

LESSONS ON PREDESTINATION #41

"War on Earth" (Part One)

(Scriptures from NKJV)

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

(Revelation 12:13-17)

INTRODUCTION: As I have stated previously, the twelfth chapter of Revelation gives us a behind-the-scenes picture of the invisible war which is going on between the kingdom of God and His Christ, and the kingdom of Satan and his antichrist. Satan's goal is for his kingdom of pride and dominion to overcome Christ's kingdom of humility and servanthood.

(1) The persons and events described in verses 1-6 set forth the opposition of Satan to God's kingdom in the period of time on earth from the time of Adam and Eve to the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to His throne. It depicts his attempt to destroy the people of God through which God had chosen to bring forth the Messiah, who would, by His obedience as a servant, elevate man to a place of rank and authority over the angels. Satan's efforts to defeat this phase of God's purpose has been shown to be a failure as seen in the lessons on "The Serpent's Trail in History."

(2) In the meanwhile, Satan had been conducting a war in heaven consisting of slandering or accusing the brethren who were in heaven. The persons and events in verses 7-12 set forth the opposition of Satan to God's kingdom in the period of time in heaven occurring from the death of Abel to the death of Christ and His enthronement. It describes his accusations against the "brethren," who are the departed saints of the Old Testament era. He does so because God has taken them to heaven without their sin debt being paid. Upon Christ's ascension to the throne, Michael and his angels can now defend the charges made against the elect brethren by pointing to Christ's shed blood serving as the atoning sacrifice. The sin debt has been paid in full. Christ is now on His throne reigning as a King over a kingdom of sovereign saving grace. Satan was then cast out of the heavens no longer able to accuse the brethren of being unforgiven sinners.

(3) The second result of Satan's being cast out of the heavens is that he is

permitted to continue to persecute God's people here on earth with great intensity. It is at this point that our study resumes in verses 13-17.

A. THE OVERALL PICTURE.

1. Revelation 12 divides itself into three natural sections: verses 1-6; verses 7-12; and verses 13-17.

2. Here in verses 13-17 we have the last part of the sections which began with the picture of a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head (vs. 1). She gives birth to a male child who was snatched up to heaven, while she was cared for on earth in a desert place prepared for her by God (vs. 6). The second section describes Satan's defeat in heaven followed by a heavenly song of victory. The third section continues the account of the woman being pursued by the dragon.

3. The dragon resumes his persecution of the woman who gave birth to the Male-Child (vs. 13). The woman can now be identified as the church, though some view her as the revived nation of Israel. Unable to attack the exalted Lord in heaven (Male-Child), Satan on earth seeks to destroy the church, which is now called the body of Christ. Jesus and his followers are one body. As Saul learned when Jesus asked him, "**Why are you persecuting me?**" Christ is the Head and we are His body (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18; 2:19).

4. The woman is given the wings of a great eagle which enables her to escape from the wrath of the dragon (vs. 14).

5. The woman flees into a wilderness or desert where God has prepared a special place for her protection and nourishment (vs. 14).

6. There she is sheltered for a period of time expressed as "**a time, and time, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.**" (Vs. 14). NOTE: This is also expressed as 1260 days in verse 6.

7. Not being able to follow the woman into the desert, the serpent attempts to flush her out of the wilderness with a flood of waters gushing from his mouth (vs. 15).

8. The earth comes to the aid of the woman and opens its mouth and swallows up the flood waters from the dragon's mouth (vs. 16).

9. The dragon, being unable to conquer the woman, makes war with her individual children who are committed to God and His Son Jesus Christ (vs. 17).

B. METHOD OF INTERPRETATION.

1. There are two methods of interpreting the images in this chapter and the book of Revelation as a whole. They are:

a. The literal reality. This is set in contrast to the symbolic reality. Examples of this are seen in reference to the angels, the Devil and Satan, heaven, earth, God, and Jesus Christ are expressions of literal reality, rather than being symbolic representations.

b. The symbolic reality. This means the reality is to be seen through the uses of a symbol. Examples of this are the woman, the dragon, the Male-Child, wings of an eagle, etc., etc. What makes the book so difficult to interpret is to know when to view the images as literal or symbolic. All systems of theology make use of both methods, but disagree as to which is literal or symbolic. All systems of theology agree that nearly all the images involved are drawn from expressions found in the Old Testament, but do not agree as to whether those images are used by John as pictures of literal or symbolic realities. So the differences continue on, with no hope of agreement ever being reached in this life.

