

7,000 inhabitants lose their lives. In contrast to the unrepentant reaction in **9:20-21**, the terrified remnant in Jerusalem gave glory to God.

Thought Question: How did God use the death of the two witnesses to accomplish His good purposes?

A dramatic announcement follows. **Verse 14** mentions that the second woe has passed and that the third woe is coming quickly. In other words, the sixth trumpet judgment has been completed and now the final trumpet will be blown.

Thought Question: What does the ministry of the two witnesses teach us about the cost of ministry?

9. Anticipation of the Seventh Trumpet (11:15-19)

i. Proclamation of Victory (15)

At this point the seventh angel who will blast the final trumpet, anticipates the coming rule of Christ with, “*The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of Our Lord and of His Christ and He will reign forever and ever.*” This proclamation of victory insinuates that the world is presently the kingdom of Satan (**John 12:31; 14:3; 16:11**). Throughout the tribulation, the devil seems to have tightened his grip his subjects through the rule of the anti-Christ, but when the seventh trumpet sounds, Christ shall triumph, assume his throne, and rule the earth.

Thought Question: Why do you believe that God allows Satan to rule the world at present? What purpose does this serve?

ii. Song of Triumph (16-18)

In response to this declaration the twenty four elders prostrate themselves and sing a song of praise. They extol Him for the following:

His Power (vs. 17): The elders express gratitude towards God as He graciously answered the prayers of the saints. They call Him the “Almighty” implying that no one can resist His power. He will soon wield His “great power” to dispose of His enemies and govern the planet.

His Wrath (18a): Institution of the kingdom of God provokes defiant rage from the kingdoms of this world. Yet, God's holy wrath silences their wicked rage, as He rightfully and forcefully overthrows their power.

Thought Questions: Why would various world governments rage against the kingdom of God?

His Retribution: Not only does God overthrow these kingdoms at the onset of His reign, He will also judge all people. The prophets, the saints, and all those who fear God whether of lowly or imperial stature the Father will grant their reward, eternal life in heaven (cf. ***Rev. 21:9-22:5***). Yet, those who destroy the earth, in particular the Beast, false prophet, and Satan, he will destroy.²⁹

iii. Revealing of the Temple (19)

In response to the victory hymn of the elders, God opens His heavenly temple. When Jesus died, the veil was torn revealing the Holy of Holies. This symbolized the reconciliation between man and God through the death of Christ. In this case, the opening of the temple and revelation of the ark represent a new age in which God will not have to conceal His glory. The revealing of the Ark of the Covenant is significant since it long symbolized God's presence, atonement, and covenant with His people. It has long been lost, but it will be restored to the earth when the Temple of God descends to the earth during this future and final reign. With the ark open for everyone, all will experience unmediated fellowship with God.

As the God shows John the ark, peals of thunder, flashes of lightning, hail, and an earthquake rock the earth. All the earth prepares itself for the coming of Christ to reign upon the earth.

Thought Question: What is necessary to secure unmediated fellowship with God?

²⁹ This conclusion comes in light of the context of Revelation, in which these three are presented as the arch enemies of God who decimate His creation.

10. The Seven Personages (12-13)

Before the final trumpet blast and the outpouring of the seven bowls, John sketches a meaningful backdrop by which God will paint the rest of Revelation. In chapter twelve through thirteen, the author introduces us to seven personages whose identities helps us to understand the hidden forces behind the climax of human history.

Thought Question: As we explore this passage we will see the usage of the term sign (*12:1, 3*). What is the purpose of a sign? (Hint: consider the word *signify*)

a. The Woman Clothed with the Sun (vs. 1-2)

In anticipation of the seventh trumpet, John looks up in the heavens and beholds a great sign. This is the first of a series of signs which convey valuable information to understanding the historical context of the final trumpet judgment. Each of these signs are rich in metaphorical and symbolic details as the term “sign” indicates that each of these portraits point to a literal reality. Thus, when talking about seven heads and ten horns the usage of signs give us latitude to seek the metaphorical meaning of the description instead of embracing a wooden interpretation.

Thought Question: Much debate has ensued regarding the identity of the woman. What details do *verses 1* and *2* provide?

To help us sort through the details we will survey the three most prominent views.

