

## Revelation 11:12-17

### A Time, And Times, And Half A Time: Satan Attacks the Church From Within and Without

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We left off looking at Rev. 11: 6-11, where John describes how futile the attempts by Satan and the nation he ruled, ancient Rome, had been in trying to kill the Lord Jesus. He describes the persecution of faithful Christians as war between Satan and Christ, between Satan's tool, Rome, first in its imperial form as the ancient Roman Empire, then in its form as the Roman Catholic Church, against the true church of Christ. This passage, as we said last time, refers to the warfare in heaven when Lucifer lead a revolt against God and was cast from heaven along with his fallen angels, becoming Satan and his demons, but it also refers to that warfare as conducted on earth between Satan and God's elect. The promise here is that Christ and His church will win that war, "on earth as it is in heaven." Before the early 4th century, who would have dreamed that, for example, Christianity would go from being outlawed to being the de facto official religion of the Roman Empire? Ordinary Christians, through their Gospel witness, who would not betray their Savior even when staring death in face, conquered the most powerful empire the world had ever known without firing a shot. They brandished the sword of the spirit, the Word of God, (Eph. 6:17) and the gates of hell fell down flat (Mt. 16:18). Rejoice, Christians, because Satan is a defeated foe!

The heavens are where the stars are, and in Rev. 1:20 Jesus says the stars symbolize ministers. To extrapolate from Romans 13, ministers are of two classes, ministers who serve Christ in the church and ministers who serve Him in the state, the civil government, as we have observed in previous sermons. Rom 13: 3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4 For he is the **minister** of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the **minister** of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. 5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. 6 For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for **they are God's ministers**, attending continually upon this very thing. "Those who dwell in the heavens" therefore could refer to all who are ministered to, that is, those within the covenant of God, His people, who spiritually dwell with Him, so in a sense we can be spoken of as dwelling in heaven. I Jn. 4:13: 13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit. So this verse 12 could be paraphrased as, "*Rejoice, faithful ministers of Christ, both in church and state, and rejoice, all you Christians.*"

Sea and earth probably represent the rest of mankind, who spiritually do not dwell with God in heaven, but dwell in the lower realms, — the sea would immediately mean to John’s contemporaries the Mediterranean Sea, so this verse could then be saying, Woe to those who are of the earth, within in the civilized world, and those of the sea, that is, in lands over the Mediterranean, who are not spiritually dwelling in heaven, that is, not found in Christ. Christians are to rejoice for what has happened and will happen in human history, but Christ’s enemies can only fear, for their doom is sealed.

**12b “For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”** Rev. 20:10, speaking of the last day when Christ returns: “the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire.” Yes, we rejoice even in this, because Satan has been thrown out of heaven, a defeated foe, and has but a short time before he is destroyed. And he knows it, and this increases his rage. Those who know they have but a short time to live make the most of their time left, and Satan is no exception. He also knows that he is limited in what he can do. He is but the unwilling servant of the Lord, as the book of Job teaches, as well as Christ in Lk 22:31, where He tells Peter, “Satan hath desired to have you.” But as we know, Satan was not permitted that, proving again that Satan can do nothing of himself. Christian, rejoice, because his defeat in heaven signals the end of him, and his defeat on earth is assured!

**13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

The dragon is Satan. The woman is the church of Christ, His true gospel church, His covenant people. The New Testament church is fleeing from Roman persecution, imperial and papal, just as the church did in the Old Testament, it fled from Egypt — a type or picture of Rome, imperial and papal — to escape persecution, it fled into the wilderness, where it was nourished by the Lord, protected from hunger and thirst by heavenly manna and water from rocks, through His guardianship and protection from snakes and wild beasts and all the threats

of the desert, guarded and protected by Him from even having their shoes wear out over 40 years. The OT church did these things literally, and it was a picture of the NT church. The NT church did these things spiritually. The NT church was persecuted from the beginning, and fled into the wilderness — that is, was scattered by persecution and dispersed into the world, bringing the Gospel to far-flung places. God’s covenant people were nourished by Him, protected often from persecution — a wonderful picture of that is His people the Waldensians, who came to live in the remote and inaccessible mountains of northern Italy, where they were nourished and protected from the face of the serpent for centuries.

**“where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”**

The Lord always keeps and protects his remnant people. At the end of the day, Satan is always foiled in his attempt to destroy Christ and His church. Make no mistake, he is a formidable foe; he is fighting a furious retreat action. But the operative word is “retreat.” He is in retreat, however slowly, against the steadily advancing forces of the church of Christ as it conquers the world. The church, in the Lord’s wisdom, advances two steps forward, one step back. Historically in this passage we are in the time of the pre-Constantine Roman Empire, when the church took a step back and Satan caused Emperors to declare war on the church, putting it through terrible persecutions. Then the church took two steps forward when Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity and it became the de facto religion of the Roman Empire. And so the Lord works throughout history — the church advances, strategically retreats, and on the next advance gains more ground than it gave up. Scripture promises that Christ, not Satan, will win, on earth as it is in heaven — or as Isa. 11:9 says, “the earth” not only the heavens, but the **earth** — “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” There will come a day, as Rev. chapters 15 and 20 teach, when Satan “will deceive the nations no more.”

