

***A Prelude to War
Revelation 12:1-6
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INTRODUCTION

1. This morning I want to invite you to take you Bibles and turn with me to Revelation chapter 12.
2. In our last study of the book of Revelation we looked at the sounding of the 7th trumpet found in chapter 11:15-19.
3. This was the third “woe” mentioned in Revelation 8:13.
4. If you remember there was a voice of a flying eagle that said, “Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”
5. The first “woe” occurred in chapter 9:1-12 with the sounding of the 5th trumpet.
6. The second “woe” occurred in chapter 9:13 with the sounding of the 6th trumpet.
7. The third “woe” occurred in chapter 11:15 with the sounding of the 7th trumpet.
8. Just as there was a digression before the blowing of the 7th trumpet in chapters 10 and 11 with the little scroll and the two witnesses, now see another digression in chapters 12-14.
9. We will not see the actual pouring out of the 7th trumpet until we get to chapter 16.

10. As Leon Morris says, “One again John has brought us to the verge of final judgment and once again he breaks off to unfold further teaching in a new series of visions.”
11. So in chapter 11:15-19, John introduces the 7th trumpet and now in chapters 12-14 he digresses to pick up more of the details that unfold during the Day of the Lord.
12. Here in chapter 12 we see in vv.1-6 *a prelude to the war of the ages*.
13. John tells us that he sees two signs in heaven.
14. Let’s read chapter 12 beginning at verse 1.

I. The Signs in Heaven (vv.1-6)

The first thing John saw in this vision was “a great sign” – the first of seven signs in the last half of Revelation.

The first two signs appear in verses 1-6. The third sign appears in 13:13 which refers to the signs performed by the false prophet. The fourth sign appears in 15:1 which is the “seven angels having the seven last plagues.” Then in 16:14 we see “three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” The final sign is found in 19:20 which has reference to the false prophet who “worked signs in his presence,” that is, the presence of the beast or Antichrist.

The first sign John refers to is mega, “great.” Everything John saw seemed to be huge either in size or in significance.

John saw a “great,” “enormous,” “huge,” “significant” sign.

“Sign” Gr. semeion, “describes a symbol that points to a reality” (MacArthur).

The “great, enormous, huge, significant” “symbol” that John saw was:

A. The Woman (vv.1-2)

1. Her identity (v.1a)

- a) This is a symbolic reference not an actual woman

- b) According to verse 17 the phrase “the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Christ” shows that this woman is a symbolic mother
- c) The “woman” is the second of four symbolic women identified in Revelation
 - (1) The first, though an actual woman, had the symbolic name Jezebel (2:20 - Church of Thyatira). She was a false teacher and symbolizes paganism.
 - (2) In 17:1-7 there is another symbolic woman who is depicted as a harlot. She represents the apostate church.
 - (3) The fourth woman, described in 19:7-8 as the bride of the Lamb (cf. 2 Cor.11:2), represents the true church.
- d) Some argue that the “woman” in this present vision represents the church, but as the context makes clear (cf. v.5), she represents Israel.

“The Old Testament also pictures Israel as a woman, the adulterous wife of the Lord (Jer.3:1, 20; Ezek.16:32-35; Hos.2:2) whom God will ultimately restore to Himself (Isa.50:1)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, p.4).
- e) The reference to the ark of the covenant in 11:19 adds further support for identifying the “woman” as Israel.

2. Her appearance (vv.1b-2)

a) John saw that the woman was “clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.”

(1) This description reflects Joseph’s dream recorded in Gen.37:9-11

“Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, “Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.” So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?” And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”

(2) In the imagery of Joseph’s dream, the sun represents Jacob, the moon Rachel, and the eleven stars Joseph’s brothers

(3) The woman was “clothed with the sun.”

(a) The “sun” depicts glory and brilliance as seen in Rev.1:16 and 10:1.

(b) Israel “clothed with the sun” is a reference to their future glory (Isa.60:1-3, 20; Song of Sol.6:10)

“The sun, moon, and stars depict the glory and dominion which has been promised to her in the coming kingdom, just as they pictured Joseph’s ultimate rule over his father, mother, and brothers” (Believer’s Bible Commentary).

