**THE UNHOLY WAR**

**REVELATION CHAPTER 12**

As we resume our study in Revelation, we are in the Tribulation period, somewhere in the middle part. Today we are going to look at the rise of the anti-Christ. For now, we shift our attention away from the various judgments of God and we see Satan now at work on the earth. As Chapter 12 opens John, who has been commissioned as a prophet of God, is given another vision. This time it has to do with a woman and her child. Let’s get right into the scripture…

1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

Most Bible scholars say that the woman represents the nation of Israel (I agree). The twelve stars in her crown represent the twelve tribes of Israel. It was this same woman, Israel, who gave birth to a son (the narrative is given to us in Matthew and Luke) Of course we know that this son is Jesus Christ Himself – the promised Messiah, the Son of God. From the time of Abraham when God made His covenant and established the nation of Israel until the time Jesus was born, prophet after prophet foretold the coming of one sent by God who would rule as king and make all things right on this earth. And for centuries the people of Israel cried out and longed for His coming. “But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal 4:4-5) This is the Christmas story! Mary, a young Jewish girl, gives birth to a son, Jesus.

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

The red dragon is Satan. We know this from reading ahead to verse 9. His ten horns symbolize the earthly power that he lays claim to (John 12:31 refers to Satan as the “prince of this world”). I believe v 4 references Satan’s rebellion against God. One-third of the angels of heaven joined with Satan (Lucifer). Their rebellion failed, they were thrown out of heaven and sent to earth (described in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28).

Satan has always been the enemy of God and of Israel, God’s covenant nation.

After Satan (who disguised himself as a serpent in the Garden of Eden) was successful in getting Adam and Eve to sin, God cursed him. In Genesis 3:15 God told Satan, “I will put enmity [antagonism, conflict] between you and the woman, and between your seed [the spiritual offspring of Satan] and her seed [all those who follow God]; He [referring to Jesus] shall bruise you on the head [deal a major blow to Satan by dying on the cross but then rising to life again] and you shall bruise Him on the heel [cause Jesus to suffer and die].”

So, you see, from the very beginning there has been an ongoing conflict between the forces of Satan and God. Satan has tried to thwart God’s plan time after time. In the O.T. he influenced Israel repeatedly to rebel against God. Then in the N.T. thru King Herod he tried to have the infant Jesus killed. He later tried to get Jesus to give in to temptation in the wilderness. He tried to get Jesus thrown off a cliff outside of Nazareth, etc. Satan tried everything to either kill Jesus or get Him to be disqualified as the Savior of the world. But he failed. Ultimately Jesus prevailed and aren’t you glad?

5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

So this is symbolically talking about what has happened in the past. Jesus was born and will one day rule the earth with supreme authority. Jesus, however, ascended back to the Father and to His throne. Jesus’ mission to rule the earth was temporarily placed on hold until He returns again to this old earth (in Revelation Ch 19).

6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

This has both a near and a far fulfillment. In Matthew we read where God warned Mary and Joseph about Herod’s plan and they fled to Egypt, for a period of time, until Herod died. So certainly, this is talking about that. But I believe it also speaks about something that will happen in the future, which is, an intense persecution of the Jews during the last 3 ½ years (1,260 days) of the Tribulation period.

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back,

Satan stands as the accuser of the brethren before God in heaven. So we know that the devil must have at least limited access to God in heaven in order to be able to bring his charges against God’s elect. This probably surprises some people who think that all spiritual warfare takes place here on earth. Not so. Tony Evans in his series on Spiritual Warfare used the following as one of his main texts: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

Spiritual warfare takes place both on earth and in heaven. This verse clearly indicates that there was war in heaven between the forces of Michael (God’s archangel mentioned in Jude 9) and the good angels going up against the diabolical army of Satan and the fallen angels. Well, who do you think wins this war? The good guys or the bad guys?

8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Satan and his cohorts are driven back and once and for all are banished from heaven. These last few verses show how the spiritual warfare between God and Satan looked from heaven’s perspective.

