

Revelation — Lesson 15

Chapter 11 began by introducing us to two witnesses. At first, they seemed unstoppable, but a beast from the bottomless pit killed them. Afterward, those who dwelled on the earth celebrated and exchanged gifts. Why? Because the two witnesses had been a torment to them. Things looked bleak in verse 10 — but that's all about to change. Those who were celebrating and exchanging gifts in verse 10 will be in great fear in verse 11.

11:11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up hither!" And in the sight of their foes they went up to heaven in a cloud. 13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. 14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

There are many wonderful words in the Bible, but "but" has to be one of the most wonderful! And there are few uses of "but" that are more wonderful than the "but" in verse 11 — "But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them." Some of the most important verses in the Bible begin with the word "but."

The "but" in Romans 3:21 is one of the few that rivals the "but" here in verse 11. Another important "but" appears in Psalm 22:3, which offers an interesting parallel to what we see in Chapter 11. The early Christian must have also asked the question in Psalm 22:1 — "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from

helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” And they must also have found comfort from the reply in 22:3-4 — “**But** thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.” In fact, much of Revelation is a reminder to them of what the Psalmist said in Psalm 22:3-4. God delivered his people before, and he will do so again.

Things look very bleak for the church ... but. It looks like Rome is going win ... but. It looks like Satan may have the last word this time ... but. It looks like the church is finally finished ... but. God will *always* have the final word!

After 3½ days God raises the church from the dead. The two witnesses start breathing again and get back on their feet. Where is the celebration now? Just one verse ago, the world was making merry and exchanging presents! What are they doing now? Verse 11 tells us they are now in great fear. My, how the situation has changed!

And that’s not all that has changed. Notice how the verb tenses have changed in verse 11. In verses 9-10, we read, “And they ... *shall* see their dead bodies ... and *shall* not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth *shall* rejoice over them.” But in verse 11, we read, “They *stood* upon their feet.” So certain is this course of events that John speaks of future events as though they were past events.

The earlier persecution was temporary, as depicted by the symbolic 3½ years. The apparent defeat is even more temporary, as depicted by the symbolic 3½ *days*.

In the sight of their foes, the two witnesses ascend into Heaven. They are completely vindicated. Few saw Christ ascend into Heaven, but this ascension occurs in full view of God’s enemies. All the world now knows that they are on God’s side and under God’s protection. And God is moving them to safety — which must have caused the greatest fear of all. Why did they need to be moved to safety? Rome was about to find out!

The first thing that happens is a great earthquake, which serves as an omen of a coming judgment on those who rejoiced at the apparent defeat of the church.

A tenth of the city falls and 7000 are killed. Once again only a fraction is affected; that is, even this judgment is not yet final. More is on the way.

Why a tenth and why 7000? The destruction of a tenth is an image of decimation (which literally means to take one in ten). The use of 7000 foreshadows the perfect and complete judgment that is coming and that will not allow for repentance.

What about those who are not killed? Verse 13 tells us they were terrified and gave glory to God. Does this mean that finally someone was led to repent? Did the message finally get through to them? Can the judgment be called off as it was in days of Jonah? No.

This apparent repentance is not a real repentance. Things are not what they seem, and we have seen this before. The great city here is modeled after the city of desolation in Isaiah 24-27. In those chapters, the prophet looked beyond Judah and saw a world of sin, called a waste city or city of desolation. God shook the earth, and that lofty city was brought low. The Bible tells us that out of the destruction there emerged a people who feared God — and they were right to fear God! What we see here is not repentance, but rather rationality!

Those left alive in verse 13 are not Christians. Their motive is not love but rather fear. How do we know their conversion is not genuine? For the simple reason that they remain on this earth. In this book, the faithful are pictured as being in Heaven with God, while the wicked are repeatedly referred to as those who dwell upon the earth. The witnesses ascend into Heaven. Those looking on in astonishment do not. Those called the foes of God in verse 12 remain the foes of God in verse 13 — they are now just astonished foes probably wondering for the first time whether they chose the winning side! They are much like a sports fan who roots for whichever team seems to be

winning at the moment. Remember that one day *every* knee will bow to Christ and *every* tongue will confess to God. (Romans 14:11)

What did Nebuchadnezzar say after he saw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come out of that fiery furnace unhurt? Read Daniel 3:28-29 —

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set at nought the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way."

