

# The Seven Personages

by W.J. Erdman

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*The sermon explores the vision of the Sun-Clad Woman and the Dragon, and the significance of the Seven Personages, including the Two Beasts and the First Fruits.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 12:1-13

**Topics:** "Eschatology", "Redemption"

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## Description

W.J. Erdman preaches on the profound visions in Revelation, starting with the two signs in heaven depicting the cosmic battle between good and evil, the birth of the Messiah, and the ultimate victory of God's kingdom over Satan's deception. The introduction vision highlights the conflict between the woman representing Israel, her child symbolizing the Messiah, and the dragon embodying the Devil's opposition to God's redemptive plan. The subsequent scenes reveal the rise of the two beasts, representing secular and religious powers that deceive and persecute God's people during the great tribulation. The sermon progresses to the episode of the first fruits and the three angels, emphasizing the faithfulness and judgment of God's people amidst worldly chaos. Finally, the consummation vision portrays the harvest and vintage, symbolizing the separation of the righteous and the wicked at the end times.

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## Transcript

### Introductory Vision

THE TWO SIGNS IN HEAVEN. Chapters. 12:1-13:1(a).

1 And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars; 2 and she was with child; and she crieth out, travailing in birth, and in pain to be delivered. 3 And there was seen another sign in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his heads seven diadems. 4 And his tail draweth the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon standeth before the woman that is about to be delivered, that when she is delivered he may devour her child. 5 And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and unto his throne. 6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and threescore days. 7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels going forth to war with the dragon; and the dragon warred and his angels; 8 and they prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was

cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him. 10 And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying. Now is come the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuseth them before our God day and night. 11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death, 12 Therefore rejoice, O' heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea: because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time. 13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child. 14 And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness unto 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 after the woman water as a river, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed, that keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus: 1(a) And he stood upon the sand of the sea.

From the Consummation at the Seventh Trumpet, to; which the movement of the previous prophetic scenes led, the Vision returns to a time anterior to all, to the sun-clothed Woman and the "great red dragon" They are called great Signs or Wonders, most notable, most momentous.

The great central section of the book (Chs. 12-14) brings to view seven great personages or "signs" or actors. They are the Woman, her Son, the "Rest of Her Seed," the Dragon, the Archangel, and the two Beasts.

This introductory vision shows that it is the Dragon, the Devil, who opposes God in his gracious purpose concerning the redemption of his people and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. He is seen in the following vision (Ch. 13) as the instigator and empowerer of the Beasts, but here in advance as one overcome by Michael and his angels who stand up for Israel. Of old, Daniel beheld what John now sees, the same evil angels of the then unnamed Dragon warring against those of Michael and instigating them in their attempts to thwart the good intentions of the world power of Persia toward Israel. Dan. 10:12-20.

First appears in this great Vision the scene of the Woman and the Son and the Dragon; then, before the further career of the Woman in the days of the great Tribulation is shown there intervenes the war of Michael against the Dragon which precedes the time of trouble, in which the "rest of her seed" suffer and overcome. 12:10 - 11.

That the Woman is Israel, and her Son the Messiah, should not be a matter of doubt. The imagery of Joseph's dream, of sun and moon and stars, concerning the twelve-tribed nation, may at least suggest that the Woman represents Israel. But it is the ideal Israel and that as represented in a later day by such righteous ones of the nation as Zacharias and Elisabeth, a Mary and Anna and Simeon.

And further, to attest this view that the Woman and her Child belong in the Vision to a time anterior to all the Visions and therefore earlier than the time of the Beast and of her own flight into the "wilderness," it is sufficient to note that the "diadems" are seen on the "heads of the Dragon" and not as later on the "horns of the Beast." The Dragon is the authority behind the world power at each time, but in this Vision the "diadems" on him indicate that it was a time of sole imperialism when the Woman gave birth to the Son, whom the Dragon, as in Herod's day sought to destroy. Later, the diadems appear on the "horns" of the

Beast whom the Dragon empowers.

As to the Woman and the "earth," and the "waters " with which the Dragon would overwhelm her, the symbolic words suggest her deliverance from lawless, raging enemies.