2. The methods applied to the text in verses 13-17.

a. Dragon - symbolic of Satan

b. Woman:

(1) Symbol of the nation Israel

(2) Symbol of the church

c. Male-Child - symbol of Jesus Christ

d. Great eagle - symbolic of God's providential care of the woman

e. Wilderness:

(1) Literal place on earth in Palestine

(2) Symbolic description of where and how God protects the woman

f. Time, times, and half a time:

(1) Literal period of time taking place in the last 3½ years of a seven year tribulation period here on earth.

(2) Symbolic period of time covering the period of time between the ascension of Christ to His second coming and the final judgment

g. Flood of waters:

(1) Literal reality involving a literal flood in Palestine

(2) Symbolic reality representing deceptive lies and delusions in the form of words and ideas, or the armies of the anti-Christ seeking to destroy Israel.

h. Earth's mouth:

(1) A literal earthquake will swallow up the flood waters, or defeat the armies of the anti-Christ.

(2) Symbolic expression showing how God's providential protection through the use of gospel means shall protect the woman and her offspring.

C. THE FLIGHT OF THE WOMAN - verses 13, 14.

1. The woman we view as the church. She represents the living saints or people of God on earth. The time period is the church age. Christ has ascended to His throne. Verses 7-12 have focused our attention to heaven, now verses 13-17 bring us back to earth to pick up where verse 6 left off. There we read, ***"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."***

2. The dragon (Satan) now comes down to the earth. He has failed in every respect thus far. He failed to overthrow the throne of God in the Garden. He failed to prevent the birth of the Male-Child, and he failed to destroy Him once He was born. He failed to gain his point in the war which he fought with Michael and his angels in heaven for the possession of the Old Testament saints who had gone to heaven. Because of his previous failures to frustrate the purpose of God to put His Son on His throne over men and angels, he realizes that he cannot fight on indefinitely and that his time is short. Thus he takes out his fury upon the woman (church).

3. The woman cannot stand in her own strength against the dragon. Back in the 6th verse, we were told that she fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared for her by God. Now we are told that in order to escape the wiles of the devil, she is given two wings of a great eagle. These symbolic wings remind the living saints of the church of how God had providentially cared for His people in times past. In Exodus 19:1-4, we are told how God had delivered Israel out of Egyptian captivity. ***"In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children***

of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.'" Also in Deuteronomy 32:9-13 we read, ***"For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride in the heights of the earth, that he might eat the produce of the fields; He made him draw honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock."***

4. The woman's respect for the dragon's power causes her to flee to her God where she will be protected and sheltered. The meaning of the symbolism is that God will provide His people with the means of grace to overcome the temptations of the devil so that they shall not apostatize from God. This is the Biblical doctrine of the preservation and perseverance of the saints. How important is this doctrine! If Satan can get one of God's elect to renounce God and fall away, then he can yet claim the victory. How so? It would demonstrate that God could not completely fulfill all of His eternal purpose. More will be said about this later.

D. THE ATTACK OF THE DRAGON - verse 13.

1. Several questions now emerge:

- Why does the devil still persecute the people of God on earth since the Son of God has now ascended to His throne and has been elevated above the angels?
- Has God not already accomplished His purpose?
- What is there yet lacking that must be done?
- What further good could the devil achieve by persecuting the church here on earth?
- Has not the woman served her purpose in giving birth to the Christ?
- Is Satan merely acting out of a fit of rage and vengeance?

Absolutely not! Everything the devil does, he does with a purpose in mind. He knows that somehow the woman (church) yet has a role to fulfill in fulfilling the plan of God.

2. After all, the woman is a mother! She is the mother of Christ: Christ is the Seed of the woman. He is the Son of Mary, out of the house of David, who was of the tribe of Judah, who was born of Israel, who came from the loins of Abraham, who was in the line of Shem (Noah's son), who was from the lineage of Seth, who was born from Eve, who was named such because "she was the mother of all the living seed." But she is not through

giving birth. She is also the mother of all New Testament or New Covenant believers. It is these who promote the kingdom of heaven here on earth that Satan now directs his attack against them.

