

Newsletter May 2018

In our April 2018 newsletter we began a study of Chapter 11, in which John was transported through time and space back to the moment that Christ had broken open the first seal of the Scroll, which He had received from the hand of his Father in Heaven. In response, Satan succeeded in duping mankind into accepting a false Christ – the Antichrist – to exercise his evil power over the earth. John observed and took the measure of a third Temple, which Israel had built in Jerusalem under the evil auspices of the Antichrist. In response to that unauthorized Temple, God sent two powerful witnesses to Israel, whom we determined were most likely Elijah and Moses. They witnessed for three and one-half years concerning pending judgment and of the coming kingdom age in which the true Christ would reign in righteousness. At the end of that period, they were overcome and killed by a demon from the bottomless pit. The world gloated over their dead bodies and celebrated their demise for three and one-half days, after which God resurrected the witnesses and recalled them up into Heaven.

Then, John was shown the true Temple of God opened in heaven, which contained the Ark of the Covenant that God had made with Israel. As we move on into Revelation Chapter 12, we must understand that the chapter break provided here in our Bible is only for convenience in navigating through the text of the document, and that no break occurs in the original Greek text. John often used words such as “after this” to indicate that he is moving on to another topic, but Revelation 12 begins with the conjunctive “and,” thus directly linking it to the Temple and the Ark of the Covenant, which we just read about in the last verse of Chapter 11. Therefore, the first verse of this chapter is a continuation of the text of Chapter 11, and it must be interpreted in the same context. The symbolism that we have encountered throughout this document is greatly intensified in this chapter through the extensive use of metaphors and allegories. Having said that, we must always remember that there is an objective reality represented by such symbolism, such that we must carefully interpret each verse in keeping with the immediate text and that which is placed immediately before and after it.

This chapter opens with the portrayal of a woman giving birth to a child, but the dominant player introduced in this chapter is a great red dragon, which is a portrayal of Satan. Although Satan was referred to in Chapters 2 and 3 in connection with the seven churches (cf. Re. 2:9,13,24; 3:9) and was clearly understood to be working behind the scenes in the rise of the Antichrist to power in Chapter 6 verse 2, this is the first time in Revelation that we encounter him directly in person in his active role as the determined adversary of God and the source and promoter of all that is evil. With all of this as an introduction, let us delve into the actual text of this chapter.

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (Re.12:1,2).

Immediately after the Heavenly Temple was opened in Heaven and the Ark of the Covenant was seen standing safely within it, John sees this “great wonder” in heaven. The word “wonder” found here is *semeion* in the Greek, which can also be understood as a miraculous sign. Therefore, John is telling us that he is referring to a metaphorical woman. The immediate context dictates that this “woman” is in some way connected with the Temple and the Ark, which is directly associated with Israel. The word “woman” is *gune* in the Greek, which specifically refers to a “wife.” It should be noted that Israel was metaphorically referred to as a wayward wife in the prophecy of Hosea (cf. Ho.2:2). This impression of a wife is also in keeping with verse 2 which tells us that this “woman” is “with child” and is about to deliver.

If we ignore the obvious Jewish context surrounding this verse, we could immediately jump to false conclusions. Some interpreters have emphatically stated that this “woman” represents the Church of all ages who “delivers” Christ to the world. While the Church is referred to as the bride of Christ in Scripture, she is never referred to as his mother. Conversely, the Church is actually Jesus’ creation given to the world. Not surprisingly, the Roman Catholic Church refers to this “woman” as the virgin Mary, whom they have falsely deified to the extent that she has become to them the exclusive gateway to Christ. In addition, many cults have been founded by women who have claimed that this “woman” is a symbolic representation of themselves.

The identifying attributes of this “woman” are the sun, moon, and stars. This along with the Jewish context provided in verse 11:19 clearly identifies her as Israel. This fact is easily verified by comparing the woman’s attributes with those found in an earlier dream of Joseph: “And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his

brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told *it* to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What *is* this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth” (Ge.37:9,10)? In Joseph’s dream, Jacob was symbolically compared to the sun, the moon to his wife Rachel, and twelve stars were compared to Joseph and his brothers – who would later make up the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob had no trouble identifying those metaphors with his family – that would later become the nation of Israel. Therefore, this is not a literal woman, but a sign representing Israel who “gave birth” to Jesus, the Christ, after having travailed many painful periods of tribulation that culminated in the extremely painful Roman oppression at the time of Jesus’ birth.

“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads” (Re.12:3).

