

Week 28-The War of the Ages: Part 3

Revelation 12:13–17

I. Introduction

- a. One of the darkest stains on the history of mankind has been the persistent specter of anti-Semitism.
- b. Over the centuries the Jews have faced more hatred and persecution than any other people.
- c. Much of that suffering was chastisement from God to turn the nation away from their sin and unbelief and back to Him.
- d. God repeatedly warned Israel of the consequences of disobedience (cf. Deut. 28:15–68) and punished them when they failed to obey (cf. 2 Kings 17:7–23).
- e. Within the paradigm of God's sovereign purpose for His people, Israel also has suffered constantly and severely at the hands of Satan, acting as God's instrument.
- f. Unlike God, however, Satan's purpose in causing the Jewish people to suffer is not remedial, but destructive.
 - i. He seeks to bring them not to repentance and salvation, but to death and destruction.
 - ii. Israel faced constant threats from her neighbors during the periods of the judges and of the kings.
 - iii. Later, first the northern kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.) and then the southern kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.) were conquered by their enemies.
 - iv. As a result, the Jewish people lost their independence and became subject to foreign powers, including Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.
- g. In postbiblical times the story has, tragically, been much the same.
 - i. The history of the Jewish people for the last two thousand years is a sad litany of prejudice, persecution, and pogroms.
 - ii. The first widespread persecution of the Jewish people in Europe took place during the First Crusade (1095–99).
 - iii. As they made their way across Europe toward Palestine, mobs of unruly crusaders destroyed Jewish homes and villages and massacred their inhabitants.

- iv. When they captured Jerusalem in 1099, the crusaders herded Jerusalem's Jewish population into a synagogue and set it on fire.
- v. Most of the Jews perished, and the survivors were sold into slavery.
- vi. King Edward I banished all Jews from England in 1290, thus giving England the dubious honor of being the first country to expel its Jewish population.
- vii. They would not be permitted to return until the time of Oliver Cromwell, nearly three and a half centuries later.
- viii. France followed suit in 1306, Spain in 1492—ironically, the year of Columbus's voyage of discovery to the New World.
- ix. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Jews were blamed for various natural disasters—most notably the Black Death (1348–50)—and savagely persecuted.
- x. The nineteenth century saw an outbreak of anti-Semitism in Russia, where Jews were blamed for the assassination of Tsar Alexander II (1881).
- xi. In the ensuing pogroms of the next four decades, tens of thousands of Jews were killed, and hundreds of thousands of others driven from their homes.
- xii. Nearly 3 million more were killed during Stalin's reign, part of the tens of millions of people massacred by that notorious dictator.
- xiii. 1894 saw the scandalous Dreyfus affair in France, in which a Jewish army officer, Captain Alfred Dreyfus, was falsely convicted of treason. Only after twelve years of public turmoil over the case was Dreyfus exonerated.
- xiv. But the darkest hour in the long history of anti-Semitism was yet to come. In the early 1930s the Nazi party came to power in
- xv. Germany and their insane racial theories became public policy. Unlike others who had persecuted the Jewish people, the Nazis and their maniacal leader, Adolf Hitler, did not merely seek to persecute the Jews, but to eliminate them.
- xvi. In the Holocaust that ensued when the Nazis sought to implement their "final solution" to the "Jewish problem," 6

million Jews—more than half the Jewish population of Europe—were slaughtered.

