

Who is "the Judge"? Is it God? Or could it be DEVIL?

DEVIL certainly played a role as adviser to God in the case of Job, God asked him his opinion of Job, and DEVIL gave it. In DEVIL's view, there was insufficient evidence to confirm Job's reputation as a man who turns away from everything bad (*pan poneron*). And God approved of the plan of action that DEVIL devised to put Job through his paces. Thanks to DEVIL, Job became the supreme example of endurance that James praises so highly. So it is hard to avoid thinking of DEVIL when Job's endurance is commended.

As we recall, there is no return to the satan (in the Hebrew text) or DEVIL (in the Greek text) at the end of the Book of Job, so we cannot tell whether he could be said to "flee" in the face of Job's resistance. But he would certainly have had to admit that the evidence of Job's uprightness was now overwhelming. The jury was in, and even DEVIL could not deny the facts.

6 The Apocalypse of John the Divine

6.1 SATAN AND THE ANGELS OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

For the sake of clarity, I refer to the John who is the author of the Gospel as John the Evangelist. The John who wrote the three Epistles of John is safely identified as John the Presbyter, as we shall see in section 3 below. Finally, I call the John of "The Revelation to John" by the designation of "John the Divine" – that is, John the Theologian. Traditionally, of course, all three Johns were thought of as one and the same person, to be identified with "the disciple whom Jesus loved" in the Gospel of John. But this neat identification is beset by many problems (which need not concern us here).

John's first vision in the Apocalypse is of a gigantic "Son of Man," who was dead and is now alive. He has the keys of Death and of Hades, and holds Seven Stars in his right hand, and from his mouth comes a sharp, two-edged Sword (Rev. 1.13–16). He is the risen Jesus Christ, who has been identified as the Ruler, or Archon, of the kings of the Earth (Rev. 1.5). This is close to the title that DEVIL claimed for himself (Luke 4.6) and which Jesus acknowledged as belonging to him, but soon to be removed from him (John 12.31). Now that Jesus had died and risen, the change of command seems to have occurred.

The Son of Man appears to John in both a conciliatory and a disciplining mood, a combination of "Good Cop" and "Bad Cop," with messages for the Angels of the Seven Churches, who are symbolized by the Seven Stars. The Churches themselves are symbolized by Seven Lampstands (Rev. 1.20).

The first message is for the Angel of the Church of Ephesus. He compliments the Angel for discriminating against the wicked (*kakoi*), and for putting to the test (*peirasmos*) those who claim to be Apostles, and

finding them to be false (Rev. 2.2). The Angel stands as a symbol of the local church.

Let's allow this image to sink in. Christ is congratulating an Angel for "succeeding" in a testing or temptation. The Angel has tested the fidelity and truthfulness of some of the Christians of Ephesus and found them defective. "Good work!" he says. This would be like God congratulating Satan for succeeding with his temptation of Peter, when Peter committed his threefold sin of denying Jesus. Remember that Satan received authorization to undertake the temptation against Peter and the other Apostles (Luke 22.31).

But the Son of Man goes on to chide the Angel of Ephesus for having abandoned his first love, which has constituted a fall. But all is not lost, for he has a chance of regaining his former position:

Remember from whence you have fallen! Repent! And do the works you did at first, or else I will come and remove your Lampstand from its place.
(Rev. 2.5).

So, we must ask ourselves, is this Angel a kind of Satan, or an Angel of Satan? Just how does Satan fit into all of this?

We soon find out about Satan, in the message to the next Angel, the Angel of the Church of SMYRNA:

[To the Angel:] I know thine affliction and thy poverty, even though thou art rich. I know the blaspheming of those who say they are Judeans and are not, but are a Congregation [*Sunagoge*] of Satan. Fear none of those things that thou art about to suffer.

[To the people of the Church of Smyrna:] Beware, DEVIL is about to cast some of you into prison as a test [*peirasmos*], and for ten days you will have affliction.

[To the Angel:] Be faithful until death, and I will give thee the Crown of Life.
(Rev. 2.9-10)

I have reverted to the archaic second-person singular to reflect the Greek grammar, to indicate that most of the message is directed to the Angel taking the plural form.

people of the Church of Smyrna. The result is not very satisfactory, since it makes the Angel subject to death. It just goes to show that "the Angel of the Church" is merely a visionary way of addressing the people of the Church.

