

Week 26-The War of the Ages: Part 1

Revelation 12:1-6

I. Introduction

- a. The Bible warns that “pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling” (Prov. 16:18).
- b. The most notorious and tragic illustration of that principle, the one with the most far-reaching consequences, was Satan’s prideful rebellion against God.
- c. By it Lucifer, having fallen from heaven like lightning (Luke 10:18), was cast down from his exalted position as the “anointed cherub who covers” (Ezek. 28:14).
- d. He forfeited his place as the highest created being and became the supreme enemy of God.
- e. Satan’s rebellion touched off a cosmic war throughout the universe—a war dwarfing any other war in human experience.
- f. Satan’s war against God is a two-front war.
- g. By leading a mutiny against God among the angels, Satan attempted unsuccessfully to destroy the paradise of heaven.
- h. By leading a mutiny against God among men, Satan destroyed the earthly paradise of the Garden of Eden, plunged the whole human race into decay and corruption, and usurped (temporarily) the role of the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 16:11).
- i. The opening campaign of Satan’s war of the ages took place in heaven.

- j. When he rebelled (Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:12–17), one-third of the angels foolishly and wickedly cast their lots with him.
 - i. None of them could have known what the eternal consequences of their choice would be.
 - ii. Wanting to be like God, they became as much unlike Him as possible.
 - iii. These fallen angels (or demons) became Satan’s storm troopers, doing the bidding of their evil commander.
 - iv. They fight against divine purpose, making war with both the holy angels and the human race.
- k. When Adam and Eve plummeted into corruption by choosing to listen to Satan’s lies and disobey God, the human race became embroiled in the cosmic war of the ages.
 - i. In fact, since the Fall the earth has been the primary theater in which that war has been fought.
 - ii. Though already fallen, every member of the human race faces the same choice as the angels did in eternity past: to fight on God’s side or on Satan’s.
 - iii. Remaining neutral is not an option, for in Matthew 12:30 Jesus declared, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”
- l. The final battles of Satan’s long war against God are yet to be fought. They will take place in the future,

during the last half of the seven-year tribulation period, the time Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21).

- m. At that time Satan, aided by the absence of the raptured church and the presence of increased demon hordes (9:1–11), will mount his most desperate assaults against God’s purposes and His people.
 - i. But despite the savage fury with which those assaults will be carried out, they will not succeed.
 - ii. The Lord Jesus Christ will effortlessly crush Satan and his forces (19:11–21) and send him to the abyss for the duration of the millennial kingdom (20:1–2).
 - iii. After leading a final rebellion at the close of the Millennium, Satan will be consigned to eternal punishment in the lake of fire (20:3, 7–10).
- n. The sounding of the seventh trumpet will proclaim the triumphant victory of the Lord Jesus Christ over the usurper, Satan: “Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (11:15).
- o. There will be joy in heaven because Christ has defeated Satan and established His eternal kingdom.
 - i. So, the outcome of the war between Satan and God is not in doubt.
 - ii. Christ’s ultimate triumph is certain.

- p. Though chapter 11 records the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the effects it produces are not described until chapters 15–18.
 - i. The seventh trumpet will sound near the end of the Tribulation, launching the brief, but final and devastating bowl judgments just before Christ's return in power and glory.
 - ii. Chapters 6–11 describe the events of the Tribulation up to the sounding of the seventh trumpet; chapters 12–14 recapitulate that same period, describing events from Satan's vantage point.
 - iii. In addition, the latter section takes the reader all the way back to the original rebellion of Satan (12:3–4).
 - iv. The chronological narrative of the Tribulation events then resumes in chapter 15.
- q. The Tribulation will feature both the unprecedented judgments of God's eschatological wrath and the desperate fury of Satan's efforts to thwart God's purposes.
- r. That deadly combination will make the Tribulation the most devastating period in human history (Matt. 24:21–22).
- s. During that time, horrifying events will take place, caused both by God's judgments and by Satan's fury.
- t. Before describing that final war, the inspired apostle John first introduces the main characters involved in

it: the woman (Israel), the dragon (Satan), and the male child (Jesus Christ).

II. **The Woman.**

- a. 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. (12:1–2)
- b. The first thing John saw in this vision was a **great sign**—the first of seven signs in the last half of Revelation (cf. v. 3; 13:13, 14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20).
- c. *Mega* (**great**) appears repeatedly in this vision (cf. vv. 3, 9, 12, 14); everything John saw seemed to be huge either in size or in significance.
- d. *Sēmeion* (**sign**) describes a symbol that points to a reality.
 - i. The literal approach to interpreting Scripture allows for normal use of symbolic language, but understands that it points to a literal reality.
 - ii. In this case, the description plainly shows that the woman John saw was not an actual woman.
 - iii. Also, the reference to “the rest of her children,” those “who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17), shows that this **woman** is a symbolic mother.
- e. The **woman** is the second of four symbolic women identified in Revelation.
 - i. The first, though an actual woman, had the symbolic name Jezebel (2:20).