What was Nebuchadnezzar's motivation? We see the same motivation and the same response here in verse 13. Those who remain alive now recognize that God is going to win, and they want to be on the winning side. Verse 13 doesn't tell us that they are Christians — rather what it tells us is that they are not fools!

The people in verse 13 "worship" with the same motivation as that of Nebuchadnezzar. Their fate remains unchanged. We are not told that they repented in any way from their murders, thefts, sorceries, and idolatries. Just a few verses earlier they were exchanging gifts to celebrate the apparent demise of the Lord's church!

There are many atheists in this world — but there are no atheists in the next. The Psalmist tells us that it is the fool who says in his heart there is no God. (Psalm 14:1) There are many fools in this world — but there are no fools in the next. No atheist or agnostic will remain so forever! Some day all atheists will believe, and all agnostics will care. Someday all fools will repent of their foolishness.

Nikita Khrushchev once gave a speech in which he said that the Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin "flew into space, but didn't see any God

there.” If Yuri had really wanted to see God from his tiny space capsule, all he needed to do was open the door! Nikita and Yuri are believers today. I don’t know if there are any atheists in foxholes, but I do know there are no atheists in Hell (only *former* atheists). We are seeing that same sort of realization in verse 13.

Verse 14 tells us that the third woe is soon to come. The seventh and final trumpet will be the third and final woe of the three woes proclaimed by the eagle in 8:13. The Greek word translated “soon to come” means “without delay, quickly, speedily.”

Let’s take a moment to review where we are: The message John is told to relay is that the church will undergo severe hardship and may at times appear to be defeated. But John’s message also tells us that God is on the church’s side and all will be well in the end. The church’s final victory is assured.

So far, John has relayed this message in two ways: First, the city of God will be trampled under foot for 3½ years, but the inner sanctuary will be protected. Second, two witnesses will prophecy for 3½ years, but then be killed by the beast. Their apparent defeat, however, is only temporary. After 3½ days they come back to life and ascend to Heaven.

In Chapters 12 and 13 this message will be told again in two different ways: First, in Chapter 12, a woman will be forced to flee into the wilderness for 3½ years, yet will find there a place of nourishment and protection. Second, in Chapter 13, a beast will overcome God’s people, and yet his authority will last for only 3½ years.

As we study this book, I know that sometimes it seems I repeat myself a lot. The reason for that is that God is repeating himself a lot! The central message of this book is being told again and again through many different images and symbols. Do you want the *Cliff’s Notes* version? Here it is: God loves the church! Things may appear bleak, but the church will be victorious! God’s enemies will not win, but rather will be judged and punished! (But isn’t God’s version so much better!)

15 Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

A great silence followed the opening of the seventh seal in Chapter 8. The sounding of the seventh trumpet is followed by loud voices in heaven.

Most (but not all) commentators think that the seventh seal contained (or unleashed or revealed) the seven trumpets and the seven bowls that followed, and that the seventh trumpet contained the seven bowls of wrath that followed. If so (and this view makes sense to me), then this seventh trumpet marks the end of Rome.

It may be that as the seventh trumpet sounds, the seven bowls containing the full and destructive wrath of God are poured out. That is, although we will hear the details later, it may be that the bowls are poured out when this final trumpet sounds.

Recall, for example, what we were told in 10:7— “but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God, as he announced to his servants the prophets, should be fulfilled.”