That being said, what does the passage say about Satan? The Pseudo-Jews who say critical things (blasphemy) about the Christians of Smyrna are said to belong to a Synagogue of Satan, as opposed to the genuine Jews (= Christians) who belong to a Synagogue of the Lord (this expression is in LXX Num. 20.4). In other words, they are exercising Satan's office of making accusations against Christians, and we can presume that they are making these accusations to the local government.

But then, in the next breath, the government turns out to be run by DEVIL, for DEVIL is said to be exercising the Satanic function of testing Christians. Is DEVIL envisaged as the same person as Satan? Later on in Revelation, this identification is made, but we can't be sure that this part of the Apocalypse is drawing on the same traditions.

We saw above (in chap 5.1) that two members of the Christian Church of Ephesus, Hymenaeus and Alexander, have been handed over to Satan because of their practice of "blaspheming," so that they can be cured of their habit (1 Tim. 1.19-20). This fits in with the function of Satan as punisher and rehabilitator. But in the Church of Smyrna Satan encourages blaspheming, doubtless as a form of testing, just as DEVIL serves as a jailer for the same purpose.

The next Angel to be addressed is the Angel of the Church of PERGAMUM. The Son of Man says, with a menace (mentioning the two-edged sword that comes from his mouth):

I know where you are living, where Satan's Throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was killed among your people where Satan lives. But I have a few things against you, for some of your people follow the teaching of

before the sons of Israel, to eat food sacrificed to Idols and to behave whorishly.

(Rev. 2.13-14)

So at last we know where Satan lives! It's at Pergamum, the city renowned for *pergama*, from which our word "parchment" comes. But it sounds pretty odd, doesn't it? Like some kind of joke, perhaps. Scholars have sought to explain the phrases as referring to some local landmark, and they have hit on several possibilities connected with the physical situation of Pergamum, which sat like a great fortress on a sharply protruding rock of a mountain. The city featured various Pagan sites of worship, including a monumental altar to Zeus and a temple dedicated to Augustus and Rome, which served as the center of the cult of the Roman Emperor in Asia Minor. Pergamum was in fact the capital of the Roman Province of Asia.

However, we shall see that in the later parts of Revelation, Satan seems to be regarded as the Angelic Ruler of the Roman Empire, so it may be that Pergamum was regarded as Satan's throne, or at least one of them. We recall also that in Matthew Satan took Jesus up a high mountain and showed him all of the Kingdoms of the World, and in Luke, as we just noted above, he claimed that all of them had been given to him to rule. It seems more likely that this is the sort of reference that is being made here, rather than that Satan is being associated with Pagan worship. This latter notion, of Satan fostering Pagan rites and beliefs, would soon become evident among the Church Fathers, but it may be premature to find it here in Revelation. Still, we have seen that Satan has been repeatedly connected with unbelievers, especially by Luke (Acts 26.17-18, above, **chap. 4.3**) and Deutero-Paul (1 Tim. 5.15, **chap. 5.1**), and perhaps by Paul himself, speaking of the God of This Age (2 Cor. 4.3-4, **chap. 3.3**).

The reference to Balaam does not reflect Balaam's initial appearance in Numbers 22, where he and his jenny encounter the "satanic" Angel of Yahweh, but rather the rebuke that Moses makes to the Israelite army in chapter 31: "Why have you spared the life of the Midianite women? They were the very ones who, on Balaam's advice, caused the Israelites to be unfaithful to Yahweh" (Num. 21.15-16).

The "whorish behavior" of the Pergamenians may simply refer to participation in Pagan customs and not to sexual misconduct.

The message to the Angel of the Church of THYATIRA comes from the Son of Man calling himself the Son of God. It is a similar mixture of compliment and complaint. The complaint is that the Angel tolerates the woman named Jezebel, who poses as a prophet and teaches the people to commit the same sins as the people of Pergamum. Jezebel and her children are hereby given time to repent, but, unless they do, the Son of Man will strike them dead (Rev. 2.18-23). The sinners in Pergamum were blamed for following a false prophet of old, Balaam, but those in Thyatira are following a false prophet in their midst, named after the idolatrous queen Jezebel who opposed the true prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19.1-2; see above, **chap. 1.1**).

