

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 2 THE EARTHLY DRAMA

STUDY ELEVEN

Exposing the Ultimate Evil Empire

Revelation 12

Satan is determined to hinder and harm and delay God's great work in whomever may be God's child. He spends his existence stealing and destroying and deceiving and killing. Yet His days are numbered. To put it bluntly, Satan is on the loose. But . . . he is a loser. Never forget it.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

SINCE the earliest days of human history, wicked nations have opposed God, God's purposes, and God's people.

Egypt enslaved descendants of Jacob and forced generation after generation to build up the very kingdom that enslaved them. Babylon conquered the land of Judah, brought the people into captivity, and mandated that they adopt pagan practices and worship false gods. Rome hunted down the earliest followers of Jesus and compelled them to decide between bending the knee to Caesar . . . and living . . . or bending the knee to Jesus . . . and dying.

Even today, Christians all over the world face the constant threat of state-sponsored persecution. These faithful followers of Jesus meet in secret, disguise their Bibles, and live quietly among the masses as best as they can. But even so, they still die at the hands of evil regimes every day.

Sadly, such atrocities will continue, and though the nations rise and fall, there will always be those who resist God and His people—until God says, "Enough." In this *Searching the Scriptures* study, we'll see whom Revelation presents as the king of the ultimate evil empire. Then, we'll raise a shout of victory knowing that God's kingdom will one day topple this evil ruler for good.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer a prayer to God as you prepare to open His Word. Ask Him to soften your heart, to incline your ears, and to prepare your mind for what He wants to teach you. Then call to mind those who are enduring persecution—it could be people you know by name—and pray for their commitment to and comfort in Christ.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Revelation 12 marks a transition in John’s dramatic telling of heaven and earth’s collision. For the past several chapters, we have watched in awe as God executed His justice in two cycles of seven distinct judgments against the wicked and unrepentant.

In this new scene, we witness the main conflict in the book of Revelation. And in this study, we uncover the identity of God’s true enemy: a fierce *dragon*.



Observation: The Woman, the Dragon, and the Child

Revelation 12:1–18 tells the story of the struggle between good and evil using vivid “signs” (*Revelation 12:1, 3* NASB). In this context, this term refers to symbolic imagery that depicts true realities. We will look more closely at these pictures and what they represent in the interpretation section. For now, though, our focus is *observation*. As you read this epic drama, pay close attention simply to what the words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs say.¹

An Ancient Conflict—Revelation 12:1–6

This narrative focuses on three main characters, each of whom we meet in *Revelation 12:1–6*. In the spaces below, record how John described each character and note what happened to each of them.

The Woman (*Revelation 12:1–2, 6*)

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The Dragon (Revelation 12:3–4)

The Child (Revelation 12:5)

A Heavenly War—Revelation 12:7–12

Then there was a war in heaven . . . a battle between God’s army of angels and the dragon’s demonic horde (Revelation 12:7). With the stage set, the drama can begin. According to Revelation 12:8, who lost this battle? What was the result of the loss?

In [12:9](#), John did some of the interpretive work for us and revealed the dragon to represent “the ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world.” As a result of his defeat, the heavens rejoiced in God’s victory. According to [12:11](#), how did the “brothers and sisters” in Christ (see [12:10](#)) participate in causing the “defeat” of the dragon?

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An Earthly Battle—Revelation 12:13–18

Though God cast the dragon out of heaven, he still prowled the earth seeking to bring “terror” to humanity (*Revelation 12:12*). According to *Revelation 12:13–16*, what did the dragon seek to do to the woman and the male child? What happened during each attempt?

In *12:17*, the dragon redirected his anger from the woman and the male *child* to “the rest of her *children*” (emphasis added). Whom did John identify as the true children of this woman?

“Then the dragon took his stand on the shore beside the sea” (*12:18*). This story isn’t over yet. In fact, it’s just getting started. Before we can continue in the story, however, we must stop to make sure we understand the reality behind these symbols.



Interpretation: Battling the Enemy

Nearly every sentence of this vision contains an image whose meaning we can debate. For now, we are going to focus on the main symbols and themes that John highlighted most prominently.

