

A Survey of Revelation

Week 8: The Conflict with the False Trinity
Revelation 12:1-13:18

A Brief Overview of the Book of Revelation

A. Introduction to the Book (Revelation 1)

B. Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2-3)

C. The End of the World As We Know It: God's Judgment Upon the World and Satan (Revelation 4-19:5)

1. The Vision of Heaven and the "Beginning of the End" (4:1-5:14)
2. The "Seal" Judgments and the Rapture (6:1-8:1)
3. The "Trumpet" Judgments (8:1-11:19)
4. The Conflict with the False Trinity (12:1-13:18) } *This week, we are here!*
5. The "Bowl" Judgments (14:1-16:21)
6. The End of the World (17:1-19:5)

D. A Whole New World: The Return of Christ and the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 19:6-22:21)

1. The Return of Christ and the Millennium Kingdom (19:6-20:15)
2. The New Heavens and the New Earth (21:1-22:11)
3. Epilogue to Revelation (22:12-21)

Introduction: Revelation 12:1-13:18 – A Spiritual Drama in Four Acts

Introduction

- At the end of Revelation 11, we find the sounding of the “seventh” and final “trumpet” (11:15-19). From this passage, it is clear that the world “as we know it” is about ready to end.
- But before that end is unfolded for us, there is another “pause” in the action in the form of Revelation 12-13, which gives us a “peek behind the curtain” and a “look behind the scenes” to see a great drama that has unfolded and is unfolding in a world we cannot see.



Revelation 12-13 serves as an “intermission” in the storyline of the book of Revelation designed to...

- (1) give us a peek behind the scenes at the forces of this world we cannot see but live surrounded by [Revelation 12] and
- (2) give us a more detailed picture of the “Great Tribulation”—the final 3 ½ years of this earth [Revelation 13].

A Story Told in Four “Acts”

- Revelation 12-13 can be thought of as a story that is told in four “acts”:

Act 1:	The Cosmic War, Part 1	Satan’s War Against Jesus From Jesus’ Birth	Revelation 12:1-6
Act 2:	The Cosmic War, Part 2	Satan is Cast Out of Heaven Fully and Finally at the Start of the Final 3 ½ Years of this Earth	Revelation 12:7-9
Act 3:	A War on Earth, Part 1	Satan’s Failure to Eliminate Israel	Revelation 12:13-17
Act 4:	A War on Earth, Part 2	The Anti-Christ, the Great Tribulation, and Satan’s Successful Persecution of Christians	Revelation 13:1-18

- The main point of the first three “acts” of this spiritual drama (Revelation 12) is this:

What Satan is going to do at the end of time is the end result of an eternity of going after God and everything He represents, including His people.

Act 1: The “Cosmic War,” Part 1
Satan’s War Against Jesus From Jesus’ Birth
 Revelation 12:1-6

Main Idea:

From the beginning of time, Satan has waged war against God, with his most intense efforts focused on eliminating Israel’s Messiah, Jesus. But God has ensured that Satan cannot get to Jesus.

¹A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (Rev. 12:1-6 NIV)

Act 1 Key Symbols:

A pregnant “woman clothed with the sun”	The faithful remnant of Israel
The enormous red dragon	Satan
The child born to the woman	Jesus
“A third of the stars swept from the sky”	The angels Satan took with him when he rebelled against God.

- This passage details four events:
 1. It talks about the original battle Satan had with God, which eventually led him to be thrown out of heaven and take 1/3 of the angels with him (vv. 3-4a).
 2. It talks about how after Satan was thrown out of heaven, he tried to go after God’s people, Israel (v. 1-2, 4b).
 3. It talks about how specifically Satan focused his efforts of eliminating Israel’s Messiah, Jesus (4b).
 4. It talks about how God ultimately protected Jesus from being eliminated (v. 5).

Act 1 “Reflections”

- This first “Act” gives a picture of what we’re up against when we become a Christian: when we put our faith in Jesus, we become a part of a great battle that has gone on since the beginning of time.
- In other words, we have an enemy, this enemy is real, and this enemy’s intent is nothing less than the elimination of everything good in this world—starting with Jesus, but eventually extending to you and me

Verse-by-Verse Commentary:

