

The Dragon's Kingdom

Revelation 12:3-6

By Phillip G. Kayser at Dominion Covenant Church on 2017-05-07

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Text

12:1 A great sign appeared in the sky: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 And being pregnant she was crying out in labor, being in great pain to give birth.>

3 And another sign appeared in the sky: behold, a dragon, huge, fiery red, having seven heads and ten horns, with seven diadems on his heads. 4 And his tail grabbed a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.>

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth in order to devour her Child as soon as she gave birth. 5 And she bore a Son, a male, who would shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was snatched up to God, even to His throne.>

6 And the woman fled into the wilderness to where she has a place prepared by God, so that they may nourish her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Introduction

Last week we looked at the first two verses, which give an incredible description of God's bride, pictured by the Old Testament symbol of the woman, Zion. In the Old Testament, Zion was frequently portrayed as a woman in labor giving birth to the man-child. But verse 1 also gives a glorious picture of Zion clothed in the glory of God and crowned with a stephanos crown, or a victory crown. And later in the book she will be contrasted with the harlot who rides the beast.

Today we come to the second great sign that John saw painted on the heavens - a huge fiery red dragon. We aren't left guessing who this dragon is because in verse 9 John calls him that serpent of old, the devil, and Satan. So it was not a literal dragon. The word "sign" itself indicates that this is a symbol of all that the devil represents.

I. The dragon before the fall

But interestingly, this dragon is first seen in heaven. We saw that the woman's identity was with heaven as well. And so it may seem strange that this dragon would be seen in heaven. But it shouldn't be strange. When you study the history of Satan, you realize that he was originally a perfect and upright angel. Jude 6 says that he left his proper domain, which was heaven. He was identified with heaven just as Zion was identified with heaven. He was the archangel Lucifer, the greatest created angel of heaven. So it is perfectly appropriate that this symbol starts in heaven.

A. Dragons not inherently evil since they were created by God (Gen. 1:21; Job 40:15-24; 41:1-34). There were three kinds of dragon: Tannin (Ps. 91:13), Leviathon (Ps. 104:26), and Rahab (Job 26:12-13).

We are used to thinking of dragons as evil because Satan is pictured as a dragon. But that was not always the case. God created all the various types of dinosaurs before sin entered this universe, and a dragon was just one of the types of dinosaurs. Answers in Genesis has some books documenting how various types of dragons described in history actually look like various types of dinosaur - and there were even flying dinosaurs. Genesis 1:21 says, "God created great sea creatures," and the word for great sea creatures is great sea dragons. They are not mythical inventions of men. God created them. They were real. They were one of the ancient dinosaurs that God created. And Answers in Genesis and other creationist organizations have done a lovely job of pulling together the Scriptures that talk about all the various kinds of dinosaurs in the Bible. Not all were dragons. But Scripture describes three kinds of perfect dragons that were originally unaffected by sin. Psalm 91:13 speaks of the Tannin. Those were the dragons that Genesis 1:21 talks about. Psalm 104:26 speaks of Leviathon. It says that God made Leviathon to play in the sea. And I love that image of a dinosaur-like creature playing around in the sea and having fun. And then Job 26:12-13 speaks of yet another dinosaur called "Rahab" in the Hebrew.

And though these various forms of dinosaur would have been huge and intimidating - towering above man, before the fall they were not inherently evil. They were good. God called all that He created "very good. And that includes the dragons. Originally dragons were very good.

B. Until thrown from his position, the dragon just as much a part of heaven as Zion was (v. 3a; cf. Is. 14; Ezek. 28:12-19;). However, the symbols used to describe him before the fall later become identified with evil:

So it is quite an appropriate symbol for Satan both before and after the fall. Initially Satan was in heaven, symbolized by the fact that the sign of the dragon appeared in heaven. Ezekiel 28:13 says of the pre-fall Satan (called Lucifer in Isaiah 14), "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God..." and it goes on to speak of the incredible musical skills that Lucifer had before he became Satan. Ezekiel 28:14 says,
"You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy

mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones. You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you. Now, I will warn you that if you hold to my position, you will not be thought of as a scholar. Most modern scholars, influenced by unbelieving liberal theology, do not believe that Isaiah 14 or Ezekiel 28 describe Satan before he fell. But cheer up, this is the historic position of the church, and many modern orthodox scholars do believe it. And it most certainly does describe Satan.

