



The Last Battle

The Revelation of Jesus Christ - Week 4



The Journey So Far

In Week 1, we discussed how one ought to read the genre of apocalyptic literature, how Scripture uses symbolic language, and the importance of avoiding the use Revelation as tea leaves to try to predict the future.

In Week 2, we discussed the first cycle of visions, focusing on man's inhumanity to man, as well as how a reader should parse symbolic language.

In Week 3, we discussed the second cycle of visions, how Christian eschatology is ultimately evangelical, as well as the evil of the natural worlds and demonic oppression.



The Letters to the Churches

The Book of Revelation opens, after a short prologue, with seven letters to various churches in Asia. The purpose of these letters is to spiritually prepare the reader for the journey they are about to embark on. As such, over the seven weeks of this study, we will be beginning each class with a different letter, both as a devotional exercise, as well as to ensure we do not neglect this less-discussed part of the Apocalypse of St. John.

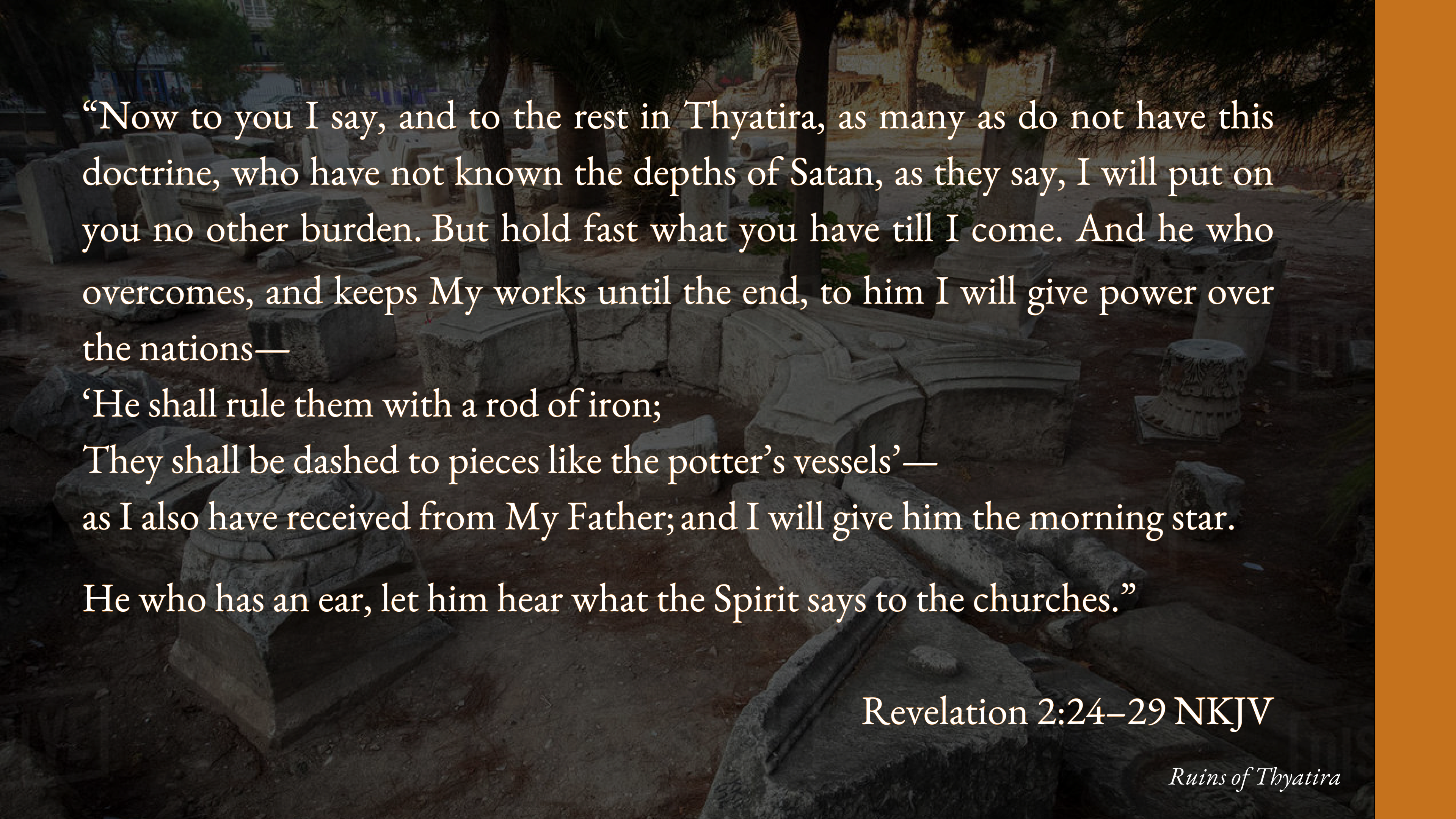


And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,

These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: “I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.

