but he rebelled against God and was cast down. Interestingly, as God’s church faithfully serves Christ and wins the lost, Satan is also cast down and defeated (**Luke 10:1-2, 17-20**). Of course, when Jesus Christ died on the cross, it meant Satan’s ultimate defeat (**John 12:31-33**). Satan will one day be cast out of heaven and then finally cast into hell (**Rev. 20:10**).
- b. What is this celestial conflict all about? The fact that Michael led God’s angels to victory is significant, because Michael is identified with the nation Israel. The name *Michael* means “who is like God?” and this certainly parallels Satan’s egocentric attack on

Jehovah—"I will be like the most High" (**Isa. 14:14**). Apparently, the Devil's hatred of Israel will spur him to make one final assault against the throne of God, but he will be defeated by Michael and a heavenly host.

- c. But perhaps there is another factor involved in this war. After the church is taken to heaven, believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and have their works examined. On the basis of this judgment, rewards will be given (**Rom. 14:10-12; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:10-11**). It seems likely that Satan will be present at this event and will accuse the saints, pointing out all the "spots and wrinkles" in the church (**Eph. 5:24-27**).
- d. The name *devil* means "accuser," and *Satan* means "adversary." Satan stands at the throne of God and fights the saints by accusing them (see **Job 1—2**). But Jesus Christ, the "heavenly Advocate" (**1 John 2:1-2**), represents the church before God's holy throne. Because Jesus Christ died for us, we can overcome Satan's accusations "by the blood of the Lamb." Our salvation is secure, not because of our own works, but because of His finished work at Calvary.

How furious Satan will be when the church comes forth in glory "without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing." When the accuser sees that his tactics have failed, he will become angry and threaten the very peace of heaven.

How does this future war apply to the church today? The same serpent who accuses the saints in heaven also deceives the nations on earth (**Rev. 12:9**), and one of his strategies is to lie about the church. He deceives the nations into thinking that the people of God are dangerous, deluded, even destructive. It is through Satan's deception that the leaders of the nations band together against Christ and His people. God's people *in every age* must expect the world's opposition, but the church can always defeat the enemy by being faithful to Jesus Christ.

- a. Christ shed blood gives us our perfect standing before God. But our witness to God's Word and our willingness to lay down our lives for Christ defeats Satan as well. Satan is not equal to God; and his tactics must fail when God's people trust the power of the blood and of the Word.

Nothing Satan does can rob us of "salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ" (**Rev. 12:10**), if we are yielded to Him. God's great purposes will be fulfilled!

Believers in any age or situation can rejoice in this victory, no matter how difficult their experiences may be. Our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of the wicked one, and these have been defeated by our Savior. Heaven will rejoice when Satan is cast out, but the earth-dwellers will not, for the last half of the tribulation will mean intense suffering for the world.

- a. The "woe" in **Rev. 12:12** reminds us of the "three woes" referred to in **Rev. 8:13**. The first "woe" is described in **Rev. 9:1-12**, and the second in **Rev. 9:13-21**. The third "woe"

is referred to in **Rev. 11:4ff.**, but this passage only summarizes the events that will climax God's plan for the earth. It may be that part of this third "woe" is casting out Satan and permitting his terrible wrath on earth.

- b. This then is the third scene in the drama: *Satan's wrath on earth* (**Rev. 12:13-16**). Knowing that his time is short and having no more access to heaven, the adversary must vent all of his anger earthward. He begins with Israel (the woman), and creates a wave of anti-Semitism. Satan has always hated the Jews because they are God's chosen people and the vehicle through which salvation came into the world.
- c. Satan would like to destroy the nation, particularly as the time draws near for the Messiah to return to the earth to establish the promised kingdom. A Jewish remnant must be ready to receive Him and form the nucleus for the kingdom (**Zech. 12:9-14:21; Rev. 1:7**).
- d. God will prepare a special place where the Jewish remnant will be protected and cared for. It is interesting that the remnant's escape from Satan is described in terms of a flying eagle, for this is a repeated image in the Old testament with reference to Israel. God delivered Israel from Egypt "on eagles wings" (**Ex. 19:4**) and cared for the people in the wilderness as an eagle would her young (**Deut. 32:11-12**).

Note that the remnant will be sheltered for the last half of the tribulation. We do not know where this sheltered place will be, nor do we need to know. But the lesson for all of us is clear: God cares for those whom He wants to use to accomplish His purposes on earth.

The phrase "water as a flood" is not explained, but there is a parallel in **Psalms 124**. (Also note the phrase "escaped as a bird" in **verse 7** of this same Psalm). This "flood" is probably an out pouring of hatred and anti-Semitic propaganda. Or it may symbolize armies that invade Israel and seek to defeat the remnant. If that is the meaning, then the earth opening up could well be an earthquake that God sends to destroy the invaders. When Satan discovers that the people he seeks to kill are protected, then he turns on those who were not carried to the hidden place for safety.