The message to Thyatira goes on to connect the above wickedness with Satan, now addressing not the Angel of the Church but the Christians who have not strayed from their faith:

But to the rest of you in Thyatira who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what are named "the deep things of Satan" (as they call it), to you I say: "I do not lay on you any other burden; only hold fast to what you have, until I come." (Rev. 2.24-25)

"The deep things of Satan" seems to be a sarcastic reference on somebody's part: "as they call it." But it is not clear who "they" are. One would naturally ascribe the saying to the faithful Christians of Thyatira to characterize the doctrine that their straying co-congregants are espousing: namely, the teachings of Jezebel. But if that were the case, we would expect the explanatory phrase to be, "as you call it."

In any case, "the deep things of Satan" is a take-off on "the deep things of God," an expression used by St. Paul (1 Cor. 2.10). But why Satan? Presumably because of Satan's association with false belief, which he uses to test the Christian faithful to abandon their

We shall see below, in section 4 of this chapter, that the faithful of Thyatira who succeed in avoiding the deep things of Satan will have Lucifer, the Morning Star (that is, Christ), bestowed on them.

When the Son of Man addresses the Angel of the Church of Sardis, he identifies himself as "the one who had the Seven Spirits of God and the Seven Stars" (Rev. 3.1). Before this, we have heard of the Seven Spirits as being before the Throne of God (Rev. 1.4). The message is bad news: "I know your works. You have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what is on the point of dying" (Rev. 3.1-2).

So it turns out that the Angel of Sardis is not really dead, but asleep, with dying (gangrenous?) members. However, the Son of Man concedes that there are a few names in Sardis that have not been defiled.

The sixth message is to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia, who is in much better shape. In spite of having only a little power, he has kept the word of the Son of Man. But this Angel has the same problem as the Angel at Smyrna: there are liars there who say they are Jews but are not; rather, they belong to the Synagogue of Satan. The Son of Man will make them bow down to the Angel, and the Angel himself (and presumably his Church) will be kept from the hour of the *peirasmos* that is going to test all the people of the Earth (Rev. 3.9-10).

Finally, the Angel of the Church of Laodicea gets an earful: he is lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, and the Son of Man, who calls himself the Great Amen, is ready to spew him out of his mouth. He wishes that the Angel were either hot or cold (Rev. 3.14-16). Does that mean, "either completely good or completely bad"? If so, why so? That is, why would being wholly bad be better than being half bad?

At any rate, the Angel is rebuked for claiming to be rich, whereas he is in reality poverty-stricken. He is advised to buy gold refined by fire and dress properly. The policy of the Son of Man is then enunciated: "I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3.19).

It seems fairly clear that the Angels of the Churches aren't really Angels but simply personifications, or, as I stated earlier, symbols, of the people in the Christian congregations of the various cities. It may be that Satan is just as much a figure of speech. But whether figurative or not, certain conclusions can be drawn about his relations with the Churches of Asia Minor, and therefore about his identity.

We are probably safe in assuming that Satan has a testing function in the two cases where Pseudo-Jews are said to constitute a "synagogue" of Satan, in Smyrna and Philadelphia, and in Smyrna their accusations are coupled with Devil's imprisoning of Christians to be tested. The only other explicit use of testing, *peirasmos*, is on the part of the Angel of Ephesus, and he is commended for using it to expose false Christians. A big future test of the whole inhabited World is on its way. It's not clear where it's coming from, for all that we know is that the Angel of Philadelphia will be protected from it.

Idolatry and/or licentiousness are/is associated with the Churches at Pergamum and Thyatira. Satan is said to live in Pergamum and to have his throne there, and the heretical opinions or practices of the Thyatirese have been labeled "the depths of Satan" by some people. Once again, we are probably to think of Satan's testing techniques: he has used specious accommodations with unbelievers to seduce Christians from their faith, thereby successfully converting his tests into temptations.

But the explicit or implicit moral of all the messages to the Seven Churches is that all those who have succumbed to such temptations still have a chance to repent and repair the damage they have done to their faith and to themselves.

