

Holy War, Part 1  
Revelation 12-13

Turn to Rev 12:17 please. I told you our text would be Rev 12, but I changed my mind, it is going to be Rev 12-13. This sermon is Holy War, part 1. Next week will be Holy War, part 2, on Rev 14 and up to 15:4. It seemed better to put chapter 13 with 12 than to put 13 with 14-15.

Revelation wants to answer this question: what is really going on in the world? What explains the hard things in the world, and what should we be doing? In particular, what explains that the world does not like Christians?

In one verse, we get the answer of Rev 12-14, in 12:17 - *Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

*He went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring.* We are those who keep God’s commands and hold fast our testimony about Jesus. We find ourselves in holy war because a great, dark power has declared war on us. We did not ask for war. We just want to obey God and follow Christ. But for that very reason, a great dark power declared war on us.

That is the world we live in, and everyone on the planet will either submit to that dragon or be at war with him. The closer we get to the End, the more evident that will be.

But Revelation was written to 7 1<sup>st</sup> century churches, and this same holy war was raging in their lives. Revelation was written to tell THEM what was really going on. Everything we cover today was real in their lives.

Holy War in Seven Scenes 12:1 – 15:4. These seven scenes are another sequence in Revelation covers the whole time between Christ’s first and second comings. That’s happened in the Throne Room, the Seals, the 144000 and great multitude, the trumpets, and the two witnesses. This is the sixth picture we’ve had of this whole time between the two comings of Christ.

Rev 12 is scene 1. Scene 1 tells us WHY the dragon was enraged at the woman and why he declared war on God’s people. Rev 12 tells us how this war came to be. And this is important: why he declared war on us is good news for us. God did good things for us, and that’s why he’s enraged. Most of Rev 12 is good news for us.

Rev 12 is scene 1. Rev 13:1 begins, “*And I saw ...*” which begins scene 2. Rev 13:11 begins, “*And I saw ...*” which introduces scene 3. That’s as far as we go today. Our translations don’t use exactly the same words every time, but in Greek it is exactly the same words 6x: “*and I saw.*” There are three more scenes in Rev 14, scenes 4 to 6, and the 7<sup>th</sup> scene in 15:2-4.

Preparing this sermon caused me considerable distress, because I want to tell you what these images mean, and I also want to show you how we know that. But we don't have nearly enough time to show you from Revelation how we can know, so for the most part we'll look at the forest today and not the trees. That is not my preference, but it probably is for the best.

*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. <sup>2</sup> She was pregnant and cried out in pain in the agony of giving birth.*

The woman is the faithful people of God, faithful Israel and faithful church together. This is the same woman as the bride of Christ at the wedding supper of the Lamb in Rev 19. She wants to give birth to her Savior. That means Israel is included in the woman, because Israel produced Christ. The words tell us this is a very difficult birth.

*<sup>3</sup> Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. <sup>4</sup> Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. 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.*

This dragon is massive enough to sweep stars out of the sky, and also hostile; the dragon destroys God's creation. Flings the stars to earth. This could well be the angels that follow the dragon. If so, he's a lying bully and they do not love him. The dragon has crowns on his heads. He is a ruler. He knows that if the woman's child survives, he's doomed.

*<sup>5</sup> 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. The line about ruling all the nations is a prediction from Ps 2. So the child is Christ. The life of Jesus is just a moment. He's born, and then God snatches him up and puts him with him on his Throne. How great is THAT!*

*<sup>6</sup> 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. 1260 days is 3½ years. The 3 ½ years of trouble start as soon as Christ ascended. It had begun in the first century. But the point is, the woman's Champion is safe, and God also protects the woman. The dragon cannot destroy either one. Good news.*

*<sup>7</sup> Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. <sup>8</sup> But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. <sup>9</sup> 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.*

Now we find out who the dragon is: the devil, also known as Satan, who was also the serpent who led Adam and Eve down the wrong path. He leads the whole world astray; he does to the whole world what he did to Adam and Eve.

