

### INTRODUCTORY NOTES:

- Last lesson we covered information about the Temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem, as well as the two witnesses. We saw the 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet was blown, but so far we have not as yet seen the beginning of the last set of judgments, the Bowl Judgments or the 7 plagues. This chapter is still in the “interlude” between the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of judgments and the 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Chapter 12 is an overview of the plan of God regarding Israel, and it is one of the most important chapters in scripture to help us understand this plan.
- We are given an important “history lesson” in this chapter, both prior history and coming history. We get a glimpse of life for Israel during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 7 year Tribulation.
- It is critical to interpret this chapter correctly. It is a test of Bible commentators. If they don’t get this chapter right in interpretation, chances are they won’t get the rest of this book, or even the entire Bible, correct. There are several “identities” to correctly decipher in this chapter. (The woman, [and her offspring], the male child, the dragon, and Michael)
- In some ways, we could say that chapter 12 really begins in the previous chapter, verse 19: **“Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.”** The real temple and the ark of His Presence are in heaven, not on earth. The writer of Hebrews tells us the earthly renditions are only copies of the real one. Chapter 11 ends in the heavenlies, and chapter 12 begins there.

<sup>1</sup> Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. <sup>2</sup> Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

- **“a woman...”** There are 4 women described in the Book of Revelation: 1) Jezebel (2:20); 2) the Harlot (ch 17 and 18); 3) the Bride of Christ (19:7, 21:2, 9) and this one. Getting her identity right is crucial to understanding this book and God’s plan.
- **Who is this?** Since this book was written there have been an untold number of interpretations and ideas about her identity. The most common error is that she is the Bride of Christ, or the Church. Well, if she is, she is in a lot of trouble, and subject to stoning by Old Testament law! She’s pregnant, and a “bride” in Hebrew culture is espoused, or engaged, not yet married. The Church is, or is supposed to be, a virgin. Another common error is that she is Mary, the mother of Jesus. But this does not fit with the 12 stars, the sun and the moon, and the wilderness flight, or even the content and context of this vision.



- We could go into **all sorts of errors**, but perhaps one of the biggest, and most arrogant, is by Mary Baker Glover Patterson Eddy, who claimed *she* was this woman. The “man child” she delivered was supposed to be Christian Science, her “new religion,” and the dragon is “mortal mind” attempting to destroy her new religion. We won’t spend time with all the errors. Once again, the only way to correctly interpret something in scripture, *is with scripture*.
- In the Old Testament, **Israel is portrayed as a woman in travail** (Isaiah 54, 66). She is also often referenced as the wife of God. Perhaps the biggest clue is in Genesis 37:9, when Joseph has a dream: *“Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, ‘Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me.’”* Joseph is seeing his brothers and his father and mother bowing down to him in this dream. The sun, the moon, and the stars are here in this vision in Revelation. The 12 tribes of Jacob—Israel—are here. Joseph is a type for Jesus, the ultimate deliverer. Everyone will bow down to him one day.
- In Isaiah 9:6 we read the verse everyone knows from Christmas cards: *“Unto us a child is born....”* Unto whom? **Unto Israel**. Israel was in labor thousands of years. **This woman in the vision is Israel** (*not the Church, and not anyone or anything else*). The 12 stars are the 12 tribes of Israel. The child she delivers is the Messiah. Unless you use this correct interpretation of this vision, nothing will make sense and any figurative identification will be stretched and scripture twisted (or ignored) to make things fit. When we understand who this woman is, everything, all the pieces, fall into place and present the picture of God’s plan for His people.

<sup>3</sup>*“And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.”*

- *“a great, fiery red dragon...”* this dragon is interpreted for us in v. 9. There is no question about who this is, Satan himself.
- The Bible has several “discussions” **about this enemy**, chiefly in Isaiah 14:12-17 and Ezekiel 28:2-15. If you don’t already know about his origins and intentions, read these passages carefully (and Genesis 3; Jude 13; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; John 8:44).
- The **color red** is used twice in this book, here and with the 2<sup>nd</sup> horse in chapter 6. Red is associated with war and death. Satan has been at war with God and with God’s people since his downfall.
- The adversary (literal meaning of “satan”) introduced what we call **“spiritual warfare”** (*for more information on this see Ephesians 6:10-13; 2 Corinthians 2:11; Daniel 10:1-9; Amos 7:1; Isaiah 59:17; 2 Kings 6:16; Revelation 9 and more.*) There are many references throughout scripture to this warfare and we won’t spend a great deal of time here on this subject. We must recognize, however, that we are in the war of the ages, that conflict between good and evil, God and the enemy. The enemy’s number one tactic is deceit, God’s weapon is truth.