He will declare war, and God will permit him to have victory for a time (**Rev. 13:7**), but ultimately, the old serpent will be defeated.

2. The Beast from The Sea (13:1-10)

Some text read, "And he [Satan] stood upon the sand of the sea." The sea symbolizes the Gentile nations (**Rev. 17:15**). From one of them, Satan will bring forth his "Super Leader," the man we call "Antichrist." Up to this point, the Antichrist has headed a ten-nation European league, but now he is about to embark on a new career as Satan's world dictator.

You will remember that the Antichrist began his career as a peacemaker (**Rev. 6:2**) and even "settled" the Arab-Israeli problem by making a covenant with the Jews to protect them for seven years (**Dan. 9:27**). This protection would permit the nation to rebuild the temple and reinstitute

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religious rituals (**Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:1**). But in the middle of the seven-year period (the time we are studying now in **Rev. 10—14**), he will break that covenant, stop the ceremonies, and set up himself as god in the temple (**Dan. 9:27; 2 Thess. 2:1-12**).

- a. The symbolic description of “the beast” enables us to learn something about his origin and character. God does not see him as a man, made in the divine image, but as a wild animal, under the control of Satan. He is a man (**Rev. 13:18**), but he is energized from hell, for he comes out of the pit (**Rev. 11:7, 17:8**). Just as Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, so “the beast” will be Satan in a human body (see **John 13:2, 27**).
- b. The seven heads represent seven mountains (**Rev. 17:9**), and since Rome was built on seven hills, this must be a veiled reference to that powerful city (see **Rev. 17:18**). It would be a most meaningful allusion in John’s day!
- c. The ten horns represent ten kingdoms (**Dan. 7:24; Rev. 17:12**). It appears that “the beast” will head a “United States of Europe,” a revived Roman Empire, before taking over as world dictator. All nations will no doubt admire and thank him for the “peace” he has achieved, little realizing the sorrow and destruction he will bring to the world.
- d. The three animals named in **Revelation 13:2** remind us of the four beasts Daniel saw in his dream (**Dan. 7**): a lion (Babylon), a bear (Media-Persia), a leopard (Greece), and a “terrible beast” (the Antichrist). John saw these animals, or kingdoms in reverse order since he was looking *back* while Daniel was looking *ahead*.
- e. The final world empire will be rooted in all previous empires and unite in one their evil and power. Added to the ferocity of these beasts will be Satan’s own power, throne, and authority.

Once Satan presents his great “masterpiece,” the counterfeit Christ, to the world, what will happen next?

- a. First, there will be *wonder* (**Rev. 13:3**). Certainly, a terrified world will wonder at the Antichrist’s power and his sudden rise to international fame and authority. But mankind will also wonder at the healing of his “wound.”
- b. What is this “wound”? John does not explain it, but perhaps what he later wrote (**Rev. 17:9-13**) can help interpret the symbolism. This “wound” must be important, because John mentioned it three times (**Rev. 13:3, 12, 14**), including the fact that it was sword-inflicted.
- c. The seven heads represent seven mountains, but also seven kings or kingdoms (**Rev. 17:10**). The Antichrist or “the beast” is one of these seven kings (**Rev. 17:11**), but he is also the eighth. Apparently, he reigns twice, but how can this be?

- i. The suggestion has been made that “the beast” will be a European leader who will form a ten-nation federation (**Rev. 17:12**), but be slain in the process. **Revelation 11:7** and **17:8** states that “the beast” will ascend out of the abyss.
 - ii. Is it possible that Satan will (with God’s permission) resurrect a man from the dead? If Satan has power to give life to a dead idol (**Rev. 13:15**), could he not also give life to a dead body?
- d. If “the beast” ruled as one of the seven kings, was slain, and then raised up again, he could rule as the eighth king. If, on the other hand, the image is seen representing kingdoms rather than individual, we would have the reemergence of a “dead kingdom” on the world scene. However, it would be difficult to understand how a kingdom could be slain by a sword. It is best (according to the author) to apply this prophecy to individual persons.

Not only will there be wonder, but there will also be *worship* (**Rev. 13:4**). Worship is the one thing Satan has always wanted (**Matt. 4:8-10**), and he will receive it through “the beast.” The second “beast” described in the last half of this chapter, will organize and promote the worship of the Antichrist, making it the official religion of the world!

There will also be *words* (**Rev. 13:5-6**). Almost all dictators have risen to power by controlling people with their words. Some can recall when Adolf Hitler was rising to power, and know now how he mesmerized huge crowds with his speeches.

- a. Satan will make “the beast” a great orator, whose addresses will blaspheme God, His name, His tabernacle (heaven), and the saints in heaven. Satan will have recently been cast out of heaven; this blasphemy is to be expected.
- b. Satan can do nothing without God’s permission (see (**Job 1—2; Luke 22:31-32**)), so “the beast’s” authority is delegated, not inherent. It will last for three-and-a-half years. The last half of the tribulation.

