

Ministry of Grace

Revelation Chapter 12

Signs of the Woman and the Beast

In this chapter we are introduced to a couple of signs in heaven. These signs are still part of what John was told to prophesy about. Remember at the end of chapter 10, he was told: "... you must again prophesy about ...". So, we know that the things described in this chapter occurred before the seventh trumpet judgment is proclaimed. In fact, we will see that the time focus of this chapter is split between events in the middle of Daniel's seventieth week and events of the second half of that week. We will learn that the first sign represents the nation of Israel and the second sign represents the Devil, himself.

Then we are told about an angelic war in heaven. This war pits Michael and the good angels against Satan and the bad angels. We learn that as a result of losing the war, Satan and all of his angelic followers are kicked out of heaven. This will so infuriate the Devil that he will do everything in his power to destroy all the Jewish people, as well as anyone else who believes in the one true God. And, once again, we will see that the raptured church is in heaven observing all that happens on the earth. The bottom line is that our God reigns supreme and, in spite of the appearance that the Devil is winning, we will see him fighting a losing cause against Almighty God.

Revelation 12:1, 2

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

"sign" – This is from the word *sēmeion*, which means "a sign or miracle with a spiritual end and purpose." Even though we are taking a literal interpretive view of Revelation this tells us that the following is not to be taken literally but figuratively. In other words, the sign has to be interpreted.

"appeared" – This is from the Greek verb *horaō*, which means "to perceive with the eyes." It is expressed in the aorist tense (indicating past action at a point in time) and passive voice (indicating action done to the subject), so it probably should be translated as "was seen." This is a past tense action because John is prophesying about this between the sixth and seventh trumpet judgments and these events happened prior to that.

"a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." – This is most likely a reference to Joseph's dream in Genesis chapter 37. In that dream, Joseph's father, Jacob is depicted as the sun; Rachael, his mother, as the moon; and the 11 stars are the other 11 sons of Israel. In responding to the description of the dream, Jacob clearly understood Joseph to be referring to himself and his descendants.

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What

is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" (Genesis 37:9, 10)

Some (such as those who hold to a post-tribulation rapture) would have this woman be representative of the church. However, verse 5 makes it clear that this woman represents Israel who is often pictured as the wife of God (Isaiah 54:5-6; Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16:4-8; Hosea 3:1).

“crown” – This is the Greek word *stephanos* or “wreath.” It is a victor’s crown.

“she was pregnant” – This is another indication that the woman represents Israel and not the church. Israel is pictured by the prophet Micah as a mother in childbirth bringing forth the Messiah (Micah 5:2-3), but the church is represented as the virgin bride of Christ who is not yet married. The passage in Micah is the one that was quoted to the Magi when they inquired about where the King of the Jews was to be born.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. (Micah 5:2-3)

Revelation 12:3

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

“great red dragon” – Literally “a great fire-like dragon.” Verse nine tells us that this represents Satan.

“seven heads” and “seven diadems” – These heads represent the seven world kingdoms through history: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Antichrist’s revived Roman empire. This is further supported by the seven crowns, from the Greek word *diadema*, which are “crowns of royalty, symbolizing power and authority.” In the vision of chapter 17 the beast is said to have seven heads and ten horns like this dragon. There the seven heads are said to be seven mountains:

This calls for a mind with wisdom: the seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman is seated; they are also seven kings, five of whom have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come, and when he does come he must remain only a little while. (Revelation 17:9-10)

In this passage the expression “seven mountains” is another reference to the seven world kingdoms through history as mentioned above. The seven kings are then explained as the kings of those kingdoms. However, there is another interpretation of the “seven mountains.” Some Bible scholars believe that this is a reference to the city of Rome which is built on seven hills.

“ten horns” – These represent the ten rulers of the final world empire who will rule with the Antichrist. There are other passages in this book in which we are told that the horns represent kings:

And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. (Revelation 17:12)

"Thus he said: 'As for the fourth beast, there shall be a fourth kingdom on earth, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and it shall devour the whole earth, and trample it down, and break it to pieces. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings shall arise, and another shall arise after them; he shall be different from the former ones, and shall put down three kings. (Daniel 7:23, 24)

Revelation 12:4

His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

“a third of the stars of heaven” – Stars are common symbols for angelic beings throughout the Bible. This is a reference to the action described in verse 9 where Satan and his angelic horde are cast out of heaven. In the current verse we are told that they are thrown to the earth. These stars are the angelic beings who joined with Satan in his rebellion against God:

"How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)

One of the reasons that this passage is seen by many as Satan’s original fall is the fact that Jesus said:

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. (Luke 10:18)

In this verse from Luke’s gospel account, the writer used the imperfect tense (past tense of continuous action) rather than a proleptic aorist for the word “saw.” This indicates that it was an action that happened in the past rather than the future. However – given that it is the Son of God speaking, it is possible that he is referring to having seen it in the past, but from sometime in the future, since he is not bound by time.