- **Don't make the mistake** however, of placing the two sponsors of this war on the same plane. One is a created being with limited power and an ultimate end. The other is Almighty, The Creator, All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Eternal. Spiritual warfare is real and present throughout the ages. You are on one side or the other. There are no fence-sitters in this war. To learn of the ultimate victory you can read: Psalm 110:1; 1 John 3:8, 4:4; 2 Kings 6:16; Romans 8:25-38; Hebrews 2:14, 10:12, 13; James 4:7; Ephesians 1:20-21; Revelation 12:10 and many more. Do your own search and study about this vital topic. It is part of what every believer must know, be and do.
- ***“seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.”*** This description also appears in Revelation 13, and 17, where we will deal with this in more detail. We will defer the discussion of these heads and horns until then.

<sup>4</sup> ***His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.***

- ***“...a third of the stars of heaven...”*** This is interpreted as a third of the heavenly host of angels that followed the enemy in opposition to God. (See Daniel 8:10)
- ***“to devour...”*** Satan (the dragon) has been trying to destroy the Messiah (the Child in this vision) since the beginning of time. The Messianic line begins with Eve.
- **COMMENTARY:** ***“This vision of Satan standing before the woman ‘who was ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born’ refers to the attitude of Satan ever since Genesis 3:15. This promise was given to humanity, predicting eventual deliverance from the domination of Satan...God guaranteed deliverance through the “seed of the woman.” In response, Satan initiated what Bible scholars call “the conflict of the ages,” attempting to stamp out the seed of the woman from the time of Adam and Eve to the Tribulation Period, from Genesis to Revelation. Satan tried to stop the seed by the murder of Abel by Cain (Gen. 4); by his effort to pollute the human race (Gen. 6, [Nephilim]); by his attempt to cut off the Hebrew nation in Egypt (Exodus 1, 2); and by the decree of Haman (Esther 3). Several times during the life of Christ he tried to destroy the “seed of the woman” – Herod’s decree to kill babies, the storm on the Sea of Galilee, and the attempts to throw Christ over a cliff. During the Christian dispensation the conflict is seen in Satan’s persecution of the Church; his propagation of [false religions]; the Dark Ages, when the Word of God was kept from men; and false religions that spring up everywhere but offer no remedy for sin. This conflict will reach its climax during the Tribulation when Satan through the Antichrist will seek to get men to worship him.”*** (LaHaye)

<sup>5</sup> ***She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.***

- ***“a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron..”*** We have already identified this male child, but this verse also identifies Him. This is a reference to Psalm 2:9 ***“You shall break [rule] them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”*** The verses immediately before this one provide our identity: ***“I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession.”*** (Psalm 2:7-8) These verses can only be speaking of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, the One who will rule the nations, the male Child of this vision.

- **“...caught up...”** In Greek, *harpazo* – raptured! Jesus’ ascension was a rapture event.
- **There are several “gaps” here.** The first is between the woman “giving birth” and the child being caught up (*about 33 years*), and also ruling the nations (*almost 2,000 years and counting*). There is another gap between verses 5 and 6 (*between the ascension of Jesus and the tribulation period, again, 2,000 years and counting*). There are several gaps in scripture that cover assumed periods of time. There are at least 24 such gaps. Daniel chapter 9 (the “70 weeks”) has a large gap that is essential in our understanding of that passage. That is the period of time that passes between Messiah’s being “cut off” and the time of “Jacob’s Trouble” (the Tribulation). It is essentially the same gap, same time period, as we have here between these verses.

