

The Cornered Serpent

“Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short” (Revelation 12:12, ESV).

Without getting caught up in the symbolism of Revelation and what all is going on in this entire chapter, I think we can learn some things about our enemy just from this statement. I know I’ve had misconceptions about Satan in the past and I appreciate those who have challenged those notions to see the truth about our enemy.

First, we need to recognize we face a real enemy. Satan is a real being who has interacted in history. While he is not a man in red with horns, a pointy tail, and a pitchfork, neither is he merely a symbolic construct that is supposed to represent all that is evil and bad. As Peter said in I Peter 5:8, our enemy prowls about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. He won his first battle in the garden against Eve and he continues to attack today. Be on guard; the someone he seeks to devour is you.

However, Satan is not the ruler of hell. In the past, I’ve seen Satan is the king of hell, governing and commanding. My view was that those who entered hell had to scrape and fawn before their master. That is simply not true. Satan is a defeated being. When he is ultimately cast into the fiery pit, he won’t go there as ruler to be served by minions. He will go there as prisoner to be punished along with those who have served him. In Revelation 20:10, John recorded that the devil “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” in the lake of fire. He won’t be king, president, or governor. He will be prisoner just like everyone else there.

Further, Satan is not dangerous because he is trying to win. Satan is dangerous because he knows he has lost. He knows his time is short. Envision an actual serpent cornered. How does it behave? It becomes vicious. It strikes and attacks with reckless abandon, not because it thinks it is going to win, but precisely because it is convinced it has lost. Its only recourse is assault. Perhaps there is some small hope that through such ferocity it can escape, but that is not the case with this serpent. John writes woe to the earth precisely because this serpent knows his time is short. He is cornered, with no escape. He knows he is going to be judged and imprisoned. He simply wants to do as much damage as possible in his remaining time. Therefore he strikes.

Please understand this. You can’t be a lieutenant in hell because you served Satan well. If you take his side of this great battle, you will be in torment just like he will be. Further, we don’t have to be afraid Satan’s vicious attacks means he has a chance of winning the battle. He doesn’t, and even he knows it. That is why his attacks are vicious.

We are facing a cornered serpent. Yes, that means he is dangerous. Let us not dismiss him. But neither let us be overwhelmed by him. Greater is He who is in us, than he who is in the world.