

The Woman in the Wilderness

Douglas E. Cox

Why does the woman of Revelation 12 flee twice?

In the prophecy of Revelation 12, the woman in heaven, clothed with the sun, represents the saints, and includes the saints of the Old Testament period as well as the church which began in the first century as related in the New Testament. The woman flees to the wilderness, twice in this chapter.

Revelation 12:6

And 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.

Revelation 12:14

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.

This presents several questions, foremost of which are, what does the wilderness represent? Are the two time periods identical? Does the church flee to the wilderness? Why does she flee to the wilderness twice? These questions are addressed below.

Is the wilderness literal?

The prophecy obviously invokes symbolic language, but some insist that some particular elements of it should be taken literally. Rev. Herman Hoeksema discussed an example of this. The wilderness was the item said to be literal, in a preterist interpretation. The paragraphs quoted below are from his book *Behold He Cometh*.¹

Hoeksema wrote:

¹<http://spindleworks.com/library/hoeksema/behold31.htm>

There is no one who takes this woman for a real woman. Nor are there any interpreters who understand the dragon as a real animal, or the stream which he casts out of his mouth as a real stream, or the wings which the woman receives as real wings. In so far there is no difficulty.

But in spite of this, it is necessary that we remind you of the fact that here we have no literal presentation of facts, but rather an allegory, which does not allow of literal interpretation. For although all agree that this is not a real woman with real eagle's wings, and that the dragon mentioned here is not a real dragon, and that the stream of water he casts out after the woman is not a real stream of water, yet there are interpreters who make the mistake of singling out that wilderness and of maintaining that it, at all events, must be taken in a literal sense of the word. The woman, so they say, is at this time evidently in Jerusalem, the Old Testament holy city. And as she is attacked by the enemy, she flees into a literal wilderness somewhere in the vicinity, where she is hidden twelve hundred sixty days, even as at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem the disciples fled to Pella. Now this is violating one of the most fundamental rules of interpretation, and especially of the interpretation of the Apocalypse. And we must guard against it. There is no right to single out one element in an allegorical representation of things and to take it in the literal sense.

The woman in Revelation 12 pictures the church. She is clothed with the sun, which represents the gospel, which is the true spiritual light of all mankind. John said about Jesus, "That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."² John showed that every human is to be enlightened by the gospel. Those

²John 1:9

who have faith and believe in Christ are pictured by the woman in heaven.

Because the woman flees to the wilderness, the church (which is represented by the woman) can not be identified with a great denomination, that is visible to the world, with its head in Rome, or some other city on the earth. The image of a woman fleeing to the wilderness suggests that the church at times has been hidden from the world, and its light has become very dim. As Puritan scholar William Fulke said, no great denomination has fled to the wilderness literally.³

Are the time periods the same?

In this prophecy, the woman flees to the wilderness for 1,260 days, and also for “a time, times, and a half.” What do these time periods mean?

Since the woman in the prophecy is symbolic, and likewise the sun, the dragon, and the wilderness, the time period for which she remains in the wilderness is symbolic too. The 1,260 days and the “time, times and a half” are figurative. They represent the entire church age, when the gospel goes to the world. To say this period means a literal 1,260 days, or three and a half years, is to single out one element in an obviously allegorical representation. This mistake is commonly made by dispensationalists.

John Bale said these numbered days signify “the time of the Gospel preaching from Christ’s ascension to the end of the world.” He wrote,⁴

The numbered days here are none other but the afore written time of the two witnesses, the time of Elias’ preaching, the time of John’s preaching, the time of Christ’s preaching, or the time of the Gospel preaching from Christ’s ascension to the end of the world. That is the very time of the feeding of his church. And not open is this feeding here, but secret in the wilderness among a sort unknown to the world, having the poverty of the spirit without having anointing, or hypocrites’ apparel. And not only hath the Lord thus nourished his people in this spiritual respect, but also in

³*Praelections vpon the sacred and holy Reuelation of S. Iohn, written in latine by William Fulke Doctor of Diuinitie, and translated into English by George Gyffard, 1573.*

⁴John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches*. 1547. (Spelling has been modified)

body. When they have been grievously handled, spoiled of their goods imprisoned, and exiled, graciously has he relieved them, and provided for them both solace and comfort at the hands of them whom they never saw before. So that the just has not felt himself forsaken, nor his children seeking bread.

