Seventh Trumpet: Third Woe Text

At the very end of chapter 11, beginning in verse 14, we are introduced to the seventh trumpet or the third woe, remember back at the end of chapter eight we were introduced to an eagle that uttered the three-fold “Woe, woe, woe” and connected those with the last three trumpets. Now verse 14 recalls that the second woe has passed which was back in chapter 9 and the third woe is coming soon which now I take it is accomplished in trumpet number 7 which begins in verse 15. So 15 through the end of chapter 11, “the seventh angel sounded his trumpet,” [which would be the third woe] and there were loud voices in heaven, which said, ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and they worshiped God, saying: ‘We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great--and for destroying those who destroy the earth.’ Then God’s temple in heaven was open, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peels of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.” Those last verses, again, imagery of final judgments.

Kingdom Transfer

With the seventh trumpet we are clearly at the very end. The seventh trumpet has brought us to the climax of history. Note verse 15 begins with, and to back up what we actually find here is we don’t have a vision. Interestingly, we don’t see anything happen, but instead we hear in the form of voices from an angelic being or loud voices in heaven.
Then the twenty-four elders we hear in their hymns or speech the content of the seventh trumpet. But the seventh trumpet clearly brings us to the very end of history. It begins with what I think is a very crucial theme in the book of Revelation, verse 15, that the kingdom of this world has now become the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, the kingdom and rule has been transferred from Satan and the beast in this world and the Roman Empire now to the person of Jesus Christ. Christ’s rule has now been consummated. What was true in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 is now a reality on earth. The Lord’s prayer, “thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven” has now reached its culmination. Unlike Rome’s kingdom, this kingdom now will reign for ever and ever. The transfer of rulership, the transfer of the kingdom is one of the dominant themes in Revelation. How will God’s kingdom and sovereignty in chapters 4 and 5 finally are realized on earth now finds its consummation as the transfer of the kingdom from this earth, the rulership of Satan and the beast now is in the hands of God and Jesus Christ.

One other point to mention the twenty-four elders in verses 16 and following provide a further interpretation of these events. Further content of the seal and I want to draw attention to simply two things. Number one, with these final verses in the speech of the twenty-four elders, notice how God is referred to in the language that we are familiar with from chapter 5. God is portrayed as the almighty and the sovereign one whose power extends throughout the entire world. His glory now has spread throughout the entire creation. But note that he is described also as the one who is and who was. It seems to me we’re missing something and when you go back to verse chapter 1:4 and 1:8, and also in chapter 4:8 we find this version of the three-fold “the one who is and was and is to come.” We’re missing that “is to come.” That is intentional, because there is no need for it, the kingdom has already arrived. What is to come is now already a reality with God’s eternal kingdom now arriving where God and his Messiah and his people will rule for ever and ever. So there is no more need for the third part of that phrase “the one who is to come” his kingdom has already arrived and been consummated.
Seventh Trumpet Connection to the End

The rest of verse 15, also in verse 17 and 18, in a sense introduce us to what are the primary thematic strands that will be taken up in the rest of the book. The author says, especially in 18, the nations were angry and your wrath has come which we saw happening in the judgment scenes. “The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and all those who reverence your name both great and small and for destroying those who destroyed the earth.” This prepares for the scenes of judgments and the scenes of rewards and vindication that we will see in chapter 19 through 22. So in a sense this last part of the trumpet introduces in the form of the speech or songs of the twenty-four elders, introduces us to the main strands that will get developed in more detail in chapters 19 through 22 later on in the book.

Now that brings us then to the end of the seventh trumpet. In a sense then, we have reached the end of history. Starting with chapter 10 you sense that we have reached a climax in this language--time is no more. Another set of plagues, the seven thunders are sealed up. Time is going to be no more. Now we find the final climax, in the seventh trumpet: the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of God and his son Jesus Christ. It is time now to reward the saints, it is time now to judge the dead. You have a sense that this is a crucial climax in the book. In that way the book can almost end right here. We have been brought to the climax. The goal of chapters 4 and 5 has been reached. The goal of history has now been reached. Time is no more. The one is to come has now arrived. His kingdom has been established. Yet we are only about half way through the book.