Also, in prophetic language the nations are viewed as a "wilderness," in which Israel temporarily lives.

That the Man Child is the Messiah should hardly be called into question. In various Scriptures it is one and the same person who is to rule with a rod of iron; and to confirm all, the very promise of the same iron rule, is made to the Church, "the Body of Christ;" and if to the "Body" of which Christ is "the Head," then the two are conjunct in such rule and the Man Child is such Head. The name "'rest of her seed," viewing the Man Child of the Woman as Christ, suggests that thereby is meant the Christian Church which the Dragon endeavours to destroy.

Progression

THE TWO BEASTS AND THE GREAT TRIBULATION. Chapter. 13:l (b)-18.

1(b) And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. 2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority. 3 And I saw one of his heads as though it had been smitten unto death; and his death-stroke was healed: and the whole earth wondered after the beast; 4 and they worshipped the dragon, because he gave his authority unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? and who is able to war with him? 5 and there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty and two months. 6 And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, even them that dwell in the heaven. 7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation. 8 And all that dwell on the earth shall; worship him, every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain. 9 If any man hath an ear, let him hear. 10 If any man is for captivity, into captivity foe goeth; if any man shall Mil with the sword, with the sword must foe be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. 11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and foe had two horns like unto a lamb, and foe spake as a dragon. 12 And he exerciset to all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And foe maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose death-stroke was healed. 13 And he doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. 14 And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived. 15 And it was given unto him to give breath to it, even to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as should not worship the image of the beast should be killed. 16 And he causeth all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free and the bond, that there be given them a mark on their right hand, or upon their forehead; 17 and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that hath the mark, even the name of the beast or the number of his name. 18 Here is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.

The Vision of the Sun-Clad Woman or Daughter of Zion and her Son, of the great Dragon and the war in heaven, of the persecution of the Woman and the tribulation of "the rest of her seed" (Ch. 12), was preparatory to the Vision of the two Beasts as the great actors in the world-wide tribulation in which both Jews and Gentiles suffer, as already depicted under the "woes" of the fifth and sixth Trumpets.

The time of the origin of the ten-horned Beast is a crisis in the history of the world. He is seen "coming up out of the sea," which is symbolic of an emergence out of a condition of tumult and confusion among the nations. In the light of other prophetic words, there has been a subversion of law and order, civil and political; lawlessness prevails; all restraints have been removed, and out of this anarchy rises one of all-quelling despotic power bringing to the peoples again order indeed, but only to arrogate to himself all authority divine and human, and to become the embodiment of a lawlessness worse and more fatal to the nations than that out of which he rose.

In depicting such a momentous crisis in world history, the visions of Daniel and of John in large measure agree. Both predict the existence of ten kings, and the rise of the eleventh horn.

However, John beheld also a "Beast " Daniel did not see; the two-horned, lamblike, dragon-tongued supporter of the ten-horned Beast in his blasphemous claim of divine worship. This second Beast, as will be shown later, is inseparable from Christendom, from its originally formative doctrines which relate to Christ, his person and his work. This Beast was not possible in Daniel's day; he is a product of a civilization and an inheritor of ideas peculiar to the centuries of the Christian Church, and he is the perverter and denier of all that is Christian.

On comparing the Scriptures concerning "the beast" or "little horn " and the "man of sin," and the "beast out of the sea," it is evident that one and the same person is meant. The characteristics and deeds and destiny are identical. The Gentile world power is his as its final possessor. His conspicuous claim is the worship of him self as God. This Beast comes up out of the tumultuous "sea " of nations; the two-horned Beast comes "out of the earth; " the former out of anarchy, the latter out of consolidated law and order. Dan. 7:1-28; II Th. 2:1-12; Rev. 13:1-18.

The first Beast performs no miracles; the language of Paul concerning him does not positively affirm that he does; it simply associates lying wonders with his coming; the second Beast performs the lying wonders to deceive men to worship the first, "the man of sin." The latter is the god, the former his prophet; the one sways the scepter of universal power, the other teaches world-wide doctrines of blasphemy against God and Christ, and uses that power to compel the assent and obedience of men to the claims of the "lawless one." This antichristian "prophet" full of the spirit of Satan reminds one, in his origin, character and deeds and doctrines more of the Antichrist of the epistles of John than of "the man of sin" described by Paul and Daniel. II Th. 2:1-10.