Revelation 2:18–23 NKJV

Ruins of Thyatira

The background of the image is a photograph of the ruins of Thyatira, showing various stone structures and columns in a state of decay, with trees in the background. The text is overlaid on this image in a white serif font.

“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden. But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’—
as I also have received from My Father; and I will give him the morning star.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Revelation 2:24–29 NKJV

Ruins of Thyatira

The Cosmic Gospel



As discussed last week, Revelation is best read as a series of layered visions, rather than a linear sequence of events, meant to reveal to us the person and work of Christ. Further, each of these cycles of visions is punctuated by an interlude, emphasizing some aspect of God's work in the world. This week, we will explore the great interlude of the whole book, which shows cosmic war between Satan and the Church, and how Jesus has already overcome the ancient dragon.

St. Michael Fighting the Dragon by Albrecht Dürer

The Interlude

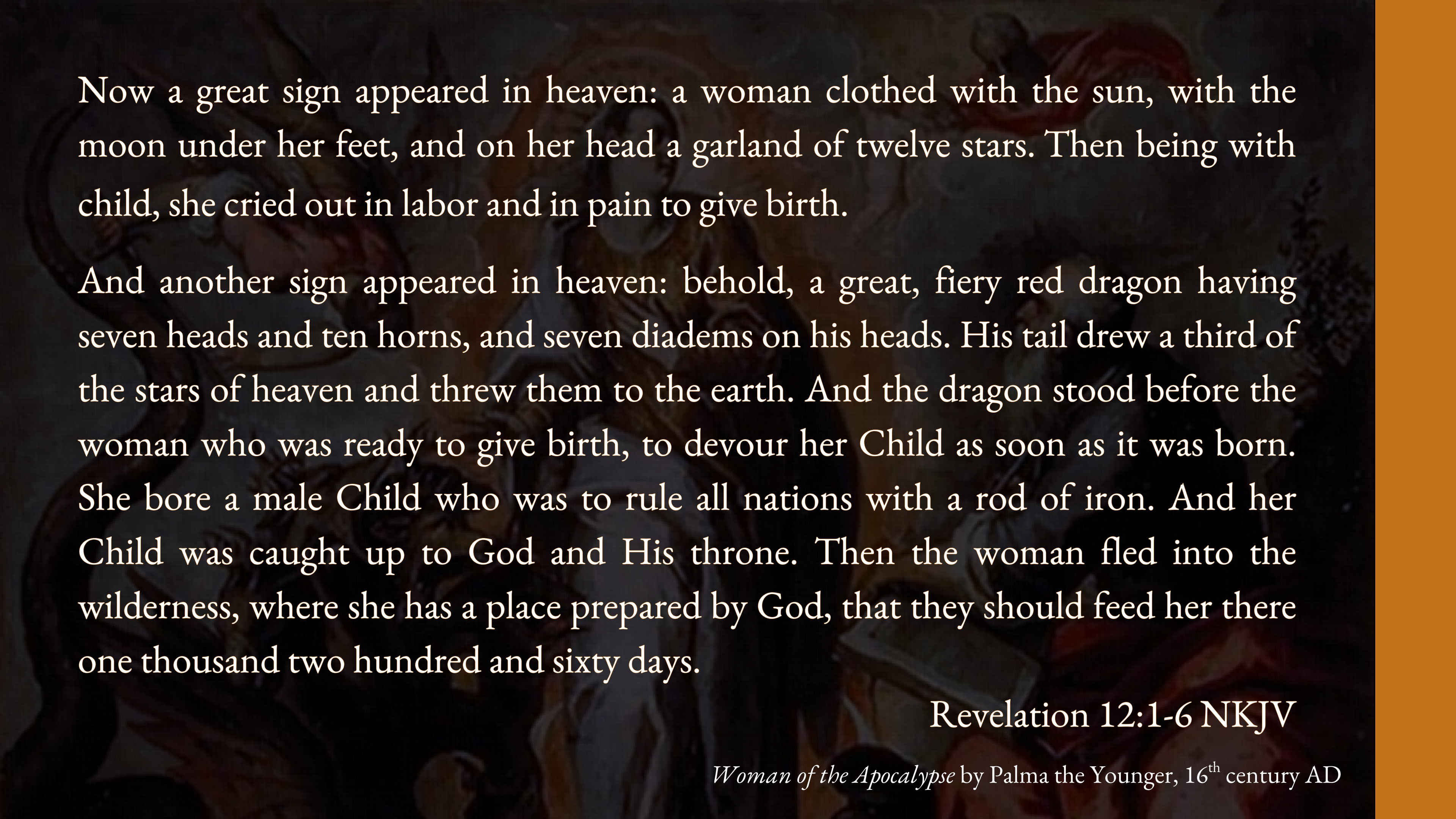
Like the two cycles before this point, the book itself is interrupted by an interlude, focusing on the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan.

