

13. War in Heaven and on Earth

Revelation 12

We come now to a difficult chapter that sets forth the unleashing of evil upon the earth that surpasses anything ever witnessed in history (Matthew 24:21). As we have seen before in our study of the Book of Revelation, the things that John the Apostle conveys in telling his vision are not all in sequential order. If you were watching the Book of Revelation as a motion picture film in the order that John wrote it, you would see sweeping previews and times in the story when you would have flashbacks and then move forward again. Added to this are many instances of symbolism and imagery.

After studying the two witnesses' ministry in our previous study in chapter eleven, the chapter closed with the seventh trumpet (11:15). The seven bowls of wrath at the seventh trumpet's blowing are revealed to us in chapter sixteen. In chapter twelve, verses 1-6, the Spirit of God shows the big picture view of what has been taking place on earth over centuries. God's desire is for His Church to understand the underlying cause of the war in heaven and earth revealed in chapters twelve through fourteen. Often in life, we cannot see the wood because we are so close to the trees, in the same way, we need to step back to take in the whole scene as the Holy Spirit gives us in symbolic picture language nations and individuals in broad brushstrokes of history.

Verses 1-6 is an overview of the unseen spiritual war between God and the forces of darkness in the world, i.e., a war for all of humanity. Simultaneously, we see two significant conflicts, one in heaven and one on earth. This theme runs from 12:1 to 14:5, focusing our attention on Antichrist's war against the people of God in the last seven years before the end of the age.

One of the things that make the Book of Revelation challenging to interpret is the use of symbolism in referencing different individuals through history. Here is where we must look closely at the Scriptures to find the meaning of these symbols. In verse 1, we read of a great sign in heaven. The Greek word, *sēmeion*, translated in verse 1 with the word *sign*, carries the thought of a mark or symbol pointing to something beyond the picture. Let's try and understand what the Holy Spirit wants to show us.

The Woman and the Dragon

¹A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ²She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. ³Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. ⁴Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. ⁵She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. ⁶The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days (Revelation 12:1-6).

Contrary to popular belief, Satan is not yet a resident of hell; in fact, the Bible says that he pursues his kingdom's objectives like a prosecuting attorney before the bar of heaven, where he daily accuses the saints of God. He is not called “the accuser of our brothers and sisters” for nothing (Revelation 12:10). He is also called “the ruler of this world” (John 14:30; John 12:31-33), and in another place, “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). In the Book of Job, we see him accusing Job twice before God (Job 2:1-6); this is also the case in Zechariah 3:1-2, where Joshua, the high priest, is being accused by Satan. This positional authority Satan has leads us to a big question we must look at before we can move on:

How did Satan get this authority to stand in heaven and accuse us before God?

The devil gained authority over the earth by his deception of Adam and Eve and their giving allegiance to Satan by their obedience to him. You may ask, “how did mankind end up in this situation?” Paul wrote about the principle of servitude in this way, “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (Romans 6:16). In the beginning, Mankind was given the responsibility to rule over all that God had made:

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:26-28 Emphasis mine).

The Hebrew word, *radah*, translated with our English word “rule,” means to “rule over or subdue.”¹ God gave responsibility and authority over all of creation to Adam and his descendants. This thought of humankind given responsibility is also brought out in Genesis 2:15: “Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” The Hebrew word, *shamar*, translated with the English words “take care of,” means: “to keep, guard, protect and preserve, as a watchman cares for his cattle or sheep.” Our forefather, Adam, gave away humanity's right and dominion to rule into the hands of Satan in the Fall. Humanity became dominated by the devil there in the Garden of Eden. Satan, with impunity, could say to Christ at the temptation in the wilderness, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to” (Luke 4:6). Satan was not offering Jesus something that he did not have. Christ came to buy us out from Satan's dominion: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work” (1 John 3:8).

Let’s look first of all at the main character symbols that we are given in this chapter:

The Woman clothed with the sun (v. 1) and the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars is a picture of the faithful from the nation of Israel. Nations and cities are often referred to in the female gender. For instance, in America, when we sing the song, *God bless America*, we sing:

¹ Key Word Study Bible. AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, page 1550.

“stand beside her, and guide her.” The woman is not just the nation of Israel, but the Messianic community whose heart is for the glory of the God of Israel, *viz.* those whose desire is for their Messiah to take the reins of the nation and entirely rule in righteousness. Just as her God “**wraps himself in light as with a garment**” (Psalm 104:2), in the same manner, is the Messianic community of Israel clothed with the sun. The twelve stars may represent the twelve sons of Israel.