6.2 DRAGON-SATAN-DEVIL AND HIS PREDICTED

OUSTER FROM HEAVEN

We need not pause over the Fourth Horseman of the Apocalypse, Death, and his companion Hades (Rev. 6.8), whom we have considered before (**chap. 2.3** above), except to say that they appear as agents in a vision of future destruction upon the Earth that is sanctioned by the Lamb of God.

We may give some consideration to other non-Satanic figures involved in future catastrophes, namely two Stars that are envisaged as having fallen from the sky to Earth. One of them is called Wormwood, after the bitter drug of that name, which poisons a third of the rivers and springs of the World (Rev. 8.10–11). The other Star is clearly an Angelic figure, because he is given the key to the Bottomless Abyss, and later seems to be identified as the Angel of the Bottomless Abyss, whose Hebrew name is Abaddon, "Destruction," and whose Greek name is Apollyon, "Destroyer" (Rev. 9.1, 11).

Abaddon is "King" of some beings called Locusts, who must be gigantic, since they are like armored horses, having scorpionic tails and crowned Human heads with women's hair and lions' teeth. These nasty figures are programmed not to harm any foliage of the Earth but only people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Such persons are to be tortured by them for five months, but not killed. Their designated victims will long to die, and not be able to, for Death will flee from them (Rev. 9.3–10).

A singular monster from the Bottomless Abyss, known handily as "the Beast from the Bottomless Abyss," will emerge to cause trouble (Rev. 11.7), as will the same or another such Beast later (Rev. 17.8), but neither has a stated connection with Satan.

Satan comes into the picture in chapter 12, though it is not obvious at first that we are dealing with Satan. Rather the talk is of a great Dragon. At this point, Dear Reader, I must ask you to put aside everything that you have heard about dragons, and everything that you think that you know about them.¹ A dragon in the ancient world was simply a large serpent, whether a land-serpent or a sea-serpent. It had no legs or feet. Now and then dragons with wings were to be found, but not usually. So why do we think of dragons as having legs? No, the idea did *not* come from Chinese "dragons."

What happened is this. During the European Middle Ages, starting in the eleventh century, *all* serpents began to be portrayed in the visual arts as being bipeds or quadrupeds, and also as having bird-leathers and bird-wings and dog-heads and dog-ears. Why did this happen? Who knows? Some sort of hidden and unexplainable pictorial evolutionary force was at work. As these painted and sculpted serpents evolved, some of them developed Human heads instead of canine heads. It was widely thought that Satan used a woman-headed serpent to persuade Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. The most famous example of the womanized Eden Serpent is Michelangelo's in the Sistine Chapel – she is practically all woman, except that her legs end in serpentine coils.

Eventually, artists came to their senses, literally. When they took their eyes off paintings and sculptures and looked around them, every real serpent that they saw lacked the artistic appendages they were endowed with in the realm of artificial images. The trouble is, none of them ever spotted a dragon, with the result that dragons kept their feet, wings, dog-heads, and so on, and they retain them to this day. The English word "dragon," and its equivalents in other European languages, was imposed on the creatures of Chinese fantasy because, what else, they clearly look like dragons!

So, when a Great Dragon appears in the sky in John's vision, let's listen carefully to what John actually says he sees:

Then another great portent [*semeion*] appeared in the sky: a Great Red Dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of the sky.

(Rev. 12.3)

Let's list the results:

- 1 Item, fiery-red skin.
- 2 Item, seven heads.
- 3 Item, ten horns (meaning that some of the heads are unicornal; e.g., four unicornal, three bicornal. Other possibilities: five unicorns, two bicorns, one tricorn; or six unicorns and one quadricorn).

¹ On the evolution of serpents (including dragons), see my essay, "The Metamorphoses of the Eden Serpent during the Middle Ages and Renaissance," *Viator* 2 (1971) 301–27.

4 Item, seven crowns.

5 Item, a great big tail.

6 Item, wings? Optional: maybe, but not necessarily. The first portent that John sees in the sky, before the appearance of the Dragon, is an enormous Woman clothed with the Sun, crowned with the twelve Stars of the Zodiac, and with the Moon beneath her feet (Rev. 12.1). She does not need wings until later, when she is given "the two wings of the great eagle" (12.14).