- h. But despite millennia of savage persecution, the Jewish people still survive. John Phillips wrote: Significantly, the turning point came in Moses' life when he saw, in the desert, that mysterious burning bush, which flamed and blazed away but, for all the crackling of the fire, was not consumed. That bush clearly symbolized Israel, which cannot be consumed despite the ceaseless hatred of her foes, because God is in her midst. Israel cannot be assimilated into the nations, nor can she be exterminated by the nations. She is a burning bush in the wilderness. (*Exploring Revelation*, rev. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1987; reprint, Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux, 1991], 156)
- i. It is the fervent hope of the Jewish people that the horrors of the Holocaust will never again be repeated.
 - i. Tragically, however, they will. The Bible warns that a time of suffering lies ahead for Israel that will be worse than anything the nation has endured in the past.
 - ii. Jeremiah called that time “the time of Jacob’s distress” (Jer. 30:7).
 - iii. Jesus described it as “a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will” (Matt. 24:21).
- j. The Tribulation will be the worst of times for Israel for two reasons. During that seven-year period God will pour out His final fury on the unrepentant and unbelieving world (including the unrepentant rebels of Israel).
 - i. At the same time, Satan will make his last, desperate attempt to prevent the promised reign of the Lord Jesus Christ on Israel’s throne and thus negate the salvation and kingdom promised to Israel.
 - ii. He will savagely assault the Jewish people, seeking to destroy both those Jews who have already come to faith in Christ, and those who still might.
 - iii. The devil will also do everything in his power to hinder the ministries of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (7:4) and the two witnesses (11:3–14).
- k. But Satan’s efforts will not succeed.

- i. His worst fears will be realized when the Jews “look on [the One] whom they have pierced; and ... mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and ... weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn” (Zech. 12:10). The believing remnant of Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25–29), and their promised kingdom will be established (cf. Hos. 2:14–23).
- l. The prophet Daniel foresaw this tragic and triumphant time for Israel: (Dan. 12:1–11)
- m. Daniel, like Jeremiah and Jesus, saw essentially the same scenario that John reveals in Revelation 12: a future time of unparalleled distress, persecution, and slaughter for Israel. Two-thirds of the Jews alive at that time will be killed as God uses Satan to purge the rebels from the nation (Zech. 13:8–9; cf. Ezek. 20:38).
 - i. But the elect, believing remnant will enter the Messiah’s kingdom, along with those resurrected Old Testament saints who at that time will “awake ... to everlasting life” (Dan. 12:2).
 - ii. Satan’s onslaught against the Jews during the Tribulation will begin with the rise to power of Antichrist.
 - iii. During the first three and a half years of the Tribulation, Satan will work to extend Antichrist’s power.
 - iv. Once he becomes the ruler of the world, Satan will make use of him for his evil purposes.
 - v. Thus, Antichrist will pose as the protector of the Jews during the first half of the Tribulation.
- n. The covenant mentioned in Daniel 9:27 is a protection pact with the Antichrist that he will break in the middle of that seven-year period.
 - i. At that point, Antichrist will become Israel’s persecutor for the last half of the Tribulation.
 - ii. He will reveal his true nature when he breaks the covenant and sets up the abomination of desolation (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15–16; 2 Thess. 2:3–4) three and a half years into the Tribulation.
 - iii. At that time, Antichrist’s persecution of God’s people, which has been going on throughout the first half of the Tribulation, will focus on Israel and intensify.
- o. This passage describes three attacks that Satan’s forces will mount against Israel during the Tribulation.

II. **Attack One.**

- a. **And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.** (12:13–14)
- b. The reason is now given for Israel’s flight, which was first mentioned in 12:6.
- c. Following his defeat by Michael and the holy angels (cf. the discussion the vision of 12:7–9 in chapter 2 of this volume) **the dragon (Satan) was thrown down to the earth.**
- d. Frustrated and enraged by his ejection from heaven and desperate, “knowing that he has only a short time” (12:12) left to oppose God’s plans before he is incarcerated in the abyss (20:1–3), the devil furiously **persecuted the woman** (Israel; cf. 12:1), **who gave birth (12:2) to the male child** (Christ; cf. 12:5).
- e. The Greek verb translated **persecuted** (*diōkō*) means “to pursue,” “to chase,” or “to hunt.”
 - i. It is used in the New Testament of pursuit with hostile intent (cf. Matt. 23:34; Acts 26:11) and thus, by implication, can mean “to persecute.”
 - ii. Here it describes Satan’s hostile pursuit and persecution of the Jews as they flee into the wilderness (12:6; cf. 13:4–7).
- f. The flight of the Jews from Satan’s forces should come as no surprise to anyone familiar with our Lord’s Olivet discourse.
 - i. In that sermon on the end times, Jesus warned the Jewish people of the desperate danger they will face: “Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever

will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.” (Matt. 24:15–22)

