

**Revelation 12: 1-6; “A Woman Clothed with the Sun”, Sermon # 85 in the series –
“The Faithful and True Witness”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
February 3rd, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship service.**

We saw in Chapter 10, verse 8, that John was given a little book which he was instructed to eat; and when he did so, he found that it was sweet as honey to his taste at first, and then after he had eaten it, his stomach became bitter. This little book is the vision of the third major time period in the history of the Church of Jesus Christ; the time period of the 1260 days. It would be a time which was sweet as honey, in that there would be much progress made for the gospel among many nations of the world; not just the nations of Europe, which is the focus of much of this prophecy. But it would also be a bitter time because of all the oppositions of Satan; all the oppressions, and persecutions, and deaths that would come to God’s people because of their faithfulness to God’s Word. It would be a bitter thing to see men who claimed to be rulers in Christ’s church leading people astray with false doctrine and suppressing the truth of Christ’s free grace unto salvation, by adding to the gospel, men’s merits and priest’s blessings.

We have seen in past sermons that these 1260 days do not refer to literal days, but rather to years. These years began at a certain point in history, which I have taken to be the point when the Antichristian Papal system became established in its temporal power. The date is somewhere between 756 and 800 A.D. We previously have seen that the rise of the Papal power began in 606 A.D. The Emperor Phocas gave the title of Universal Bishop to Pope Boniface III in that year. As time went on the Popes at Rome continued to promote and establish their own power, not only within and over many of the churches in the Western Roman Empire, but they began to seek power over Kings and the rulers of the nations around them.

The beginning of the reach of the Papal power into the nations can reasonably be dated from 756, because it was at this time that Pepin, the chief officer under Childeric king of France, having been asked for protection by the Pope against invasion from Aistulphus king of the Lombards, not only gave the Pope protection by defeating the Lombards in battle, but as a part of the treaty, Aistulphus was also forced to relinquish the Exarchate of Ravenna and 21 provinces, as well as the city of Rome; and the Pope was thereby enabled to have a political territory all to himself as an Ecclesiastical Monarch. The Imperial government of Rome had been lost back in 476 when the Goths took the city of Rome at that time. But now the Roman Empire was re-established under a new form of government. This is the eighth and last form of Roman government, as we shall study later on.

So the year 756 could be the beginning of the prophecy of the 1260 days. I suppose that it is also possible that it could come as late as 800 when Charles, or Charlemagne, was crowned by the Pope as the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Another possible and more likely date, which falls in between those two dates for the start of the 1260 Days, would be 787 A.D. when a council of the church was convened at Nicaea which approved the use of images in the worship of the churches. It is hard to be precise in determining the beginning of the 1260 days, but the Lord knows, and its end will come in the very year that the Lord has determined it.

The 1st and 2nd woes which came upon the true Church are mentioned in verse 14 of Chapter 11. They were the Antichristian Roman Catholic Papal system and the Antichristian Mohammedan religion. They were linked together in their rise, and now for more than 1200 years they have continued, and they are both still bringing woe to the nations and the true Church of Jesus Christ in our day. They had their rise together, and they began the 1260 days prophecy together. Through their propagation of false doctrine, these 2 woes will continue their plagues down to the time of the Millennium, which is yet future, and which will follow the “slaying” and “resurrection” of the witnesses. The 3rd woe is the final manifestation and possible

combination of these powers at the end of the 1260 years. After this will follow the sounding of the seventh angel, which will begin the time of the Millennium, or the gospel conquering among the nations. I say all this by way of review.

Chapter 11 is a relation of the contents of the “little book” which John ate, which is a book of prophecies giving us an overview of this 3rd time period. It has related the history of the Antichristian opposition to Christ's Church and kingdom, and how the Witnesses to the truth of God's Word triumphed over the Antichristian powers, even though they were sorely oppressed, persecuted, and sometimes killed. Chapter 12 begins the prophecy of the “little book” with John being shown signs in heaven. We want to spend the rest of our time in this message looking at this vision of 3 signs, because they reveal to us things which are relevant to our own day, since we are still living in the these times of the 1260 days. It is important that we understand these signs, for I believe that we are drawing towards the close of the 3rd time period of Church history, a time when we as the Church need to know what kind of a spiritual battle we are facing. The 1st sign is a sign of a Woman clothed with the Sun, who is about to give birth. The 2nd sign in heaven is the sign of a great, fiery red dragon standing ready to devour the Woman's child. And the 3rd sign reveals the place prepared for the Woman, by God, in the wilderness. Let's see if we can lift the veil off of this prophetic symbolic language.

