

# WAR IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH

## Lesson 7

### Revelation 12



#### WELCOME

Sometimes we experience the consequences of someone else's words or actions. Recall a time that happened to you, whether positive or negative.

#### INTRODUCTION

Every verse of Revelation 12 is full of drama and symbolism. They describe a very real and dramatic tragedy in heaven—a cosmic war between good and evil, between God and Satan—a war that would have severe consequences on earth. This chapter pulls back the curtains of heaven and exposes what caused the horrific war that was partially described in previous chapters.

#### Tips for meaningful engagement with the Word:

- “In this chapter, John saw the source of all sin, evil, persecution and suffering on earth, and he understood why the great battle between the forces of God and Satan must soon take place.”<sup>1</sup> Here is John's theological explanation: Satan's defeat in the heavenly realms by the risen Lamb would lead to Satan waging relentless war against those on earth who belong to the Lamb.<sup>2</sup> Despite Satan's rage on earth, John prophesied that Christians would overcome because of the cross of Christ and their faithfulness to Jesus, even as the war rages on.
- There are three scenes in Revelation 12, and this lesson will be divided accordingly: rebellion in heaven (**12:1–6**); war in heaven (**12:7–12**); war on earth (**12:13–18**). The verse numbers have been removed from the Scripture passages and footnotes have been inserted. These footnotes are intended to help clarify the passage and provide better understanding.

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<sup>1</sup> Barton, 134

<sup>2</sup> Fee, 161-162



## WORD

*As you come to the Word, pause and ask God to make it come alive for you. Ask Him to make it understandable and transformational.*

### Revelation 12:1–6

*Then I witnessed in heaven an event of great significance.<sup>3</sup> I saw a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant, and she cried out because of her labor pains and the agony of giving birth.<sup>4</sup>*

*Then I witnessed in heaven another significant event. I saw a large red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads.<sup>5</sup> His tail swept away one-third of the stars in the sky, and he threw them to the earth.<sup>6</sup> He stood in front of the woman as she was about to give birth, ready to devour her baby as soon as it was born.<sup>7</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> This part of John’s vision is a unique telling of the cosmic battle that started in Genesis 3 and will continue until Christ reigns on earth.

<sup>4</sup> The woman represents the people of God, and her crown of 12 stars represents the 12 tribes of Israel. The Israelites had been waiting (laboring) for the promised Messiah for thousands of years. Finally, the “woman’s” son, Jesus (**Revelation 12:5**), was born to a devout Jewish girl named Mary (**Luke 1:26–33**). Revelation 12 shows that Christ’s lowly birth in Bethlehem had cosmic significance. (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2187)

<sup>5</sup> Throughout the Old Testament, serpents, dragons and sea monsters represented evil forces opposed to God and His people (**Genesis 3:1–24; Ezekiel 29:3; Isaiah 27:1; Jeremiah 51:34**). This dragon represents Satan, and his red color indicates his character of violence and bloodshed. His crowns portray real power but not power equal to that of the Lamb. While the Lamb, Jesus, has seven horns representing complete power (**Revelation 5:6**), the dragon has ten horns, a symbol of his widespread evil power. “The 10 horns also recall Daniel’s vision of a ten-horned beast” (**Daniel 7:7–8, 20, 24**). (Duvall, 170-171)

<sup>6</sup> Satan’s major act of rebellion resulted in the fall of one-third of the angels in heaven, described further in **Revelation 12:10**. It appears angels had autonomous wills, and some chose rebellion along with Lucifer/Satan, who was also originally an angel. Scripture seems to give two possibilities as to why they chose to rebel:

“1) The pursuit of prosperity and beauty (**Ezekiel 28:11–19**).

2) The ambition and desire to surpass God (**Isaiah 14:12–15**).

The result [of this rebellion was]:

1) All of them lost their original holiness and became corrupt (**Matthew 10:1; Ephesians 6:1; Revelation 12:9**).

2) Some of them were cast down to hell (**2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6**).

3) Some of them were left free, and they engage in definite opposition to the work of [God (**John 8:43–45**) and the work of] good angels (**Daniel 10:12–14, 20–21; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7–9**).” (Theissen, 136-137)

<sup>7</sup> When Jesus was born, evil King Herod immediately tried to destroy the infant (**Matthew 2:13–20**). Herod’s desire to kill this newborn King, whom he saw as a threat to his throne, was motivated by Satan (the red dragon in **Revelation 12:3**), who wanted to kill the world’s Savior.

*She gave birth to a son who was to rule all nations with an iron rod.<sup>8</sup> And her child was snatched away from the dragon and was caught up to God and to his throne.<sup>9</sup> And the woman<sup>10</sup> fled into the wilderness,<sup>11</sup> where God had prepared a place to care for her for 1,260 days.<sup>12</sup>*

1. The minute Jesus was born, the cosmic battle between good and evil intensified. Jesus' birth provoked joy and wonder, but it also provoked evil.<sup>13</sup> Recall the life and ministry of Jesus and give some examples of the evil battle against Him.