Two perspectives

The two accounts of the woman’s sojourn in the wilderness correspond in the following ways:

1. Both are part of the same vision
2. They involve same woman
3. They have the same duration, 1,260 days, or “a time, times and a half”
4. The woman is nourished both times
5. It is the same wilderness
6. Her place is prepared by God

These accounts of the woman’s sojourn in the wilderness *differ* in at least two ways:

1. The first account occurs before the great war in heaven; the second one occurs after the war, and the victory of the saints.
2. The first time she flees, the woman’s perspective is from ground level, while the second time, it is from above, as she is equipped with two wings of an eagle, which allow her to soar high above the earth. This represents a divine point of view, in contrast to a human viewpoint.

Exodus 19:4 says that God bore the Israelites upon eagle’s wings. Isaiah speaks of eagles’ wings in connection with a renewal of strength:

Isaiah 40:31

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

So, the prophecy of Revelation 12 indicates that some may need to take another look at the scriptures, with a different point of view. The human point of view is the earthly one, from ground level. It is the point of view that is associated with the little horn, in the prophecy of Daniel 7. There is a link between this chapter and the prophecy about the woman flying to the wilderness for “a time, times and a half.” This expression is first mentioned in Daniel 7:25.

Daniel said, “behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of man, and a mouth speaking great things.”⁵ These “eyes like the eyes of man” could represent a *human* viewpoint.

The spiritual viewpoint is one that is enlightend by God, and by an understanding of the gospel. This is not a literalistic approach. An eagle soars at a great height and views the earth from above, and so, in Revelation 12, the two wings of an eagle given to the woman represent a *divine* viewpoint.

The king of Babylon, who received visions of the future from God, was represented by a lion with eagles’ wings.⁶ These wings were plucked off. The third beast in Daviel’s vision was a leopard, with four wings of a fowl, obviously meant to depict an inferior sort of wing. The Hellenistic kingdoms were characterized by pagan superstition. The worship of the Greek gods, Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Ares, Hermes, Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Hestia, and a host of others, and the pagan philosophy that went along with those beliefs, was depicted by wings of a fowl, as being a much inferior condition, compared to the understanding given to king Nebuchadnezzar. Such inferior “wings” represent false prophets and false teachings.

Thus, eagles’ wings represent the gift of understanding prophecy.

What is the wilderness?

One of the key questions about the prophecy of Revelation 12 concerns the significance of the wilderness. Paul showed that there is a connection between the experience of the church and the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness after they came out of Egypt, and all the hard lessons they learned, which were for our examples.⁷

The 42 months in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 has been associated with the 42 different camps of Israel on

their way to the promised land, listed in Numbers 33. They “pitched in Succoth;” ... “pitched in Etham;” ... “pitched before Migdol;” ... “pitched in Marah;” ... “came unto Elim ... and they pitched there;” ... “encamped by the Red sea;” ... “encamped in the wilderness of Sin;” ... “encamped in Dophkah;” ... “encamped in Alush;” ... “encamped at Rephidim;” ... “pitched in the wilderness of Sinai;” ... “pitched at Kibrothhattaavah;” ... “encamped at Hazereth;” ... “pitched in Rithmah;” ... “pitched at Rimmonparez;” ... “pitched in Libnah;” ... “pitched at Rissah;” ... “pitched in Kehelathah;” ... “pitched in mount Shapher;” ... “encamped in Haradah;” ... “pitched in Makheloth;” ... “encamped at Tahath;” ... “pitched at Tarah;” ... “pitched in Mithcah;” ... “pitched in Hashmonah;” ... “encamped at Moseroth;” ... “pitched in Benejaakan;” ... “encamped at Horhagidgad;” ... “pitched in Jotbathah;” ... “encamped at Ebronah;” ... “encamped at Eziongaber;” ... “pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh;” ... “pitched in mount Hor;” ... “pitched in Zalmonah;” ... “pitched in Punon;” ... “pitched in Oboth;” ... “pitched in Ijeabarim, in the border of Moab;” ... “pitched in Dibongad;” ... “encamped in Almondiblathaim;” ... “pitched in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo;” ... “pitched in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho;” ... “pitched by Jordan, from Bethjesimoth even unto Abelshittim in the plains of Moab.”

