

THE CENTRAL CHARACTERS IN THE GREAT TRIBULATION REVELATION 12:01–05

Introduction

This is one of the most revealing and fascinating chapters in the entire Bible. It rolls back the curtain between earth and heaven and shows what lies behind all the sin and evil and all the conflict and struggle of this world. It reveals a great *spiritual struggle* occurring behind the scenes of this world. And in the last days that spiritual struggle will be more intense than ever. The conflict will be so intense that the struggle waged upon earth is called by our Lord the *great tribulation*. By *great* He meant the most intense and terrible tribulation the world has ever seen. But why does the world suffer tribulation? Why does there have to be tribulation upon earth? And why will there be such intense and terrible tribulation in the end time? This passage tells us: it shows us the *great spiritual warfare* that is waged behind the scenes of this world, the great spiritual warfare that is being fought for the souls of men. There are three principle characters who have been involved in the spiritual warfare. These characters are the subject of this first passage.

- I. The first character: a woman with child (vv. 1-2).
- II. The second character: a great red dragon — Satan (vv. 3-4).
- III. The main character: a man child — Jesus (v. 5).

I. Revelation 12:01–02 Israel

There is the first character in the great tribulation — a woman with child. Note how the woman bursts upon the scene. She is said to be a “wondrous sign” or “wonder” (semeion). Note also that she is in heaven. This means that she is the heavenly representative of some earthly people. Who is the woman on earth, what people does she represent?

1. This woman is not identified, but it is clear who she is.
 - a. She is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her. This refers back to the Old Testament to a dream that Joseph had:

Gen 37:9-11 Then he 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.” When 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?” His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

Note that Jacob understood exactly what Joseph meant: the sun represented the father Jacob, the moon the mother, and the twelve stars the brothers. The dream was

a picture of Israel; Joseph was dreaming that Israel would be saved from destruction through him.

- b. She is pregnant and the child is pictured as being born (v. 2, 5). Note what is said about the child.

Rev 12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

This clearly refers to Jesus Christ. He and He alone was born to rule all nations (cp. Psa. 2:9), and He alone was exalted to the throne of God. As stated, this is a clear reference to Jesus Christ.

2. Now who is this woman? There are three main positions as to who she is.
 - a. Some say she is Mary, the mother of Jesus. But there are just too many supernatural things said about this woman for her to be an earthly or human being.
 - b. Some say she is the church. But this is difficult to see, for the church did not give birth to Christ. On the contrary, Christ gave birth to the church.
 - c. Some say she is the ideal Zion, the ideal Jerusalem, the ideal Israel, the chosen people, the community of God from which Christ came. These say the mother represents all the true people of God, those before Jesus came and those after He came. Paul actually speaks of the Jerusalem which is above, who is the mother of the people of God on earth (Gal. 4:26). This position is a possible identification of the woman. But again, this position does not fill all the things said about the woman, not as well as Israel itself does.
 - d. Some say that the woman represents Israel, the very people who gave birth to Jesus Christ. This seems to be the clearest identification of the woman. As we progress through the passage, we will see that everything said about this woman fits Israel just like a glove.

=> Paul himself said that Jesus Christ came out of Israel (Rom. 9:5).

=> Isaiah prophesied that Israel would have labour pains and bring forth a male child (Isa. 66:7-8).

II. Revelation 12:03–04 Satan – Dragon

There is the second character in the great tribulation – an enormous dragon, that is, the devil. Note that the dragon is also said to be a sign in heaven. Three significant things need to be discussed about this sign.

1. There is the description and authority of the dragon or devil. The description is entirely different from what most people think. When people think of the devil, they picture a fiery red serpent-like creature with two horns and a long pointed tail who

holds a pitchfork in his hand. But this is a total misconception, a far cry from the truth. When Scripture speaks of Satan as a dragon, it is referring to the evil work he does, not to his looks or appearance. Scripture says that Satan is the highest and most glorious being ever created by God, that his being is so magnificent that he shines like the sun and actually possesses glory just like God. Note what this verse says about his description, and remember: this is not picturing what he looks like. It is describing his authority and power.

⇒ Satan has seven heads: seven is the number of completeness and fullness. Satan is complete in intelligence; he has full knowledge. He is not omniscient, of course, but his knowledge is complete and full.

⇒ Satan has seven crowns: this symbolizes authority, rule and dominion — a crowned ruler who has a kingdom that he rules over. Scripture clearly says that Satan is a crowned ruler and that his authority is well beyond anything that man ever thinks.

⇒ Satan has ten horns: this symbolizes great power, but power that pierces, rips and tears — all in the most ferocious and vicious way. It symbolizes that he uses his head and authority in an evil way.

⇒ Satan is the god of this world who blinds men's minds.

2 Cor 4:4 *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

⇒ Satan is the prince of this world.

John 12:31 *“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”*

John 14:30 *“I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me.”*

John 16:11 *“And in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”*

⇒ Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

Eph 2:2 *In which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

⇒ Satan is the king of a kingdom.

