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Thomas D. Ice

Liberty University, tdice@liberty.edu

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REVELATION 12 AND THE FUTURE OF ISRAEL

Tom's Perspectives

by Thomas Ice

Some critics of our futuristic views of Bible prophecy say that the New Testament does not speak prophetically about a future national Israel. "There is not a single verse in the New Testament that supports the claim that there is prophetic significance in Israel's restoration as a nation," declares replacement theologian Gary DeMar. "Beyond A.D. 70, Israel as a nation plays no prophetic role. The New Testament only addresses Israel's near destruction never its distant restoration."¹ While I believe that there are a number of references, especially in Revelation, that clearly implies that a future nation of Israel is doing various things in their land, Revelation 12 is a whole chapter that deals with national Israel during a future time.

THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

Who does the woman of Revelation 12 symbolize? "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" (Rev. 12:1). While Catholics and many replacement theologians believe that the woman in this passage is the Church, even preterists like DeMar realize that the biblical symbolism of Genesis 37:9–11 demands that it refer to Israel.² However, preterist err in seeing it as a reference to Israel in the past, not the future. The sun refers to Jacob, the moon Rachel, Jacob's wife and the 12 stars the sons of Jacob and the 12 tribes of Israel (Jacob).

Verse 2 says, "and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth." We see here the picture of Israel as a woman experiencing labor pains during the time of the birth of the Messiah at Christ's first coming. Such a picture of Israel was quite common in the Old Testament.³ Robert Thomas tells us: "The reference is to the birth of Jesus at His first coming, but technically speaking this historical event had already occurred when John wrote. So this is a heavenly enactment of that past historical event just as other parts of this vision are enactments of events yet to occur."⁴

The next verse says, "And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems." The fact that verse 3 speaks of heaven (as does verse 1) indicates that we are seeing in this vision the angelic conflict that is being played out throughout history and its relationship and impact upon Israel, especially during the tribulation. The past conflicts set the stage and demonstrates a trend, which is the basis for understanding the future conflict noted in verses 6 through 17. The red dragon is unmistakably Satan himself (see Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The seven heads represent "seven consecutive world empires . . . indicating that they are in the process of running their course as John writes."⁵ The ten horns and seven diadems speak of the anti-Christ's kingdom during the tribulation as indicated in Daniel 7:7–24 and Revelation 13 and 17.

The past conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) is rehearsed in verses 4 and 5. A third of the stars having been swept away by the dragon's tail inform us that a third of the angels fell and followed Satan in his original revolt. We learn this when we realize that the stars in this passage are symbolic of angels (compare Rev. 12:7, 9). The male child of verse 5 is Jesus the Messiah who is the seed of the woman and the one that the dragon is really at war with.

“And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days” (Rev. 12:6). Some Bible commentators call this event in the middle of the tribulation the second exodus (see also Matt. 24:15–22) where God will miraculously take care of the Jewish remnant in a manner similar to the 40-year exodus event. The likely place where Israel will go is the ancient fortress city of Petra in southwest Jordan. Some Old Testament passages call that area Bozrah (Isa. 34:1–7; 63:1–6; Jer. 49:13–14; Micah 2:12–13; Hab. 3:3) where the city of Petra was eventually built.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum tells us about Petra:

Petra is located in a basin with Mount Seir, and is totally surrounded by mountains and cliffs. The only way in and out of the city is through a narrow passageway that extends for about a mile and can only be negotiated by foot or by horseback. This means the city is easy to defend, . . . Petra is shaped like a giant sheepfold, with its narrow passage opening up to a spacious circle surrounded by cliffs. . . . The city of Bozrah in Mount Seir is located in ancient Edom or southern Jordan. Since this area will escape the domination of the Antichrist, it is logical for the Jews to flee to this place. Thus, God will provide a city of refuge outside the Antichrist’s domain for the fleeing Remnant.⁶

GOD VERSES SATAN

The historic conflict between Christ and Satan reaches a climax in heaven where Satan and his demons are cast out of heaven to the earth at the midpoint of the seven-year tribulation period (Rev. 12:7–12). Satan’s defeat is first implemented in heaven by Michael and his angels in preparation for the final defeat of the dragon on earth three and a half years later at the second coming (Rev. 20:1–3). What is Satan’s response to being cast down to the earth?

Just like in the movies, when the bad guys cannot defeat the superhero himself they go after his wife and children. Since Satan cannot defeat God in direct combat, when he is cast down to the earth he attacks His children. In this case he goes after the Jewish remnant. “And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child” (Rev. 12:13). This will result in the greatest time of persecution against the Jews in the history of the since Satan will be on planet earth directing it himself.

Why is persecution of the Jews so important to Satan? Since Revelation 12 is a chapter dealing with the issue of the great struggle between God and Satan, with a focus on the future, we see the outworking of Satan’s final effort to defeat God which is to prevent the second coming. Since the second advent cannot occur until the Jewish nation is converted to Messiah and calls on Him to rescue them, Satan attempts to liquidate the Jewish people in his attempt to prevent it from happening. Satan believes that if He can obstruct God’s predestined plan from unfolding then he will have defamed Him. However, it is not going to happen.

HEAD FOR THE HILLS

What is God’s response to Satan’s persecution of His people? “And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent” (Rev. 12:14). God will protect the remnant

supernaturally as noted by the phrase “two wings of the great eagle.” This is a figure of speech used in the Exodus (Ex. 19:4; Deut. 32:10–11) to speak of God’s divine intervention as the Jews leave Jerusalem and the surrounding areas and are protected in Petra.

Satan launches an effort to track down the Jewish people, but God’s protection overcomes his efforts. “And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood” (Rev. 12:15). In context it appears that Satan’s pouring out water like a river from his mouth after the woman is a metaphor for military pursuit. He sends out his armies to search for the Jewish people who are in hiding. The intent of his pursuit is to destroy the Jews as stated in the figure of speech “so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.”

In spite of Satan’s great efforts God hides and protects his people. “And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:16). God uses the rugged and mountainous terrain of the wilderness to counteract Satan’s efforts at destroying the Jewish remnant. Satan gives up his search and in his anger goes after other Jewish believers, likely the 144,000 Jewish witnesses (Rev. 7:1–8; 14:1–3) who are scattered across the globe.

CONCLUSION

Not only are there references to the future of Israel in the New Testament, the future destiny of the nation is outlined in great detail in Revelation 12 and also found in other passages throughout the final book of the Bible. When we realize that Israel has already become a nation that is generally in unbelief toward Christ and that virtually the whole world is already anti-Israel, it is not hard to realize that the Lord is setting the stage for tribulation events that will focus on that tiny nation that the Lord loves. Many comparisons are being made today between the conditions in the Muslim world and the mentality of the Nazis toward the Jews in the 1930s.⁷ At the end of the day Revelation 12 teaches us that it is a fight between God and Satan. Maranatha!

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 398.

² DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp. 146–47.

³ See Isa. 13:8; 21:3; 26:17–18; 61:7–8; 66:7ff; Jer. 4:31; 13:21; 22:23; 30:4–8; Hos. 13:13; Mic. 4:10; 5:2–3.

⁴ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), p. 121.

⁵ Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, p. 123.

⁶ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, 2003), pp. 296–97.

⁷ Chuck Morse, *The Nazi Connection To Islamic Terrorism: Adolf Hitler and Haj Amin al-Husseini* (New York: iUniverse, 2003).