



THE BOOK OF REVELATION

6: HEROES and VILLAINS THE UNHOLY TRINITY

A WINDOW INTO HELL

Whereas a door had been opened for John into Heaven through which he might see the glory and majesty of God (4v1), suddenly in the midst of these revelations, a door at it were, is opened into Hell. Sandwiched between the sovereign throne room of God and the coming of the Messiah, appear an unholy Trinity, in the shape of an enormous red dragon, a beast from the sea and a beast from the earth.

These are the spiritual realities that lie behind the persecution of the Church in John's own days (1v9; 2v10; 3v10), throughout all the ages and at the end of days (13v7). The fear, hatred and hostility of sinful humankind towards the Church are in reality the manifestation of the fear, hatred and hostility of the Devil towards Jesus Christ.



THE UNHOLY TRINITY

1: The Red Dragon

An enormous red dragon of chapters 12,13,16,20.

He is variously described as:-

- 'Satan' ['Adversary'] (12v9; 20v2)
- 'The One who leads the whole world astray' (12v9; 20v10)
- 'That ancient serpent' (12v9,14; 20v2) – the snake of Eden all grown up!
- 'The Devil' ['Accuser, Slanderer'] (12v9; 20v2,10)
- 'The Accuser' (12v10).

Which tells us everything that we need to know about him, except that his nature – that of a blood coloured, devouring, savage monster, is often well hidden (2 Cor.11v13-15).

Much of the imagery concerning these three derives from the imagery of Daniel, especially chapters 7 and 8. In Daniel's day, the focus was primarily on Antiochus Epiphanes, whereas for John and his audience, the focus has shifted to the Roman empire and to its emperors. But as always there is also a specific end-times application.

The seven horns and crowns, speak of absolute power and might (the number 7 = perfection or completeness) and is Satan's counterpart to the 'King of kings and Lord of lords' of 19v16.

War in Heaven (12v7-9)

We are not told the background to this conflict. It may reflect the ancient cosmic battle between Satan and the Lord, alluded to in Scripture, whereby the Devil rebelled against God and sought to cast Him down but was himself cast down (Isa.14v12-15; Ezek 28v12-19). It may equally be referring to the eternal battle in the heavenlies between good and evil (Eph.6v10-12). But it must also refer to the end times and not least because in this passage Satan is actually ejected from the heavens and cast down to earth, whereas in Ephesians he is still located in the heavenly realms. And he turns in great fury upon God's people, because 'his time is short' (12v12). To what was Jesus alluding in Lk.10v18, when He said: 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven'?

War on the Earth (12v12-17; 13v5-7; 6v9-11; 17v6).

In the coming time, there will be a fierce onslaught unleashed upon the people of God (cf Mk.13v9-20).



2: The Beast from the Sea

Unlike the dragon or the beast from the earth, this creature bears no other name but is in fact the one known as the 'Antichrist'.

The sea in Scripture represents both chaotic humanity and also chaos itself, ungovernable and threatening. It is also the abode of the chaos monsters. Thus it is one of the many layered significances of Jesus walking on the water and stilling the storms. (cf Ps.65v7; 89v9-10; Isa.27v1).

The beast's ten heads with seven crowned horns with blasphemous names, reflect the power of the Roman Empire and the increasing claim of the Emperors to divinity.

The Antichrist

Variously called 'The man of sin', or the 'man of lawlessness', John speaks both of the Antichrist as an individual but also as there being the 'spirit of Antichrist', which is recognised by the denial of the incarnation of Jesus – i.e. a denial of His divinity, atoning death and resurrection and thus of the defeat of Satan (2 Thess.2v3ff; 1 Jn.2v18,22; 4v3; 2 Jn.7). And of course Jesus foretold the rise of many false Messiahs (Mk.13v21-22).

The word 'anti' carries with it both the obvious understanding of being opposed to (e.g. anti-racism), but also the idea of seeking to replace (e.g. antibiotics).

His Specific Characteristics

- His nature is revealed in the bestial description given to him (13v2) and he derives his power and 'great authority' from the dragon (13v2,4). It comes direct from the Pit.
- He blasphemes the Lord (13v5 cf Dan.7 and 8)
- He makes war against the saints (13v7)
- He is given power and authority to do this by Satan but also, ultimately by people (13v3-4,8)
- He receives universal worship (13v8)
- Upon his back rests the entire ungodly world system that hates and persecutes the people of God, as personified by the woman dressed in purple, riding on the beast in chapter 17.
- He has a fatal sword wound that is (miraculously?) healed (13v3,12,14).
 - The 'resurrection' of the Roman empire after the bitter civil wars following the death of Nero.
 - The belief that Nero had not died but had either survived and would return or had actually come back to life – the myth of *Nero redivivus*.
 - Counterfeiting the resurrection of the Christ, will the final and last Antichrist also appear to die, or actually die, and to come back to life?



3: The Beast from the earth

First appearing in 13v11f, he is later identified as being the False Prophet (16v13; 19v20; 20v10).

Throughout Israel's history, they had been plagued by people claiming to speak for God but actually speaking lies and often turning the people away from God to false gods. In Deut.18v17-22, the Lord both promises that He will raise up another prophet like Moses (Jesus) and gives instructions as to how to recognise the true from the false.

This False Prophet will give the spiritual backing and empowering to the rule of the Antichrist. Paul warns the church in Corinth how the Devil and his emissaries can appear to be light when in fact they are darkness (2 Cor.11v13-15) and here the False Prophet looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon (13v11).

He leads the people to worship the Antichrist through performing eye catching miracles of great power (13v12-14). The significance of calling down fire from heaven is that it mimics Elijah's miracle at Mount Carmel. The difference being that on Mount Carmel the people had been called back from the worship of idols to worship of the true God, whereas here the 'miracle' leads the people away from God and to the worship of an idol.



