

# THE MIGHTY SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE BEHIND THE GREAT TRIBULATION REVELATION 12:06–17

## *Introduction*

The curtain has been rolled back between earth and heaven, and we have seen a mighty spiritual conflict going on behind all the ungodliness and evil of this world. We have seen that the dragon, the devil, is out to hurt and cut the heart of God. He does this by turning people away from Christ and leading them to destroy their lives by following evil. The Revelation has shown us this: the rampage of the devil against God will intensify in the end time, especially during the *tribulation*. This is the weighty discussion of this passage: *the spiritual struggle behind the great tribulation — the dragon's (Satan's) attacks against the woman (Israel)*.

- I. The woman flees for her life (v. 6).
- II. The great war over Israel and God's people is fought in heaven (vv. 7-9).
- III. The glorious victory and salvation are won (vv. 10-11).
- IV. The warning to earth is given (v.12).
- V. The dragon launches an attack upon the woman (vv. 13-17).

## **I. *Revelation 12:06 The Great Tribulation of Israel***

The woman flees for her life. This is the picture of the terrible holocaust of the end time. We know this because of the thousand two hundred and sixty days (three and one half years) mentioned. This is the period always referred to as the *great tribulation* (see note, pt. 2-4, Rev. 11:2). The woman, Israel, is going to be severely persecuted by the antichrist in the end time. The Jews are going to have to flee for their lives, flee to the wilderness of the mountains, hills and forests — to every hiding place they can find. However we must always keep in mind that the holocaust is going to be launched against the Gentile believers of the end time as well. There will literally be millions — a numberless number — of Gentile believers slaughtered right along with the Jews (cp. Rev. 7:9). All believers and Israel, the Old Testament people of God, will be fleeing to every corner of wilderness in the world, seeking any place they can to hide.

Note the wonderful promise: God has a place for His people to hide. God is going to save a remnant of believers. He is going to use this persecution to turn even more Jews to His Son, who is the true Messiah, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Rom 11:2** *God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah — how he appealed to God against Israel:*

**Rom 11:15** *For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*

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**Rom 11:23-24** *And if they [Israel] do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you [Gentile believers] were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree [Israel], how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!*

**Rom 11:25-26** *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.”*

**2 Tim 1:12** *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

**Psa 57:1** *When he had fled from Saul into the cave: Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.*

**Psa 121:4** *Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

**Isa 25:4** *You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall.*

**Isa 43:1-2** *But now, this is what the Lord says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.*

## **II. Revelation 12:07–09 The Great War over God’s People**

The great war over Israel and God’s people is to be fought in heaven. The mighty struggle for the believer’s soul occurs in the spiritual realm, the spiritual world or dimension of being. This is the picture of these three verses. The intense struggle for the souls of Israel and the believers in the end time will be occurring in the spiritual world. Remember: Israel and the believers are having to flee for their lives from the worst holocaust the world has ever seen. It has been launched by the antichrist, the one man who embodies the very evil of the devil himself. These verses show us what lies behind this terrible holocaust, what is causing the terrible attack against Israel and the believers.

1. The forces of the spiritual struggle are Michael and his angels and Satan and his fallen angels. Note several things.
  - a. Scripture teaches that God has assigned angels to look after and to minister to believers.

**Heb 1:14** *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (See Angels, Heb. 1:4-14.)*

- b. Scripture teaches there are ranks and orders of angels, that there are various levels of authority among angels. They rule as powers over the spiritual world. This is true among both good and evil angels.

**Rom 8:38-39** *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Eph 1:21** *[Christ is] far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

**Eph 3:10** *His intent [purpose] was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.*

**Eph 6:12** *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

**Col 1:16** *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.*

**Col 2:10** *And you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*

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

- c. Michael is one of the archangels who serves God. In Scripture he is presented as being above all the other angels. He seems to be the prime administrator of God (Dan. 10:21; 12:1, 7-12; 1 Th. 4:16; Jude 9). He is also pictured as the guardian angel of God's people. He struggles against the fallen angels who seek control over the nations and people of the earth (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1; cp. Dan. chapters 10-12).
2. A spiritual war will be fought in the end time between the spiritual forces of good and evil. Satan and his angels will attempt to do what they have always tried to do: stamp out Israel and the followers of Christ. But there will be one difference: verse twelve tells us what it is. Satan "knows that his time is short." God will be ready to end human history. Therefore, Satan will attack both Israel and the believers as never before. He will literally try to wipe out every Jew and believer that he can. Why? Because every one who is killed will never be able to accept Christ nor bear testimony and lead anyone else to Christ. God will hurt and be cut that much more because more people will be lost and never became true worshippers of God.

