

BaptistWay Bible Series for July 24: Christ provides the mettle for perseverance_71105

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Christ provides the mettle for perseverance

- Revelation 12:1-6, 13-18; 13:1-4, 11-18

By Wayne Smith

First Baptist Church, Lamesa

Last week's lesson covered the Second Interlude. During this pause in the narration of God's history, mounting Roman persecution called for Christians to continue witnessing. The Roman Empire would be destroyed, although Christians would continue to suffer for some time.

Revelation 12 begins the second section of the book's 22 chapters. In this last of three interludes, John pictures a wave of hostility directed against the church by the Romans. Emperor Nero who is portrayed as the antichrist dictates the persecution.

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The conflict between Rome and the church is a picture of the conflict between Satan and God. Although the conflict with Rome will be resolved, the conflict between good and evil will continue until end times. The third interlude occurs prior to the vision of the judgment of the bowls—the final outpouring of God’s wrath upon his enemies.

The dragon and the woman (Revelation 12:1-6)

A sign appears in heaven of a pregnant woman about to give birth. An enormous red dragon stands ready to devour the child as soon as it is born. After the woman gives birth to a male child, he is taken away to heaven while the dragon pursues her.

This scene is symbolic of the beginning of the church as Jesus was born, established the church and returned to heaven. Persecution continued against the church. The woman flees into the desert where God protects her. Although the church is persecuted, God will not allow it to be destroyed.

The war in heaven (12:7-12)

The scene shifts to heaven where Michael and his angels defeat the dragon. They hurl the dragon (Satan) along with his angels to earth, where he will

be allowed to practice his evil.

The dragon pursues the woman (12:13-18)

The dragon pursues the mother of the male child. This symbolic picture is one of continued Roman persecution of the church. The woman is lifted on the wings of an eagle (deliverance and protection of the church). The dragon spews out water and attempts to drown the woman, symbolic of the wave of hostility directed against the church. The earth opens and swallows the water and the woman is protected. The dragon turns his anger against the remainder of the woman's children, representing Nero's anger against those who have survived his first wave of persecution against the church.

The beast from the sea (13:1-4)

As the dragon stands on the seashore, a beast with seven heads and ten crowns emerges from the sea. The seven heads and ten crowns represent seven Roman emperors who reigned and three lesser rulers who governed for a short time during the existence of the church within the Roman Empire.

The beast resembles composite animals, representative of national powers that had conquered the world. The dragon gives the beast all authority. One of the heads has a fatal wound that is healed. This head represents the power of evil to survive. Men worship the beast (emperor worship) and the dragon that gives him power. The dragon recognizes the beast as all-powerful and asks if anyone can make war against him.

The beast conquers the world (13:5-10)

The beast is given power to slander God and conquer the entire world. He is allowed to persecute the church. Christians are told to remain steadfast in their witnessing.

The coming of the antichrist (13:11-18)

Another beast comes out of the earth. He has two horns like a lamb but speaks like a dragon. This is the antichrist. He makes the entire earth worship the first beast and performs great and miraculous signs. Because of the signs, he is given power to act on behalf of the first beast.

He orders worship of the first beast's image, giving power to the image of the beast to speak. He orders all who will not worship the first beast killed. He orders everyone to receive a mark on the hand or forehead. No one can buy or sell without bearing the mark. The mark is the name of the beast or the number of his name—666. More than likely, the number represents Nero as the antichrist.

This lesson presents a vision of Christ founding the church, which continues to exist after his ascension to heaven. After killing Christ, the Romans attempted to destroy the church. The emergence of Nero as the antichrist, the embodiment of evil and enemy of the church, is a symbolic narrative of historical events that occurred in the first century. Prophetic interpretation pictures events that will occur during the end times. The constant message through all interpretations of the Revelation is one of hope that enables Christians to persevere.

The Christians will continue to be persecuted—even in the midst of the terrible events taking place. They will continue to die. The conflict between the church and Rome is symbolic of the continuing war between good and evil. Rome will be defeated, but evil will continue to exist. The final judgment and defeat of evil will occur at the end times. In the meantime,

courage and persistent witness is required of Christians.

Application

We do not face the physical threats of conflict the early Christians did. We do face the threat to our Christian witness of compromise with conflicting secular practices. Compromise will not endanger our lives but it will endanger our influence.

Discussion question

- Do I constantly seek God's direction and draw upon his strength as I face conflict in my daily Christian walk?

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