These 42 different camp sites help to show what the wilderness represents in Revelation 12:6 and 14. Like the Israelites who moved from place to place, the church also has not attained her permanent spiritual “land,” but is still being taught, and led, often in a roundabout way, to her final destination, the promised “rest,” and the eternal inheritance of the saints.

Illustrations of this occur when individual Christians abandon formerly held interpretations, and systems of interpretation, for a different view, or leave the denomination they were brought up in, and become aligned with another. The wilderness for us is the unsettled state, of seeking our promised land, not having attained it already.

The two different flights of the woman to the wilderness may be explained as representing two different viewpoints, or methods of interpretation; one being the earth-bound view, to which the woman is restricted, when she lacks the two wings of an eagle, that are given to her in her second flight to the wilderness. The wings of eagles represent an understanding of prophecy, as when an eagle soars high, riding on the wind, it views the earth from above, picturing the divine viewpoint, which contrasts with a human viewpoint, that is repre-

⁵Daniel 7:8

⁶Daniel 7:3-4

⁷1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

sented by the eyes like the eyes of a man, possessed by little horn, which dominates the saints in the vision of Daniel 7.

In the wilderness the woman has a place prepared of God, and they *feed* her there for 1,260 days, but who “they” are is not stated. Then, we read of a great war in heaven. It is a spiritual war, as it is fought between the various angels of the dragon, and Michael and his angels. But that does not mean that the saints or the church have no part in it. Michael is victorious, and the dragon and his angels are cast out. When Satan is cast out, verse 11 says “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.” Thus in this war, the church is involved in a great struggle for the truth. But it is not a war between flesh and blood. Paul said:

Ephesians 6:12

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The woman is persecuted by the dragon, who sees he has been cast out.

About the time the magnificent temple in Jerusalem was nearing completion, John the Baptist went out to the wilderness to preach. The people had to leave the towns and cities, and go to the desert to hear him. John did not join one of the Jewish sects; the wilderness was neutral territory.

The woman has a place prepared for her in the wilderness, which pictures saints seeking God, by following the teaching of the scriptures. In the quest for the truth, many have left established institutions. The spiritual journey of saints to their promised “rest” is represented by the woman fleeing to the wilderness. Jesus said,

Matthew 7:13-14

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The disciples who followed Jesus left all; they left their traditions, families, and friends.⁸

Most people accept the teaching of the religion or denomination in which they were raised. But Jesus

⁸Mark 10:28, Luke 5:28; 18:28

showed that for those who follow him, even family unity could be threatened.⁹

In the wilderness, the woman is nourished with the message of the gospel.

The children of Israel were fed with manna in the wilderness, but Jesus said that he is the true manna.¹⁰

The wilderness represents the way through which Christ leads his saints to their eternal inheritance.

John 10:4

And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

The saints are those who follow him wherever he goes.

Revelation 14:4

These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

The saints seek a heavenly inheritance.

Hebrews 13:14

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Paul said, “come out from among them,” referring to the world.

2 Corinthians 6:17

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

From the wilderness, the whore can be seen.

Revelation 17:3

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Again there is a warning to the saints, to come out of Babylon:

⁹Matthew 10:35-3; 19:29

¹⁰John 5:32-58

Revelation 18:4

Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

The wilderness pictures the period of preparation of the saints before they enter their promised rest. Jesus promises rest.

