The Woman and the Red Dragon
Revelation 12:13–17

While sailing up the Rhine River in Germany on our recent European cruise, I had the opportunity to talk to a Jewish man from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; knowing I was a Christian pastor, he asked me why there was so much anti-Semitism among Christians; “Wasn’t Jesus a Jew?” he asked; I assured him that I totally supported Israel, which made for an interesting conversation; the answer to his question is partially addressed in Revelation chapter 12.

Our text gives us an overview of the enigma of Israel without which the Bible cannot be fully understood; the nation of Israel has suffered greatly through the ages; the story of Israel is a story of historical hostility, occupation, punishment, and judgment; they were held captive by the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans; following Rome’s control of Jerusalem and the land of Israel, they were controlled by the Byzantines, then the Muslims, the Mamluks of Egypt, the Turks, the British, the Jordanians.

The prophet Ezekiel speaks of “the ancient hatred” between the sons of Esau and the sons of Jacob with no apparent end in sight (Ezekiel 35:5); the same phrase is used by Ezekiel to speak of the attitude of the Philistines toward the Jews (Ezekiel 25:15); Philistia would refer to modern day Gaza; both the descendants of Esau and the territory of Gaza would include the people known as Palestinians.

Since Israel has become a nation for a second time in 1948, she has been attacked by her Muslim Arab neighbors five times, yet she survived every attack; she is always on the alert for future attacks.

While many people today are Holocaust deniers, I have personally been to Dachau in Germany where the first Nazi Concentration Camp was located; you leave there in solemn disbelief wondering how someone so evil as Hitler could gas so many Jews to death; in all, six million Jews died in various Concentration Camps throughout Europe; I have also visited Holocaust Museums in Los
Angeles and Jerusalem where they have kept the memory of the Holocaust alive and where they tell you “Never again!”

Why has all of this happened? The Jews have undergone a chastening from God whose judgments on them is a call to return to Him; Satan has brought a destructive judgment on them; his one goal has been to eliminate the Jew from the face of the earth; so Israel has had its troubles both from God and from Satan; from God, as an act of His love; He is like a loving Father who would discipline his wayward son; from Satan, out of sheer hatred for the Jew; why such hatred on the part of Satan? Israel is God’s covenant people who brought the Messiah into the world and who gave us the Bible that we might know Him and be saved from our sins.

The persecution of Israel is not finished; Satan will launch his severest attacks upon Israel and the Jewish people during the Great Tribulation; Jeremiah referred to the last 3½ years of the Tribulation as the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7); Jesus warned there is coming a time of trouble called “the great tribulation” (Revelation 2:22; Matthew 24:21); He said “there has not been anything like it since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:21).

In our lesson last week, we learned that a woman was pregnant with the Christ Child; at His birth there was a great, fiery red dragon ready to devour the Child; but the Child was caught up to God and His throne; therefore, the dragon does not succeed in killing Christ, so He goes after the woman who gave Him birth; she flees to the wilderness where she is protected by God for 1260 days, or 3½ years; in this analogy, the woman is Israel, the red dragon is Satan; if Satan cannot touch the Messiah, at least he will seek to destroy Israel, Christ’s mother and hopefully bring an end to Christ’s millennial kingdom on earth.

**The Persecution of the Woman (12:13)**

“Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child” (12:13).

*The purging of Israel...* Certainly God has allowed Satan to be effective in his persecution of Israel; He has allowed Satan to kill millions of Jews and believers through the ages, and God will allow that to happen in the great Tribulation—but why? What is God’s purpose? Could it all be part of God’s purging process? The prophet Zechariah said that it shall come to pass in the land of Israel that two
thirds of the Jews who do not believe will die; those are the ones who follow after 
the false shepherd who could well be the Antichrist; Zechariah put it like this: 
“‘And it shall come to pass in all the land’, says the LORD, ‘that two thirds in it 
shall be cut off and die, but one third shall be left in it: I will bring one third 
through the fire, will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is 
tested. They will call on My name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘This is My 
people’; and each one will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (Zechariah 13:8–9).

Did you notice that Zechariah writes that Israel will be persecuted—tested by 
fire—that she might be refined as silver, and tested as gold is tested? God is 
purging Israel that she might return to Him and say, “The LORD is my God.”

