

BITTER HONEY: THE REVELATION

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CHAPTER 12: ROME AND ISRAEL

Verses 1-6

In Revelation 11, Israel testified against man's empire until the nation was destroyed by Rome. Revelation 12 will describe Israel's conflict with Rome. The fourth beast in Daniel 7 was Caesar's Rome. It conquered and assimilated the empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. Rome had ten horns which represented the period of mixed nations. A small horn grew up among the ten and pulled out three horns by the roots. The small horn was the Antichrist. Daniel promised that God would judge the whole beast and send it to hell. Then the dominion of all the kingdoms under heaven would be given to the saints of the Highest One.

The fourth beast of Daniel 7 will be seen in two slightly different forms in Revelation 12-13. In Revelation 12, John saw this beast as a great red dragon with seven heads. This dragon represented Satan, and it was named in Revelation 12:9. The dragon also stood for Caesar's Rome. Its seven heads stood for the seven hills and seven kings of Rome (Revelation 17:9-12). The dragon had diadems on his heads because the seven heads now had authority over the world. The red dragon also had ten horns and a tail which swept a third of the stars to earth. The ten horns stood for the period of mixed nations which were part of Rome. The stars would be swept to earth at Babylon's fall and at Armageddon.

As Revelation 12 opened, a great sign appeared in heaven. John saw a woman clothed with the sun. The moon was under her feet, and she wore a crown with twelve stars. In Scripture, Israel was often symbolized as a woman, and sometimes as an unfaithful wife (Isaiah 49:18; 61:10; 62:4-5). The same symbol was carried into the New Testament. Christ's church was His bride. The sun, moon and stars may have come from Genesis 37:9-10. Joseph saw a dream in which the sun, moon, and stars symbolized his father, mother, and brothers. The sun, moon, and stars were also symbols in their own right. The woman was clothed with the righteousness of the sun. This symbol may have come from Malachi 4:1-2. Malachi 4:1 had described Armageddon. Then Malachi 4:2 said that the sun of righteousness would arise with healing in its wings. When the sun of righteousness arose, Christ would return bringing His people abundant life. This would be the final fulfillment of God's promises to Israel. So the woman of Revelation 12 may be clothed with faith in God's promises.

The woman wore a crown with twelve stars. Genesis 37:9-10 identified these stones as Jacob's sons. A similar symbol can be seen in Zechariah 9:16. Zechariah described God's people as the stones of a crown sparkling in God's hand. The crown itself is more difficult to identify. The crown may represent Christ. Isaiah 28:5 promised that the Lord would become a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem for His people. The crown could also symbolize authority in Christ's church. Crowns in Revelation usually showed authority. This usage would parallel the beast's diadems in Revelation 12:3. Finally, the crown could point to the seal of God. When Aaron came into God's presence, he wore a golden crown. The crown was inscribed with a seal containing the words "Holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36). The woman could wear a similar crown to show that she was part of the sealed Old Testament community.

The woman was with child, and she was suffering labor pains. These pains could be Israel's suffering during the 3½ time periods before Christ was born. Rome stood before the woman who was about to give birth. Rome planned to devour her child as the Roman Empire had swallowed the empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. Israel gave birth to a son who was destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron. Psalm 2:9 identified this son as Christ. Her Son was caught up to God and to His throne at Christ's ascension. Jesus died, rose from the grave, ascended to His Father, and sat at the right hand of God. Then Israel fled into the wilderness and was nourished by God for the 3½ time periods from Christ to the end of history. The wilderness symbol may have come from Ezekiel 20:35. God said that He would send Israel into the "wilderness of the peoples" and judge her there. Revelation 12:6 may mean that after

Christ ascended, Israel would once more be dispersed among the nations. Though God judged His people in that wilderness, God kept them alive in exile.

Verses 7-12

Revelation 12:7-12 described the defeat of the great dragon Satan. Michael and his angels waged war against Satan. Michael may lead the angels of heaven against Satan because Christ is on earth. The devil was not found strong enough, and he was thrown down from heaven to earth. This defeat may have come at Christ's death and resurrection. In John 12:31, Christ was about to be crucified. He declared, "Now judgment is upon this world. Now the ruler of this world shall be cast out." Satan may also be thrown down at Christ's death because Revelation 12:9 called Satan the one who deceived the whole world. After Christ's resurrection, Satan would be bound so that he would not be able to deceive the nations. Many gentiles would come to belief, and they would join the exiled community of Jewish believers. Satan would not be able to create another world empire until the new Babylon fell and the exile was over.

