

Unlocking Revelation

The War Behind All Wars

about keeping the seventh day (Saturday) holy as the Sabbath is no longer necessary. Many professed Christian churches actually teach that God's law as a whole is no longer a necessary moral code since Jesus died to forgive us. It would be as logical to say a criminal pardoned by its government is at liberty to continue his life of crime once granted freedom. The pardon itself, however, should arouse a spirit of gratitude that would cause the forgiven lawbreaker to willingly obey the law.

Of course the Bible supports absolutely no changes in or deletions from God's law. Jesus Himself said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17, 18). The apostle James offers us this inspired logic: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law" (James 2:10, 11). To live in disobedience to any one of God's commandments is sin. So we really are out of harmony with the spirit of the law as a whole, which is loving obedience, when we disregard even one of its principles. The remnant church at the end of time will be a church that upholds obedience to all of God's commandments—not eight, not nine, but ten.

The second characteristic of the end-time church is just as important as the first. She will "have [possess] the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Revelation 12:17). The testimony of Jesus is not, as some have suggested, our

personal testimony *about* Jesus. Yes, Christ's true followers will have a personal testimony to bear. Verse 11 of Revelation 12 says they will overcome partly by "the word of *their* testimony." But verse 17 says the remnant church will possess in her midst "the testimony of Jesus," His own word of testimony. Later in Revelation a heavenly messenger told John that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Revelation 19:10). In other words, Jesus speaks to His people through the spiritual gift of prophecy.

The apostle Paul confirms with John that the gift of prophecy would exist in the church until the end of earth's history. He said, "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Christ has a remnant church that upholds His law and possesses the gift of prophecy. Don't depend on heritage. Don't depend on human criteria. Don't depend on your own ability to make a good random guess. Prayerfully look for the church that Jesus identified to John as His remnant. You will find in this world only one church that passes the test. If you sincerely want to be led to the true church, Christ will lead you. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold, and one Shepherd" (John 10:16).

The things we see in this world are not the primary reality. Life on planet earth is definitely real, sometimes more real than we would like. But the all too apparent struggle between good and evil that transpires here is merely an extension of a much larger sphere of warfare that began before our world existed. Our planet has become the battleground for a conflict of eternal dimensions. Revelation 12 draws the veil aside to give us an insight into the war behind all wars.

"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. 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. 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" (Revelation 12:1-5).

The Woman and Her Child

In the Bible a woman symbolizes the people of God, His church on earth. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah "likened the daughter of Zion [Israel] to a comely and delicate woman" (Jeremiah 6:2). In the New Testament the apostle Paul says that the church is "espoused . . . as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:2). An unfaithful church is symbolized in the Bible by a whore (see Revelation 17:1-6).

The beautiful woman of Revelation 12 represents the true church of Christ. She is clothed with the sun

to illustrate her dependence on the righteous life and atoning death of Christ for salvation. In an Old Testament prophecy the coming Messiah was named "the Sun of righteousness" who would "arise with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2). The moon under her feet must represent the Old Testament prophecies and the sanctuary service, all of which reflected the light of Christ as the moon reflects the light of the sun. The twelve stars that form her crown represent the twelve apostles who laid the foundation of the New Testament church (see Ephesians 2:19-22). The "man child" of the woman in Revelation 12:5 is Jesus Christ, born to humanity as its Savior. Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would be given to the world as "a son" (Isaiah 9:6).

The Dragon

The "great red dragon" who stood before the woman "to devour her child as soon as it was born" is "Satan" according to verse 9. But the Bible tells us that it was the Roman government, by the command of King Herod, that attempted to execute Christ soon after His birth (see Matthew 2). Many baby boys were slain in an effort to rid the world of Christ before He could accomplish His mission as our Savior. Therefore, while the dragon is ultimately a symbol of Satan himself, it also represents Rome as the human agency through which the Devil worked to perform his wicked will.

But the diabolical scheme failed. Christ grew into manhood to live a life of righteousness on behalf of sinners and to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our rebellion. Having triumphed over sin and death, He was raised from the dead and "caught up unto God, and to His throne." Now, as our High Priest in heaven, "He always lives to make intercession" for His people (Hebrews 7:25, NKJV).



The Woman in the Wilderness

“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” (Revelation 12:6).

Having failed in his attempt to destroy Christ, Satan turned with fury on the church of Christ. The wilderness became the church’s only refuge from the severe persecution unleashed against her. While the efforts to crush Christianity began early in its history, Revelation 12 calls our attention to a specific period of time during which the church survived only in hidden valleys and secret mountain havens. Bible students have long recognized the 1260-day period of Revelation to be the 1260 years from 538 A.D. to 1798, during which time Christianity was preserved by a humble, persecuted few who fled into obscurity. (We have learned in previous studies that a day is equal to a year in Bible prophecy.)

In 330 A.D., Constantine, the Roman Emperor, relocated the empire’s capital from Rome to Constantinople, now Istanbul. The vacancy in Rome was eagerly seized as the seat of power for the papal Roman church-state. The church gained undisputed reign in 538 A.D. by driving the Ostrogoths out from Rome for their Arian beliefs. This exercise of power emboldened the church to persecute all who did not yield to her authority. Century after century passed as millions of Christians were martyred for their faith by the papacy. Those who escaped her sword did so by taking refuge in the wilderness areas of northern Italy and southern France, as well as the northern territories of newly-discovered America.

We will return to the church’s wilderness experience when we come to verses 13-17. But now John shifts our attention back to the dragon.

