

# THE SEVENTH TRUMPET: THE SEVEN BOWLS PENDING— SATAN'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST ISRAEL AND HER MESSIAH

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Revelation 12 begins with an enactment in heaven and ends with action upon the earth. The whole chapter along with chapters 13–14 furnishes background information that will help to understand the pouring out of the seven bowls (or vials) in Revelation 16. As noted in our earlier studies, the seven bowls comprise the content of the seventh trumpet. Even though the seventh angel has already sounded his trumpet (11:15), in the progressive revelation of the book the earthly outworking of that trumpet is still pending.

## **Satan's Enmity against the Messiah (12:1-6)**

Israel and her Messiah take center stage in Revelation 12. Though her identify is often debated, the woman who was part of the great sign given to John in 12:1 must be a symbolic representation of corporate, national Israel. As a basis for understanding the “woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (12:1), Genesis 37:9-11 tells of Joseph's dream in which the sun and moon represent Joseph's father Jacob and his mother Rachel and the eleven stars represent Joseph's brothers. Also, the Old Testament often represents Israel as a travailing woman about to give birth (Isa. 26:17-18; 66:7 ff.; Jer. 4:31; 13:21; Mic. 4:10; 5:3; cf. Rev. 12:2). Since Revelation 11:19 introduces this chapter with the representation of Israel's ark of the covenant in the heavenly temple, evidence for identifying the woman with Israel is strong.

John's vision disclosed a second sign in heaven, this time “a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and upon his heads [were] seven diadems” (Rev. 12:3). Establishing the identity of the dragon is not difficult, because explicit statements in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 identify him as Satan. Revelation 12:9 specifies that he is “the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan.” With slightly different wording, Revelation 20:2 does the same.

The dragon focused his attention on the woman (12:4b), meaning that the devil focused his attention on Israel. The implied reason for his interest in her was the child she was about to bear (12:4c). The devil wanted to “devour” the child as soon as he was born. Verse 5a fixes the identity of the child by noting that He was destined to “destroy all nations with a rod of iron.” No one other than the Messiah of Israel could be spoken of in such terms. The devil knows that Israel's Messiah will eventually conquer him along with his forces of evil.

For ages Satan has sought to stop the promise of a coming Messiah from being fulfilled. His evil intentions toward the woman's unborn child evidenced themselves throughout the Old Testament. Incidents that showed such an intent include events such as Cain's hostile murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8), the corrupting of the line of Seth (Gen. 6:1-12), attempted rapes of Sarah (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-18) and Rebekah (Gen. 26:1-18), Rebekah's plan to cheat Esau out of his birthright and the consequent enmity of Esau against Jacob (Genesis 27), the murder of the male children in Egypt (Exod. 1:15-22), attempted murders of David (e.g., 1 Sam. 18:10-11), Queen Athaliah's attempt to destroy the royal seed (2 Chron. 22:10), Haman's attempt to slaughter the Jews (Esther 3–9), and consistent attempts of the Israelites to murder their own children for sacrificial purposes (cf. Lev. 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; 2

Chron. 28:3; Ps. 106:37-38; Ezek. 16:20).

Satan's attempt to thwart the mission of Israel's Messiah continued into the New Testament with Herod's slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16), the temptation of Jesus, the attempt by Mary the mother of Jesus to dissuade Him from His destined course, Peter's rebuke of Jesus for predicting His coming death, and, of course, the crucifixion of Christ at Calvary.

All the devil's attempts to withstand the promise ended in failure with the ascension of Jesus Christ to the Father's right hand, i.e., when the woman's child in John's vision was "caught away to God and His throne" (Rev. 12:5b). At that point the Messiah was beyond Satan's reach. The devil was frustrated. All that he had to oppose now was the woman herself. At that point he began expending all his energies to destroy the woman, forcing her to flee into the wilderness where she could enjoy God's protection for 1,260 days (12:6). Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to the Father's throne, the woman or national Israel has been the object of special satanic enmity. She will remain so into the future, until the period known as the seventieth week of Daniel. During the last half of that seven-year period, she will enjoy God's special protection from the devil's persecutions against her. That will be the 1,260 days spoken of in verse 6 of Revelation 12.

