

One fine day in 1941, Violet Bailey and her fiancé Samuel Booth were strolling through the English countryside, deeply in love and engaged to be married. A diamond engagement ring sparkled on Violet's finger—her most treasured possession.

Their romantic bliss suddenly ended. One of them said something that hurt the other. An argument ensued, then escalated. At its worst point, Violet became so angry she pulled the diamond engagement ring from her finger, drew back her arm, and hurled the treasured possession with all her might into the field.

The ring sailed through the air, fell to the ground, and nestled under the grass in such a way that it was impossible to see. Violet and Samuel kissed and made up. Then they walked and walked through that field hunting for the lost ring. They never found it.

They were married two months later. They had a child and eventually a grandson. Part of their family lore was the story of the lost engagement ring.

Violet and Samuel grew old together, and in 1993 Samuel died. Fifteen years passed, but the ring was not forgotten. One day Violet's grandson got an idea. Perhaps he could find his grandmother's ring with a metal detector. He bought one and went to the field where Violet had hurled her treasured possession 67 years earlier. He turned on his metal detector and began to crisscross the field, waving the detector over the grass. After two hours of searching, he found what he was looking for. Later, filled with joy

and pride, he placed the diamond ring into the hand of his astonished grandmother Violet. The treasured possession had come home.

What a great story, huh...? This morning I would like to be part of the telling of an even greater story... about a treasured possession that comes home. What excites me about the story I am about to tell... is that it has all the elements of a remarkable story... and it has the potential to lead you and I to a stronger confidence in the God we have come here to today to worship.

There must be certain characteristics for any impressive story... whether it is true or not... and ours... although future... is **truer** than any account of American history. It possess all the magnificent qualities... including an intense conflict and an evil protagonist. And we can see ourselves in this titanic struggle.

Kent Hughes... with his commentary on the chapter in Revelation we will be studying today (Revelation chapter 12)... begins in the following manner:

Does it sometimes seem to you that Satan has the upper hand in the struggle of the ages? Does it look like he is the one who knows how to fight to win, and God always seems to pick the losing strategy? Turn the other cheek. Bless those who persecute you. Love your enemies. Preach Christ and him crucified and not with what the world thinks is eloquent wisdom. Choose the weak things of the world.

It's almost as though God shows up on the playground to pick his team, and instead of picking the guys who look like they can play, he picks the obviously inferior team. And how does it always turn out? God triumphs every time.

Do you ever look around your life and feel like God has dealt you a losing hand? If you're a student of the Bible, when you see what looks like a losing hand, you know that God is about to triumph in a way that will give him all the credit for the victory. Isn't that the kind of victory you want? So when everything in your life looks unimpressive, sure to lose, insignificant, trust Christ and watch for the glory of God to be demonstrated.

When you feel like a loser, when you feel like a failure, when you feel like you're incompetent, praise God! You're exactly the kind of person God uses. God uses people like us to defeat the great dragon.

Revelation 12:1-6

Can you imagine anything more vulnerable than a woman laboring to give birth? Women in labor are completely occupied with giving birth. They are not thinking about defending themselves. They cannot strategize about how to escape from danger. They are focused on one thing: giving birth.

The process of giving birth is a colossal struggle for life. The whole of a woman's mental energy, emotional strength, and bodily power are focused on what seems impossible and is nothing short of miraculous. A human being is about to come into the world out of her body, and the baby seems bigger than the birth canal. It looks impossible. It is a miracle of frantic human determination and astonishing divine design.

Can you imagine anything more frightening or threatening than a huge dragon? Let me suggest a way to make a dragon even more dreadful: give it seven heads. Now put a horn on each head, and three of the heads have two horns; so there are seven heads and ten horns.

Put the two images together and you have a powerful drama. A pregnant woman is in the process of giving birth, and she is threatened by a massive

dragon who wants to eat her baby the moment he is born. She cannot run. She cannot hide. What hope does she have?

Do you want to heighten the desperation and urgency of the situation? The child about to be born, sure to be eaten by the dragon, is the world's last hope. This is an epic pageant of intense, unprotected goodness confronted with a shocking evil that looks powerful, inevitable, devastating.

