

Rev. 12-14, The Three-Phased War: Phases 2 & 3
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Overview

1. 12:1-6 summarizes the conflict between the woman and the dragon. The balance of the chapter, and on through ch. 14, develops this conflict in three sequential stages.
2. Last time, in 12:7-12, we traced the combat in heaven, against the Angels--since before the time of Christ, down through the present.
3. The next two sections describe what happens on earth during the 3.5 years of the Great Tribulation (compare time notices in 12:14; 13:5). These two descriptions appear to correlate with the two groups identified in ch. 7 (the 144K Jews, and the unnumbered multitude from every nation), who will reappear in ch. 14.
 - a) 12:13-16, On earth, against the Woman--beginning of the 3.5 years. Full of imagery of the exodus. Israel protected during the Great Tribulation.
 - b) 12:17-14:20, On earth, against the woman's seed--during the 3.5 years. Gentile believers persecuted during the Great Tribulation.
4. Each successive stage notes the devil's increasing rage, which leads in turn to intensified warfare on his part. He is getting madder and madder in an emotional chain reaction.
 - a) 13, when he sees that he is shut out of heaven, he goes against the woman.
 - b) 16-17, when he can't destroy her, his overflowing anger seeks another channel, and he turns to the remnant of her seed.

A. Exodus imagery in 12:13-16

These few verses bristle with images drawn from the Exodus (though not always used in the same way):

1. 14, "wings of an eagle," Exod. 19:4; cf. Deut. 32:9-12
2. 14, flee into wilderness, cf. the Exodus, and Exod. 14:5, 11.
3. 14, "her place," cf. v.6, "prepared for her," Exod. 23:20, the promised land
4. 14, "fed," cf. manna in Deut. 8:3, 16 (though the verb is different);
5. 14, 3.5 years = 42 months, cf. Num. 33, the number of camps of Israel in the wilderness.
6. 14, shifts from "dragon" to "serpent," cf. Num. 21, the fiery serpents
7. 15, trial by water, cf. Red Sea and Jordan River
8. 16, earth opens its mouth, Korah (Num. 16:32; 26:10)

B. The Underlying Meaning of the Exodus

1. Ezek. 20:2-20, a place of purification (13b, 15-16) and protection (14, 17) for a mixed people.
2. 1 Cor. 10:1-13, Exodus used as an illustration of the need for believers to avoid impurity and sin, and also of God's protection (v.13). Note the same two strands of thought as in Ezekiel 20.
3. With reference to Israel's eschatological delivery
 - a) Micah 7:15, Israel's eschatological delivery will be "according to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt."
 - b) Ezek. 20:33-44 develops extensive comparison, and is probably another view of John's vision of the woman in the wilderness. Just as John and Ezekiel share the visions of the cherubim (Ezek. 1; Rev. 4) and the measuring of the temple (Ezek. 40; Rev. 11), so God grants them both to see Israel in the wilderness.

C. The Meaning of 12:13-16

1. The Exodus story includes both purging and preservation; discipline and delivery.
2. Both Ezekiel and John see Israel in the last days sent into the wilderness.
 - a) Ezekiel focuses on the need for purging to separate the unbelievers from the believers.
 - b) John focuses on the delivery.
3. Interpretation of the paragraph:
 - a) Like Pharaoh of old, the devil will try to destroy God's people, the Woman.
 - b) God protects her by taking her into the wilderness. (John does not discuss the purging function that also takes place at this time, according to Ezekiel.)

D. 12:17-14:20, On earth, against the woman's seed

Today, consider only 12:17 by way of introduction.

1. John records the mounting wrath of the dragon. He has lost twice now: once in heaven, again against Israel on earth. This is his last chance to get back at God.
2. The second clause of the verse shows sequentiality: "he went [lit. went away] to make war" Unable to enter into her wilderness stronghold, now he brings all his energy against believers who are not secured there with her, "the remnant [rest] of her seed"--in addition to the Lord Jesus and the Jewish believers protected in the wilderness.
3. Satan's enmity is stirred up particularly by two characteristics of these Tribulation saints, characteristics that we should emulate if we would be effective in spiritual warfare.
 - a) "who keep the commandments of God"--obedience to God's word.

This is NOT obsolete in the so-called "age of grace"! Eph. 2:8-10, true believers are God's workmanship, created unto good works; if we don't do good works, that's evidence we are not truly God's workmanship.

b) "who ... have the testimony of Jesus Christ"--throughout the NT, this phrase means "to have testimony borne to one," not "to bear testimony to someone." We are indeed to BE witnesses to Jesus (Acts 1:8, but that is not the focus here. The focus is on the Lord Jesus' recognition of them as his own and the resulting changes that he brings about in their lives, giving evidence that they are his. Our witness to Christ is not something we generate in our own strength, but the result of Christ's witness to us, branding us as his own. Those whose lives show the true marks of Christ's redemption are singled out for persecution by the dragon.

1) The idiom:

- a> John 5:36, Jesus "has testimony" from three sources: John, the works, and the Father.
- b> 1 Tim. 3:7, the elder must "have a good testimony" from them which are without.
- c> 1 John 5:10, believers "have the witness" of God concerning his Son in themselves.
- d> Rev. 6:9, the martyrs slain for the word of God and "for the testimony which they held."
- e> Rev. 19:10, other believers "have the testimony of Jesus."

2) 22:16, 20: Jesus is the one testifying throughout this book!