

THE WAR IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH OF REVELATION 12

THE PARTIES OF THE WAR

- Although the 7th trumpet sounded in Rev 11:15, its details are not revealed until chapter 16
- Chapters 12-15 are still part of the interlude between the 6th and 7th trumpet (chapters 10-15)
- They do not advance the chronology of the Tribulation events, but they do fill in a number of details of that time period
- Specifically, they describe seven persons who are involved in the second half of the Tribulation:
 1. The woman representing Israel (12:1-2)
 2. The red dragon representing Satan (12:3-4)
 3. The male child representing Christ (12:5-6)
 4. The archangel Michael representing the angels (12:7-12)
 5. The offspring of the woman representing the remnant of believing Israel (12:13-17)
 6. The beast out of the sea representing the Antichrist (13:2-10)
 7. The beast out of the earth representing the false prophet (13:11-18)
- This chapter is about Satan's intense persecution upon Israel that will occur during the latter stages of the Tribulation

THE PARTIES OF THE WAR

Israel

Revelation 12:1-2 ~ A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

- This “great sign” is the first of seven signs in the last half of Revelation (cf. Rev 12:3; 13:13, 14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20)
- It was intended to be a symbol that points to a reality (the literal method of interpreting the Scriptures allows for the use of symbolic language...but that symbolic language points to something literal)
- Here the “woman” is not an actual woman but a symbol of Israel
- Three other “women” are mentioned in the book of Revelation, each of which symbolize something literal:
 1. The woman “Jezebel” who symbolizes paganism (Rev 2:20)
 2. The harlot woman who symbolizes the apostate church (Rev 17:1-7, 15, 18)
 3. The wife of the Lamb who symbolizes the truth church (Rev 19:7)
- The description of this woman as being “clothed with the sun and the moon” is reminiscent of Jacob and Rachel (Joseph's parents) being described as the sun and the moon in Genesis 37

Genesis 37:9-11 ~ Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” 10 He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, “What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and

your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?” 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

- This allusion identifies her with the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant
- The 12 stars clearly refer to the 12 sons/tribes of Jacob (also see the same allusion in Gen 37:9)
- Israel is often referred to in the OT as the adulterous wife of God (cf. Is 54:5-6; Jer 3:1, 6–8, 20; 31:32; Ezek 16:32-35; Hos 2:2, 16)
- She was “with child...in labor and in pain to give birth”
- Israel was “in pain” when the Messiah came the first time, waiting for His arrival after
- In a similar way, Israel will be “in pain” awaiting His arrival in the second coming, pain which results from their persecution at the hands of Satan and his Antichrist
- Satan has persecuted Israel throughout all of their history because he knows that to destroy Israel would be to destroy God’s plan to work through the Jewish people through whom the Messiah was to come
- “It comes as no surprise that the devil will intensify his persecution of Israel as the establishment of the millennial kingdom draws near...With his time running out (cf. v. 12), Jewish people will become the special target of Satan’s hatred and destructive attacks...For centuries, Israel agonized and suffered, longing for the Child who would come to destroy Satan, sin and death, and establish the promised kingdom. No nation in history has suffered as long or as severely as Israel has – both from God’s chastening, and also from Satan’s furious efforts to destroy the nation through whom the Messiah would come.”¹
- These indications make it clear that Israel is in view here, not the church
- “Who she is must be determined from another consideration, namely her relation to the child. Since the child is clearly Christ (from the description of His ruling in v. 5...), the woman must be the one who bore Christ – Israel. That she is Israel and not only Mary is corroborated by the fact that it is this woman who is persecuted during the last half of the Tribulation (vv. 13-17).”²
- “Though, historically, the nation gave birth to Christ through the Virgin Mary, the implication of verse 2 is that the references are to the sufferings of Israel as a nation rather than to the historic birth of Christ. It may refer to the sufferings of the nation in general over its entire troublesome history.”³
- We know that Israel will play a key role in the events of the end times:
 - The 70th week of Daniel will primarily concern Israel just as the first 69 weeks did (Dan 9:24-27)
 - God promised to ensure Israel’s existence as a nation (Jer 31:35-37)
 - God promised to give Israel a kingdom (Is 9:6-7; 65:17-25; Ezek 37:21-28; Dan 2:44)
 - God promised to save Israel nationally (Zech 12:10-13:1, 8-9; Rom 11:26)

Satan

Revelation 12:3-4 ~ Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. 4 And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

- We know with certainty that this “red dragon” is Satan himself since verse 9 identifies the dragon as “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan”

¹ John MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 5.