Introduction to Revelation 12-13

Chapter 12 and 13 in a sense seem to almost begin a new vision. And intriguingly David Aune in his commentary and a number of other works actually begin a new section with verse 19 of chapter 11 where in God’s temple in heaven was open. In the same way in chapter 4 we saw heaven open. Now once again we see heaven open. So some have
actually begun to see a new section, extending to chapter 12 verse 13. Maybe a way to look at it is like this: Revelation tells the same story twice. This isn’t the only way to look at it, but one way. It tells the story twice. One story is told in chapter 4 through 11. Now chapter 12-22 will tell the same story as chapters 4-11 but now using different imagery only now in a more detailed and a deeper way than chapters 1 through 11. But nevertheless chapter 12 and 13 has been often described as sort of the center point of Revelation or the fulcrum of the book. Whether that is the case or not, chapter 12 through 13 clearly plays a very significant and a very important role. In fact, we’ve already suggested chapter 12 and 13 will spell out in more detail the conflict that we saw in chapter 11, where the two witnesses but a beast came out of the Abyss and put them to death. We now will be introduced to the beast again. We will not be introduced to that conflict. But it is as if that conflict in chapter 11 is not going to be explored in a more detailed and a much deeper manner than it was explored in chapter 11.

Chapter 12: The True Source of the Church’s Conflict

Chapter 12 introduces us to a section that I think has the primary function of exploring the true source of the church’s conflict. So starting with chapter 2 and 3, especially the two churches they were suffering because they refused to compromise. Chapter 11 and elsewhere portray the church as a suffering and faithful witness. Chapter 12 and 13 is now going to explore in more detail the true source of the church’s conflict, the true source of the conflict they now face. In other words, in true apocalyptic fashion chapter 12 and 13 is going to lift the curtain and lift the veil and show God’s people in an expanded view, in a new perspective to show them when they look out at the world and they suffer at the hands of Rome and they are called upon to refuse to compromise and suffer because of that. Then one person Antipas has already lost his life and John thinks there is more to come. How are they to see that? Chapters 12 and 13 lifts the curtain to help the readers see more clearly from a new perspective the true source of the conflict and what they struggle with so that they can see it and respond to it in a new light.
In chapter 12 we are introduced to three major characters that kind of dominate the scene in chapter 12. We are going to be introduced to a woman who is described in rather interesting detail. We are going to be introduced to a dragon and then we are going to be introduced to a son, the son of the woman.

Text of Revelation 12

But look at chapter 12, Revelation chapter 12 reads: “A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept the third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child will be snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the dessert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. And there was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven [Satan and his angels]. The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our throne before our God, day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as the strength from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.’ When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had been given birth to the male child. The woman was given
the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time [or 3 and half years] out of the serpent’s reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped out the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and he went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

Identity of the Woman

This is a very interesting story indeed. But what I want to do is try to untangle a little bit of the story of this interaction between a woman and a dragon and the son of the woman as well. We should ask the question again of some of the details as far as their background. But how does this function within the book of Revelation? How does it function for the first century readers in helping them with to come to grips with and understand the situation in which they find themselves? First of all is asking the question of identity. The first one being, who is this woman that we are introduce to in the beginning of chapter 12. The woman is described in very interesting terms, she is clothed with the sun. She has the moon under her feet. She has 12 stars on her head. Without reading all of the text starting with Genesis but also in some of the intertestamental apocalyptic literature this language of sun and moon and having stars on one’s head is often associated with a description of the patriarchs and their wives. For example, in Genesis chapter 37, and verse 9, reads: “Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. ‘Listen,’ he said, ‘I have another dream, and this time the sun and the moon and the eleven stars were bowing down to me.’” This is describing Joseph’s dream. Notice the sun and moon and the stars in association with the 12 sons of Israel, with the patriarchs. We also find in, for example, a book like Testament of Abraham another apocalyptic work and elsewhere that the sun and moon the 12 stars around the head are often associated with patriarchs and even their wives. So that suggests that probably at
least at this point the woman stands for the nation of Israel out of which the Messiah came, as we will see in a moment, the son she gives birth to is to be identified with. So probably at this point the woman stands for the nation of Israel but she gives birth to the Messiah, the son of God.