In any event, we know that at this point the judgment is done and the outcome is inevitable. Hence the cry goes out: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

What is meant by the phrase “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord”? The judgment of Rome and the victory of the church depict a public vindication of something that was already true in fact — Jesus is king! This verse does not mark the beginning of Christ’s kingdom or of Christ’s authority over anyone. Instead, it depicts a public reaffirmation of that kingdom and that authority. Recall —

- **Revelation 1:5** Jesus is [not will be] the ruler of the kings of the earth.
- **Ephesians 1:21** Jesus sits [not will sit] at God's right hand, far above every principality and power and every name that is named.
- **1 Peter 3:22** Jesus "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him."
- **Psalms 29:10** The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king for ever.
- **Daniel 4:17** The Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will, and sets over it the lowliest of men.

The word "kingdom" as used here includes more than the church. (The two terms are not always synonyms. See the lesson on God's kingdom available at ThyWordIsTruth.com as part of our series of lessons on the Lord's church.) Here the kingdom includes all of the people and nations of the world. Jesus has *all* authority. In the widest sense, the universe is his kingdom. Jesus does not just have authority over believers. He is king of everyone and everything. All are subject to the rule of Christ. In Acts 2:36-38, those who heard the first gospel sermon were told to obey Christ — not to *make* him Lord — but because he was already Lord. We obey Christ because he is our Lord and King — not to make him our Lord and King. It is a subtle distinction, but it is an important distinction.

Verse 15 says that Jesus shall reign forever. Again, note that Jesus is reigning now and was reigning then. Paul tells us about the reign of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:24-28 —

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. **For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.** For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted,

which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, **that God may be all in all.**

What do those verses tell us? They tell us that Jesus is reigning now — “**For he must reign**, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.” They tell us that he will reign until his enemies are destroyed, with the last of those enemies being death.

But hasn't death already been defeated? Yes. We were freed from the bondage of sin and death by the cross. Death has been defeated, and yet it continues. (Rome also continued for quite awhile after being defeated.)

The writer of Hebrews described mankind's relation with death in Hebrews 2:14-15 —

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

In Romans 5:12, Paul personifies death as a cosmic power that entered the world through Adam and that reigns over everyone.

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

And yet when Paul wrote, death had already been defeated. Paul told us in Romans 8:38-39 that not even death could separate us from the love of God —

For I am sure that **neither death** nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will

be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The defeat of death occurs at the resurrection of the dead; the two are one and the same. And that is precisely Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15 — if there is no resurrection of the dead, then death will forever remain unconquered. When Jesus rose from the dead never to die again, death was forever defeated! Death will have been finally destroyed on that great day when we too rise never to die again.

And 1 Corinthians 15 tells us something else about that last great day. Paul tells us that when Jesus comes again, it will not be to establish a kingdom, but rather it will be to offer up to the Father an already established kingdom. And once Christ delivers his kingdom to the Father, God will be all things in all. His reign will be unchallenged. Death will not just have been defeated; death will have been destroyed. No one will doubt the defeat of death on that day!

16 And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying, "We give thanks to thee, Lord God Almighty, who art and who wast, that thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign. 18 The nations raged, but thy wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth." 19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple; and there were flashes of lightning, voices, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

In verse 17 the 24 elders say to God, "thou hast taken thy great power and begun to reign." What does that mean? This is the same question that we just considered with regard to Christ in verse 15.

As we often do, let's start with what it does *not* mean. It cannot possibly mean that God was not reigning prior to the judgment of Rome because we know that God has always reigned over his creation. If God was not reigning over Rome, then how were they in subjection to him? What right did God have to judge them and punish them if they were not his subjects?

But the world is in such a mess! How can God be reigning when everything seems to be going so wrong? Premillennialists often make that argument to support their warped views about the kingship of Christ. But what does the Bible say? Psalm 29:10 tells us that "the LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, and the LORD sits as King forever." Was the world in a mess at the Flood? Was God reigning over the world when it was in a mess? Yes and yes. And God is reigning over our world as well. Remember Psalm 47:8 — "God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness."