² Charles Ryrie, *Revelation*, 107-108.

³ John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 188.

- He is not an actual dragon but he is symbolized by that because he is terrifying and ferocious
- His “red” appearance likely indicates his murderous nature and the bloodshed that will occur at his hands
- As Jesus said in John 8:44, Satan “was a murderer from the beginning”
- The “diadems” on his heads show his authority and power
- The 7 heads likely represent the 7 consecutive world powers who existed under Satan’s dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist’s future empire
- The 10 horns relate Satan to the beast coming up out of the sea who is described in nearly the same way in Rev 13:1
- The 10 horns refer to the revived Roman Empire occurring in the Tribulation, which will be a 10-nation confederacy ruled over by Antichrist, and which was anticipated in Daniel

Daniel 7:7-8 ~ After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 8 While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

Daniel 7:24 ~ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.



- Satan is described as having a tail which “swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth”
- Although this could refer to literal stars, it likely is a reference to Satan’s original revolt in which he took with him a third of the angels, since stars often refer to angelic beings (cf. Rev 9:1; Job 38:7)

Isaiah 14:12 ~ How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!

Ezekiel 28:15-16 ~ You were blameless in your ways From the day you were created Until unrighteousness was found in you. 16 By the abundance of your trade You were internally filled with violence, And you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane From the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, From the midst of the stones of fire.

Luke 10:18 ~ And He said to them, “I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.”

- Although Satan and his demons were cast out of heaven after their original rebellion, they still have access to it (cf. Rev 12:10; Job 1:6; 2:1)
- However, a day is coming when they will be permanently barred from heaven (see Rev 12:7-9 below)
- How many angels fell with Satan in his rebellion? → the number is not known but it is vast
- The number of angels around God's throne is described in Rev 5:11 as "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands"...in other words, nearly innumerable
- Since one third of the angels fell with Satan and Rev 9:16 says that 200 million demons will be released during the 6th trumpet judgment, there must be at least 400 million holy angels
- But we know the number is higher than those since there will be other demons released from the abyss during the 5th trumpet judgment...and still other demons are free to roam the earth currently
- Verse 4b refers back to the time of the birth of Christ and Satan's efforts to destroy Him
- Throughout the OT, Satan tried to wipe out the Israelites and the messianic like (i.e. Satan prompted Cain to kill Abel; Satan sent demons in Genesis 6 to produce an unredeemable race of men; He prompted Haman to wipe out the Jews)
- Unable to destroy the people of God prior to Messiah's arrival, Satan tried to murder Christ Himself:

Matthew 2:13, 16-18 ~ Now when they had gone, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."...16 Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged, and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi. 17 Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: 18 "A VOICE WAS HEARD IN RAMAH, WEEPING AND GREAT MOURNING, RACHEL WEEPING FOR HER CHILDREN; AND SHE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED, BECAUSE THEY WERE NO MORE."

- "It is significant that Herod as an Edomite was a descendant of Esau and of the people who were the traditional enemies of Jacob and his descendants. Whether motivated by his family antipathy to the Jews or by political consideration because he did not want competition in his office as king, Herod nevertheless fulfilled historically this reference to the destruction of children in Bethlehem."⁴
- Having failed at killing the Messiah, Satan tempted Him to mistrust God (Matt 4:1-11)
- He eventually was able to kill Christ at the cross through the Pharisees and wicked Gentile rulers, but that turned out to be Satan's ultimate defeat

