

Revelation

Escape the Coming Wrath!

Lesson 12

Chapter 12

War in Heaven!

1. Read verses 1-6.

Revelation 12-13 introduces us to the three key characters in the drama of the last half of the Tribulation: Satan the dragon, the false Christ, and the false prophet. These three are, in a sense, an evil trinity, opposing the true God and His people on earth. While these events will be of special significance to God's people at that time, the message of these two chapters can encourage suffering saints during any age.

Satan is the great enemy of the church, and he fights against God and His people by accusing the saints in heaven and attacking them on earth. However, Christ has overcome the old serpent, and He gives victory to His people.

The adversary always works through human means, in this case, "the beast" (false Christ or Antichrist) and the false prophet. Satan is an imitator, a counterfeiter; and he seeks to control men by means of deception. "The beast" is the future world dictator who promises to solve the pressing problems of the nations; the false prophet is his "propaganda minister." For a time, it appears that the satanic trio is succeeding; but then their world empire begins to collapse, the nations assemble for one final battle, Jesus Christ appears, and the battle is over.

Has this not been the pattern for the church's conflict with evil over the centuries? Whether the ruler has been a Caesar, a Hitler, a Stalin, or an agnostic humanist, Satan has energized and motivated him. The ruler has promised the people all that they want and need, only to lead them into slavery. He has usually had an associate to promote his program to the people and to entice them, if not force them, to obey. Often their submission amounted almost to worship.

God has permitted His people to suffer under the despotism of these rulers, but He has also enabled His people to experience great victories, even in martyrdom. They have been true overcomers! Then He has brought deliverance, only to have the cycle repeat itself, with each succeeding dictatorship worse than the previous one. The climax will come with the appearance of the Antichrist in his time (II Thess. 2).¹

- (a) What sign appeared in heaven? What does this woman symbolize (Jeremiah 3:20; Hosea 2:1-2; Micah 4:10; 5:2-3)?

That the woman was clothed with the sun reflects redeemed Israel's unique glory, brilliance, and dignity because of her exalted status as God's chosen nation (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; I Kings 3:8; Pss. 33:12; 106:5; Isa. 43:20)...The reference to the moon under

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1989), 601-602.

her feet may be a further description of Israel's exalted status. It could also include the concept of God's covenantal relationship with Israel, since the moon was part of the cycle of Israel's required times of worship (cf. Num. 29:5-6; Neh. 10:33; Ps. 81:3; Isa. 1:13-14; Col. 2:16). The crown (*stephanos*; the crown associated with triumph in the midst of suffering and struggle) of twelve stars...on the woman's head refers to the twelve tribes of Israel.²

- (b) According to verse 2, in what condition was this "woman?"
- (c) Read Genesis 3:15. [Challenge question] Explain the prophecy in this verse (cf. Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 1:26-38)? [Hint: the offspring of the woman would be the Messiah.]
- (d) What other sign does John see appear in heaven and who does this "dragon" represent (verse 9)? Why do you think John uses the word, dragon?

The dragon is further described as having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems (crowns). He is depicted as a seven-headed monster that rules the world. Satan has been allowed by God to rule the world since the Fall and will continue to do so until the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15). The seven heads with their seven diadems (*diadema*; royal crowns symbolizing power and authority) represent seven consecutive world empires running their course under Satan's dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist's future empire (17:9-10). The final kingdom, ruled by Antichrist, will be a ten-nation confederacy; the ten horns represent the kings who will rule under Antichrist (17:12; cf. 13:1; Dan. 7:23-25). The shifting of the diadems from the dragon's heads to the beast's horns (13:1) reveals the shift in power from the seven consecutive world empires to the ten kings under the final Antichrist.³

- (e) The fall of Satan. Read Isaiah 14:12-15 and Ezekiel 28:12-17. Verse 4 states, "His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth." What do you think happened in this verse and when do you think it happened (verse 9)?

The Bible warns that "pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Prov. 16:18). The most notorious and tragic illustration of that principle, the one with the most far-reaching consequences, was Satan's prideful rebellion against God. By it Lucifer, having fallen from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18), was cast down from his exalted position as the "anointed cherub who covers" (Ezek. 28:14). He forfeited his place as the highest created being and became the supreme enemy of God.

² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Revelation 12-22* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 2000), 5.

³ *Ibid.* 7.

Satan's rebellion touched off a cosmic war throughout the universe—a war dwarfing any other war in human experience. Satan's war against God is a two-front war. By leading a mutiny against God among the angels, Satan attempted unsuccessfully to destroy the paradise of heaven. By leading a mutiny against God among men, Satan destroyed the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden, plunged the whole human race into decay and corruption, and usurped (temporarily) the role of the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11).