In Revelation 12:10, a loud voice was heard in heaven declaring that the kingdom had come because the accuser of our brethren had been thrown down. Satan was the accuser of God's children in both the Old and New Testaments. Satan had accused Job before God (Job 1:9). In Zechariah 3:7, Satan had also stood before Christ and had accused Joshua the high priest. Christ rebuked Satan and removed Joshua's sin. Christ had dressed Joshua in robes of righteousness. Now Satan had been defeated and had been cast down. When Christ died and rose from the grave, He had won a kingdom that would include believers from all of time. They were all saved by His blood, and they would all rise in Him. All those who kept His witness and shared His Spirit were part of His kingdom.

Satan was defeated. Satan knew that his time was short. Satan knew that in time, Christ would return and would send him to hell. So Satan went out in a great rage to destroy Israel. Satan leveled Jerusalem and scattered Jews through the world. For nearly two millennia, Satan has tried to destroy Israel. Jews never had a permanent home, but they always had somewhere to run. Satan's greatest attempt to exterminate God's people was the Nazi holocaust. Yet that was the thing that enabled Israel to return to the Promised Land. God's kingdom is inevitably drawing near, and Revelation 12:12 warned, "Woe to the earth and the seas because the devil has come down to you. He has great wrath because he knows that his time is short." The phrase "woe to the earth and seas" comes from the first five trumpets. They described the first Woe. Seeing that his time is short, Satan will destroy the new Babylon and will set up his last human empire. The exile community will be decimated, but as Israelites return to faith, the kingdom will continue to grow. Satan must stop God's kingdom at all costs. Finally, he will gather all his armies for one last battle against God on the plains of Megiddo. Jerusalem will be overrun, but Satan will see Christ returning to fight for His people. In one last desperate attempt to thwart God, Satan will turn his armies against each other and will try to destroy the earth. Satan's armies will rain fire on each other until few people are left alive on the earth. However, Satan had really lost the battle when Christ rose from the grave. As Christ returned on the clouds, His children would rise from the dead and believers would meet Him in the air. Satan and his hoards would be judged and sent to hell. Then Christ's children would inherit the kingdom forever.

Verses 13-17

Revelation 12 closed by describing Satan's wrath against Israel. Satan had persecuted Israel which had given birth to Christ. Jerusalem had been destroyed, but the wings of a great eagle had been given to her. The eagle was a symbol for God (Deuteronomy 32:11). God used an eagle to describe Himself because this kind of bird carries its young on its back to the nest. God delivered His people in a similar way. God told Israel, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself (Exodus 19:4). God delivered Israel from Satan's presence and nourished her in exile for the last 3½ time periods of the last days.

Satan poured out a flood of water after the woman trying to sweep her away. Scripture sometimes used water to symbolize gentile nations. The sea in Daniel represented the peoples of the earth (Daniel 7:3). In Isaiah 8:7, Israel was promised that Assyria would flood over the land. Isaiah 17:12-13 promised that the peoples would roar like the seas and the nations would rumble like mighty waters. So Revelation 12:15 may mean that Satan would pour out gentile nations and try to use them to destroy Israel. A similar passage can be seen in Jeremiah 47:2. The prophet described the destruction that Babylon would bring to the earth. Jeremiah promised that waters would arise from the north, and they would become an overflowing torrent. They would overflow the land and all its fruitfulness, the city and those who lived in it. Revelation 12:15 should be interpreted the same way. The Roman legions flooded Palestine and turned it into desolation. The Jews were driven from their land for two millennia. During those long centuries, Jews were persecuted by gentiles almost everywhere on earth. Satan constantly tried to use the gentile nations to destroy God's people in order to prevent the final coming of Christ's kingdom in its eschatological form.

The earth helped the woman who represented Israel. The earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of its mouth. A somewhat similar image can be seen in Genesis 4:11 where the earth opened its mouth to receive Abel's blood. The Old Testament often spoke of Sheol, the place of the dead. Descriptions of Sheol are far from consistent. Whatever this place may be, Sheol was often depicted as being down under the earth. Afterlife imagery in the ancient Near East usually saw the region of the dead as being below the earth's surface. In Numbers 16:32-33, Korah and his whole family plummeted into Sheol when the ground opened up beneath them. Revelation 12:15 may have meant that Satan tried to use the gentile nations to destroy Israel. However, the Roman Empire died, and every nation that persecuted the Jews eventually suffered a similar fate. The earth opened its mouth to receive into Sheol every nation that opposed and tried to destroy God's chosen people.