But note what the glorious outcome of the battle will be. Satan and his fallen angels will be *defeated* and cast out of heaven once for all. After this event — when this battle takes place in the *great tribulation* — Satan will never again have access into heaven. He will never again accuse a believer before God.

Remember: Satan is said to presently have access to heavenly places and to God (Lk. 10:18; Eph. 6:12; Job 1:6f). But this will be the final battle between evil and good. This is the picture being painted by Revelation. After this battle, Satan will be defeated forever.

**Dan 10:14** “Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”

**Dan 12:1** “At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered.”

**Thought 1.** In all the graphic description of the above we must remember what will be happening upon earth. Israel and believers will be suffering the worst horror of evil ever launched upon earth: the holocaust of the antichrist. He will be doing all he can to eliminate every Jew and believer from the face of the earth. Why? All because of the dragon, that ancient serpent, called the devil and Satan. (See *Satan*, Rev. 12:9.)

### REVELATION 12:09 SATAN

*The 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. Rev. 12:09*

Satan is called “the great dragon...that ancient serpent.” His name is *Lucifer*. He was probably one of the highest angels ever created by God, but he fell because of selfishness and pride (Isa. 14:12; cp. 1 Tim. 3:6; Rev. 12:3-4; 2 Cor. 11:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:8.). He is “an angel of light” with such deceptive and seductive power that even some ministers follow him, ministers who “masquerade as servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:14-15). Throughout Scripture Satan is described as follows:

1. He is “the god of this world” who blinds men’s minds (2 Cor. 4:4).
2. He is “the prince of this world” (Jn. 12:31; 14:20; 16:11) and “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Eph. 2:2; 6:12).
3. He is Satan, which means the adversary (1 Chr. 21:1; Job 1:6; 2:1-6; Zec. 3:1; Mt. 4:10; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:8; Jn. 13:27; Acts 5:3; 26:18; Rom. 16:20).
4. He is the deceiver of the whole world (2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9).

5. He is the devil, which means the slanderer (Mt. 4:1, 5, 8, 11; Lk. 4:2-6, 13; 1 Pet. 5:8; Rev. 20:2).
6. He is the tempter (Mt. 4:3; 1 Th. 3:5).
7. He is the evil one (Mt. 6:13; 13:19, 38).
8. He is the father of lies (Jn. 8:44).
9. He is the accuser of our brothers (Rev. 12:10).
10. He is a murderer (Jn. 8:44).
11. He is called Beelzebub (Mt. 12:24; Mk. 3:22; Lk. 11:15).
12. He is called Belial (2 Cor. 6:15).
13. He is called Abaddon (Rev. 9:11).
14. He is called the angel of the Abyss or bottomless pit (Rev. 9:11).
15. He is called Apollyon (Rev. 9:11).
16. He is called the enemy (Mt. 13:39).
17. He is called the gates of Hades (hell) (Mt. 16:18).
18. He is called an enormous red dragon (Rev. 12:3).
19. He is called a lying spirit (1 Kng. 22:22).
20. He is called that ancient serpent (Rev. 12:9; 20:2; cp. Gen. 3:4, 14; 2 Cor. 11:3).
21. He is called the dominion of darkness (Col. 1:13).
22. He called the prince of devils (Mt. 12:24).
23. He is called the ruler of this dark world (Eph. 6:12).
24. He is called the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient (Eph. 2:2).
25. He is called the evil spirit (Mt. 12:43).

Satan's purpose in making war against God is twofold.

1. Satan's purpose is power and worship, to receive as much of the power and worship of the universe as possible (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezk. 28:11-17). He goes about this in three ways.
  - => He opposes and disturbs God's work in the world (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezk. 28:11-17; Job 1:6; 2:1-6; Mt. 4:10; Mk. 1:13; Lk. 4:8; Rev. 12:7-9).
  - => He discourages believers through various strategies (Lk. 22:31; Eph. 6:10-12).
  - => He arouses God's justice against people by leading people to sin and to deny and rebel against God. And when they do, God's justice has to act and judge people to the fate of their choice: that of living with Satan eternally (Mt. 12:25-26; Jn. 13:31-32).
2. Satan's purpose is to hurt and cut the heart of God. Why? Because God has judged and condemned him for rebelling against God. Therefore, Satan does all

he can to get back at God. 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.