- g. The only appropriate response to the imminent danger will be immediate flight; there will be no time even to return home to gather belongings.
 - i. Pregnant women and those nursing infants will be especially vulnerable, since it will be difficult for them to flee quickly. So severe will the peril be that God will intervene and “for the sake of the elect [both Jews and Gentiles] those days will be cut short” (Matt. 24:22).
 - ii. Were it not for that intervention, even the elect would perish.
 - iii. Israel’s situation when the storm of Antichrist’s persecution breaks upon them during the Tribulation will be terrifying and tragic.
- h. The Jews will be in desperate need of any assistance they can get and, in God’s providence, there will be some people who will help them: (Matt. 25:31–40)
- i. In the Jews’ time of peril and flight they will receive help from individual Gentiles.
 - i. Those Gentiles will demonstrate the genuineness of their faith in Christ by their willingness to help the persecuted Jews—even at the risk of their own lives.
 - ii. Not only will God providentially use believing Gentiles to aid the Jewish people, but He will also intervene directly on their behalf.
 - iii. John saw in his vision that **the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness.**
 - iv. This is figurative language that symbolically depicts Israel’s escape from Satan’s assault.
 - v. The striking imagery of **the two wings of the great eagle** is taken from Exodus 19:4: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself.”
 - vi. God will bring Israel to safety, just as He delivered the nation from bondage in Egypt.

- j. **Wings** in Scripture symbolize strength (e.g., Isa. 40:31) and speed (e.g., 2 Sam. 22:11; Pss. 18:10; 104:3).
- k. Most commonly, however, **wings** speak of protection. In Deuteronomy 32:9–11 Moses exulted: “For the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for 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.”
- l. The psalms repeatedly use the imagery of **wings** to describe God’s protection of His people:
 - i. Keep me as the apple of the eye; Hide me in the shadow of Your wings. (Ps. 17:8)
 - ii. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. (Ps. 36:7)
 - iii. In the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge Until destruction passes by. (Ps. 57:1)
 - iv. Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. (Ps. 61:4)
 - v. For You have been my help, And in the shadow of Your wings I sing for joy. (Ps. 63:7)
 - vi. He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge. (Ps. 91:4)
- m. **Eagle** -These large birds with enormous wingspans serve as a fitting symbol for God’s protection and sheltering of Israel.
 - i. This is not, of course, a reference to an actual **eagle** with literal **wings**; rather, it is picturesque language depicting God’s miraculous assistance of **the woman, so that she could fly swiftly into the wilderness to her place** of shelter and safety.
 - ii. The location of the **place** to which the Jews will flee is not revealed.
 - iii. The term **wilderness** does not reveal the exact location of Israel’s **place** of refuge, since that term is a general one often used to describe the desolate area east of Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 3:1; Mark 1:4; John 11:54).
 - iv. Jesus’ warning to flee to the mountains (Matt. 24:15–16) suggests that the **place** of refuge will not be in the coastal plain

to the west of Jerusalem, or the relatively flat Negev (desert region) to the south.

- v. More likely, it will be in the mountainous region east of Jerusalem.
- vi. Daniel 11:41 provides further evidence for that view:
 “[Antichrist] will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; but these will be rescued out of his hand: Edom, Moab and the foremost of the sons of Ammon.” Perhaps God will spare Edom, Moab, and Ammon, ancient countries to the east of Israel, to provide a refuge for His people.
- n. In her place of safety and refuge, Israel will be supernaturally **nourished** (fed) by God.
 - i. Cut off from the world system, and unable in any case to buy and sell (cf. 13:17), the Jews will need outside help to survive.
 - ii. God will supernaturally supply them with food, just as he did by providing their ancestors with manna and quail in the wilderness (Ex. 16:12ff.), and Elijah with food at the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17:1–6).
 - iii. Certainly it is not incredible that, in a time of devastating miraculous judgments, God will miraculously provide provisions for His people.
- o. The duration of Israel’s hiding and God’s provision is defined as a **time and times and half a time**.
 - i. That phrase, drawn from Daniel 7:25 and 12:7, refers to the second half of the Tribulation (the three-and-a-half year period Jesus called the Great Tribulation; Matt. 24:21).
 - ii. It is the same period defined in 12:6 as “one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (cf. 11:3) and in 13:5 as “forty-two months” (cf. 11:2).
 - iii. This period, initiated by the setting up of the abomination of desolation (Dan. 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:3–4), will mark the visibly, overtly evil career of Antichrist.
 - iv. During that time God will protect Israel **from the presence of the serpent**. Although Satan may know where the Jews are hiding, he will be unable to get at them because of divine protection. Frustrated by this defeat of his first assault on the Jewish people, the devil will launch a second attack.