1. The Woman, Child, and Pursuing Dragon. (12)
2. The Dragon Marshals His Forces (13)
 - a. The Beast from the Sea
 - b. The Beast from the Earth
4. The Conquering Lamb and the 144,000 on Mt. Zion. (14:1-5)
5. Defeat of the Dragon and his Beasts Prophesied. (14:6-13)
6. Vision of the Harvest and the End. (14:14-20)

The Mother of God

Two great signs appear in the heavens, a woman clothed in the sun who stands of the moon, who is opposed and hunted by a terrible red dragon. This woman, arrayed in such celestial splendor, is most explicitly Israel. The symbol draws on imagery from Gen. 37:9, where God's people are represented in Joseph's dream as the sun, moon, and stars. Because the child she bears is clearly Christ, many modern Roman Catholics see this figure as the Blessed Virgin Mary and they aren't necessarily wrong. Symbols possess multiple layers of meaning, as the woman here represents Israel, the Blessed Virgin, and the Church.



The background features a faint, artistic illustration of the 'Woman of the Apocalypse' from the Book of Revelation. She is depicted as a woman with long, flowing hair, wearing a crown of twelve stars and a garment that appears to be the sun. She is shown in a state of labor, holding her head in pain. The illustration is rendered in a style reminiscent of 16th-century religious art, with soft, ethereal tones. The text is overlaid on this background, with the first paragraph in a larger font and the second in a slightly smaller font.

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. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

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. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. 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.

Revelation 12:1-6 NKJV

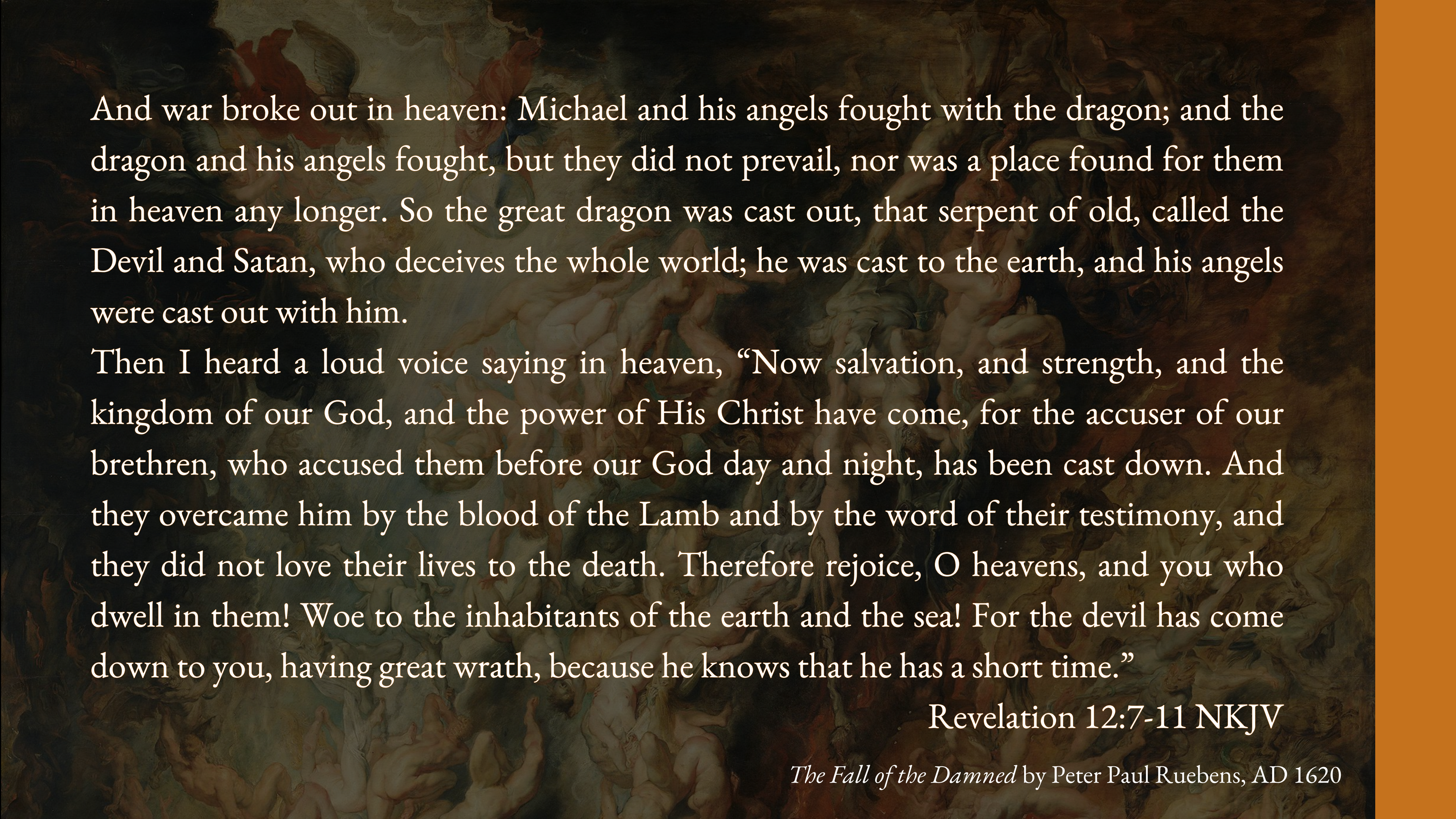
Woman of the Apocalypse by Palma the Younger, 16th century AD