14b **“she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”** The woman, who is the church, is protected by God for a time, and times, and half a time. What could this mean, a time, and times, and half a time? It is taken from Dan. 7:25 speaking of the fourth beast of Daniel’s vision, which is the papacy: NKJV: “25 He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, Shall persecute F23 the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.”

If a time means a year, and times means two years, then a time, and times, and half a time means a year plus two years plus half a year, or 3 and a half years, which is 1260 days. Using the day/year method of prophetic interpretation — which the overwhelming majority of theologians attest to — 1260 days is 1260 years. And that should be a very familiar number to you. We have seen it over and over again in prophesy — the same period of time that the witnesses bore their testimony in Rev. 11. Again, I refer you to the sermon on the 1260 days of Revelation at [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com). ([www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=926071756810](http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=926071756810))

For 1260 years the Lord protected his remnant in the assault on the church from without and from within, from Islam and other enemies without, from heresies and Romanism and other enemies from within. There are three principal interpretations different Protestant theologians historically have offered as to precisely when the 1260 years began and ended, but they all agree that the true Gospel church of Christ, Protestantism *in vitro* if you will, was persecuted for 1260 years, and that the Lord kept it, protected it, in its embryonic stage, until He willed it to be born and grow with astounding speed to eventually take over the world. The woman, the Gospel church, was “**given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place**” Some have likened these two wings to faith and prayer. She flies into the wilderness — an allusion to the 40 years that Israel spent in the wilderness, attacked by enemies from within and without, protected by the Lord, taught by Him to reach some degree of spiritual maturity, before they were ready to enter the promised land. But that entrance to the promised land was not a victory celebration, it was a call to war, protracted war.

The picture is of the apostolic church — again, think of the Waldensians in their remote mountain hideaways, and others, the faithful Christians before the Reformation, hiding from persecutors, meeting for worship in secret — the faith of the apostles, sent into the wilderness, the time before the Reformation, attacked by enemies from within and without, protected by the Lord, taught by Him to reach some degree of spiritual maturity before the church was ready to blossom via the Protestant Reformation. And like the OT church in the wilderness, as Acts 7:38 calls Israel before it entered the promised land, the Reformation was not a victory celebration, it was a call to war, protracted war. That war, like OT Israel’s, is a war that we will win, because Satan is a defeated foe who knows he has but a short time (Rev. 12:12).

The time of this verse appears to be after the reign of Constantine. That is when the bishops of Rome really began to consolidate their power, both ecclesiastical and political, working hand-in-glove with the Roman Empire, which had largely fallen back into paganism after Constantine.

The parallel between the corruption of the faith of Israel by the Pharisees and the corruption of the faith of the New Testament church by Roman bishops during and after Constantine is very close. In both cases, Pharaseeism came to dominate the faith. **Romanism is Pharaseeism**, as seen in its:

- \* works-righteousness false gospel;
- \* elevating unwritten tradition to the place of Scripture;
- \* affectations of distinctive dress for its clergy;
- \* its insistence that it is the only true church and that salvation apart from it is impossible;
- \* its burdening the faithful with rules and duties invented by men not found in Scripture,

and so forth. Remember that it was shocking to the people of Israel that Jesus never submitted Himself or His ministry to the oversight of the Pharisees, nor did he recognize their claimed authority to add to Scripture. Mt. 23: 13-33:

“13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. 14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. 15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. 16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! 17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold? 18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. F44 19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? 20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon. 21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein. 22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. 23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise F45 and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. 24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. 25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful

outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. 29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, 30 And say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. 31 Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. 32 Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. 33 Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

In fact, He made it crystal clear that not only did He not agree with them, He called them "fools" — Biblically, a fool is an unbeliever, a person who says in his heart there is no God (Ps. 14:1, 53:1). Jesus called the Pharisees "hypocrites," "blind guides," "whited sepulchres," meaning tombs that are painted white on the outside making them look clean and pretty, but on the inside are full of rottenness, decay and corruption, "children of hell" leading people away from the true faith into hell. And in Jn. 8:44 He called them sons of the devil who do the devil's work. "This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." (Mark 7:6-7)

This is what the Lord said in condemning Phariseeism, and Romanism is Phariseeism.