1. She was a false teacher and symbolizes paganism.
- ii. Another symbolic woman, depicted as a harlot, appears in 17:1–7.
 1. She represents the apostate church. The fourth woman, described in 19:7–8 as the bride of the Lamb (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2), represents the true church.
- iii. Some argue that the **woman** in this present vision represents the church, but as the context makes clear (cf. v. 5), she represents Israel.
 1. 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).
 2. A reference to the ark of the covenant (11:19) adds further support for identifying the **woman** as Israel.
- f. That Israel will play a key role in the end-time drama is not surprising.
 - i. The seventieth week of Daniel’s prophecy (the Tribulation) will primarily concern Israel, just as the first sixty-nine did (cf. Dan. 9:24–27).
 - ii. Israel’s presence in the end times is consistent with God’s emphatic promises of her continued existence as a nation: Read Jer. 31:35–37 (Jer. 31:35–37; cf. 33:20–26; 46:28; Amos 9:8)

- iii. Further, Israel's presence during the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy is in keeping with God's promises to her of a kingdom (Isa. 65:17–25; Ezek. 37:21–28; Dan. 2:44; Zech. 8:1–13) and national salvation (Zech. 12:10–13:1; 13:8–9; Rom. 11:26).
- g. Often as an instrument of God's judgment, Satan has persecuted the Jewish people throughout their history.
 - i. He knows that to destroy Israel would make it impossible for God to fulfill His promises to the Jewish people.
 - ii. God will not allow him to do that, but will use Satan to chasten Israel.
 - iii. It comes as no surprise that the devil will intensify his persecution of Israel as the establishment of the millennial kingdom draws near.
- h. As I said earlier, the seventh trumpet will sound near the end of the Tribulation.
 - i. Only weeks, or perhaps a few months at most, will remain after it sounds until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - ii. With his time running out (cf. v. 12), Jewish people will become the special target of Satan's hatred and destructive attacks.
- i. John saw that the **woman** was **clothed with the sun, and had the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.**

- i. That fascinating description reflects Joseph's dream, recorded in Genesis 37:9–11:
 - ii. In the imagery of Joseph's dream, the sun represents Jacob, the moon Rachel, and the eleven stars Joseph's brothers.
 - iii. The allusion to Joseph's dream is fitting, since his life parallels Israel's history.
 - iv. Both endured the indignity of captivity in Gentile nations, yet were in the end delivered and exalted to a place of prominence in a kingdom.
- j. That the **woman** was **clothed with the sun** reflects redeemed Israel's unique glory, brilliance, and dignity because of her exalted status as God's chosen nation (cf. Deut. 7:6; 14:2; 1 Kings 3:8; Pss. 33:12; 106:5; Isa. 43:20).
- k. It also links her with Jacob (the sun in Joseph's dream), an heir in the Abrahamic covenant; Israel's continued existence as a nation reflects the ongoing fulfillment of that covenant (cf. Gen. 12:1–2).
- l. The reference to **the moon under her feet** may be a further description of Israel's exalted status.
 - i. It could also include the concept of God's covenantal relationship with Israel, since the **moon** was part of the cycle of Israel's required times of worship (cf. Num. 29:5–6; Neh. 10:33; Ps. 81:3; Isa. 1:13–14; Col. 2:16).
- m. The **crown** (*stephanos*; the crown associated with triumph in the midst of suffering and struggle) of

twelve stars (Joseph being the twelfth) on the woman's **head** refers to the twelve tribes of Israel.

- n. Having described the woman's attire, John noted her condition: **she was with child.**
 - i. That 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).
 - ii. 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).
- o. Being pregnant, the woman **cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.**
 - i. Just like a pregnant woman in labor feels pain, so the nation of Israel was in pain, waiting for Messiah to come forth.
 - ii. The cause of some of the pain is the persecution by Satan, who attempts to destroy the mother.
 - iii. The nation was in pain when the Messiah came the first time.
 - iv. So will it be at His second coming.
 - v. Ever since the first promise of a Redeemer who would come to destroy him (Gen. 3:15), Satan has attacked Israel.
 - vi. For centuries, Israel agonized and suffered, longing for the Child who would come to destroy Satan, sin, and death, and establish the promised kingdom.
 - vii. 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.

- p. Having described the woman's agonizing labor pains, John introduces the cause of her suffering.