Matthew 11:28

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The purpose of the wilderness

The purpose of Israel's wilderness experience under Moses was to try them, and for discipline, and to prepare them for entry into the land of promise.

Deuteronomy 8:2-5

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.

Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee.

Paul tells us there was yet another reason for it; their experience was for our examples.¹¹ Ezekiel foretold another wilderness experience, which must be the same wilderness experience John described as applying to the church.¹² Ezekiel's prophecy cannot be said to have been fulfilled by ethnic Jews migrating to Palestine in modern times, but it applies to the church's experience, in a figurative sense.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

¹² Revelation 12:6, 14

Ezekiel 20:33-38

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you: And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face.

Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord GOD.

And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant:

And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD.

This can only refer to the wilderness experience of the church, and the saints who are gathered from many countries over a time span of many centuries. The covenant is the new covenant. The promise of the new covenant is that God will write his laws in our hearts, and in our minds, and "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."¹³

Although the wilderness that Ezekiel refers to in his prophecy is clearly not the same as the literal wilderness of the land of Egypt, God's pleading with his people is comparable, and Paul warned that the same judgments that fell upon the Israelites in the wilderness apply to New Testament believers. He compared their experience with the experience of Christians.¹⁴

The church's struggle for the truth

The time periods that are so prominent in chapters 11, 12, & 13 of Revelation form a clear link with the prophecies of Daniel, which is where John obtained the phrase "a time, times, and a half." This phrase and the numbers associated with it, 1,260 days, and 42 months, all point to the same period, of half a prophetic week, and they

¹³ Hebrews 10:16-17

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:1-11

correspond to the similar symbolic 1,290 days and 1,335 days of Daniel 12.

The pattern in the phrase a time, times, and a half exists in these numbers, and becomes evident when the period is expressed in terms of leap years of 13 months and regular years of 12 months. In the ancient calendar used in Daniel's time, months were determined by the phases of the moon, and each month began with a new moon. Years of 13 months were leap years, and regular years had 12 months. The numbers fit the pattern of "a time, times and a half," as follows:

$$1,290 \text{ days} = 13 \times 30 + 2 \times 12 \times 30 + 12 \times 30/2$$

$$1,335 \text{ days} = 12 \times 30 + 2 \times 13 \times 30 + 13 \times 30/2$$

$$1,260 \text{ days} = 12 \times 30 + 2 \times 12 \times 30 + 12 \times 30/2$$

A literal three and a half years cannot have two or three different numbers of days, but a symbolic three and a half years can!

The phrase "a time, times, and a half" occurs in Daniel 7:25, and in Daniel 12:7. I suggest it is the last half-week of the 70th week of Daniel 9:24-27, when Christ continues to confirm his covenant with his church. One of the promises Jesus gave to his disciples was "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."¹⁵

In Revelation 12, John applies the 1,260 days and the *time, times, and a half* to the period when the woman is in the wilderness.

The 42 months in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5 probably alludes to the sojourn of the Israelites in the wilderness, when they were led by Moses, en route to the promised land, which they entered and took possession of under the leadership of Joshua.

There is a connection between the *time, times, and a half* and Daniel's 70th week, the 70th week is divided, and consists of two parts, one being the ministry of Jesus and John the Baptist, while the last half-week is symbolic of the entire church age, and when that period is fulfilled, all of the things listed in Daniel 9:24, each of them being associated with the gospel, have been accomplished.

Daniel 9:24

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in

¹⁵John 16:13

everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

Revelation 12 features two separate descriptions of the woman's flight to the wilderness, the first one occurring *before* the description of the war in heaven, and the second occurring *after*. In both of these flights to the wilderness, the woman is fed. In her second flight to the wilderness she is equipped with eagle's wings. In both flights to the wilderness, the time specified is similar, and corresponds to the symbolic "time, times, and a half," and its equivalent of 1,260 days, and to the duration of the ministry of the two witnesses. The wilderness depicts the sojourn of Christians in this present life.¹⁶

The character of the woman's two flights to the wilderness may be contrasted.