However, Christ has broken Satan's power by two acts (Jn. 12:31-32; 16:11; 8:44: Col. 2:15).

1. By never giving in to the devil's temptation (Mt. 4:1-11) and by never sinning (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ overcame sin. He was righteous: He was perfect.
2. By destroying the devil's power of death. Christ was not held by physical or spiritual death (Heb. 2:14-15). He arose and ascended to God's right hand.

It is for this reason that the Bible says "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 Jn. 4:4); and again. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). □

### III. *Revelation 12:10–11 Glorious Victory and Salvation*

The glorious victory and salvation are won by Christ. Note three facts.

1. A loud voice in heaven will shout out that the victory and salvation are now won — once-for-all. Who will this voice be? God's people. We know this because the voice refers to "our brothers." Note what the voice will declare:
  - ⇒ The great salvation of our God: God will be ready to launch the glorious day of salvation, the day of redemption, to bring every person who has ever trusted him into eternity. God will be ready to save the whole world, making a new heavens and earth. The final triumph of salvation will be ready to take place.
  - ⇒ The great strength of God will have just been demonstrated. Satan will have been defeated and cast out of heaven.
  - ⇒ The great kingdom of our God will now be ready to be established forever and ever.
  - ⇒ The power of God's Christ and Messiah will be proven. Every true believer will now live with God forever, worshipping and serving Him — all because of the power of God's Messiah.

**1 Cor 4:20** *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power.*

**Rev 11:17** *Saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign."*

**Rev 19:6** *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns."*

2. The result of God's salvation will be glorious: Satan will be barred from heaven. He will no longer be able to accuse believers before God. Scripture teaches that Satan takes the sins of believers and throws them up into God's face. He points out every

failure of a believer. Why? As stated before, to hurt and cut God. God gave His Son to die for the sins of men. Therefore, every time a believer sins, the devil reminds God...

- that the death of His Son was wasted and useless; it was not worth the price if believers are going to trample the blood of Christ underfoot.
- that the believers' love for Christ and God is hypocritical and shameful.
- that the believer could care less about God and Christ: he does not care enough to obey God. If he did, the believer would not sin.
- that the believer is not worth all the pain and hurt; that God should go ahead and wipe out the human race.

On and on we could go, but the point is the accusation of Satan against believers. But note: Satan will be thrown out of heaven. He will never again be able to appear before God and cut God by the sins and failures of believers.

**Zec 3:1** *Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.*

**Job 1:6** *One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them.*

3. The weapons used to gain the victory over Satan will be threefold. Remember these are the very weapons that Michael and the angels will use in the battle with Satan (v. 7-9). Michael and the angels will protect Israel and the believers in the end time, and a remnant of Israel and of Gentiles will be saved. How?
  - a. By the blood of the Lamb, of the Lord Jesus Christ (see note, pt. 2, Rev. 5:6-7).
  - b. By the word of their testimony, that is, by proclaiming the Word of God and by continuing to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

**Acts 4:20** *“For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

**2 Tim 1:8** *So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.*

**1 Pet 3:15** *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.*

- c. By being loyal to Christ even to death. Note: many will die, millions in fact. But they shall live eternally. They shall never taste death. Quicker than the blink of an eye God shall transfer them to heaven into His very presence. But remember why: because they were loyal; they stood fast in Christ and refused to deny Him.

**Mat 16:25** *“For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”*

**Luke 9:23** *Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”*

**Luke 14:26-27** *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters — yes, even his own life — he cannot be my disciple. And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”*

**Luke 18:29-30** *“I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”*

**1 Cor 15:58** *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

**2 Tim 4:18** *The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

**Thought 1.** The only way we can ever conquer Satan is to use these same three weapons.

- 1) We must be covered by the blood of the Lamb and we must claim the blood of the Lamb.
- 2) We must have a strong testimony for Christ, strongly proclaim the Word of God and continue to confess the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour.
- 3) We must be loyal to Christ even to death (Mt. 10:22).