The opening campaign of Satan's war of the ages took place in heaven. When he rebelled (Isa. 14:12-15; Ezek. 28:12-17), one-third of the angels foolishly and wickedly cast their lots with him. None of them could have known what the eternal consequences of their choice would be. Wanting to be like God, they became as much unlike Him as possible. These fallen angels (or demons) became Satan's storm troopers, doing the bidding of their evil commander. They fight against divine purpose, making war with both the holy angels and the human race.

When Adam and Eve plummeted into corruption by choosing to listen to Satan's lies and disobey God, the human race became embroiled in the cosmic war of the ages. In fact, since the Fall the earth has been the primary theater in which that war has been fought. Though already fallen, every member of the human race faces the same choice as the angels did in eternity past: to fight on God's side or on Satan's. Remaining neutral is not an option, for in Matthew 12:30 Jesus declared, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

The final battles of Satan's long war against God are yet to be fought. They will take place in the future, during the last half of the seven-year tribulation period, the time Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). At that time Satan, aided by the absence of the raptured church and the presence of increased demon hordes (9:1-11), will mount his most desperate assaults against God's purposes and His people. but despite the savage fury with which those assaults will be carried out, they will not succeed. The Lord Jesus Christ will effortlessly crush Satan and his forces (19:11-21) and send him to the abyss for the duration of the millennial kingdom (20:1-2). After leading a final rebellion at the close of the Millennium, Satan will be consigned to eternal punishment in the lake of fire (20:3, 7-10).

The sounding of the seventh trumpet will proclaim the triumphant victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over the usurper, Satan: “Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever’” (11:15). There will be joy in heaven because Christ has defeated Satan and established His eternal kingdom. Thus, the outcome of the war between Satan and God is not in doubt. Christ's ultimate triumph is certain.

Though chapter 11 records the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the effects it produces are not described until chapters 15-18. the seventh trumpet will sound near the end of the Tribulation, launching the brief, but final and devastating bowl judgments just before Christ's return in power and glory. Chapters 6-11 describe the events of the Tribulation up to the sounding of the seventh trumpet; chapters 12-14 recapitulate that same period, describing events from Satan's vantage point. In addition, the latter section

takes the reader all the way back to the original rebellion of Satan (12:3-4). The chronological narrative of the Tribulation events then resumes in chapter 15.

The Tribulation will feature both the unprecedented judgments of God's eschatological wrath and the desperate fury of Satan's efforts to thwart God's purposes. That deadly combination will make the Tribulation the most devastating period in human history (Matt. 24:21-22). During that time, horrifying events will take place, caused both by God's judgments and Satan's fury.⁴

- (f) In verse 4, John writes, "The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born." This verse is symbolic of Satan's main goal. What has been that goal since creation?

- (g) Read Exodus 1; I Samuel 18:10-11 [It was prophesied that the Messiah would come from the line of David]; Matthew 2:13-16; and Luke 4:28-30. List some of Satan's attempts to destroy God's plan of redemption for the world.

- (h) Read verse 5. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. When will he rule with an iron scepter (Psalm 2:7-9; Revelation 19:11-16)?

In spite of all of Satan's relentless efforts to prevent it, the woman (Israel) gave birth to a son. The incarnation of the male child, the Lord Jesus Christ, "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3; cf. Rom. 9:5), was the fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:2). Israel brought forth the Messiah. The Bible emphasized that Jesus was of Jewish lineage. He was a son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), a member of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2; Rev. 5:5), and a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1; cf. II Sam. 7:12-16).⁵

- (i) John writes, "And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne." To what event does this refer (Matthew 17:23; Acts 1:9; 2:24; Philippians 2:9)?

- (j) Read Colossians 2:15. When did Jesus defeat Satan?

⁴ Ibid. 1-3.

⁵ Ibid. 11.

But though he is a defeated foe, Satan will not give up. Unable to stop Christ's birth, ascension, or rule, Satan still assaults His people. He has already instigated the genocidal massacre of Jews in Europe, as well as the death of countless thousands throughout history. During the Tribulation, Satan will increase his efforts to destroy the Jewish people, so that the nation cannot be saved as the Bible promises (Zech. 12:10-13:1; Rom. 11:25-27). And so that there will be none left alive to enter the millennial kingdom, he will seek to kill believing Jews. As always, Israel will be his prime target. IN a brief glimpse of what will be described more fully in verses 13-17, John noted the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days (cf. v. 14). God will frustrated Satan's attempt to destroy Israel during the Tribulation by hiding His people, just as the Lord Jesus Christ predicted (Matt. 24:15-21).

