

# Revelation 12:1-17. The Great Red Dragon



This is the continuation of [The Last Prophecy: An Abridgment of Elliott's Horae Apocalypticae.](#)

## **Supplemental History Of The Adversaries Of The Church. Satanic Agency of Pagan Rome.**

[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.

[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.

[5] And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

[6] And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

[7] And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

[8] And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

[9] And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

[10] And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

[11] And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

[12] ¶ Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

[13] And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

[14] And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time,

and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

[15] And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

[16] And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

[17] And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Rev 12:1-17)

IN REV. 11:7, we have seen mention made by the Covenant Angel of "the Beast that ascendeth out of the abyss." But it was requisite, in order to St. John's understanding who this enemy was, that a supplemental and more explanatory prophecy should be given. As soon, then, almost as the history of the witnesses is finished, this supplemental prophetic sketch is supplied, and, with a view to greater distinctness, it is introduced by a preliminary notice of the chief previous enemy which the Church would have for its persecutor, namely, the "seven-headed Dragon," or the devil inspiring and acting in the Pagan Roman Empire. As the seven-sealed book, originally seen in the hands of Him who sat upon the throne, and which contained the whole fateful prophecy respecting the destined fortunes of the Church and the world, was described 'as a scroll written within and on the outside, so we may justly suppose this supplemental prophecy to have occupied the outside of the scroll. It will be presently seen that it involves the same famous prophetic period of the 1260 days or years, which the continuous prophecy of the seals and trumpets had done before.

The new development opened beautifully with the vision of a woman clothed with the sun in the Apocalyptic heaven or sky, the moon sandalling her feet, and a coronet of twelve stars on her head. She represented evidently the faithful Church, being defined as the mother of "those who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." But wherefore so exalted in the figurative vision, and when does history record such exaltation? The state of things depicted answers to the time when Constantine had become the supporter of Christianity and of the Christian Church. Then for the first time she appeared before men with the lustre of the imperial power, like as of the sun in the heaven; having the moon, or other chief rulers in the empire, subordinate to her; while the stars that crowned her head may be explained to be the ministers or bishops of the Churches, now recognized as dignitaries before the world: the number twelve corresponding with that of the twelve tribes of the symbolic Israel.

As to the man-child which the woman was about to bring forth, its meaning is well explained as defining the line of Christian emperors, by the language of ecclesiastical writers of the time to which we refer the vision. They styled the emperor, when baptized, a "son of the Church." And it was just at the crisis when Constantine was about to be baptized, and so before the world to become professedly the son of the Church, that Roman paganism, through the instrumentality, first, of the Emperor Maximin, then of Licinius, made its last attack on the Christian cause.

And this too is strikingly prefigured by the other great symbol in the vision, viz., the seven-headed ten-horned Dragon, which was represented as

seeking to devour the woman's man-child as soon as born. For we must needs assign to the seven heads and ten horns, when upon the Dragon, the same explanation as that which was given of them afterwards by the angel in chap. xvii, when they appeared (with a certain small and defined difference) on the Beast, the Dragon's successor. This explanation was to the effect that the seven heads had the double mystical meaning both of Rome's seven hills, and of the seven ruling heads that in succession administered the supreme power of the Roman state. These were kings, consuls, dictators, decenvirs, military tribunes, and emperors; the emperors, beginning with Augustus, being thus the sixth head, agreeably with the angel's statement (Rev. 17:10) that "five are fallen and one is." It was added by him that a seventh should succeed, whose power should continue but a short time; and as the beast which succeeded the Dragon was declared to be the monster under its eighth head, the Dragon, as depicted in the vision before us, must be the monster under the short-lived seventh head. It is seen, on referring to history, that shortly before the last persecution of Christianity by Pagan Rome a change was made in the form of government; instead of one sole emperor as heretofore, four being constituted joint rulers, each with his own division of the empire, but with Rome as the common capital. It appears, moreover, that the diadem of pearls was then adopted as the chief imperial badge, instead of the laurel crown. And very remarkable it is, and very confirmatory of the view here given, that in the Apocalyptic vision the Dragon was pictured with diadems on his heads, not crowns. There is yet a third very curious coincidence between the representation of the Dragon and the facts of history to which we refer it, viz., that first Maximin, and then after him Licinius, were rulers over the Eastern third of the Roman Empire; and there persecuted the Christian ministers and bishops, while they made war against the advancing Christian army from the West: just as the Dragon, in double position of attack, is said to have drawn with his tail the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth, when standing in hostile attitude before the woman with intent to devour the man-child that she was about to bring forth.

The result, as prefigured, was that the man-child was born, and caught up to what is called "God's throne," with the destiny assigned to him of after a while "ruling the Gentiles with a rod of iron." The result, as realized in history, was, that Constantine, after conquering Licinius, and so becoming ruler over the whole Roman Empire, was baptized, and thus recognized before the world as a son of the Christian Church; that in this character he and other orthodox Christian emperors after him, especially Theodosius, professed, like David and Solomon, to be seated as his earthly vicegerents on the Lord's throne; and that at length, with the severest laws, they oppressed, and ere the end of the fourth century all but extinguished, the Pagans and Pagan worship throughout the Roman world.