Interestingly, the woman still plays a role after the birth of the son. So that the woman probably stands for more than only the nation of Israel but demonstrates the continuity of the people of God that she is Israel but then she is also the new people of God. People of God can consisting of both Jews and Gentile or the church in the later part of Revelation. So that woman is probably transcends anyone specific time period. She is Israel but clearly she represents and embodies the entire people of God. We see John do that already. He takes Old Testament language sets “the kingdom of priests” that applied to Israel and now applies it to the church. This new people expands Israel and includes people form every tribe and language and nation. I think that is how we should look at the woman here. Let me back up, the woman also could at least partially I would not primarily and exclusively make at least be suggested of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It says she does give birth to a son but probably that therefore the woman is more than just the nation of Israel but may suggest Mary as part of that and extends to include the church as the people of God as well. The fact that she suffers birth pains again is typical Old Testament apocalyptic notion of birth pains indicating suffering. The suffering of God’s people now leads up to the Messiah to the birth of the Messiah. So that is the first character. The woman who represents Israel but more broadly represents the people of God, that transcends Old Testament Israel but also includes the New Testament people of God, the church made of Jews and Gentiles.

A dragon is described as having seven horns and seven heads and ten horns. Seven suggests completion, perfection. Ten is a large number suggesting completion. So you get this picture of something that yields great power and authority and once more the dragon, as we saw with the beast back in chapter 11, the dragon is a figure or an image that comes down to John already with a history. It brings with it a history. It already
brings with it a meaning that it has picked up through its use throughout Old Testament literature and throughout Old Testament history. Within the Old Testament we find a dragon or a sea monster type of figure playing an important role in the Old Testament. In many of the psalms and in the prophetic literature it is used to symbolize a kingdom or a ruler.

For example, we find a pharaoh often or Egypt portrayed as a sea monster or a dragon. In other Jewish works we often find a dragon or sea monster used to portray wicked godless oppressive empires that oppose God and persecute his people. For example, in Psalm chapter 74, and I am just providing a couple of examples. One from Psalms and one from prophetic literature. Psalm 74 verse 13 and 14, I’ll back up and read 12. “But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was you who who crushed the heads of Leviathan.” Leviathan was another sea monster that has association in the Old Testament; some would even say back going all the way back to Genesis. Apocalyptic literature has another similar beast. “You crush the heads of Leviathan and you gave him his food to the creatures in the desert.” Clearly this is in the context of splitting open the sea, the sea monster or Leviathan. Notice the heads of Leviathan who is a seven-headed monster. Clearly this is representing here the pharaoh or the ruler over Egypt at the time when God split the sea and let Israelites through.

Another interesting text is Isaiah chapter 51 and verse 9, giving an example from Old Testament prophetic text. In Isaiah chapter 51, and verse 9 we read, “and this is in the context of the prophet anticipating a time when God will inaugurate a new exodus, where he will bring his people out of exile, he will redeem and restore his people from exile in a brand new exodus. And chapter 51 is a call for God to begin to act now and bring about a new exodus in the same way that he did at the first exodus. So verse 9 begins, “Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the days of gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab [the name of another sea monster]. Was it not you who pierced that monster through? Verse 10: “Was
it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made a road in the depths of the sea so that the redeemed might cross over?” This is a clear allusion to Exodus. So again pharaoh is being portrayed as a sea monster as Rahab that God defeated when he led the Israelites when he rescued them from Pharaoh and the Egyptians and led them through the Red Sea. Now the author of Isaiah anticipates a rehearsal of that, a repetition of that in a new exodus. It’s interesting the Aramaic translation of Isaiah at this point, actually in verse 9 identifies Rahab as pharaoh in the text itself.