In any case, in those two passages God shows how two empires were controlled by Satan. And in those passages he starts by addressing the king and then moves to addressing Satan who was behind that king. And in the same way, where the Gospels show Herod attempting to kill the baby Jesus, this goes behind the scenes and shows who was controlling Herod. It was Satan. The dragon stood behind Herod the Great and also stood behind Rome. And even though the seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems are appropriate images of why Lucifer was tempted to fall in the first place (they describe his prefab perfections), they also symbolically give a premonition of the fact that Satan will use those seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems to be the controller of the four empires in Daniel's various visions.

For example, the three heads of the first three empires and the four heads of Rome add up to seven heads. Commentators point out that's not by accident. Satan stood behind all four empires. And the crowns and horns on the beasts are hinted at in Satan's crowns and horns. Now keep in mind that this is all symbolism. Satan doesn't literally have seven heads and ten horns. But they symbolize Satan.

In any case, this verse is describing Satan at his fall or just before his fall. If you take the order of these verses sequentially, then verse 3 is describing Lucifer, or Satan just before he fell, with the very characteristics that led to his fall. It is not until verse 4 that Satan actually led the rebellion. In any case, Lucifer was one of the angels that God created on day one of the creation week. He was one of the morning stars that Job 38:7 describes as singing and worshiping God when they saw what He was creating. So let's look at each word of this description of the pre-fall dragon.

C. "huge" showing him to be the most powerful of spirit beings (v. 3b)

It says first that he was huge. And the descriptions of Lucifer as he was being tempted seem to imply that part of his temptation to pride was that he was greater than any other created thing. Just consider this. Today, Michael

the archangel is the greatest elect angel. But Jude 9 says that when Michael was contending with Satan over the body of Moses, he dared not bring a railing accusation against Satan, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" That implies that Satan was stronger than Michael. In Isaiah 14 Satan certainly considered himself to be so great that he thought he was as great as the Most High. That's astounding. Why would he think that? Now it may have been because the Theophany of God sitting on His throne before the angels hid some of His glory. (A theophany is a physical appearance of the non-physical God.) So that is a possible explanation. But I doubt that. I think there was something else going on. Let me read that passage for you. Isaiah 14:13-15 says,

For you have said in your heart: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God [stars were symbols of angels, so being exalted above the stars of God means above all angels. Lucifer goes on to say,] I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."

His hugeness was part of his temptation. And in verse 4 we get a hint at his hugeness when his tail alone grabbed a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. The symbol implies that his tail was greater than a third of all angels put together. Now, it's only a symbol, but it certainly gets across one of the reasons why Satan would be tempted by pride. He was huge.

D. "fiery red" showing beauty; but also premonition of danger

Second, it says that he was fiery red. Well, his prefall name was Lucifer, which means "Day star." Well, the Day Star was Venus, which Space.com calls a hot, hellish, and volcanic planet. It is fiery red. I put a NASA picture of it in your bulletin. So if he was named after Venus, he may indeed have been fiery red. And he was also called "son of the morning," no doubt because of his color. He was said to walk among fiery stones.

But you don't need to initially identify that fiery red with evil. The passage that describes him being like Venus describes it as being a part of Lucifer's beauty. Like the dragon in Hobbit movie, the fiery redness was part of that dragon's vanity. He was an incredibly beautiful creature. Now, I'm not saying that the dragon here looks like the dragon I copied from the Hobbit website. But both had a certain beauty about them. And it is symbolized here by the fiery red. Most commentators attribute red to his murderous nature, and that later did become associated with Satan, but I think it is important to keep to the order of the text. This is describing Satan before he became a murderer. And there is a certain beauty in fiery red.

