

# ***Behind the Curtain***



## ***The Great Controversy In Revelation***

***# 7 in a series***

## Introduction

Many will remember the famous movie entitled “The Wizard of Oz” starring Judy Garland. Here is the story of a young girl named Dorothy who is carried away by a whirlwind and finds herself in a strange land. She desperately looks for a way to return to her home and family by making inquiries of the strange people she meets along the way.

Dorothy is told the solution to going home is simple: “Follow the yellow brick road to the Land of Oz where you will meet the ‘Wizard’. He will reveal to you how to find your way home”. After an adventurous and whimsical journey, she finally finds the Wizard who is operating some sophisticated machinery behind a curtain. She is greatly surprised at what she encounters because it isn’t at all what she expected.

Although a very different story, we do see some parallels in the book of Revelation. The first half of Revelation places us in a “strange land”. We discover a planet being destroyed by its inhabitants who are full of gross sinful behaviours and seemingly addictive selfishness.

The good news is that the book of Revelation reveals directions to show us the way to our real and eternal heavenly home. Rather than a Wizard directing us in our life’s journey, we have Jesus as our Guide showing us the way to His eternal kingdom – the Holy City. Revelation calls our heavenly home the “New Jerusalem”.

The second half of the book of Revelation (starting in chapter 12) we’re taken *behind the curtain* to reveal the real truth of what is going on with planet Earth. Some sinister force is ‘pulling the strings’ of devastation, death and hopelessness. But a far greater power – Jesus Himself – has control of Earth’s final destiny. Jesus promises He will restore our planet to its original perfection and glory. One day, the curse of sin with its pain, death and suffering we now see on this planet will be gone forever.

## Overview for Session #7

1. Introducing “The Heart of Revelation” (chapters 12 – 14)
2. An Overview of the Main Players (Revelation 12:1-6)
3. Summarising the “Cosmic Conflict”
4. The problem of suffering in this world

## 1. Introducing “The Heart of Revelation” (chapters 12-14)

Let's begin our focus with *Revelation 11:19* *Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.*

*Question 1: What item of important significance is found behind the curtain of the temple in heaven?* \_\_\_\_\_



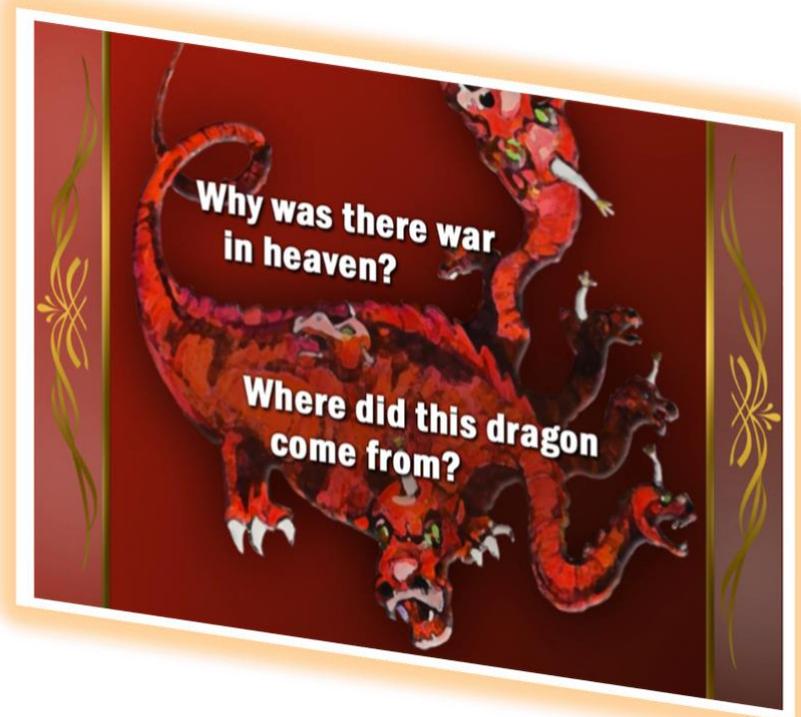
In Revelation 11:19 we are looking at God's sanctuary (or "temple") in heaven. In particular we are in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary where God Himself dwells. You will remember that the main piece of furniture in the earthly sanctuary's Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant which was a large ornate box containing the 10 Commandments given to Moses and written with the finger of God Himself on Mount Sinai. The Ark of the Covenant is also significant in the heavenly sanctuary and we will see how the Ten Commandments figure prominently in the chapters we are studying right now. In fact, the Ten Commandments are central in the the great battle between good and evil we see in Revelation.

