One of the hottest topics among certain prophecy buffs was, “What will happen on September 23, 2017?” Is that the day of the rapture of the Church? The day the Tribulation will begin? Or will it be the day that Russia and her Muslim allies invade Israel as prophesied in Ezekiel 38-39?

Why all this excitement? It was the day there was a great sign in heaven; it was to them a day prophesied in Revelation 12:1–6; there we read where a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet had on her head a garland of twelve stars; being with child, she cried out in labor ready to give birth; before the woman stood a dragon ready to devour the child the moment He was born; she bore a male Child who was to rule the nations and the Child was saved from the dragon and was caught up to God on His throne; the woman then flees from the dragon into the wilderness to a place prepared by God; there she was fed for 1,260 days.

This prophecy was supposed to reveal the date of the rapture of the Church for adherents of the great sign in heaven; they saw the male child as the Church caught up to God, and not Christ ascending into heaven.

These so-called prophets had been warning people; when such an astrological sign appears in the heavens, be ready for the rapture, for the woman is Israel, the dragon is Satan, and the child born to the woman is the Church that is caught up to God; so for many prophecy buffs, the day of the rapture was to be September 23, 2017.

In truth, there was an astronomical marvel on that date; the constellation Virgo, a virgin woman clothed with the sun, had at her feet the moon, the nine stars of the constellation Leo, plus the three planets Mercury, Venus, and Mars were in alignment atop her head, like a garland of twelve stars; the planet Jupiter ended its nine-month circling within Virgo and exited east past her feet.
There are astronomers who have said such an alignment of stars and planets has
never occurred before and will never occur again.

It would appear in this alignment that if one is to make a spiritual analogy from
this, that the constellation Virgo, the virgin woman, is Israel; the garland of 12
stars over her head represent the 12 tribes of Israel, and Jupiter, who spent nine
months circling within Virgo, represents the Christ child born of Jewish descent;
He was saved from the dragon by being carried away in His ascension; (We will
look at this in much more detail a little later in this lecture); the problem with the
prophecy daters was they confused the birth Child who is Christ with the Church;
therefore, in their analogy, when Jupiter moved past Virgo and was carried away
on September 23, 2017, that was to represent the rapture of the Church.

Surprise! Surprise! The rapture did not occur on that date, unless we are the ones
left behind; so now this date of September 23, 2017 represents the beginning of
the end, or the last great astrological sign before the rapture takes place; that
may be or may not be, but while I believe the rapture can happen anytime, I am
not putting my faith in these prophets who seem to never get anything right!

However, September 23, 2017 was a most interesting day in Jewish history; it
intersected with some very curious anniversaries: 100 years since the Balfour
Declaration when Great Britain turned the land of Palestine over to the Jews for
their homeland to be called Israel; 70 years since the UN resolution allowing
Israel statehood; 50 years since Israel recaptured Jerusalem; in addition the
Feast of Trumpets—or the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah—fell on September
21-22 in the year 2017; many Orthodox Jews believe their Messiah will come on
the Feast of Trumpets; also, there are those who teach the rapture will occur on
the Feast of Trumpets.

With this interesting background let’s explore what this great sign in heaven is all
about.

The Appearance of the Woman (12:1–6)

_The sign of a woman_... “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed
with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve
stars” (12:1); There are various interpretations as to who this woman is; the
Roman Catholic Church claims she is Mary, the mother of Jesus; others see her
as the Church, and still others as the whole community of God—both OT and NT saints.

The imagery of the woman should clarify the matter for she comes right out of Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9–11; the text says: “Then the dreamer had another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream, and this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’ So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?’ and his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.”

You remember the story of Joseph, how out of envy he was sold by his brothers as a slave to Egyptian slave traders and how eventually he got promoted to second in command in all of Egypt for interpreting the dream of Pharaoh; he had dreamed there would be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine; Joseph told Pharaoh he needed to store food while there was feast to prepare for the coming famine; when the famine came to the land of Israel, Joseph’s family came to Egypt for food, and not recognizing Joseph they bowed before him; Joseph’s dream literally came true.