It has always been obvious that John's Dragon and his subsequent Beasts are based on the four great Beasts-from-the-Sea of the Book of Daniel, chapter 7:

1 Beast-from-the-Sea no. 1: Like a lion, with eagle's wings (the wings are then plucked off and it stands up like a man and gets a Human mind).

2 Beast-from-the-Sea no. 2: Like a bear, with three tusks.

3 Beast-from-the-Sea no. 3: Like a leopard, with four bird-wings and four heads.

4 Beast-from-the-Sea no. 4: Unlike the others, with iron teeth and ten horns, and feet (number unspecified); an eleventh horn appears, while three of the ten are plucked out; the new horn has Humanlike eyes and a mouth given over to arrogant speech.

(*Dan.* 7.3-8)

Moreover, Red Dragon's subsequent fight with Michael is inspired by Michael's fight with the "General" of the Kingdom of Persia, that is, the Angelic Governor and Defender of that country (*Dan.* 10.13, 20). However, none of Daniel's Beasts is a dragon, although the fourth one starts out with ten horns.

John's Great Red Dragon, therefore, would more readily conjure up the sea-monster Leviathan. God's question to Job, "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook?" (*Job* 41.1), is rendered in the Greek Septuagint, "Can you draw out Dragon with a fishhook?" (*LXX Job* 40.25). And Isaiah says, "On that day Yahweh with His cruel and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent [*nahash*],

Leviathan, the twisting serpent [*nahash*], and He will kill the monster [*tannin*] that lives in the sea" (*Isa.* 27.1). In Greek it reads, "On that day God will plunge His holy and great and strong sword into Dragon, the fleeing serpent, into Dragon, the twisting serpent, and He will destroy Dragon" (*LXX Isa.* 27.1).

In Psalm 74, the monster appears with multiple heads: "You broke the heads of the dragons in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan" (*Ps.* 74.13-14). In the Septuagint, the last line reads, "You crushed the heads of Dragon" (*LXX Ps.* 73.14).

Other mythical dragons could also have contributed their DNA to John's monster: notably the Red Dragon Set in Egypt, who pursues the Goddess Isis and is eventually slain by her son, Horus; and the Greek Dragon Python, who attempts to kill Zeus's son Apollo and his mother Leto and who is killed by Apollo.

But when picturing John's Red Dragon, we would do best, I suggest, to concentrate on the obvious Alexandrian Jewish Scriptures and imagine a supersized Biblical combination of a sea-serpent, part multi-headed Dragon-Leviathan and part ten-horned beast, now red-skinned and air-borne, like a great Constellation in the sky, to match the comprehensive Constellation of the Woman. This Draconic Constellation combines the existing Constellations of Draco, Serpens, and Hydra (the last-named having multiple heads).

When Red Dragon sweeps down a third of the stars with his tail, it parallels the devastation caused when the Fourth Angel blew his trumpet: "a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars" (*Rev.* 8.12).

Right in the middle of the visionary account of the conflict between Red Dragon and the Woman, there is inserted an account of the fight between the Dragon (now identified as, or with, Satan) and the Angel Michael:

And war broke out in Heaven. Michael and his Angels fought against Dragon. Dragon and his Angels fought back, but they were defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in Heaven.

Dragon the Great was thrown down, that Ancient Serpent, who is called DEVIL and Satan, the one deceiving the whole inhabited World – he was thrown down to the Earth, and his Angels were thrown down with him.

(Rev. 12.7-9)

It has been common to interpret the appellation “that Ancient Serpent” – literally, “the Serpent, the Ancient One” (*ho Ophis, ho Archaios*) – as referring to the Serpent of the Garden of Eden.

One reason for this identification has been the assumption that Satan was already identified with the Eden Serpent, and that everyone was thinking about the sin of Adam. However, as I have shown above, St. Paul is the only New Testament writer who makes a big deal, or any deal at all, out of Adam's sin, and even he doesn't implicate Satan in this sin.

Another reason for identifying the Red Dragon of the Apocalypse with the Eden Serpent has been the false inference that dragons and serpents were different genera or species of being. Not so, as we have seen: the Leviathan Dragon in the Septuagint is just as much a snake, *ophis*, as the upright garden-serpent of Genesis. And since there is as much difference between Great Red Dragon and the talking Eden Serpent as there is between a Great Dane and a Chihuahua, the odds are against the ID. Besides, the fate of the Eden Serpent was to go upon his belly and to eat dust all the days of his life (Gen. 3.14).