The name "Antichrist" has been so long applied to the latter that it may seem strange to call into question the propriety, of such application. Both Beasts are verily antichrists as opposers of Christ, both are the agents of the Dragon and empowered by him in his efforts against God and Christ, but the first Beast is more than an antichrist; he is a false Christ in relation to the Jew, is secular and imperial, while the office of the lamb like Beast is spiritual and religious. Their opposition in doctrine is against the Jehovah of the Israelite and the Christ of the Church; and as to rule, they rage against Jehovah and his Messiah. The "mystery of lawlessness" which was to be consummated in the coming of the "lawless one," was already working in the early years of the Church; and in the later years there were many antichrists forerunners of

the Antichrist, false prophets to be followed by the one great "false prophet," also many false Messiahs to be followed at last by the one, great and final false Messiah. He will be pre eminently "the lawless one." Both "beasts" are de ceivers as is the devil who uses them. The one is the Lie of whom Paul speaks, the other the Liar foretold by John; and the devil the father of both.

"The Liar" of John's epistles will uphold "the Lie" of Paul's; the "Antichrist" of the Church will be the deceiver in behalf of the false Messiah of the Jews; the denier of the Son will demand obedience to the substitute of the Son.

For both the masterpiece of Satan will be prepared, the new religion of antichristianity. The old Christianity will be deemed, as even now by many, to have outlived itself. In its stead appears a blasphemous mimicry of the old in doctrines and forms; man its god and object of worship; dragon, beast, and prophet an infernal trinity opposing Father, Son and Holy Spirit each in his own sphere of salvation; all is demonic in signs and miracles attesting his Lie by which opposers of the Truth will be deluded. The confession of the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit will be supplanted by the Confession of the Dragon and the Beast through the lying spirit of the false Prophet.

In the return of imperialism through the sovereignty of the Beast and the dechristianization of all that once constituted the governments of Christendom, the "deadly wound" (the death stroke) of ancient imperialism is healed and the nations return to their original, godless civilization and culture. It will be a gigantic final at tempt of men to realize the primal lie of the serpent "ye shall be as gods," whose poison infused into the heart of man with the first sin has been transmitted from generation to generation ever since.

The Creed of the Antichrist will be:

1. "No personal God without and above the universe.
2. "Man is himself his own God and the god of this world.
3. "I am the representative of humanity; by worshipping me, humanity worships itself." -- Godet.

Episode

THE FIRST FRUITS AND THE THREE ANGELS, Chapter. 14:1-13.

1 And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. 2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps: 3 and they sing as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures and the elders: and no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth. 4 These are they that were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they that follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were purchased from among men, to be the first-fruits unto God and unto the Lamb. 5 And in their mouth was found no lie: they are without blemish. 6 And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim unto them that dwell on the earth, and unto every nation and tribe and tongue and people; 7 and he saith with a great voice, Fear God, and give him glory; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made the heaven and the earth and sea and fountains of waters. 8 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, that hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication. 9 And another

angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worshippeth the beast and his image, and receiveth a mark on his forehead, or upon his hand, 10 he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger; and he shall be tormented with fire and brim stone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; 11 and the smoke of their torment goeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image, and whoso receiveth the mark of his name. 12 Here is the patience of the saints, they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. 13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from hence forth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow with them.

Here again is an interlude. As between the sixth and seventh Seals, and between the sixth and seventh Trumpets, so here, in the midst of the dramatic movement, occurs this Episode. The purpose is the same as that of the other Episodes. It is to console and to encourage the people of God. Such is the intent of the vision of the First Fruits and of the message of the Three Angels. Like all the Episodes of the Apocalypse, this is both restrospective and prospective. It retrogresses to the very beginning of the great tribulation which is viewed in 13:1-- IS as past, and thus as an Episode it is Retrospective in its warnings against the Worship of the Beast and in its word of comfort to the Martyrs. It is also prospective in announcing the Judgment to come.