III. **The Dragon.**

- a. 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.(12:3–4)
- b. 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.**
- c. Verse 9 clearly identifies the **great red dragon** as Satan (cf. 20:2).
- d. Satan, of course, is not an actual **dragon** (any more than Israel is an actual woman) but a malevolent spirit being, a fallen angel.
- e. The symbolic language used to describe him pictures the reality of his person and character.
- f. Only in Revelation is Satan referred to as a **dragon**; before that he is called (among other names) a serpent (Gen. 3:1ff.; 2 Cor. 11:3).
- g. A dragon is a far more terrifying symbol.
 - i. 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; Pss. 74:13; 148:7; Jer. 51:34; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2).

ii. It pictures a large, ferocious, and terrifying animal.

h. **Red**, the color of fiery destruction and bloodshed, further stresses Satan's vicious, deadly, destructive nature. I

i. In the words of Jesus, "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

ii. The Hebrew word for "serpent" (*nachash*) used in Genesis 3:1 is used interchangeably in some texts with the Hebrew word for dragon (*tannin*) (cf. Ex. 7:9, 15).

iii. So the animal Satan used in the Garden of Eden was a reptile, but one not yet cast down to its belly (Gen. 3:14).

iv. Likely, it was more upright—a dragon standing upon two legs, cursed to walk on four legs close to the ground, or slither like a snake.

v. **Red** is a fitting color for the **dragon**, since he attacks both the woman and her child.

i. Ezekiel 29:1–5, which describes Pharaoh as the enemy of God, captures the essence of this frightening imagery used to describe Satan (Read Ezekiel 29:1–5).

j. The **dragon** is further described as **having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems**.

- i. He is depicted as a seven-headed monster that rules the world.
- ii. Satan has been allowed by God to rule the world since the Fall and will continue to do so until the seventh trumpet sounds (11:15).
- iii. The **seven heads** with their **seven diadems** (*diadema*; royal crowns symbolizing power and authority) represent seven consecutive world empires running their course under Satan's dominion: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and Antichrist's future empire (17:9–10).
- iv. The final kingdom, ruled by Antichrist, will be a ten-nation confederacy; the **ten horns** represent the kings who will rule under Antichrist (17:12; cf. 13:1; Dan. 7:23–25).
- v. 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.
- k. Satan's pervasive, evil influence is not limited to the human realm, but extended first into the angelic realm.
- l. In the picturesque language of John's vision, the dragon's **tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.**
 - i. The references to the dragon's angels in verses 7 and 9 indicate that the **stars of heaven** are angels.

- ii. Angels are depicted symbolically as **stars** elsewhere in Scripture (9:1; Job 38:7).
- m. When Satan fell (Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:12–17), he **swept away a third of the** angelic host with him.
 - i. Along with their defeated leader, those evil angels were cast from heaven **to the earth**.
 - ii. (It should be noted that although he was cast from his dwelling in heaven, Satan, in this present age, has access to God’s presence, he will be permanently barred from heaven after his defeat by Michael and the holy angels during the Tribulation.)
- n. The number of angels who joined Satan in his rebellion is not revealed, but is vast.
 - i. Revelation 5:11 says that the number of the angels around God’s throne numbered “myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands.”
 - ii. *Myriad* does not represent an exact number; it was the highest number the Greeks expressed in a word.
 - iii. Since one-third of the angels fell, and 9:16 reveals that two hundred million demons will be released from captivity near the Euphrates River, there must be at least four hundred million holy angels.
 - iv. Uncounted thousands of other demons will have already been released from the abyss earlier in the Tribulation (9:1–3).

- v. In addition to those two groups of bound demons, there are millions of others who are currently free to roam the earth and the heavenly realm (cf. Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15).
- vi. They, along with evil men under his control, assist Satan in his unholy war against God.
- vii. Adding the (unrevealed) number of these unbound demons to the calculations given above increases the numbers of both the holy angels and the demons.
- o. As the next event in his dramatic vision unfolded, John noted that **the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.**
- p. Throughout history, Satan has bent all of his efforts toward persecuting the people of God.
 - i. Abel was a righteous, obedient man; Satan prompted Cain to kill him.
 - ii. In his first epistle, John wrote, “Cain ... was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous” (1 John 3:12).
 - iii. Seeking to produce a mongrel, half-human half-demon and thus unredeemable race of men, Satan sent demons (“sons of God”; the same Hebrew phrase refers to angels in Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss. 29:1; 89:6) to cohabit with human women (Gen. 6:1–4).

- iv. Because they were the chosen people through whom the Messiah was to come, and by whom the good news of forgiveness was to be proclaimed, Satan reserved his special hatred for Israel.
- v. After Joseph's death, the Israelites became slaves in Egypt.
- vi. In that place, the fates both of the nation and of its human deliverer hung by a slender thread.
- q. From a human perspective, Pharaoh attempted to destroy the Israelites because he believed them to be a threat to his power.
 - i. But in reality, Pharaoh was an operative of Satan, who sought to wipe out the people from whom the Messiah would come.
 - ii. It is also true to say that Satan was acting within the purposes of God for Israel.
 - iii. The courage of the Hebrew midwives and God's sovereign protection of Moses, whom He would later use to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage, thwarted Satan's schemes.
- r. During the period of the judges, Satan used Israel's pagan neighbors in an attempt to destroy them.
 - i. Yet God preserved His people through all of those assaults, raising up judges to rescue them from their oppressors.
 - ii. Later, Satan tried to use Saul to murder David and thus eliminate the messianic line (cf. 1 Sam. 18:10–11).

