



In the last study, we covered the two witnesses preaching of the truth for 3 ½ years. It is interesting that during this time, God symbolically pictures *a part of the Church* being protected while the other group is not. This is represented by “measuring” the inner Temple quarter but not the outer court.

John mentions, “Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, ‘Rise and *measure* the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But *leave out the court which is outside the temple*, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months. And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth” (Rev. 11:1-3).

Here we see a separation of God’s people into two groups. One refers to those who “worship” inside the Temple grounds. The indication is they are closer to God and are “measured” or protected, while those on the outer court are “not measured,” facing persecution from the “Gentiles” or the hostile forces. *Tyndale Commentary* notes, “‘*Them that worship*’ stands for the people of God in their capacity as a worshipping community...The meaning apparently is that what was measured at God’s command is *under the direct control and care of God*. The church will be protected in the coming disaster” (p. 146).

Similarly, in Rev. 3:10 God says those who are faithful will be kept “from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” Now in chap. 12, this separation of the Church into two groups is made even clearer.

John states, “Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. 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. 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 His throne” (12:1-5).

God now describes in this chapter 12 the history of God’s people *from the time of Christ to His return*. In Christ’s day, Israel is pictured as a Woman who is about to bear the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The symbolism is taken from Joseph’s dream in Gen. 37:9-10, with the sun being Jacob, the moon being Rachel and the twelve stars being their 12 sons who became the 12 patriarchs. *Tyndale Commentary* explains, “The time of birth is near. Israel is about to give birth to the Messiah. For the early Christians there was an important continuity between old Israel and the Church, the true Israel. Here the Woman is undoubtedly Israel who gives birth to the Messiah. But in the latter part of the chapter She is the Church who is persecuted for her faith” (p. 157).

Once the Messiah is born, Satan, that fiery dragon, is ready to devour Him. This occurred when Satan used King Herod to try to kill the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, but God helped and they fled to Egypt.

Christ, after finishing his earthy life, then ascends to heaven where He looks after His Church. The next great event for the Church is when the Woman is forced to flee into the wilderness. The following great moment is the end times. We consider the flight of the Woman to take place in A. D. 325 when Emperor Constantine adopts Roman Catholicism as the true Christian religion throughout the Roman Empire and begins a ruthless persecution of those who keep the Sabbath and the Christian Passover instead of observing Sunday and Easter. The 3½ year period is taken to be 1,260 years (prophetically, each day represents a year, Num. 14:33; Ez. 4:6; Rev. 2:10). The epoch ends in 1585 when the Dark Ages of the Church ends with the British war against Spain that frees England from a Catholic takeover and religious freedom can prosper.

John continues, “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:7-9).

Historically, after the Woman finishes her “wilderness years” there comes a time of religious freedom where she can grow and spread the Gospel

to the entire world, and then, “the end will come” (Mt. 24:14). *That is what we are currently doing.* But there will come a time when that access to the world will be hindered and another great persecution will take place. Satan will again storm heaven and try to dethrone God. But Michael and his angels will defeat Satan and his minions and cast them to the earth.

John proceeds, “Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, ‘Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time’” (Rev. 12:10-13).

Satan and his angels will be full of wrath and God will permit him a period of 3½ years of great power. He will take advantage of it and attack the Church!

John explains, “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” (Rev. 12:14-17).

Here is when the separation of the Church into two groups takes place. One is protected and sent to a place of safety while the other group will have to face Satan’s wrath during this Great Tribulation period. Notice all the times described so far last 3 ½ years. As *Tyndale Commentary* points out, “The same length of time [3 ½ years] as in Dan. 7:25 and 12:7, is allowed for the treading down of the holy city by the Gentiles, the prophesying of the two witnesses, the

Woman’s stay in the wilderness, and the Beast’s exercise of authority. This is the [same time] period Antiochus Epiphanes tyrannized in Jerusalem, a time of unbelievable horror for the pious Jews, but a time which came to an end” (p. 147).