1st - This sign reveals the Church as she really is. (Verses 1 and 2)

“Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.” The great sign; this great wonder which appeared in heaven is none other than the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church is clothed with Christ who is “the Sun of Righteousness who arises with healing in His wings.” (Malachi 4: 2) He is the Sun, the light of life for every sinner who will believe in Him. He has grace to pour as a balm into the wounds which sin makes in the souls of fallen men. The Church is clothed in Christ's righteousness, surrounded continually by the light and glory of their illustrious Lord. This righteousness is imputed to them and they are clothed with it. Because of His grace imparted, all those who make up His Church are illumined and they radiate His glory and grace through their witness, to a watching world. The Church, and the light that shines forth from her, is a great sign of God's goodness in giving such a gift to a world of fallen sinners, and the Church is a sign to be opposed by those who are unbelieving. She is a rebuke to a sinful world which does not want to believe that they need to be saved from sin. To repent of sin and to forsake sin is farthest thing from the mind of a person who loves the world and the things of the world.

The Church is pictured here as “having the moon under her feet”, which could well be the picture of having overcome the World and its mindset; the World and its lusts, by the powerful grace of Christ which alone can satisfy the empty heart; the heart that longs to know the meaning of life. “Having the moon under her feet” could also be a picture of the Church's having the Old Covenant Jewish ordinances under her feet. Those ordinances and ceremonial laws gave forth a dim light of the Christ who was coming, but now that the Sun of Righteousness had arisen; there was no need for the light of that Old Testament ceremonial law to shine any longer. Something much brighter and much more powerful had come when our Lord Jesus came to earth and the Word was made flesh. The Light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it. Christ is the light of the world. But His Church is to shine as lights in the darkness. Collectively they are “the light of the World”. “A City on a hill cannot be hid.” “Let your light so shine before men that they see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

She also has “a garland of twelve stars on her head”. This is the picture of the Apostle's teaching. There were 12 apostles of our Lord and their teaching is to be a garland to each person and every local church that would be faithful and true to their Lord. Christ's Church is to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. They are to live their lives with the wisdom which comes from above and not by earthly wisdom; thinking like natural men. The Word of God as it has been handed down to the Church in the Scriptures is that which is the garland of twelve stars

which graces the Church's head. It reminds the sincere believer of what is true and false and right and wrong, and it is a reminder to them of how they are to live and what truth they will be guided by. The early Church "continued steadfastly in the Apostle's doctrine," it says in Acts 2: 42. Let me ask you whether you think of yourself in this holy way; as part of Christ's holy, radiant Church? We who believe in Jesus are clothed with the Sun, have the Moon under our feet and have a garland of 12 stars on our head. We "look to Him and are radiant and our faces are not ashamed." (Psalm 34: 5) "We walk in the light, as He is in the light, and we have fellowship with one another." (1 John 1: 7) This is the Church which is being spoken of here in verse 1.

This great sign is said to "appear in heaven". What heaven is being spoken of? Is it the heaven where God dwells in His blessed presence? Well, it is true that heaven is the place where God rules and reigns; the place from whence He governs the World and especially His people. "Heaven is My throne, Earth is my footstool." So, since one word picture is usually meant to represent and point to a spiritual reality in the kingdom of Christ here upon the earth; what can we say? We can postulate that this verse in Revelation 12: 1 could be referring to some high place where power and authority are being exercised over men and God's saints; His beloved people. The great sign in verse 1, of the Woman clothed with the Sun appearing in heaven, could mean that there has been, and there still is today, a great struggle and conflict in heaven (literally), between Satan and God. The conflict is over who it is that will rule and reign over Christ's Church on the earth. Satan appeared before God to debate with Him over Job's integrity. Why could he not do this just as well, in relation to the advance of the gospel among the nations?

