

The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon

Revelation Series #9

Revelation 12

Introduction: As we came to the close of Revelation 11, a scene in heaven depicted all the saints of God once again worshipping the Lord.

The temple being open, and the Ark of the Covenant being seen in the temple at the close of Revelation 11 confirms God's promise that during the tribulation, God will work in the life of the nation of Israel.

It is good to keep in mind as we study this part of Revelation that it has to do with Israel, not the church. The church is already taken out, raptured from the earth.

What we are going to study has to do with God's covenant with the nation of Israel, with Abraham, and with David, that there would be One upon the throne of David who would rule forever and ever. "One is coming who is going to rule, and of his government and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

God has given the world its Messiah through the Jews and the nation of Israel. That Messiah will come once again in power and glory at the end of the Battle of Armageddon.

Chapter 12 marks a new beginning in the study of the book of the Revelation. In chapters 4 through 11 we have been looking through a telescope. But from chapters 12 through 20 we will be looking through a microscope.

Today we go from the Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 to the Woman, the Child, and the Dragon of Revelation 12. We have examined the character of the tribulation. But now we are introduced to the main characters in the tribulation.

We are now plunged into the last three and one-half years of the tribulation. Jesus himself said that it would be a time of trouble unlike the world has ever seen; the time of "Jacob's trouble."

Those who read the book of Revelation wonder how do you know what parts are allegory and what is narrative. We read the text. John makes it perfectly clear that we are shifting gears with the first seven words of this chapter: ***"Now a great sign appeared in heaven ... "*** (Revelation 12:1). John tells us he is about to see something that is a sign or a symbol of something else.

Remember how Jesus communicated with the multitudes? Often, he spoke to people by telling stories or parables. The word parable comes from two Greek words-***para***, which means "alongside of," and ***ballo***, which means "to cast or throw." A parable is a story that comes alongside a truth to illustrate it.

Think of the shepherd finding his lost lamb, or the woman finding her lost wedding coin, or the father welcoming home his lost son, all of which illustrate the heavenly joy over a lost sinner who receives salvation (Luke 15).

Sometimes, however, parables are difficult to understand if you don't have the key to unlock their meanings. Jesus explained many of His parables to His disciples, but not to the masses. When the disciples asked Him why He didn't open the meanings to everybody, He replied, ***This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*** (Matthew 13: 13, NIV).

Like every other part of Scripture, with careful interpretation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can understand what God wants to reveal to us in these next chapters.

Looking at the sign John sees, it would be beneficial for us to determine the cast of primary characters. That way, we will know who we're dealing with. So, as we read, you will notice that there is one character who is identified ***directly***, one who is identified ***indirectly***, and one appears to be a ***mystery***.

I. Let's begin with the direct character and ID the Dragon:

"A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

3Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. (Revelation 12:1-4, NIV).

Without any doubt, there are symbols and analogies throughout the book of Revelation. Many of them are interpreted directly by the apostle John, or easily understood from the scripture itself. This is one of those cases.

The word "**dragon**" is used thirteen times in Revelation. Eight of those occasions in this chapter. While the identity of the dragon is fairly apparent, before we give a positive ID, let's look at the wider context.

Red is the color of blood and the color of death. The second horse was the color red. (Rev. 6:4) this refers to the fact that he kills and destroys and murders. Jesus said concerning the devil that he was "a murderer from the beginning." (John 8:44) then we are told that he has "seven heads."

Seven is the number of completeness and heads represent wisdom. Ezekiel 28:12 describes the beauty of the devil before he rebelled against God. The bible says he was "**full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.**" but after he fell, we are told that his wisdom was corrupted.

Then we read he has "ten horns". Horns are the symbol of power. He has "seven crowns" on his head. Crowns are the symbol of authority. So, this tells us that the devil, during this time will have complete power and dominion over this world. Jesus called the devil in John 12:31 "the prince (ruler) of this world."

In Revelation 13:2, we see the dragon giving power and authority to the Antichrist. That certainly narrows down the options. But for those who want something more concrete, John gives us a rock-solid identification in chapter 20, verses 1-3; **And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.**

3He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.” (Rev. 20:1-3, NIV).

Mystery solved, case closed, suspect identified in record time. The dragon is the devil.