- (4) The woman had “the moon under her feet” – This “may be a further description of Israel’s exalted status” (MacArthur).
- (5) The woman had “on her head a garland of twelve stars” – this is a direct reference to Israel according to Gen.37:9-11.

William Barclay says John “added something which the pagans of Asia Minor would well recognize as part of the old Babylonian picture of the divine. They frequently depicted their goddesses as crowned with the twelve signs of the zodiac and this also is in John's mind. It is as if he took all the signs of divinity and beauty which he could find and added them together” (The Revelation of John, Vol.2, Ch.6-22).

- b) John sees the woman “being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth” (v.2)

- (1) This “also is familiar Old Testament imagery describing Israel (cf. Isa.26:17-18; 66:7-9; Jer.4:31; 13:21; Mic.4:10; 5:3)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, p.6).
- (2) According to the context this seems to refer “to the emerging nation of Israel in its suffering prior to the second coming of Christ” (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

“Israel...had agonized and suffered for centuries, longing for the Messiah to come and destroy Satan, sin, and death, and usher in the kingdom” (John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible).

- (3) “That the woman is pregnant further confirms her identity as Israel; the church cannot be a mother since she is not yet married (19:7-9; 2 Cor.11:2)” (John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, p.6).

Having introduced the woman’s agonizing labor pains, John introduces the cause of her suffering.

B. The Dragon (vv.3-4)

With the second sign, a new character emerges on the scene: the woman’s mortal enemy, dramatically portrayed by “another sign” that “appeared in heaven.”

1. His identity (v.3)

Verse 9 clearly identifies the “great, fiery red dragon” as Satan (cf.20:2). Satan, of course, is not an actual dragon (any more than Israel is an actual woman) but a fallen angel.

- a) Satan is described as “a great, fiery red dragon” (v.3a)
 - (1) Only in Revelation is Satan referred to as a dragon.

In Genesis 3:1ff, he is called a “serpent” but the symbol of a “dragon” is far more terrifying

In the Old Testament the same Hebrew word translated *dragon* (Isa.27:1; 51:9) is also translated *monster* or *sea monster* (Gen.1:21; Job 7:12; Ps.74:13; 148:7).

It pictures a large, ferocious, and terrifying animal.

The color “red” further “stresses Satan’s vicious, deadly, destructive nature” (MacArthur).

In John 8:44, Jesus said, “He was a murderer from the beginning” (NASB).

- (2) The Hebrew word for “serpent” (nachash) used in Genesis 3:1 is used interchangeably in some texts with the Hebrew word for dragon (tannin)

- (a) Exod.7:9 - “When Pharaoh speaks to you, saying, ‘Show a miracle for yourselves,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your rod and cast it before Pharaoh, and let it become a serpent (tannin - dragon).’ ”
- (b) Exod.7:15 - “Go to Pharaoh in the morning, when he goes out to the water, and you shall stand by the river’s bank to meet him; and the rod which was turned to a serpent (nachash) you shall take in your hand.”
- (3) Ezek.29:1-5, which describes Pharaoh as the enemy of God, captures the essence of this frightening imagery used to describe Satan
- b) Satan is further described as “having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads” (v.3b).
 - (1) He is depicted as a seven-headed monster that rules the world

In Mat.4:8-9, Satan said to Jesus, “Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.”

- (2) The “seven heads” with their “seven diadems”

“diadems” Gr.diadema, “royal crowns symbolizing power and authority”

The “seven heads” and “ten horns” is figurative language taken from Daniel 7:7, 20, 24 “depicting Satan’s domination of seven past worldly kingdoms: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist’s future empire (17:9-10).

- (3) The “ten horns” represents the final kingdom ruled by Antichrist; 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” (John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22, p.7).

2. His Activity (v.4)

- a) In the angelic realm (v.4a)

“His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”

- (1) The first part of verse 4 refers to Satan's fall recorded in Isa.14:12-15 and Ezek.28:12-17
- (2) When Satan fell he "drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth" (v.4a)

"His tail" – In 9:10, 19 the demons that were released from the abyss (pit) "had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails" (v.9). Verse 19 says, "For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm."