Before the Dragon's prefigured downfall, however, there was to be "war in heaven." And accordingly under Julian, called "the apostate," from having renounced Christianity for Paganism, there was renewed the struggle against the true Christian cause and Church. But it was not of long continuance, Julian's reign having lasted scarcely a year and a half. Moreover, after his fall the Dragon is said to have "persecuted the woman that brought forth the man-child;" a statement fulfilled in the fact of the Arian persecutions of the

orthodox Christian Church and its chief champions, such as Athanasius;" for the spirit of Paganism was declared by both Christians and Pagans to have revived in Arianism. And now, both on this account, and on account of the superstitions which began also at this time very manifestly to corrupt the doctrine and practice of professing Christians, there was fulfilled the symbol of the woman, or faithful orthodox Church, seeming to "fly" more and more from the visible scene "into the wilderness." Against Arianism, Theodosius, with the help of a great general Council gathered from the two great divisions of the empire (like the "two wings of the great eagle" in the vision), effectually helped the Church. But superstitions continued to strengthen and multiply.

While the woman was thus retiring towards the wilderness, the "flood" was sent forth by the Dragon. This symbol was fulfilled in the fact of Emperor Valens and others of the Pagan or Arian remnant inviting Gothic hosts into the Roman Empire, thus endangering the faith newly established. But the "earth helped the woman, and swallowed up the flood." These nations one after another became nominally Christian. In fact, the mass of the inhabitants of the Roman world, more numerous by far than their invaders, remained firm in their adherence to the orthodox faith; and at length, as the fifth and sixth centuries passed, the flood of Pagan and Arian renown was swallowed up.

But "the woman" – the faithful, united, and spiritual Church – though preserved alive, was to pass away for a long season from observation. She was to remain "in the wilderness for' 1260 prophetic days," i.e., for so many years was she to be insulated from the world, obscure and desolate (the expression in the fourteenth verse, "for a time and times and half a time," being, as in Daniel, used to denote the same period). Of such being the state of the true Church of Christ during the many dark centuries that followed, we have already shown that history furnishes abundant evidence. The outward progress of ecclesiastical rule and ordinances was by no means a criterion of its real condition. The distinction between the sealed and the unsealed henceforward became more important, as we have traced in our Eighth and Ninth Lectures. Milner states that the impression left on his mind from the account which Eusebius gives is, that the general appearance of the Church did not present much of a spirit of godliness. "If we look," he says, "at the external appearance of Christianity, nothing can be more splendid. Pompous apparatus, augmented superstitions, unmeaning forms of piety, much show, but little substance... External piety flourished; but faith, love, heavenly-mindedness appear very rare. The doctrine of real conversion was very much lost, or external baptism placed in its stead; and the true doctrine of justification by faith, and the true practical use of a crucified Saviour for troubled consciences, were scarce to be seen at this time... While superstition and self-righteousness were making vigorous shoots, the real Gospel of Christ was hidden from the men that professed it."6 Again, speaking of the Council of Antioch in Valens' reign, at which 146 bishops were present, "These pathetically bewailed the times, and observed that the infidels laughed at the evil; while true Christians, avoiding the churches as being new nurseries of impiety, went into deserts and lifted up their hands to God with sighs and tears."

When, then, the opening inquiry of these lectures is asked, Where was our religion before the Reformation? we have here the answer. The very question implies what prophecy had declared – its temporary invisibility. It was in the wilderness; hidden, but not lost; cast down, but not destroyed; exhibited amongst the few; known to God, though mostly unknown to men; like the seven thousand whom Elijah knew not of, who had not bowed the knee to Baal: some in secret, insulated from those around, even as in “a barren and dry land where no water is,” pouring forth their fervent prayers, sighing and crying to God; some, fewer still, prepared to act a bolder part, and stand forth as Christ’s confessors and martyrs before professing but false Christendom. The Romish Church maintains its own ubiquity and visibility at all times; consequently, never having experienced this predicted wilderness life, it could not for this very reason be the true Church of Christ. While history, moreover, tells of the songs “in heaven” – the triumphant rejoicings and congratulations with which the high places of the Roman world exulted in the overthrow of Paganism and the establishment of Christianity under Constantine, and to which exultation the previously suffering Christians were publicly exhorted by the imperial decrees of that day – we are enabled likewise to understand the force of the added warning, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.” While the mere outward and earthly-minded observers were indulging in anticipations of external power and glory for the Christianized Roman world, the heavenly-minded and spiritually-taught might foresee predicted times of coming judgments – Arian heresies and Gothic scourges, wherewith the devil would seek to revenge himself on those who had not only terminated his long-maintained Pagan ascendancy, but had even numbered the days of Pagan toleration.

Continued in [Revelation 13 And 17. The Beast From The Sea, Etc. The Lamb-like Beast. The Image Of The Beast.](#)

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