There was angel war in heaven and Satan and angels were thrown down. This kind of thing comes up in the rest of the NT. In Mark 3, Jewish leaders accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Jesus told them they knew very well that was impossible. Then Jesus explained how to steal from a strong man. Here's the only way to do it:

You go into his house and first you must overpower him and tie him up. Once you have him tied up, you can plunder his house, take what you want. That's what Jesus has done with Satan already during his ministry. He's bound Satan, and is plundering his house. He never tells us to bind Satan. Jesus bound Satan. His followers took what was the devil's and made it God's.

In Luke 10, the 70 disciples came back and joyfully told Jesus that even the demons submitted to them. Jesus said, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."*

That's sounds like Rev 12, doesn't it. Jesus acts like he has already defeated Satan during his earthly ministry, although the later NT teaches that it happened with Jesus' death and resurrection. One way or the other, the first coming of Christ brought a great victory over Satan.

*<sup>10</sup> 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."*

Christ's kingdom started with his first coming. The kingdom of God and the authority of the Messiah are already in place now. Rev 1:5 says Jesus is the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Before Christ died, Satan accused God's faithful people that were with God. They were sinners, but God had accepted them. Satan accused Abraham and Jacob and David, and was really accusing God for being unrighteous – "You say you are a holy God, and you have uncleansed sinners enjoying your eternal blessing. You are not a holy God."

But once Christ died, once the Lamb was slaughtered, their sins were covered, they were freed from their sins by his blood (Rev 1:7). Satan was silenced and expelled, and we can bet they were happy in heaven about THAT!! In John 12, after Jesus speaks of his coming death, he says, *"now the prince of this world will be driven out."*

*<sup>11</sup> They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Now, all of a sudden, it is not Christ who conquers the dragon, nor is it Michael and his angels, it's us, it is the faithful.*

How do we conquer? Three things: one, the blood of the Lamb that bought us for God; two, the word of our witness, Jesus is Lord of all no matter what happens; and three, we'll die before we'll change on these things. By this we conquer the dragon.

*12 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. 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.*

In Exodus God took Israel out of Egypt and into the wilderness, out of Egypt’s reach. In Exodus 19, when they got to Mt Sinai, God said, “*You yourselves have seen what I did to your enemies, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.*” Those same eagles’ wings carry this woman into the wilderness where God will guard her for the time of trouble.

The dragon failed to destroy the woman’s son, he lost an angelic war, he was expelled from heaven, so he chased the woman, the church. But God takes the woman, the church, to the wilderness, out of the serpent’s reach. He can’t get to the woman.

For the three and a half years of trouble, which is the whole time between the two comings of Christ, Satan cannot destroy the church. “*On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of death, the forces of death, will not overcome it*” said Jesus in Matthew 16. The church will last.

*15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.*

Notice that in this verse, he’s the serpent, not the dragon. That takes us back to Genesis 3. What comes out of the serpent’s mouth in Gen 3? Lies, slander, deceit. This the dragon still uses, from outside the church and inside the church. But it won’t work. The earth is on our side in this battle. So the woman is not destroyed, but the lies and slander do cause us serious trouble.

[We need to see how similar this scene is to the thousand years in Revelation 20. There also it is an angel that overpowers Satan, and Christ rules with authority, their also believers faithful until their deaths are triumphant rulers, there also he loses ability to deceive, just as the river out of his mouth here was not effect. Rev 12 and the thousand years in Rev 20 are much the same.]

*17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

The dragon cannot destroy Christ, or God, or God’s angels, or even the church. He’s doomed, his time is short. But he can attack individual believers, and does so. We are those who keep God’s commands and hold fast to our confession that Jesus is Lord of all and has full rights to our lives.

All of that is how we got into a holy war. It’s how John’s 7 churches got into holy war, and how every follower of Christ gets into holy war. The war is intense, but it comes out of good news.

Scene 2: The Shape of the War: a Beast that demands Worship (13:1-10)

*The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. 13:1 And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. <sup>2</sup> The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. <sup>3</sup> One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. <sup>4</sup> People **worshiped** the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also **worshiped** the beast and asked, “Who is like the beast? Who can wage war against it?”*

Satan calls up a monster out of the sea, but it is a land beast, a leopard-bear-lion, a marvelous creature. People worship the dragon and the beast, but not for love. Rather, there is no point fighting it. Who can wage war against it?