So the Woman (or the Church), is given “two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly [from the Gk. *petomai*, “to fly”) into the wilderness to her place” (Rev. 12:14). This means air transportation of some kind, whether miraculous as what happened to Philip (Acts 8:39-40) or by mechanically-assisted flight—we simply don’t know which. Once having arrived in that region (and from Rev. 7:3-4, the group could consist of 144,000 Church members, including their families and others), all “measured” by God, just as Israel was “measured” and spared during the first Passover by the blood on the doorposts. As 2 Pet. 2:9 says, “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.” Satan will try to prevent the Church from arriving at her final destination so he sends a “flood” probably meaning a huge army, since “waters” symbolically mean many “peoples” (Rev. 17:15). God will intervene and swallow all of those sent against her, just as He did in the Red Sea, when it says, “You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them [in the sea]” (Ex. 15:12). Then the Church will be “nourished” during 3 ½ years (the Gk. term, *trepho* can include not only physical but also spiritual nourishment or training). Mounce says, “It is there that the Woman is nourished (or perhaps trained) for 3 ½ years” (p. 241). It will be exciting!

What happens to the other group of the Church? Likely, they are symbolized by the neglectful five spiritual virgins of Mt. 25 or the Laodicean Era of Rev. 3:14-22 where they are told they are spiritually lukewarm and will have to buy spiritual gold passed through fiery trials. Here it says Satan will turn his wrath on them, who are the “rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). Christ’s “testimony” is that they “do” keep all of God’s commandments as He taught—not the Christian world’s version of doing away with God’s laws!

Remember, we are going over a long interlude covering chapters 10-15, where God explains who are the main characters of this end-time scenario. He

has already revealed who is the Church and also her two witnesses. Now He will reveal who are *the three evil ones* that will unleash the Great Tribulation!

John records, "Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, 'Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?' And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints" (Rev. 13:1-10).

This Beast is called a "composite" creature, or "made up" of several previous beasts in Daniel 7:4-6. In the end time, the Beast is symbolically described as having the seven heads of previous empires—one from Babylon, one from Medo-Persia, four from Greece and one from Rome. It is the one from Rome that has the ten crowns, for Dan. 7:24 says, "The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise *from this* [fourth] *kingdom*." Also as Rev. 17:12 explains, "'The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but *they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast*.'"

So this Beast arises from "the sea," symbolic of a tumultuous time in the world, to become its pseudo-savior. The deadly wound is symbolic of a near-death experience of one the empires—in this case, the

Roman Empire, which collapsed in A.D. 476, but was "resurrected" again—and actually, would do so *seven times* until Christ's return—that is pictured in the woman riding a *7-headed Beast* in Rev. 17.

This resurrected Holy Roman Empire will have 3 ½ years to impose its will upon the world. It will have the backing of Satan's great power and will be unbeatable. In the past, dictators who have had great success and provided people what they want are usually given free reign. As Historian Alistair Horne notes, "Up until 1803, the French perceived Napoleon as a peacemaker, but afterward saw him as a conqueror and founder of a new empire. Until the years when things visibly began to go wrong, *they happily went along* (indeed, *much as the Germans had during the years of Hitler's easy conquests*)" (*What If?*, 2001, p. 204).

This Beast power will have world-conquering success none of his beast predecessors ever had: no, not Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, Augustus, Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, Charles I, Napoleon or Hitler. Yet it will be by Satan's power—for "the dragon *gave him his power, his throne, and great authority*" (Rev. 13:2). His pretension of being a god-like figure is the main blasphemy described here. No one will have ever had such political, military and economic success as this person. He will be "worshipped" by the world in a similar way as many Germans "worshipped" Hitler and were willing to die for him. In fact the Waffen SS, Hitler's personal bodyguards, wore a skull and bones emblem to indicate their willingness to die for Hitler.

Only those who have God's Holy Spirit will be able to withstand the Beast, whose names are in the Book of Life (Rev. 13:8). Consequently, Satan will persecute the "saints" and "overcome them" (Rev. 13:7). These saints are those "outside" of the place of protection and are exposed to Satan's wrath. It will be a terrible time for those saints. Many will be taken into captivity and be killed, but God promises that those who commit these crimes will themselves be captured and killed. As a modern version says in Rev. 13:10, "This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently and remain faithful." Jesus similarly told the Laodicean Church, "I counsel you to buy from Me *gold refined in the fire*, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed" (Rev. 3:18). This is food for thought!