Clearly, the image of the woman in Revelation 12 represents Israel; Jacob, Joseph’s father, was called Israel; so the sun that clothed the woman is Jacob, the moon under her feet is Rachel and the garland of twelve stars on her head are the twelve brothers— twelve counting Joseph.

The sun clothing the woman speaks of the glory and the brilliance of Israel; Paul spoke of that glory when he said, “...who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers, and from whom according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternal blessed God. Amen” (Romans 9:4–5).

_The suffering of the woman in childbirth..._ “Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth... She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron” (12:2, 5a).

It is clear that this woman gave birth to the Messiah, Jesus Christ; we can understand why some would interpret the woman as Mary and not Israel; yet Paul told us that Israel gave birth to Jesus when he wrote of the Israelites that from
them, “according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternal blessed God. Amen” (Romans 9:5).

The sight of a red dragon... “And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born” (12:3–4); This fiery red dragon is Satan and he is called a dragon 13 times in Revelation; previously he is identified as a serpent; a dragon is more terrifying.

Here you have the dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on his heads; the seven heads are seven kingdoms that have held Israel in bondage or subjection—Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and then a seventh kingdom that will rule the earth for a short time during the Tribulation referred to as “a revived Roman Empire;” all these empires have been or will be under the control of Satan the dragon; the ten horns represent that future Roman empire ruled over by 10 vassal kings under the rule of the Satanically-possessed Antichrist during the second half of the Tribulation.

Satan has from the beginning sought to destroy the Messianic line so that the Messiah would never be born; this can be seen from the beginning when Adam sinned and brought a curse on mankind making the need for a Savior (Genesis 3); there, the first prophecy of the Messiah was made where Satan will bruise His heel, but Christ will bruise his head (Genesis 3:15); then Cain murders his brother Abel out of jealousy because Abel brought the acceptable sacrifice to God to atone for sin and Cain did not (Genesis 4); then you have angelic corruption when angelic-demons had sex with the women of the world creating a hybrid giant, part man, part demon, known as the Nephilim who caused such evil on the earth that God had to destroy it with a flood (Genesis 6); then you have all the strife, jealousy, and hatred in the families of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the families through whom the Messianic line was to come (Genesis 12–50); then we come to King Saul who on six occasions tried to kill David to keep him from becoming king and through whom the Messianic kingship was to come (1 Samuel); then there was King Jehoram who led the people away from God and into pagan practices resulting in an invasion into Judah by the Philistines who looted the royal palace and carried off the king’s family except the youngest son, Ahaziah; in this invasion the royal family and the bloodline to the Messiah was almost wiped out (2 Chronicles 21); then there was King Coniah’s blood curse (Jeremiah 22:30); Coniah, also called Jehoiachin was Judah’s last king carried off into
Babylon; his curse was that he would have no sons that would sit on the throne; this was Satan’s attempt to stop the Messianic line from David through Solomon which would ultimately give birth to Joseph; therefore, the bloodline went from David through Nathan, whose lineage led to Mary, which made the virgin birth possible; then there is the story in Esther of Haman, who so hated the Jews that he called for genocide, the total wiping out of the Jewish people (Esther 5–8).

Then we come to Revelation 12 and Satan, the fiery red dragon, standing before the woman ready to give birth; he wants to “devour” the Christ child at His birth; “to devour” just like a dragon; the reference here is to King Herod ordering all male babies two years of age and under being killed in hopes of killing the baby Jesus, who was born “to rule the nations with a rod of iron.”

Following Satan’s failure to kill the Messiah at His birth, after Jesus was baptized He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil; if Satan could get Jesus to sin He knew His Messiahship would end (Matthew 4:1–11); He did manage to get Him crucified and He thought that was the end of the Christ, but then three days later He arose from the grave (Matthew 27–28); but Satan is not finished as you will see!

*The salvation of the Christ Child… “And her child was caught up to God and His throne” (12:5b).*

This seems to be an obvious reference to Christ’s ascension when His earthly ministry was finished; it is interesting to note that the word used for “caught up” is the very same word used by Paul to speak of the rapture of the Church in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and Paul’s description of the man who was caught up into the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2); so Jesus was “taken up… into heaven” (Acts 1:11); John goes from the birth of Christ to His ascension and skips His entire ministry; the one thing that he was concerned about was the safety of the Messiah.