Antichrist's desecration of the temple will send the Jewish people fleeing into the wilderness. The exact location where God will hide them is not revealed, but it probably somewhere east of the Jordan River and south of the Dead Sea, in the territory formerly occupied by Moab, Ammon, and Edom (cf. Dan. 11:40-41). Wherever their hiding place will be, they will be nourished and defended by God (cf. vv. 14-16), just as their ancestors were during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. The length of Israel's stay in hiding, one thousand two hundred and sixty days (three and half years; cf. 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:5) corresponds to the last half of the Tribulation, the period Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). Those Jews who remain behind in Jerusalem will come under the influence of the two witnesses, and many in that city will be redeemed (11:13). Eventually, in spite of Satan's efforts, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26).⁶

- (k) Read Psalm 91. Have you felt the attacks of the enemy recently (Ephesians 6:12)? How so? Where should you flee when you sense the attacks of Satan?

2. Read verses 7-12.

- (a) An future epoch war is described in verses 7-9. Describe what John sees taking place.

- (b) What do you think will cause this battle to be fought?

Michael and the dragon (Satan) have known each other since they were created, and the battle during the Tribulation will not be the first time they have opposed each other. Michael is always seen in Scripture as the defender of God's people against satanic destruction...

The New Testament also reveals Michael to be the defender of God's people...

Significantly, Jude 9 describes Michael as an archangel...

⁶ Ibid. 11-12.

All of Satan's attempts to oppose God throughout history have failed, and he will lose this final angelic battle as well. The devil and his angels are not strong enough to defeat God, Michael, and the holy angels. Satan will suffer such a complete defeat that there will no longer be a place found for him and his demon hosts in heaven. Every inch of heaven, as it were, will be thoroughly scoured and all the rebellious angels permanently cast out. They will no longer have access to God's presence, and Satan will never again accuse believers before God's throne. This defeat will also mark the end of Satan's reign as "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2)

But Heaven's cleansing is earth's pollution, as Satan's full fury explodes on humanity when he is cast to the earth (cf. 12:12). At exactly what point in the Tribulation Satan and the demons will be evicted from heaven is not revealed, nor is the duration of their battle with Michael and the holy angels....During that last period, Satan's full power will be directed at anyone belonging to God, especially, Israel.⁷

- (c) Read II Corinthians 4:4 along with verse 9. What has been Satan's objective with mankind from the beginning?
- (d) With the casting of Satan out of heaven, what breaks out in heaven?
- (e) According to verse 11, how does a believer overcome Satan? Explain each.
- (f) John states, "Woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you!" Why is Satan full of fury at this point during the tribulation?

John Phillips wrote, "Satan is now like a caged lion, enraged beyond words by the limitations now placed upon his freedom. He picks himself up from the dust of the earth, shakes his fist at the sky, and glares around, choking with fury for ways to vent his hatred and his spite upon humankind" (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 160).

- (g) Today, as you observe world events, do you sense that time is short?

3. Read verses 13-17.

One of the darkest stains on the history of mankind has been the persistent specter of anti-Semitism. Over the centuries the Jews have faced more hatred and persecution than any other people...

Israel faces constant threats from her neighbors during the periods of the judges and of the kings...

⁷ Ibid. 17-18.

In postbiblical times the story has, tragically, been much the same. The history of the Jewish people for the last two thousand years is a sad litany of prejudice, persecution, and pogroms...

In the Holocaust ...when the Nazis sought to implement their “final solution” to the “Jewish problem,” 6 million Jews—more than half the Jewish population of Europe—were slaughtered...

The Tribulation will be the worst of times for Israel for two reasons. During that seven-year period God will pour out His final fury on the unrepentant and unbelieving world (including the unrepentant rebels of Israel). At that time Satan will make his last, desperate attempt to prevent the promised reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on Israel’s throne and thus negate the salvation and kingdom promised to Israel. He will savagely assault the Jewish people, seeking to destroy both those Jews who have already come to faith in Christ, and those who still might. The devil will also do everything in his power to hinder the ministries of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:4) and the two witnesses (11:3-14).

But Satan’s efforts will not succeed. His worst fears will be realized when the Jews “look on [the One] whom they have pierced; and mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and ...weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). The believing remnant of Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25-29), and their promised kingdom will be established (cf. Hos. 2:14-23).⁸

- (a) According to verse 13, who will Satan pursue when he is cast out of heaven permanently?

- (b) What will the woman [Israel] be given in order to flee Satan?

- (c) Read Deuteronomy 32:9-11. What do you think the “two wings of a great eagle” represent?

- (d) How long will God protect these Jews in the desert?

- (e) Since they will be out of Satan’s reach, what will he do next in attempt to destroy them?

- (f) Read II Samuel 22:17; Job 27:20; Psalm 32:6; 69:1-2; and, Isaiah 43:2; cf. Jeremiah 47:2; Daniel 11:25-26. What do you think this “water like a river” might represent?

- (g) In verse 16, God supernaturally comes to the aid of His children, Israel. Then, who does Satan go after?

- (h) Having read this chapter and knowing that believers are the enemy of Satan, to whom should we flee (Psalm 91)?

- (i) If studying Revelation puts fear in you what should you do according to Philippians 4:6-7?

- (j) Have you placed your undivided trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?