

Revelation 12:13–17

A Ministry in the Word

Scripture Reading

And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. 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. 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. 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. 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.

The Woman and the Individuals — A Distinction to Keep

A distinction must be maintained between the woman as a corporate entity and the individuals who compose the remnant within her. God protects the woman — the remnant of Israel as such, the body of faithful Jews whom He will bring through to the millennium. But that protection does not guarantee the safety of every individual, because Revelation 13:7 says it was given to the beast to make war with the saints and to overcome them. Individuals may be martyred. But the demise of the individual does not mean the demise of the woman, nor any change in God's purpose toward her. Those who are martyred have their part in the first resurrection. Those who pass through unmartyred enter into the millennium, forming the woman clothed with the sun as she will be displayed at last. The guarantee is of God's purpose — and His purpose is certain.

The Dragon and the Serpent — Two Aspects of the Enemy

Verses 13 and 15 present two different modes of attack, and two different names are used that correspond to them. In verse 13, the dragon persecutes the woman — the dragon is associated with power, with direct violence, with the open fury of the roaring lion. In verse 15, the serpent casts out water as a flood — the serpent is associated with subtlety, with deception, with the corruption that works through guile rather than force. Violence and corruption: these are the two great instruments of evil that have filled the earth since the fall, and both are brought to bear against the woman in these two verses.

The contrast with the garden of Eden is instructive. There, the serpent came with sweet words — *ye shall not surely die* — bringing enticement and temptation, causing Eve to doubt God and trust the deceiver. Here, the dragon does not come with sweet words. He persecutes. He is dealing with a people who know their Lord and will not be moved by seduction — so force is used instead. The enemy adapts his methods to the condition of those he attacks.

The Flood and What It Represents

The serpent casts water as a flood after the woman to carry her away. Water in the symbolic language of Revelation is often connected with what is unstable — the wicked are like the troubled sea that cannot rest, casting up mire and dirt (Isaiah 57:20). The flood the serpent casts may represent various instrumentalities of deception and pressure that seek to overwhelm and carry away those who will not submit to the beast. The earth, by contrast, is something more stable — and the earth opens and swallows the flood. Whether this refers to literal geographical events or to some form of instrumental preservation provided by God through more stable elements of human society is not given to us to specify with certainty. What we know is that the flood does not succeed.

There is a principle in how God preserved Moses as an infant: put in a little ark of bulrushes in the river, he was not carried away downstream. The very waters that threatened were made the means of his preservation. God is not limited in what He uses to protect His own.

The Remnant of Her Seed — Obedience First, Then Testimony

Verse 17 describes the remnant of the woman's seed as those *which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*. Not all Jews are meant — just as not all who descended from Abraham are the seed of Abraham in the full sense. *They are not all Israel which are of Israel* (Romans 9:6). The remnant are those who have kept the commandments of God and refused the mark of the beast, and who have received and hold the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The order is worth noting: obedience first, testimony second. That is God's order throughout Scripture. There is a temptation to seek a large and prominent testimony and deal with obedience afterwards. But the remnant in the wilderness — in a desert, where no one appears to be watching — keeps the commandments of God first, and the testimony follows from that obedience. God gave Elijah a great testimony when he was at the brook Cherith and the only beings who knew how to find him were the ravens. God is not dependent on prominent places for His testimony to bear fruit.

Verse 17 also confirms what this remnant will know: they have *the testimony of Jesus Christ*. They are not members of the one body of the assembly, but they are alive to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of the kingdom — that the King is coming to reign — will be preached by those who know His name. Matthew 24 speaks directly to them; the Lord's words there are addressed to those who will be under these very persecutions.

The Spiritual Exercises of the Remnant — Leviticus 26

Leviticus 26:41-42 gives a remarkable promise that illuminates what the remnant will pass through: *If then their uncircumcised heart be humbled, and they then accept the punishment of their iniquity — I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.* This is what the wilderness will work in the remnant. They will not fight against God. They will not be angry at the dragon and seek to make war against him. They will bow under the hand of God, accept the punishment of their iniquity, and call upon Jehovah to remember — not the Mosaic covenant, which they have failed to keep, but the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which rests on God's unconditional promise.

God always falls back on His unconditional promises to the fathers. He will bring Israel into the bond of the covenant — not the covenant of Sinai. And when the remnant are humbled before God, they will know this. The moral connection is one that is not hard to see: all of that trouble is to get Israel to repent. It is the birth pangs of Messiah — the suffering that precedes the joy of seeing Him come. And they are not regenerated at the sight of the Lord, as though they belong to Him only from that moment — they keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus already. They are quickened souls. But they are not yet in the conscious known rest of revealed acceptance before God. That comes when He is revealed to them, when the great day of atonement finds its fulfillment in the one whose blood it all pointed to. Then they will be at rest in a known relationship with their God.

— Study ends —