III. Attack Two.

- a. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. (12:15–16)
- b. Thwarted in his initial attempt to massacre the Jewish people, and unable to directly assault them in their hiding place, Satan will resort to long-range tactics.
- c. Since the **serpent** is not an actual snake but a symbolic representation of Satan, the **water** he spews **like a river out of his mouth** is likely symbolic as well.
- d. The imagery once again derives from the Old Testament, where floods symbolize trouble in general (cf. 2 Sam. 22:17; Job 27:20; Pss. 18:16; 32:6; 69:1–2, 13–14; 124:2–5; 144:7) and an invading, destroying army (cf. Jer. 46:8; 47:2; Dan. 11:26).
- e. Satan’s attacking force will sweep toward the Jews’ hiding place like a great flood.
- f. The devil will seek to **cause Israel to be swept away with the flood;** to be drowned by it, to be consumed and destroyed.
- g. But just as He sheltered Israel from Satan’s initial onslaught, so also will God defeat this second assault.
- h. In dramatic fashion, **the earth helped the woman; it opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.**
 - i. The imagery is reminiscent of Moses’ description of God’s destruction of Pharaoh’s army in Exodus 15:12: “You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them.”
 - ii. Another Old Testament parallel is the dramatic story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whose rebellion against Moses was crushed by God in a shocking, dramatic fashion:
 1. Moses said, “By this you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will

understand that these men have spurned the Lord.” Then it came about as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. (Num. 16:28–33)

- i. It may be that one of the frequent earthquakes during the Tribulation (cf. 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18; Matt. 24:7) will cause the ground to split open and swallow Satan’s forces.
- j. Whatever this symbolic language pictures, it marks the destruction of the attacking army and the end of Satan’s second assault.

IV. **Attack Three.**

- a. **Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.** (12:17)
- b. By now thoroughly frustrated and **enraged** by his inability to destroy **the woman** (Israel), the **dragon** (Satan) will turn his fury toward new targets.
- c. Some have identified **the rest of her children** with whom Satan will **make war** as the 144,000 (cf. 7:2–8; 14:1–5); others see them as believing Gentile Tribulation saints (cf. 7:9–14), who are sons of Abraham by faith (Gal. 3:7).
- d. It seems best to take this as an all-inclusive phrase, referring to all those who name the name of Jesus Christ.
- e. They are further described as those **who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**
- f. *Entolas* (**commandments**) is a word used frequently in John’s writings to refer to New Testament commands (e.g., 14:12; John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12; 1 John 2:3–4; 3:22–24; 5:2–3).
- g. The **testimony of Jesus** is not testimony about Him, but the testimony He gave, the truths He taught that are revealed in the New Testament.
- h. These persecuted believers will give further evidence that their salvation is real by their obedience to the truth of Scripture.

- i. Like his first two attacks directed against Israel, Satan's third attack on God's people will also fail.
- j. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, "loud voices in heaven" will proclaim, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (11:15).
- k. All of Satan's efforts to prevent Christ's kingdom from being established are doomed.
 - i. The Lord Jesus Christ will triumph; He will reign on earth, and the surviving Tribulation saints, both Jews and Gentiles, will enter His earthly kingdom.
 - ii. For the long-suffering people of Israel, the darkest hour lies ahead.
 - iii. But it will be followed by a glorious dawn.
 - iv. The elect remnant of Israel, having survived the most savage persecution in the nation's long history, will be saved and enjoy the bliss of the millennial kingdom, "and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written" (Rom. 11:26).