The 1st flight to the wilderness

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, there is a famine, of "hearing the word of the Lord."¹⁷

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, there is no rain of the word of God, but a famine. The 1,260 days correspond to the three and a half years of no rain in the days of Elijah.

The two witnesses have power to "shut heaven."¹⁸ The "rain" is symbolic of God's word.

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the holy city is trampled by Gentiles.¹⁹

People view the prophecies through the spectacles of men who they view as spiritual "giants," and see themselves as "grasshoppers" in comparison to them. They quote from commentaries, and follow the traditions of men that are embraced by particular denominations or sects, that effectively kill the two witnesses, the word, and the Spirit.

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the saints are overcome by the little horn, the Antichrist spirit.²⁰

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the saints are scattered.²¹ This has been fulfilled, and is shown by the tens of thousands of denominations.

¹⁶1 Corinthians 10:1-12

¹⁷Amos 8:11-13

¹⁸Revelation 11:6

¹⁹Revelation 11:2

²⁰Daniel 7:21, 25

²¹Daniel 12:7

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the church becomes desolate, like a valley of dry bones.²²

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the church is plundered by the armies of Gog and Magog.²³

In Zechariah's prophecy, in Zechariah 14:1-3, many of the saints are taken into captivity, houses rifled, and women ravished. It is a spiritual seduction, such as Paul alludes to in 2 Corinthians 11:1-3.

In her *first* flight to the wilderness, the world rejoices over the desolation of the church, and the death of the two witnesses.²⁴

The 2nd flight to the wilderness

In her *second* flight to the wilderness, the saints have renewed strength. The woman has been given eagle's wings.²⁵ The prophecies may be viewed in a new way— from above, as pictured by eagle's wings, whereas in the first flight to the wilderness, her point of view was earth-bound, having "eyes like the eyes of a man."

Revelation 12:14

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.

Isaiah said the saints will renew their strength, and "shall mount up with wings as eagles."²⁶ David said God "satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."²⁷

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, Satan, the accuser of the brethren, has been cast out.²⁸

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, the wilderness itself is changed. Isaiah said, the wilderness will be glad; the desert will "blossom as the rose,"²⁹ streams will flow in the desert;³⁰ the mountains and hills bring forth fruit;³¹ hills will rejoice.³² God will make bright clouds, and showers of rain.³³

²²Ezekiel 37:1-2

²³Ezekiel 38:10-13

²⁴Revelation 11:10

²⁵Revelation 12:14

²⁶Isaiah 40:31

²⁷Psalms 103:5

²⁸Revelation 12:9

²⁹Isaiah 35:1

³⁰Isaiah 35:6

³¹Ezekiel 36:11

³²Psalms 65:11-13

³³Zechariah 10:1

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, Isaiah said, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped."³⁴

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert."³⁵

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, there is a highway for her to use, called "The way of holiness ... the redeemed shall walk there."³⁶

In her *second* flight to the wilderness, the woman has some help; the flood from the serpent's mouth gets swallowed up by the earth.³⁷ The deceptions are exposed.

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, the two witnesses come to life, and stand on their feet.³⁸

Daniel said the beast is slain, and his body given to the burning flame.³⁹

Fire falls on those who "know not God."

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, the war between the angels has been fought. The saints are victorious.⁴⁰

In the woman's *second* flight to the wilderness, they are brought into the bond of the covenant,⁴¹ and the ark of the covenant is seen in the temple.⁴² This may be understood as the fulfillment of the new covenant, that says God will write his laws on our hearts, and remembers our sins no more.⁴³

The second exodus

The woman's flight to the wilderness in Revelation 12:6 & 14 was foretold by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

³⁴Isaiah 35:5

³⁵Isaiah 35:6

³⁶Isaiah 35:8; 40:3; 43:19; 49:11; 62:11

³⁷Revelation 12:16

³⁸Revelation 11:11

³⁹Daniel 7:11

⁴⁰Revelation 12:11-12

⁴¹Ezekiel 20:37

⁴²Revelation 11:19

⁴³Hebrews 10:16-17

Isaiah described it in terms of a second exodus.

