

68 WAR IN HEAVEN—REV 12

INTRODUCTION: Revelation 12:7 and following is often cited as evidence of the “fallen angel” story, however, a literalistic approach is inappropriate for this type of literature. The book of Revelation is a series of symbol-rich visions and must be regarded as representational. We will seek to show that the antagonist in this passage, is a reference to the human temple authorities who were adversaries of the Lord Jesus and His people. The wicked “angels”, that is, messengers, were militants like Saul who rounded up Christians for imprisonment and execution. (See Preterist Paper #67).

1. THE TIME FRAME FOR THE FULFILLMENT OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION WAS THE FIRST CENTURY.

- A. Rev. 1:1 “what must happen soon”
- B. Rev. 1:3 “for the time is at hand”
- C. Rev. 1:19 “the things you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will happen hereafter;”
- D. Rev. 2:10 “things which you are about to suffer”
- E. Rev. 2:10 “devil is about to throw some of you into prison”
- F. Rev. 3:11 “I am coming quickly”
- G. Rev. 10:6 “no longer be delay”
- H. Rev. 22:6 God is showing... “things which must happen soon.”
- I. Rev. 22:7 “I come quickly”
- J. Rev. 22:10 “The time is at hand”
- K. Rev. 22:12 “I am coming quickly”
- L. Rev. 22:20 “Surely, I come quickly”

2. FIVE NAMES FOR THE WARRING ANTAGONIST SPIRIT

- 1. **Dragon** — represents power, recalling slavery/Pharaoh/Egypt
- 2. **Serpent** — represents deception, recalling the serpent in Genesis
- 3. **“The devil”** — the slanderous
- 4. **“Satan”** — the adversary
- 5. **Accuser** — false accuser

3. DRAGON REPRESENTS BONDAGE/EGYPT/PHARAOH. (Is. 51:9-10, Ez 29:3)

- A. **Scribes and Pharisees:** “They tie up heavy loads, hard to carry, and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing even to lift a finger to move them.” Mt 23:4
- B. **Religious experts:** “Jesus replied, ‘Woe to you experts in religious law as well! You load people down with burdens difficult to bear, yet you yourselves refuse to touch the burdens with even one of your fingers!’” Lk 11:46
- C. **Jewish leaders:** “...if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.” Jn. 9:22
- D. **Pharisees:** “...because of the Pharisees they would not confess Jesus to be the Christ, so that they would not be put out of the synagogue.” Jn 12:43
- E. **High priests:** “Saul...went to the high priest and requested letters from him to the synagogues... so that if he found any who belonged to the Way...he could bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem.” Acts 9:1-2 (see P.P. #67)
- F. See also P.P #67 regarding the power wielded by the temple High Priest and other leadership.

4. SERPENT REPRESENTS THE LYING/DECEIVING SPIRIT

- A. **Pharisees, Sadducees:** “But when he [John the Baptist] saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’” Mt 3:7
- B. **Crowds:** “So John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, ‘You offspring of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?’” Lk 3:7
- C. **Pharisees:** Jesus said, “Offspring of vipers! How are you able to say anything good, since you are evil? For the mouth speaks from what fills the heart.” Mt 12:34
- D. **Religious leaders:** Jesus said, “You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna [national judgment]?” Mt 23:33
- E. **Chief Priests and Sanhedrin:** “The Chief Priests and the whole Sanhedrin were trying to find false testimony against Jesus so that they could put Him to death. But they did not find anything, though many false witnesses came forward.” Mt 26:59-60
- F. **Enemies of the disciples:** “Look, I [Jesus] have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions and on the full force of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you.” Lk 10:19

5. DEVIL: MEANS THE SLANDEROUS (DIABOLOS)

- A. **Unbelievers in Israel:** “For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon!’” Mt. 11:18
- B. **Judeans:** “Aren’t we correct in saying that you [Jesus] are a Samaritan and are possessed by a demon?” Jn 8:48