Another consideration is that this Ancient Serpent is said to deceive the whole *Oikumene*, the “lived-in” populated World, whereas the Eden Serpent went to work on Eve when she and Adam made up the entire Human population of the newly formed Earth. Of course, readers who identify the Red Dragon with the Eden Serpent understand “deceiving the whole World” to mean that Satan has deceived everyone in the World since the time of Adam. But the deception mentioned in John's vision has the look of referring to current activity. John may have in mind the activities of the Dragon and his Beastly colleagues after he comes down to Earth (more about this later).

Since Red Dragon now has Angels, we are perhaps to think of him as assuming a single-headed anthropomorphic Angelic form during his fight with Michael, just as the fallen Star Abaddon became a key-wielder as Angel of the Bottomless Abyss. The need to abandon the “portentous” fiction of Great Red Dragon for a fully anthropomorphic form is even stronger when the *semeion* is interrupted for a proclamation, which informs us about what DEVIL's day-job – and night-job – has been all these years, namely Chief Prosecutor in the Celestial Court. In other words, the same position he held in the Septuagint version of the Book of Job and the Book of Zechariah. Here is the text:

Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven, proclaiming:

“Now has come the salvation and the force [*dunamis*] and the kingdom of our God and the power [*exousia*] of His Christ. For the Accuser [*ho Kategor*] of our brothers has been thrown, the one accusing [*ho kategoron*] them day and night before our God. They have triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the Word to which they bore witness, because they did not prefer their life to death. So let the Heavens rejoice and all who live there.

“But woe to the Earth and sea, for DEVIL has come down to you with great anger, knowing that he has little time.”

(Rev. 12.10-12)

The passage that I put in bold type is the most important Biblical text in the whole history of Satan, in my view, because it decisively refutes the theory of a primeval Luciferian fall. Let me give some other translations. Here is the version of the N/B:

Now that the Accuser, who accused our brothers day and night before our God, has been brought down.

(N/B Rev. 12.10)

The NRSV makes it gender-inclusive, allowing for sisters as well as brothers:

For the Accuser of our comrades has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. (NRSV Rev. 12.10)

Is this notion, that Satan as the Heavenly accuser of the followers of Christ will be cast out of Heaven only after the shedding of the blood of Christian martyrs, some newly discovered meaning in the Bible, recently brought out by fresh translations? Not at all. Here is the King James Version (1611):

For the Accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. (KJV Rev. 12.10)

Let's go back further. Here is the Latin Vulgate version (ca. AD 400):

Quia projectus est Accusator fratrum nostrorum, qui accusabat illos ante conspectum Dei nostri die ac nocte. (LVB Rev. 12.10)

And here is the Douai version of 1582, which translates the Vulgate:

Because the Accuser of our brethren is cast forth, who accused them before the sight of our God day and night. (DR Rev. 12.10)

The facts are inescapable: Satan has remained in his position as Heavenly Accuser of Humans since the time of Job and Zechariah's vision. He has continued to exercise this function through the present and into the future, adding Christians ("our brothers") to his list of defendants. But eventually he will be ousted from his position.² The ouster is described in two ways. First, as the outcome of a battle between Michael and Satan in his serpentine guise. Second, as the outcome of a court-trial, in which the Accuser's charges are decisively refuted by two kinds of evidence: (A) the Blood of the Lamb; and (B) the testimony of witnesses (*marturoi*, "martyrs"), presumably the defendants themselves, the very "brothers" who were being accused. The

reference to the Blood of the Lamb might suggest that the victory took place at the time of the crucifixion of Christ. But there were as yet no testimonies of Martyrs. Just the opposite, in fact: the Gospels make it clear that none of the followers of Christ suffered with him. This, then, is decisive proof that Satan's defeat is taken as occurring in the future.