*The security of the woman… “Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (12:6).*

The woman is Israel and God is going to protect her from the fiery red dragon; if the dragon cannot destroy the Messiah, then he will go after His mother, Israel; the wilderness may well be Petra in Southern Jordan, for Daniel writes that one area not controlled by the Antichrist is the territory once known as Edom, Moab,
and Ammon, which today is modern Jordan; Petra was once the capital city of the Edomites, once a massive city carved out of rock walls; the irony here is, the Edomites live today as Palestinians who seek to destroy Israel; yet, in the Tribulation, the ancient land of the Edomites becomes a haven for the Jews where God protects them for 3½ years, or the second half of the Tribulation; He will undoubtedly feed them miraculously as He did the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings.

Remember Jesus warned about “the abomination of desolation;” that is, when the Antichrist takes control of the Tribulation temple and proclaims himself to be god, Jesus said, “Flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15–16); it is possible He was referring to southern Jordan, on the east side of the Dead Sea.

**The Angels at War in Heaven (12:4a, 7–9)**

*The war over God’s throne...* Concerning the fiery red dragon, “His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to earth...” (12:4a).

This is a reference of Satan’s initial rebellion when he wanted to overthrow God; his name at the time was Lucifer; the prophet Isaiah records it in these words: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you have weakened the nations! You have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest side of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the lowest depths of the Pit” (Isaiah 14:12–15). The prophet Ezekiel speaks of Lucifer as “an anointed cherub” who was “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty;” His role in heaven was to protect the holiness of God (Ezekiel 28:12–15); but Lucifer got a big head and thought himself superior to God, that he could overthrow the government of God; there was war in heaven and Satan and his angelic horde was cast out of heaven, which was one third of the angels in heaven who joined him in that rebellion.


So in Revelation 12:4, John speaks of Satan’s initial attempt to overthrow God’s rulership.
The war in the heavenlies... “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was there a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (12:7–9).

The text begins: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon;” Satan still has access to heaven as seen in the book of Job, when Satan and the sons of God presented themselves before the Lord (Job 1:6); he has access to God even at this time; that is one reason why he is called “the prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 6:12); He wants to oppose God anyway he can; so we read where he approaches God with his demonic horde and is met by Michael and his angels.

When the text says that Satan, the dragon and his angels were cast out of heaven, “nor was there a place found for them in heaven any longer,” it means that they no longer had a home in heaven; this is a picture of God cleansing heaven; he is now without any rivals in heaven; remember that Satan was once known as Lucifer, the “shining one” and was the highest ranking angel in heaven; he was the anointed cherub who guarded the throne of God (Ezekiel 28:14); heaven was once his home, but once he was kicked out of heaven he no longer lives there; however, he does try to visit heaven often and stir up trouble but is never successful; he is always the defeated Adversary.

Michael and Satan have had several encounters; as stated, it was Michael who cast Satan out of heaven when he sought to overthrow the government of God prior to the creation of Adam and Eve; it was Michael who contended with Satan over the body of Moses as to who was going to dispose of the body; even Michael, though powerful and authoritative, did not dare dispute with Satan, so he left the matter in God’s hands saying, “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 1:9); this ought to be a warning to us; if Michael dare not rebuke Satan, we certainly should not try; rather we must call for the Lord to rebuke him; yet I have heard people say when facing a strong temptation, “I rebuke you Satan in the name of Jesus;” it is not for you to rebuke Satan even in the name of Jesus.

In Daniel 10 we read where Daniel was in prayer and mourning that too few Jews had left Babylon under the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple; the answer to his prayer was delayed twenty one days because Satan had assigned demons over Persia withstanding the angel Gabriel bringing answer to Daniel’s prayer;
Gabriel then comforts Daniel saying that God has heard his prayer and that Michael, one of the chief princes in the angelic realm, came to his assistance in defeating Satan’s demonic influence over Persia; so his prayer has been answered and he learns there will be demons over every nation and empire, especially those who hold Israel in subjection; this shows the real power of Satan and gives us insight into the nature of warfare fought in the heavenlies between God’s angels and Satan’s demons; that is why Paul warns us: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12).