3. It is at this point that Herman Hoeksema makes this observation.

The devil is not a mad fool. He certainly is a fool, and he also is mad. But he is not a mad fool in this sense, that he does things that have nothing to do with the plan of God Almighty. And you may depend on it, if the woman after she has brought forth the man child was of no account any more, the devil would not trouble himself about her. He has but one purpose, and he lives from but one principle. It is the purpose and the principle of opposition against God Almighty. This principle he never denies. And whatever has nothing to do with that principle he leaves severely alone. That is already plain in the individual lives of the people of God on earth and in the church. If you are of no account to the coming of God's kingdom and are in no way related to the glory of God, the devil does not trouble his head about you. It is only when he begins to surmise that you also are one of the followers of Christ and that you confess Him that he begins his action against you. Thus it is also with the woman. The very fact that the dragon in raving madness indeed turns against the woman, to persecute her, already causes us to surmise that she is still of great importance to the kingdom of God and the fulfillment of His plans. (Hoeksema, *Behold He Cometh*, p. 441).

4. Satan cannot fight directly anymore against the King of the kingdom of heaven. The King has been caught up to the throne of God. Satan cannot go to heaven any more to dispute about the right of the saints to be there. The saints' sin debt has been paid. The only issue left for him to dispute about is whether God can save and keep all of His elect on earth from apostatizing from the faith. God says He can. Satan says He can't, and that He (God) has to prove it. So the war now continues on earth and will continue until all of the elect are called, justified, sanctified, and glorified. More will be said in the next lesson about the serpent's method and motive for tempting the elect while they are yet on earth, and how God enables them to overcome him.

E. THE PREPARED PLACE IN THE WILDERNESS - verses 6, 14.

1. The question now before us is "What is the meaning of the wilderness?"

a. As we have seen earlier, it is derived from a literal episode in the lives of God's Old Covenant people Israel being led into the wilderness to escape the wrath of their Egyptian persecutors.

b. Some hold that it is a geographical region in Palestine where the armies of the anti-Christ will try to destroy the restored nation of Israel. Time will not permit me

to deal with such a concept, as it distracts from the beauty of the entire passage.

c. Some believe the wilderness symbolizes the suffering and deprivation which the people of God suffer in the world. While God's people do suffer hardships in this life, that is not the meaning of the text. How would human suffering protect them from the attack of Satan? The wilderness is where the woman is fed and nourished by God, not a place of want and deprivation.

d. The text itself helps to describe the nature and purpose of the wilderness.

(1) Verse 6 - it is **"a place prepared by God."**

(2) Verse 6 - there she is fed.

(3) Verse 14 - it is **"her place."**

(4) Verse 14 - it is **"where she is nourished."** NOTE: The word "nourished" means to be nurtured or cared for.

(5) Verse 14 - it is where she is protected from the presence or face of the serpent.

(6) Meaning: it is a place prepared by God in which the devil cannot enter and deceive the saints of God with His lies and delusions.

2. A comparison of a wilderness with the rest of the world.

Question: What is a real wilderness or desert? If you are traveling along and you encounter a desert, what do you discover? There are no rivers or streams. There are no people, no houses, no cities, no animal life, no plant life or vegetation to speak of. It is a place in the world, but it is not like the rest of the world. It is totally separate from the rest of the world. If one is in the wilderness, he is separated from the life of the world.

3. Now the symbolism is ready to be understood. The reality of which John is symbolizing is found in the words of Jesus in John 17:14-18. There, He expresses the meaning of the wilderness as being "In the world, yet not of the world." **"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."**

When God saves one of His elect, he is transferred out of the world and placed in a spiritual world where he is nourished by the Word of God. Just as a believer cannot live in the world of unbelievers, neither can Satan live in the wilderness. The dragon lives in a kingdom nourished by pride, dominion and self-exaltation. The woman lives in a kingdom nourished by humility, servanthood, and Christ-exaltation. The dragon cannot enter God's

place of protection for His people. He must stop at the edge of the desert and try to flush the woman out with a flood of lies. But he shall not be enabled to separate any of God's chosen, redeemed, called and justified from reaching God's eternal purpose for them to be glorified and elevated in rank above the angels.

4. Application: The devil cannot live where humility reigns! In James 4:7, we are exhorted to **"resist the devil and he will flee from you."** Now how do we resist the devil? In James 4:7, 8, we read, **"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."** The in verse 10 we read, **"Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."** Back in verse 6 we are told, **"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."** It is the woman's (church's) separateness from the world that is her protection and strength. In II Corinthians 6:14-18 we are told, **"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore, 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the Lord Almighty."**

Our strength to live the Christian life is to exalt Christ and not ourselves. We have unbelievers all around us whose lives are devoted to promoting themselves. While we have contact with them, we do not live like them. We are informed that we **"were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."** (I Corinthians 6:20).

It is in the wilderness of humility and servanthood that we have our victory in Christ.