<p>Rev 12:1 <i>A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.</i></p>	<p>The “woman” is a reference to the faithful remnant of Israel. The imagery is taken from Genesis 37:9 and Joseph’s dream of his father’s descendants (Jacob, later renamed “Israel”) who are represented in the dream by the sun and moon and stars.</p>
<p>Rev 12:2 <i>She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.</i></p>	<p>This represents Israel about ready to produce the Messiah, Jesus. Israel went through many struggles to finally produce the Messiah.</p>
<p>Rev 12:3 <i>Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.</i></p>	<p>The dragon is a clear reference to Satan (see v. 9). The seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns are a reference to different empires, kingdoms, and rulers, and will be explained in greater detail in Revelation 17.</p>
<p>Rev 12:4a <i>Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.</i></p>	<p>This is a reference to the fall of Satan at the beginning of time. “Stars” in the Bible sometimes represent angels (Job 38:7). When Satan fell from heaven, this verse is telling us that he took 1/3 of the angels with him.</p>
<p>Rev 12:4b <i>The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born.</i></p>	<p>This verse refers to Satan trying to stop the Messiah / kill Jesus. It may be a direct reference to Herod’s murdering all the babies two and under in Bethlehem following Jesus’ birth (Matthew 2:16-18).</p>
<p>Rev 12:5 <i>She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.</i></p>	<p>Despite Satan’s attempts to kill Jesus, he was not successful. Jesus was born, and God protected Him by eventually taking Him up to heaven.</p>
<p>Rev 12:6 <i>The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.</i></p>	<p>This is a “transitional” verse. It takes us from the past (the events of Rev. 12:1-5) to the future—the reference to 1,260 days is a reference to the final 3 ½ years of this earth. This verse will be picked up and explained in greater detail starting in v. 13.</p>

Act 2: The “Cosmic War,” Part 2

Satan is Cast Out of Heaven Fully and Finally at the Start of the Final 3 ½ Years of this Earth

Revelation 12:7-9

Main Idea:

During the final seven years on this earth, Satan will make one last attempt at usurping God. He will fail and be cast down to earth, which will begin the period of Great Tribulation.

⁷ Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Rev. 12:7-9 NIV)

Act 2 “Reflections”

- One of the reasons why the final 3 ½ years on this earth will be so intense is because Satan knows that his “reign of terror” is about ready to end once and for all:

“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” (Rev. 12:12 NIV)

- Nevertheless, do not get any impression that Satan is in any way God’s equal: though Satan puts up a fight, God is able to vanquish him without so much as lifting a finger!

Verse-by-Verse Commentary:

Revelation 12:7-9 *Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

This “war” likely immediately precedes the “abomination of desolation” and the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Satan and his forces make one last attempt at usurping God—and ultimately fail miserably. (Note that not even God fights Satan—He simply sends one of His angels—Michael—to do it!)

It is the final casting down of Satan to this earth that sets up the period of Great Tribulation and the intense persecution that will be experienced on this earth at that time.¹

¹ In between “Act 2” and “Act 3” is Revelation 12:10-12. This is a hymn celebrating Satan’s final removal from heaven and lamenting the terror he is about to unleash during the Great Tribulation.

Act 3: A War on Earth, Part 1

Satan's Failure to Eliminate Israel

Revelation 12:13-17

Main Idea:

Satan's initial target during the Great Tribulation will be the people who "gave birth" to Jesus—the remnant of Israel. But God will provide supernatural protection for Israel during this time. And so Satan will go after the next best thing: you and me—Christians.

¹³ When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴ The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷ Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring-- those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

Key Symbols

The woman	The faithful remnant of Israel God will protect during the Great Tribulation
The serpent	Satan (the same as the dragon)
The "rest" of the woman's offspring	Gentile believers in Christ

Act 3 "Reflections"

- Even Satan realizes the chosen status that Israel has in God's program, and Israel provides Satan his first target.
- But God, true to His promise to save the people of Israel at the end of time, provides supernatural protection to them.
- This is what directly sets up the persecution of Christians during the Great Tribulation.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary:

<p>Rev 12:13 <i>When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.</i></p>	<p>Now we return back to the event described in Revelation 12:6. Satan cannot get Jesus since Satan has been fully and finally hurled out of heaven. So Satan is now trying to get the “mother” of Jesus—the people of Israel (perhaps with specific reference to the 144,000). This is the beginning of the Great Tribulation, right after the abomination of desolation.</p>
<p>Rev 12:14-16 <i>The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵ Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.</i></p>	<p>But initially Satan is not able to get the people of Israel; God provides supernatural protection for them in some way (again, the 144,000 may specifically be in view here) for the 3 ½ years² of the Great Tribulation. We are not told how God protects them, but perhaps God directs them to “flee for the mountains” as Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:16.</p>
<p>Rev 12:17 <i>Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring-- those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus. (Rev. 12:17 NIV)</i></p>	<p>Since Satan cannot get the people of Israel, he goes after you and me—the “rest of her offspring,” those of us who have been “grafted” into Israel (Rom. 11:17). In other words, since Satan cannot get the remnant of Israel, he goes after Gentile Christians, those who “keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.”</p> <p>But how does Satan go after us? That is what Act 4—and Revelation 13—is all about.</p>

² “Time, times and a half of time” in Revelation 12:14 refers to 3 ½ years. It’s taken from Daniel 7:25 and Daniel 12:7.