He sets up a statue (as did so many kings and emperors!) but the difference is that this one is given 'breath' and actually speaks (13v15). A parody of the creation of humankind? By state terror, by deceit and by economic control he brings the nations of the world under the domination of Antichrist and thus of Satan – the power behind the throne (13v14-17). He requires everyone to receive the mark, which is the name of the beast and which is described as being 666 (13v18).

Rather than seek to work out the exact significance of this number – see study number 2, surely the thrust of the number being 666, is that it is totally *not* the number of perfection, which is 7 and which belongs only to God. In spite of all his pretensions to universal power and authority, this is actually a sham and a lie. How could a mere mortal ever be like God? And thus the mark signifies sin, imperfection and rebellion against God.

The significance of the hand and forehead also surely references Deut.6v4-8: *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.* Such devotion is now to be given to the Antichrist.

BLASPHEMY

As the Christ derived His authority and His words from God the Father and lived only to do His will (Mt.11v27; Jn.5v19; 6v38; 8v28-29; 12v49-50), so the Antichrist derives his mission and ministry from the 'father of lies' (Jn.8v44; Rev.13v2-7). As the Holy Spirit glorifies and bears witness to the Christ (Jn.15v26; 16v14), so the False Prophet glorifies and bears witness to the Antichrist (Rev.13v12).

WHO HAS THE POWER AND AUTHORITY?

In spite of the great power and authority exercised by the Unholy Trinity and in spite of their apparently successful war against the people of God: and in spite of the worship and service they receive from the whole world and in spite of their apparent invincibility...it is all a lie. That is what they do and their only hope for success is to persuade people to believe the lie. So the Devil deceives and Antichrist deceives and the False Prophet deludes (Rev.12v9; 20v8,10; 2 Jn.1v7; 13v14; 13v14; 19v20), as has been done since the days of Adam and Eve. And if we believe and receive the lie then we give Satan the power (cf 2 Cor.10v3-5).

Yet the truth is that it is Jesus who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The dragon is 'not strong enough' and is cast out of heaven: the dragon and both beasts will be judged and eternally condemned (19v20; 20v1-3, 10,13-14): and the saints against whom the devil wages apparently successful war, are those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. And it is their very martyrdom and their testimony which overthrows Satan (12v11,17)!

And the power of evil operates within God's limits. In the same way that the persecution about to fall on the church at Smyrna is not only foretold but also limited in duration – '10 days' (2v10), so too is the world-wide domination of the Unholy Trinity limited. The domination of the Gentiles over the holy city will last '42 months' (11v2), as will the rule of the Antichrist (13v5). The Two Witnesses will exercise their ministry for '1260 days' (11v3), whilst the woman clothed with the sun will be sheltered in the desert for 'a time, times and half a time', i.e. a year, two years and half a year, or 3 ½ years (12v14). And the fire that is called down by the False Prophet mimics the fire of Elijah which ended a drought of 3 ½ years (Lk.4v25; Jas.5v17). A solar month is 30 days, so

30 x 42 months = 1260 days, or 3 ½ years. Which incidentally also indicates that Revelation is a series of overlapping and overlying events and not a succession of events, one following after the other.



THE ORIGINS OF THE DEVIL

That Satan exists, not as some metaphor or as a personification of abstract evil but rather as a malevolent evil spiritual being, is clear from both Old and New Testaments. However neither is he presented as being some eternal pre-existent being, the opposite of but equal to everything that God is - sometimes called 'Dualism'.

So what do we know about him?

There are two main O.T. Scriptures that give an insight into his origins. One is Isaiah 14 and the other is Ezekiel 28. On both occasions the chapter begins with a prophecy about an earthly leader - the ruler of Babylon (Isa.) and the ruler of Tyre (Ezek.) but moves on to a description of the spiritual power behind the human ruler, just as Rev.13v1-2 describes the dragon behind the beast.

ORIGINS

- The language used of 'the Morning Star' ('Lucifer' / 'Light Bearer' / 'Shining One') of Isaiah 14v12 and of the 'King' of Tyre in Ezekiel 28v12-14, is clearly not applicable to any human being.
- This being dwelt in heaven (Ezek.28v13-16; Rev.12v7; Lk.10v18).
- He was a created angelic being (Isa.14v12 cf Job 38v7; Ezek.28v13-15; Rev.12v7).

HIS APPEARANCE AND CHARACTER

- Perfect and Sinless (Ezek.28v15)
- Wise (Ezek.28v17)
- Beautiful (Ezek.28v12-13,17)

HIS FALL

- He became corrupted and sinful due to pride in his beauty and wisdom (Ezek.28v15-17; 1 Tim.3v6).
- He rebelled and attempted to overthrow God, corrupting other angels in the process (Isa.14v13-14 ; Rev.12v7-9). N.B. 'I will' x 5 and 'Most High' is explained in Gn.14v19,22 as 'Creator' or 'Possessor of heaven and earth'
- He was overthrown and cast down from Heaven (Isa.14v12,15; Ezek.28v16-18; Rev.12v8-9; Lk.10v18).

WHAT HE HAS NOW BECOME

- A Liar (Jn.8v44)
- A Murderer (Jn.8v44)
- A Deceiver (Rev.12v9; 20v8-10)

THE BELIEVER AND SATAN

- In Jesus the believer has authority and power over Satan (Mt.16v15-19; Mk.16v17; Lk.10v17-19; Rom.16v20; Rev.12v11).
- We fight a spiritual battle (2 Cor.10v3-5; Eph.6v12)
- We need the full armour of God with which to conquer and to be victorious (Eph.6v10-11,13-18)