## 2. An Overview of the Main Players (Revelation 12:1-6)

In previous studies we found that much of the imagery of Revelation has been borrowed from the Old Testament. In Revelation, it has been cleverly modified to suit the New Testament message.

### **Revelation 12:1-6**

*Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. <sup>2</sup> Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth.*



### **The woman of Revelation 12**

*And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. <sup>4</sup> His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. <sup>5</sup> She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. <sup>6</sup> Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*

First of all, let's identify some of these symbolic characters in Revelation 12:1-6:

The **“woman”** in this section of Revelation is not a specific woman of history. Here the woman is a symbol that represents the collection of God's faithful believers. In Old Testament times **a woman was used in scripture to represent the nation of Israel** – God's chosen people. In the New Testament, **a woman symbolizes ‘spiritual Israel’** – that is, God's people in New Testament times.

Here is an example from the Old Testament where a woman is used to represent Israel.

*Jeremiah 6:2 “I have likened the daughter of Zion to a lovely and delicate woman.”*

*Question 2: Who is symbolized by the Woman in Jeremiah 6:2? \_\_\_\_\_*

Here are two examples from the New Testament where a woman is representing ‘spiritual Israel’.

*2 Corinthians 11:2 “For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”*

*Ephesians 5:26-27 “That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”*

*Question 3: Can you see how the symbol of a woman is used in 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Ephesians 5:26-27 to symbolize the New Testament Church? \_\_\_\_\_*

Further, Revelation 12 emphasises that the woman represents the New Testament church.

The **“Dragon”** is a symbolic reference to **the Devil** (made clear for us in verse 9). Also described in chapter 13, this dragon has seven heads and ten horns. The imagery of the beast with ten horns is taken from the Old Testament book of Daniel - chapter 7. The 1,260 days in this text is also used in Daniel chapter 7. The interpretation of these specific details will be spelled out more clearly in the next lesson.

*Question 4: Who is represented by the dragon in Revelation 12? \_\_\_\_\_*

What are the stars in the sky mentioned here? They represent **the fallen angels** who have aligned themselves with Satan in his rebellion against God and His law.

*Question 5: What is the meaning of the stars falling from heaven? \_\_\_\_\_*

The “Male Child” clearly represents Jesus who is often referred to in Scripture as the Messiah ruling with an iron sceptre (see Psalm 2:9, and also Revelation 19:5).

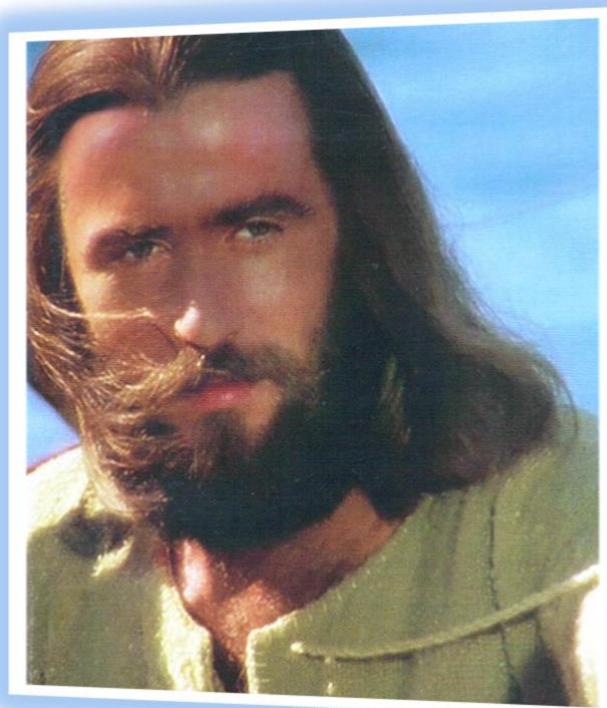
*Question 6: How would you explain the identity of the male child? \_\_\_\_\_*

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So, another way to say Revelation 12:1-6 is:

**1** A vision appeared to me: I saw Israel as she was represented in Joseph’s dream in Genesis chapter 37. **2** Israel was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. **3** Then another vision appeared to me: I saw Satan in a way that was similar to the dream of Daniel chapter 7. **4** Satan’s influence swept a third of the angels out of heaven and flung them to the earth. Satan stood in front of Israel who was about to give birth to the Messiah, so that he might devour Christ the moment He was born.