Act 4: A War on Earth, Part 2

The Anti-Christ, the Great Tribulation, and Satan's Successful Persecution of Christians

Revelation 13:1-18

Main Idea:

Satan will use all of his power to attack God's people on this earth in the final 3 ½ years. This attack will occur primarily through the raising up of an Anti-Christ who will kill those who do not show allegiance to him.

Overview

- In Revelation 13:1-18, we get the most detailed description in the book of Revelation of what the Great Tribulation will look like: this chapter details the final 3 ½ years of this earth and the extents to which Satan will go to make life difficult for Christians here on this earth.
- This "Act" itself can be divided into two parts:
 - ① The Anti-Christ Described (Revelation 13:1-2)
 - ② The Anti-Christ's Actions Revealed (Revelation 13:3-18)

① The Anti-Christ Described (Rev 13:1-2)

"The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. ²The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." (Rev. 13:1-2 NIV)

- Satan (the dragon) calls forth a ferocious looking "beast." The beast represents two things:
 - 1. The beast represents a final, evil, end-time empire.**
 - The description of the "beast" is ferocious in its appearance and uses imagery used elsewhere in the Bible to describe other evil empires that warred against Israel and God's people. This "beast," however, combines all of those images in one: this "beast" represents the most *evil* empire that ever exists.
 - The description of this empire is clearly reminiscent of the Roman Empire in Revelation 13, but it is also more than that: the Roman Empire does not fully satisfy all of the details of Revelation 13. Thus this empire will be even more evil—and will cause more difficulty for God's people—than the Roman Empire.
 - This empire itself may be the amalgamation of seven separate empires (the seven "heads") and ten leaders (the ten "horns"). (The "heads" and "horns" are described in greater detail in Revelation 17, and we will discuss it there.)

2. The beast also represents the final *leader* of that empire—the Anti-Christ.

- The “beast” is also talked about in individual terms (notice the use of the third-person singular pronoun throughout Rev. 13).
 - It also does certain things and has certain things done to it that only make sense if a single individual is involved (Rev. 13:3, 5-7, 18).
- **Thus this “beast” is a final, evil, end-time empire and the leader of that empire—the Anti-Christ.**

② The Anti-Christ’s Actions Revealed (Rev. 13:3-18)

- There are five primary things that the Anti-Christ will do during the “Great Tribulation”:
 1. **He will slander God and the followers of God** (Rev. 13:5-6).
 2. **He will be the beneficiary of some sort of miracle, which will help convince people to worship him** (Rev. 13:3, 8, 12, 14).
 - The text indicates in three places that the Anti-Christ will at some point be killed—or will appear to be dead (the “fatal wound” of Rev. 13:3, 12, 14)—but then will come back to life.
 - This “miracle” has historical precedent; after Emperor Nero died in 68 AD, a rumor circulated in the 70s AD that Nero had come back to life and was going to lead an army to destroy Rome.
 - Through this miracle, the Anti-Christ is trying to mimic the resurrection of Jesus. This miracle will convince many that the Anti-Christ is worthy of worship, and “all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev. 13:8) will do so.
 3. **He, with the aid of a religious-type figure—a “false prophet”—will set up a false religion around the Anti-Christ, forcing people to worship him** (Rev. 13:7, 11-15).
 - The Anti-Christ will be joined by another “beast,” apparently a religious-type figure (Rev. 13:11-17). He is the “false prophet” of Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10.³
 - This “false prophet” seemingly organizes a worldwide religion to pay homage to the Anti-Christ (Rev. 13:12-15). This also has historical precedence; the “Imperial Cult”—the religion that worshipped the leaders of Rome as gods—was led by a group of people known as the “Asiarchs” who presided over the religious ceremonies of the Imperial Cult (see Acts 19:31).