Here is a case where God is using Satan to do the purging; he is on the attack 
against Israel; he is going to pursue them and hunt them down; Jesus warned 
against this; He said, “when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by 
Daniel...” that is, when the Antichrist stands in the holy place of the temple and 
proclaims himself to be god—do what? “Flee to the mountains” (Matthew 24:15– 
16; see Daniel 9:27; 2 Thessalonians 2:3–4); this is the midpoint of the 
Tribulation; it is when Satan focuses a final time on Israel.

There are several ways Satan has tried to woo people back to himself—through 
false christs, false prophets, false signs and wonders; finally there is the Satan-
possessed Antichrist who claims to be the promised messiah; Jesus warned, “Do 
not be fooled.”

*The parable of the sheep and the goats...* The Jews are fleeing from the dragon; 
some of those people are going to need help; in Matthew 25 Jesus gives us the 
parable of the sheep and the goats; He says when He comes to earth in all His 
glory there is going to be a judgment where He will separate the sheep from the 
goats; who are the sheep but those who cared for the Jews during their time of 
persecution; they feed those who are hungry, they give drink to those who are 
thirsty, clothe those who are naked, take in those who are strangers, and visit 
those who are in prison; these Gentile sheep are those who care for Christ’s 
brethren when they were in need while fleeing to the wilderness.

The sheep are rewarded for their benevolence; Jesus says to them, “Come, you 
blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of 
the world.” This does not mean they are saved, but they will enter Christ’s 
Millennial Kingdom; salvation is not based on helping the poor but in accepting 
Christ as your Lord and Savior; Bill Gates has given billions of dollars to
benevolent causes, but he is not one of the sheep; when asked if he believes in God he said, “I have no time for religion.” In the parable of the sheep and the goats, it is the goats who spurn the Jews during their time of trial and Jesus says of them, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:31–46).

The prophecy of Daniel on God’s purging of Israel in the end times... It is very important to understand that a day of purging is coming for Israel; during this purging a remnant of Jews have a promise of protection while others have the promise of judgment and slaughter; the prophet Daniel speaks of this when an angel spoke to him about end time prophecy; Daniel writes: “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:1–2); in the end times there is going to be a time of great trouble and separation; as Zechariah prophesied, two out of three Jews will not be able to handle the heat of that time and will turn against God and will be killed, but one third will turn to God for protection and are saved, for their names are found written in the book.

Daniel is then told that these “words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end” (Daniel 12:9); this proves that this is an end-time prophecy; then Daniel further speaks of the different decisions of the Jews at that time for verse 10 says: “Many shall be purified, made white and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.”

Notice also verse 7 of Daniel 12; it tells us the exact time when this purging will take place; “Then I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and a half a time; and when the power of the holy people has been completely shattered, all these things shall be finished.” “Time, times and half a time,” that is 3½ years, the same amount of time that the dragon, also called the serpent and Satan, will seek to persecute the woman who is being protected by God in the wilderness for “a time, times, and half a time” (Revelation 12:14b).
God uses the Tribulation to purge His people Israel; Satan uses the Tribulation to annihilate the Jews; God allows tribulation to purge out those who will come to know Him through those fiery trials; people respond one of two ways when the going gets tough; some curse God and walk away permanently; some call upon God to save them; it’s persecution that separates the wheat from the chaff.

*The plot of the dragon who is Satan...* In Revelation 12:13, Satan is cast down from heaven and he begins to persecute the woman; this is the third time in chapter twelve that Satan was cast out of heaven; in verse 4, you have his initial casting out when he was known as Lucifer and sought to overthrow the government of God; this took place before the creation of Adam and Eve; in verse 7, you have the second time he was cast out at Christ’s ascension into heaven; he could not kill the Christ Child when He was born, so he attempts to devour Him before He reaches the throne of God (see verse 5); in verse 13, we have his final casting out, which is in the middle of the Tribulation; here he makes one last effort to overthrow the government of God; Satan is determined to remove God from His heavenly throne and to become god (see Isaiah 14: 12–15); there are undoubtedly many times not recorded in Scripture where Satan attempted to re-enter heaven, but each time he was cast down; his final time is recorded in Revelation 12:13; having been defeated once again, he takes his wrath out on the woman, Israel.