“the dragon stood before the woman ... so that when she bore her child he might devour it” – Throughout history Satan has attacked the people of God in order to foil God’s plan; from Cain’s murder of righteous Abel, to the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt and Pharaoh’s attempted murder of all male children, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the carrying off of the Israelites to Babylon, to the murder of the children in Bethlehem in an attempt to prevent the advent of the Messiah, to the crucifixion of the Messiah. This verse shows Satan poised to destroy Christ in His incarnation. These events only highlight the fact that nothing can thwart God’s plans!

Revelation 12:5

She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

“a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” – Some would have this be a reference to the church which will rule with Christ. They claim that the expression “caught up” refers to the rapture of the church. However, the words, “male child,” are translated from the Greek words *huion arena*. The word *huion* refers to a son, one who will inherit, but it is

sometimes used to refer to a female who will inherit. The word *arena* however, specifically identifies the child as “male.” In contrast, the Greek word for the church, *ekklēsia*, is a feminine noun, and throughout the New Testament the church is pictured as an unmarried virgin woman engaged to be married to God’s Son. Therefore, this is not a reference to the church, but a reference to Jesus Christ, the coming Messiah, who will rule eternally, beginning with His Millennial reign.

The fact that He is said to “rule all the nations with a rod of iron” is an apparent reference to:

I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."
(Psalms 2:7-9)

The expression “You shall break” is from the Hebrew word *rāa*, the root of which means “to break.” However, in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) this word is translated from *rāa*, with the Greek word *poimainō*, which literally means “to shepherd” involving both the protective care and the discipline that a shepherd must exercise over the sheep. This is the same word translated in Revelation 12:5 as “to rule.” This “breaking” and “ruling” will occur when the Messiah returns to claim His kingdom at Armageddon and begins His thousand-year earthly reign (ruling with a rod of iron) which is just the beginning of His eternal reign.

From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron ... (Revelation 19:15a)

“her Child was caught up to God and to His throne.” – Given the interpretation above, this is an obvious reference to the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Revelation 12:6

and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

This flight of Israel is likely referred to by our Lord when He told His disciples of the signs of the end:

"So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.
(Matthew 24:15-16)

This flight will be triggered by the “abomination of desolation” which is when the Antichrist sits himself in the temple and demands that everyone worship him. Though some claim that the place to which they flee is Petra, the exact place is not mentioned in scripture. Therefore, Israel will flee to the wilderness and be protected by God during the great tribulation (the 2nd half of Daniel’s seventieth week).

It is interesting to note that in Daniel chapter eleven, “the king of the north” (a likely reference to the final world ruler, the anti-Christ) will enter “the glorious land” but he will not attack the lands of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (in the mountains on the eastern side of Israel, across the Jordan river).

This prophetic utterance by Daniel regarding the abomination that causes desolation has a second application. When Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a Seleucid king, came to power in 168 BC, he launched a massive campaign of repression against the Jewish religion. He converted the sacred temple in Jerusalem to a temple honoring the Greek god Zeus and offered a pig on the altar. This was seen by many as an abomination to God and a desecration of the temple. So, when Jesus referred to the abomination that causes desolation, most Jews thought of Antiochus Epiphanes and expected a similar desecration. When Rome invaded Jerusalem in AD 70, many Christians fled the city because of these words of Jesus, while virtually all of the Jews in Jerusalem were slaughtered by the Romans.

Revelation 12:7, 8

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.

This is a description of the heavenly battle where Satan and his angels fight against Michael and his angelic forces. We are not specifically told when this battle begins though we have some clues as to when it ends. Some have speculated that it occurs as a result of the church being raptured from the earth though there is no scriptural evidence for this. It is reasonable to assume that this battle begins (and ends) in the middle of Daniel's 70th week (mid-tribulation) because of the description given in the twelfth chapter of Daniel:

At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. ... (Daniel 12:1)

Daniel's description of "a time of trouble" is very similar to the description that our Lord gave when asked what the end times would be like. He said it would be a time of great tribulation:

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. (Matthew 24:21)

Therefore, it appears that the point in time in which Michael will arise is the middle of the tribulation (the beginning of the great tribulation) which apparently is when this battle takes place.

"no longer any place for them" – This is an idiomatic expression meaning that they no longer existed there. This is the same expression used of the present heaven and earth when they are destroyed at the Great White Throne judgment:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. (Revelation 20:11)

Revelation 12:9

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Trivia note: This verse is exactly half way through the book of Revelation.