"Drew" Gr.suro, "to drag" (UBS), "as moving someone or something along by force" (Friberg). It is to "pull, tow" or "sweep" (Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek [NT]).

It is used of "violently dragging persons alone" (Vine) as of Saul making "havoc of the church, entering every house, and *dragging* off men and women, committing them to prison" (Acts 8:3).

"A third of the stars"

"Stars" Gr.aster, is a reference to angels according to Job 38:7, "morning stars sang together."

“The number of angels who joined Satan in his rebellion is not revealed, but is vast. Revelation 5:11 says that the number of angels around God’s throne numbered “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands” (MacArthur).

According to 9:16 “two hundred million” demons were released from the pit.

Jude 6 says they joined in Satan’s rebellion: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”

b) In the earthly realm (v.4b)

- (1) This is a direct reference to Genesis 3:15 where God says to the serpent:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

According to Galatians 3:19 “her Seed” is a reference to the Messiah, “the Seed” that “should come to whom the promise was made.”

- (2) Matthew 2 records the efforts that Satan made to kill Jesus His birth (vv.13-23)

John MacArthur notes “At the outset of our Lord's earthly ministry, Satan tempted Him to mistrust God (Matt. 4:1-11). But the devil's efforts to get Jesus to abandon His mission did not succeed. Satan tried to use the people of Nazareth to kill Jesus (Luke 4:28-30), but their enraged attempt to "throw Him down the cliff" (v. 29) ended in failure when He calmly "pass[ed] through their midst, [and] went His way" (v. 30). Satan's other attempts to cut short Jesus' earthly ministry also ended in failure, "because His hour had not yet come" (John 7:30; 8:20). Even the devil's seeming victory at the Cross was in reality his ultimate defeat (Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 Pet. 3:18-20; 1 John 3:8)” (Revelation 12-22, p.10).

C. The Male Child (vv.5-6)

1. In spite of all of Satan’s relentless efforts to prevent it, the woman (Israel) “bore a male child” (v.5a)
 - a) 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, NASB).
 - b) Israel brought forth the Messiah and the Bible makes it clear that He was of Jewish lineage; a son of Abraham (Mat.1:1), a member of the tribe of Judah (Gen.49:10; Rev.5:5), and a descendant of David (Mat.1:1).

2. Satan will not be able to hinder Christ's coronation (v.5b)

a) Jesus will "rule all nations with a rod of iron"

Psalm 2:7-9 indicates that this rule is a breaking, shattering work of judgment.

The verb *poimaino* (rule) in Rev.12:5 carries the idea to destroy as it does in 2:27.

The Messiah will come and destroy "all nations" (19:11-21) and in His kingdom He will have dominion over the nations that enter to populate that kingdom.

The "rod of iron" speaks of the resoluteness of Christ's rule; He will swiftly and immediately judge all sin and put down any rebellion.

b) Between Christ's incarnation and His coronation came His exaltation (v.5c)

"And her child was caught up to God and to His throne."

(1) This is a reference to His ascension

(2) Acts 1:9-11 says, "Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who

also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

- (3) Christ’s exaltation signifies the Father’s acceptance of His work of redemption (Heb.1:3).
3. Since Satan could not destroy the Messiah he will not stop at his effort to destroy God’s people
 - a) Verse 6 is a prelude to verses 13-17 describing God’s protection for the remnant of Israel
 - b) Throughout history Satan has sought to destroy the Jews so that there would be none alive to enter the millennial kingdom and to receive the promises of God
 - c) During the tribulation and the Day of the Lord, Satan will step up his effort to eliminate the people of God
 - (a) It will come directly through the persecution from the Antichrist
 - (b) It will come from within the home
 - (1) Mat.10:21-23 - ““Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And

you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I say to you, you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes."

(2) Mat.24:9-12 - ""Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

(c) Antichrist's desecration of the temple will send the Jewish people fleeing "into the wilderness"

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 is 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 a half years; cf. 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:5) corresponds to the last 3 ½ years that 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).

CONCLUSION

The great cosmic war of the ages between God and Satan that began with Satan's rebellion is set to reach its climax.

In verses 7-12 we will next see *the war in heaven*.

Let's pray.