What then does verse 17 mean when it says that God has "begun to reign"? We know what it means! It means that the events described in this book are a powerful reminder of his reign. They are a new expression of his reign. They depict a public vindication and reaffirmation of his reign. If anyone ever doubted that God was king, look at what he is doing here! He has begun to reign! He is coming in judgment to exercise his royal power against his rebellious subjects.

Hailey: "The kingdom of prophecy was now a definite realization among men, for at the defeat of His enemies God had taken His power and rule over the world."

Did the kingdom come in Acts 2? Yes. Did the kingdom come with power in Acts 2? Yes. Did the world know it at that time? No. Does the world know it following the events described here? Absolutely! After God judges Rome, there is no doubt about which kingdom is the eternal kingdom!

Verse 18 tells us "the nations raged, but thy wrath came." We are about to see the bowls of God's wrath poured out on top of Rome. The

time for repentance is over; the time for judgment is here. This verse is modeled after Psalm 2 —

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

And how does God respond to the raging nations? “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.” That reminds me of Isaiah 52:15 — “The kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.” God is in control of the nations of this world, and he takes them out when he sees fit. Remember Psalm 110:5-6 —

The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries.

It is comforting today in a world filled with raging nations and people who imagine vain things to know that God reigns.

Verse 18 tells us that this is “the time for the dead to be judged, for rewarding thy servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear thy name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.” 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.

Now verse 18 *has* to be the end of the world, right? No, it doesn't have to be, and, in my opinion, it isn't. We need to remember the all important time frame, and we need to read verse 18 in its context, right there between verses 17 and 19. And we need to remember how Old Testament judgments were described. When we do, I think we will discover that this language is yet another vivid image of Rome's judgment. The details of this judgment will be given in Revelation 20, and I will have much more to say on this topic when we get there. But for now, whenever verse 18 happens, the message is clear — Christ's enemies will be judged and destroyed; Christ's servants will be rewarded.

Notice that the prophets are among those rewarded in verse 18. They had looked for and foretold the coming King and his eternal kingdom, and now their reward was to see those prophecies fulfilled. Their reward was to witness the unfolding of the mystery.

Why is the ark of the covenant seen in verse 19? The ark of the covenant was located in the Holy of Holies, the inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen and into which the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. But that is no longer the situation for a Christian. Recall Hebrews 10:19-22 —

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true

heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

The ark of the covenant provides reassurance that God remembers his promises. It is always in his presence 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 are Old Testament symbols of judgment intended to remind us that God keeps his promises. He promised to judge and punish the church's enemies — and he will. He promised to vindicate the church — and he will. God keeps his promises.

Chapter Twelve

1 And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery.

Chapter 12 begins with a great portent or great sign. In the gospels, John uses this Greek word for “sign” where the other three gospel writers use the Greek word normally translated “miracle.” The Greek word for “sign” occurs seven times in Revelation — three times in reference to God and four times in reference to the deceptions of Satan. This sign, of course, is from God, and the first thing we see is “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.”

Who is this woman? Let's look at the clues. First, she wears the sun and the moon, which Genesis 1:17 reminds us were designed to give light to the world. Second, she wears a crown of twelve stars, where we recall that 12 is the number that depicts God's people (12 patriarchs, 12 tribes, 12 apostles).

So she gives light to the world, she wears a crown, and that crown has 12 stars. She must be yet another symbol for the church, right? Wrong! (And just when you thought things were getting predictable!)

It's not entirely wrong, but this woman represents more than just the church in its general New Testament sense. How do we know? Because she is shown to have existed before the birth of Christ and before the establishment of his kingdom in Acts 2.

So who is she? Some say she is the church, while others argue she is the virgin Mary. In my opinion, she represents all of God's people throughout time. She is the faithful remnant. She represents those who keep God's covenant. We see similar images in the Old Testament. Recall Isaiah 54:5-7 —

For thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.

And also Isaiah 66:7 —

Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.

And also recall 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.

It is in the very next chapter, Micah 5:2, that we read:

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.

