

to stop His birth, out of fear and dread. This is what is going on in the pages of the Old Testament; look out for it as you read the Scriptures!

As was stated in our three previous articles on Revelation 12:1-3 and the material above, the “man child” (5) is the Lord Jesus. He is male and He was born to the church, referred to as “the woman” in this chapter. Our Redeemer is the One who rules “all nations with a rod of iron” (5). This is a reference to Psalm 2:9, a messianic Psalm, which Christ applies to Himself and those in Him in Revelation 2:26-27.

Only two events in the life of our Saviour are referred to in Revelation 12:5: His birth and His ascension into heaven. The rest are implied and well-known from the rest of sacred Scripture: His holy life, His atoning death and His mighty resurrection. Christ’s birth and ascension alone are mentioned because these are the ways He came into, and departed from, this world. The dragon was not able to stop Him!

Since then, it is very obvious that the Messiah is absolutely untouchable by the evil one. After all, He is now in heaven with Almighty God. The ascended Christ is seated on His throne ruling all nations with a rod of iron!

The word “rule” in Revelation 12:5 means to “shepherd,” speaking of His gracious leading, protecting and providing for His flock, the church. His “rod of iron” is His powerful providential government of the ungodly, smashing them in pieces. Thus our Lord shepherds and defends His people (in part) by His mighty rule over the wicked.

With Jesus Christ being utterly untouchable, as the One who has ascended into heaven and is enthroned at God’s right hand reigning over the universe, the dragon turned his attention to the church to persecute her, so “the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (6).

Herman Hoeksema is right: “The battle of the world is a battle of the devil against God. Not between the world and the church in [the] last instance, not even between Antichrist and Christ, is that battle. They all are agents. Christ is the anointed agent of God to fight, with His people, the battle against the devil. Antichrist ... is the agent of Satan, to fight his battles against God and His church. What a tremendous idea is expressed here! We, as the covenant people, as being of God’s party in the midst of the world, fight the battle of Jehovah against the old serpent, the devil. There is magic joy in the very idea that the Lord will use us as instruments in His hand, nay, as His living people, to fight against the old dragon ... God Almighty has always been victorious in the past, and ... the devil with all his attempts to prevent the birth of the Great Seed has simply effected his own defeat. So it will be in the future. God will always be victorious, of course. Not yet has the devil given up the attempt to gain dominion over the kingdom of God. But the voices in heaven have already sung of it, and the elders have acknowledged it, that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ [11:15-18]” (*Behold He Cometh*, pp. 422-423).

May the Lord grant us understanding of His marvellous ways, and may He protect us from, and strengthen us against, the great red dragon, Satan himself! *Rev. Stewart*

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## The Great Red Dragon and the Man Child

Revelation 12:4 ascribes two wicked actions to the great red dragon or the devil. First, “his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.” The “stars” here are not Rigel or Alpha Centauri or any of the astral bodies. The stars in Revelation 12:4 are “angels,” as is clearly stated in verses 7 and 9. This way of speaking of angels is not unique to Revelation 12. Job 38:7 refers to angels as “morning stars.” Isaiah 14:12 calls the King of Babylon/Satan “Lucifer,” the day star or the morning star.

In that the devil draws a “third” of the stars from heaven, we learn that not all the angels are fallen, not even a majority of them. Instead, a great many, a significant minority, of the heavenly host have apostatised.

This refers to the rebellion that Satan led in heaven. A third or a significant minority allied themselves with the devil and revolted from the Lord God. Thus these (now evil) angels “kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation” (Jude 6). This rebellion happened soon after creation and before Satan tempted Eve in Genesis 3.

Second, “the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev. 12:4). Behind Herod’s slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem stands the devil (Matt. 2:16-18). This was his attempt to swallow up the man child after His birth.

Satan tried to stop the (first) advent of the Messiah in many other ways. Think of the murder of Abel by Cain or the mixing of the godly and ungodly lines which took place before the flood (Gen. 6) and was proposed at Shechem (Gen. 34). Saul attempted many times to kill David, an ancestor of Christ. Queen Athaliah wiped out the royal seed, except for one infant, Joash. Haman plotted to slaughter all the Jews. Antiochus Epiphanes IV made a concerted effort to destroy God’s covenant people. In short, the Old Testament teaches that the devil repeatedly tried to stop the Messiah’s coming!

There is another important instance not yet mentioned: Pharaoh’s command to cast all the newborn Israelite boys into the River Nile (Ex. 1:22). Ezekiel 29:3 even calls Pharaoh “the great dragon” because he was puffed up by Satan to an idolatrous pride. Psalm 74 describes God’s destruction of Egypt at the Red Sea in similar language: “Thou didst divide the sea by thy strength: thou brakest the heads of the *dragons* in the waters. Thou brakest the heads of *leviathan* in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness” (13-14).

