

# Lesson 27

Last week when we ended we were looking at the first half of verse 18. Let's begin this week by looking at the second half of that verse.

**Revelation 11:18b** — *And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great.*

Okay, time frame or no time frame, verse 18 must be the end of the world, right? Well, no. It doesn't have to be. And assuming we don't throw our time frame out the window, we shouldn't be too quick to leap to the end of the world even when we reach a verse such as verse 18. But how can we make sense of verse 18 and remain consistent with the time frame of 1:1, 1:3, 22:6, and 22:10? Several ways.

**First**, we need to remember how other judgments are described in the Bible — both Old Testament judgments as well as the New Testament judgment of Jerusalem in Matthew 24. When we recall those descriptions, I think we will discover that the language used here is similar to that other language that we know was not describing the end of the world. If the language here is being used as it was used for those other judgments, then what we see here is a vivid image of Rome's judgment — not a description of the judgment at the end of all time.

After all, is verse 18 speaking of Rome really that different from Matthew 24:30 speaking of Jerusalem?

**Matthew 24:30** — *And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

We know with certainty because of Matthew 24:34 that Matthew 24:30 occurred in the first century — why not verse 18 here in Revelation 11, also? Yes, one day there will be a **literal** judgment of all men on that last great day — but God **figuratively** comes in judgment when he judges an enemy of his people. We know that is what we see in Matthew 24:30 as to the judgment of Jerusalem.

I think we are seeing the same thing here, but as to the judgment of Rome rather than of Jerusalem.

A **second** point about this judgment in verse 18 is that Hebrews 9:27 tells us that we each have an appointment with death. That's true today, and it was also true in the first century. Christians died, and Romans died. Those Christians who remained faithful unto death received a crown of glory, while those Romans who rejected God received wrath and indignation. **When did they receive those things?** Did they receive it the first century or is that all still yet to come on the last great day?

In one sense, it is all yet still to come. On that last day, Christ will judge the world and men will hear their sentence. Some will hear "well done," while others will hear "I never knew you." But let me ask you this — for anyone who will have already died before Jesus' return (such as everyone who lived in the first century), will the sentence they hear on the last great day come as a surprise? No. They will have known what that sentence will be ever since the moment of their death.

Whether we believe that the dead in Christ today are with Abraham (as was the case at least *prior* to the cross) or that the dead in Christ today are with Christ (as I believe, and as I believe Paul believed), one thing we can all agree on is this — those who are dead already know their eternal fate. So, at least in that sense, the judgment of the Romans happened when they died.

As soon as a Roman persecutor died, including the Roman emperors themselves, that person knew that he or she had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. And that was a **first** century realization, wasn't it? Perhaps that is what verse 18 has in mind when it refers to "***the time of the dead.***"

Rome was judged in the first century, and perhaps much of that judgment involved the individual judgments by God of individual Romans that occurred at the moments of their individual deaths. We have talked a lot about the judgment of the **nation** of Rome — but in the end all judgments are personal, individual judgments. Nations are not lost or saved; people are lost or saved.

A **third** point is to recall something we discussed in our introduction and something we have already seen in our study of the text: **sometimes a literal event is used as a figure for some other event.** We have seen this with a literal **past** event — the literal plagues of Egypt have been used as figures for the judgment that is coming on Rome. We may be seeing the same thing here, but with a literal **future** event.

God may be using the **literal** future judgment of the world as a **figure** for the first century judgment of Rome. If so, then these descriptions here (and also later descriptions, such as in Chapter 20) may tell us something about that yet future event (the judgment of the world) as well as tell us something about the past event that it is depicting (the judgment of Rome).

Those are just three points to think about. We will have much more to say on this topic as we proceed into the second half of the book.

Whenever verse 18 happens, **the message is clear** — Christ’s enemies will be judged and destroyed; Christ’s faithful servants will be rewarded.