Some commentators see the reference to the sun, the moon, and the stars in the description of the woman as further evidence that she embodies the faithful remnant throughout time. The stars, they tell, us depict the Patriarchal age, in which the mystery was still very much hidden. The moon depicts the Mosaic age, in which the prophets proclaimed the mystery, and yet it was still only dimly understood. Finally, the sun represents the Christian age in which the mystery was fulfilled and revealed.

I said a moment ago that this woman is not the church in its general New Testament sense. What does that mean? When we think of the church we rightly think of the body of Christ to which each of us was added at our baptism. But what about the faithful people of God who died *before* the establishment of the church? After the great roll call of faith in Hebrews 11, that chapter ends with verses 39-40:

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

The faithful remnant under the old covenant were not made perfect without us, but rather we were all made perfect together by the blood of Christ. Also, read Hebrews 9:13-15 —

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, **for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament**, they which

are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Thus, if we understand the church to be the collective spiritual body of God's people, including that faithful remnant who died prior to Acts 2 but who received the promise in Christ, then this woman represents the church after all.

Who is the child? No one who has read this far in the Bible could have any doubt as to the identity of this child! It is, of course, Jesus, who descended through the Jewish line; that is, from those who were God's people under the old covenant. We will witness the birth of this child in verse 5. The child is Jesus, who from a physical perspective was brought forth from out of God's people. This child had been in the womb of the faithful remnant since Genesis 3.

Some of the most beautiful and dramatic images in the Bible are found here in Chapter 12. The destiny of this woman depends upon her child; it was her own sin that made his birth necessary.

3 And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. 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 bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth;

J. R. R. Tolkien once said, "It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him." That's good advice for us, for here we meet a powerful, blood thirsty dragon who appears before the woman waiting to devour her 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. In Genesis 3:15, God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall

bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." This battle has been going on for a long time — and guess what! It's head bruising time!

This dragon is Satan, but it also depicts Rome. This dragon is Satan acting through the most powerful weapon in his arsenal, the mighty Roman empire and its godless emperors. It is Satan who John 8:44 tells us was a murderer from the beginning. It is Satan who is ever working for the death of God's people.

How do we know that Rome is involved here? We know that from the dragon's description — seven heads with diadems and ten horns. Why seven? Why ten? Why horns? Stay tuned. The details regarding these symbols will be given when they appear again in Chapter 13 and when they are explained by an angel in Chapter 17, and we will see that they represent Rome.

Even here, however, we have enough clues to get a glimpse of what we will discover in those later chapters. The word "diadem" 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. The diadem originated with the Persians and is a headdress of royalty. It always denotes 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? Satan is arrayed with the emperors of Rome! It was through their reign that Satan sought to destroy the church. This connection will be confirmed for us in Chapter 17.

What are the stars of Heaven in verse 4? They likely represent God's people. They certainly remind us of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:5 — "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be." And they remind us of Philippians 2:15 — "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

But the dragon causes some of these stars fall to earth. Their fall to earth most likely indicates that the dragon caused them to fall away

from God. That is, they become part of “those who dwell upon the earth.” The word translated “cast” in verse 4 means to drag away or to pull away. It was through Roman persecution and emperor worship that Satan caused some Christians to compromise with the world and be lost. Satan’s success did not occur when a faithful Christian died physically, but rather when a faithful Christian was pulled away and died spiritually. And he did that to some, but not to all. Just as we say thirds in the descriptions of God’s earlier partial judgment, so we see a third here to describe Satan’s partial success in causing Christians to fall away.

There is a lesson here for us. 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. He 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 you have other things you would rather be doing on Sunday.

A challenge of this book is that we begin to see things as God sees them, and I fear we do not always see a Christian’s fall from grace in the same cataclysmic terms in which Heaven views that departure. It looks like such a non-event from our perspective — the person is here, and then sometimes here, and then never here. We may ask about them, we may even call him, but then very often that is the end of it. 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.