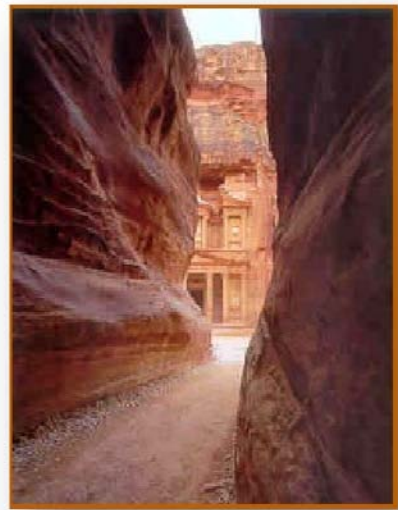


- It is important to note that there is absolutely NO mention of the Christian Era, the Age of Grace, or the Church itself in these verses (if interpreted correctly), except for the birth and ascension of the male child born to this woman. The entire vision relates to Israel. The first five verses occur before the end of Daniel’s 69th week, there is then a gap (in which we are living now, the age of the Church) followed by the 70th week, the tribulation period. This chapter does not concern the Church, but Israel, and God’s plan of the ages.
- **“to God and His throne.”** Jesus is **the only one who has ascended to heaven** and to throne of God (His authority). There is no question of His identity through these verses and through scripture. Any other interpretations are false. (*Be sure to look very carefully at the background in the picture above!*)

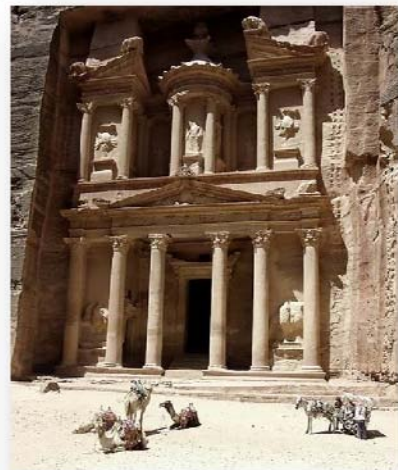
***<sup>6</sup> Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.***

- **“the woman fled...”** We know the woman is Israel. And since the period of time is specified this deals with Israel during very specific time frame...the last half of the Tribulation. And now she is “on the run” from the enemy.
- **“...into the wilderness...” Where is this place in the wilderness?** The “wilderness” has given rise to all sorts of speculation. *Declaring a literal interpretation and assuming this is a literal wilderness place*, many speculate it could be the region we call today **Petra**, which lies in southwestern Jordan, near the southern tip of the current state of Israel (*about 50 miles south of Jerusalem*). The reasons given for this speculation are in Matthew 24:15-16, Isaiah 34 and 63, and Micah 2. Petra can house about 250,000+ people in the thousands of apartment-like caves. It is within the “God-ordained” boundaries of Israel, and is completely inaccessible (*very defensible*) except through the Siq (a very narrow opening in the rocks), or overhead. It was previously occupied by the Edomites, descendents of Esau (which means “red”), before being built into the “red rock” city of hand carved dwellings by the Nabateans.

- There is a reference in Isaiah 63 that the **Messiah will come (2<sup>nd</sup> coming) from Bozrah**, which is a city near Petra. There is a great deal of speculation that Bozrah (literally “sheep pen”) will actually be the site of Jesus 2nd coming, before He comes to Jerusalem. Isaiah 34 and 63, and Micah 2, have references that support this. Petra (also known as Mt. Seir in Scripture) is a stunning place, but there is plenty of information about it available, so we won’t spend more time on this. Whether Petra is the ancient fortress for Israel in the last days or not will remain to be seen. (A very interesting discussion about how Petra fits into prophecy regarding the 2nd coming can be seen at <http://www.yeshuatyisrael.com/bozrah.htm>. This speculation is entirely possible, based on very clear scripture references.) It seems likely that Petra may be the sanctuary for Israel, but regardless of where it is, God will divinely care for His people during this “Time of Jacob’s Trouble” – the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation – as they flee from the persecution of the world leader at that time. ***(In 1989 the movie “Indiana Jones and the Final Crusade” made Petra famous. The scenes through the Siq that open up onto the Treasury Building are no movie set. Those are real!)***
- ***“one thousand two hundred and sixty days”*** – here is that unique time frame again. We’ve had this spelled out to us so many different ways that we cannot misinterpret this, although some still try! This is a literal period of time, 3 ½ years (360 day years as mentioned before), the last half of the tribulation.
- There is a very interesting passage in scripture that seems to indicate that the areas of old Edom, Moab, and Ammon escape from the rule and control of the final world ruler: ***“He [the king of the North, identified as the final world ruler] shall also enter the Glorious Land [Israel], and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape.”*** (Daniel 11:41-42)  
Petra is located in this region. Daniel 12, which continues this passage states: ***“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, Every one who is found written in the book.”*** (Daniel 12:1) Again, scripture is our best commentary on the book of Revelation, and on any book in the Word of God.