The Enormous Red Dragon with seven heads and ten horns symbolizes our enemy, Satan (v. 9), the arch deceiver and fallen angel who is determined to corrupt and try to destroy anything that God is doing. Why are there ten horns on the dragon? We believe that, in the seventieth week of Daniel, i.e., the seven-year period, the world under the Antichrist's leadership will be represented as ten trading blocs as the Club of Rome in 1973 proposed in its report, *Regionalized and Adaptive Model of the Global World System*.² Hence, the ten horns of verse 3. The ten regions are also typified by the ten toes of the last vestiges of ruling empires that dominated Israel, as shown in Daniel 2:40-45. Satan's tail sweeping a third of the stars and flinging them to earth may represent those angels that joined Satan in his rebellion against God and are active today in the unseen realm to influence humanity to turn incrementally to demonic spirits.

The Male Child—the Ruler. This is a picture of the Redeemer and Messiah Jesus in his earthly birth as a man, representing man and dying as a sinless substitute in place of sinful humanity. It is He Who is destined to “**rule all the nations with an iron scepter**” (v. 5). The dragon standing before the woman and trying to destroy the male child speaks of the many attempts to kill the Messiah even from His birth. When three wise men from the East came to Rome's client king Herod, asking about the One born to be King of the Jews (Matthew 2:1-2), that statement did not go down well with Herod. After all, the title King of the Jews was the title he had managed to get from Caesar Augustus. The evil spirit within Herod immediately planned to kill Jesus from His birth. Herod sent his soldiers to murder all boys under three years of age in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:16-18).

Satan's desire for his kingdom on earth not to be uprooted has resulted in many attempts to hinder the birth of the Messiah King, e.g., think in terms of Pharaoh's trying to kill all males in Egypt (Exodus 1:15-22). Then, Haman's plot was also to wipe out the Jewish nation before the birth of the Messiah (Esther 3). Even after Christ's substitutionary death on the cross and ascension to heaven, the enemy plotted to wipe out the Jewish people in various pogroms in Russia, Spain, and Hitler's murder of six million in Europe during the Second World War in the hope of frustrating God's plan of redemption to bring to Himself a remnant of Jewish believers as well as a multitude of Gentiles brought into the Covenant of God. At every attempt to kill Christ by Satan, the Lord Jesus was victorious and fulfilled His mission of paying the redemption price on the cross for all who trust Him. He then was caught up to heaven (v. 5). The picture symbol of the Woman, the Dragon, and the Man Child reminds believers down through the 2,000 years since the Book of Revelation was written that we are in a spiritual battle with an unseen evil at work in the world of men.

² http://www.churcharise.org/articles/one_world_government.pdf

In verse seven, the broad sweep of history now changes to focus on Satan's attempt to destroy the Messianic community in the second half of the seven-year period, the 1260 days. Still, she is fully protected and taken care of by her God (v. 6).

The War in Heaven

⁷Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ¹⁰Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹²Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (Revelation 12:7-12).

In this passage, we are introduced to the Archangel Michael and the angels with him. The scene is of a war in heaven where the Archangel Michael, “the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people will arise” (Dan 12:1). Jude 9 calls Michael an archangel, a chief angel, and Daniel calls him a chief prince (Dan 10:13). The passage speaks of a war between Satan and his dark angels and Michael and the angels that fight with him. The dragon, Satan, loses this battle, and he and his forces are thrown down from heaven with the effect that he can no longer accuse God's people before the heavenly bar.

Satan and his dark angels can no longer accuse the saints before God, and they are thrown down to the earth (v. 9). How do you think this will affect the spiritual and earthly battle? What will this mean for all true believers?

This writer believes this war in heaven takes place before the last half of the seven-year period begins. When Satan is thrown down, he takes possession of the Antichrist just as he did with Judas: “Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot” (Luke 22:3). Satan, “who leads the whole world astray” (v. 9), continues his war of deception on the majority of earth's population. This point is where we read elsewhere of great tribulation (Matthew 24:21) breaking out worldwide, beginning at Jerusalem when the Antichrist takes his seat in the temple of God and proclaims himself as God (2 Thessalonians 2:4). This time is not the wrath of God, as some think; the Scripture says that it is Satan's wrath (v. 12).

This war for the souls of men has been going on for centuries. Under Satan's dominion, the whole world system is a construct of evil spiritual forces designed by intellects much more intelligent than our human minds can fathom. The world system was what John warned his readers not to love: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them” (1 John 2:15). These dark spiritual entities have been weaving cultures and rulers to try to wipe out humanity's belief in a creator God who loves His greatest

creation—Mankind. We must see the events in history that lead up to this point through the lens of God's story. Our education and differing cultural influences can blind us to the spiritual battle raging for millennia the world over. There are evil spirits at work in influential positions all over the world, and we will know them by the fruit of their lives, i.e., what they do as well as what they say. Here's how the Apostle John put it:

²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world (1 John 4:2-3).