So the point is you have a history, and I could read other texts, in apocalyptic literature as well. You have a dragon or sea monster that carries associations of chaos, evil and oppression and satanic power. You have that sea monster over and over again in the Old Testament playing a role of representing human rulers and empires that are oppressive and oppose God and his people. So John is using the term he is picked up, the term that already brings a history of meaning with it. So that when John uses this imagery of a dragon or a sea monster he is using one that is already connotes something specific. More importantly it’s interesting that if this is the case, then John is clearly telling us that in a sense the true power then is identifying this dragon as satan as he does in verse 9. Notice in verse 9 he tells us this “great dragon that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray.” John clearly takes us back to Genesis 3. So it is as if John is saying this dragon that he sees in chapter 12 this is the same satanic power that inspired other oppressive, godless idolatrous evil empires and rulers such as Egypt in the past now is surfacing again John’s own vision in chapter 12.

The fact this dragon is described back in verse 4 as having a tail that sweeps a third of the stars out of the sky and flings them to earth. This imagery comes right out of Daniel chapter 8 and verse 10 where a similar occurrence takes place. Some have tried to link this to a specific historical event and perhaps this is an image of the primordial fall of Satan where he brings demonic beings down with him. The stars are standing, as we’ve seen now in Revelation for angelic beings. So the picture may be at his fall Satan drags and brings with him his demonic cohorts. That’s possible although it may be here that
this is simply an indication of the power of this draconic being. The power of the dragon John sees is now demonstrated by the fact that he can drag with his tail a third of the stars, clearly is an allusion back to Daniel chapter 8 and verse 10.

The Male Child

But what happens then to introduce the third figure is the dragon pursues this woman for the sole purpose of devouring her child. So the woman we’ve been told is pregnant and she is about to give birth to a son. What makes it clear that this is the Messiah, that this is Jesus Christ himself, the lion from the tribe of Judah back in chapter 5, the Lamb that was slain in chapter 5? What it makes his identity clear is that he is described in verse 5 as a child, a son, a male child who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. This is a clear illusion to Psalm chapter 2 verse 8, which gets applied to Jesus Christ elsewhere in the book of Revelation. So the child, the son, that the woman is about to give birth to is nothing less than Jesus Christ the Messiah. I often like to tell people besides Luke, Mathew 1 and 2 and Luke chapter 2, this is the most detailed account of the Christmas story that one finds in the New Testament. Although here we have it in apocalyptic symbolic key we find the birth of Jesus Christ narrated. Now the author skips a lot by simply saying when the son is given birth to he is immediately taken up to heaven. So it’s almost as if the life and the death and resurrection and exultation of Jesus are all collapsed in one event. But clearly John has already assumed the death of Jesus Christ in text like chapter 5 by portraying him as a slain lamb. Slain Lamb references the blood of Jesus Christ as the one who dies and now is alive. John assumes clearly that part of this is the death of Jesus Christ is to be included here as well.

Battle in Heaven

But the story then revolves around this woman giving birth to a son and the dragon trying to devour the son but as soon as the son is given birth to by the woman. The dragon’s intentions to devour and kill the son are thwarted and he is not able to do this. Immediately we read this account of the woman fleeing into the desert in verse 6 to be
kept there for 1,260 days. I’ll return to that because verse 13 is going to pick that back up again. But what I want to pay attention to is in 7 through 12, we find an intervening section. In other words, if you took 7-12 out, the story would flow fairly well. But I think we find this intervening section that further interprets this event that further interprets the forwarding of Satan or the devil or the dragon to devour this child. And verses 7 through 12 will further describe and interpret that.