- i. **The Virgin Mary:** This Catholic position comes from the straightforward observation that the woman gives birth to Jesus. Yet, early Christian literature lists no references to that effect. Epiphanius of Salamis, approximately in the middle of the fourth century, is the first one to note that “some individuals [unnamed] were identifying the woman with Mary.” But the New Testament speaks against this exegesis, because for herself Mary assumes a modest place in society and church. Also, during the Middle Ages the majority of writers equated the woman not with Mary but with the church. Further, as we shall see later, this misses much of the obvious symbolism.³⁰
- ii. **The Covenant Community:** This, the reformed position, recognizes the Jewish symbolism of the woman with child, but extends the metaphor to cover all Saints from all ages. Yet, this is improbable since the gentile community can scarcely be regarded as the “mother of the messiah.” Such a title is better suited for Israel. Further, in

³⁰Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. New Testament Commentary, Page 354. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

Revelation 12:17 the Dragon pursues the “rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” This reference to a separate and distinct body of believers makes it difficult to conceive of the woman representing *all* believers from every age.

iii. **National Israel:** For a variety of reasons this is the best option:

1. As mentioned earlier, there exists a strong presence of National Israel in Revelation (i.e. the Temple and the 144,000).
2. Often the Old Testament portrays the Israel as the wife of God (cf. *Isa. 54:5-6* and *Jer. 31:32*).
3. The woman gives birth to the Messiah. This accords with the promises made to national Israel via the Abrahamic (*Gen. 12:1-3*) and Davidic Covenants (*2 Sam. 7:8-17*).
4. The imagery of the Sun and the moon allude to *Genesis 37:9-10* where Joseph says:

Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, "Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." And he related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?"

In this passage, the sun refers to Jacob, the moon – Rachel, and the stars their sons, the patriarchs of national Israel.

Thought Question: Of the above three views, which is to be preferred and why?

Thought Question: What can be known about the spiritual state of the Nation of Israel during the tribulation? In other words, must we assume that the nation of Israel consists entirely of believers? Why or why not?

John goes on to describe the manner in which the woman gave birth “*in labor and in pain.*” This speaks of the pain and suffering national Israel endured in anticipation of the Messiah.

Thought Question: Why do you suppose God makes mention of national Israel before the seventh trumpet blast? What might this suggest about God’s plan for them (*cf. Romans 11:25-29*)?

b. The Red Dragon (12:3-4)

i. Description of the Dragon (vs. 3):

Great red Dragon: As with the red horse, the red color of the Dragon represents warfare. In this case, the color matches the Dragon’s intentions to rip the child away from the woman. As we shall find out later, the Dragon is explicitly described as Satan, the avowed enemy of God and His people.

Seven heads with Seven Diadems: The seven heads and the ten horns are an admittedly difficult description to decipher. The strong references to Daniel must play a crucial role in discerning the meaning of this symbolism. In that Old Testament book of prophecy, Daniel makes several references to the future kingdoms which will dominate the world. Consider the following chart taken from the MacArthur Study Bible:

An Overview of Daniel's Kingdoms

I. Daniel 2/Daniel 7

A.	Babylon	2:32, 37,38; 7:4, 17
B.	Medo-Persia	2:32, 39; 7:5, 17
C.	Greece	2:32, 39; 7:6, 17
D.	Rome	2:33, 40; 7:7, 17, 23
E.	Revived Rome	2:33, 41–43; 7:7,8, 11, 24,25
F.	Millennium	2:34,35, 44,45; 7:13,14, 26,27

II. Daniel 8/Daniel 11

A.	Medo-Persia	8:3–8, 20,21; 10:20,21, 11:2–35
B.	Greece	8:3–8, 20,21; 10:20,21, 11:2–35
C.	Revived Rome	8:9–12, 23–26; 11:36–45.

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Now, at the time of the writing of Daniel, Israel was under the domain of Babylon. But in the following years, Babylon would soon lose their dominating status to Medo-Persians, who would eventually be conquered by the Greeks, who would eventually be conquered by the Romans. Finally, at the end of days the Kingdom of the Antichrist will take power in the form of a revived Roman empire. This backdrop helps us to understand the historic progression of the kingdoms of the earth.