- iii. During the days of the divided kingdom, the messianic line twice dwindled to one fragile child (2 Chron. 21:17; 22:10–12).
- iv. Still later, Satan inspired Haman to undertake his genocidal mission against the Jewish people (Est. 3–9).
- v. But God used Esther to save her people from disaster.
- vi. Throughout their history, the devil incited the Israelites to murder their own children as sacrifices to idols (cf. Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3; Ps. 106:37–38; Ezek. 16:20).
- s. Having failed to wipe out the people of God and the messianic line, Satan desperately attempted to murder the Messiah Himself before He could do His saving work.
- t. John saw that **the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child** (Christ).
 - i. Satan attacked Jesus first through Herod, who attempted to kill the baby Jesus: (Matt. 2:13, 16)
- u. At the outset of our Lord’s earthly ministry, Satan tempted Him to mistrust God (Matt. 4:1–11).
 - i. But the devil’s efforts to get Jesus to abandon His mission did not succeed.
 - ii. 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).

- iii. 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).
- iv. 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).

IV. **The Male Child.**

- a. 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, ⁶and 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 (12:5–6).
- b. In spite of all of Satan’s relentless efforts to prevent it, the woman (Israel) **gave birth to a son.**
 - i. 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; cf. Rom. 9:5), was the fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Mic. 5:2).
 - ii. Israel brought forth the Messiah. The Bible emphasizes that Jesus was of Jewish lineage.
 - iii. He was a son of Abraham (Matt. 1:1), a member of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10; Mic. 5:2; Rev. 5:5), and a descendant of David (Matt. 1:1; cf. 2 Sam. 7:12–16).
- c. Nor will Satan be able to hinder Christ’s coronation;

- i. He will **rule all the nations with a rod of iron** during His earthly, millennial kingdom (v. 10; 2:26–27; 11:15; 19:15).
- ii. Psalm 2:7–9 indicates that this rule is a breaking, shattering work of judgment. In fact, the verb *poimainō* (**rule**) carries the connotation of “destroy,” as it does in 2:27.
- iii. The Messiah will come and destroy **all the nations** (19:11–21) and in His kingdom have dominion over the nations that enter to populate that kingdom.
- iv. An iron rod is also one that cannot be broken.
- v. Just as all of Satan’s past efforts to hinder Christ have failed, so also will his future efforts fail (cf. 11:15).
- vi. The phrase **rod of iron** speaks of the firmness of Christ’s rule; He will swiftly and immediately judge all sin and put down any rebellion.
- d. Between Christ’s incarnation and His coronation came His exaltation, when He **was caught up to God and to His throne** at His ascension.
 - i. Christ’s exaltation signifies the Father’s acceptance of His work of redemption (Heb. 1:3).
 - ii. Satan could not stop Christ from accomplishing redemption and therefore being exalted to the right hand of the Father as a perfect Savior.
 - iii. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared, “God raised [Christ] up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was

impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:24).

- e. But though he is a defeated foe, Satan will not give up.
 - i. Unable to stop Christ’s birth, ascension, or rule, Satan still assaults His people.
 - ii. He has already instigated the genocidal massacre of Jews in Europe, as well as the death of countless thousands throughout history.
 - iii. During the Tribulation, Satan will increase his efforts to destroy the Jewish people, so that the nation cannot be saved as the Bible promises (Zech. 12:10–13:1; Rom. 11:25–27).
 - iv. And so that there will be none left alive to enter the millennial kingdom, he will seek to kill believing Jews.
 - v. As always, Israel will be his prime target. In a brief glimpse of what will be described more fully in verses 13–17, John noted that **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** (cf. v. 14).
 - vi. God will frustrate Satan’s attempt to destroy Israel during the Tribulation by hiding His people, just as the Lord Jesus Christ predicted: (Matt. 24:15–21)
- f. Antichrist’s desecration of the temple will send the Jewish people fleeing **into the wilderness**. T

- i. 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).
 - ii. 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.
- g. 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 half of the Tribulation, the period Jesus called the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21).
- h. 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).
- i. Eventually, in spite of Satan’s efforts, “all Israel will be saved” (Rom. 11:26).
 - i. The great cosmic war of the ages between God and Satan that began with Satan’s rebellion is set to reach its climax.
 - ii. In this passage John provided important background information on that war and introduced its key figures.
 - iii. Then his vision turned to a description of the war, both in its heavenly and earthly phases, and its inevitable outcome.