

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 79 – REVELATION 8-12 - THE DRAGON VS THE WOMAN]

Last time we finished up looking at the message to the seven churches of Asia Minor.

- ◆ In each case there is the admonition to hold on to what you have and in some cases to repent of your ways, but this is followed up with the promise of future glory.
- ◆ We see the message is one of allegiance to the heavenly kingdom rather than to the conquering power of the Roman Empire.
- ◆ But the message of Revelation was not just for these churches in Asia Minor, it is a message that resonates for Christians down through the centuries, as we too have to live by our Christian convictions in an evil world dominated by malignant beastly powers.
- ◆ We also looked at the first six seals and through them identified a number of sources representing the malignant powers of evil that dominated the early church age.
- ◆ They were the despotic and cruel Roman emperors, his conquering armies, grasping businessmen, corrupt governments, politicians and agencies and false religious institutions.
- ◆ We finished with the sixth seal that was a divine warning to these evil forces.
- ◆ God is not going to stand by and let this repetitive evil process continue forever.
- ◆ He will use His divine power to bring it all to an end.
- ◆ But just before God steps in, there is a pause.
- ◆ It's as if God is hoping people will come to their senses and He won't have to use force to bring them to their senses.
- ◆ This pattern of foreboding, pause and hope is repeated throughout the book.
- ◆ However if they don't respond, then sudden destruction is brought upon them.

We pick up the story in Revelation 8.

- ◆ The seventh seal is opened revealing the seven plagues that will befall these evil powers unless they repent.
- ◆ We need to be careful we don't read too much into this scenario as though it is a fait accompli.
- ◆ Even though the souls under the altar cry out, ***"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10)***, we need to remember God is about life and not death.
- ◆ We need to remember there are previous examples where people heeded God's warning to repent and God relented, like the people of Nineveh.
- ◆ ***Jonah 3:9-10 Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish."***¹⁰ ***When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.***
- ◆ And again there is a caution in the story of Jonah for all Christians and that is we shouldn't sulk like Jonah did when evil doers repent and don't get what we think they deserve (Jonah 4:1-4).
- ◆ We like the angels in heaven should rejoice when sinners come to repentance (Luke 15:8).
- ◆ On the other hand, we have the example of Pharaoh during the time of the Exodus, although warned repeatedly, only relented after being afflicted with ten plagues.
- ◆ Before each plague, Moses was sent back to Pharaoh to warn him of the wrath to come.
- ◆ As we will soon see, this same scenario of warning is repeated here in Revelation.
- ◆ However it is during one of these plagues, the fifth, we see another source of evil added to our list.
- ◆ ***Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).***
- ◆ Later on we will further identify who this "Destroyer" is. Suffice to say here, destruction is his modus operandi.
- ◆ In addition, he has at his disposal a host of evil cohorts who go about inflicting torment and destruction on humanity.
- ◆ ***Revelation 9:2-3 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.***³ ***And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.***
- ◆ Normally this scenario in Revelation is applied to the end days, but in reality these evil supernatural powers have been inflicting their torment on humanity down through the ages as all the victims of war and pestilence (including those under the yoke of the Roman Empire) will testify.

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- ◆ However after six trumpets, similar to what happened in Egypt, nothing changes, they did not repent even in the face of these horrific plagues.
- ◆ **Revelation 9:20- 21** *The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*
- ◆ We expect the final trumpet to sound, but again a voice from heaven interrupts the scenario.
- ◆ **Revelation 10:11** *Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”*
- ◆ So again, in the face of impending doom, there is a pause, and the reason is to allow a prophetic voice in the mode of Moses and Jonah to call for repentance.
- ◆ Again we are reminded God is a God who seeks to give life not take it.
- ◆ God appoints two witnesses to go forth calling for change (Revelation 11:3).
- ◆ However the call for repentance is rejected and they are killed (Revelation 11:7).
- ◆ The seventh trumpet sounds and again a different vision is displayed, rather than a vision of a world bent on destruction, we see one under the gracious reign of God.
- ◆ **Revelation 11:15** *The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign for ever and ever.”*
- ◆ This cycle of foreboding, a pause and then hope is repeated.
- ◆ The message for us as Christians regardless of the age in which we live is, we too are to be life bringers not life takers.

In Revelation 12 we are introduced to another beastly power that was alluded to earlier.