Notice that the **prophets** are among those rewarded in verse 18. They had looked forward to and foretold the coming King and his eternal kingdom, and now their reward is to see those prophecies fulfilled. Their reward is to witness the unfolding of the mystery. Their reward is to witness the vindication of God’s people. Can’t we just picture Daniel and Zechariah watching these events unfold?

What about the phrase at the end of verse 18 — “and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth”? What does that mean? Thayer tells us that “to destroy does not mean to extinguish or bring to extinction, but to change for the worse, to corrupt,” as moths corrupt garments in Luke 12:33 or as evil dispositions corrupt minds in 1 Timothy 6:5.

Rome had corrupted the earth, but the tables were about to be turned on Rome. God’s people would put on incorruption (1 Corinthians 15:54), but not so with Rome. God’s people have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4), but not so with Rome. Rome was about to reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). Why? Because of Galatians 6:7 — “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Finally, why are we shown the ark of the covenant in verse 19?

**Revelation 11:19** — *And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament.*

The ark of the covenant was located in the Holy of Holies, inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen and into which the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. But that temple was now destroyed, and the ark of the covenant had been missing since at least the Babylonian captivity.

Why do we see the ark here? The ark of the covenant provides reassurance to God's people that God remembers his promises. The ark is pictured as always being in the presence of God to remind him of those promises. Whatever the terrors to come, God will not forget his promises.

In a similar way, the thunder, the lightning, the earthquakes, and the hail in verse 19 are Old Testament symbols of judgment that are intended to remind us that God keeps his promises. God promised to judge and punish the church's enemies — and he will. God promised to vindicate the church — and he will. God keeps his promises.

In fact, verse 19 is a confirmation that God has (past tense) kept his promises because verse 19 comes after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which marked the judgment of Rome. The church has triumphed! Rome has been defeated!

## Chapter 12

### **Revelation 12:1-2**

**1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: 2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.**

Chapter 12 begins with a great wonder or great sign in heaven. In the gospel accounts, John often used this Greek word translated “sign” where Matthew, Mark, and Luke used the Greek word translated “miracle.” This same Greek word for “sign” used by John in his gospel account occurs seven times in the book of Revelation — three times in reference to God and four times in reference to the deceptions of Satan. This sign in verse 1, of course, is a sign from God, and the first thing we see in this great sign is “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.”

**Who is this woman?** As we always do with such questions, let's start by looking at the clues in the text.

First, she is clothed with the sun. Second, the moon is under her feet. Third, she is wearing a crown. And fourth, there are twelve stars on the crown.

Let's start with the last of those clues — the twelve stars. We have seen the symbol twelve before in this book, and we know what that symbol means. Twelve is the symbol for the people of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New — twelve sons of Jacob, twelve tribes of Israel, and twelve apostles. So we should expect this woman in verse 1 to depict, in some way and at some time, the faithful people of God.

What else do we see? We see the sun, the moon, and the stars. Where else in the Bible do we see those same three symbols used closely together with regard to the people of God? One place is Jeremiah 31. We are all familiar with verse 31 of that chapter in Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 31:31 — Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.*

But after the description of the new covenant in verses 31-34, we then get to verses 35-36 of Jeremiah 31, where God makes it very clear that the new covenant did not mean that God was going to turn his back on his faithful people under the old covenant. Instead, as we know, the gospel of the new covenant is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; **to the Jew first**, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). Listen as Jeremiah describes this in verses 35-36 of Jeremiah 31.

*Jeremiah 31:35-36 — Thus saith the Lord, which giveth **the sun** for a light by day, and the ordinances of **the moon** and of **the stars** for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The Lord of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the Lord, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever.*

The sun. The moon. The stars. God pointed to those heavenly ordinances in Jeremiah 31 as evidence that he would not forget his people under the old covenant when he established the new covenant. And here in Revelation 12, we see the people of God represented by those same three heavenly ordinances: the sun, the moon, and the stars.