John writes of the victory of God's people over the dark forces allied against them. "They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Revelation 12:11).

What does the triumph of the saints look like to you? What two weapons of spiritual warfare do they use in this triumph? (v. 11). How does that play out in practical ways in daily living?

The War on Earth

¹³When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. ¹⁵Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. ¹⁶But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. ¹⁷Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus (Revelation 12:13-17).

John, the Apostle, writes about the dragon's attack upon the woman, pursuing her into the wilderness. Perhaps, this passage coincides with the Antichrist desecrating the newly-built temple of God and proclaiming himself as God at the mid-point of the seven-year period (2 Thessalonians 2:4, Matthew 24:15-16, Mark 13:14). Jesus warned those in Jerusalem that they should flee from the city at that time, for then there will be great tribulation. As we read in our previous study, the army of the Antichrist will seize the city of Jerusalem: "They will trample on the holy city for 42 months" (Revelation 11:1-2). This wrath against believers in Christ is, perhaps, why the Antichrist's pursuit of the Woman, i.e., the Messianic community of Israel, in their departure from Judea and Jerusalem into the wilderness.

When the dragon finds himself on earth and comes to the realization that he can no longer legally accuse and weaken God's people in the heavenly realms, he tries an attack on those living for the Lord among the tribes of Israel, the Woman. Verse fourteen says that this period lasts for a time, times, and half a time—a time being one year, times being double that amount, and half a time being half a year—three and a half years, forty-two months, or 1260 days. We read that the

woman was given the two wings of a great eagle that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness. This writer does not believe that we will see a great literal eagle flying overhead protecting the Woman, as in the movie *“Lord of the Rings.”* Again, this is a picture language promise to remind the Israelite people of how God powerfully protected the children of Israel when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (Exodus 19:4).

¹⁰In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, **“like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them aloft (Deuteronomy 32:10-11).”**

Those who flee from Jerusalem **“shall mount up with wings like eagles”** (Isaiah 40:31). The Antichrist is just a tool of Satan from that point on; he will pour out a flood against the Messianic community (vv. 15-16). How do we interpret what is going on at this stage? A flood is a common metaphor for a tide of ungodliness and evil: **“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him”** (Isaiah 59:19). When the Antichrist realizes that God is watching over and protecting the Messianic community of Israel, he will turn his attention **“to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God’s commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus”** (v. 17).

I take it that the rest of the woman’s offspring are the Gentile believers all over the world who will be persecuted, and some, perhaps many, will be beheaded during the great tribulation (Revelation 20:4). It will be eternity’s badge of honor to not bow down to Antichrist’s image.

Paul writes that all believing Gentiles (non-Jews) are grafted into the New Covenant tree of faith (Romans 11:17-24). The Jewish believers are our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Without their early depth of dedication to evangelism, the Gospel would never have crossed over from the Jewish culture into the Gentile world of all nations. When the enemy sees that he cannot destroy the Jewish Messianic community, he will turn his attention to an all-out war against their brethren, those whom the Lord has called to Himself: **“those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters”** (Hebrews 2:11), i.e., believers in Christ worldwide.

This war against believers in Christ is what Jesus referred to as the Great Tribulation that starts at the desecration of the temple. The wrath of Satan characterizes this war against the saints of God. He is enraged (v. 17) at all those who hold to the God of Israel. The second half of the seven-year period is not God's wrath but Satan's wrath against the Church. A war that the Body of Christ will win by not going along with worshiping the Antichrist and choosing a better resurrection in that they **“did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).**

What can we learn about the promises of God and God’s character from these verses? What do you think God will do for His people during this time?

You have probably heard many people talk about the Book of Acts as if it were a "golden age" of the Church. Many firm believers long to experience that type of community in the Church, to see the miraculous they did, and to experience the level of reality and power in the Holy Spirit! The Book of Acts records that “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). Brothers and sisters, if this were the case back in the days of the early Church while suffering persecution, how much more will God arise and pour out His great grace and power on His people in the last days? God's grace in great measure will be there for us at precisely the time that we need it. Isaiah 60:2 tells us that the Lord will rise upon us and that His glory will be seen upon us. Just as God has watched over His people, Israel, and fulfilled His promises to her as a nation, we, as His children, will see His promises to us fulfilled. The subject of the Antichrist and his warfare against the Church is the focus of chapter 13 of the Book of Revelation, which we will look at in our next study.

Before closing this study, let's think of the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples when they asked Him how they should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Matthew 6:9-13).

Addendum. To see a chart of events that take place before Christ sets up His Kingdom, click the following link: [https://prewrathresources.wordpress.com/free-pre-wrath-charts/#jp-carousel-430.](https://prewrathresources.wordpress.com/free-pre-wrath-charts/#jp-carousel-430))

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