- C. Some Judeans** responded to Jesus, “Now we know you’re possessed by a demon!” Jn 8:52-53
- D. Crowd of unbelieving Jews:** “Many of them were saying, ‘He [Jesus] is possessed by a demon and has lost his mind! Why do you listen to him?’” Jn 10:19-20
- E. “Jewish leaders** replied, ‘We are not going to stone you for a good deed but for blasphemy...’” Jn 10:33
- F. Judeans said:** “By the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, he [Jesus] casts out demons.” Lk 11:15
- G. Unbelievers in Israel:** Jesus said, “If they have called the head of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more will they defame the members of his household!” Mt 10:25

6. SATAN: THE JEWS WERE THE PERSISTENT ADVERSARY (Greek: satana) OF THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

- A.** “They [Jews] continued to stone Stephen while he prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!’ Then he fell to his knees and cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them!’ When he had said this, he died.” Acts 7:59-60
- B.** “Now on that day [stoning of Stephen by Jews] a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were forced to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.” Acts 8:1
- C.** “Now after some days had passed, the Jews plotted together to kill him, but Saul learned of their plot against him. They were also watching the city gates day and night so that they could kill him.” Acts 9:23-25
- D.** Paul “was speaking and debating with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they were trying to kill him.” Acts 9:29
- E.** “But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high social standing and the prominent men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of their region.” Acts 13:50-51
- F.** “When both the Gentiles and the Jews (together with their rulers) made an attempt to mistreat them and stone them, Paul and Barnabas learned about it and fled.” Acts 14:5-6
- G.** “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and after winning the crowds over, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, presuming him to be dead.” Acts 14:19-20
- H.** “But the Jews became jealous, and gathering together some worthless men from the rabble in the marketplace, they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. They attacked Jason’s house, trying to find Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly.” Acts 17:5
- I.** “But when the Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul had also proclaimed the word of God in Berea, they came there too, inciting and disturbing the crowds.” Acts 17:13
- J.** “Now while Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews attacked Paul together and brought him before the judgment seat,” Acts 18:12
- K.** “Because the Jews had made a plot against him [Paul] as he was intending to sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.” Acts 20:3
- L. Apostate Jews:** “If they persecuted me [Jesus said], they will also persecute you [disciples].. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know the one who sent me.” Jn 15:20-21

7. ACCUSER: PERTAINS TO FALSE ACCUSERS

- A. Scribes and Pharisees:** “...that they might have something to accuse him [Jesus] of.” Jn. 8:6
- B. The Pharisees** asked: “‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day...’ that they might accuse him [Jesus].” Mt. 12:10
- C. Scribes & Pharisees:** “...seeking to catch him [Jesus] in something... that they might accuse him.” Lk 11:54
- D. The chief priests, scribes, assembly:** “began to accuse Jesus: ‘We found this man perverting the nation...’” Lk 23:2
- E. The chief priests and the scribes:** stood, vehemently accusing him [Jesus].” Lk 23:10
- F. Jewish officials:** “I [Pilate] found no basis for a charge against this man [Jesus] concerning those things of which you accuse him.” Lk 23:14

8. WAR IN GOD’S HOME IS IMPOSSIBLE. NO CONFLICT IN HEAVEN.

- A. God’s will always done in heaven:** “Our Father in heaven...your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Mt 6:10
- B. The kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Heaven.** Also see Preterist Paper #67

9. “HEAVEN” WAS A SYMBOLIC REFERENCE TO THE TEMPLE-CENTERED RELIGIOUS SYSTEM. THE TEMPLE WAS A REPRESENTATION (SHADOW) OF GOD’S PRESENCE.

- A. “The place where they [earthly priests] serve** is a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary.” Heb 8:5
- B. Solomon said,** “O LORD, I have built a lofty temple for you...” 2 Chr 6:2
- C. Glory filled the temple at its dedication.** “...and Yahweh’s glory filled the house.” 2 Chr 7:1
- D. Jesus said,** “He who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who has been living in it.” Mt. 23:21
- E. Destruction of the temple necessary:** “The way into the Holy Place [God’s presence] is not yet revealed while the first tabernacle [temple] is still standing; which is a symbol of the present age [Old Covenant].” Heb 9:8-9

10. “ANGEL” [ANGELOUS] CAN REFER TO A PERSON/PEOPLE AS WELL AS CELESTIAL BEINGS.

