

Revelation
A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #25-2 (Corrected)

1/17-24/2007

The Judgment of God, The Great Tribulation, The Great Day of God's Wrath
Chapter Twelve

The Conflict Between God and Satan and the Place of Israel in World History

This is a reference to God's protection of Israel during **"the great tribulation,"** or the last three and one half years of the **"Tribulation Period."** In Matthew 24:15-22 Jesus spoke about this time and said:

"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

God does not identify the place to which Israel flees, only that it was a place prepared by God where she would be protected and find provisions. Some people say that the place is Petra, the rock-hewn city, and it may be that they are right. However, when God does not tell us something it may be that He does not want us and the rest of the world to know. Such things are best left unknown for if God wanted us to know He would have told us. It surely is improper for us to dogmatically say we know such things. Such expressions are usually made out of our ignorance rather than understanding.

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His **“ruling with a rod of iron”** follows His ascent back into heaven to sit on His throne as Lord of all. It also follows His victorious second coming.

The **“ruling”** is what He does in His millennial kingdom after He has defeated Satan and his followers at the end of the **“Tribulation Period.”**

The book of Revelation is the unveiling of the ascended Christ. The Gospels tell us about His earthly, vicarious ministry and His offering of salvation through His grace. However, only brief glimpses of Christ's glory are seen in the Gospels.

In the Gospels we see a Savior Who, willingly, temporarily, humbled Himself and left His glory in heaven. After the cross and His victory over death, Christ reclaimed His position of glory in heaven which was inherently His prior to His self-humiliation, a glory equal to the glory of God the Father. In John 17:5, **“And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was”** we read Jesus' anticipation of reclaiming His glory. In Philippians 2:6-10 we read a summary of His self-humiliation and return to glory:

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”

Even today many Bible students erroneously seem to think that Jesus, God the Son, is less than God the Father. The book of Revelation was written to show us what Jesus is like in all of His restored glory. Thus, in this statement, in Revelation 12:5, the emphasis is placed upon His position in heaven, not what He did on earth.

Perhaps the most appropriate description of Jesus, the Child born to the woman, the Child Whom Satan tried to devour, is seen when He returns in all of His glory as portrayed in Revelation 19:11-16 and concludes with His rightful name in verse sixteen: **“...he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”**

Revelation 12:6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

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“... and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.”

Knowing from the Garden of Eden what his fate would be did not cause Satan to quit and give up. His primary purpose on the earth was to thwart God's plan and prevent its fulfillment — to keep Christ from being incarnated into this world and to defeat Him. He must have thought that, if he could prevent God from fulfilling His prophecy, he would not only make God a liar, but also prevent the birth of his conqueror. He must have felt confident when he used King Herod to kill all of the male babies born in that region that were under two years of age (Matt. 2:16). God knew what Satan was doing and sent an angel to warn Joseph of the impending danger as He thwarted and voided Satan's efforts to kill the newly-born Messiah. This was but one of many attempts Satan used to try to stop God's plan, but all ended in his defeat. Nevertheless, Satan continued to use everything at his disposal to **“devour the child as soon as it was born.”** However, God always wins and Satan always loses!

The third “Key Personality” is Christ and is introduced to us in verse five as God says: **“And she brought forth a man child.”**

God's statement swings from the birth of Christ to His second coming in which He will come as the ruler and King of kings and Lord of lords and assert His rule over all of creation: **“...who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”** This reminds us of what God said in Isaiah 9:6-7 where, after saying **“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given”** in reference to the birth of Christ, the description shifted forward to Christ's glorious second coming and ruling in His millennial kingdom: **“...and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”**

After telling us Who the Child is, God then told us what the Child does.

He, Who is **“to rule all nations with a rod of iron,”** is then described as being **“caught up unto God and to His throne”** in a description of the victorious ascension of Christ after He defeated the devil and his great weapon of death. God does not linger in His description to tell us of Christ's earthly ministry, not because it is unimportant, but because, in this summary of world history, God was focusing our attention on the climactic end of it all.

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He controls the nations of the world and offered them to the Lord Jesus if He would just worship him (Matt. 4:8-9). To get all of creation to worship him is Satan's goal. He was called *"the god of this world"* in 2 Corinthians 4:4 and *"the prince of the power of the air"* in Ephesians 2:2. For a time and according to His plan, God has allowed Satan to rule the nations of this earth.

He was called **"red"** because he is a murderer and has been from the beginning (John 8:44). He has no regard for human life and it is fair to say that he is behind each and every murder that occurs today, including the murder of unborn babies.