Here John sees a second wondrous sign in Heaven. This “Red dragon” represents Satan as is clearly stated in the text of verse 9. Satan is not a literal dragon any more than Israel is a literal woman. Red indicates his deadly murderous nature. He has seven heads upon which are seven crowns likely representing Satan’s previous attempts to rule over the world through six world rulers: Pharaoh of Egypt, Shalmaneser of Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, Cyrus II of Media-Persia, Alexander of Greece, Caesar of Rome, and finally his yet future attempt through the Antichrist, the seventh. The ten horns likely represent the heads of ten nations whose armies he will commandeer to exercise control over the world through the Antichrist, who will be unveiled in chapter 13.

“And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne” (Re.12:4,5).

The “stars (Greek, *aster*) of heaven” in this verse represent angels, which Satan corrupted in his rebellion against God (cf. Job 38:7). Satan and one third of the other “bright ones” who had followed him were cast out of heaven and down to the earth, where they continued to oppose God by perverting men to aid them in their evil rebellion. Satan early on sought to destroy the line of Seth from which the messiah would be born, but he ultimately failed. The angel Gabriel had said to Mary, “And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS” (Lu.1:31). Through Mary, Israel had brought forth the “man child” who was destined to rule the nations of the world “with a rod of iron.” As Isaiah had earlier prophesied, “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Is.9:6). In proper context, “us” in this verse specifically pertains to Israel, not to Christians or the world at large.

When he could not prevent Jesus’ birth, Satan stood ready to destroy the child (the messiah) as soon as he was born to the nation. He enlisted Herod who through political jealousy sought to find the child and have Him killed lest he run the risk of losing his crown to Him. Failing to locate Him, he ordered that all of the male children in the region around Bethlehem under two years of age be killed by the sword. Nevertheless, the child he sought to kill was not one of those that was slaughtered; Joseph having been warned by God of Herod’s evil intent, had taken Mary and Jesus down into Egypt – where they resided until the death of Herod,

Throughout Jesus’ ministry Satan plotted to divert Him from his mission, or to have Him killed before He could accomplish his act of redemption. At the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, Satan sought to tempt his human nature in the wilderness, but in that he utterly failed. After that, he enlisted the pride of Israel’s religious rulers to oppose Him, and lastly he entered into Judas Iscariot to betray Him to his executioners. Jesus’ crucifixion was not the victory Satan had sought, for on the third day Jesus rose bodily from the dead bringing many redeemed sons to glory in his procession. Afterwards, Jesus “was caught up unto God, and to his throne.”

“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred *and* threescore days” (Re.12:6).

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, Israel’s political resistance increasingly became a burden to Rome. One generation after the ascension of Christ, Roman armies laid siege to Jerusalem, and in AD 70 they entered the city, totally destroyed the Temple, and laid the entire city to waste. Through heeding the clear warning given by Christ 40 years before, Christians and many Jews escaped before the siege was fully formed (cf. Lu 21:20-22).

A few Jews also escaped after the destruction of the city, but a far greater number were slaughtered as infuriated Roman armies pursued them to purge the entire land of any trace of Judaism. At that point, Israel as a nation ceased to exist, and her small remnant had been scattered abroad within the wilderness areas of Gentile nations where they huddled together in small enclaves temporarily hidden away in out-of-the-way places.

Over many centuries of suffering and persecution, Jews as a people, have miraculously survived and even grown in number. So much so that their rapidly increasing numbers were viewed as burdensome to various nations, wherein antisemitism grew resulting in great conflicts and violence. Jews escaping persecution soon had no place to go. As a solution to this refugee problem, the United Nations voted to carve out a portion of land located within the region of Palestine, in which Jews could be segregated from the rest of the world and live in peace. This area corresponded to a small portion of their ancient homeland, which excluded the city of Jerusalem. In 1948, Israel again became a sovereign nation, and the Jewish diaspora slowly began to return to repopulate the land. Today, Israel has become a strong nation quite capable of defending herself against her angry Arab neighbors – who are bent upon her total eradication.

In the second half of this verse, John informs us that God has prepared a special place for Israel in this vast Gentile wilderness, but he does not say that Israel will actually occupy it at that time. As we know, this dispersion of Jews into Gentile nations has already lasted much longer than “a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (3 ½ years), and the scattered remnant from that first exodus have been more often than not heavily persecuted rather than nourished. We shall discover that the significance of the special place mentioned here is not to be actualized until we reach verse 14, as a second mass exodus out of Jerusalem will take place.

“And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Re.12:7-9).