The dragon was enraged with the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring who kept God's commandments and who held to the testimony of Jesus. Scripture often described Satan's continual wrath. There is a limit to how much Satan can express his anger against Israel because they had fled into the wilderness of the nations. So the devil made war against Israel's offspring, the New Testament church. Paul talked about this spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6:12. Paul wrote, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is against rulers, against powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."

CHAPTER 13: ISRAEL AND THE ANTICHRIST

Verses 1-2

John opened Revelation 13 by pointing again to Daniel 7. Like Daniel, John stood on the sea shore. John saw a beast coming up from the sea. This beast resembled the fourth beast in Daniel 7. The beast had ten horns like Daniel's beast, and its body was like a leopard, a bear, and a lion. Those are the first three beasts in Daniel 7 which were eaten by the fourth beast. The Roman Empire crushed and assimilated the empires of Mesopotamia, Persia, and Greece. The beast that John saw in Revelation 13 was not the red dragon in Revelation 12. The dragon had diadems on his heads while the beast had diadems on his ten horns. So the beast in Revelation 13 was the period of mixed nations which were given power and authority by the dragon. Revelation 13:1-2 talked about the period when Satan was bound. With his power to deceive the nations diminished, Satan could not create a unified front to attack God's people. When Satan is again loosed to deceive the nations, the church would fall to apostasy and a unified world empire would emerge.

Verses 3-10

John saw one of the beast's heads as if it had been slain. His fatal wound was healed, and the whole world followed after the beast. The fatal could refer to one of two things. The beast's seven heads represented Rome. The empire fell and was broken up. Verses like Revelation 11:7 said that Rome was in Sheol until the empire was re-established. Sheol was the place of the dead. Perhaps the beast's fatal wound was the period of mixed nations when Satan was bound in Sheol. The fatal wound could be cured when Rome was re-established. Isaiah 23:13 provided an Old Testament parallel here. Chaldea was called "the people which was not." Assyria made the land desolate. Later, the city was reborn, and it became man's first world empire.

The beast's fatal wound could also have been the new Babylon's fall. In Revelation 17:3, Babylon sat on the beast with seven heads and ten horns. John was told that the seven heads were the seven hills of Rome and seven kings. One of those kings existed during Babylon's reign, and one was yet to come (Revelation 17:10). The head that was coming was the Antichrist's empire. The sixth head could have received its fatal wound when Babylon was destroyed. Although one of the beast's heads was killed, the beast itself did not die. It was healed and resurrected as the Antichrist's empire. The motif of an incurable wound was used at least twice in the Old Testament. Nahum 3:19 claimed that Ninevah's wound was incurable putting the deadly wound motif in the context of the empires of Mesopotamia. Micah 1:9 claimed that Jerusalem's wound was incurable, but Micah 4 promised restoration for the city in the future. So there is Biblical background for applying the idea of a healed deadly wound to a nation or empire.

The whole world will worship Satan because he gave his authority to the new Rome. The world will also worship Rome because no one can oppose it. Revelation 13:5 noted that the new Rome was given a mouth to speak arrogant words and blasphemies and the authority to act for 42 months. The mouth that spoke blasphemies may have been the Antichrist or the false prophet. The Antichrist was given the authority to act for 42 months. It is hard to be sure if this was a limited time period parallel to the 3½ last days motif or if the 42 months saw the Antichrist in the broad context of the Roman Empire, the mixed nations, and the restored Rome. All three were parts of the same eschatological force. The mouth that spoke arrogant words and blasphemies may have come from Daniel 7:8. Daniel was contemplating the fourth beast's ten horns. Then a little horn grew up among them, and it tore out three others by their roots. This little horn was the Antichrist's empire. It had eyes like a man and a mouth that uttered great boasts. Daniel 7:25 claimed that this last horn would persecute God's people for

time, times, and half a time. That was the same basic image as 3½ days, months, or years. It was the same period as the 42 months of Revelation 13:5. Rome would be led by one man, the Antichrist. He would persecute the church severely and blaspheme God. Revelation 13:7 claimed that he would not only make war against the saints, but he would overcome them. Then he would rule over every people, tongue, and nation. The age of the exiled church would end as almost every believer would either be martyred or fall away. Everyone whose name was not recorded in the Lamb's book of life from eternity would worship the powers of this world.