*<sup>5</sup> The beast **was given** a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and it **was given** authority for forty-two months. <sup>6</sup> It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. <sup>7</sup> It **was given** power to wage war against the saints and to conquer them. And it **was given** authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. <sup>8</sup> All inhabitants of the earth **will worship** the beast—all whose names have not been written in the Lamb’s book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.*

V7 - *It was given power to wage war against the saints and to conquer them.* In Rev 11:7, that is exactly what the beast does to the two witnesses. That’s one of the reasons we assume the two witnesses represent all the saints.

The 42 months is 3 ½ years, and that time of trouble began shortly after Christ’s first coming. In the first century the beast was Caesar, the churches knew that quickly. The Caesars insisted on emperor worship because they thought it would reduce rebellion. Caesar had a lot of authority.

But “was given” occurs four times here. This means by God. The beast is on a leash, and God holds the leash. God, for his own reasons, permits this. He has not lost control, though it might seem that way. And there’s a time limit, God permits it for 3 ½ years, then he’ll pull in the leash.

Warning to the Saints: This Beast means Trouble 13:9-10 *Whoever has ears, let them hear. “If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.* That’s pretty clear. Let us resolve to endure and stay faithful to God.

Scene 3: A 2<sup>nd</sup> Beast, the 1<sup>st</sup> Beast’s Enforcer (13:11-18) = False Prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)

*<sup>11</sup> And I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. <sup>12</sup> It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. <sup>13</sup> And it*

*performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. <sup>14</sup> Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. <sup>15</sup> The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.*

In every city the Roman government set up a statue of the Caesar, and people needed to come once in a while and bring an offering and worship there, and your name would be checked off a list. The only reason person would not do that, in their minds, was if they were traitors or spies.

That's not why the Christians refused, but the Christians did refuse, and Revelation absolutely insists that they refuse. The local government was loyal to Caesar, of course, and so Christians were treated severely.

The first beast is Caesar and the central power in Rome, the second beast is the local enforcer. John's 7 churches in Asia did not have had much trouble figuring this out. They had to bow in front of Caesar's image, and if they did not bow, death was a very real possibility.

*<sup>16</sup> It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, <sup>17</sup> so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name.*

In the Roman world, every trade in every city had a brotherhood, a sort of workers union. Builders and truckdrivers in our day, and computer technicians, would belong to this. These brotherhoods had meals together in which they celebrated a certain god, they ate meals of offering to the idol. This was a problem in Corinth.

Flee from idolatry, Paul wrote, you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too, you cannot have part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons (1 Cor 10). This was a problem in two of John's churches (Pergamum, Thyatira). But if you avoided these, you could hardly work in that trade in that city. Worshipping only God can block our economic survival.

*<sup>18</sup> This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of man. That number is 666.*

The number of the beast. In Greek, how you said "the number of a man" and how you said "the number of man" are exactly the same. Only the context helps people decide what you mean.

Until the last verse of Rev 13, nothing tells us that the beast is a human. He's a leopard-bear-lion that comes out of the sea. The number tells us: he's human-human-human. Taking 666 on our foreheads is saying, "I worship a human-human-human."

In the very next verse, 14:1, the 144000, that's us, have God's name and the Lamb's name on our foreheads. That's who we worship. The point of 666 is not to identify a particular man, it is to identify the species of the beast: he's just human, for goodness sake! So don't worship him!!

God's mark on his people, his name on our foreheads, is not visible to the world. Nothing on our foreheads for people to see. Why would the beast's mark be any more visible than God's mark?

In conclusion: The dragon has declared war on those who keep God's commands and who are faithful to Jesus. We're not his real enemy, but he's already been defeated by his real enemy, and for this time, which seems long to us, individual believers are the only target he can reach.

He's doing his best to force us to leave our faithfulness to God, and worship authorities that he has placed. Paul says: *“Take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

Let us keep God's commands and be faithful to Jesus. The one who called us is faithful, and he will do it. Amen.