After the fall of Adam, Satan divided his efforts between roaming about the earth seeking someone to subvert with his lies, and appearing in Heaven where he scandalously accused men before God. A war was soon waged in Heaven by the archangel Michael, the protector of Israel (cf. Da.12:1), along with his angelic hosts, against Satan who was accompanied by his fallen angels (i.e. demons). Satan could not prevail against Michael and his heavenly hosts who vastly outnumbered his evil forces two-to-one (cf. Re.12:4). John sees that Satan ultimately lost this war, after which he and his demons were permanently expelled from Heaven and cast down to the earth.

“And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Re.12:10,11).

As the war comes to an end and Satan and his demons are expelled from Heaven, John hears a loud voice out of Heaven saying, “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ.” There is exultation in Heaven by the brethren of those whom Satan had slandered and cursed before God day and night. By faith, they had stood firm against Satan and had prevailed. They had overcome him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

“Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Re.12:12).

While the heavens had reason to rejoice that they would no more see Satan, the people living on earth must soon experience the first woe, the fifth trumpet judgment as Satan is cast down to earth where he will be permitted to open the bottomless pit to release his demons upon the earth’s population. Although Satan’s time is short before he must endure his eternal incarceration in the lake of fire, he intends to use that time to torment and destroy as much of mankind as possible, and in particular, he desires to corrupt and eliminate the people of God.

“And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man *child*” (Re.12:13).

The angry dragon (Satan) whose movements are now limited to the earth greatly seeks to persecute and utterly destroy Israel, to whom the victorious Christ was born, to extract the ultimate revenge for his defeat.

“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent” (Re.12:14).

This place is the one that John has already told us about in verse 6, but here we are told that Israel was given “two wings of a great eagle, that she may fly into the wilderness, into her place” of safety. The word “eagle” is *aetos* in the Greek indicating a powerful bird having a great wingspan. God had used “eagle wings” to transport his people out of harms way before, as we find in Exodus 18:4. Those wings are symbolic, speaking of Israel’s sure flight as they are upheld and transported by the power of God to their place of safety. “A time” is a year, “times” is two years, and “half a time” is one-half year corresponding to the “thousand two hundred and threescore days” mentioned in verse 6. Again, we observe that the total time the Jewish remnant needs to spend in this wilderness area will be three and one-half years – the second half of Daniel’s seventieth week.

This verse specifically refers to a future time after which the Antichrist will have set up an “idol of abomination” in the holy of holies of a future third Temple, which will have been built by unsuspecting Jews under his auspices in Jerusalem. In his Olivet Discourse Jesus had warned his people of this very moment: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand): then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains” (Mt.24:15,16). When this idol of the Antichrist is seen by the Jews, they will suddenly realize that the Antichrist is actually the satanic “man of sin,” not the messiah whom they had earlier supposed him to be. The Israelites of that day will be left inconsolable (i.e. desolate) by this sudden shock.

Heeding Jesus earlier warning, they must flee Jerusalem without delay into the mountainous region east of them for their physical safety. In the past, some have speculated that this place was the natural rock fortress in a mountainous basin called Petra, which is now located in southern Jordan. Petra has only one narrow entrance making it relatively easy to defend. However, this basin offers no protection at all from a modern aerial bombardment. The location of this place that God has prepared for them still remains unknown. Wherever this secret place will be, God will hide, nourish, and protect the Jewish remnant in it during the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week. During that same time, God’s fierce wrath will be unleashed in the form of seven trumpet judgments, which Christ will send down upon the earth out of the heavens above.

“And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood” (Re.12:15).

The word for “water” in this verse is *hudor* in the Greek which can be taken literally or figuratively. We note that the Word of God is referred to as water by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:26. The words that come out of Satan’s mouth will rush forth like a flood of water. We know this is not a literal flood inasmuch as John refers to it “as a flood.” Unable to locate Israel’s hiding place, Satan will speak evil rumors concerning Israel, which will begin a very intense worldwide flood of antisemitism within the hearts of men. Satan will enlist a great army of these anti-Semites in hopes of breaching Israel’s stronghold and sweeping her off the face of the earth.

“And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth” (Re.12:16).

Nevertheless, the great flood of antisemitism that comes out of Satan’s mouth will be swallowed up by the earth, and it will come to naught as the great trumpet judgments occupy men’s minds. Perhaps an earthquake will open a deep chasm around Israel’s hiding place, further protecting her from Satan’s massive onslaught.

“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Re.12:17).

Satan was very angry with Israel who had escaped all his efforts to “wash her away.” He then redirected his efforts “to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Many believe that this remnant is made up of messianic Jews who have placed their hope in Jesus Christ, and in particular the 144,000 Jews who have received the seal of God’s protection. Inasmuch as they openly provide a continuous witness of Jesus Christ to the world, they have not been hidden safely away with the rest of Israel, thus making them a target – albeit an impregnable one. © Arthur J. Smith May 2018