He was called a **"dragon"** because of the viciousness of his character. He was originally created Lucifer, meaning the light-bearer and son of the morning, (Ezekiel 28:12-19), but now he is the expression of the very worst that a created being can possibly be. He is the most dangerous of all of God's creatures and goes about *"seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Peter 5:8)

His strange characteristics are given to us in verse three where he is pictured, symbolically, as **"having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads."**

His **"seven heads"** symbolize his wisdom. In Ezekiel 28:12 we are told that he was created *"full of wisdom."* He is smarter than any other creature. He is said to be *"wiser than Daniel"* (Ezekiel 28:3). His cleverness enables him to seduce even the most highly intellectual of men.

His **"ten horns"** likely suggest the revived Roman Empire over which he will rule and from which he will make his appearance during the **"Tribulation Period."** The **"ten horns"** remind us of Daniel's visions (Daniel 2:40-43; 7:7-8) in which he saw the one who would be Anti-Christ. The **"seven crowns upon his heads"** are related to the meaning of the **"ten horns"** indicating rule and power.

After describing Satan's appearance, God went on to tell us what Satan did in his rebellion as he led one-third of the angels to rebel against God.. **"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth."** Satan / Lucifer was somehow able to persuade one-third of the **"stars,"** angels, to follow him in his rebellion against the Creator. Daniel makes reference to this extensive influence which Lucifer had upon his fellow angels.

There, in reference to Anti-Christ or Satan, Daniel tells us of the power he had over other angels, *"And it waxed great, even to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamped upon them"* (8:10). Jude, the half-brother of Jesus also alluded to this expansive rebellion against God and the angels that followed Lucifer in verse six: *"... the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation"* Influencing other angels to follow him in his rebellion and become **"fallen angels"** or demons was not all that the **"great red dragon"** did.

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Notice that God told us that *“before she travailed, she brought forth....”* Then, to make sure we do not miss what He said, God repeated His statement to emphasize what He said, *“before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.”* In both statements God tells us that the **“travailing and the pain”** came **after** the **“birth of the child,”** or the birth of Christ. In this passage in Isaiah, God told us about travail and pain Israel would experience **after** the birth of Christ, at a much later time. This would indicate that it was related to the Tribulation Period.

In addition to this passage in Isaiah is the well known verse in Micah 5:2 that identified the place of Jesus' birth: *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”*

However, the next verse in Micah, like the passage in Isaiah, adds another dimension to the prophecy:

“Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.”

While this passage began by identifying the birth place of Jesus, it continued on to describe something beyond that, in the future. In so doing, like the passage in Isaiah, it referred to the Tribulation Period and to the remnant that we read about in Revelation 12:17 where we find *“the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.”* *“The remnant”* of Micah 5:3 is **“the remnant”** mentioned in Revelation 12:17.

Later in Chapter twelve we will read more about this **“remnant”** and see how this view of the **“travailing and delivering”** helps us understand what God is telling us here. We will also see that **“the remnant”** in verse seventeen has been identified by God through the writings of the Apostle Paul, specifically in the books of Romans and Galatians.

The second of the “Seven Key Personalities” is the “red dragon” who appears as another **“wonder”** or sign in heaven.

“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.”

Notice that God tells us that these images such as “the woman” and “the dragon” are **“signs.”** They represent things that are real, but are not literal. God makes it clear when He uses signs and symbols. Otherwise we are to accept what we read as being literal.

There is no mystery here. In verse nine God identified the **“great red dragon”** as **“the Devil, and Satan.”** He was called **“great”** because of his vast power.

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redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth."

God has told us of the pain and suffering experienced by the nation of Israel down through the ages leading up to the birth of the Savior. Much of that pain was the normal result of her sin and rebellion against God, but much more was the result of Satan using various nations in his efforts to eradicate Israel as a people from the face of the earth.

Satan had known ever since the Garden of Eden, when he heard God's pronouncement of judgment against him, that God would send His only begotten Son into this world to defeat him. God had said, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* God had foretold that Satan would cause a lot of pain and misery, **"bruising of the heel"** for both God's Redeemer and those involved in His coming. He would try many times to thwart God's plans, but he could never win.

