



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #25: "Satan's War against the Faithful"

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 12

Memory Verse: "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." Revelation 12:17.

In the prophecy of Daniel 7, we found pagan Rome represented by a "dreadful and terrible" beast with ten horns. You will recall that, among the ten horns there came up a "little horn," which symbolized papal Rome.

In the twelfth chapter of Revelation we find Satan working through both pagan and papal Rome to make war against God's Son, God's people, and God's law. Let us familiarize ourselves with the characters of this prophecy, for we are now living in the hour of final fulfillment!

1: WHO IS REPRESENTED BY THE WOMAN IN REVELATION 12?

Revelation 12:1: "There appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars."

A number of times in the Bible God uses a woman to symbolize the church.

Hosea 2:19: "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness and in mercies."

Isaiah 62:5: "As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee."

This woman of Revelation is clothed with the sun, symbol of the gospel light of the pure church. Notice also that a corrupt woman symbolizes a corrupt church.

Ezekiel 23:2-4: "Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother: and they committed whoredoms in Egypt; they committed whoredoms in their youth: there were their breasts pressed, and there they bruised the teats of their virginity, And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister: and they were Mine, and they bare sons and daughters. Thus were their names; Samaria is Aholah, and Jerusalem Aholibah" (Revelation 17:3, 6, 15-16).

Another text or two might be quoted to show that a pure woman symbolizes the true church:

Jeremiah 6:2: "I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman."

2 Corinthians 11:2: "I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ."

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So this woman, in Revelation 12:1, undoubtedly represents the true church; whereas the sun aptly represents the gospel and the glory of the church established by Christ.

The moon symbolizes the types and shadows of the Old Testament, which passed away when the full gospel sun arose upon the earth. And the twelve stars suggest the twelve tribes and the twelve apostles.

The Old Testament days had their glory of types and shadows and the glory of the majesty of law. This glory of Judaism was as the shining of the moon. But love and grace and the Spirit of God, as revealed in Christ and the New Testament, are like the shining of the sun. Justice is deep and abiding, but love and mercy are warm, kind, and gracious. Their rays bring life and light, and warm the heart with an overwhelming desire to do the will of God and keep His commandments.

2: WHO WAS THE MAN-CHILD BORN TO THE WOMAN?

The man-child born to the woman was Christ. He it is who is destined to rule with a rod of iron.

Revelation 12:5: "She brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron."

Psalms 2:7-9: "The Lord hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The man-child was caught up to God's throne. Even so, Jesus, after His victory over sin and death, ascended to His Father's throne.

Revelation 12:5: "And her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne."

Ephesians 1:20-21: "Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."

That this child is Christ would seem to be no question. He is to rule with a rod of iron. Of Christ it is said:

Revelation 2:27: "He shall rule them with a rod of iron."

He was to be caught up to God's throne.

Hebrews 8:1: "We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."

3: WHAT WAS MEANT BY THE GREAT RED DRAGON?

Revelation 12:3-4: "There appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born."

Satan, the "great dragon" and "that old serpent" (*Revelation 12:9*) worked against Christ and the church through pagan Rome. This was the legally constituted power that became the tool for the "devouring" of the man-child. Of pagan Rome we read in Daniel 8:25, "He shall also stand up against the Prince of princes." As a general rule, we find the nations of earth brought to view in the Bible when they have

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some connection with God's work and people. The "third part of the stars of heaven" are the angels who were "cast. . . to the earth" when Lucifer was thrust out of heaven (*Revelation 12:7-9*). Observe carefully the following points:

1. The dragon had ten horns, as did the dreadful beast of Daniel 7. This represents the ten divisions of pagan Rome.
2. The dragon was a common symbol of old Roman ensigns.
3. Rome, under Augustus, brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem to enroll for taxation, and there Jesus was born (*Luke 2: 1-5, 11*).
4. Rome, through King Herod, tried to destroy Christ as a babe (*Matthew 2:3-18*).
5. Rome, under Pilate, put Christ to death.
6. The tomb of Jesus was sealed with a Roman seal (*Matthew 27:65-66*).
7. The tomb was guarded by a Roman watch, or guard.
8. Thus Satan worked by means of the great red dragon, which was pagan Rome, against the Son of the woman.