The description of the beast and the Antichrist in Revelation 13 was interrupted by verses 9-10. These verses claimed, "If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes. If anyone kills with the sword, by the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints." What do these verses mean? Revelation 13:9 repeats Christ's constant command in Revelation 2 and 3 that the one with ears to hear should hear. So Christ commanded His church to understand something. What was it? The first sentence in Revelation 13:10 came from the prophets. It meant that the promised judgment was inevitable. So those who are willing to understand should prepare for the judgment. In Jeremiah 15:2, God told Israel that those who were destined for death, famine, sword, or captivity must go where they were destined. In Jeremiah 43:11, Egypt was told nearly the same thing. Jeremiah's point was that man's empire would conquer the whole world through Nebuchadnezzar. The nations could not escape this judgment because God had decreed it. So Christ told his church in Revelation 13 that the Antichrist would take over the world. Christ's children must prepare for this time. God also promised that those who killed with the sword would in time be killed with the sword. Although the Antichrist would persecute the church, he would be destroyed by his own violence. So Christ told His people to keep the faith despite persecution. Their suffering would end when the Antichrist was destroyed.

Verses 11-18

John saw another beast which came up out of the earth. Through Daniel and Revelation, beasts which signified empires always came from the sea because the sea was a symbol for the vast bulk of humanity. This beast came from the north because it was identified with the new Rome which had been released from the abyss (cf. Revelation 20:7-10). The beast had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. The beast tried to look like the Lamb of God, but he spoke like Satan. This beast was the false prophet who ruled with the Antichrist. This false prophet would make the whole earth worship the Antichrist.

The false prophet performed great signs. He even made fire fall down from heaven in the presence of men. Revelation 16:13 predicted that the Antichrist and the false prophet would send spirits of demons to gather the nations to Armageddon. These demons would perform signs to deceive the world. The false prophet was primarily responsible for these signs. Revelation 19:20 said that he would produce these signs in the Antichrist's presence. Christ warned His church several times to expect the Antichrist to produce these signs and wonders, but the church must not be deceived (cf. II Thessalonians 2:3-12). The false prophet and his institution may look like a lamb, but they speak for Satan.

The false prophet deceives men because of his ability to call down fire from heaven. He tells men to make an image of the beast that had the wound of the sword and was healed. The image of the beast was given the ability to speak, and everyone who did not worship it was killed. The image's ability to speak was probably the blasphemous mouth of Revelation 13:5-6. The image of the beast may well refer back to Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar saw a vision of man's empire in Daniel 2:31-35. Then in Daniel 3:1, Nebuchadnezzar built a golden image of the vision that he had seen. Nebuchadnezzar required everyone to worship the image of man's power. Anyone who refused to worship the image would be killed.

Nebuchadnezzar was not the only person to worship man's power. Rome had set up images of Caesar, and the empire first encouraged then required emperor worship. Some of the worst persecutions that Christians faced in the first century came because they refused to worship Caesar. In the same way, Herod

allowed himself to be called a god. Because of this, the Lord killed him in a terrible way (Acts 12:23). Men would rather worship human power and authority than worship the true God. The image in Revelation 13:14 was probably not an idol although it was worshiped as if it were one. The beast who came back to life was the new Rome. An image of a government should be an institution. Since the Antichrist and the false prophet shared power in Rome, the image of the beast may be the false church led by the false prophet. The false church would force anyone who did not worship the new Rome to be killed.

The false prophet commanded that anyone who did not worship the Antichrist must die. This command began the final persecution which would decimate the gentile church. The New Testament community remained a largely Jewish church until Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. The New Testament community would remain a largely gentile church until the new Babylon was destroyed and the final persecution began. Increasing numbers of Jewish people would be converted before Babylon was destroyed. The exile of the faith began in a gradual way and it would end by a gradual process.

The final persecution would involve both physical abuse and an entire economic system designed to entrench the Antichrist's power. Revelation 13:16-17 promised that every person would receive a mark on his forehead or right hand. Without this mark, it would be impossible to buy or sell anything. To receive this mark, a person must swear allegiance to the beast. That is why Revelation 14:11 promised that anyone who received the mark would be thrown into hell. Revelation 13:18 declared, "Here is wisdom. Let him who has understood calculate the number of the beast because it is the number of a man. His number is 666." The idea of numbering in Revelation usually described man's inheritance from God. How could 666 describe the Antichrist's inheritance from God? Using Scriptural sources, this number could be interpreted in several different ways. It is not clear which approach is correct. One possibility is that the number 666 referred to the sixth seal, the sixth trumpet, and the sixth bowl of wrath. All of these described the events leading up to Armageddon. The number 666 could suggest that the Antichrist's inheritance from God was his complete destruction in the flames of Armageddon.