As it begins it has a two-fold interpretation. The first part is a vision is of a battle in heaven. We are told that Michael and his archangels battle against Satan and his angels. What is significant about this is one might expect that you would read this: God and his angels battle against Satan and his angels. Instead, you find Michael, the archangel, and his angels battling against Satan and his angels. In other words, here again is no dualism in the book of Revelation. I think this is intentional because it says something’s about God’s sovereignty over Satan. One might say God himself does not need to fight Satan. His archangels Michael one of his angels is sufficiently able to defeat Satan and his angels and cast him out of heaven. Behind all this lies God’s sovereignty but far above any dualistic conflict between the powers of God and powers of gods and powers of Satan. God is not even involved in this battle but all it takes is Michael the archangel and his angels to be able to defeat Satan and cast them out of heaven.

Probably the author is again appealing to Daniel chapter 10. For example, in verse 21, of Daniel chapter 10. We find this reference to Michael the archangel so beginning with verse 13. I’ll read verse 12 “Then he continued, ‘Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help because I was detained there with the king of Persia.”

In verse 21 also that text says, “But first I will tell you what is written in the book of truth. No one supports me against them [that is king of Persia, the prince of Persia] except Michael, your prince.” So chapter 10 of Daniel provides this background of
Michael doing battle and this case against the prince and the angel behind Persia. Now we find Michael, with John drawing an act now that he reconfigures that for his own purposes to show how Michael is once again battling but this time against the dragon, the sea monster, who is no one less than Satan himself.

Also these texts seem to reflect Jewish tradition regarding the expulsion of Satan from heaven, particularly the primordial expulsion of Satan from heaven that most point back to Isaiah chapter 14 and verses 12 through 15 actually Isaiah chapter 14. We read, “How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, ‘I will ascent to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of sacred mountain. I will ascend tops of clouds; I will make myself like the Most High. But you have brought down to the grave to depths of the pit.” Often this text played a role in the speculation about the expulsion from Satan from heaven at the beginning of creation.

But what I want you to recognize John takes this notion Jewish literature of the expulsion of Satan from heaven and he gives it a very specific application. The question is: when does this happen? When does this battle and this expulsion of Satan from heaven happen? John gives it an explicit application by suggesting that it happens at the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Notice in verse 11, in the hymnic part of this, the author says this is the second part of the interpretation. This is the hymn of the loud voice in heaven in verses 10 through 12 that interprets this event. The voice says, “They overcame him [that is, the devil, the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” So I take it that John is telling us that this battle in heaven was between Michael and his angels and Satan and his angels is an apocalyptic symbolic way of describing the defeat of heaven that happens as a result of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the same way that Christ overcame back in chapter 5 and in chapter 1. Christ overcame because he was dead and now is alive. Christ as the lion of tribe of Judah he conquered and overcame. How did he do that because he is the Lamb who was
slain. The hymns in chapter 5 celebrated Jesus was worthy to take the scroll because he overcame through his death on the cross to purchase people, from all of humanity to be his kings and priests.

So I take it that John maybe drawing on this idea of the expulsion of Satan from heaven but he gives it a specific application. He uses it as an image to demonstrate that Satan was ultimately defeated through the death and resurrection of the person of Jesus Christ. Again chapters 10 and 12 function to interpret this heavenly battle. So this battle in verses 7 through 9 get interpreted by this hymn in chapters 10 through 12. The battle was God’s victory over evil and the establishment of God’s kingdom that came about by the death of Jesus Christ. So we are not to see here a reference to exclusively a future event nor is John referring to a primordial event in the past at creation or some other time. But John is using that imagery and giving us big application to refer to what happens because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It constituted and defeated Satan. In fact, verse 10 through 12 then interprets the heavenly battle demonstrating a result of this verse 10 now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God. So, with the death of Jesus Christ defeating the powers of evil, defeating Satan; now God’s salvation and now his kingdom have begun to take place. His kingdom has begun to unseat the kingdom of Satan and the rule of Satan.