**The Protection of the Woman (12:14)**

“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” (12:14).

*The flight on eagle’s wings...* The woman was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness; of course, we are looking at symbolic language; eagle’s wings become a metaphor for God delivering His people from a pursuing, threatening, killing force; in Exodus 19:4 we read, “You yourselves have seen... says the LORD... what I did to the Egyptians... how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself;” you will remember how Pharaoh’s army was coming after Israel and God says, “I picked you up and brought you to safety.” In Deuteronomy 32:9 we read: “For the LORD’s portion is His people, Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance; He found him in a desert and in the howling waste of a wilderness, He encircled him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young; He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. He made him ride on
the high places of the earth.” Here we have a magnificent picture of God as an eagle protecting and caring for His people Israel.

Then there is Psalm 91:3–4, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust. He will cover you with His pinions and under His wings you may seek refuge.” Again we see the protective care that God gives; the same God that can cover us with His wings can put us on His wings and fly us to safety.

**The fortress in the wilderness**... Perhaps the best passage to see where the Jews find safety during the Tribulation is Daniel 11:41; speaking of the Antichrist, Daniel writes: “He shall enter the Glorious Land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon.”

The one place the Antichrist has not controlled is modern-day Jordan; and the particular place in Jordan where the Jews will find safety is Southern Jordan east of the Dead Sea; it was land formerly occupied by the Edomites who were descendants of Esau; isn’t it ironic that an enemy like Edom will ultimately be a safe haven for Jews to escape the terror of the Antichrist?

Daniel 11:1–35 is one of the most amazing sections of Scripture in the Bible because it describes in great detail world events that occur hundreds of years after prophesied by Daniel; so exact and detailed are the events described that skeptical scholars say Daniel could not have written these verses and therefore they give a late date for the book of Daniel; they maintain Daniel was written by some pseudo author around 165 BC and not 530 BC, as Biblical scholars contend.

Daniel writes about the future kings of Persia that follow King Cyrus; the rise of Alexander the Great who will rule the world according to his will and the four-part division of his empire after his death to be ruled over by his four generals and not his blood relatives.

He describes clashes between the kings of the North, Syria, and the kings of the South, Egypt, as well as arranged marriages between those kings for the purpose of spying on each other, but that didn’t work out too well; then there is the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes of Syria who seizes the throne by murdering the son of Seleucus IV, who was heir to the throne; he also speaks of Antiochus committing
the “abomination of desolation” by erecting a statue of Zeus Olympus in the Holy Place of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem and sacrificing pigs on the altar; then the victory of Judas Maccabaeus by intrigue over Antiochus IV though suffering great loss.

All these prophecies came true down to the minutest detail about 365 years after Daniel wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

However, beginning in verse 36 to the end of the chapter, it is all unfulfilled prophecy; this is where he speaks of a king who will exalt and magnify himself above God; who will do according to his own will; who will speak blasphemies against God; he will prosper in whatever he does; he will have no regard for the god of his father nor have any desire for women; he shall honor strength and military might.

Who is Daniel speaking of but the Antichrist whose type is Antiochus Epiphanes IV and his hatred for the Jews; remember, he is the first one to commit the “abomination of desolation.”

Then comes verses 40–45 where Daniel prophecies the climax of world history; the Antichrist comes with his army and enters the land of Israel to annihilate the Jews; there, he is met by opposition from nations that can no longer support him; nations that come from the south, north and east; the Jewish people whom God protects flee to Jordan where they are safe from the Antichrist’s attacks; he finally meets his end between the seas (the Dead sea and the Mediterranean) and the glorious holy mountain (Mount Zion in Jerusalem); there was no one who will help him; that is the end of the Tribulation; however, getting back to our text in Revelation 12, we are in the middle of the Tribulation, not the end of it.