In *Revelation 17:10* the author equates the seven heads of the Dragon with seven kings.

“they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.”

Notice that five have fallen, one presently exists, and one will come in the future. The historical context dictates that Rome would be the kingdom presently in existence, as John authored Revelation during the reign of the Roman Empire. The Future Kingdom will be the Kingdom of the Tribulation run by the Antichrist. The initial five would then consist of five fallen kingdoms, and working our way backwards from when John wrote the book, we conclude that they are Greece, Medo-Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. Therefore, in light of the backdrop of Daniel, it seems best to take the seven heads as the seven Kingdoms who have and will dominate Israel.

³¹MacArthur, John Jr. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. electronic ed., Da 2:4. Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997.

Thought Question: What power lay behind the kingdoms which dominated Israel? Why were they are target?

Ten Horns: The imagery of the ten horns comes from *Daniel 7:24* which reads:

'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.

Revelation 17:12 picks up on this same imagery:

"And the ten horns which you saw are ten kings, who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.

From this text, we read that the ten horns represent the ten kings who reign with the anti-Christ during the final Satanic kingdom.

- ii. ***The History of the Dragon (vs. 4):*** *"And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and them to the earth."*

Though some people might take this passage literally implying that Satan's tails swept a third of the stars to earth, we should remember that the "sign" terminology gives us greater freedom in discerning the meaning. Another option would be to take the stars are representative of angels. In *Revelation 9:1-2*, an angel is represented by a falling star. Further, *Matthew 25:41* refers to the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and *his* angels. Thus, it would be logical to conclude that the stars represent angels. At some point in time, between creation and the fall, Satan led them in rebellion (his tail swept a third of the stars). Thus, they fell from grace and have aligned themselves with Satan.

Thought Question: Judging from what you know about Satan, why do you suppose he took a third of the angels with him when he fell?

Not only did Satan lead the angels in rebellion, he also actively sought to devour the woman's child (Christ-as we shall see later).

Thought Question: In what ways did Satan try to oppose the birth of Christ and why?

In the words of one commentator:

Influenced by Satan, Cain killed his brother Abel, and Pharaoh drowned the male children of the Hebrews. With murderous intent King Saul hurled his spear at David, and Haman plotted to annihilate the Jewish people living in the provinces of Persia. In New Testament times, Herod the Great slew the baby boys up to two years old in Bethlehem. Whenever a new development was about to take place in the history of God's people, in this verse symbolized by the woman, Satan stood ready to thwart God's purposes and tried to eliminate his Son. Satan's attacks on the woman continue until Christ returns.³²

Thought Question: Why do you suppose Satan persists in opposition to God when the Scriptures teach that he will fail?

c. The Male Child (12:5-6)

Moving on the third personage, there is general consensus that this child refers to Christ. Born of the woman of Israel, He is the king of the Jews.

- i. **“Who is to rule all the nations”** This refers to His future reign over all of the nations of the earth (11:15).
- ii. **“With a rod of Iron”** An iron scepter is one that cannot be broken or resisted. Jesus will rule with might, crushing any resistance to his decrees and plan.

Thought Question: Why won't there be a democracy when Jesus comes back?

³²Kistemaker, Simon J., and William Hendriksen. Vol. 20, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Accompanying biblical text is author's translation. New Testament Commentary, Page 357. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001.

- iii. **“Was caught up to God and to His throne”** This refers to the Ascension, in which Jesus rises to the Father’s heavenly residence. Absolutely powerless to harm Him at this point, Satan turns his attention elsewhere.
- iv. ***The Woman Flees:*** With the absence of the Son, the woman becomes the object of Satan’s ire. She runs for her life, and finds refuge in the wilderness for 1,260 days. The mention of the 1,260 days immediately takes us back to the second half of the tribulation. As you may recall, this is a time when the gentiles trample the holy city of Jerusalem underfoot. In keeping with the imagery of **Chapter 12**, when this final Satanic Kingdom (the seventh head) comes to conquer National Israel (the woman), the Jews flee for their lives. Reminiscent of their forefathers’ residence in the desert, the Father tenderly provides and protects His people.

Thought Question: With Jesus out of the picture, why do God’s chosen people now become Satan’s targets?