Ironic Overcoming

So in chapter 12 then verse 11 further specifies the basis of verse 10. How has that salvation come? How has that reign come? How has the authority been established? How has the accuser been hurled down? Through verse 11, which says it was through the blood of the Lamb, through the death of Jesus Christ and on an ongoing basis, through the suffering and even death of his people. Because of their faithful witness that is how Satan has now been defeated. So we are introduced again to this concept of an ironic view of overcoming. How do God’s people overcome? How did Christ overcome and win the victory? Not through military might like Rome, but through the faithful witness of his son Jesus Christ, through the death of Jesus Christ and through the suffering
witness of his followers, even to the point of death.

This, in a sense, is what we find in the section reflected in Jesus own teaching. In the Gospels for example in Matthew chapter 12, where we find this notion of Jesus Christ now coming and casting out demons. In Matthew chapter 12, in response to the Pharisees accusation that you cast out demons in the name of Satan himself, Jesus says using power language, using kingdom language, he says, how can a kingdom stand if it is divided against itself. But he says unless one binds the strong man first only then can Christ’s kingdom be established. Then he says, “If I cast out demons in the name of Jesus Christ, or with the power of the Holy Spirit, if I cast out demons then the kingdom has come, God’s kingdom has arrived.” Why? Because by defeating the powers of evil, which will ultimately take place through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, by defeating the power of evil, God’s kingdom is already making inroads into the kingdom of Satan. We see that you are in chapter 12 and especially verses 10 through 12 the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the kingdom has already come. God’s kingdom has already been inaugurated. The kingdom of Satan has already been unseated through the death of Christ and through the suffering faithful witness of God’s people, even to the point of death. Satan’s kingdom continues to be dealt a blow.

But verse 12 in preparation for the rest of chapter 12, verse 12 lets us in a crucial element and that is as a result of this defeat while this spells rejoicing in heaven, it spells woe for the earth and all who dwell in it. And the reason at the end of verse 12, Satan now knows that his time is short he’s already been defeated but sort of like a dragon that’s been slain, but in his death throws he’s allowed to flail about a little bit and kick about and cause problems and sufferings and even death for the people of God. So, what this then is suggesting for the church in chapters 2 and 3 for those who are suffering for their faithfulness, for those who are persecuted because of their faithfulness, even those who like Antipas have lost their lives because of their faithful witness for Jesus Christ, this is a reminder and a description of what’s going on, what is actually happening is, Satan has already been defeated and he’s simply allowed to flail about in his final death
throws because he knows his time is short. So he will wreak as much havoc as he can, and cause as much problem as he can for the people of God because he’s already been defeated. Because his time is short, he’s unleashed a final flurry of activity of persecuting and putting to death God’s people.

So this is meant to help them to see their situation in a new light and those who are suffering persecution at the hands of Rome, this is meant to function as an encouragement and again to help them to see their situation in true apocalyptic fashion from a new perspective that things aren’t as they appear. Rome appears to be a huge colossal empire and it appears to be futile to try to withstand them and maintain a faithful witness and they appear to be able to put to death whoever they want. Now having read Revelation 12 they’re able to see the curtain has been raised and they can see behind the scenes what’s really going on, the result of their physical conflict with Rome is nothing less than part of a broader conflict that has its origin in heaven with Satan being cast out, defeated by the blood of Jesus Christ, by the death of Christ, and now having been defeated and thrown out of heaven. He knows that his time is short; he is able to flail about a bit and that is the true source of the conflict that Christians face with the Roman Empire.

Now, two other important features of this story is, first of all, the story then gets picked up in verse 13 having been provided a further commentary on Satan’s being thwarted from devouring this child in the form of the battle between Michael and his archangels, then expelling Satan from heaven and further interpreting that through these hymns that indicate that the result of that is the establishment of God’s kingdom through the death of Jesus Christ. The expulsion of Satan from heaven means that his time is short. He’s unleashing a last ditch attempt to destroy God’s people.