The Origin of Evil

“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. 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. 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” (Revelation 12:7-12).

The dragon’s warfare against Christ did not begin when the Savior came to our world as God in human flesh. The war began in heaven. Satan, once an exalted angel named Lucifer, deceived approximately “a third” of the angels (see Revelation 12:4). He led them to believe that God is unjust and, therefore, unworthy of worship. The prophet Isaiah informs us that Lucifer sought to exalt himself above God and usurp the throne. He coveted the worship and authority that belongs to God alone (see Isaiah 14:12-14).

War broke out in heaven. Satan, the adversary, led his sympathizers in an all-out revolt against the kingdom of God the Father and His Son. Michael, the name of Christ before He came to earth as our Savior, led the loyal angels in defense of the Creator. It was not a war of violence with swords or guns, but a war of ideas, of words, of accusations against God on the part of Satan and vindication of God on the part of Michael.

The Devil did not prevail and was expelled from the heavenly kingdom. Now the earth became his battleground. Here he would demonstrate his “better” plan of government. Here he would manifest his true character. Here he would prove himself a liar and a murderer.

In the form of a serpent, the master of deceit accomplished the fall of our first parents and, through them, has ensnared the world in his trap of sin. All the guilt, the sorrow, the degradation and tragedy of our world is the result of Satan’s rulership.

For thousands of years Satan wore the mask of deceit, claiming goodwill and charging God as the criminal in the war. The book of Job reveals that Satan presented himself in heaven as the self-proclaimed prince of this world (see Job 1 and 2). There, before the “principalities and powers” (Ephesians 3:10) of the unfallen universe, he argued his accusations against the character of God. He claimed that Job did not serve God from a motive of love, but rather for personal gain; that God is not worthy of obedience and worship, so He must bribe His followers in order to retain their loyalty, was the implication of the subtle fiend. God is selfish and his followers are deceived, he charged.

Down through the ages the lies of God’s enemy had given him access to heaven according to the book of Job. But when Jesus came to our world and was cruelly crucified, the Devil’s mask was torn away. He manifested that he, not God, was a selfish deceiver whose heart was filled with malice and hatred. It is the cross of Christ that John had in mind when he announces, “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” (Revelation 12:10). After the crucifixion of Christ, Satan lost all influence with the heavenly universe. His accusing voice has been silenced. The cross of Christ demonstrated God’s love and vindicated His character beyond question. Those in heaven “rejoice” at God’s conquest and Satan’s defeat.

But the war isn’t over yet. While the heavens can rejoice, John issues a warning of “woe to the inhabitants of the earth.” Satan has lost all influence in heaven, but he still plans to deceive and ruin as many human beings as he possibly can. He knows his time is “short.” He is a defeated foe, and he knows it. So with great “wrath” he channels all his power to the one purpose of taking men and women to destruction with him (see Revelation 12:12).

Those Who Overcome

Not all will fall prey to Satan’s sophistry. Not all will join him in rebellion against the loving Lord of heaven. Some will overcome him.

But how?

John tells us how in verse 11. There are three specific weapons of warfare that will secure the victory for us:

1. “The blood of the Lamb.” When we behold and appreciate the love of Christ revealed at the cross, we are strengthened to resist the Devil’s temptations. God’s love is our single greatest need. When we understand and exercise faith in the cross, our hearts are filled with love for Him. And love produces a loyalty and devotion that nothing can destroy (see Romans 8:35-39; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15).
2. “The word of their testimony.” Our second source of overcoming power is to bear our personal testimony of God’s love and salvation. Expression deepens impression. The more we share our faith in Christ with others, the more secure and strong we will become in that faith.
3. “They loved not their lives unto death.” Our third source of victory over the Devil is to place higher value on God’s honor than on our own lives. If we love God and want to glorify Him more than we fear death, Satan cannot steal our salvation. Even if we lose our lives for our faith, eternity awaits us.

The Remnant Church

“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” (Revelation 12:13-17).

America—A Refuge

In verse 6 we noticed that “the woman fled into the wilderness,” indicating a foot journey. But in verse 14 she is “given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness.” A journey of flight is here portrayed. After centuries of severe persecution in Europe, finally the church was given wings to fly far away to a new land of liberty. “The earth helped the woman,” John says in verse 16. The meaning here is obvious. The faithful church took flight from the persecuting apostate church to a safe part of the earth where she could worship her Lord with freedom. Here Bible prophecy foretold the settling of Christian pilgrims in North America.

In this new land the church would be “nourished,” spiritually strengthened for its mission of evangelizing the world. America would preserve from persecution and doctrinal deception a “remnant” of the woman’s offspring, a remnant church. This end-time church is called “the remnant” because she bears likeness, in faith and practice, to the early Christian church founded by Christ and the apostles. She is the pure remainder of the original church, holding faithfully to all the Bible truths that the apostles taught; and she is preserved from the apostasies of fallen Christianity.

Characteristics of the Remnant

John gives us two unmistakable characteristics of the remnant church: (1) They “keep [the Greek is “preserve” or “protect”] the commandments of God,” and (2) they “have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

In order to find the true, end-time church of Christ, you must find the one church that possesses these two characteristics. In the midst of hundreds of confusing claims by religious bodies to be the true church, there is only one that upholds or preserves obedience to all ten of God’s commandments. Many churches believe in eight or nine commandments. Some have laid aside the one about image worship. Some have decided that the one