Isaiah 11:10-12

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.

And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

In vs. 10, Isaiah identified the ensign as Christ. Zechariah 9:16 refers to the saints as an ensign.

Those who have a part in this great exodus come to worship at Jerusalem.

Isaiah 27:13

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

Isaiah said Jerusalem and Zion would be raised up;⁴⁴ and in the New Testament this prophecy is fulfilled, as shown in Hebrews 12:22-23, where Jerusalem is referred to as the “heavenly” Jerusalem; “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem...”

According to Jeremiah, the second exodus will eclipse the first one.

Jeremiah 16:14-15

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and

from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.

Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians encouraged to go to the land of Canaan, so Jeremiah’s reference to “the land that I gave unto their fathers” must refer to the eternal inheritance of the saints, under the figure of the promised land, which was called a “rest,”⁴⁵ but was only a type or shadow of the eternal “rest” promised to the saints.⁴⁶

In the New Testament, Abraham is called the “father” of those who have faith in Christ.⁴⁷ Paul called him “the father of us all.”

Jeremiah described the second exodus as something so great, and wonderful, that the first one, when Jews came out of Egypt under Moses, will seem insignificant in comparison.

Jeremiah 23:7-8

Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

What is the promised land of the saints? It is not Canaan, but what Canaan represents, the invisible things that the saints hope for.

The highway in the wilderness

Isaiah said, “make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”⁴⁸

Isaiah’s message was taken up by John the Baptist.

The highway construction Isaiah and John the Baptist referred to was clearly not about building a literal road in the desert, but it was a metaphor. It is one that applies to the teachings of Jesus, for example in the sermon on the mount, and to the teaching of the apostles.

⁴⁵Psalm 95:11

⁴⁶Hebrews 4:8

⁴⁷Romans 4:16

⁴⁸Isaiah 40:3

⁴⁴Isaiah 2:2

Isaiah gave the name of the highway; it is called "The way of holiness."⁴⁹

The woman in Revelation 12, who represents the church, is described as fleeing to the wilderness, in verse 6 and verse 14, and it is in the wilderness, which is a spiritual or figurative one, that this figurative highway exists.

Proverbs 16:17 says: "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil."

Paul spoke plainly; he said, an essential part of the "seal" of a Christian, is to "depart from iniquity."

2 Timothy 2:19

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

Paul wrote,

Hebrews 12:14

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

The apostle Peter gave similar advice, in a step by step fashion, for every believer.⁵⁰

A highway implies a well defined, and well traveled route, that many people follow. The highway in the wilderness leads to the kingdom of God, by the most direct route possible.

Isaiah said, the rough places will be made straight, the mountains will be made low, and the valleys will be exalted, or filled up.⁵¹ Of course, none of this was meant to be taken literally. The mountains being made low suggests mysteries of scripture will be explained; valleys being filled suggests that things unknown, and missing information will be revealed. Rough places being made straight suggests hard sayings will be explained and understood.

A highway implies a route that is well marked and documented. Its destination is clearly defined; the highway in the wilderness leads people into the kingdom of God. The objective is kept in view; dangers and hazards and potential wrong turns are identified, and marked.

Landmarks along highways are identified. In a wilderness, the mountains are prominent landmarks. Experienced travelers recognize them, and so can easily de-

termine where they are. On the highway in the wilderness, the prophecies of scripture have this role. Mysterious prophecies, and covenants, and revelations of God, are represented by mountains in scripture. For example, Sinai represents the Mosaic legislation. Less prominent revelations are represented by hills. These are all included in the things promised to the saints, and so are represented by the promised land.