The war over Christ’s ascension... Our text speaks of another war in heaven in which Michael is involved; what is it all about? There are different opinions over this war in heaven; Dr. John MacArthur sees this battle taking place at the rapture as Satan tries to prevent the Church from being raptured; Dr. David Reagan sees this taking place in the middle of the Tribulation as Satan tries one last time to take the throne of God; I see it taking place at the ascension of Christ; the context deals not only with the birth of Christ, when the dragon tried to devour the Christ child and was unsuccessful, but then John mentions Christ’s ascension saying, “And her child was caught up to God and His throne” (12:5); so apparently he chases Christ into heaven at the time of His ascension, desperate to conquer Him before He reaches the throne of God!

Satan, the fiery red dragon, would not give up on devouring Christ and thwarting God’s redemptive plan of salvation; but he failed! He failed miserably, so what does he do next but seek to annihilate the woman, Israel, who gave Him birth; furthermore, he seeks to keep people from coming to Christ and he seeks to destroy your walk with God.

The Adoration in Heaven (12:10–12)

The rejoicing in heaven... “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ has come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death’” (12:10-11); why do all the saints in heaven rejoice?
1. They rejoice over the coming kingdom of God... “Then I heard a loud voice from heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of Christ has come...” (12:10a).

2. They rejoice over the casting of Satan out of heaven as the accuser of the brethren... “...for the accuser of our brethren has been cast down” (12:10b); Satan has continually been before God accusing the brethren of sin and why they are unworthy to be part of God’s kingdom.

   Every time I sin, Satan reminds God, “Look, there is Keller sinning again; how can you possibly save someone like him;” But then there is Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father; He is our Advocate constantly reminding the Father, “I died for that sin, I died for that sin, I died for that sin” (1 John 2:1); now Satan has been cast down one final time, never again to be in God’s presence as the accuser of the brethren; we don’t really know how many times Satan has been cast out of heaven; we know for sure at least three, could this be a fourth which takes place at the middle of the Tribulation? I am sure there are many times that Scripture does not mention, for Satan has been relentless in his attempts to overthrow the throne of God and to defeat God’s children.

3. They rejoice over the cleansing of Christ’s blood and the conquest of their testimony... “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12:11a); there are two ways of overcoming the devil: what Christ did on the cross through His blood which was shed to cover all our sins, and what the believer does in being a good witness by having a faithful testimony both in life and in lip.

4. They rejoice over the commitment of those willing to die for their faith... “...and they did not love their lives to death” (12:11b); they were willing to die for their testimony; they had a love for the Lord that was greater than the love they had for their own lives here on earth.

The realization by the devil that his time is short so he comes down to earth full of wrath... “Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows he has a short time” (12:12).
This is a warning to the inhabitants on earth during the second half of the Tribulation; “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea.” He comes with “great wrath” (θυμοσίν); the word means rage, turbulent, emotional fury as he makes one last effort against God and his plan; he knows his time is short—at best 3½ years.

It seems that Satan may be a good student of Bible prophecy knowing his time is short, yet he does not give up; he pursues his agenda to the very end; so a fearsome time is coming—not that I would want to be part of it, nor would you, but with all that Satan can do, he can’t touch us; we can rejoice in that. Amen!

We began this message by speaking of the great sign in heaven; “a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars;” she was with child and cried out in labor pains and at the time of the birth of the Christ child stood a fiery red dragon ready to devour her.

Such a great sign appeared in heaven this past September 23, 2017; obviously, it was not the date of the rapture as some predicted, but is there any significance to it at all? Could it be, as others suggested, a warning in the heavens that the end is approaching? Whether it has meaning or not, time is drawing to a close; Satan is still active, and we need to remain faithful to the end; he is still the accuser of the brethren, but we still overcome him by the blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony. Amen!