

The Dragon of Revelation

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INTRODUCTION: THE DRAGON IS an enigmatic character that shows up sporadically in the book of Revelation. Because Revelation is the only New Testament book that mentions the dragon, we need to consult the Old Testament for understanding. As usual, we have adhered to our principle of interpretation, letting Scripture interpret Scripture and not forcing our assumptions on the text. We will seek to show that “the dragon” is a symbol for destructive, terror-inducing human rulers. It is not the name of a spiritual being.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENT INFORMS OUR INQUIRY INTO THE DRAGON.

- A. The dragon in the Old Testament is Strong’s Hebrew word #8577, “tannin,” and occurs 27 times.
- B. “Tannin” is translated variously as dragon, serpent, great creature, and monster.
- C. Unfortunately, in newer translations, “tannin” is often translated “jackal,” which perhaps springs from embarrassment at the “unscientific” dragon reference. However, this mistranslation fails to convey the dread and danger that the word is meant to evoke.

2. “DRAGON” IS A REFERENCE TO LITERAL DANGEROUS, WILD CREATURES.

- A. “*God created the great sea creatures [dragons #8577] and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed*” (Gen 1:21).
- B. “*Praise Yahweh from the earth, you great sea creatures [dragons #8577] and all depths*” (Ps 148:7).
- C. “*Thorns will come up in its palaces, nettles and thistles... and it will be a habitation of dragons [#8577] . . .*” (Isa 34:13).
- D. “*I will make Jerusalem heaps, a dwelling place of dragons [#8577]. I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant*” (Jer 9:11).
- E. “*The voice of news, behold, it comes, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a dwelling place of dragons [#8577]*” (Jer 10:22).

3. “DRAGON” IS A METAPHOR FOR POWERFUL, CONQUERING RULERS.

A. The proud and mighty Pharaoh was a dragon: *“Behold, I [Yahweh] am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster [dragon #8577] that lies in the middle of his rivers, that has said, ‘My river is my own, and I have made it for myself’ (Ezek 29:3).*

B. As a powerful dragon, Pharaoh destroyed many nations: *“Take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt, and tell him, ‘You were likened to a young lion of the nations; yet you are as a monster [dragon #8577] in the seas. You broke out with your rivers, and troubled the waters with your feet, and fouled their rivers’” (Ezek 32:2).*

C. Nebuchadnezzar was a devouring, crushing, swallowing dragon: *“Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has devoured me [Jeremiah speaking for Judah]. He has crushed me. He has made me an empty vessel. He has, like a monster [dragon #8577], swallowed me up. He has filled his mouth with my delicacies. He has cast me out” (Jer 51:34).*

4. THE DRAGON POWERS ARE DEFEATED BY YAHWEH.

A. Pharaoh/his army was a dragon: *“You [Yahweh] divided the [Red] sea by your strength. You broke the heads of the sea monsters [dragons #8577] in the waters” (Ps 74:13).*

B. David’s enemy was a dragon: *“You [Yahweh] will tread on the lion and cobra; you will trample the fierce lion and the dragon [#8577] underfoot” (Ps 91:13).*

C. A proud nation was a dragon: *“In that day, Yahweh, with his hard and great and strong sword, will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan, the twisted serpent; and he will kill the dragon [#8577] that is in the sea” (Isa 27:1).*

D. Pharaoh/Egypt was a dragon: *“Awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Isn’t it you [Yahweh] who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster [dragon #8577]?” (Isa 51:9).*

5. THE DRAGON IS A HUMAN ROLE, NOT THE NAME OF A SPIRITUAL BEING.

Our study of the passages in #3 demonstrates that the dragon is a function or role and not the name of a spiritual being. With their ruthless, unbridled conquests, both the Egyptian Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, acted as dragons. The Scriptures in #4 further establish the use of the dragon as a symbol and assure us that it is Yahweh who subdues the fearful, overweening dragon powers.

6. TWO KEY REVELATION PASSAGES REGARDING THE DRAGON BROADEN OUR UNDERSTANDING.

A. *“The great dragon was thrown down, the old serpent, he who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world. He was thrown down to the land, and his messengers were thrown down with him”* (Rev 12:9).

B. *“He seized the dragon, the old serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years”* (Rev 20:2).

7. REVELATION 12 AND 20 REVEAL THAT THE DRAGON=SATAN=DEVIL=Serpent.

Because Rev 12:9 and 20:2 show the dragon, devil, Satan and old serpent (Genesis 3) to be synonymous, we have logical, contextual proof of the meaning of all these words. They are human roles, not names of spiritual beings. As fear-inspiring human rulers, both Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh were dragons. Now we can entertain the possibility that perhaps, when the word “dragon” is used in Revelation, it may pertain to the High Priest, the temple authorities, the Pharisees, the army and four angels in chapter 9, or the zealots, all of whom played the terrifying “dragon” role at some point. Logically, they would be suited for the role of the devil, the serpent and the Satan as well.