The second meaning of "travailing and delivering" is less known, but it is significant. After her travailing in the birth of the Savior, Israel also experienced travail in another sense. It was related to **"the delivery"** of those who become the children of God by faith. While the second meaning is less recognized, it is necessary because of the context of Chapter twelve as well as what we find in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that it is not uncommon to find prophecies in the Old Testament with double or layered meanings, as was the case with the prophecy quoted by Peter in his sermon at Pentecost, (Acts 2:17-21), where he quoted from Joel 2:28-32. In Revelation 12:2 we find a similar case.

Consider what God told us in Isaiah 66:7-8:

"Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children."

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to see that the conflict revolves around and involves Israel, both Satan's efforts to destroy it and God's protection of it.

We are told that **"the woman"** is **"a wonder"** or a sign (same Greek word as for sign) in heaven although her life is here on this earth. She is a symbol representing the nation Israel, not a literal woman.

God gives us clear identifying marks here in 12:1 so that we will be able to identify **"the woman."** The **"sun, moon and stars"** remind us of Joseph's dream found in Genesis 37:9-10:

"And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?"

Jacob properly interpreted the sun, moon and stars to represent himself, his wife, Rachel, and Joseph's brothers. Each of Jacob's sons became one of the patriarchs and the head of one of the tribes of Israel. We are told that, ***"his brethren envied him (Joseph); but his father (Jacob) observed (to keep and meditate upon) the saying."*** Yes, Jacob understood that Joseph's dream referred to his family and descendants. We should also be able to see that **"the woman"** is a symbol of Israel. To understand this helps to give meaning to this Chapter, but to do otherwise produces great difficulties in interpreting it.

As we move through this Chapter we will see that there are additional Scripture passages that provide support for the view that **"the woman"** is Israel.

"The woman, being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered."

The reference to "travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered" has a double meaning.

The first meaning of "travailing and delivering" in reference to the birth of the Savior is generally well known.

There are many references in the Old Testament to the sufferings Israel would experience because God would use her to bring forth the Savior's birth. Consider what we are told in Micah 4:10 and 5:2-4:

"Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall

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Revelation 12:11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

Revelation 12:12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Revelation 12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

Revelation 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

“The woman” is **the first of the “Seven Key Personalities.”** The events of this Chapter revolve around **“the woman”** so a wrong identification of her complicates one's understanding of God's message in Chapter twelve.

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”

The Roman church identifies **“the woman”** as **the virgin Mary** and many other theologians follow its lead and agree with it in this viewpoint. Others identify **“the woman”** as **the church of all ages**. Yet, others, particularly female leaders of various cults, identify themselves as **“the woman.”** **All who interpret “the woman” in any of these ways are wrong.**

“The woman” is Israel! To fail to understand that **“the woman”** is Israel can result in distorted and erroneous interpretations of Scripture, and not just misinterpretations of Revelation 12 or the book of Revelation, but of the whole of Scripture. Even a cursory reading of Chapter 12, without any effort to interpret the symbolic language, leaves the reader with the impression that he is reading about a conflict between God and Satan and that Israel is in the middle of that conflict. While it is true that God's conflict with Satan predates the founding of the nation of Israel, the Bible, from Genesis twelve forward, has Israel at its center and is related, directly or indirectly, to God's dealings with the descendants of Abraham and Jacob. Not only does the Savior of the world enter humanity as a Jew, but it is also noteworthy that God used Israel as the channel through which He gave us His laws and commandments. This is in addition to the fact that God made unconditional and unbreakable covenants with Israel and her descendants. Therefore, the view that sees **“the woman”** as Israel is consistent with both a natural reading of the chapter and a normal view of the Scriptures as a total entity. In summary, while Chapter twelve describes God's conflict with Satan, it is critical

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In Chapter ten, verses six and seven, we were told that **“there should no longer be time (delay): but in the days of the voice of the seventh trumpet, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His prophets.”** Therefore, the sounding of the **“seventh trumpet”** brings us to the edge of eternity, but many details and explanations were not given to us. Thus, with the presentation of the **“Seven Key Personalities”** God tells us some things that help us better understand what He is doing and how everything ends.

Chapter twelve presents to us the panoramic view of history, beginning before time and ending with events that take place during the **“Great Tribulation Period,”** as the first of the **“Seven Key Personalities”** that dominate history is presented. That which is begun in Chapter twelve should not be separated from the happenings presented in Chapter thirteen for it is there that we find the last two of the **“Seven Key Personalities.”**

Revelation 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

Revelation 12:2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Revelation 12:3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

Revelation 12:4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

Revelation 12:5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

Revelation 12:6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

Revelation 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

Revelation 12:8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

Revelation 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.