We have one textual clue remaining in verse 1 — the crown. That would make the woman, not a king, but a queen. In verse 2, we see this woman delivering a child, which we will see in verse 5 is a son. What do you call the son of a queen? You call him a king! This woman is giving birth to royalty.

So who is this woman in verse 1? Is she the church? **Yes and no.**

Yes, in the sense that the faithful people of God under both the old covenant and the new covenant are now a part of God's eternal kingdom, the church, that was established in Acts 2. In fact, the Old Testament prophets make up part of the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

So why yes and no? I say yes and no because, although those under the old covenant **became** part of the church after its establishment, verse 1 is looking back to a time prior to the establishment of the church. Verse 1 is describing the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Perhaps that is why we see twelve used here rather than twenty-four or 144,000. I think we are looking here at the faithful people of God prior to the new covenant.

And that makes sense with the other clues as well. Jeremiah 31:35-36 (the sun, the moon, and the stars) was addressed to God's faithful people under the old covenant who were wondering about their position under the new covenant. The answer to that concern in Jeremiah is the same as Paul's answer to the same concern in Romans 9.

***Romans 9:4-5** — Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever.*

And notice what Paul adds in verse 5 — “of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came.” I think Revelation 12 is making that same point. And I think the child in Romans 9:5 is the same child we see in Revelation 12:2 — the child Jesus who came from the faithful people of God under the old covenant. And he came to bring salvation under the new covenant, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

We see Messianic promises in the Old Testament that are very similar to what we see here in Revelation 12:1-2.

***Isaiah 66:7** — Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.*

**Micah 4:10** — *Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.*

And what do we see in the very next chapter of Micah?

**Micah 5:2** — *But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.*

So what then is the point of Revelation 12:1-2? The point is that Jesus did not appear on this earth fully grown. Jesus was born of a woman (Galatians 4:4). This woman in Revelation 12 is not Mary, but this woman is the faithful people of God under the old covenant, of whom Mary was numbered.

Why did God bring his faithful people back to Jerusalem out of Babylonian captivity as we studied earlier from the book of Ezra? Because God's faithful people had to be living in Jerusalem in the first century for the promised blessings of Christ to come to pass. Absent the faithfulness of God's people from the time of Ezra to the time of Christ, God's plan could not have proceeded according to prophecy. I think it is those faithful people who we are seeing here in the opening verses of Revelation 12.

So the woman in verse 1 represents the faithful people of God under the old covenant. Will that be the case for the entirety of the chapter? Perhaps not. We need to be on the lookout for a possible transition in this description from the old covenant to the new covenant. If that happens, then we would expect to see this woman represent God's faithful people under the new covenant rather than under the old. But however you look at her and whenever you look at her, she represents God's faithful people.

So who then is the child in verse 2? No one who has read this far in the Bible could have any doubt as to the identity of this child! This child is Jesus, who descended from God's people under the old covenant. We will witness the birth of this child in verse 5.

This child is the royal child of Micah 5:2, that we read just a moment ago — “out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose go-

ings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” That explains the crown on this woman’s head! “Out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be **ruler** in Israel.”

Yes, Jesus came from the womb of Mary, but Jesus more broadly came from the womb of those faithful Jews who were awaiting the promised Messiah — people like Simeon, who “was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).

Some of the most beautiful and dramatic images found anywhere in the Bible are found right here in Chapter 12. The destiny of this woman depends upon her child of promise. And what could be more helpless than a little new born child? But surely no one would seek to harm a baby, right? Wrong! On to verse 3.

### **Revelation 12:3-4**

**3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. 4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.**

Verse 3 reminds me of a quote by one of my very favorite authors, J. R. R. Tolkien. He once wrote that “it does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him.” That’s good advice for us here in Revelation 12 because in verses 3-4 we meet a powerful, bloodthirsty dragon who appears before the woman waiting to devour her newborn child.