Satan's spiritual strategy upon the "earth" of the Roman Empire, had been to seize political control over nations and kingdoms where the gospel was going, through taking the high places of government in the Roman Empire and thus through influencing the minds of wicked Emperors against the truth. Through their promotion of idolatrous worship of false gods, he tried to prevent the gospel's advance to conquer in many hearts. But we have seen that even though he succeeded in putting multitudes to death for their faith, through the persecutions of so many emperors and men in authority in the governments of the nations ruled over by Rome; still Christianity lived and spread to more and more people. This is the picture of the 2nd verse of Chapter 12. The Woman is with child; she is pregnant and crying out in labor to give birth. This is the Church laboring to bring forth Christ to the nations. The Apostle Paul speaks this way in his appeal to the Galatians, in Chapter 4, verse 18, when he is trying to turn them away from listening to false apostles. He says, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you."

The 2nd sign in heaven is of a great, fiery red dragon who is ready to devour the Woman's child. (Verses 3 and 4)

"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." Now although some commentators tell us that this takes us back to the Pagan Roman Empire and to the things that we have studied before in the 1st time period of Church History, we must remember that the dragon is being described here as having seven heads and ten horns, and the diadems are on its heads and not yet on the horns. This means that the context is the time period when Pagan Rome had gone through 7 forms of government and the Empire had been divided into 10 kingdoms, each kingdom being ruled over by a separate monarch.

And although the dragon does represent Satan, it is representative of Satan in his 1st great strategy to destroy Christ's Church through the persecuting Emperors. His strategy would have to change after Constantine defeated his first strategy and brought it to an end. And it did

change in the second time period; that of the rise of Antichrist. I was looking on line yesterday, studying a little on Charlemagne and I found a picture of his crest of arms which was 2 fire breathing dragons linked together like Siamese twins. And a picture of his kingly crown was there as well; a crown filled with diadems. The first king of the Holy Roman Empire was a protector of the Pope. Although he may have protected the Pope, I am not at all sure that he was a protector of God's true people. The true people of God, had in many places, to flee into the wilderness, and this is our third and final sign flowing out of the first two.

The 3rd sign in heaven reveals the place prepared for the Woman, by God, in the Wilderness. (Verse 5 and 6)

“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 to 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.” We now see that all of these first 6 verses of Chapter 12 must relate to the time, just before, and just after, the 3rd time period of Church history began; the period which is stated to be 1260 days, or years as we have seen in past studies. The dragon was ready to devour the mystical male Child whom the woman was giving birth to. He was ready to devour the true Christ of the gospel, as He is preached by all true preachers, pastors, and churches. He was ready to devour all the people converted by the true gospel. He did not want to see the Lord Jesus Christ, who had been “caught up to God”, be believed in, and honored, and worshipped as God seated in His temple. He wanted to see a Pope exalted to that place. “Be sober, be alert, for your adversary the Devil, goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.”

In this case the Devil is pictured as a dragon working through false authorities in the visible church, and leaders in government who would work together with them to persecute Christ's true Church and promote and establish a false way of salvation and worship of God. But nevertheless, here we see to our astonishment, the woman brought forth the Child even though the attempt was made to devour Him. The gospel did go forward and many people were saved, in spite of the many attempts of the dragon to exterminate the true church in the six hundred years before the Reformation. God would give the true Church a place to flee in those years. It would be to go to the literal wilderness of the valleys of the Piedmont. Many true Christians and true churches would flee the more populous areas and hold meetings secretly in many places in many of the countries in Europe. We will study more of this as we continue on in our study. God's ministers would continue to nourish and feed the true people of God the words of sound doctrine, even though the Church was in a Wilderness state.

The place prepared by God is not the place of godless high society or churches which have been built on the foundation of people giving money to a priest in order to get his relatives out of purgatory, or to build great cathedrals. The place prepared by God is the wilderness areas of this world where men and women and children can go and worship God without being molested by spiritual tyrants and persecuting magistrates. The Lord Jesus also,” it says in Hebrew 13: 12, “that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” “Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach.” “For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” Let us all seriously weigh the idea that every true Christian is crucified to the World and the World has been crucified to him. It is under his feet. Satan has been trying to devour the Christ of the gospel as it is preached through us, through this whole time period of the 1260 days. But he will not succeed. The male Child has been born and is being born to the nations even now. He will rule all nations with a rod of iron. He will come and judge among the nations in the time of the Church's crisis, when it seems that the Child, the gospel of salvation in Him, might die, and the labors of the Woman might be in vain, to see Christ brought to the nations. But it shall not be; for Jesus “shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied”.