8. SATAN IS A HUMAN ROLE, NOT THE NAME OF A SPIRITUAL BEING.

A. **Peter was Satan:** *“But he [Jesus]...rebuked Peter, and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you have in mind not the things of God, but the things of men”* (Mark 8:33).

B. **Judas was Satan:** *“Satan entered into Judas, who was also called Iscariot, who was counted with the twelve”* (Luke 22:3).

C. **Unbelieving Jews were Satan:** *“Behold, I make some of the synagogue of Satan, of those who say they are Jews, and they are not, but lie...”* (Rev 3:9).

9. THE DEVIL IS A HUMAN ROLE, NOT THE NAME OF A SPIRITUAL BEING.

A. **Persecuting Jews were devils:** *“Don’t be afraid of the things which you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil [diabolos #1228] is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested; and you will have oppression for ten days. Be faithful to death, and I will give you the crown of life”* (Rev 2:10).

B. **Women were warned not to be devils:** *“Older women likewise are to exhibit behavior fitting for those who are holy, not slanderous [diabolos #1228]”* (Titus 2:3).

C. **Judas was a devil:** *“Jesus said, ‘Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil [diabolos #1228]?’”* (John 6:70).

D. **Note:** Diabolos means slanderous, an adjective, but is used as a noun, similar to “the wicked.”

10. THE SERPENT IS A HUMAN ROLE, NOT THE NAME OF A SPIRITUAL BEING.

A. Israel deteriorated into serpents: *“Their wine is the poison of serpents, the cruel venom of asps”* (Deut 32:33).

B. David’s enemies were serpents: *“Rescue me, O Yahweh, from the evil man; from the man of violence guard me . . . They sharpen their tongues like a snake; the venom of a viper is under their lips”* (Ps 140:1-3).

C. The Pharisees and Sadducees were serpents: *“When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, ‘You offspring of vipers...’”* (Matt 3:7).

D. The Pharisees were serpents: *“You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks”* (Matt 12:34).

E. The scribes and Pharisees were serpents: *“You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?”* (Matt 23:33).

11. WE MIGHT FRAME THESE FOUR HUMAN ROLES THUS:

A. The dragon is the spirit of tyranny, using force and violence to gain and maintain power.

B. The Satan is the spirit of material man who does not have in mind the things of God.

C. The devil is the spirit that accuses falsely.

D. The serpent is the obsequious, treacherous spirit of the deliberate deceiver.

E. These all interpenetrate and are under the broad class of the spirit of anti-Christ.

12. CLOSING THOUGHTS: THE FALSE CONCEPT OF “SATAN” DISTORTS THE MESSAGE OF THE BIBLE.

A. The dragon is not a spiritual entity: The dragon of Revelation is most often interpreted by commentators as Satan, the cosmic enemy of Yahweh. This excludes the clear teachings of the Tanakh—that the dragon represents despotic powers, like Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. Secondly, “satan,” which means adversary, refers to human enemies and has nothing to do with a cosmic enemy of Yahweh (see item #8 above).

B. Satan is a common noun: The word “satan,” rightly understood, means “adversary.” Otherwise, the angel of the Lord in Numbers 22:22 was the supernatural enemy of God along with Peter in Mark 8:33.

C. Listen to Yahweh: *“The inclination of the heart of man [not Satan] is evil from his youth”* (Gen 8:21).

D. Listen to Jeremiah: *“The heart [not Satan] is deceitful above all things and it is exceedingly corrupt”* (Jer 17:9).

E. Listen to Jesus: *“Out of the heart [not from Satan] comes evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimony, and blasphemies”* (Matt 15:19).

F. Young’s highly respected Literal Translation of the Bible does not contain the word “Satan” anywhere in it. ☩

This study is taken from Preterist Paper 93: The Dragon of Revelation (<https://preteristpapers.com/93-the-dragon-of-revelation/>).

Additional Studies about “Satan” at www.preteristpapers.com

P.P. #59 Serpent in the Garden Was Not Satan

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P.P. #61 Problems with the Word “Satan” in the New Testament

P.P. #62 “Satan” in Job

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P.P. #66 “Ruler of this World” is not Satan

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By Duncan Heaster

“The Real Devil” (book available at <https://heaster.org/rd.pdf>). Not available in print.