10 And I heard [John speaking] 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 brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

Satan knows (as the Tribulation period comes to an end) that he only has a short time left to disrupt God’s game plan to redeem the world. So he steps up his persecution of the redeemed. He’s relentless. However, the Tribulation believers do not break under the pressure. Instead they hold fast to their faith in Christ even to the point of facing martyrdom. They do not overcome Satan because of their own goodness and church work, but rather by the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and by the words of their testimony.

The formula for success in overcoming the devil during the Tribulation is the same for us living today. When Satan comes accusing me, it really does not matter my many faults and sins. “You’re right, Satan, I am a sorry dog! But back in April of 1968 I gave my life to Jesus Christ and accepted His death on the cross as the payment for my sins – all my sins up to that time and all those sins I committed ever since. So that stuff you’re saying while true, but it really doesn’t matter, Satan. It doesn’t matter because my Lord Jesus Christ paid for all of that on the cross of Calvary. Satan, you have no right or claim to my life!”

The Tribulation saints overcame. Their testimony was their unshaken faith. “They loved not their lives even unto death.” In other words, they did not love their life even when faced with death. For this reason, there is great rejoicing in heaven.

But woe to the earth for there is still more tribulation left. As we will see Satan is not quite finished yet…

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

Remember that the dragon represents Satan. The woman who had given birth to the male child represents Israel. When Satan sees that the overcoming Tribulation saints, both Jews and Gentiles, have defeated him, he changes his strategy. He not only steps up his persecution of the Tribulation saints, but also targets the remaining remnant of the nation of Israel, many of who still do not believe. Tim LaHaye in his commentary on Revelation refers to this campaign of terror as “Satan’s final anti-Semitic crusade.” So Satan not only targets believers but now also the entire nation of Israel.

14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.

16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

Even though Satan and those who come under his control have consolidated their forces to harm Israel, God in His faithfulness protects her. She finds a safe haven in the desert and is aided by Gentiles. This could possibly be Egypt or Jordan, but nobody knows for sure. Even the godless generation that remains on earth during this terrible time will not allow a repeat of the tragedy of the Holocaust when the world turned their backs on Jews and allowed six million to be slaughtered. I think it is possible that the protection given to her in v 14 – “the two wings of the great eagle” could be a cloaked reference to the United States, but who knows? I am hesitant to connect these dots, only because of translation issues. The NLT says, “she was given two wings like those of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness.” So this verse may not be referring to an eagle necessarily, but to something else altogether.

There’s a lot of speculation as to what the water pouring like a river could be referring to. What seems to make the most sense in light of the context of this chapter is that this speaks of a massive invading army formed by the antichrist. The passage goes on to describe the earth opening its mouth and swallowing up the river. This brings to mind what God did to the rebellion of Korah in the wilderness in Numbers 16. There God supernaturally allowed the earth to open up and swallow those who rebelled against Him. He did it before. Surely He can do it again.

17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Satan becomes angry when he is thwarted in his attempt to exterminate the Jews. God is protecting Israel because it His plan that many of the Jews specifically be saved during the last half of the Tribulation period, to accept Jesus finally as their Messiah. Despite God’s miraculous intervention in preserving His people alive, which He has done all throughout history, Satan continues to battle against them targeting the nation of Israel, primarily the Jews, at the close of this chapter. Satan’s last-ditch effort against Israel will be used by God to establish revival among His people. Satan cannot and will not win. God remains in control. What Satan means for harm, God will ultimately turn into good.

[Cindy’s lesson]

A war is being waged, but we know from studying Revelation that the outcome has already been determined. We’ve read the end of the book and we know who wins! Satan and those who follow him have already been defeated and will be destroyed in just a few chapters. Despite being doomed to destruction, Satan continues his battle to bring more people over to his side. God has guaranteed victory for those of us who ally ourselves with Him. Rest assured – GOD WILL NOT LOSE THIS WAR! But we must make sure not to lose the battle for our own souls. The books of Hebrews and Jude and other places talk about a great apostasy – a falling away from the faith by so-called believers. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to Christ. Even in our day, even before we get to the tribulation, a great spiritual battle is being fought in our nation and in our own communities. We need to make a choice. Are we with Him? Are we going to stand on the side of God and righteousness and holiness? As time goes by the choice to stand on God’s side does not get easier. It only gets harder.

Sing “Stand Up Stand Up For Jesus”