*The Siq, entrance to Petra, with Treasuring Building in the background.*



*The Treasury Building, hand carved out of the red rock by the Nabateans, just inside Petra.*

***7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. 9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.***

- In these verses we have a scene change from earth back to heaven. Now there is a war in heaven. This is just a continuation of that age-old warfare between God and the Enemy, truth and lies, which comes to a major battle that results in the Enemy being ejected from heaven. Since the rebellion of satan, there has been war in the spiritual realm.
- ***“Michael...”*** We’ve met Michael a few times before in scripture. He is identified as one of the “chief princes” in Daniel 10, and a warrior for Israel. He is called an “archangel” by Jude, and apparently he is charged with the protection of God’s people, Israel. In Zechariah 14 and Numbers 21 we see him fight in wars for God.
- ***“...but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.”*** Some people interpret this as the original “casting out” of satan from heaven to earth in the beginning. However, it may surprise some people to know that satan has apparently had access to heaven, and to the throne of God, all along...until this point. We see this in Job, Zechariah, Daniel, Luke, Jude and other places. He has been accusing God’s people from the beginning, playing the role of prosecutor before the bench of the Almighty. But he will soon be forced to retire from the position, as these verses tell us that there is an ultimate war in the heavens and he, along with his supporters, are cast out of heaven. God has determined there is no more room, or place, for these enemies any longer. (See Luke 10:18, John 16:11; 12:31) We will see the accuser respond in anger in the next verses.
- ***“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world;...”*** With this complete description, there can be no doubt as to the identity of the dragon. “The serpent of old” is the teller of lies in the garden, his name is the Devil (“slanderer”) and Satan (the “accuser”) and he deceives the whole world. There is no one else who fits this description. God always makes sure we understand the important points of scripture. Again, the best commentator on scripture is scripture itself. The dragon is satan, here in these verses and throughout the rest of the book of Revelation.



***10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. 11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.***

- Another unidentified loud voice from heaven declares that it is time for the salvation and strength and kingdom of God to be proclaimed, and all the promises to be fulfilled, for Jesus to take His throne...very soon.

- The reason this is soon is that **the one who accused believers before the throne of God can no longer do so**. The righteousness of God covers believers into eternity. Some speculate that this voice is actually the crowd of believers who have gone on to heaven before these martyrs (witnesses) since they make reference to **“our brethren.”** It is doubtful that angels would speak of the earthly believers in this way.
- **“...they overcame him...”** “they” are believers, who are part of the spiritual warfare currently being fought. They (we) overcome this enemy by three things:
  - **1)** first and foremost by the **“blood of the Lamb,”** the blood of Jesus spilled for us in payment for our sins, for “eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12) (His work, not ours). His blood covers us permanently, there is nothing more we can be accused of before God;
  - **2)** by the **“word of their testimony,”** which is the witness of a life lived for Jesus. This is not just a verbal testimony, but it is backed up with a whole life of testimony.
- **COMMENTARY: There is something that is strengthening in giving a testimony. Don't misunderstand me—some of the testimonies given today are pretty shallow. Some of them are given by those who ought not to be giving a testimony, because the people close to them know their shoddy living, and it makes them rather cynical and skeptical. The place to give a testimony is not at a nice, well-fed church banquet where all the saints say amen to everything you say. If you have a life to back it up, the place to give your testimony is out yonder in the world, when you are up against that godless, blaspheming crowd. Let them know that you belong to Christ and that you are in Christ. (McGee);**
- and **3)** they loved God and their future lives with Him, more than their corrupt lives on earth. And they did this **“to the death,”** which probably indicates that these were true martyrs for God and died as a result of their steadfast witness. But in so doing, they indeed overcame the enemy to become victors in Jesus. These verses may apply to the tribulation saints, but they also give us some real application information. **We also overcome the enemy** first by the blood of Jesus, then by living a life that witnesses of our belonging to Him, and by not loving this life but yearning for the one to come with Him. (Remember Revelation 2:10 – **“...Be faithful even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**)