This means, of course, that not only the church in the Old Testament but also Satan himself lived in anticipation of the birth of the Messiah. For 4,000 years, the church laboured in bearing Christ, with hope and joy. For the same 4,000 years, Satan sought

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## The Church and Israel (1)

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This issue of the *News* will answer three questions concerning Israel and the church, the last two of which were sent by the same reader. Here they are:

1. How do we support our view that Israel and the church are the very same one people of God in light of Matthew 16:18? Christ says, “I will *build* my church.” If words mean anything, does this not imply that, at that time, the church was not around yet but was an entity to come only in the future? Therefore, Old Testament Israel could not possibly be “the church” (as we say).
2. The church is called the “body” of Christ (Col. 1:18) and entrance into the body is said to be through Spirit baptism (I Cor. 12:13)—the key element being that the work of the baptism of the Holy Spirit is what places a person into Christ’s body, in whom elect Jews and Gentiles are united as the church. Since Acts 1:5 views Spirit baptism as future, while Acts 11:15-16 links it to the past, is it not evident that the church began on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2)?
3. Certain events in history were essential to the establishment of the church—the church did not come into being and was not established until certain events had taken place. An example of this is that the church could not become a functioning entity until after the Holy Spirit provided the necessary spiritual gifts and offices (Eph. 4:7-11). So how can Old Testament Israel be the church?

That Israel and the church are the same is clearly taught in Scripture and is an important teaching of the Word of God. There are many passages we could use to show this but one passage in Acts is especially significant.

Acts 7:38 is clear and decisive: “This is he [i.e., Moses], that was in the *church* in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.” Israel is “the church in the wilderness.” The New Testament word for the church, *ekklesia*, is used by Stephen and by the Spirit of God who speaks through him.

There are other passages as well. The church is built not on the foundation of the apostles alone, but on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). Those who were aliens and strangers from Israel and covenants have been made nigh by the blood of Christ, so much so that these aliens and strangers (the Gentiles) are now reconciled unto God in one body (11-16), and we know that the church is that body: not just the New Testament church but Israel is the body of Christ. Together they are the one building and habitation of God through the Spirit.

The church did not begin at Pentecost. Christ, the builder of the church, did not begin to build His church then but from the very beginning, even after the fall of Adam and Eve. The words of Jesus in Matthew 16:18, “I *will* build my church,” are not so much future as emphatic. Never have and never will the gates of Hell prevail against the church.

The necessity of Spirit baptism for entrance into the church does not mean that there was no entrance into the church in the Old Testament. It only means that Spirit baptism, “the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5), was experienced by God’s people in the Old Testament as well as the New (cf. Ps. 51:7-12; Eze. 36:25-27).

The gifts of which Paul speaks in Ephesians 4:7-11 were present in the church of the Old Testament in the offices of prophet, priest and king. Those offices, as well as the offices which Paul lists in Ephesians, are the offices of Christ as the Head and Mediator of His people, so that, both in the Old Testament and the New, Christ exercises those offices to reveal to His people the will of God for their salvation, to offer Himself as a sacrifice for their sins and intercede for them to God, and to rule over them by His Word and Spirit, defending and preserving them from their enemies, and giving them eternal life.

The difference between the Old and New Testaments is not that there were two different peoples, Christ standing in a different relation to each and saving them in different ways, the one by works and the other by grace, and giving each a different future.

The difference is, first, that Christ was present in the Old Testament through pictures and types. Pictures and types they were, to be sure, but Christ was present in them. Moses’ intercession was effective on Israel’s behalf, not because Moses was anything but a sinful man but because he was a picture of Christ the Intercessor. Abraham saw Christ’s day and was glad (John 8:56). He offered his son and received him back from the dead “in a figure” (Heb. 11:17-19). The sacrifices of the Old Testament sent the people to Christ picturing what He would do for them. David spoke of Him in the Psalms (Acts 2:25-31), as did all the prophets, and what they said was the Word of God, living and powerful and able to make men wise unto salvation, not because David’s voice was mighty but because Christ spoke through David. Read Psalms 22 and 69, and you will still hear Him speaking peace to His people as our Prophet and Teacher.

The second difference between the church of the Old Testament and the church of the New Testament is explained by Paul in Galatians 4:1-7. The church in the Old Testament was like a child not yet come to maturity and into its inheritance. It was like a child under the “bondage” of tutors and governors, the tutelage and governorship of the law. The church of the New Testament is that same child come to maturity and into its inheritance, through the coming of Christ and the outpouring of His Spirit. The beginning of the New Testament does not mark the birth of that child but its coming to spiritual adulthood. One child, one church!

This truth is important as far as baptism and its administration are concerned, as far as the promises of the Old Testament are concerned and as far as future coming of Christ is concerned. But we will deal with this next time, Lord willing. *Rev. Ron Hanko*

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Pastor: Angus Stewart, 7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR • (028) 25 891851

[pastor@cprc.co.uk](mailto:pastor@cprc.co.uk) • [www.youtube.com/cprcni](http://www.youtube.com/cprcni) • [www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC](http://www.facebook.com/CovenantPRC)