### **Expulsion of the Dragon from Heaven (12:7-12)**

Revelation 12:7 shifts to other action that will transpire at the beginning of the aforementioned 1,260 days. It describes a war in heaven between Michael and his angels on one side and the devil and his angels on the other. Verses 7-9 describe the war and its outcome, and verses 10-12 record a heavenly hymn of victory, celebrating the outcome.

The war will be an end-time event that occurs midway through Daniel's seventieth week. Michael who leads the battle against the dragon is the special patron of the people of Israel (Dan. 10:13, 21; 12:1). This is not his first conflict with the devil. Jude 9 recounts his dispute with Satan over the body of Moses. The text does not tell specifically what will provoke the end-time conflict, but apparently the dragon will attempt to unseat the woman's Son and reestablish himself in the presence of God. Michael as the archangel (Jude 9) will lead other unfallen angels in putting down the dragon's revolt. His forces will prevail over the devil and his angels. That will be the end of the devil's access to heaven (Rev. 12:8).

"The great dragon, the serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole earth" will be cast down (12:9). For emphasis' sake, verse 9 speaks of his being cast down and then repeats "was cast down" twice more, the first time repeating the casting down of Satan himself and the second time speaking of the casting down of his angels. From that point on, his domain of existence will be the earth and the earth alone.

That defeat helps explain his stepped-up efforts to destroy the woman. That last three and a half years will see an intensification of his wrath against Israel.

The purging of heaven through the dragon's removal occasions a heavenly hymn that comes in 12:10-12. The hymn's three stanzas celebrate the arrival of God's kingdom (v. 10), the earthly victory of the saints who identify with Christ in His witness and death (v. 11), and the celebration over the expulsion of the dragon and a warning to earth because of the devil's ejection from heaven (v. 12).

The first stanza of the hymn sounds as though the arrival of God's kingdom were already a past event, but it celebrates an arrival which will come three and a half years after Satan's expulsion. The power that produced the male child and took Him to heaven (12:5) also provided for the dragon's defeat (12:8-9). That power will also insti-

tute “the kingdom of our God” on earth (cf. Rev. 20:1-10) and in the new heaven and the new earth (21:1-22:5). That kingdom will be under “the authority of His Christ” as an earlier hymn has celebrated (Rev. 11:15).

The hymn’s second stanza (12:11) celebrates the victory of the brethren that will be based on two happenings. The primary and objective cause of victory will be the blood of the Lamb. The brethren were able to overcome the dragon because the death of Christ has furnished a basis for them to defeat him. The secondary and subjective cause is their own labor and self-sacrifice. Their personal accomplishments in spreading the Word of God and their willingness to do it at the sacrifice of their own lives furnishes a secondary ground for their victory. “They did not love their life unto death” (12:11c) recalls Jesus words spoken over sixty years before the writing of Revelation: “The one who loves his life loses it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal” (John 12:25).

The hymn’s third stanza (12:12) celebrates the expulsion of the dragon from heaven, but warns the earth of intensified persecution that his wrath will bring to the faithful there.

Next month, we will complete our remarks on Revelation 12 and begin a discussion of Revelation 13. Obviously, this section of Scripture describes a future period of concentrated opposition not only for the people of Israel, but for all whose faith in Jesus Christ is strong enough to keep them walking in the truth in spite of obstacles Satan places in their paths. May God give us a renewed determination to live for our Savior in days when our lives, which are relatively free of persecution, may suddenly turn into lives beset with heavy burdens we must bear because we are Christians. May He remind us that no burden is heavy enough to make us relax our faithfulness to Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

**Note:** For more details about the seventh trumpet and Satanic opposition to Israel and her Messiah, see my discussion in *Revelation 8–22* (Moody Press, 1995), pages 115-137. To order this volume, you may contact Grace Books International at (800) GRACE15 or <[www.gbibooks.com](http://www.gbibooks.com)>.