The Dragon Defeated



This vision is the ultimate, spiritual fulfillment of God's promise delivered in Genesis, of the "enmity between [the serpent] and the woman, and between [his] seed and her Seed. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (3:15). Satan opposes the woman and seeks to devour her Child, who instead is caught up to Heaven to rule with an iron rod. This scene then is the Incarnation and Ascension of Jesus, as seen through Heaven's eyes, the ultimate fulfillment of God's promised victory.

The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed with the Sun by William Blake, AD 2002



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 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.

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 have 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. 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 that he has a short time.”

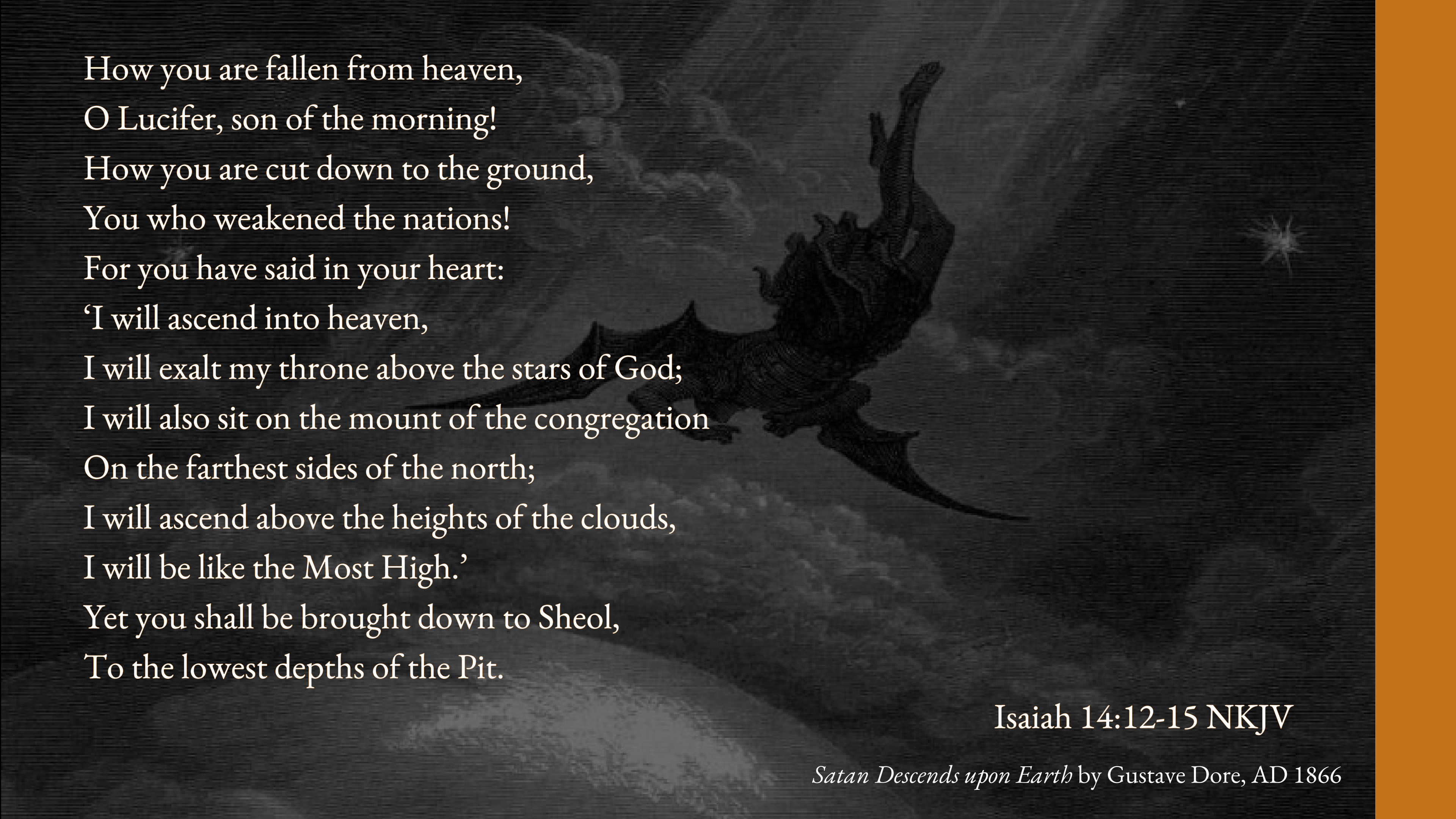
Revelation 12:7-11 NKJV

The Fall of the Damned by Peter Paul Rubens, AD 1620

War in Heaven

Following the Ascension of Christ in 12:5, the woman flees into the wilderness, and we see Satan cast down from Heaven by St. Michael the Archangel. There appears to be allusions to the same event in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, with Christ's comment about seeing Satan fall like lightning also needing to be harmonized as well. Many at this point ask when exactly Satan fell, and the events described here occurred. Again, reading the Apocalypse non-linearly helps us. This fall can be read as a flashback to Eden, occurring at the crucifixion, or as an ongoing reality. What actually matters is that Jesus has overcome the devil by the power of His blood.