Still, it seems odd that the flow of the narrative about Dragon is interrupted. One solution that is popular with scholars is that verses 10-12 are a *redactional interpolation*, not by some later author, but by John himself.³ This means that after setting out the defeat of Dragon as coinciding with the death and resurrection of Jesus, John changed his mind and now specifies that the removal of Satan from Heaven would occur sometime after a significant number of Martyrs had suffered in the name of Christ. Paul can be seen to undergo a similar change of mind. In First Thessalonians Paul believed that the Lord would return during his own lifetime (1 Thess. 4.15-17). But in Second Thessalonians, written after Paul's death by someone pretending to be Paul, the delay in the Lord's coming is explained, as we have seen above (**chap. 5.1**): the Man of Lawlessness must first come (2 Thess. 2.2-3).

No matter how the text of Revelation finally was set and received, the result of the victory of the brothers is that Satan is totally discredited and removed from his official forensic position. All that is left to him is to continue his efforts on the terrestrial level to discredit and disqualify Humans from being accepted as virtuous and faithful servants of God.

But in spite of this clear proof that Satan's ouster from Heaven has not yet happened, most readers of the Bible eventually came to believe that the fight of Satan with Michael had not only already taken

² On Satan's contest with Michael as a forensic defeat and the termination of Satan's juridical appointment in the Heavenly Court, see G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: Black, 1966), pp. 152-57.

³ On the idea that Revelation 12.10-12 (specifying that Satan's removal from his post of Heavenly Accuser occurs only after he has made accusations against Christian Martyrs) is an interpolation by John himself, see David E. Aune, *Revelation*, 3 vols., Word Biblical Commentary series 52A-C (Nashville: Nelson, 1997-98), 2:702-03.

place, but actually took place before the beginning of time. Such is the power of "eisegetical prejudice," the ability to read what we wish into given texts.

After the account of Red Dragon's ouster from the sky is interrupted by the forensic account of the Accuser and his termination as Accuser, the story of the Draconic Satan is resumed. Having been thrown out of Heaven, he now persecutes the Church on Earth:

So when Dragon saw that he had been thrown down to Earth, he pursued the Woman who had given birth to the Man-Child. But the Woman was given the two wings of the great eagle, so that she could fly from the Serpent into the wilderness . . . Then from his mouth the Serpent poured water like a river after the Woman . . . But Earth came to the help of the Woman, for Earth opened her mouth and swallowed the river that Dragon had poured from his mouth. Then Dragon was angry with the Woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

(Rev. 12.13-17)

We note here that "Dragon" and "Serpent" are interchangeable. We also note that Dragon-Serpent has a great supply of water in him, perhaps reflecting Leviathan's original habitat.

In our chapter on St. Paul (**chap. 3.2**), we discussed whether St. Paul's reference to crushing the head of Satan (Rom. 16.20) referred to the prophecy of Genesis 3.15 about the relationship between the Serpent and Eve, and we have to ask the same question here about Dragon and the Woman. The connection has often been taken for granted. For one thing, the birth-pangs experienced by the Woman in the sky (Rev. 12.2) can easily be related to the curse upon Eve (Gen. 3.16). But Dragon's pursuit of her does not resemble the predicted stand-off between Human heel and serpentine head.

In the next installment of this visionary insight into the future, Dragon takes his stand on the sand of the seashore, and John sees

a Beast rising out of the sea that bears a suspicious resemblance to Dragon. He – let's call it a "he" because of its high status, even though the Greek for "beast," *therion*, is neuter – has ten horns and seven heads; but unlike Dragon he has ten crowns, one for each horn. There are no crowns on the heads themselves, but instead there are writings of blasphemous names. Oh, and one more thing: he's not a serpent. Rather, he has the overall look of a leopard, with bear's feet and a lion's mouth. Dragon bestows on him his own force (*dunamis*) and his throne and great power (*exousia*) (Rev. 13.1-2).

One of Beast's heads had been "wounded to death," but Death's blow has now healed, and all the people of the Earth marvel at Beast and prostrate themselves before Dragon, because Dragon has given his power to Beast. And they cry out, "Who is like Beast, and who can fight against him?" (Rev. 13.2-4).

In other words, we see here the Ancient Serpent in the process of "deceiving the whole World," with the help of his monster protégé, Beast-from-the-Sea. The question, "Who is like Beast?" is a parody of the name Michael, which means, "Who is like God?"