As we already saw, John identified the dragon as Satan in *Revelation 12:9*. But He left the identity of the woman and her child unstated. Use your Bible-study tools to help you interpret these images. You can look at Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*.² If you’d prefer a free, online resource, check out *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org.

What or whom does the woman represent? What or whom does the child represent? Be sure to identify specific details from the passage that help you interpret the meaning of the images. What does God’s interaction with these figures reveal about His character?

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As this passage reveals, God's chief rival goes by many names. The name Satan means "adversary." In *Revelation 12:10*, John referred to him as the accuser. Elsewhere, he is called the devil, which means "slanderer" (see *Matthew 4:1*). And Jesus Himself calls His enemy a murderer and the father of lies (see *John 8:44*). How do each of these titles highlight a different aspect of Satan's activity in the world against humankind? How does this behavior counteract God's work in creation?

Many feel ill-equipped to engage in battle against Satan. Yet John offers the only weapons followers of Jesus need: the blood of the slaughtered Lamb and their testimony (*Revelation 12:11*). How do these rather unusual weapons allow the people of God to overcome Satan?

How magnificent a scene is that? Remember, when the child of God in Christ claims the blood of the Lamb and stands against the powers of the enemy, the believer in Christ wins. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Ancient Serpent

In *Revelation 12:9*, John identified the dragon as "the ancient serpent." By making this connection explicit, John nudged his readers to the book of Genesis to see the origins of this conflict.

In *Genesis 3:1–7*, the shrewd, dragon-like serpent subverted the created order. Though God commanded the humans to rule the animals (see *Genesis 1:26–28*), this particular creature made himself a god over humanity when he tricked them into rejecting the Creator. By this act, Satan introduced sin into God's good world and claimed temporary rule over the earth.

Yet God wouldn't allow this rule to persist, and He proclaimed a curse against the serpent in *Genesis 3:14–15*. Summarize this curse in your own words.

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Genesis 3:15 foreshadows the entirety of the story of Scripture by introducing the generational conflict between the people of God and the serpent. What does this verse reveal about the nature of this conflict? How does it point to the resolution of the conflict?

How does understanding the context of *3:15* help you see the past, present, and future components of the conflict between the woman and the dragon in *Revelation 12:1–18*?

There is continual, spiritual warfare going on. You don't see it. You don't hear it. But you witness the results of it, and at times, you feel the impact of it—especially when you are in regions that are dark, where the gospel has not penetrated. But Satan's days are numbered. His ability is limited. And no one knows it better than Satan himself. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Overcoming the Dragon

The conflict between the dragon and the woman along with her children offers gems of timeless truths valuable to any Christian in any circumstance:

- God's people may face trials and opposition, but God's people are not forgotten.
- Satan may be a powerful and aggressive enemy, but he will not ultimately triumph.
- Christ-followers may be an open and assaulted target, but we need not fear.

Which of God's promises do you find yourself having a hard time believing? How has this passage reassured you of His faithfulness? In what ways can you remind yourself that God keeps His promises—even when it feels like He doesn't?

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How does it feel to know that you—as one who strives to keep God’s commandments and to maintain a testimony for Jesus (see [Revelation 12:17](#))—are a target of Satan’s angry attacks? More specifically, how does it feel to know that he may have been behind some of the chaos in your life, in your family, or even in your nation?

What does it look like practically for you to overcome Satan in the present through the blood of the slaughtered Lamb and your testimony?

Satan, that angry dragon, rules the ultimate evil empire—the empire from which every wicked earthly kingdom and nation takes its cues. And just as Egypt, Babylon, and Rome fell, so too will Satan and his wicked minions. The slaughtered Lamb has slain the dragon by *dying* for those trapped in Satan’s fierce clutches.

This isn’t nonsense. It’s the way of Jesus. So walk in Jesus’ way today.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the difficult reminder that Satan is on the loose in this world. Give me the strength to stand strong against his angry attacks. But thank You also for reminding me that he is a loser. You have already won the war. Help me trust You in the battle. In Jesus’ victorious name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