- A. Human messengers were angelous:** “He [Jesus] sent messengers [angelous #32] on ahead of him.” Lk 9:52
- B. John the Baptist was an angelon:** “This is the one about whom it is written: ‘Look, I am sending my messenger [angelon #32] ahead of you who will prepare your way before you.’” Mt 11:10

C. The two spies Rahab hid were angelous: “Was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers [angelous #32] ...?” Ja 2:25

11. CELESTIAL ANGELS ARE SINLESS ETERNAL BEINGS AND CANNOT DIE i.e. NO SINFUL ANGELS.

“But those who are regarded as worthy to share in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. In fact, they can no longer die, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, since they are sons of the resurrection.” Lk 20:35-36. (See also Preterist Paper #67)

12. THE “WAR IN HEAVEN” WAS THE TRANSFER OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY TO THE DISCIPLES.

A. Disciples received authority: “The seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ He said to them, ‘I saw Satan [adversary i.e. Jewish authorities] having fallen like lightning from heaven [Old Covenant authority]. Behold, I give you authority to tread on serpents [deceivers] and scorpions [adversaries], and over all the power of the enemy [all opposed to the gospel].’” Lk 10:17-19

B. Corrupt temple authority lost power: Before his death, Jesus said, “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world [Old Covenant world] will be cast out.” Jn 12:31

C. Temple power thrown down: “The dragon [temple authority] was not strong enough to prevail, so there was no longer any place left in heaven [spiritual authority] for him and his angels [agents, messengers]. So that huge dragon [powerful temple locus of control] – the ancient serpent [deceiver], the one called the devil [the slanderous] and Satan [the adversary], who deceives the whole world [oikoumenen #3625—the dispersed Jews in the Roman world] – was thrown down to the earth [ge—land of Israel #1093] and his angels [militants like Saul] along with him.” Rev. 12:8-9

13. CAST DOWN/THROWN DOWN/FALLEN IS A FIGURE OF SPEECH FOR LOSING POWER.

A. Example: “Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, O God.” Is 56:7

B. Example: “With this kind of sudden violent force, Babylon the great city will be thrown down...” Rev 18:21

C. Example: “Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great! She has become a lair for demons...” Rev 18:2

14. “TIME WAS SHORT” FOR ENEMIES OF CHRIST BECAUSE OF THE RAPID SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL. (Rev. 12:12)

A. Chief Priests and Pharisees conspired: “If we allow him [Jesus] to go on in this way, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away our sanctuary and our nation.” Lk 11:48

B. Pharisees fearful: “You see that you can do nothing. Look, the world has run off after Him [Jesus, after raising Lazarus from the dead]!” Jn 12:19

C. “The Way” of the Lord Jesus was more powerful after His death and resurrection: “None of the rulers [leadership] of this age understood it. If they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” 1 Cor 2:8-9

D. Disciples emboldened: Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel know beyond a doubt that God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ.” Acts 2:36

E. Great authority given to the apostles: “With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was on them all.” Acts 4:33

F. Jewish authorities were made foolish: Jesus, “having disarmed the rulers and authorities, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.” Col 2: 13-15

G. The Jewish world was being turned upside down: Jews cried, “These [Christians] who have turned the world upside down have come here [to Thessalonica] also...”. Acts 17:6

15. “THE WOMAN” WHO ESCAPED THE JUDGMENT WAS DEVOUT ISRAEL. (Rev. 12:14)

A. Jesus warned: “When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Those who are inside the city must depart. Those who are out in the country must not enter it, because these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.” Luke 21: 20-22

B. Unexpected opportunity: The Syrian Roman legion camped outside Jerusalem for 6 days in the autumn of AD 66 in a pre-war attempt to stop the Jewish rebellion. General Cestius mysteriously withdrew his troops after a few days without apparent reason. Jerusalem residents used this opportunity to flee Jerusalem. Josephus states, “After this calamity had befallen Cestius [his abrupt withdrawal and attack from behind] many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink.” Josephus, “Wars” 2.20.1

C. Christians escaped: Church fathers Eusebius and Epiphany state the Jerusalem Christians escaped to Pella in the Decapolis. There are some questions regarding this report, but the Christians most certainly would have gone some place east of Jordan, since the mountains are to the east of Jerusalem and Jesus had said to flee to the mountains, the direction of the Decapolis.

16. WINGS OF AN EAGLE TO ESCAPE FROM “EGYPT” recalls Yahweh’s past care for Israel, now given to Jewish Christians. (Rev.12:14)

A. “You... have seen what I did to Egypt and how I lifted you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” Ex 19:4

B. "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, so the Lord spread out His wings and took him, he lifted him up on his pinions." Deut. 32:11

17. FIVE REFERENCES TO 3 ½ YEARS.

Roman General Vespasian entered Palestine in the spring of AD 67 and his son, Titus, left Jerusalem destroyed in the autumn of AD 70.

A. "Leave out the court which is outside of the temple, and don't measure it, for it has been given to the nations. They will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months." Rev. 11:2

B. "My two witnesses... will prophesy one thousand two hundred sixty days." Rev. 11:3

C. "The woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that there they may nourish her one thousand two hundred sixty days." Rev 12:6

D. "Two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, so that she might be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time..." Rev. 12:14

E. "A mouth speaking great things and blasphemy was given to him [the beast]. Authority to make war for forty-two months was given to him." Rev. 13:5

Daniel prophecy: "It will be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have finished breaking in pieces the power of the holy people [national judgment], all these things will be finished." Dan 12:7

18. THOSE WHO STAYED IN JERUSALEM SUFFERED THE GREAT TRIBULATION. Rev. 12:17

A. **Throats cut, imprisonment, torture, death:** "Now after these [two priests] were slain, the zealots and the multitude of the Idumeans fell upon the people [of Jerusalem] as upon a flock of profane animals, and cut their throats... But for the noblemen and the youth, they first caught them and bound them, and shut them up in prison, and put off their slaughter, in hopes that some of them would turn over to their party; but not one of them would comply with their desires, but all of them preferred death before being enrolled among such wicked wretches [zealots] as acted against their own country. But this refusal of theirs brought upon them terrible torments; for they were so scourged and tortured, that their bodies were not able to sustain their torments, till at length, and with difficulty, they had the favor to be slain." Josephus "Wars" 4.5.3

B. **Starvation:** "...the famine [in Jerusalem]...devoured the people by whole houses and families; the upper rooms were full of women and children that were dying by famine, and the lanes of the city were full of the dead bodies of the aged; the children also and the young men wandered about the market-places like shadows, all swelled with the famine, and fell down dead, whosoever their misery seized them...many died as they were burying others." Josephus, "Wars" 5.12.3

C. **Heavenly scene of those who went through the Great Tribulation:** "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! For this reason they are before the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. They will never go hungry or be thirsty again, and the sun will not beat down on them, nor any burning heat [perhaps referring to outdoor prisons] because the Lamb in the middle of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Rev 7:13-17

CONCLUSION: Our hermeneutic is to let scripture interpret scripture. When prophesied events occurred after the writing of the New Testament books, we look for testimony from primary sources. Josephus was one of the "holy people" and a scholarly eye-witness to the "breaking in pieces the power of the holy people" (Daniel 12:7), the subject matter of Revelation. Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, and our hope is to contribute to a clearer understanding of this passage.

NOTES: For students of the Bible and especially Revelation and Daniel, we strongly recommend Josephus' "The Wars of the Jews" translated by William Whiston. Abridgments may be of interest for an overview, but will not be useful for a full understanding. One could start in book 2 chapter 17 and read through book 7 chapter 3 (approximately 130 pages) and have a very good grasp of the essential narrative. Please note, the Romans did not enter Jerusalem until late summer/fall in the year 70.

Other Preterist Paper discussions pertaining to the concept of "Satan": #60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67.
Josephus' report of zealot accusers: see Preterist Paper #41 "ACCUSER OF BROTHERS"