#### **IV. Revelation 12:12 Warning to the World**

The warning to earth is given. Satan will be hurled, cast down to earth, and he will have one more chance to wreck and destroy all he can. Remember two things:

=> First, the rise of the antichrist is a judgment of God upon earth and its people. Why? Because of people’s ungodliness, evil, idolatry, murder, sorcery, immorality and thievery. In the end time evil will grow worse and worse. Therefore God will let man run wild with their evil, have their own way; and in the end, men will turn to a world leader who promises utopia upon earth, the antichrist himself.

=> Second, Satan has been hurled out of heaven. In the great tribulation Satan is a defeated foe, but he will not be destroyed — not yet. God is going to judge the world through him.

This is what is being pictured in this verse. When Satan is cast out of heaven, he knows he has but a brief time. Therefore, he stirs up the antichrist to create the worst devastation ever seen upon earth.

#### **V. Revelation 12:13–17 Terrible Attack against the Woman**

The dragon, the devil, will launch a terrible attack against the woman. Four points are given.

1. Satan will severely persecute the woman, Israel, and all believers who refuse to deny Christ. There will be a holocaust unparalleled in human history. Through the antichrist, Satan will launch an attempt to literally wipe the Jews and believers from



off the face of the earth. The world will witness not a local or national holocaust but a world-wide slaughter. All over the world...

- the knock on the door by the secret police will be heard by frightened Jews and believers hovered in the corners of their homes.
  - the arrests and jailing will be efficient and quick and will include children as well as adults.
  - the boxcars will roll once again as they have so often in history, packing Jews and believers together like herded cattle.
  - the execution camps will be restored and the executions will be quick and efficient.
2. The woman (Israel) and the believers will be delivered by the wings of an eagle. This is simply a picture of the delivering arms of God. This does not mean, of course, that no Jew and no believer will be killed. The exact opposite is true: the antichrist will slaughter millions, more by far than any other holocaust ever launched in history (cp. Rev. 7:4, 9). God will give His dear people the wings of an eagle to deliver some on home to heaven and others to safety upon earth. Note that the persecution will continue for three and one half years (cp. v. 6).

*Exo 19:4* 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'

*Deu 32:11-12* Like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. The Lord alone led him; no foreign god with him.

3. The serpent, the devil, will attempt to flood Israel and believers with tribulation after tribulation. The idea is an onrushing flood of trouble and persecution, attempt after attempt, horror after horror.

*Psa 18:4* The cords of death entangled me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

*Psa 32:6* Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.

*Psa 124:4* The flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us.

*Isa 43:1-2* But now, this is what the Lord says he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

4. There will be enormous help coming from the earth. God is going to use the earth to swallow up the flooding waters or attacks, of the devil and his antichrist. This probably means one or both of the following:

- => The devastations, natural catastrophes, of God's judgments upon the earth will distract and require the attention of the antichrist. The catastrophes, natural suffering of the earth, will save a remnant of Israel and believers. Remember the enormous destruction upon earth that has already happened due to the seal and trumpet judgments (see notes, Rev. 6:3-8; 6:12-17; 8:6-9:11; 8:6-12; 8:13-9:11; 9:12-21). There will also be nations who do not go along with the policies of the antichrist and they will give refuge to the Jews and believers who escape to their shores.
- => The dragon will launch an attack upon the rest of the woman's seed. This probably refers to the devil and his antichrist launching a more aggressive attack against the Jews and believers who did not flee to other parts of the earth for safety (nations or barren and destroyed parts). Again, remember that vast areas of the earth will be barren due to the natural catastrophes or judgments of God. This could be what is meant by the wilderness areas to which so many flee. In this day, when travel is so easy and with spy satellites and airplanes and helicopters, the wilderness has to mean either huge areas of vast wastelands or else nations that will be sympathetic to the persecuted believers. But not all will flee. Therefore, the antichrist will turn against those who remain behind with more animosity than ever.

**Thought 1.** The attacks of Satan have always been devastating, devastating in that his attacks destroy human lives. We must, therefore, stand fast in Christ and proclaim the victory of Christ over the devil. People can be saved through Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, the glorious message of salvation in Christ must be proclaimed to every man, woman and child on earth. Jesus Christ is their only hope of deliverance from the destruction of Satan.

*2 Cor 11:3* But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

*Eph 6:10-11* Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

*Heb 2:14-15* 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 — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

*James 4:7* Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

*1 Pet 5:8-9* Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ■