

Lesson # 40 The Woman Persecuted

Revelation 12: 13-17

Date: July 31, 2011

Revelation 12:13-17 (ESV)

¹³And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. ¹⁴But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. ¹⁵The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. ¹⁶But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. ¹⁷Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

Introduction

As I mentioned last week, Satan's special project has always been to target God's people – Adam & Eve, Israel, the Church. Israel has had his most intense focus throughout history. It is obvious in the OT, the gospels, Acts and here in Revelation. He has utilized various gentile groups as tormenters, including the church and especially Islam once it arrived on the world stage in the 600's AD. ①

We have to remember that much of the persecution that has taken place since about AD 30 against the Jews has been the result of God's remedial punishment on Israel for their rejection of Jesus Christ and their part in His crucifixion. God has used Satan in many ways to carry out those things meant to bring them to repentance as His will to punish them takes various forms. Since AD 70 and the sack of Jerusalem, they have been dispersed across the world, removed from their land and been treated as foreigners even in those countries where they have emigrated to for centuries. Eventually, God will bring them back to the land, and many believe that has already started to occur as of May 1948 when Israel declared her independence after having been put into at least part of what God had originally promised to Abraham. Of course, there are still many millions of Jews across the world who have not yet returned to Israel.

John MacArthur calls Satan "the architect of all anti-Semitism"ⁱ. He will certainly be busy in the Tribulation period, the "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7) as he incites the Antichrist & False Prophet against the Jews and Christians, but just as in the WW II Holocaust, the most incredible aspect of the Tribulation holocaust will be the willing participation of regular human beings who will be more than willing to kill those who refuse to take the Mark (the Elect, Christians, Jews). This attempted final extermination of the Jews is Satan's swansong – his last chance to stave off the return of Jesus Christ to set up the Millennial Kingdom, which has always been promised to the Jews.

Although many Jews will die, purged from earth in accordance with God's judgments, with Satan and his demons as willing executioners, God will spare a remnant as He has always done during times of persecution, war or famine. God will ensure that there are believers alive to enter the Millennial Kingdom when Christ returns.

I. The Second Exodus vv. 13-14

Satan realizes he has been denied access to heaven, and now finds himself confined to the earth. This sentence is almost redundant, except that I believe the importance of it is that this has happened to Satan before. In the days of Adam & Eve, he was expelled due to his sin at that time, but after that, until this point, he was allowed access back to heaven, for reasons only God knows. That will no longer be allowed to occur. So, if he can't get to heaven, he can still get at the woman – Israel – the one who had brought forth Jesus Christ and ruined Satan's world. That aspect of this passage is concurrent with the breaking of the 7 year peace agreement the Antichrist made with Israel at the 3 ½ year point, and the opening of the 2nd Seal Judgment.

By the way, this passage proves that the woman is not Mary. Mary is in heaven too, not still on earth, so if Satan is pursuing the woman on earth, the woman is also on earth. Therefore, the Roman Catholic position that the woman is Mary is easily refuted from this passage alone.

This is also not a recounting of the original exodus from Egypt – it is not historic – although some of the imagery John uses parallels that. In v. 14, the woman is given “2 wings of the great eagle...fly from the serpent...into the wilderness...a place (prepared by God)”, where she is to be nourished for a time, times and a half a time. (3 ½ years)

This is not describing a massive airlift. Where would such an airlift leave from and go to? This is worldwide in scope. This imagery of the 2 wings of a great eagle is a reference back to **Ex. 19:4** and perhaps **Isa. 40:28-31** or **Psalm 91:1-4**. It is this ‘flight’ that Jesus is referring to in **Matt. 24:15-28**. The pursuit of Satan is very hostile due to his rage, and his realization that his time is very short now. The deliverance being spoken of is supernatural, and most likely means that a majority of Israel will escape his clutches and this, for 3 ½ years – note **12:6,14**. The time, times and a half time is 1,260 days or 3 ½ years – the last 1/2 of the Tribulation, Daniel's 70th week. Since this time period is said 3 different ways in Scripture, we are meant to take it as literal, not symbolic. It is not just an indeterminate long period of time as some say.

Daniel 12:1 describes the events at the start of the last ½, the Great Tribulation, as Michael arises (he is described as the great prince who has charge of ‘your’ people- Israel). The 2nd part of v. 1 is a direct parallel to Christ's words in **Matt. 24:21-22**. But then note the 3rd part of Daniel 12:1 – “But at that time your

people will be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.” This is in part what is being described in **Rev. 12:14**.

They will be delivered by somehow being made inaccessible to Satan and those under his control. They will receive food and water, probably from benevolent other people (cf. Matt. 25:35-40) or perhaps God will send Manna, quail & water from rocks as He did in the wilderness in the OT. The protection of God’s people will have a certain supernatural flair to it, so that Satan’s attempts to rid the world of believers, both Jewish believers and gentiles will be only marginally successful – cf. **Matt. 24: 21-22**. God will save those He has chosen to save (cf. **II Peter 3:1-10**) and will spare the physical lives of His servants who will populate His Kingdom when Christ comes to reign on earth.

This wilderness, if Jerusalem is the beginning of the escape, is to the mountains (according to Jesus in Matt. 24:16), but could also mean the desert of the Sinai. However, this is not the only place where Jews will be under attack, especially Jews who have converted to Christianity and have become 2 things that Satan hates most – Jews and Christians.