What a dramatic story ... (and it is true!) Like I said earlier – it has a benefit for you and I. ... We need to know the danger we face. We need to know that it always looks like the odds are that Satan will win... but he always loses. ... And we need to know that victory has been secured... that no satanic accusation will stand against those who trust in Christ... and that God can and does protect his people.

While the events we read in Revelation chapter 12 will be of special significance to the Jewish nation... during the middle of the Tribulation... the message of chapter 12... and next week's chapter 13 of Revelation... can encourage God's people during any age – including you and I.

The picture revealed to us... in these two chapters (just like last week's)... spotlight Israel. ... Five passages in our New Testament... (Romans 11... Revelation 7... Revelation 11-13... all make it very clear to me that God is not finished with Israel. He has not completely turned His back on the Jewish people... even though they rejected His clearly announced and verified Messiah.

Most of the evangelical Christian denominations do not believe this. They confuse the church... with Israel... and say that the Church is "Spiritual

Israel”... and every promise God made to them... now belongs to the church.

I cannot go along with the majority... because of Romans 11, Revelation 7, Revelation 11, Revelation 12, and Revelation 13. The church is never Israel and Israel is never the church. Jews are always Jews, Gentiles are always Gentiles, the church is always the church and Israel is always Israel. ... (LISTEN) Revelation 11-13 is telling us the story about Israel... a treasured possession that comes home... to their promised Messiah. ... It is the story of an incredibly powerful... forgiving... and faithful God.

In our study through the book of Revelation... chapter 12 places us in the middle of the Tribulation. We have already dealt with the earlier passage of Revelation that portray the first 3 ½ years... and now we are about to enter the second half... or the final 3 ½ years. ... Last week (chapter 11)... this week (chapter 12)... and next week (chapter 13) are showing us how prominent Israel is... for why the Tribulation will occur. ... God is bringing His people back to Himself.

Let there be no mistake... God will be judging all the people who are on earth at that time... and **all** will suffer... But Israel will suffer more. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah prophesy that Israel will receive double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-2 and Jeremiah 16:16-18) ... Another name that the Bible uses for the Tribulation is “The Time of Jacob’s Trouble” (A phrase used in Jeremiah 30:7.) It will be particularly difficult for Israel during that time.

Here is what Zechariah wrote:

Zechariah 13:8-9 (ESV)

In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

It will be so severe for Israel that (please take note of what Zechariah says...) 2/3 of them will perish... only 1/3 is going to survive the Tribulation. It will be a time when God refines them like silver and gold... but they will eventually come back to Him and say, "The Lord is my God." The Tribulation is primarily the story of God bringing the people of Israel back to Himself.

This is why we have our passage today in Revelation... given to us... just before the last half of the Tribulation is explained. We are to understand that the Tribulation mainly concerns Israel.

Revelation 12:1-2

This is all symbolic of Israel, and identifies the woman as representing Israel. The symbolism is first found in Genesis 37 in the second of Joseph's dreams.

Genesis 37:9 (ESV)

Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

The number twelve is Jewish because of the twelve tribes corresponding to the twelve sons of Jacob. Jacob's brothers made up 11 stars... and Jacob, himself, would be the 12th star in our passage in Revelation.

Imagine a woman wearing the sun as a garment. She has "the moon under her feet," and she has a crown on her head. The crown is made of twelve stars. These heavenly bodies are reminiscent of Joseph's second dream (once again in Genesis 37)... Gen. 37:9 has Jacob saying , "*Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me.*" ... And then Joseph's father Jacob... aka Israel... interprets the dream in verse 10 saying, "*Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?*" ... So in Joseph's dream, Jacob/Israel is the sun... Joseph's mother Rachel is the moon... and Joseph's eleven brothers are the eleven stars... with Joseph evidently the twelfth.

Revelation 12:3-5a,b

The red dragon is the devil himself according to verse 9...

Revelation 12:9a,b

Through all the ages, Satan had attempted to prevent this promised mission of the seed from its fulfillment, continually standing before every woman in the line of promise from Eve to Mary, seeking to slay her man-child before he could accomplish God's mission. (We are about to see) that his failure will make him more bitterly angry than ever, and he will continue in every way he can to persecute the symbolic woman and all her seed.