- ◆ It is here we come face to face with the ultimate source of evil.
- ◆ **Revelation 12:1-5** *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. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*
- ◆ These heavenly bodies are the same ones that appear in Joseph’s dream where his family bows down to him (Genesis 37:9).
- ◆ This woman represents the nation of Israel bringing forth the Messiah.
- ◆ But the woman has a mortal enemy intent on destroying her child.
- ◆ **V.3** *Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads.*
- ◆ V.9 identifies this dragon as Satan the devil.
- ◆ Its reference to seven heads is later identified as the city of Rome (Revelation 17:9).
- ◆ Here we see John identifying the true source of evil motivating these world dominating beasts is this enormous red dragon who was earlier called “**Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).**”
- ◆ **V.4** *Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.*
- ◆ This is a flashback to an earlier time.
- ◆ Back before humanity existed this dragon mounted a rebellion against God with the support of a third of the angels.
- ◆ However they were defeated and thrown down to the earth (Isaiah 14:13-14).
- ◆ So right from the beginning, we see this dragon’s modus operandi is to destroy God’s good work.
- ◆ His intention in the Garden of Eden was to destroy God’s good work.
- ◆ Now we see him trying to destroy Jesus’ redemptive work.
- ◆ **V.4 ...***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. 5 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.*
- ◆ You will remember King Herod’s attempt to destroy Jesus as a young child by ordering the deaths of all male children from two years old and under who lived in and around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18).

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- ◆ Jesus however fled with His family to Egypt and went on to complete His mission of redemption and returned to heaven.
 - ◆ **Revelation 12:6** *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.*
 - ◆ The woman, now representing the New Testament church is protected and nourished by God down through the ages, despite the devil's attempts to destroy it (Matthew 16:18).
 - ◆ **V.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.*
 - ◆ This is not referring to the previous rebellion just mentioned but a new battle after Christ's atoning sacrifice and resurrection.
 - ◆ Prior to this event, we are told in the book of Job that Satan had access to God's throne and used it to bring accusations against God's people (Job 1:6-7; Job 2:1-2).
 - ◆ But because of Christ's saving work, the devil's accusations are no longer valid so his access is denied and he and his demons are cast down to the earth for good.
 - ◆ **Revelation 12:10** *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*
 - ◆ As we saw earlier, the decisive battle to rid the world of evil is not going to happen at the end of the age, as it has already happened when Jesus defeated the principalities and powers with his atoning sacrifice at the cross (Colossians 2:14-15).
 - ◆ As Genesis 3:15 had predicted, there would be ongoing "enmity" between the serpent (Satan) and the woman (God's people) and the "Seed" (Jesus) who would come from the woman.
 - ◆ Satan was able to "bruise" Christ's heel through the crucifixion, but that very event fatally doomed the devil by "bruising" his head.
 - ◆ By defeating the devil through the temptation, atonement and resurrection, Jesus dethroned this beastly illegitimate ruler and claimed rulership of the cosmos back for God.
 - ◆ **Ephesians 1:19-22** *....That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, ²¹ far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church.*
 - ◆ This is why we read here in verse 22, God has already "**placed all things under his feet**" and appointed him to be head over everything," even though the full manifestation of this reality is still in the future.
 - ◆ Again, this is the "already, but not yet" tension we discussed earlier.
- Jesus' decisive victory over Satan at the cross and his banishment from heaven sends the fatally wounded Satan into a fit of rage.**
- ◆ **Revelation 12:12-13** *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."*
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.*
 - ◆ This event precipitates the clash between the reign of the newly instituted kingdom of God and the evil values of the kingdoms of this age.
 - ◆ It sets the stage for the inevitable clash between the values of the new creation and the bestial and brutal images a desperate devil is about to unleash on God's people.
 - ◆ This is why the early church suffered such heavy persecution at the hands of the dragon's human instruments, the beastly Roman Empire with its iron teeth and bronze claws.
 - ◆ Jesus through John wants his readers to understand they are the victims of a defeated and desperate devil.
 - ◆ They are encouraged to hold firm and not give in to the prevailing conditions as God will give you the strength to prevail.

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- ◆ *Revelation 12:14 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.*
- ◆ This *"time, times and half a time"* is the same period of 1260 days mentioned in verse 6, but represented in years rather than days.
- ◆ Remarkably, the persecution of Christians ceased when the emperor Constantine who had "converted" to Christianity in 312AD granted Christianity official tolerance a year later with the "Edict of Milan," in 313AD.
- ◆ It was 67 years later that Christianity was proclaimed the official religion of the Roman Empire by emperor Theodosius in 380AD.
- ◆ The point being, God is not going to allow the destroyers to have their way as He has and will overcome them with the opposing power of life.
- ◆ So again the question comes back to one of allegiance, even in the of face terrible persecution, "Are you with the dragon who presides over destruction or with the Creator who presides over life?"