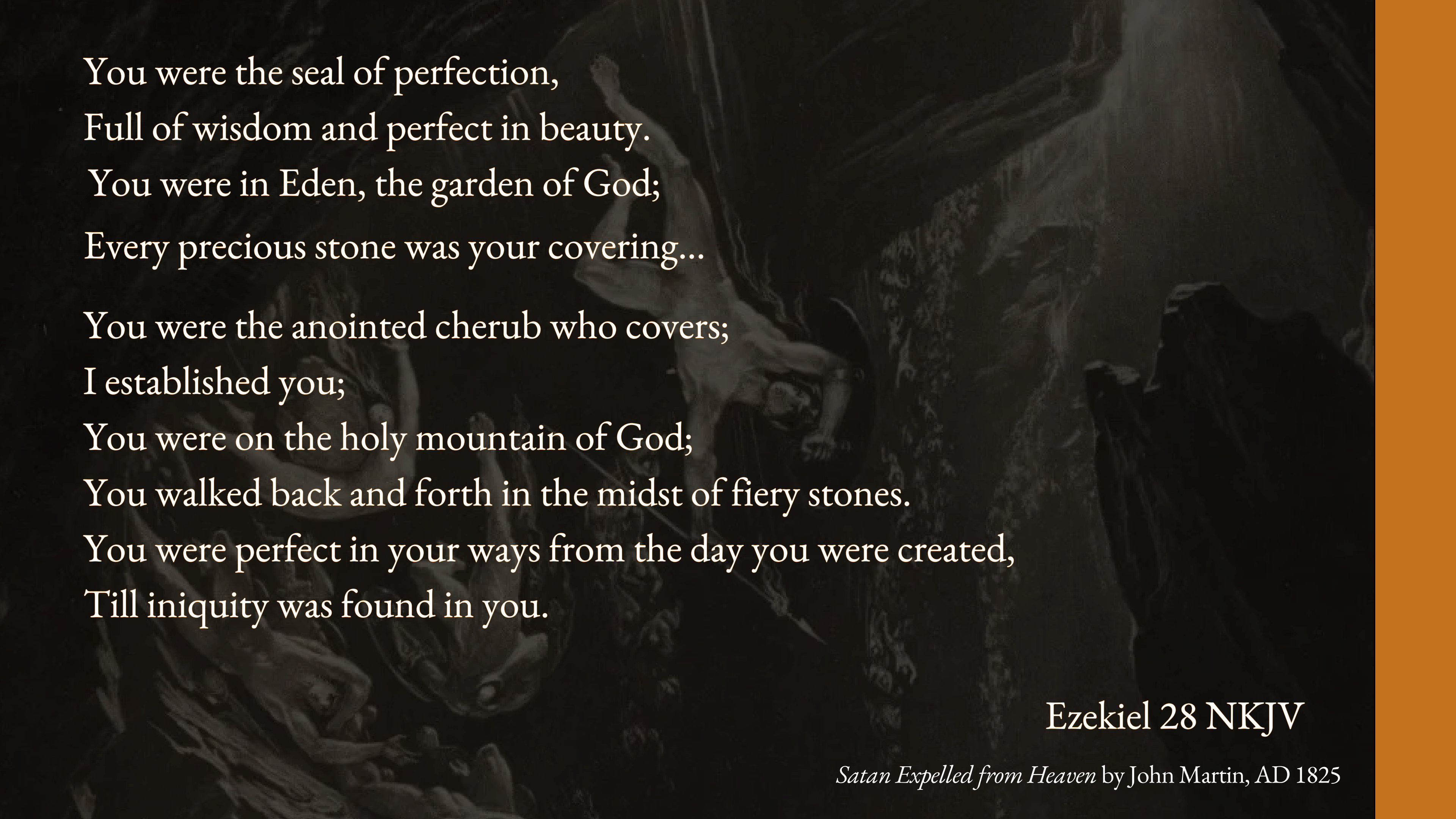




How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides 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 NKJV