At the end of the war in heaven, Satan is cast down to the earth. Some claim this to be Satan's casting down from the first or second heaven to the earth. They claim that Satan's casting out of the third heaven is spoken of in Isaiah:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (Isaiah 14:12)

And by Christ in:

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

However, Paul tells us in Ephesians that we (currently) wrestle against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

The words "heavenly places" come from the single Greek word *epouranios*, which literally means "the above heavens" or "the over heavens." The same word was used by Christ when he referred to His "heavenly" father:

So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you ... (Matthew 18:35)

Paul also used the same word when he told the Ephesians that we currently have all spiritual blessings in the "heavenly places":

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (Ephesians 1:3)

Since Christ's Father is not just in the first or second heaven, but the third heaven, and our spiritual blessings are also in the third heaven, this word must refer to the third heaven (the above heaven or the over heaven) as used by both Paul and Jesus, and we currently are wrestling with the spiritual forces in the third heaven (Ephesians 6:12 above).

Also notice in the next verse (Revelation 12:10) that Satan is currently accusing (present tense participle of the Greek verb *katēgoreō*) which indicates that he is right now before the Father in the "over heaven" accusing us of wrong doing. The spiritual wickedness that we wrestle with on a day-to-day basis is in the "over-heaven" right now.

Based on all this scriptural evidence, we can be certain that Satan and his demons have not yet been kicked out of the third heaven. This means that both Isaiah 14:12 and Luke 10:18 refer to future events that are spoken of as if they already happened (proleptic aorist in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 14:12 and omniscient future view of a past event in Luke 10:18).

How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! (Isaiah 14:12)

And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18)

This casting of Satan and his demonic horde to the earth means that they will no longer have access to the heavenly realm (the third heaven). This casting to the earth of Satan and his angels occurs in the middle of Daniel's seventh week based on Revelation 12:13, 14.

"his angels were thrown down with him" – This is further evidence that the "stars" in verse four are, in fact, angelic beings. When these fallen angels are thrown to the earth, joined by the

demons already roaming the earth, the demons spewed forth from the abyss (**Revelation 9:1-3**), and two hundred million other demons headed by the four formerly bound in the Euphrates (**Revelation 9:13-16**), there is likely to be demonic activity on this earth the likes of which has not happened since time began (Therefore, the woe proclaimed for the earth dwellers in verse 12).

Revelation 12:10

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

“Now the salvation ... kingdom of our God ... have come” – The verb translated “have come” is a proleptic aorist (a future event that is so certain that it is spoken of in the past tense).

“our brothers” – Since angelic beings are never referred to as brothers to those who have “overcome by the blood of the Lamb”, this collective group must be saved humans in heaven. It is likely that these include the martyrs who were revealed with the fifth seal judgment as well as those who have been martyred since then.

“a loud voice” – This is written in the singular, but this same voice calls the brothers “our” brothers. Therefore, it follows that this must be a voice of one who represents all Christians. It is most likely one of the twenty-four elders. This is one more indication that we will be able to observe the events of the tribulation period from the throne room of God.

Satan has been opposing God and His plan since the fall of Adam and Eve. Currently he has access into the presence of God and he is there regularly accusing faithful servants of God, a position from which he is to be thrown down at mid-trib (see verses 13 and 14).

Revelation 12:11

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

“they have conquered” – This is a reference to the “brothers” in the previous verse.

Those who had been subject to Satan’s accusations have become “overcomers” (or conquerors) as described in chapters 2 and 3 in the letters to the seven churches. Those who conquer do so by the blood of the lamb and their testimony. Some of these (many of them during the tribulation) kept their testimony even in the face of martyrdom.

Revelation 12:12

Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!

Following the down-casting of Satan to the earth there is a proclamation of rejoicing in heaven for those who dwell there. The word translated “dwell” is a form of *skēnoō*, meaning “to pitch a tent and encamp.” There is also a proclamation of woe to the earth and the sea. Many manuscripts say “inhabitants of the earth.” The word translated “inhabitants” is a form of *katoikeō*, meaning “to dwell permanently in a fixed dwelling.” Therefore, we who have been invited to heaven through the blood of the lamb will rejoice, while those who reject the blood offer and, instead choose to be permanent earth dwellers, will experience great woe.

Why do you think that the unsaved are said to be permanent earth dwellers, while the saints are said to encamp in heaven (as a temporary condition)? Could this be because inhabitants of heaven will one day leave that abode and become permanent dwellers in the new heavens and the new earth?

“in great wrath” – Once Satan and his demonic hordes have been cast to the earth they will realize that the end is near and will be furious with God and His people! The word here translated as “wrath” is not *orgē*, the word normally translated as “wrath,” but *thumos*, implying “great passion, fierceness, or indignation.” Once Satan and his fallen angels are cast to the earth, he will be filled with fierce determination to foil God’s plan (but he will ultimately fail).

Revelation 12:13, 14

And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.