E. "seven heads" - given supreme authority

Third, the image gives him seven heads. That doesn't mean that Lucifer literally had seven heads. Heads are images of authority. Seven is the number of completeness and perfection. So the seven heads represent the fact that he was the supreme angel in charge. And Ezekiel 28 says that Lucifer was put in charge as the covering cherub. He was hovering over the throne of God. But this exalted position also made him want more. Isaiah 14 says that he said in his heart, "I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation ... " He wanted supreme authority.

F. Ten horns - 1 horn = strength; 10 horns = mighty power

But he also had ten horns. Ten is a number of completeness or fullness, and a horn was a symbol of power in the Old Testament. Where one horn in Scripture speaks of power or strength, ten horns would refer to completeness of strength or mighty power. You can see where that would be a temptation. He was the most powerful of all of the angels. Based on the image of his tail grabbing a third of the angels, he didn't need to arm wrestle anyone to prove his strength. He was so vastly superior in strength to the other angels that it was obvious.

G. with seven diadems on his heads - 1 head = royalty; seven = perfection of rule

And finally, seven diadems speaks to perfection of rule. His rule really was perfect initially. God said so. He said in Ezekiel 28, "You were the seal of perfection... You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created till iniquity was found in you."

Well, when you are perfect, and other people think you are perfect, it can get to your head. And Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 indicate that it did go to his head. Pride was his downfall. Pride was the first sin of the universe.

So I believe this sign or symbol of the dragon shows not only the perfect way that God created Lucifer, but also what led to his temptation, and then what he has used since that time to try to rule every aspect of planet earth.

II. But this dragon led a rebellion against the kingdom of heaven with one third of all angels (v. 4a)

And verse 4 describes how the temptation led to leading others into the same revolt. "And his tail grabbed a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to

the earth." Notice this is not God throwing the stars or angels to the earth. That will happen later. Job, 2 Kings, and other passages show that Satan continued to have access to heaven after his fall. Revelation shows that Satan continued to have access to heaven until AD 66, when we saw that he was cast forever out of heaven. And the second half of this chapter will amplify on that. So this is not God casting the angels out of heaven. This is Satan taking angels out of their heavenly domain and kingdom and forcing them into an earthly kingdom that he was now ruling over. He had succeeded in robbing earth from Adam and he now sought to overthrow the kingdom of heaven. But the most he was able to do was to get one third of all angels to rebel.

Some people find that number discouraging - think of the billions of demons that we have to contend with! But I find that number encouraging. We have far more angels on our side than Satan has on his side. We have double the number of angels as there are of demons. But at the same time, it gives you an idea of the vast size of Satan's kingdom. It includes billions (if not trillions) of angels. Jude 6 speaks of "the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode." Their proper domain was the kingdom of heaven, but they left their proper domain and went to earth to rule with Satan.

So in symbolic fashion this passage goes back to the beginning of time and shows how the conflict of the ages started.

III. This dragon has always stood before the woman and continued to stand before her (perfect tense) in the days leading up to the incarnation in order to destroy the coming Messiah (v. 4b)

And that there was conflict that went on with humans is implied in the Greek tense for the word "stood" in verse 4. It is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense indicates that the action had already started in the past and continues to happen at the time the writer is writing. So when verse 4 says, "And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth" it indicates that the standing before the woman had been going on, continued to go on just before the woman gave birth, and would continue on after she gave birth. And of course, the rest of the chapter says the same thing.

But if you will remember from last week's sermon, the woman is Zion, the corporate people of God. From the time of Eve and on, there was conflict between the woman, Zion, and the serpent, Satan. Genesis 3:15 says,

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

So this standing before the woman sums up the ages long conflict that Zion of the Old Testament had with the devil and that Zion continued to have with the devil afterwards.