Now we resume the narrative, the story of Satan, the Son, and the woman. In verse 13, we are now introduced to the woman who, post-birth of Christ, and post-resurrection and ascension, we find the same woman which then probably indicates that now in continuity with the Scripture of her back in verses 2 or 3, now the same woman,
representing the people of God, now including people from every tribe and language and tongue, representing the Church, I want you to notice how the story develops. First of all, the dragon decides to pursue her, having been thwarted from getting at the son, now he goes after the woman. But what happens is the dragon is apparently thwarted from getting at her as well, and here the author begins to draw on Old Testament exodus imagery by describing the woman as being pursued into the desert, and by being given wings of an eagle to fly into the desert. That language of being given wings like an eagle and going into the desert recalls the Exodus story again, and we’ve already been introduced to that, to the Exodus story in terms of the beast and the dragon, in association with Pharaoh. Here the Exodus imagery continues the woman, symbolizing the people of God, is now given, as the nation of Israel was given, wings like an eagle to go into the desert. Here the desert is clearly portrayed in verse 14 as a place of keeping, a place of protection, and a place of preservation. In Exodus, chapter 19, and verse 4, we read God saying to the Israelites, “I took you up as on eagle’s wings.” So now we find the woman being given wings as an eagle--the Exodus motif continues.

Notice also the same temporal imagery, the 1260 days, earlier in verse 6, and now the time, times, and half a time from Daniel, and as we have said previously, these probably are referring to the exact same time period that is the entire period of the churches existence. Beginning in the first century with the churches in Asia Minor, this whole period is described as 1260 days, making clear the allusion back that Daniel, or time, times, and half a time. Another allusion to Daniel, but suggesting a period of time that is intense, but short, it won’t last forever. A time that falls short of the perfect number of 7, it’s only half of seven, so what that means is the events of chapter 12 are taking place roughly at the exact same time as the events of chapter 11. The image of the woman being preserved in the desert is taking place at the same time as the two witnesses in chapter 11.

In other words, another way to look at it is the author is describing the churches existence and the churches function from different perspective. The church can be
described as a temple that is measured, showing its preservation, even though it is persecuted. The church can be described as two witnesses, describing their faithful witness even in the face of opposition and persecution, and even death. Now the church is described as a woman who flees into the desert and is preserved and is protected in the face of the opposition of Satan himself.

One other interesting feature in the story is the way the dragon tries to exterminate the woman, the way he tries to exterminate is through spewing out of his mouth a flood or a river, and clearly we’re in the realm of apocalyptic symbolism. Certainly one would not want to suggest literally a dragon arrived on the scene at some point in church history, and poured out, spewed out water out of its mouth. Clearly this is symbolism suggesting once again Satan’s attempt to oppose the people of God. He has not been able to get at the Son, so now he goes after the woman. Now, representing the people of God, the church made up of Jew and Gentile. Now symbolizing his opposition, he pours out a flood. Often in the Old Testament, we see the flood language as figurative of the persecution of the people of God. This may also and in my opinion, I think it was probably correct to see this as sort of reflecting the image of the Red Sea, where the Red Sea was seen as a barrier, the Red Sea was seen as a threat to the people of God. Go back to Isaiah, chapter 51, verse 9 where the Red Sea was seen as the home of the sea monster, and God defeated the sea monster at the crossing of the Red Sea. So, once again, this spewing forth of water could be seen as almost a reenactment of the Exodus. In the same way that the Red Sea, according to Isaiah 51, was the home of the sea monster, was a threat to the people of God. In the same way that provided a barrier to the people of God, and threatened their security, threatened their livelihood, threatened their very lives, in the same way now, Satan is trying to thwart God’s people by spewing forth a torrent of water that is meant to drown them and to harm them and to snuff out their lives and their existence.

Yet, in true symbolic fashion, we read that even that was thwarted. Even the earth opens up and swallows the water in symbolic type of imagery, all showing that Satan’s
attempt was to destroy this woman. Having been thwarted from being able to devour his prey in the early part of chapter 12, Satan now goes after the woman. He’s also thwarted from being able to destroy her as well.