4: WHAT PICTURE IS GIVEN OF WAR IN HEAVEN?

Revelation 12:7-10: "There was war in heaven: Michael and His angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found anymore in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

Michael signifies Christ. Notice these three Scriptures:

Jude 9: "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation."

1 Thessalonians 4:16: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first,"

John 5:28: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice."

The voice of the archangel then is the voice of Christ, and Michael is the archangel. Satan, of course, is the "great dragon," "that old serpent." So here we have the picture of conflict between Christ and Satan—a conflict that began in heaven and will continue until Satan is destroyed.

W. A. Spicer writes: "This picture of the original conflict in heaven is evidently thrown in here to show the animus of Satan in his warfare against the man-child, the Son of man. They had met before. Jesus was not only Son of man, but He was the eternal Son of God. As Commander of heaven's hosts, He had expelled Satan and the rebellious angels from heaven."

When Christ came to earth, Satan assaulted Him. He sought to have Him slain as a babe (*Matthew 2:13-16*). He tried in vain to conquer Him in the wilderness of temptation (*Matthew 4:1-11*). He trailed the Saviour day and night, seeking to lead Him to sin against God's law or to give up His plan of saving man. Satan did not rest until Jesus was nailed to the cross.

But what seemed to be victory for Satan was actually defeat:

Revelation 12:10: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down."

Christ's death was a guarantee that Satan could no longer deceive the inhabitants of heaven or earth. His malice and deceit were unmasked before the universe. Jesus humbled Himself to the death of the cross, but will be exalted "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named" (*Ephesians 1:21*). Satan sought to exalt himself, and was cast down. At the end of the millennium Satan and his hosts will perish in the lake of fire after seeking to make an assault on the camp of the saints, the city of God, the New Jerusalem, which descends from heaven. This will be Satan's final defeat, his utter and complete end in ignominious failure. He will be annihilated, and never will he be anymore (*Ezekiel 28:19*).

5: AGAINST WHOM DOES SATAN DIRECT HIS ATTACKS?

Revelation 12:11-13: "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the manchild,"

Satan, having failed to defeat Christ, sensed anew that, not only God, but now time was against him. As John said, "He knoweth that he hath but a short time." Some four thousand years of battle against earth's inhabitants lay behind him, with every passing year bringing him nearer to the day of awful retribution.

In fury Satan turned upon the church—the followers of Jesus. The apostles drank of the cup of sacrifice and martyrdom, as Jesus had predicted. Paganism, Satan's carefully constructed system of error, was now headed by the pagan Roman power. Under the emperors Nero, Domitian, Tarjan, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Maximinus, Decius, Valerian, Aurelian, and Diocletian, the early church suffered the tortures of persecution and the pangs of cruel death. Multitudes sealed their testimony with their blood, "and they loved not their lives unto the death." Not the least of these was the great apostle Paul.

6: WHAT LONG PERIOD OF TRIAL COMES TO THE CHURCH?

Revelation 12:6: "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

Revelation 12:14-16: "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth."

In an earlier study on Daniel 7, we learned that a day stands for a year in prophecy. So here we have 1,260 literal years. Read Revelation 12, verses 6 and 14; and note that "time, and times, and half a time" are 1,260 days. In prophetic time, a day stands for a year (*Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6*).

Numbers 14:34: "After the number of the days in which ye searched the land. even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years."

Ezekiel 4:6: "When thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year."

The following facts become apparent at once:

The "saints" were persecuted for a time, times, and dividing of time. A time, times, and half a time is the same as 1,260 days, or years (*Revelation* 12:14, 6). It is clear that the woman here represents the church during the same period as the "saints" of Daniel 7:25. This period is the 1,260 years (AD. 538. to AD. 1798) of papal Rome's supremacy, during which papal Rome persecuted the saints. Satan thus persecuted the woman (*Revelation* 12:13) during these dark days. And Satan was more or less successful in his assault on the early church. Persecution is not easy to endure, and popularity is often preferred. When errors began creeping in, the church began to take on the color and complexion of heathen Rome.