Mat 12:26 *“If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?”*

Mat 4:8-9 *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”*

=> Satan has his grip upon the whole world.

1 John 5:19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

2. There is the origin of the dragon or devil. This statement is telling where Satan came from. This is clearly seen in the Greek tenses of the statement. Note the two statements in the Greek:

=> His tail “sweeps” (surei, present tense) a third part of heaven. That is, Satan pulls and drags a third of the stars (angels) of heaven.

=> He “flung” (ebalen) them down or threw them down. This is past tense; that is, it tells us what Satan did long ago.

The point is this: today, in the present moment, Satan has authority over one third of the stars or angels of heaven. How? Because in the past he flung them down with himself. Now note two points.

a. Where were Satan and the angels flung down from? Heaven. They were the stars of heaven, but they were cast down from heaven. Eons ago, sometime before man ever began, God created an angel, the highest and most glorious being ever created.

=> His name is Lucifer which means star of the morning.

=> He was the anointed cherub who covered the very throne of God itself. He was the angel put in charge of the glory of God’s very own throne.

But something happened: he did what so many people do. He began to look at himself, and he began to want to live like he wanted instead of like God wanted. He wanted to do his own thing instead of doing like God said. Therefore, he rebelled against God, and in his rebellion he led one third of the angelic beings with him. Consequently, God had no choice but to cast him down from his exalted position in heaven. From what we can glean from Scripture this is what happened to Lucifer, how he became the devil, the arch-enemy of God (see *Satan*, Rev. 12:9; *Satan*, 2 Cor. 4:4; note, 1 Pet. 5:8).

Isa 14:12-15 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.” But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

Ezek 28:11-19 The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man. take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald,

chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings. By your many sins and dishonest trade you have desecrated your sanctuaries. So I made a fire come out from you, and it consumed you, and I reduced you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. All the nations who knew you are appalled at you; you have come to a horrible end and will be no more.’”

Rev 12:3-4 *Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His 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 he might devour her child the moment it was born.*

3. There is the aim of the dragon or devil. Satan’s aim is to devour the woman, to destroy Israel. This has always been Satan’s aim. Why? Because he is out to get back at God for judging him. He is out to hurt God, to cut the heart of God. And the best way he can do this is to turn the hearts of people away from God and lead them to sin and to follow the way of evil.

Now, go way back in history again, to the time when God promised to send the Saviour to the world. When God first promised to send Christ to save the world. Satan knew it. He was listening. He was the serpent who had tempted Adam and Eve and led them to sin and hurt God. But God loved Adam and Eve and wanted to save them from sin and death; therefore, God promised to send the seed, the Saviour of the world, who would crush the head and power of Satan.

Gen 3:15 *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”*

As stated, Satan heard the promise. Consequently, he was bound to do all he could to delay the coming of the Seed, the Saviour. He, of course, knew what we know: no person can stop God’s plan and will. But Satan wanted to get as many people as he could to sin and to turn away from God so that God’s heart would be cut and hurt. He wanted to delay his own defeat and the crushing of his head as long as he could. This is what is meant by this verse:

Rev 12:4 *His 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 he might devour her child the moment it was born.*

Satan has tried from the very beginning to destroy the seed of the woman. He has been waging war against the Seed of God, the Saviour of the world, ever since God promised to save the world. The great Baptist preacher W A. Criswell points this out by tracing some of the attempts of the devil throughout the Bible (*Expository Sermon On Revelation*, Vol. 4. Grand Rapids. MI: Zondervan, 1969, p. 86-87). For clarity, the attempts are put in chart form by us.

<p style="text-align: center;">THE SEED OR LINE THROUGH WHOM THE PROMISED SEED WAS TO COME</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">THE STRATEGIES OF SATAN TO DESTROY THE SEED OR DEVOUR THE CHILD AND GOD’S GREAT DELIVERANCE</p>
<p>=> There was the line of Abel, Adam’s Son.</p>	<p>* Satan led Cain to kill Abel, but God gave Adam another son, Seth (Gen. 4:1f).</p>
<p>=> There was the early line of the godly seed.</p>	<p>* Satan led the godly line to mix with the ungodly and led them into such vile wickedness that God had to destroy the earth. But God raised up Noah (Gen. 6:5f).</p>
<p>=> There was the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.</p>	<p>* Satan led Esau to threaten to kill his brother, Jacob. But God protected Jacob (Gen. 27:41f).</p>
<p>=> There was the line of the children of Israel.</p>	<p>* Satan led Pharaoh to attempt to kill all the male babies of Israel. But God saved Moses (Exo. 1:8f)</p>
<p>=> There was the line of David.</p>	<p>* Satan led son after son of David into sin and to murder and disqualify themselves. But God always kept at least one son of David alive (2 Sam. 13f).</p>
<p>=> There was the line of the sons of David.</p>	<p>* Satan led Jehoram, one of Jehosophat’s sons, to kill all his brothers. But God caused sons to be born to Jehoram to carry on the line (2 Chr. 21:1f).</p>
<p>=> There was the line of Jehosophat’s sons.</p>	<p>* Satan led an enemy to come in and kill all the sons but one – Ahaziah (2 Kng. 8:25f).</p>
<p>=> There was the line of Ahaziah.</p>	<p>* Satan led Jehu to kill Ahaziah, and the queen’s mother, Athaliah, took over the throne and killed all the sons. But God led the wife of the high priest to save one small</p>