Christ

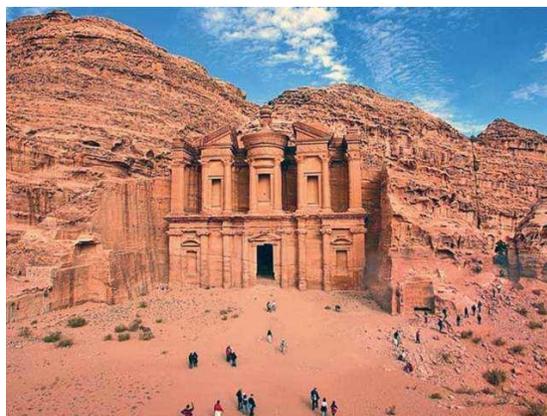
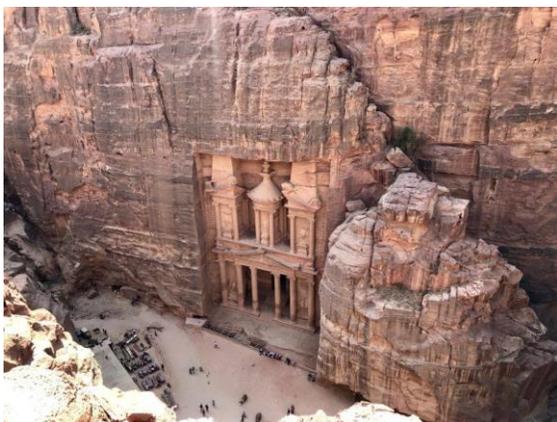
Revelation 12:5-6 ~ And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. 6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

- The birth of Christ is in view in v. 5
- He is identified as the ultimate ruler of the nations ("who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron") – cf. Psalm 2:9; Rev 11:15; 19:15
- Christ will be the undisputed ruler of earth, immediately judging all sin and putting down any rebellion
- His ascension is also described in v. 5 ("her child was caught up to God and to His throne")...Christ's ascension proves that Satan was unsuccessful in destroying Him

⁴ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 189.

Ephesians 1:20-21 ~ which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

- “The catching up of the Child referred to the Ascension, not to the later Rapture of the church though the same word for ‘snatched up’ is used of the Rapture”⁵ in 1 Thess 4:17 (*harpazo*)
- Although he failed to kill Christ, Satan will not give up...he will turn his attention to the woman, Israel, to pour out his vengeance on her
- However, God will preserve a portion of the nation Israel in “the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God”
- The exact location where God will hide his people is not known, but it is probably somewhere east of the Jordan River and south of the Dead Sea, perhaps in the region of Petra, Jordan
- This city has a very narrow access which could be easily defended but which opens up into a large canyon capable of harboring thousands of people in safety



- God will protect them for 1,260 days (or 3.5 years)...the latter half of the Tribulation
- They will heed Christ’s warning to flee to safety

Matthew 24:15-20 ~ Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), 16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! 20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

- As a result, two-thirds of Israel will be killed in judgment and the remaining one-third will be saved and enter into the Millennial kingdom

Zechariah 13:8-9 ~ “It will come about in all the land,” Declares the LORD, “That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it. 9 And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ And they will say, ‘The LORD is my God.’ ”

THE WAR IN HEAVEN

Revelation 12:7-9 ~ And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war, 8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. 9 And the great

⁵ Walvoord, J. F. (1985). [Revelation](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 958). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

- This text describes a war between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels
- Ever since the fall of Satan, there has been war between Satan and his forces and God's holy angels

Daniel 10:13 ~ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.

Daniel 10:20 ~ Then he said, "Do you understand why I came to you? But I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I am going forth, and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come.

Jude 9 ~ But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

- This kind of heavenly conflict takes place behind the scenes all the time
- Throughout all of human history Satan's network of demons have been behind the scenes, endeavoring to do all they can to foil the plan of God
- "Satan's battle plan for the earthly phase of the war of the ages is brutally simple: to eliminate all those who serve God. If he could, he would kill them all. If not that, he would destroy their faith, if that were possible. Were he able to rid the earth of all those who serve God, the devil would achieve his goal of unifying the entire world under his rule... To achieve those goals, Satan desperately wants to prevent the Lord Jesus Christ from establishing His kingdom – both now spiritually in the hearts of men and in its future millennial and eternal forms."⁶
- This conflict in the spiritual realm will intensify and reach its climax during the Tribulation, with angelic and demonic forces engaging in an epic battle
- This supernatural war will reach its crescendo as the time for Christ to establish His earthly kingdom draws near
- Because Satan and his forces "are not strong enough," they will be defeated
- It will result in Satan and his minions being "thrown down" to earth, permanently barred from heaven
- The earth will be overrun with demons at this point
- Satan's full fury will explode on humanity at this time, adding to the horror of the Tribulation
- This will constitute the end of Satan's reign as "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2) and "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4)
- Notice the 5 names given to Satan in v. 9:
 1. The great dragon – refers to his fierce nature
 2. The serpent of old – refers to his craftiness
 3. The devil – refers to him as the accuser or slanderer
 4. Satan – he is the adversary
 5. Who deceives the whole world