To make a long story short, all this business, together with the matter that follows, is an easily recognizable allegory of the Roman Empire and the cult of Emperor worship. I say "easily recognizable," but only in *globo*, not in its particulars. For instance, there is dispute over the identity of a second Beast who arises from the ground, having two horns like a lamb but the voice of a dragon, and the number of a man, namely 666 (Rev. 13.11-18). The favorite candidate for this Beast is the Emperor Nero, now reincarnated.

Some highlights of what follows: foul Spirits like frogs come from the mouths of Dragon and the two Beasts (the second one is called the False Prophet), who are assigned to assemble the Kings of the World for the battle at Armageddon (Rev. 16.13-16). John sees a Woman, named Babylon the Great, sitting on a familiar-looking beast, with seven heads and ten horns, and red – not fire-red this time, but scarlet. This Beast is about to ascend from the Bottomless Abyss and go to destruction (17.1-8).

Eventually, the Word (*Logos*) of God appears, a fierce warrior riding a white horse, like the destructive Word of God in the Book of Wisdom (Wis. 18.15–25, see **chap. 3.4** above), not like the silent and salvific Word of the beginning of John's Gospel. This Word of God comes with "the terrible swift sword" coming from his mouth: he "will trample out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored." In the ensuing battle, both the Beast-from-the-Sea (the Emperor?) and the Beast-from-the-Earth, or False Prophet (the local Roman magnate?) will be captured and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 19.11–20).

Then an Angel comes down from Heaven with a key to the Bottomless Abyss (it must be a different key from the one Abaddon has – and by the way, just where is Abaddon? He seems to have disappeared from the action). He also has a great chain, and he seizes Dragon, that Ancient Serpent, who is DEVIL and Satan. He throws him into the Abyss, where he must stay for a thousand years, so that he can no longer deceive the Nations. When the thousand years are up, Satan will be released to work his deceptions again and gather multitudinous forces (called Gog and Magog) for a great battle (Rev. 20.1–8).

The narrative suddenly switches to the past tense: "Fire came down from Heaven and consumed them [Gog and Magog], and DEVIL, who had deceived them, was thrown into the Lake of Fire where the Beast and the False Prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night through ages of ages" (Rev. 20.9–10).

Then comes the Last Judgment. John sees a great white Throne and the One who sits on it. Earth and Heaven flee from Him, and there is no longer any place for them. The dead stand before the Throne and are judged according to their recorded deeds. Sea then gives up her dead, and so do Death and Hades. We hear no more about Earth, Heaven, and Sea (later, we are told that they "passed away"), but Death and Hades are punished, being thrown into the Lake of Fire, along with all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life (Rev. 20.11–14).

This is all pretty weird stuff, which we can't take too literally (that way madness lies). It purports to be about the future, after all, and it is inspired by lots of similar literary visions, notably those of the Book of Daniel, but also many other apocalyptic fantasies.

But we can attempt to come up with some sound conclusions. One such conclusion is that falling from Heaven is not necessarily a sign of "evil," in the modern sense of radical moral badness. Take the example of the fallen Star who turns out to be Abaddon. He's definitely "A Bad 'Un," but he's bad only to those who deserve to be punished. He fits comfortably in the long line of authorized Destroying Angels, joined at the end of this book by the vengeful Word of God, in a guise similar to that of the Book of Wisdom.

But Satan in the Book of Revelation is clearly something else. Yes, he was originally authorized to be the official Accuser of Humankind in Heaven, and he still holds this position at the present time, at the point when John's visions begin. But he will go too far in his accusations, with the envisioned result that there will no longer be any place for him in Heaven.

Satan correctly anticipates having some time to operate on Earth, while being aware that the time will be short. He will be imprisoned in the Abyss for a thousand years, and will then be released for a short time to engage in his characteristic deceit and to marshal opposition to the virtuous. Then he will be punished for ever in the Lake of Fire, but that is also where wicked Human Beings wind up, as well as allegorical figures like Death and Hades and the Beast-from-the-Sea and the Beast-from-the-Earth.

6.3 ANOTHER JOHN, ANOTHER WORLD-VIEW: DEVIL AND ANTI-CHRISTS IN THE EPISTLES OF JOHN THE PRESBYTER

The three Epistles of John were written by a teacher in the Johannine tradition (that is, the tradition of the Gospel of John). He identifies himself as an Elder (*Presbyter*) of the community. "Prester John," as we may call him, wrote the First Epistle around the year 100. The