So what happens next is the dragon decides to go after her offspring and so that what we have here, I think the offspring also symbolizes the church, or the people of God. Notice how they’re described at the end of verse 12, “her offspring are those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” That is exactly how the church is described elsewhere in Revelation and what it was supposed to do in chapters 3 and 4. So, clearly the offspring of the woman is meant to represent or symbolize the church as well. Yet, what is intriguing is apparently the dragon is able to get at them. We’ll see that I think that’s what going on in chapter 13. I’ll introduce in just a moment. In other words, we have this rather strange picture, the woman seems to represent the people of God, the church, but she is preserved in the desert like Israel was at the exodus. Yet, at the same time, her children represents the people of God, and apparently, Satan is able to get at them. So what’s going on? I think once again we see John looking at the people of God, the Church from two different perspectives. On the one hand, like the woman, the church is preserved and kept and secure, though, on the other hand, like her children, the church is subject to persecution and even to death at the hands of Satan who is trying to destroy God and his people.

It is a little bit like, for example, the temple that we saw in chapter 11, the temple was measured showing its security, yet the outer courts were thrown to the Gentiles suggesting it was still subject to persecution. The two witnesses, on the one hand, were invincible suggesting their preservation and protection by God. Yet, on the other hand, they appears to be vulnerable at the end of the story where they were put to death by the beast, suggesting that they were still subject to persecution and death at the hand of the beast. So I think the same thing is going on here. Satan is ultimately not able to destroy the church. It is preserved and protected, although he is still able to persecute its people by putting them to death.
But again, ironically, in the context of Revelation, John is clear that this is the way the saints overcome. Ironically, this is the way they actually defeat Satan, through their death and because of their suffering faithful witness.

So the church is preserved, yet it’s still persecuted. Satan is allowed to wreak havoc and persecute its members, yet he is not ultimately able to destroy it. So, once again, note how Revelation 12 is unveiling and uncovering the true source, the nature of the church’s conflict, and the true struggle. They look out at the Roman Empire and they are confronted with its claims. Many of them are suffering because of their refusal to compromise. One person has been put to death, and others now are going to be in the wake of that. So they look out and wonder if it is really worth it and try to take a stand against such a monstrosity and what Revelation 12 does is lift the curtain, allow them to see behind the scenes to show them the true source of their conflict is Satan himself. Satan tried to kill God’s son, Jesus Christ, but was thwarted, and Satan now who is going after the people of God. Yes, he can wreak havoc and he will be able to persecute them and put them to death, but ultimately the church will be protected. Ultimately, God’s people will be preserved.

Relationship to the Churches of Rev 2-3

So, now, with that new perspective, they will be able to understand and see their situation in a new light. For those who are suffering persecution because of their faithful witness, especially two of the churches in chapters 2 and 3, this will be a source of encouragement to maintain their faithful witness and be steadfast, but for the other churches, it will be a wakeup call to stop compromising and to instead, take a stand and to maintain their faithful witness even if it means death and despite the consequences that that might bring.

In Chapter 12, beside the fact that Satan has already been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Satan has been defeated and what he is allowed to do to the people of God is simply his last ditch effort in his death throws, his last ditch effort to flail about and cause harm for the people of God.
Now, in the next section I want to back up. We’ve looked at several details of the text, but I want to back up and look at the story again in all of chapter 2, from two different perspectives, and I’m going to suggest that chapter 12, the main plot line of chapter 12 of the story of the son, and the woman, and the dragon, that the story that takes place throughout this section and probably into chapter 13 as well, this entire story, the main plot of it, probably owes its existence to stories. One of them coming out of the Old Testament, and one of them coming out of the Greco-Roman world, and probably the author has constructed this story that would resonate, as we have seen with some of the other visions John uses. John has constructed a story in chapter 12 that resonates with these two stories, one from the Old Testament, and one from the Greco-Roman world.

In our next section we will look at what those stories are, and how they help us make sense of some of the details of the text and how they help make a difference by actually reading and interpreting and shedding new light, additional light on Revelation, chapters 12 and 13 as well.