**15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.**

The serpent of course is another name for Satan: Rev 12:9: "And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan." Also 20:2 says the same thing: "2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan..." In v. 15 we have a symbolic description of Satan persecuting the true church. The persecution is called a flood of water. Jude 13 likens heresies to a flood: heretics are called "raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame." Most sound commentators say this flood in Rev. 12:15 means a flood of heresies upon the church, and it is historical fact that the early church was plagued with a flood of heresies: Judiazers, Valentinianism, Gnosticism, Marcionism, Montanism, Manichaeism, Donatism, Arianism, Pelegianism, Nestorianism, to name some of the best-known — so much

so that it was very nearly overwhelmed by heresies and carried away, much as a flood of water does to anything in its path. Matthew Henry wrote, *“The church of God is in more danger from heretics than from persecutors; and heresies are as certainly from the devil as open force and violence.”* This verses teaches that heresies come out of the devil’s own mouth, although he uses men as his slaves to proclaim them. And he is, as Christ said, a liar, and the father of lies. Heresies are directed at the church, to destroy it as the vessel of truth and turn it into a cesspool of demonic lies: “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood **after** the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.” Note the word “after.” James Durham points out that implies that the woman is moving. *“It is not said that he wanted to drown her with the flood, but that with such errors he might drive her from truth and steadfastness therein, and carry her away in that flood with the rest of the unstable world; and so, in a word, that he might undo her, that there should be no woman and no church...1) The (early, visible) church by temporal pomp and grandeur, and multiplying of ceremonies and such like did being the flight of the true church...2) the devil took advantage to raise up abominable errors and did drive them on* (Complete Commentary on Revelation, Renny 1799 edition, Vol. 2, p. 363).

**16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.**

This verse may remind you of the account of Korah and his followers who were opposed to Moses’ leadership of Israel, which meant that they rejected what God had ordained. Num. 16:32-33: “and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods. 33 So they and all those with them went down alive into the pit; the earth closed over them, and they perished from among the assembly.” You may also be reminded of the earth swallowing up the great flood that destroyed the earth, sparing only Noah and his family in the ark. Some commentators think “the earth opening her mouth” means the preaching of the gospel and the decrees of church councils that condemned the heresies. Others see the conversion of the Emperor Constantine and the nominal Christianization of the Roman Empire, virtually the entire civilized earth, which ended the persecutions of Christians by Rome.

One or all of these may be correct. What we can be sure of is that the verse teaches that Satan’s plan to capture the entire church and use it to spread lies in the name of Christ is foiled. The original Geneva Bible note on this verse is, “God gives means to His Church to escape the fury of Satan.” As the devil cast out heresies like floods to carry away the church, the Lord used some extraordinary means to stop it, to protect the true church, the woman’s seed, those

who held to the faith of the Bible, He drained and dried up these heresies just as effectively as floodwaters would disappear if the earth opened up under them. And history testifies again that that is exactly what happened to most of the heresies that plagued the early church. While some of them are still around, they are confined to cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons; they no longer pose a threat to Christ's church. They have disappeared as though the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.

Finally, verse 17: **“And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”**

Having failed to overcome the true church with a flood of heresies, Satan becomes even angrier. He goes to war against the remnant, that is, God's elect. To use another Scriptural analogy, he could not crush Christ's head, but he is able to bruise His heel (Gen. 3:15). Albert Barnes says this verse applies particularly to the Papacy and its invention brought up from the pit of hell itself, the Inquisition. Barnes writes, *“It were (that is, it is) the purpose of Papal Rome”* — he is not talking about the Roman Empire, but about Papal Rome, the institution that calls itself the Roman Catholic Church — *“the purpose of Papal Rome (is) to sweep (the true church) entirely away.”* He writes that this verse Rev. 12:17 teaches, *“The Papacy commences a new opposition against the spiritual Church of Christ...Still filled with rage — though incapable of destroying the True Church itself — he (Satan) turns his wrath, under the form of papal persecutions, against individual Christians.”* (Notes Explanatory and Practical on Revelation, Harper & Brothers 1872 edition, p. 350)

Of course, Satan has always been at war with the elect since creation, but this indicates that he has stepped up his campaign against them. Note they are defined as those who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ,” and they are a remnant, as opposed to the larger numbers of people who are in the false church of antichrist, those who keep the commandments of Satan and have the testimony of antichrist. Just as Jesus said of the Pharisees can be said of these worshippers: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Mt. 15:9. Durham: *“By this we may see that vows, fastings, pilgrimages, adoration of crosses and the like, though never so many, with never so much devotion and seeming piety, will never prove one to be the seed of the true church, whereas the simple, sincere practice of clear commanded duties, will sufficiently evidence the same.”* The remnant, God's elect, have the testimony of Jesus Christ — not of legalism, doing seemingly pious acts to be saved, but resting in the blessed assurance of the testimony of Christ,



that whosoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God (I Jn. 5:1).

This passage in the book of Revelation, like many other passages in the Bible, Old Testament and New, is a promise from God to give encouragement and assurance to God's people. The ever-increasing remnant of the woman's seed — God's elect — will continue to increase in number until we cover the whole world and bring all the nations under Christ's rule, on this present earth in this history in this time, before the last day. We will, as His servants and His vice-regents, defeat Satan and his witting or unwitting followers. This passage is God's promise that Satan can do nothing to stop or even to slow the true church of Jesus Christ. Everything he does that, to human eyes, appears to slow it down or even, at times in history, appears to extinguish it, causes it to flourish like never before, much like the severe pruning of a tree causes it to flourish and produce fruit like never before. Christian, rejoice in this absolute assurance, directly from the mouth of the Lord Himself, found in Num. 14:21: **“As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.”**