IV. This dragon sought to kill the child as soon as He was born (v. 4c)

The next phrase shows the reason why the dragon stood before the woman throughout those ages. It gives the object of His hatred. It says, "in order to devour her Child as soon as she gave birth." He knew that there was a Messiah promised to come through Eve. He was right there when God promised it. And there is evidence in the text that Adam and Eve thought that Cain was the Messiah. But when Satan gets hold of him, they look for another. Then perhaps the Messiah would come through Abel. But when Cain kills Abel (probably at Satan's instigation - that's why 1 John says that Satan was a murderer from the beginning), God continues to promise a Messiah through Shem. So Satan fights against the seed of Shem. And then it was through Abraham, through Judah, through David, etc. Satan only knew so much, but he engaged in conflict with the woman to kill whatever seed she might bring forth that would do him in.

And so Satan made a concerted effort to kill the seed of the godly line in order to extinguish the possibility of the Messiah coming. It's not by accident that all male children were thrown into the river by Pharaoh in the book of Exodus. Satan stood behind that. It's not by accident that on two occasions Satan tried to have Sarah raped by a pagan king. The dragon's enmity with the seed is manifested symbolically in the enmity of Esau against Jacob even in the womb. It's not by accident that Herod tried to kill all the male babies in Bethlehem two years old or under. It was Satan working through him to try to destroy Jesus. This in a nutshell summarizes Satan's many attempts to kill the coming Messiah. And of course, the last attempt was with Herod.

V. But the birth of Christ indicated the imminent reign of Christ (Greek = "about to shepherd all the nations")

And Satan had reason to fear. In Genesis 3 God had promised that the coming Messiah would crush Satan's head. Christ came into the world with the specific purpose of warring against Satan and defeating his kingdom.

While Satan ruled all nations in the Old Testament (with the exception of Israel) verse 5 says that those nations are no longer going to be His. It says, "And she bore a Son, a male, who would shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron." The rod of iron symbolism comes from Psalm 2, so we don't have to wait for Psalm 2 to be fulfilled. The words "who would shepherd" is literally "who was about to shepherd." The Greek word for "about to" indicates that Christ's kingdom began in the first century. And when you read Acts 4's use of Psalm 2, you can see that the early church believed that Christ's kingdom had already begun. That's why the conflict and persecution was so intense.

VI. Christ's ascension was to His kingdom throne

And the next phrase confirms that. "And her Child was snatched up to God, even to His throne." When the seed of the woman, Jesus, ascended on the clouds of heaven in AD 30, He ascended to His throne. To put this off to the future as Dispensationalists do makes absolutely no sense. There is a perfect order and sequence in this snapshot of the dragon.

VII. Sometime after this ascension the woman flees from the dragon and is protected for three and a half years (v. 6) (The beginning of that three and a half year period will be described in verses 7 and following)

And what happens as a result of the dragon continuing to stand before the woman after the child is born (the meaning of the perfect tense of "stood" in verse 4 - he continues to stand before her)? What does that mean? It means that persecution would continue to heat up even after the ascension. And of course, the book of Acts speaks of that persecution that the early church received. And it continued until the woman was so endangered with the possibility of extinction that God had to hide her from the dragon's wrath. Verse 6 brings up our common theme of the three and a half year period. It says, "And the woman fled into the wilderness to where she has a place prepared by God, so that they may nourish her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days." This was the church's flight to Pella in AD 66 a few months before the war broke out in earnest. And Pella was the place where she was able to survive the entire holocaust of that three and a half year war against Jerusalem.

So that's the meaning of these verses. Let me make seven additional

applications.

VIII. Seven additional applications

First, don't underestimate the power of Satan or his kingdom. While it is true that Satan himself was bound in AD 70 (and we will look at that in the next couple of weeks) his kingdom was not bound, and there were still billions of his followers who continue to roam this earth and seek to do their destruction. Don't underestimate the power of Satan. As we will be seeing later in this chapter, he was a formidable enemy. And we continue to fight Satan by fighting his remaining demonic angels.

