

The Earthly War

Revelation 12:13-17

INTRODUCTION

- A. I have heard about war my whole life.
 - 1. I was born near the end of the Vietnam War.
 - 2. Both of my grandfathers fought in war — my father’s father fought in Africa and Italy during WWII and my mother’s father fought in the Korean Conflict — and I grew up seeing pictures and hearing war stories.
 - 3. Twelve years ago, we went to war in Iraq, and we’re getting ready to go to war in Iraq once more.
 - 4. A year ago, we went to war in Afghanistan, and we still have skirmishes in that region.
- B. I have never fought in a physical combat, but since I became a Christian, I have been engaged in a spiritual combat.
 - 1. We Christians are engaged in a battle — “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).
 - 2. Tonight, we want to study about the war in which we are engaged. John, in our text this evening, discusses this war.
- C. In our text, we notice several similarities with the Exodus from Egypt.
 - 1. The pursuit of the woman is similar to the pursuit of Pharaoh against the Hebrews after they left Egypt (Ex. 14:8).
 - 2. The two wings reminds one of God’s words at Sinai — “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself” (Ex. 19:4).
 - 3. The river of water that the serpent unleashed may be a reference to Pharaoh’s instructions to drown the male Israelites in the Nile (Ex. 1:22).
 - 4. The opening of the earth reminds one of the destruction of Korah and his followers (Num 16:31-33).

THE PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH, vv. 13, 17

- A. When the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child, v. 13.
 - 1. When the dragon realized that he had lost his place in heaven and would not be able to regain it, he persecuted the woman.
 - 2. The woman here stands for Jewish Christians — remember the woman who gave birth to the child was the Jewish remnant looking for the Messiah, and after the birth of the Child the woman comes to stand for Jewish Christians.
 - 3. Jewish Christians were, in fact, persecuted in the church’s early days.
 - a. The apostles, all Jews, faced persecution, Stephen, a Jew, was murdered.
 - b. After Stephen’s death, “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles” (Acts 8:1).
- B. 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, v. 17.
 - 1. The dragon became enraged with the woman.
 - a. His rage was aroused because the woman found protection from God.
 - b. The benefits God gives us causes Satan to become angry, enraged.

- 1) Isn't in some sense that a sweet thought?
- 2) Isn't it nice to know that our chief enemy becomes angry when God is so good to us?
2. Although Satan's rage is, on some level, a sweet thought, Satan's rage causes him to make war with the rest of her offspring.
 - a. The rest of her offspring probably represents Gentile Christians; if the woman represents the church in general, the rest of her offspring could refer to Christians in general.
 - b. At any rate, Christians are brethren with Christ.
 - 1) "Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).
 - 2) "Both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. 2:11).
- C. These offspring are those "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."
 1. Christians are here described as those "who keep the commandments of God."
 - a. If we do not keep the commandments of God, can we truly call ourselves Christians?
 - b. Only those who do God's will will enter heaven — "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Mt. 7:21).
 - c. "This is love, that we walk according to His commandments" (2 Jn. 6).
 2. Christians also have the testimony of Jesus Christ.
 - a. The idea here is that Christians hold the testimony of Jesus, and this is the testimony Jesus bore.
 - b. This is simply another way of saying that Christians stood for the faith Jesus delivered.

THE PROTECTION OF THE CHURCH, vv. 14-16

- A. 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, v. 14.
 1. The wings given to the woman symbolize divine deliverance and enablement — these wings allow this woman to escape from the dragon.
 2. She flies into the wilderness where she has a place prepared for her — we have already been told that this place in the wilderness has been prepared for this woman by God (v. 6).
 3. She is nourished for 3 1/2 years — again we have already been told this in verse 6.
 4. God provides for and protects his church.
 - a. This had to be a great comfort to the early Christians who read this text — the dragon was trying to kill them, and he would succeed in killing many of them.
 - b. But, God would protect them.
 - 1) God would not under every circumstance protect their bodies; God does not under every circumstance protect our bodies — he will allow us to be in a car accident and killed.
 - 2) But, God would not allow Satan to succeed in victory over his church.
 - a) "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (Jn. 10:28).
 - b) Satan will not be able to do whatever he wants to us (remember again the example of Job); he has been defeated; we will have the victory.
- B. 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, v. 16.
 1. In the Old Testament, the flood is a common metaphor for overwhelming evil and tribulation.
 - a. "The pangs of death surrounded me, And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid" (Ps. 18:4).
 - b. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Is. 43:2).
 2. The dragon unleashes severe persecution in order to gain victory over the woman.
 - a. As you read the New Testament as well as Christian history, you see just how much persecution

the dragon unleashed upon the church.

- 1) The Hebrew Christians endured persecution (Heb. 10:32-34).
 - 2) Paul sounded a solemn warning to Timothy: "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12).
- b. According to John Fox who wrote Fox's Book of Martyrs in the Middle Ages, many persecutions came upon the church.
- 1) Luke was hanged on an olive tree by the idolatrous priests of Greece.
 - 2) Barnabas was killed in AD 73.
 - 3) Emperor Sapor of Persia gave orders to persecute Christians in all parts of his empire.
- c. Certainly Satan, the dragon, used all available means to destroy the church.
- C. 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, v. 16 .
1. The earth helped the woman by opening up to swallow the flood spewed by the dragon upon the woman.
 2. This again shows that God protects his church and her members.
 3. "On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16: 18).
 - a. This demonstrates once more that God provides for his church and protects her and her members.
 - b. Are you a member of that church where you have protection from Satan?