<p>=> There was the line of the chosen people.</p> <p>=> There was the line of the Promised Seed, Jesus Himself, at His birth.</p> <p>=> There was the line of the Promised Seed, Jesus Himself, at his temptation.</p> <p>=> There was the line of the Promised Seed, Jesus Himself, at his hometown, Nazareth.</p> <p>=> There was the line of the Promised Seed, Jesus Himself, in facing the religionists..</p> <p>=> There was the line of the Promised Seed, Jesus Himself, on the cross.</p>	<p>baby, Joash. At this point the line of the promised seed rested in the saving of this little baby's life (2 Kng. 9:11f).</p> <p>* Satan led King Ahasuerus to exterminate all of God's people. But God gave him a most restless and frightening night of sleep. The king, therefore, spared the chosen line (Esther).</p> <p>* Satan led King Herod to slay all the babies in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the promised child. But God warned Joseph and told Joseph to flee with the child (Mt. 2:1f).</p> <p>* Satan tempted Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, to secure the loyalty and worship of the people by the spectacular instead of the cross. But Jesus chose God's way, the way of the cross, instead of Satan's way (Mt. 4:1f).</p> <p>* Satan led the citizens of Nazareth to try to cast Jesus off the cliff of a hill, but Jesus escaped (Lk. 4:29).</p> <p>* Satan led the religionists to hate Jesus and to plot his death time and again (Jn. 7:1f). But Jesus escaped time and again.</p> <p>* Satan led the world to put Jesus on the cross and to kill Him. But God raised Jesus from the dead (Jn. 19:1f).</p>
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This is how Satan has attempted to hurt God, by doing all he could to devour the woman, the line of Israel. He did all he could to keep the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, from being born. Now that Christ has come, Satan does all he can to turn people away from judgment to come. Even when people do repent and turn to follow Christ, Satan does all he can to turn the followers of the Lord away from Him.

This is the battle, the combat, the struggle that is going on behind the scenes in the spiritual world. And the war will wage on and on until the world ends. The point of the present passage in Revelation is to show how the struggle will intensify in the

great tribulation. During the great tribulation Satan will use all the resources that he has to destroy the “seed of the woman,” the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. He will do all he can to cut and hurt the heart of God. God is not willing that a single soul perish; therefore, when Satan is successful in turning and destroying one person, the heart of God is cut and hurt as deeply as a cut can pierce.

Thought 1. Note; although the present passage is dealing primarily with the great tribulation, the same spiritual struggle is waged in every generation of history. Satan is out to turn every person he can away from God. He wants people to follow him instead of God. He wants the obedience of people instead of people giving their obedience and loyalty to God.

III. *Revelation 12:05 Jesus Christ*

There is the third character in the great tribulation, Jesus Christ Himself. Note two points.

1. Jesus Christ was born or sent into the world to rule the world. He was sent by God to bring godliness and righteousness to earth, to use an iron sceptre of judgment in order to get rid of sin and ungodliness in the world.
 - a. This He did, of course, by the cross. Upon the cross Jesus Christ made it possible for men to be forgiven their sins and to stand before God, to stand before God free of sin. He did this by bearing the sins of men upon Himself when He died on the cross. He took the sins and the punishment of sins upon Himself. Therefore, man can now be free of sin and acceptable to God. Jesus Christ judged sin, condemned it upon the cross. Therefore, we can say that the rod of iron was used first of all upon Satan when Jesus Christ died upon the cross. Jesus Christ judged and destroyed the power of Satan.

John 12:31 *“Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”*

Heb 2:14 *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil.*

Col 2:15 *And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

1 John 3:8 *He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.*

- b. Jesus Christ will also use the iron sceptre against the nations of the world — against all the ungodly and evil of the world — in the end time. Jesus Christ shall rule all nations and bring righteousness and godliness to this earth by exerting all the authority and discipline of God needed. He shall bring the kingdom of God to earth.

Psa 2:9 “You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

Rev 2:27 ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery’ — just as I have received authority from my Father.

Rev 19:15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron sceptre.” He treads the wine-press of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.

2. Jesus Christ ascended and was exalted to the throne of God. This is proof that He shall rule and reign and bring righteousness to the earth.

Luke 22:69 “But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

Rom 1:4 And who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Eph 1:20 Which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.

Phil 2:9-11 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

1 Pet 3:22 Who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand — with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Isa 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase 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. ■