II. The Indirect Character – Let’s ID the Child

When God confronted Adam and Eve with their sin in the garden, He also dealt with the serpent. He told him, ***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*** (Genesis 3:15).

From the beginning, God foretold the victory of the coming Messiah over the devil. Because of that, Satan tried to destroy the Jews in general throughout history and Jesus specifically once He arrived on earth.

Think about how the devil corrupted all the earth in the days of Noah, to where there was only one righteous family which the Messiah could possibly come.

Israel was persecuted under Pharaoh in Egypt during the days of Moses for four hundred years in bondage. When Moses was born, the Pharaoh decided to kill all the male babies born to the Jewish people in the land of Goshen. Much blood has flowed from the Jews through the centuries. Later, in the book of Esther the Persian king was tricked into signing an edict that all Jews would be destroyed.

Had it not been for Esther, the queen of Jewish origin, going before the king and asking for his mercy, the whole nation of Israel would have been destroyed. So anytime you see an attack on the nation of Israel, whether it is Egypt, the Persian Empire, or the Romans, then you know that Satan is behind it all.

All Jews were driven from Spain in 1492 during the Inquisition. Hitler is reported to have exterminated eight million Jews.

The devil tried again when the Messiah was still a babe in Bethlehem, the bible says: ***“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.***

“Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” (Matt. 2:13).

Thirty-three years later, Satan finally did have what he perceived to be a great victory. Jesus was crucified on the cross and died. Three days later, that devilish dragon discovered that all his evil work had ended up playing right into the perfect, righteous plan of God the Father.

Even though Jesus is not mentioned by name, He is clearly, the child mentioned in Revelation 12. In Genesis 3:15 Jesus is called the seed of a woman. In Matthew 1:1 he is called the son of Abraham. In Genesis 48:9-10 he is called the son of the tribe of Judah. In numbers 24:17 he is called the star of Jacob.

If anyone is still not convinced, they just need to read how John describes Him in verse 5: ***She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.”***

There is only one person who was "caught up" and who will rule the nations with an iron scepter, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. If there is still any doubt that Jesus is that ruler, we only need to look at Revelation, chapter 19 to find John's description of the Lord:

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. 12His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” (Revelation 19:11-15).

The child is Jesus the Messiah, and the dragon has been after Him since the Garden of Eden. These first two identifications have been simple. Tracking down the identity of the woman is a little more challenging.

III. The Mystery Character – Let’s ID the Woman

It would be easy to say, "Well, if the child is Jesus, then the woman must be His mother, Mary." This language plainly tells us that this is not a literal woman being depicted. In fact, we are told that this woman is **"a great sign"**. A sign is symbolic of something else. So, we know by her clothing and by the fact that she is referred to as a sign, that we are dealing with something other than a real woman.

The Bible and history both inform us that Jesus was born of a virgin. Not only was Mary a virgin, she was also Jewish. This ethnicity is key to the woman's identity.

"The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days." (Revelation 12:6).

We know those numbers. Those are tribulation numbers-forty-two months; or three- and-a-half years. Placing Jesus' mother, Mary, into this scenario in the tribulation period doesn't make sense and doesn't fit.

There are those who say this woman is the church, because the church is the bride of Christ. When John wrote this in 95 A.D., the church was undergoing one of its most severe persecutions by the Roman Government. Some say this is a picture of the great dragon, Rome, persecuting the church. But the woman cannot be the church since she gives birth to a man child. The church did not give birth to Christ; Christ gave birth to the church.

An important clue to the woman's identity can be discovered if we answer the question, why did she flee? But before we can answer that, we must realize that between verses 5 and 6 there is a time lapse. This is common in prophetic statements. Reading this passage is like looking at a series of mountain peaks. From a distance, those peaks look like they are back-to-back-to-back.

However, if you climb to the top of the first peak, you discover that the second peak is miles away, and the third is even farther. The same is true about prophecy. You may have years, or centuries, between one verse and the next.

For instance, when Isaiah wrote about the birth of the Messiah, he said, ***Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given...*** (Isaiah 9:6).

Seven hundred years before that incredible night in Bethlehem, the prophet told of the moment that the Messiah would come as a gift from the Father above. We read about that in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. But, if we keep reading in Isaiah, in the very next phrase, he jumps at least 2,000 years ahead to a period that has not yet come: ***“...and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.7Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*** (Isaiah 9:6-7, NIV).