(Some examples can be found in: **Matthew 2:13; Matthew 4:1–11; Matthew 12:13–14; Matthew 26:3–4; Matthew 27:26–31; Luke 4:28–30; John 5:16–18**)

2. Satan, the red dragon, is a key figure in Revelation. What has been/is your personal perspective on him?

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<sup>8</sup> **Psalm 2:6–9** prophesied the same thing.

<sup>9</sup> In these two short verses, John entirely skips the life, ministry and death of Christ. He goes immediately from His birth to His reign in heaven.

<sup>10</sup> Once again, John skips details and moves quickly. The woman now represents all believers—the Church—who were saved through her Son, Jesus. (Barton, 144)

<sup>11</sup> The wilderness is a place of trial and persecution for God's people. It is also a place of protection and provision, as it was during Israel's wilderness journey when they left Egypt (**Exodus 16:4–35**) and during Jesus' time of temptation in the wilderness (**Mark 1:12–13**). (Duvall, 173)

<sup>12</sup> 1,260 days could represent a literal 3 ½ years or a period of time that only God understands. Again, the number means that this is not forever; there is an end date. (Duvall, 173; Mounce 221)

<sup>13</sup> Fee, 222

- a. Read and comment on the following statement by C.S. Lewis:  
“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devil and demons.<sup>14</sup> One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are pleased with both errors.”<sup>15</sup> Why do you think the enemy would be pleased with each of these errors?
- b. How have you experienced these errors?
- c. Another error many Christians make is to believe Satan is an equal opposing force to God. In reality, Satan is in opposition to God but never equal to Him. How does this give you hope?
3. God protected and cared for “the woman” when she fled to the wilderness, a place of spiritual refuge. Note at least two ways you’ve experienced God’s protection spiritually throughout your life.

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<sup>14</sup> Demons are fallen angels, sinful spiritual beings who have Satan as their leader (**Matthew 25:41; Luke 11:15**). (Barton, 141)

<sup>15</sup> From the preface to *The Screwtape Letters* by C.S. Lewis as quoted in Duvall, 175

## Revelation 12:7–12

*Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels.<sup>16</sup> And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This great dragon—the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—was thrown down to the earth with all his angels.*

*Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, “It has come at last—*

*salvation and power  
and the Kingdom of our God,  
and the authority of his Christ.*

*For the accuser of our brothers and sisters  
has been thrown down to earth—  
the one who accuses them  
before our God day and night.*

*And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb  
and by their testimony.<sup>17</sup>*

*And they did not love their lives so much  
that they were afraid to die.*

*Therefore, rejoice, O heavens!*

*And you who live in the heavens, rejoice!*

*But terror will come on the earth and the sea,  
for the devil has come down to you in great anger,<sup>18</sup>  
knowing that he has little time.”<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>16</sup> “This event fulfills Daniel 12. Michael is a high-ranking angel. One of his responsibilities is to guard God’s community of believers.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2187)

<sup>17</sup> Christ is the ultimate Overcomer. Christians are overcomers because of the blood of the Lamb and their testimony.

<sup>18</sup> **Ephesians 6:10–12** makes it clear that Christians and Satan are still in a spiritual battle by saying, “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on all of God’s armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all the strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly realm.” (*Life Application Study Bible*, 2188)

<sup>19</sup> What Satan knows is that God has set boundaries to his time. Satan has divinely set limits, and that angers him. (Fee, 173)

4. **Revelation 12:7–12** speaks of the dragon being “thrown down” multiple times,<sup>20</sup> signifying an extremely important event. How was Satan’s being thrown from heaven to earth both good news and bad news?

5. Revelation 12 makes it clear that Satan’s primary weapons are deception, lies and accusations. In addition, Jesus said, “*The thief’s [Satan] purpose is to steal, kill and destroy ...*” (**John 10:10**)

When confronted with persecution, lies, accusations, etc., “We are not tasked with defeating the devil but only with staying loyal to Jesus and resisting the devil.”<sup>21</sup> Jesus fought back with Scripture when tempted by Satan (**Matthew 4:1–11**). What has helped you fight wrong choices or temptations in the past? What do you believe could help you now?

6. **Revelation 12:11** states that Christ-followers have an active role in defeating Satan. We overcome the enemy of our souls by the blood of the Lamb and by our testimony. How does this play out in your life and the lives of your fellow believers?