*The food for nourishment...* The woman Israel flees to the wilderness, “where she is nourished for a time, times, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (12:14c); just as God provided for the children of Israel during their 40-year wandering in the wilderness, so God will miraculously provide for the Jews who seek shelter under the protective wings of God as they wait out their time in the wilderness of Southern Jordan; the prophet Hosea speaks to this point when he prophesied, “Therefore, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. I will give her vineyards from there... as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ‘And it shall be in that day’, says the LORD, ‘that you will call Me ‘My husband,’ and no longer call Me ‘My Master’... I will betroth you to Me forever... And you shall know the LORD”
(Hosea 2:14–21); it is in the wilderness where God is protecting and providing for the woman and it is there that He renews His marriage covenant with Israel.

The Plan of the Serpent- Dragon (12:15–17)

The attack of the serpent like that of a sea monster... “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” (12:15); Satan is thwarted in his attempt to kill off the Jews that God has protected in the wilderness; for some reason he has been hindered from getting to them so he launches long-range war tactics.

The imagery of spewing water out of his mouth is not uncommon for animals like crocodiles and alligators who live in the water to draw water in and then blow it back out of their mouths; so the serpent is cast in that same imagery as some sea monster blowing water out of his mouth to create a flood that he might drown those whom he has not yet been able to kill; Scripture occasionally uses the flood imagery of describing a way of destroying people.

Psalm 24:1–5 says: “‘If it had not been the LORD who was on our side,’ let Israel now say—If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us alive, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters would have overwhelmed us, the streams would have gone over our soul; then the swollen waters would have gone over our soul” (see also Isaiah 59:19; Jeremiah 46:8).

The assistance of the woman by the earth... “But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened up its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of its mouth” (12:16); God uses the earth to put a stop to the serpent’s flood waters; in Exodus 15 you have the Red Sea coming down on Pharaoh’s army; in Numbers 16, you have the earth opening up and swallowing alive Korah, Dathan, and Abiram as well as those who supported Korah’s rebellion in his attempt to remove Moses and Aaron from leadership; then the text says, “So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit, the earth closed over them, and they perished among the assembly” (Numbers 16:33).

The serpent Satan has sent out an army like a flood in search of those whom God is hiding in the wilderness, but as in the days of the Korah rebellion, God opens the earth and swallows them alive and then closes it over them; God is not against repeating miracles of disaster as He did in ancient times past.
The aggressiveness of the dragon against all the saints... “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” (12:17); the dragon could not get after Israel; his attack on them was miraculously thwarted; but he is relentless; he is now enraged; he is going after everybody who keeps the commandments of God and holds to the testimony of Jesus; there you have the marks of a true believer: one who obeys the biblical teachings as well as one who reveals those teachings to others; if Satan cannot kill off the believing Jews he will go after the Gentiles.

This is the third attack of Satan in this short text: 1) he attacks Israel when she is in her land (12:13); 2) he attacks her when she is being protected in the wilderness (12:14–16); 3) he launches a worldwide attack on all who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ; these are referred to as “the rest of her offspring;” remember, Israel is a descendant of Abraham but all people who demonstrate the faith of Abraham are considered his offspring (see Romans 4:13–25; Galatians 3:7–9); every Gentile believer is by virtue of faith a child of Abraham; that is why Paul could speak of the Church as “the Israel of God” (Galatians 6:16).

Yes, Satan is successful in martyring millions of saints during the Tribulation; however, he will ultimately be unsuccessful, for the dying believer goes directly to heaven; that is why we find such rejoicing in heaven when the seventh trumpet sounds; Revelation 11:15 says: “Then the seventh trumpet sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’”

What we have learned in this study is, from the standpoint of Israel, the worst is yet to come and the best is yet to come; there will be a final holocaust launched by the dragon against the woman Israel; two thirds of the Jews living at that time will be killed, but on the other hand, God will protect the other third in the wilderness and provide for all their needs for the 3½ years that they dwell there; these are the Jews who come to believe in their Messiah during this time of purging; God has a plan to save the Jew and as strange as that may seem, it is through hardships, purging and tribulation; they are God’s covenant people and God is a faithful God even when we are not faithful; remember those words of Paul to Timothy: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Timothy 2:13).
When I think of God’s faithfulness and the covenant He made with His people it makes me grateful that He has chosen me and has saved me; Amen! He has also chosen you and saved you; Amen! Aren’t you rejoicing in those truths? Are you now ready to sing with loud voices the song of heaven: “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ has come, for the accuser of our brethren... has been cast down” (Revelation 12:10). Amen!