<sup>12</sup> ***Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.***

- These events are a cause for **rejoicing in heaven, and woe on earth**. We have reference to two different “dwellers” here: 1) the **“dwellers of heaven”** (and this can apply to those still on earth at this time, believers who consider earth a mere place of sojourn and not home. Home is heaven, even if we haven’t gotten there yet!) and 2) the **“inhabitants of the earth”** that we have seen used so many times in this book, as a reference to unbelievers, those who value their earthly lives more than anything else. It’s almost over, and that is the best news to the first group, and the worst news to that latter group.
- **This woe corresponds to the third woe** from Revelation 11. The 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet has blown, the 7 plagues are ready to be poured out (the 3<sup>rd</sup> set of judgments) and with them, it will all be over. The wrath and judgment upon the evil on this earth, and those who oppose Him, will be complete.

- *“...the earth and the sea!”* The addition of the “sea” here is merely an underscore that this is a reference to literal earth, the entire earth, no exceptions.
- The enemy was tossed out of heaven and is now angry (great wrath!). He knows scripture. He knows he only has a short time to do his best against God and His people. The evil coming on the earth will be greater than at any other time in history. The enemy cannot accuse anymore, but still can wreak havoc here on earth.

*<sup>13</sup> Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. <sup>14</sup> 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.*

- **This chapter can read like a 3-act play.** The 1<sup>st</sup> act is Israel and the Messiah and the dragon in a heavenly portrayal of history and God’s plan. The 2<sup>nd</sup> act is the war in heaven, resulting in the casting out of the enemy and his followers down to earth. Now begins the 3<sup>rd</sup> act, which is the persecution of Israel (and other believers, v 17) by the dragon, and her divine protection.
- We must remember the correct identity of this woman. **It is Israel**, not the Church. Satan is very angry, knows his time is short, and now turns his full fury against Israel. He will take his anger out on God’s most prized possession: His wife, Israel. However, in verse 17, we see him frustrated about Israel, so he turns his attention to “her offspring.”
- *“two wings of a great eagle...”* Eagles are often used in scripture as **symbolic for divine deliverance**. Obviously, the entire nation of Israel will not mount up on the back of some gigantic eagle. In a literal interpretation, the guidelines are to take literally whatever CAN be taken literally, and look for scriptural interpretation of those passages that are obviously symbolic. Some people have tried to make this eagle a symbol for the United States of America. This is a big, unfounded, stretch – especially considering Zechariah 12:3 (all nations will be against Israel) and the United States’ waning support for Israel. Remember, look for Biblical interpretation first. Eagles are a known symbol for God’s protection and deliverance.
- *“...fly into the wilderness...”* We have already seen reference to the wilderness early in this chapter, and we have already discussed the possibility of Petra being a literal place God sets aside for his people. However, there is another important note to be made about the wilderness. There are so many references and allusions to the **events in Exodus in the book of Revelation** that it is somewhat uncanny. When God delivered Israel out of Egypt, He brought them into the wilderness. In this place these people were protected and separated from the rest of the world so God could teach them and nurture them and build them into the nation He intended them to be. He sent them a deliverer.
- During the entire 40 years of their wilderness experience, God provided for ALL of their needs, both the physical and the spiritual. All food and water was provided, protection was afforded, guidance and teaching was given.





- Israel's "nourishment" in the wilderness was both in body and in spirit. It is likely that the same thing will happen in the wilderness (Petra or some other place) here. God will divinely protect and provide for them, and He will teach them and guide them into the truth and into a saving relationship with His Son, their Deliverer, and ***"they will look on Me, whom they pierced."*** (Zech. 12:10) Israel is protected from the serpent's wrath in this time.
- ***"a time and times and half a time..."*** Once again, we are given the exact length of this period of time. A ***"time"*** is one year, ***"times"*** is two years, and ***"half a time"*** is ½ year. Total, 3 ½ years (360 day years). There is no question how long a time this is. And it is a literal period of time, not allegorical.