Revelation 12, Verse 1 ***describes a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.***

A clue to the identity of this woman is found in Genesis 37:9-11 where this same symbolic imagery was once used, ***“Then he (Joseph) had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. “Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”10When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” 11His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*** (NIV)

Jacob's twelve sons made up the twelve tribes of Israel. Joseph only saw eleven stars because Joseph himself was the twelfth star. Of course, this was God's prophesy that one day Joseph would be a great leader, and his brothers would come and worship and bow before him. This came true many years later during a famine in the land of Israel.

But notice the symbolism of the sun, the moon, and the stars; then go back to Revelation 12:1-2, as you will see why this relates to the nation of Israel. This pictures the glorious dignity of Israel, clothed with the sun, the moon, and the stars at her feet. The sun represents Jacob, Joseph's father; the moon represents his mother; and the stars represent his brothers.

Here we plainly see that this imagery was used to symbolize the nation of Israel. Israel is God's chosen people...God's billboard...God's blueprint. God’s hope for the world.

When you combine the devil, Jesus, and the one who gave birth to Jesus, it is not difficult to identify the woman. **She is none other than the nation of Israel.**

Ever since the first curse in Genesis, the devil has done all he could to destroy the Jewish people, and the coming of the Messiah.

In Revelation 12, John moves from the ascension of Jesus in verse 5 to the woman fleeing for the wilderness in verse 6. What is the reason for the woman's flight? That is described in verses 7-13.

“Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. 10Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” 13When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that (Rev. 12:7-13, NIV).

The great tribulation begins with a war in heaven and ends at Armageddon with a war on earth. Now this is a strange thing. Heaven would be the last place you would think of having a war. Everywhere else in Revelation heaven is described as a place of worship, but now it as a place of war.

The participants in this war are Michael and his angels versus the dragon and his angels. Now the reason why Michael is chosen to lead the charge is because he is not just a mere messenger-angel, but also a warrior angel. He is God's Angelic General. He also happens to be the great defender of the nation of Israel.

Daniel 12:1 says, ***"At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found-written in the book."***

Michael is the commander of the angelic army in heaven and the guardian angel of the nation of Israel.

The name Michael literally means ***"who is like God?"*** It is ironic to see that the one who has a name with this meaning defeats Satan, who had the ambition to *"be like the Most High God,"* according to Isaiah 14:14. Michael prevails and Satan is cast out of heaven for good.

The question is whether this heavenly war has happened yet. Is this speaking of when the devil was defeated for his prideful desire to usurp God's authority, and one third of the angels followed him? I don't believe it is.

Contrary to popular opinion Satan is not in hell. Job 1 tells us ***"One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. 7The Lord said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it." 8Then the Lord said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." 9"Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10"Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." 12The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your power, but on the man himself do not lay a finger. Then Satan went out from the presence of the lord."*** (Job 1:6-12, NIV)

Here we see two primary activities of the devil. He spends his time **accusing** the saints in heaven (v.10) and **attacking** the saints on earth (v.12).

After this great angelic battle, however, no longer will there be "a place for him and the one-third of the fallen angles in heaven." While there will be rejoicing in heaven, there will be great bitterness down below on earth.

The devil, in defeat, will take out his anger on the woman, and he will persecute the woman who gave birth to the male child (Revelation 12:13). When will this happen?

Verse 12 says, ***“Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”***

The result of this war is worship in heaven, but woe on earth. According to John F. Walvoord, the immediate aftermath of Satan's being cast out of heaven is his persecution of the woman which brought forth the man-child. When Walvoord speaks of "the great tribulation," he is talking of the second three-and-a-half years of the tribulation. This fits perfectly with the "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" of verse 6.

This is what Christ warned Israel about in Matthew 24:15-22

When Jesus spoke from the Mount of Olives, He said that when the Jews (the people whom He was addressing) saw in the temple the abomination that makes desolate that Daniel spoke of in his day, they should flee to the mountains. In the last three and one-half years of the great tribulation the antichrist is going to break his covenant with the nation of Israel. He will go and sit in the very holy of holies in the rebuilt temple and declare himself to be God in the flesh.