"At the end of the second century, within a little more than one hundred and fifty years after the first preaching of the gospel, it is obvious to remark the changes already introduced into the Christian church. Christianity already began to wear the garb of heathenism.

"Out of this mixture of Judaism, Christianity, and paganism came the papacy, or papal Rome, which persecuted the saints in the centuries following pagan Rome. Satan, having filled the church itself with error, brought about the exaltation of the 'man of sin' to rule over even the kings and princes. The long, dismal night of the Dark Ages came and dragged on for century after century. The noonday of the papacy was indeed the midnight of the world.

"The persecution of this 1,260-year period has been touched upon earlier. We shall refrain from discussing the horrors of the torture and the death of its millions of victims. On the illustrious roster of martyrs are such names as Huss, Jerome, Latimer, Cranmer, Tyndale, and many others.

"But the earth helped the woman. She fled into 'the wilderness' regions of Europe. In the mountain fastnesses, the Alpine retreats, and the Piedmont valleys, the faithful of God sought refuge.

"Then the New World opened up as an asylum for the persecuted. To this land of liberty, millions have flocked to live free from tyranny and oppression. The power that came up out of the 'earth' helped the woman" (*Sketches of Church History, Century II, sec. VII*—James Wharey).

7: WHAT CONFLICT DEVELOPED BETWEEN THE DRAGON AND THE REMNANT OF THE WOMAN'S SEED?

Revelation 12:17: "The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ".

At this point let us pause and summarize our lesson by making six simple statements:

1. Satan persecuted Christ through pagan Rome.
2. Then he persecuted the early church through pagan Rome.
3. Next he persecuted the church for 1,260 years through papal Rome.
4. Finally, he "went to make war with the remnant of her seed."
5. The "remnant" church is the "last" church, in these last days.
6. God's remnant church may be identified by three characteristics (*Revelation* 14:12).

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Let us now concentrate on the meaning of this prophecy to us. As you know, the Protestant Reformation took place during the 1,260-year period (A.D. 538 to AD. 1798), and it stirred the wrath of Satan deeply; but, as time has gone by, apostasy has been making its inroads into the great Protestant movement. Moreover, the Reformation was unable to eradicate all the errors of the papal system. For example, the manmade change in God's law was not remedied (*Exodus 20:8-11*). So the arrested reformation is still to be completed.

God has set His hand, in our day, to gather His remnant people. As the remnant of cloth is the last piece from the bolt, so the remnant church is the church of the last days. This church will have the true faith of Jesus and keep God's commandments—all of them. The hour of God's judgment has come. The law of God is the standard of that judgment. God's message of the judgment hour must go to every nation on earth (*Revelation 14:6-7*). A people is being gathered who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (*Revelation 14: 12*).

Satan, knowing that his time now is truly short, is stirred to "make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus" (*Revelation 12:12*). Yet "the Lord knoweth them that are His" (*2 Timothy 2:19*). And "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (*2 Peter 2:9*).

The great lesson of Revelation 12 is that Satan, who was cast out of heaven for his rebellion, wages continuous warfare against Christ, the Son of God; against God's people; and against the divine law of God. The keeping of the commandments of God will be one of the things that will identify His remnant people, and Satan will seek to discourage them by bringing reproach and trouble upon them. The issue of God's Son and God's law is to become worldwide; and, upon our relationship to this issue, our eternal destiny will be determined. May God help us all to be on God's side.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"The very first effort of Satan to overthrow God's law—undertaken among the sinless inhabitants of heaven—seemed for a time to be crowned with success. A vast number of the angels were seduced; but Satan's apparent triumph resulted in defeat and loss, separation from God, and banishment from heaven. When the conflict was renewed upon the earth, Satan again won a seeming advantage. By transgression, man became his captive, and man's kingdom also was betrayed into the hands of the arch rebel. Now the way seemed open for Satan to establish an independent kingdom, and to defy the authority of God and His Son. But the plan of salvation made it possible for man again to be brought into harmony with God, and to render obedience to His law, and for both man and the earth to be finally redeemed from the power of the wicked one. Again Satan was defeated. And again he resorted to deception, in the hope of converting his defeat into a victory. To stir up rebellion in the fallen race, he now represented God as unjust in having permitted man to transgress His law." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 331