Where have we seen this same cast assembled before? For that we must turn from the last book of the Bible all the way back to the first.

*Genesis 3:15 — And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

This battle has been going on for a long time — and guess what! It's head bruising time! This child has been in the womb of God's faithful people since the opening chapters of the Bible, and now this child has arrived. And Satan knows what that means! Satan knows all about Genesis 3:15 — Satan was there to hear it spoken, and Satan knows the Bible better than we do! Satan is a Bible scholar!

So who is this great red dragon? This great dragon in verse 3 depicts Satan, but more precisely in this context the dragon depicts Satan using Rome as a powerful weapon against the church. It would have been difficult to think of a more potent weapon than the mighty Roman empire and its godless emperors. And who was wielding that weapon? A murderer! John 8:44 tells us that Satan was "a murderer from the beginning." This murderer is waiting in verse 4 to murder a new born child.

How do we know for sure that Rome is involved here? We know that from the dragon's description in verse 3 — "seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads." Why seven? Why ten? Why horns? Stay tuned. We will see these same symbols again in Chapter 13, and they will be explained to us by an angel in Chapter 17. When we get there we will see that they very precisely represent Rome. In fact, we looked at them earlier in our study of Daniel, which we will review when we get to Revelation 13 and 17.

But even here in these verses we have enough clues to get a glimpse of what we will discover in those later chapters. The word "crowns" in verse 3 occurs three times in Revelation, but nowhere else in the New Testament. It is different from the crown of victory (*stephanos*) that we have discussed before. These crowns in verse 3 denote royal power or royal rule. Which royal rule is in view here? Well, who was reigning at this time on earth? What royalty was Satan using to attack the church? Rome! Satan is arrayed with the emperors of Rome! It was through their reign that Satan sought to destroy the church of Christ.

What are the stars of heaven in verse 4 that are cast down by the dragon? Sadly, I think they represent the people of God. Why sadly? Because the dragon causes some of them to fall to the earth. The word translated "cast" in verse 4 means to drag away or to pull away.

Are they people in the church who fell away? The timing here suggests not. Instead, I think these were faithful people under the old covenant who fell away. People who did not continue to faithfully await their coming Messiah. Remember, here in verse 4 the woman has not yet given birth to her son.

But while this description is focused on those who fell away under the old covenant, it has a lesson for those who are tempted to fall away under the new covenant. Didn't we read about such fallen stars in Revelation 2-3? It was through Roman persecution and emperor worship that Satan caused some Christians to compromise with the world and be lost. These stars did not fall when they died physically; these stars fell when they turned away from Jesus and died spiritually.

**Luke 9:24** — *For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.*

**Matthew 13:20-21** — *But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

Some did not endure faithfully to the end.

But although Satan caused some to fall away, he did not cause all to fall away. Just as a third was used earlier in this book to denote a partial judgment, a third is used here to describe Satan's partial success in causing some of God's people to fall away. And how important that was! If all of God's people had fallen away, then how could Jesus have come into the world? Where would God have found Mary and Joseph and John the Baptizer and the Apostles? God was depending on his faithful people under the old covenant to prepare the way for his son to bless the entire world under the new covenant.

There is an important lesson here for us in verse 4 — this dragon should not be underestimated! Yes, Satan has been defeated. Yes, Satan is acting out the role in this book that God has given him. But, Satan is real, and Satan is dangerous. Otherwise why do we have all the warnings in the Bible about Satan? Satan causes people to fall away from God, and when that happens it is as if a star has fallen from heaven — whether it be because of Roman persecution or just because someone has other things he or she would rather be doing on Sunday morning.

All throughout this book, God is calling upon us to see things as he sees them. Many people say that the symbols in Revelation are describing things that we cannot see, but I think that is wrong. I think the symbols in Revelation are de-

scribing things that we can see, but that were aren't seeing correctly. God wants us to see things correctly, and the way to see something correctly is to see that thing as God sees it.