Satan Descends upon Earth by Gustave Dore, AD 1866

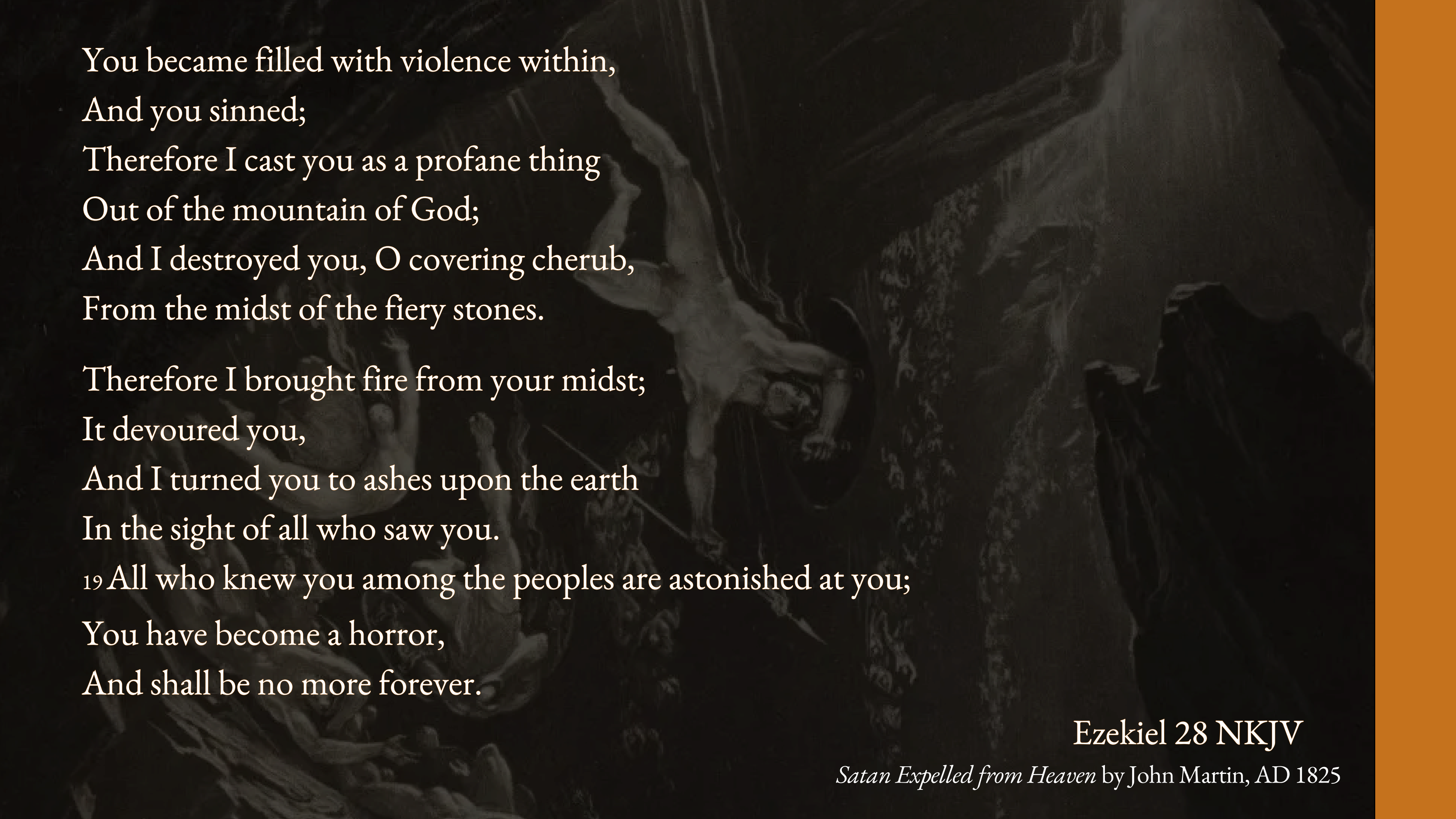


You were the seal of perfection,
Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
Every precious stone was your covering...

You were the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.

Ezekiel 28 NKJV

Satan Expelled from Heaven by John Martin, AD 1825



You became filled with violence within,
And you sinned;
Therefore I cast you as a profane thing
Out of the mountain of God;
And I destroyed you, O covering cherub,
From the midst of the fiery stones.

Therefore I brought fire from your midst;
It devoured you,
And I turned you to ashes upon the earth
In the sight of all who saw you.

¹⁹ All who knew you among the peoples are astonished at you;
You have become a horror,
And shall be no more forever.

Ezekiel 28 NKJV

Satan Expelled from Heaven by John Martin, AD 1825

The Beast of the Sea



With Satan cast down to earth, he raises up two servants to help him in his struggle against the Church. The first is the beast from the sea, which appears to be a kind of religio-political force, to whom the dragon gave “his power, his throne, and great authority” (13:2 NKJV). It would be difficult to identify any one historical figure or institution with this beast, as it likely represents all religious and political forces which seek to stamp out the faith.

The Beast of the Land

A second beast is then described, this time coming from the land. It apes the Lamb, giving all the appearances of Godliness, while speaking lies and pointing its followers towards worship of the first beast. This is likely the same one St. Paul describes in 2 Thessalonians, “who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2:4).



Antichrist(s)

Both of these beasts are popularly seen as images of ‘The Antichrist’ today, a world leader who will arise in the last days to lead the nations astray. However, St. John does not use the ‘antichrist’ title in his Apocalypse, making it hard for us to draw a definite conclusion if the ‘antichrists’ mentioned in his first letter are the beasts mentioned in his visions.

However, I don’t think this is a stretch. Classically, the beast of the sea has been understood to be those secular governments hostile to the faith, which oppress and persecute Christians. The beast of the land has had more diverse identifications throughout history. Given its description, it is clearly a religious leader who places himself in the place of Christ, leading Luther and the Reformers to identify the beast as the Pope.



The Church can never be better governed and preserved than if we all live under one head, Christ, and all the bishops equal in office (although they be unequal in gifts), be diligently joined in unity of doctrine, faith, Sacraments, prayer, and works of love, etc., as St. Jerome writes that the priests at Alexandria together and in common governed the churches, as did also the apostles, and afterwards all bishops throughout all Christendom, until the Pope raised his head above all.

This teaching shows forcefully that the Pope is the very Antichrist, who has exalted himself above, and opposed himself against Christ because he will not permit Christians to be saved without his power, which, nevertheless, is nothing, and is neither ordained nor commanded by God.