**5** Israel gave birth to Jesus the Messiah as prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, and after His resurrection He ascended to heaven and now sits on God’s throne. **6** Soon after Christ’s ascension his believers had a ‘wilderness experience’ on earth for a specific period of time. But the Lord made sure that they were cared for.



### 3. Summarising the “Cosmic Conflict”

What we see here is the curtain being drawn back on the supernatural battle that is happening in the universe right now. It is a battle between two opposing powerful beings – God and Satan - good and evil - truth and error. In one way, Christ has already won this battle by becoming a sacrifice for our sins on the cross of Calvary. Although this sinful world has been allowed to continue for a time, ultimately God Almighty will triumph and evil will exist no more.

*Question 7: What is the “Cosmic Conflict” (sometimes called the “Great Controversy”) all about? \_\_\_\_\_*

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We see snippets of the battle between God and the Devil in Scripture. In the beginning, Satan tempted humanity in the Garden of Eden and his temptations continue to inflict suffering on individuals today. Whether we like it or not, we are part of this battle. Christ and Satan are both seeking our allegiance. Satan wants to destroy us and God wants to save us, and our individual decisions will determine how each of us spends eternity.

Here in Revelation, this battle takes centre stage. It is obvious that an evil influence exists in the world wreaking disruption and deep suffering. It is masterminded by this evil creature who is a fallen angel named Satan who gains allegiance by deception, but God gains our loyalty through His love for us. We have the option as to whose side we will choose.

In Revelation chapter 12 we see a summary of the battle as exposed in Revelation.

*Verses 1-3 – Satan verses the woman*

*Verses 4-6 – Satan verses the Son*

*Verses 7-9 – Satan verses Michael and the Angels  
(The name Michael means – ‘Who is like God’)*

*Verses 10- 12 – Satan verses the Lamb*

*Verses 13-16 – Satan verses the Woman*

*Verse 17 – Satan verses the woman’s offspring*

In Revelation 12:17 the woman’s “offspring” are the followers of the God of heaven in the last days of this earth. Satan has always persecuted these believers and here we are told that he will do so at the very end of time. His attack strategy is to draw us away from God by deceptive or forceful means. The Devil will do all in his power to stop you from being faithful to God.

At the other end of the spectrum is Christ who has displayed His love for us through His sacrificial act on the cross. God will not force Himself upon us, but will attempt to draw us to Him and into a loving relationship with our Creator. His desire is to save all people from eternal destruction.

We live in a planet in rebellion against God and will one day cause all the rebellion to cease. In the meantime, He is allowing all people to make their choice of allegiance. To choose Jesus Christ as your Saviour places you on the winning side. This decision of faith in God’s grace will make you part of God’s everlasting kingdom for all eternity.

## 4. The Problem of Suffering in This World



Many people in this world choose not to serve God because they cannot reconcile how a loving God allows the terrible suffering we see on our planet. They argue that if God is all powerful why doesn't He stop pain and suffering? The truth is that the true instigator of suffering is not God at all, but the Devil. It is Satan, as the architect of disobedience and selfishness, who has caused the suffering and pain we see in the world today.

*1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*

Yes, the Devil is indeed attempting to destroy you - but God isn't.

### **WHAT HAS GOD DONE ABOUT THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING?**

#### **GOD HAS DONE SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT:**

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)*

Because of Jesus' death on the cross our sins are forgiven – and He has promised there will be an end to suffering and its causes.

#### **AND GOD IS DOING SOMETHING SIGNIFICANT ABOUT SUFFERING NOW**

*"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14)*

Through Christ's earthly representatives, the gospel message is being proclaimed. This message extends an invitation to you to be a part of God's kingdom where there will be no more suffering.

### **GOD WILL ONE DAY END ALL SUFFERING**

*"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4)*

Those who accept the gospel are given the reward of living in God's everlasting kingdom where sin and suffering will never again arise. Very soon Satan and sin will be gone. The suffering of what sin ultimately brings will have been proven beyond doubt to the whole universe for all of eternity.

*Question 8: Can you see how God's plan to eliminate sin in the universe is the wisest plan?*

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In the meantime, God is saving souls and supporting His people who are struggling in this world of sin. His followers are identified as those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17).

*Question 9: Is it your desire to be one of God's faithful followers today so that you might enjoy God's wonderful promise of eternal life in a perfect world? \_\_\_\_\_*