Given the effects of what we’ll read of in Rev. 13:16-18 (the Mark of the Beast), the wilderness worldwide will likely mean to get out of the urban areas into the rural areas where one could more likely live off the land, and have fewer people to contend with. If it is mostly believers escaping, they will be able to form some sort of underground community to help one another survive. Without the ability to buy and sell, and the decision not to take the Mark (a capital crime – cf. 13:7-8), believers will need to get away from where people congregate, and “live off the land”. They will need to trust in God to somehow provide for them, and He will...”they will be nourished.” It is not as if God has never done that before – the manna, quail, Elijah & the ravens during the drought, then the widow and her son and the oil & flour that would not come to an end, etc. There will be enemies for sure – Matt. 25:41-46, but also there will be those who will courageously assist God’s people – **Matt. 25:35-40** for example. ③

II. Water & Earth

vv. 15-16

These 2 verses describe the pursuit and protection in symbolic language. Verse 15 is almost impossible to interpret apart from actually seeing it take place. It is tough to envision this as an actual Satanic flood of water sent to somehow drown people but other attempts to decipher it offer little hope that their ideas are likely. **Jer. 46:7-8** & **47:2-3** use this sort of imagery as a metaphor for a large army, which perhaps makes the most sense if applied here, especially if it is related to the 6th Trumpet judgment, but other ideas like: “it is the Jewish authorities trying to eradicate the church in Acts 8:1-3”, or “it is a river of lies from II Thess.2:9-11”, fall flat. This flood is describing force used by an authority figure in some way. The context does support that.

As impressive as this force is, supernatural protection is provided by God to counter the attack. If it is somehow water as in a flood, then this could be describing earthquakes which open the ground and the water is literally swallowed by the earth. Similar pictures of earth swallowing Israel's enemies are found in Ex. 15:10-12, and in Num. 16:28-33; 26:10 (Korah, Dothan, Abiram). Whatever this protection consists of, it is certain that it is from God.

III. Her Other Offspring

v. 17

The frustration for Satan continues to multiply. His early plans to defeat God and His people always resulted in advancing God's intentions and purposes – ie. Joseph, and this will be no exception. He lost his chance to get at the Son and failed unwittingly at Calvary; his accusations over the years mainly solidified God's protection of His saints; martyrdom made believers victorious and famous so that their deaths inspired others (eg. Jim Elliot, and all those contained in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and so many more); his war in heaven and now his best shot at "the woman" have been stymied. Yeah, he is frustrated and angry.

Apparently, whatever protection has been prepared for the woman for 3 ½ years is impenetrable, so Satan turns his attentions elsewhere, hoping to win from a different angle. His focus now is "the rest of her offspring". This is a more scattered group, not as protected perhaps because they were not able to flee to this place of safety, and remain exposed as those who will not take the Mark.

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There are 4 main ideas who these people are:

- Gentile Christians, distinct from the mother-church in Jerusalem, but this restricts the woman to Jews in Jerusalemⁱⁱ.
- Selected members of the believing community who undergo persecution – but this doesn't make them "other" than those already under attack.
- These are a believing remnant and the woman is Israel as a wholeⁱⁱⁱ - this does not explain why Israel as a whole is then protected. Although these are believers per "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus", they are not a remnant in this context.
- The best view – according to Robert Thomas, is that these offspring are the 144,000 evangelists of Rev. 7:4-8 because they are active witnesses during the last 3 ½ years and are not hidden away. He points to Rev. 14:1-5 as proof of their victory over the Antichrist and False Prophet. This does make sense, but since they survive, this for me does not jibe with **Rev. 13:7**. If the Antichrist is allowed to make war with the saints and conquer them, and if the 144,000 are sealed and safe after the 3 ½ years, then this other offspring cannot be the 144,000. They are not hidden away and protected in the wilderness but are active evangelists – that is why they were sealed, and they will be targets, but will overcome.

Therefore, I prefer to see the 'other offspring' as John MacArthur^{iv} does – as "an all-inclusive phrase, referring to all those others who name the name of Jesus Christ". Obviously, all those who are not divinely protected with the woman in v.

16 and those who will yet become new believers in the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation are included.

The chapter ends with Satan standing on the sand of the sea. Now I must point out here that there is a deviation in translations at this point. The ESV, NIV, HCSB and NASB say that it is the dragon who is standing on the sand of the sea. The ESV says this as v. 17 of chapter 12; the NASB & NIV as v. 1 of chapter 13, and HCSB has it as v. 18 of chapter 12. If you have a KJV or NKJV, it says in 13:1, “I stood on the sand of the sea”, meaning John. Using earlier manuscripts than were available to the translators of the KJV, the newer translations have it correct, and the context into chapter 13 will bear that out almost immediately. It is no cause for alarm that the translations differ here, and we should be thankful that God in His providence has given us people who are skilled in ancient languages and archeology in order to provide us with better insight into the Scriptures.

Thwarted at every turn, Satan now prepares to empower his Antichrist, who will “rise from the sea” – cf. Dan. 7:2,3,7,8,19-27 – which probably refers to the Abyss (cf. Rev. 17:8)and thus a supernatural Antichrist and the False Prophet who will “rise from the land”. These 2 persons will oppose God and His saints and will garner worship for the Antichrist, and thus Satan.

Antichrist has been in power since the start of the Tribulation, and probably even a few months or a couple of years prior to that. It is his peace treaty with Israel that begins the Tribulation, not his rise to power. He is likely under then tutelage of Satan at that time, but it is not until the mid-point of the Tribulation that he is indwelt by Satan and all the carnage begins in earnest. ⑤

Next lesson – Lesson # 41 Rev. 13: 1-10 The Antichrist

ⁱ John MacArthur, in a sermon entitled, “The War of the Ages Part III”, 1994, accessed online at Grace to You – Scripture reference is Rev. 12:13-17

ⁱⁱ Dusterdieck, quoted in Robert Thomas, Revelation 8-22, p. 141

ⁱⁱⁱ IBID – p. 142 – quoting John Walvoort

^{iv} John MacArthur, Revelation 12-22; p. 34