It is taught by some that these First Fruits represent a class of Christians who now any day even before the "end of the age" may be removed from the earth into glory while the rest of the Church will be left to the time of the Tribulation.

It is enough to answer that first fruits always belong to a harvest, and the harvest of parables and prophecy belongs to the "end of the age/" and that therefore even if such a special class of Christians exist, they cannot be removed very long before the time of the Harvest.

On the other hand, it is more likely in view of the time of sifting and in view of the peculiar character given them and in contrast with "Babylon" and her "daughters" (whose fall is announced in this same Epitome) that they are the Church in her ideal character, even the "people of God" who came out of "Babylon" before her destruction by the Beast and his Kings. Three things are spoken of the "first fruits":1, that they are virgins undefiled with women, that is, with "the harlots" of Babylon; 2, that in their mouth was found no lie, that is, they have nought to do with the lies of this time of the great liar, the Man of Sin; and 3, "they are without blemish," which is the character and standing of the saints of the elect Church of the Epistles. Also, they have the name of the Lamb and his Father's name written on their foreheads, two of the three names to be written upon the overcomers of the Church in Philadelphia. It is as such, purified and pure, she is seen as proleptic of her pure and perfect presentation to the Lord with whom she is to be and whom she is to follow forevermore.

This is the procedure predicted for the people of God; they first are disciplined through persecution of enemies, and then, in turn, the latter are punished. Judgment be gins at the house of God; the Tribulation will separate the wheat from the chaff. I Pet. 4:17; Prov 11:31; Jer. 25:29; Is. 10:12.

In addition to this, the evident typical teaching of the first fruits in Leviticus should not be slighted. Both the Passover sheaf and the Pentecost sheaf are termed the "first fruits"; the former, that of Christ, is for our "acceptance," the Church is accepted in Christ and is as he is; and the latter, that of the Church, is "for the Priest"; i. e., Christ. Also, the "barley" and the "wheat" are spoken of as one harvest. In view of all this,

these redeemed ones should not be regarded as a holier and more worthy number of the Church who would be removed from the earth before the reaping of the rest, but rather as the "Body of Christ," now corresponding to the ideal holiness and unity which is always set before her. Levit. 23:4-22; Eph. 5:22-23.

## Consummation

### THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE. Chapter. 14:14-20.

14 And I saw, and behold, a white cloud; and on the cloud I saw one sitting like unto a son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his Hand a sharp sickle. 15 And another angel came out from the temple, crying with a great voice to him that sat on the cloud, Send forth thy sickle, and reap: for the hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16 And he that sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth; and the earth was reaped. 17 And another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18 And an other angel came out from the altar, he that hath power over fire; and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19 And the angel cast his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vintage of the earth, and cast it into the winepress, the great winepress, of the wrath of God. 20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

The Harvest and the Vintage cannot be viewed as two aspects of the judgment on the enemies of God. When the treading of the winepress is described, there is nothing corresponding to the Harvest. On the other hand, the very imagery of "the Son of Man on a white cloud," sending forth his sickle of angel-reapers, agrees with various Scriptures concerning the Parousia of Christ for the saints. The parable of the wheat and tares in the gospel of Matthew and this Vision mutually interpret each other.

What additional events besides those of the gathering of the tares and garnering of the wheat belong to this "time of the harvest" must be learned from other Scriptures. The parable confines itself to the two. Of these the gathering of the tares comes first. It accordingly precedes the garnering of the wheat which in other prophetic language is called the Rapture of the saints to meet the Lord at his Coming. The tares, however, are not burned until after the garnering of the wheat; the saints are delivered from the wrath to come; but the deliverance and the wrath are not far apart.

The gathering of the tares and the garnering of the wheat predicted in the Parable have a remarkable confirmation, both as to the agency of angels and the order of events in the Visions of this Epitome of the "end." It is also suggestive that the preaching foretold in this Epitome is of a character indicating that men have become deniers of God not only as the God of Redemption, but even of God as the Creator. A final appeal is made to the primitive and universal and everlasting revelation of God in "the things that are made"

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