Revelation 12:10-12 ~ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. 12 For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell

⁶ MacArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, 15.

in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”

- As a result of Satan’s defeat in heaven, a voice there breaks into praise
- Because martyrs are mentioned in v. 11, it is possible that “the ‘loud voice’ may very well be the shout of triumph of the tribulation saints longing for and anticipating their ultimate victory and triumph”⁷
- The voice announces that the arrival of God’s kingdom is at hand
- So certain is the establishing of Christ’s kingdom that, even though it is yet future, it is spoken of in the past tense
- Since the beginning of time, Satan has been “the accuser of our brethren...who accuses them before our God day and night”
- The way to overcome this “accuser” is found in v. 11 ~ because of the blood of the Lamb and because the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death
- That verse describes 3 elements in the formula for victory over the accuser
- Notably, nothing is mentioned in that verse about overcoming Satan by binding him, confronting him, or rebuking him
- In v. 12, heaven is summoned to rejoice and the earth is warned about Satan’s wrath...a violent wrath because Satan knows “that he has only a short time,” i.e. just the remainder of the Tribulation

THE WAR ON EARTH

First Attack

Revelation 12:13-14 ~ And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. 14 But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

- Thrown down to earth, Satan will then focus his efforts on persecuting “the woman,” namely Israel to exterminate God’s people and thwart God’s plan to bring in His earthly kingdom
- Although it is hoped that the horrors of the Holocaust will never be repeated again, they unfortunately will
- During “the great tribulation” (Matt 24:21), “the time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer 30:7), Satan will devastate Israel in a way that will be worse than anything the Jews have had to endure in the past

Daniel 12:1 ~ Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands guard over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued.

- At that time, the Jews will be in need of any help they can get and God will graciously supply them help:

Matthew 25:31-40 ~ But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; 33 and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36 naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in

⁷ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 193.

prison, and you came to Me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? 38 ‘And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39 ‘When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40 “The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’

- But God will also protect them Himself on “the two wings of the great eagle”
- This is not likely a reference to airplanes as much as it refers to God’s delivering and protecting power
- This allusion was used frequently in the OT:

Exodus 19:4 ~ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.

Deuteronomy 32:11-12 ~ Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. 12 The LORD alone guided him, And there was no foreign god with him.

- God will supernaturally nourish them during their 3.5 years in the desert in much the same way He sustained the Israelites when they came out of Egypt

Second Attack

Revelation 12:15-16 ~ And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. 16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

- Although the water could be a literal flood, it more likely symbolic of Satan’s effort to exterminate Israel
- But God will protect them (as illustrated by the earth opening its mouth)
- This is reminiscent of the way God delivered Israel from Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea (Ex 15:12) and how He thwarted Korah’s rebellion by opening up the earth (Num 16:28-33)
- Perhaps in similar fashion, God will destroy Satan’s army
- The result is that a third of Israel will survive (Zech 13:8)

Third Attack

Revelation 12:17 ~ So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

- When Satan fails to destroy those who fled into the wilderness, he will turn his attack on “the rest of her children”
- That they are believers is affirmed by the fact that they “keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus”
- “While the program of Satan is against the Jewish race as such, anti-Semitism as a whole will reach its peak against Jewish *believers* during this period. There is a double antagonism against those in Israel who turn to Christ as their Messiah and Saviour in those critical days and maintain a faithful witness.”⁸
- These are those who did not flee to the wilderness for protection, probably including Gentile believers as well

⁸ Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 196.