<sup>15</sup> ***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.*** <sup>16</sup> ***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.***

- The devil is frustrated over this divine protection of Israel. He can't get to her. In his anger, he ***"spewed water out of his mouth like a flood."*** Is this literal? Is there actually a flood of water in the desert? Well, could be, but more than likely it is a euphemism, one that has been used before in scripture, for military force, or a great force of opposition. In Daniel 9:26, a passage which speaks of the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD reads: ***"And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined."***
- The Temple was not destroyed with a literal flood, but by a "flood" of soldiers and military might against Israel at that time. In Isaiah 59:19 we read: ***"So shall they fear The name of the LORD from the west, And His glory from the rising of the sun; When the enemy comes in like a flood, The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him."*** There are many other references to enemy forces like the force of a flood. Perhaps this reference here relates to some sort of military response on the part of the world leader to destroy Israel while it is under God's protection. This plan, whatever it is, is foiled.
- ***"But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood..."*** We have no reason to believe this is NOT literal. God has done this before. In Numbers 16:31 (also Numbers 26, Deuteronomy 11, Psalm 106), God opened the earth to swallow up some of the Israelites who were disobedient to Him; in Micah 7:15 the prophet says that God will work just like He did in the times of the deliverance from Egypt against the enemies of Israel, now in this time.
- Whether this is a literal flood of water, or a flood of military action against Israel at Petra or wherever she is in the wilderness, God will open the earth and swallow this evil meant to destroy the *apple of His eye* (Israel). In the "Left Behind" series, LaHaye portrays this as a massive military move, which is then swallowed literally into the earth, perhaps by an earthquake. Whatever happens, God delivers Israel from the harm meant by the enemy. And this serves to **enrage** the enemy.

***17 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.***

- The dragon throws a **huge temper tantrum** here. He is enraged with Israel (the woman), but he cannot do anything to her at this point. So his rage is turned toward the next in line, **“her offspring”** (literally, “remnant of her seed”). We don’t have to wonder who this is. Again, the Word provides the answer right in this verse. These offspring are Christians, believers who come to Jesus during the tribulation – tribulation saints. Now the persecution of believers is really stepped up.
- **“...who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”** These two identifiers may be an indication that these Christians are more precisely Messianic believers. These could even be the sealed 144,000 (chapter 7). There is reference here to “the commandments” [the Law] and to the witness of Jesus [grace] (old and new covenants). These who are now persecuted could be Jewish believers. However, it could also be a reference to any believer at this time, Jew or Gentile. It indicates the entire covenant people of God.
- We cannot underestimate how **horrible and gruesome these times will be for believers**, both Jew and Gentile, but especially for the Jews. The book of Zechariah makes this very clear: **“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 the 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) During the time of “Jacob’s Trouble,” the Great Tribulation, 2/3 of the Jews will die. This passage deals specifically with Israel. God says that one third will be spared, and also “refined” through this time of persecution and testing, so that they are true believers, strengthened by God and standing firm for Him.

#### FINAL NOTE

It is easy to see how interpretation of the entire book of Revelation, even the entire Bible, can go terribly awry if the correct understanding of the characters and sequence of events in this chapter are not achieved. Today there is a rising tendency toward anti-Semitism, toward thinking that God is done with the Jews and they have no right to their land or to anything else. This is so far away from the truth, but the enemy has done a good job of deceiving those who are gullible, those who do not read or know the Word of God, and those who would choose to ignore God’s plan and clear word about Israel. It is critical for all believers to completely understand that Israel is in a covenant relationship with God, who will fulfill each and every one of the promises made to her. The Church is grafted into the olive tree that is Israel. We do not replace her. As we said at the beginning of this lesson, the way this chapter is interpreted by others is a key to knowing how they interpret the entire book, and the entire Word of God. **When you read human commentaries, use this chapter as a test.** If the writer correctly interprets this chapter, chances are they will be correctly interpreting the remainder of the book. If not, well, the best advice is to toss it out. And we can’t say it enough: the best commentator is God Himself, in His Word. It’s all there if we only look.