If you want to know how God really feels about the devil, then notice carefully v.9. This is the most exhaustive description of the devil in the bible. He is called four different things, each of which illustrates a part of his nefarious character.

He is called a **dragon** because he is strong. A dragon is a picture of some fire-breathing man-eating beast that kills everything in its path.

He is called a **serpent** because he is subtle. The word serpent literally means "the shining one." Don't get the idea that Satan is some hideous, ugly, evil looking creature that wears a red suit, horns on his head, and carries a pitchfork. The bible says he can transform himself into an angel of light. When he was that serpent of old who deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, he was one of the most beautiful creatures God created.

He is called the **devil** because he is sinister. The word devil means "slanderer! Or "accuser." That is his specialty. He loves to slander the Savior and accuse the saints. He will lie to you. He will lie about you. Then he will lie to you about you. He will tell you you are lost when you are saved. He will tell you you are guilty when you have been forgiven. He will tell you you are weak when you are strong.

Then he is called **Satan** which means "adversary." He is the adversary "who deceives the whole world," he is one who opposes, one who deceives. Jesus said, **"he is a liar, and the father of lies,"** (John 8:44)

There is no denial that the enemy we face is powerful, insidious, and vicious, whose purpose is to do us harm. But take heart. We see the victory in heaven.

Verse 10 says, ***"Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down."*** (NIV)

We see in v.10 that the devil is cast down. Eventually he will be cast into the bottomless pit for 1000 years and finally he will be cast into the lake of fire.

CONCLUSION:

Ever since the first curse in Genesis, the devil has done all he could to destroy the advent and the sustaining of the Jewish people. At first, it was so he could stop the coming Messiah. Now it is so that he can thwart God's plans for His coming judgment on the world, including on Satan and his servants.

In those final days of the tribulation, Satan will act purely out of spite in the hope that there will be no more Jews left. He wants to negate the promise that at the end, "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

When we look at the sorrow and grief the devil causes today while he still has access to heaven, imagine what it will be like when he is locked out and he knows that his days are numbered. His fury will know no limits. It will be his demonic hordes that will pour out of the abyss to torment mankind for five months with the sting of a scorpion.

It will be his four demonic spirits at the Euphrates River who will lead the 200 million troops to kill a third of mankind. And it will be the devil himself who will empower the Antichrist to carry out his schemes.

But despite all this, we read of victory on earth. *"And they (Tribulation Saints) overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."* (v.11)

We are given here the three keys to victory over the devil. This is important. The first C of victory is **CLEANSING**. The second C of victory is **CONFESSION**. The third C of victory is **COMMITMENT**.

First, they overcame him by the blood of the lamb. That is, by **CLEANSING**. I John 1:7 tells us *"the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin."*

When Satan stands before God and accuses us of sin, God the judge looks at our defending attorney, the lord Jesus Christ, and 1 John 2:2 says, *"if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* (NIV)

The devil may try to call you dirty, but if you are under the blood, you are clean.

Secondly, they also overcame him "by the word of their testimony." that is by their **CONFESSION**.. It is not enough just to put your sins under the blood and to be cleansed. You need to let other people know that you have been cleansed and that they too can be cleansed. You need to be vocal and verbal about what God has done for you.

Third, they also overcame him because "they did not love their lives to the death." that is **COMMITMENT**. These Christians had made up their mind they were going all the way with Jesus. Live or die, sink or swim, once and for all, now and forever, they were given over to Jesus, even if it meant death.

STORY: Once Upon a Time...A Chicken and a Pig lived on a farm. The farmer was very good to them, and they both wanted to do something good for him.

One day the chicken approached the pig and said, "I have a great idea for something we can do for the farmer!" The pig, quite intrigued by this, said, "of course!" "I think the farmer would be very happy if we made him breakfast."

The chicken, understanding that he had little else to offer suggested, "I could provide some eggs." The pig SAID, "What else should we make?" The chicken looked around...then said, "ham? The farmer loves ham and eggs!"

The pig, said, "while you're making a **contribution**, I'm making a **commitment!**"

What about you...are you **cleansed** and covered by the blood of Jesus. Do you **confess** that Jesus is Lord and testify of His love for you and others? Have you been baptized in the Holy Spirit so that you can be His witness. Are you **committed** to being a Christ-follower to the end, even unto death?