³ See also Matthew 24:24 – “For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”

- This “false prophet” will also perform miracles of his own (13:13; see also 2 Thessalonians 2:9). He even seems to make it so that a “statue” of the Anti-Christ is able to speak (13:15).
4. **He, along with this “false prophet,” will forbid anyone in his nation to do business unless they show allegiance to him. This will happen through a mysterious “mark” they will require people to get (Rev. 13:16-17).**
- The “false prophet” will force people to receive a mark that shows allegiance to the Anti-Christ (13:16). No one will be able to conduct any business without this mark.
 - The “mark” is obviously a parody of the “seal” that God put on the 144,000 in Revelation 7. But the Greek for “mark” is different than “seal”; it is the word that was used for the tattoos adherents of pagan religions often had at this time.
 - In the Roman Empire, people would often have tattoos of their “patron god” on their hand (or elsewhere on their body). It revealed the dedication that people had to their god and to the empire.
 - Apparently something like this will take place in the last days: people will have to show allegiance to the Anti-Christ / the final empire in some way in order to do business. Those who do not do that will be turned away from businesses, stores, etc. They will be shunned for not showing commitment to the state.
 - This recalls the situation of the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev. 2:9; 3:8). It was nearly impossible in those cities to do business without paying allegiance to the Imperial Cult. This will be magnified in the last days.

“Believers will lose their jobs, their homes, and their places in society; then they will be hunted to the death. This was true at times in the first century; it is true in many places today; and it will universally be the case in the final period of history.”

- Grant Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse*

Note: Despite what the internet may tell you, we DO NOT have to worry about “mistakenly” taking the “mark of the beast.” This is clear for three reasons:

1. **The “mark of the beast” will not happen until AFTER the abomination of desolation, an event all Christians will recognize.**
2. **Based on its connection with the first-century “Imperial Cult” the “mark of the beast” will likely be accompanied by an oath someone will have to take where they simultaneously commit full allegiance to the Anti-Christ and his empire AND renounce faith in Jesus. In other words, it will not be “slipped” to us unknowingly (through the taking of medicine or something like that).**
3. **God seems to provide supernatural protection for Christians from taking the mark (see Revelation 13:8).**

5. Finally, the Anti-Christ will lead a worldwide persecution of Christians (Rev. 13:7a, 15).

*The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak **and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.***
(Rev. 13:15 NIV)

The “Number of the Beast” (Rev. 13:18)

- John concludes this troubling chapter with a cryptic message. He says:

This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666. (Rev. 13:18 NIV).

- But what does this mean? A few options:
 1. It could be a reference to Nero Caesar. In the ancient world, letters were often assigned a number. One Hebrew spelling of Nero Caesar adds up to 666. This could mean that the Anti-Christ will be a “Nero-type” figure.
 2. It could be a reference to the ultimate example of “evil” or sinful mankind. Because “6” is one-short of “7,” the number of completeness in the Bible, “6” is often thought to be the number of “incompleteness”—and thus sin and evil. Mankind was also created on the sixth day, so “6” is also seen as the number of man. Thus 666 could symbolize the ultimate in sin and rebellion against God. Thus this individual will embody everything evil.
 3. It could be some other meaning not yet clear to us. But it will be clear to us when the Anti-Christ is revealed—hence John’s call for “wisdom” (Rev. 13:18).

“The better part of wisdom is to be content that the identification is not yet available, but will be when the future false Christ ascends to his throne.”

- Robert Thomas, *Revelation Exegetical Commentary*

Application: We Are Not Afraid

- Though it may seem like there is much to fear about the Anti-Christ, the “Great Tribulation,” and Satan, in general, we would do well to remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 10:28

“Don't be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28 NLT)

- The Bible makes it clear: when viewed in light of eternity, Satan has nothing. Only God is the one who has eternity in our hands. He is the only one to “fear.”
- Particularly in our day-and-age, we need to remember that, recalling the spirit of our brothers and sisters in the faith who gave everything—including their lives—for the sake of Jesus. As Revelation itself says,

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Rev. 12:11 NIV)

- Contrary to some of the “sermons” we hear today in the church, the Christian message is not a message of “love yourself.”
 - No, it’s a message of “love Jesus no matter what the cost.”
- Someday, that message may cost us our lives. But remember the words of Jim Elliot, someone who lost his life for his faith:

“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot earn.”

– Jim Elliot

Are we ready to pledge our allegiance to Jesus, and Him alone, no matter what the cost?

Don't forget to email questions!
questions@friends.church

Homework for next week: Read Revelation 14-16 at least twice this week.