The Smalcald Articles (I.IV.9-10)

The Harvest Comes

Like with each set of visions preceding it, this vision ends with the end of the world. The depiction is not fiery and cataclysmic this time. Instead the end is pictured as a harvest, where first Jesus reaps the wheat, before then reaping the grapes juicy with His wrath. This scene brings to mind other scenes of judgement from Scripture, such as the sheep and goats (Matthew 25:31-46) and the tares among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).

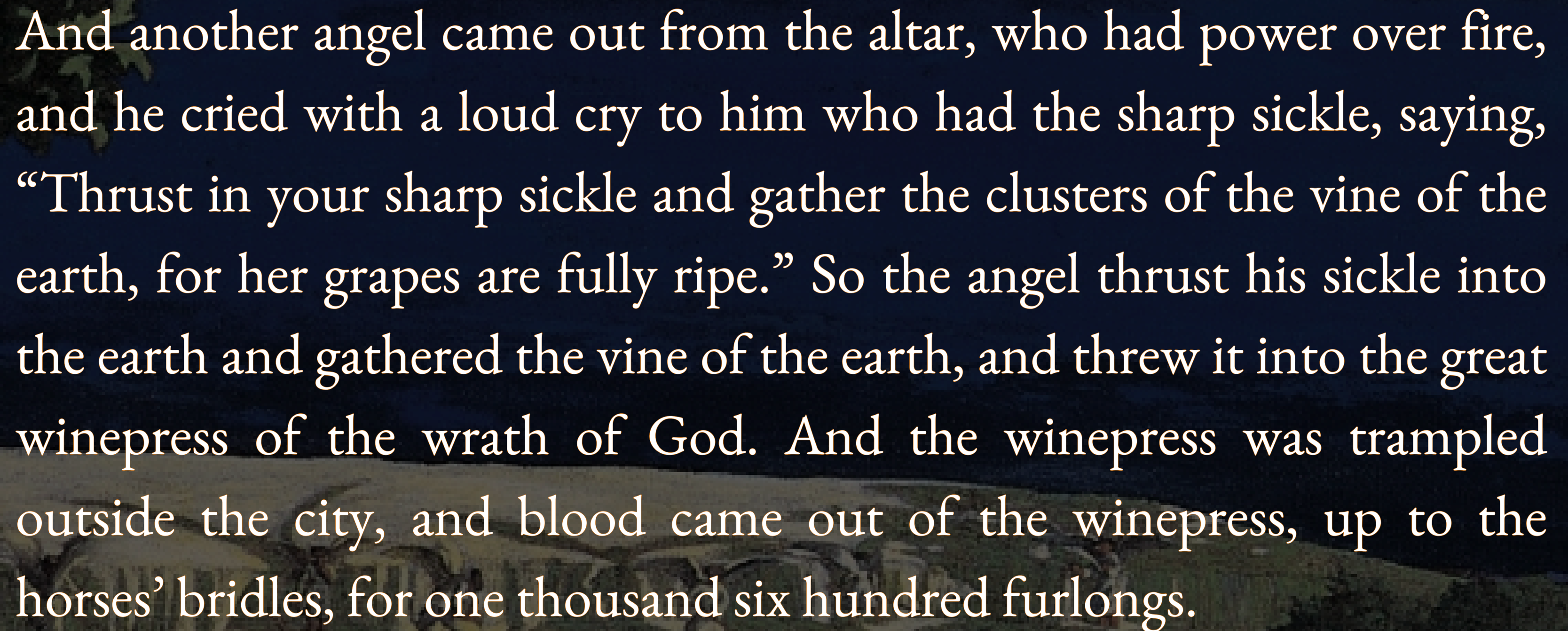
While not as dramatic as previous visions, it is no less poignant, with those who receive the mark of the beast being “tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night” (Revelation 14:10-11 NKJV).



Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Revelation 7:14-17 NKJV

The Fields are White by Roger Wagner, AD 2019



And another angel came out from the altar, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses’ bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

Revelation 7:18-20 NKJV

The Harvest is the End of The World and the Reapers are Angels by Roger Wagner, AD 1989

Further Reading

- *The Concordia Commentary on Revelation* by Louis Brighton
- *The Book of Revelation* by G. K. Beale
- *A Theology of Revelation* by J. Scott Duvall
- *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*, edited by Steve Gregg
- *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* by Richard Bauckham
- *Visions of the Apocalypse* by Bruce Chilton
- *Revelation: Reformation Heritage Bible Commentary* by Mark Brighton
- *Christ and the Caesars* by Ethelbert Stauffer



Questions?