But at the time of Jesus' birth Satan intensified his effort. He stood poised for action even before He was born... And after He was born... immediately the attacks to kill Him occurred... when he had Herod attempt to murder Him (Matthew 2:16). ... Then... several more times Satan attempted to

destroy Christ... before He could go to the cross. ... When he was unable to destroy Jesus through the wilderness temptation... he attempted again and again to slay Him... but always without success. ... Only when the proper hour had come... Jesus went to the cross... and Satan thought that he had finally won.

Revelation 12:5c

God turned certain and total defeat... (His Own people rejecting and crucifying the Messiah)... into the victory that saves the world. ...When it looked like the last defense against evil had fallen... Christ rose from the dead... decisively breaking the back of evil.

Do you know this victory? ... Do you believe that God turns loss into gain? Do you believe that God has irrevocably defeated Satan through the death of Jesus on the cross? ... Believe it.

But now we pick up our story in the rest of Revelation 12... at the second half of the Tribulation. During the first half we saw God leaving His witness in Jerusalem through the two powerful witness we read about last week. They will witness to the Jewish nation - right there in Jerusalem... and 144,000 Jewish evangelists who we read about in Revelation chapter 7... will be witnessing all over the world to other nations. That all happens during the first 3 ½ years.

Then half-way through this 7 year Tribulation... the Anti-Christ... who established a peace treaty with Israel... and rebuilt their Temple... will suddenly declare himself to be god... and demand that they worship him. The Jewish nation will refuse... the Anti-Christ will launch a particularly

harsh out-rage against them... 2/3 of them will die... but many will flee to the wilderness... to a very special place that God will miraculously provide for them... and protect them.

Revelation 12:7-14

This is designed to encourage the Christian to stand fast... whether he or she is living in the ongoing struggle of our present Church Age (before the rapture)... or in the intense struggle of the final phase of the tribulation... There will be believers who come to the Lord through revivals brought on by the 144,000 witnesses and also the two prophets in Jerusalem. (These tribulation saints... in particular... will need Revelation 12's explanations of what is happening. ... They are also going to find much needed blessing from Christ's explanation of this very same events... in Matthew 24.

Jesus first explains the events of the first half of the Tribulation...

Matthew 24:9-14

I believe that verse 13 indicates that the 1/3 of the Jewish nation that survives the Tribulation... are going to be saved. They are going to flee to the desert mountains... just as we just read in revelation... they will survive... and they are going to be reconciled to God.

Matthew 24:13

And I believe verse 14 points to the results of the 144,000 witnesses and the two prophets in Jerusalem... It will be a testimony to all the nations!

Matthew 24:14

Next... Jesus speaks of the second half of the Tribulation... and the events we just read in the second half of Revelation chapter 12... Jesus starts with the event of the Anti-Christ walking into the Temple and demanding to be worshipped as God... immediately followed by the Jews fleeing to their special place in the dessert that God prepares for them.

Matthew 24:15-28

2/3 of the Jewish nation will die... but 1/3 will flee to a place of refuge that God prepares. They will be nourished by God for 3 ½ years... (Let's go back to our verses in Revelation 12...

Revelation 12:6 (ESV)

and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Revelation 12:14 (ESV)

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.

When God led his people forth from Egypt and into the wilderness... signifying His protection... Moses... in Exodus 19:4... and again in Deut. 32:11... used the expression that He "*bore them upon eagles' wings.*" ... That is the same phrase used in revelation 12. ... God is going to lead them and protect them again... just like He did in the exodus from Egypt... during the second half of the Tribulation.

Look how Isaiah prophesied of this loving protection that He will give them at this time of their fleeing...

Isaiah 33:13-16 (ESV)

Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and you who are near, acknowledge my might. The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: "Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands, lest they hold a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed and shuts his eyes from looking on evil, he will dwell on the heights; his place of defense will be the fortresses of rocks; his bread will be given him; his water will be sure.

Isaiah 41:17-20 (ESV)

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them; I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive. I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together, that they may see and know, may consider and understand together, that the hand of the LORD has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

From our passage in Revelation 12... we see that right in the middle of the Tribulation... there will be a war between Satan and Michael (God's Arch-Angel who Daniel presents as the guardian protector of Israel.) Satan will be thrown to the earth... and no longer have access to heaven to accuse believers. This will enrage Satan... and cause him to pour out his wrath in particular on Israel. Zechariah prophesied that 2/3 will perish... and Revelation 12 declares that the surviving 1/3 will be born on the wings of eagles... and be preserved under God's protection... for the last 3 ½ years of the Tribulation. ... But Satan is not going to let it go...