I fear that we do not always see a Christian's fall from grace in the same cataclysmic terms in which God views that departure. It looks like such a non-event from our perspective — the person is here, and then the person is sometimes here, and then the person is never here. We may ask about the person, we may even call him, but then very often that is the end of it. They drift away from the church, and we drift away from them. Drifting doesn't seem very dramatic, does it?

But if that is the way we see things, then we aren't seeing things correctly. Perhaps we need to picture that person as a shining star cast back down to earth by the tail of a great red dragon. **That's how God sees it!**

*Luke 15:10 — Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

“Joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Is that how we see things when someone comes forward to repent of wrongdoing? If not, we aren't seeing things correctly! The book of Revelation is many things — but perhaps more than anything else the book of Revelation is an eye test!

But was Rome really a great red dragon waiting to devour the church? The handout this week (available at [www.ThyWordIsTruth.com](http://www.ThyWordIsTruth.com)) shows two coins minted during the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian (and also a third coin minted about 20 years later during the reign of Hadrian). On one coin,



Domitian is referred to as **Divi Filius** — which means son of the divine, or son of god. On the other coin, Domitian's own infant son (who died very young) is referred to as “The Divine Caesar, Son of the Emperor Domitian.” That child of Domitian is shown sitting on the globe and stretching his hands out toward seven stars. Note also the seven stars shown on the coin from Hadrian's reign, about twenty years after Domitian. A divine child who holds seven stars in his hand — where have we seen that before? Revelation 1:16, speaking of Christ, says, “and he had in his right hand seven stars.”

These similarities are unmistakable. Domitian must have seen Christianity as a great threat to his own claims of divinity for himself and for his own infant

son. Remember what Paul say about Domitian in 2 Thessalonians 2:4 — “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.” Read that description and look at those two coins! And you might want to show those two coins to anyone who doubts that Rome is the villain in this book. Who can look at those coins and doubt that Rome and the church were on a collision course? And who can then read Daniel 2:44 and doubt the outcome of that conflict? Domitian thought that his own child was a royal divine child holding seven stars in his hand — but Domitian was very badly mistaken.

Here in Chapter 12, a great red dragon waits to swallow up the son of God. We know very little about Domitian’s son except that he died in infancy. It certainly makes you wonder who swallowed up whom! Perhaps Domitian experienced the last of those Egyptian plagues **literally**. We will have much more to say about Domitian as our study continues.

In verse 4 this great red dragon stands before the woman, waiting to devour her child as soon as the child is born. To any outside observer it must have looked like this child had absolutely no chance. How could anyone, much less a newborn baby, prevail against a great red dragon? The great red dragon likely had the same view — how could it be possibly defeated by a newborn baby? The dragon will just swallow it up, and that will be the end of the matter. Right? **Wrong! Things are not what they seem!**

Satan had once attempted to swallow up this child literally through Herod the Great, which was really through Rome even then since it was by Rome’s authority that Herod ruled. Satan has crucified this child, again using Roman hands. Now Satan was once again trying to do the same thing to the body of Christ, his church, and once again through Rome. Satan knew that he would never have a better opportunity than this — attack the church in its infancy with the mighty Roman empire, the greatest weapon he had ever had. Satan had been waiting to devour this child since Genesis 3, and now was his chance!

This devouring of God’s people reminds us again of Old Testament imagery. In Jeremiah 51:34 Babylon swallowed God’s people “like a monster.” Egypt, which also tried to devour a servant of God as a child (Moses) and which also persecuted God’s people, is called a great dragon in Ezekiel 29:3. At the time of this book, Satan’s weapon had changed from Babylon and Egypt to Rome, but the one wielding that weapon is the same serpent we met all the way back in Genesis 3.

Revelation is often viewed as a book that looks forward — but it might equally be described as a book that looks backward as it repeatedly describes Rome in terms of past events.