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<sup>20</sup> “The Bible documents several descents or falls of Satan:

- 1) Some evidence points to a fall before the creation of the world (**Revelation 12:7–9**),
- 2) the decisive fall from heaven to earth at the cross/resurrection/exaltation of Jesus (**12:7–9**),
- 3) the descent from earth to the Abyss (**20:3**), and
- 4) the final descent into the lake of fire (**20:10**).

In other words, Satan is a defeated and doomed enemy.” (Duvall, 179)

<sup>21</sup> Duvall, 180

## Revelation 12:13–18

*When the dragon realized that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman<sup>22</sup> who had given birth to the male child. But she was given two wings like those of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness. There she would be cared for and protected from the dragon for a time, times, and half a time.<sup>23</sup>*

*Then the dragon tried to drown the woman with a flood of water that flowed from his mouth.<sup>24</sup> But the earth helped her by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that gushed out from the mouth of the dragon.<sup>25</sup> And the dragon was angry at the woman and declared war against the rest of her children—all who keep God’s commandments and maintain their testimony for Jesus.*

*Then the dragon took his stand on the shore beside the sea.<sup>26</sup>*

7. In contrast to the evil flood waters of Satan, Jesus said to drink the Living Water. **John 7:38–39** records Jesus saying, “Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, ‘Rivers of living water flow from his heart.’” (When He said “living water,” He was speaking of the Spirit who would be given to everyone believing in Him...)”

What does it mean for you, emotionally and practically, to drink the Living Water when you face the floodwaters of the enemy (lies, accusation, threats, etc.)?

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<sup>22</sup> Whereas the woman represented the Jewish nation while they waited for the Messiah/the Christ to be born, she now represents all Christ-followers, the Church. (Barton, 144) The word “pursued” is the same word used in Greek as “persecute.” Satan is stalking and pursuing/persecuting God’s people (the Church) because he failed to stop Jesus from His mission and Christians belong to Jesus. (Barton, 144)

<sup>23</sup> “Time” means one year; “times” means 2 years; and “half a time” means half a year. This equals 3 ½ years and is the same as the 42 months in **Revelation 11:2**. God would protect the woman during the season of persecution. (Barton, 145) This is also the same period of time as the 1,260 days from **Revelation 12:6**.

<sup>24</sup> “A flood is a common Old Testament picture of overwhelming evil (see **Psalms 18:4; 32:6; 69:1–2; 124:2–5; Nahum 1:8**). This is a flood of lies and deceit in an attempt to drown the woman [Christ-followers] in sin.” (Barton, 145)

<sup>25</sup> While this is a strange image, it is clear that God uses extraordinary means to protect His people.

<sup>26</sup> Some Bible translations place this verse at the beginning of **Revelation 13:1**. (Barton, 146)



## WORSHIP

***Take a moment to enter into a time of worship—both on your own and with your community—to show praise, adoration and love for God.***

The great hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God”<sup>27</sup> assures us that Satan’s strength can never match God’s power. Read and meditate on these words, and be encouraged by their tremendous truth. Highlight a few phrases that especially speak to you, and thank God for His power.

### A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

A mighty fortress is our God,  
a bulwark<sup>28</sup> never failing;  
our helper he, amid the flood  
of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
does seek to work us woe;  
his craft and power are great,  
and armed with cruel hate,  
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,  
our striving would be losing,  
were not the right Man on our side,  
the Man of God’s own choosing.  
You ask who that may be?  
Christ Jesus, it is he;  
Lord Sabaoth<sup>29</sup> his name,  
from age to age the same;  
and he must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,  
should threaten to undo us,  
we will not fear, for God has willed  
his truth to triumph through us.

The prince of darkness grim,  
we tremble not for him;  
his rage we can endure,  
for lo! his doom is sure;  
one little word shall fell him.

That Word above all earthly  
powers  
no thanks to them abideth;  
the Spirit and the gifts are ours  
through him who with us sideth.  
Let goods and kindred go,  
this mortal life also;  
the body they may kill:  
God’s truth abideth still;  
his kingdom is forever!

<sup>27</sup> This hymn was written by Martin Luther between 1527–1529 during the Reformation and is based on Psalm 46. “A Mighty Fortress is our God.” Public Domain

<sup>28</sup> A bulwark is a defensive wall or fortification.

<sup>29</sup> Sabaoth is an ancient noun meaning the hosts of heaven. The Lord reigns over them. “Sabaoth.” *Dictionary.com*, [www.dictionary.com/browse/sabaoth?s=t](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sabaoth?s=t).





## WITNESS

*Believers are called to reflect Christ in the world. This section will help you engage with how to be a witness—reflecting Christ—this week.*

What thought or Scripture from this lesson encouraged, comforted or helped you?

Among your friends or family members, is there anyone who is battling against the lies, threats and accusations of the enemy? Share the thought or Scripture that encouraged, comforted or helped you with that person.

Pray that God will use it to minister to them.