Revelation 12:15-17

The flood symbolically says Satan is going all out to crush the Jew. But every effort by Satan will fail. God will preserve His people from every attack. Hitler thought he could wipe out the Jewish race, but he failed. Today Hitler is dead and despised, but the Jews thrive in Palestine.

History shows that every nation has been frustrated in attempts to wipe out the Jew. Even in the Great Tribulation, when Satan puts forth his supreme effort to destroy the Jews, he is powerless to accomplish his evil desire. To the very end God frustrates the efforts of the dragon. So he will turn his hateful actions toward the Gentiles... who were won to Christ through the witness of the 144,000.

But where is this place... where God will protect the Jews... and eventually reconcile them to Himself... just before Jesus returns...? Believe it or not... Scripture leaves us some strong clues.

#1. Jesus said It will be in the mountains... #2. Revelation 12 tells us it will be in the wilderness... #3. Isaiah reveals that it will be high up in a defensible fortress of rocks.

There is a place that fits this description very accurately. It is in a part of modern day Jordan... what used to be known in Bible days as "Edom." Petra is a city that exists there today... It is still considered wilderness... and it is totally defensible because it is completely surrounded by mountains and cliffs. The only way in or out is through a very narrow passage that can only be navigated by foot or horseback – not any modern military equipment.

But here is the main reason why I believe it will be Petra... which exists in what used to be called (in Bible days) - "Edom." Daniel mentions Edom and gives a major clue that this will be the place.

The context of Daniel 11:40-45 are the events of the middle of the Tribulation. Daniel prophesies that the Anti-Christ will have a political take-over of the world... but he notes a minor exception...

Daniel 11:41 (ESV)

He shall come into the glorious land. And tens of thousands shall fall, but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites.

The Anti-Christ will conquer the entire world – except Edom... Moab... and Ammon. All three of these ancient kingdoms comprise what is today known as "Jordan." (That is where Petra is.) ... Since the Anti-Christ will not have control over this area... it is only logical that the Jews would flee to that place. ... And then we see that it fits Jesus'... Isaiah's ... and Revelation 12's description.

How big does this place of refuge need to be? We do know that all the Jews will not escape. Zechariah told us that only a remnant will remain... after two-thirds of the Jews are killed.

Now... the Jewish population (today) is about 6 million. That means the hiding place will need to hold at least two million people. In Petra, some caves hold 3000 people. Guides in Petra have stated that this area could hold five million people very easily.

As we prepare to wrap up this amazing story of a treasured possession that comes home... here is another reason for knowing that it is a true story...

A historic treaty was signed between Jordan and Israel on October 26, 1994 in the sands of Arabah by King Hussein of Jordan and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. One thousand journalists from the world were present for this historic occasion. The treaty promotes tourism between the two countries. When the Jews were surveyed and asked what the most important aspect was in this treaty, 96% said they would now have the opportunity to visit Petra. Another interesting feature of this treaty was the agreement of both countries to continue their negotiations for a highway to be constructed and maintained between Egypt, Israel, and Jordan near Eilat. Did you know that Isaiah talked about such a highway?

Prophetically, this highway will open up opportunities to Syria, Egypt, and Israel to come together to worship in the Temple Mount in Jerusalem during the Millennium. The main thing we are trying to show on this point is the possibility of the Jews finding refuge in Jordan one day when the AntiChrist attempts to destroy them.

(LISTEN) I began this morning by asking... Does it sometimes seem to you that Satan has the upper hand in the struggle of the ages? Does it look like Satan is the one who knows how to fight to win, and God always seems to pick the losing strategy?

That certainly is not the case at all. He is making sure that a treasured possession of His is coming home... (the Jews.) This faithful covenant-keeping God is One that you can entrust your life to...

Although Satan is very powerful... as anyone can plainly see by the condition of this world... and even though he rages today against the

people of God... he is the loser. ... God's effective hand of protection is available to you today.

Will you entrust your life to Him...? Become part of this incredible story!