Second, is a balance to the first - never give Satan too much credit. The crown the the woman wears in verse 1 is the stephanos crown, which is a victory wreath. The devil is never said to wear that stephanos crown. Victory is not attributed to Satan. Instead, he wears diadems - the crown the emperors wore - and of course, each empire has passed away. Empires come and go, but Zion remains. God has given victory to the church, not Satan. Satan may rule, but his rule is diminishing because of the victory of the bride. Never give too much credit to Satan.

Third, learn from the pride of Satan; the pride that led to his fall is a pride that can destroy us too. His pride was not a false pride. He had something to be proud about. He was the biggest, baddest, best looking, most powerful, and most highly exalted angel around. So if he only compared himself to other angels, he had something to be proud about. But if he had focused on God he would realized how infinitely small he was compared to God, and how his perfections were infinitely outmatched by God's perfections, and his beauty paled against God's beauty. But by making himself the comparative point with others, he began to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. Your gifts and abilities may be astoundingly great. It doesn't matter. There is no excuse for pride. Pride leads to independence, and the way to reverse that is to remind yourself of how dependent you are upon God and how unworthy you are of any of God's mercies. To focus upon God and His glories is a great antidote to pride because it is a humbling exercise. We are like dust in comparison to God. But learn from Satan's pride and hate pride as a mortal enemy. It will destroy you.

Fourth, learn from verse 4 that to seek your own kingdom is always to rob God's kingdom. Satan couldn't create angels. All he could do is rob God's kingdom of angels. He couldn't create a kingdom. All he could do is rob Adam of his kingdom. Seeking your own rights and your own ways always

ends up robbing someone of something. Everything that you are and have belongs to God and Christ calls us to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and if you have needs, God will minister to your needs. But when you put yourself first and seek your own kingdom rather than God's, He's not going to minister to your needs. He will do the opposite. God will put you last - the first shall be last. So self-seeking always ends up robbing us as well in the final analysis.

Fifth, when verse 5 quotes Psalm 2 as being about to be fulfilled in AD 30, and when it says that Jesus was seated on His throne at that time, it gives added meaning to Psalm 2. And I would like you to read through that Psalm fairly rapidly with the image of this dragon in the background. The dragon Satan helps to explain why kings irrationally try to fight Jesus.

Psa. 2:1 ¶ Why do the nations rage, And the people plot a vain thing?

It's a question that should mystify us. Why do they do it? It's irrational. And there are a lot of irrational things that can be explained when you see that there are billions of demons under the direction of Satan who seek to oppose Christ. Verse 2:

Psa. 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, And the rulers take counsel together, Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, Psa. 2:3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces And cast away Their cords from us." Psa. 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision. Psa. 2:5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, And distress them in His deep displeasure: Psa. 2:6 "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." Psa. 2:7 "I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Psa. 2:8 Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. Psa. 2:9 You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' " Psa. 2:10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. Psa. 2:11 Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. Psa. 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish in the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

How does Christ shepherd the nations with His rod of iron? He protects and blesses those that put their trust in Him, and He smashes and judges those who cast off His laws. What does that say about America? If Jesus is in the nation shepherding business, then expect some smashing to start happening unless we repent.

The sixth application is that God can protect His church from extinction while He smashes the nations if the church will follow His commands. The only reason this church survived in the wilderness for three and a half years was because they obeyed Christ's commands to flee the city the moment they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies. Now, we aren't given privy information about how to escape judgment in America, but it is good to take

what prudent steps you can and then trust that God can take care of the rest. He can protect you even during times of hellish war. God had a place prepared for her, and He can have a place prepared for you. So trust and obey.

The seventh application is implied in the allusion to Genesis 3:15. God put enmity between the woman and the serpent. That takes sovereign grace to take a woman who was friends with Satan and had become an enemy of God and turn her into a friend of God and an enemy of Satan. She didn't seek it. She and Adam ran from God's grace. If it was left up to free will, there would have been no salvation. Their will was opposed to God. But God sovereignly sought them out and saved them and put the corporate woman at enmity with Satan. So my last application is to say that if you are truly saved, you will be an enemy of Satan. You will fight him. You will hate his ways. That is your calling from which you should never veer. May it be so. Amen.