Finally, there will be *war* (**Rev. 13:7-10**). God will permit the Antichrist to war against His people (“wear out the saints,” **Dan. 7:25**) and even to defeat some of them. John prophesied that some of the saints will be captured and some will be martyred. But because of their faith, they will have patience, or endurance (see **Heb. 6:12; Rev. 1:9**), and will not deny the Lord in spite of persecution and death.

- a. The world’s population will be divided: Those who are saved, with their names in God’s book, will not submit to “the beast”; those who are lost—the earth-dwellers—will worship “the beast” and do his bidding. In every age of the church, true believers have had to take their stand for Christ, come what may.

- b. Keep in mind that “the beast” is a counterfeit Christ. The world would not receive Christ, but it will receive the Antichrist (**John 5:43**). The world will not believe the truth, but they will believe the lie (**2 Thess. 2:8-12**).
- c. Jesus spoke (and still speaks) gracious words of salvation, and men turn a deaf ear, but they will listen to the blasphemous words of “the beast.” The world will not worship *the* Christ, but they will bow down to the Antichrist.

In **Revelation 17**, we learn that “the beast” rises to power by means of “the harlot,” a symbol of the apostate world church. This is not any one denomination or faith, but a world religious system that has rejected God’s Son and God’s truth. However, when “the beast” rises to universal power, he will no longer need “the harlot” and shall subsequently destroy her and establish his own satanic religion.

3. The Beast From The Earth (13:11-18)

In **Revelation 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10**, the beast from the earth is called “the false prophet.” The dragon or Satan is the counterfeit Father (“I will be like the Most High”), “the beast” is the counterfeit Christ, and the false prophet is the counterfeit Holy Spirit. This completes the satanic trinity.

One of the ministries of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ and lead people to trust and worship Him (**John 16:7-15**). The false prophet will point the Antichrist and his image and compel people to worship Satan through “the beast.”

- a. The image of the horns (**Rev. 13:11**) suggests that the false prophet has authority, but the absence of a crown indicates that his authority is not political. Our Lord warned that there would be false prophets (**Matt. 24:11, 24**), and this one will be the greatest. He will have the “character” of a lamb but the voice of the dragon.
- b. When our Lord ministered on earth, Jewish leaders often asked Him to perform some sign to prove that He was indeed their Messiah, and Jesus refused. But the false prophet will perform deceptive signs that will lead the world into devil-worship.
- c. His greatest sign will be “the abomination of desolation” mentioned by Daniel (**Dan. 9:27, 11:36**), Jesus (**Matt. 24:15**), and Paul (**2 Thess. 2:4**).
- d. What is the “abomination of desolation”? It is the image of “the beast” set up in the temple in Jerusalem. An idol is bad enough, but setting it up in the temple is the height of blasphemy. Since Satan could not command worship in heaven, he will go to the next best place—the Jewish temple.

The false prophet, energized by Satan, will perform his “lying wonders” and even duplicate some of the signs perform by the two witnesses (**Rev. 13:13**). Up to this time, the two witnesses have been

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ministering at the temple in Jerusalem, but “the beast” will slay them and take over the temple. When God raises the two witnesses from the dead and takes them to heaven, the false prophet will answer that challenge by giving life to the image of “the beast.” Not only will the image move, but it will also speak!

- a. Not content to control people through religious deceit, the false prophet will institute strong economic measures as well. Everybody (except believers; **Rev. 20:4**) will receive a special mark in order to buy or sell, but the only way to get the mark is to submit to “the beast” and worship him. This is a strong allusion to the Caesar worship in the Roman empire, but this same policy has been used by political leaders throughout history.
- b. This special mark is the name or number of “the beast”—the mystical 666. In ancient world, the letters of the alphabet were used for numbers, both in Greek and Hebrew, and Bible students have been attempting for years to unravel the mystery of this name and number. If you work at it hard enough, almost any name will fit!
- c. Since man was created on the sixth day, six is the number of man. Creation was made for man and likewise has the number six stamped on it: twenty-four hours to a day (4x6), twelve months to a year (2x6). Seven is the number of perfection and fullness, but six is the “human number,” just short of perfection.

Despite all man’s imaginative calculations, we must confess that no one knows the meaning of this number and name. No doubt believers on earth at that time will understand it clearly. The “satanic trinity” cannot claim the number seven; it must settle for 666.

This much is sure: In recent years, we have seen a worldwide increase in the use of numbers for identification. In the United States, a person’s Social Security number is indispensable. In fact, numbers are more important to computers than names! Perhaps this is an advance warning of what will happen on earth when “the beast” is in control.

We have reached the middle of the tribulation in our study, but we are not yet ready for the return of the Lord. Before John revealed how the great drama will climax, he paused to overview great events to come, and that will be our next topic.

Homework: Voices Of Victory. Read Revelation 14—16.