This indicates that Satan and his angels are cast to the earth at mid-trib, because the woman will be nourished for 3½ years. The word translated “when” is *hote*, which means “after,” or “when,” or “as soon as.” The implication is that right after Satan is cast to the earth, he pursues the woman (who, as we saw in verse one, represents Israel).

“pursued” – This is from the Greek word *diōkō*, which means “to pursue or to persecute.” Therefore, Satan will go after Israel to destroy them, once and for all, so that God’s plan might finally be thwarted.

The woman, Israel, will be able to flee to the wilderness where God will miraculously nourish her for three and one-half years. This is the same period referred to in verse six as one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Satan will somehow be kept away from this place as the text says that the place of the woman will be “from the serpent.”

Revelation 12:15

The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood.

Since we know that “the serpent” is a symbolic reference to Satan we must assume that the “water” that is spewed out of his mouth is also symbolic. It is possible that this refers to literal water but it is just as likely that this represents a flood of people, perhaps an army, sent to find and destroy the Israelites.

Revelation 12:16

But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

“the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river” – Again, the earth opening its mouth is possibly symbolic. If you read **Numbers 16:28-33**, however, you find this same expression, “the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up” to consume Korah and his family and followers, meaning that the ground beneath them split apart and they fell into the opening. Therefore, it is very possible that the water that Satan sends forth after the Israelites (whether it be literal water

or representing a mass of people) is suddenly consumed by massive seismic activity that causes the ground to split open.

Revelation 12:17

Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Another reason to believe that the “water” in the previous verse is an army, is the fact that we see in this verse that as a result of Satan’s inability to destroy the Jews fleeing Jerusalem he now goes to war against all Jews. But, it’s not just Jews (the rest of her offspring) but also anyone who keeps the commandments of God and has the testimony of Jesus Christ. In other words, all believers whether Jew or Gentile will be targeted by Satan through the instrumentality of the antichrist throughout the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week (the great tribulation).

So What?

Because of my age, whenever I think of Satan and his opposition to Christians today, I think of the old Flip Wilson comedy routine. For those of you who are too young to know who Flip Wilson was, he was a comedian with an alter-ego by the name of Geraldine, the preacher’s wife. When her husband asked her why she bought yet another new dress, she said, “The devil made me buy this dress.” She then went on to explain how the Devil followed her down the street and forced her to look into the window of a dress shop. The Devil seduced her with praise and then forced her to sign her husband’s name on the check to buy the dress. And, this excuse worked so well that her excuse for every misstep in her life became, “The devil made me do it!”

Many Christians today want to blame the devil for all the ills of their life. What we fail to realize is that there are millions of Christians in the world today and only one devil. And – he is not omnipresent like our God is. The devil can only be in one place at a time. Not only that, but as we learned in verse 10, Satan is in God’s throne room day and night accusing us of wrongdoing. So, he doesn’t have very much time to interfere in our lives. But before you feel too relieved that the devil is not constantly attacking you, remember that he leads millions of fallen angels who are willing to do his bidding. He has a huge army of powerful angelic beings, and according to Paul:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12)

But - he doesn’t really even need their help to make us fall into sin. Our good-ole sin nature takes care of that. Even though he doesn’t need to make us fall, he still gets delight in breaking our fellowship with the Father. He is definitely the enemy. He not only is the accuser (that’s what the name Satan means), but his other name, Lucifer, means “the shining star.” According to the Prophet Ezekiel, Lucifer was a most beautiful creation:

You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. (Ezekiel 28:12)
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And, he is also the master of disguises:

... for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. (2 Corinthians 11:14)

It's no wonder that everything he offers us is so attractive. He's the master of attractive. Add to all this the fact that Satan has been at this battle for thousands of years, from the Garden of Eden onward. So, what's our defense against such a powerful, experienced foe? We are to be made strong in the Lord and we are to put on our defensive armor.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ... Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. (Ephesians 6:10-18a)

I'm sure that we're all familiar with this passage and many of us have memorized it at least once. Unfortunately, sometimes familiarity breeds contempt, or in this case, laziness. We know what we should do, but we all tend to be a bit lazy at times.

In this passage from Ephesians, we are not told to pursue Satan and we are not told to run away from him either. We are told to "stand against the schemes of the devil." But we can't do it under our own power. We need God's power and God's protection. We do this by submitting to His authority in our lives and by intentionally moving closer to Him, as James tells us:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. (James 4:7, 8a)

Now, consider what it will be like for the tribulation saints. The earth will be inundated with evil spirits and the saints will be the constant target and prey of these evil forces and the enemy will be assisted by the permanent earth dwellers, who won't know any better.

Let's spend time this week giving thanks to God that He has given us salvation during the church age and pray that we will live our lives in a manner that is pleasing to Him. Let us submit to Him, resist the Devil, and draw near to our God and Father.

Let's pray.

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