Where a highway exists, the overall plan is laid out; on the highway in the wilderness, the overview is revealed by prophecy. The gospel, after all, is a prophecy.

This spiritual highway in the wilderness is for the righteous, not the wicked. The wicked won't follow it.

Isaiah 35:8 [NIV]

And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it.

Other translations suggest a different meaning to the last part of the verse; Young has "even fools err not."

On a highway, the route has to be so clearly marked, even simple folk can find their way.

Isaiah said that the mountains of God will be a "way," and his highways will be exalted. I suggest, the mountains Isaiah referred to are the prophecies of scripture. They become a "way," and a route for the saints to follow, when they are properly interpreted.

Isaiah 49:11

And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.

Isaiah said, "prepare ye the way of the people." He also mentions raising a "standard" or a banner.

Isaiah 62:10-11

Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.

Behold, the LORD hath proclaimed unto the end of the world, Say ye to the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy salvation cometh; behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

What could be more clear? The way of the saints leads to their eternal inheritance, and their promised "rest" in the kingdom of God; that is the "highway in the wilderness."

⁴⁹ Isaiah 35:8

⁵⁰ 2 Peter 1:3-8

⁵¹ Isaiah 40:4

What is the white stone?

In the wilderness, the Israelites were fed daily with manna, and the church, the woman who flees to the wilderness in Revelation 12:6 and 14, is likewise fed with spiritual manna, the word of God, contained in scripture.

In his messages to the churches, Jesus promised the church at Pergamos that those he will give those who overcome the hidden manna to eat. This must refer to a non-literal interpretation of the scriptures, otherwise there would be nothing "hidden" about it, as the simplistic literal approach can be found by anyone.

Some people, such as the dispensationalists, think there is merit in taking the scriptures as literally as possible. But the "hidden manna" is preferred, which Jesus promised only to those who "overcome."

Revelation 2:17

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Many interpretations have been offered for the white stone in this scripture. Tony Garland wrote:⁵²

A number of alternative interpretations have been offered for the meaning of the white stone.

1. Token of Innocence - A white pebble was placed in a ballot box by a Greek judge pronouncing a sentence of acquittal (a black pebble indicating condemnation). ...
2. Token of Privilege - A *tessera* ... was given at Olympic games to the victor with subsequent attendant social privileges. ...
3. Token of Initiation - A token of initiation into the cult of Asklepios. ...
4. Good Omen - Reflecting the practice of a person who placed a white or black pebble for each happy or unhappy day into an urn. At his death, the colors were totaled to rate the happiness of his life. ...

⁵²Garland
http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Book_of_Revelation/commentary/htm/030217.htm

5. High Priest's Headdress - "One explanation links the white stone with the platelet of gold that graced the high priest's headdress (Ex. 28:36-37)." ...

6. High Priest's Breastplate - "Another explanation from Jewish customs is that the imagery of the white stone originated with the twelve stones in the high priest's breastplate. The names of each of the twelve tribes in Israel were inscribed on the stones. One difficulty with this view is that the stones in the breastplate were not white (Ex. 28:17-21)." ...

7. Urim and Thummim - Trench supposes the white stone may be a diamond, the same stone which is the Urim and Thummim. ...

8. Stone Tablets of the Law - "A fourth explanation in Jewish custom for the white stone connects it with the stones on which God inscribed His moral will (i.e., the Ten Commandments)."

The stones set up at Mount Ebal, after the Israelites entered the promised land, where the law was written out, were first whitewashed with lime, so they became "white stones."⁵³ Garland wrote:⁵⁴

The written law upon the tablets of stone was a picture of how one day God would write the law upon tablets of flesh: ... (2Cor. 2:2) The white stone may be a memorial to the law in that it records a new name which expresses the character of God to which the believer is being conformed (Rom. 8:29; 1Cor. 15:49; 2Cor. 3:18; Php. 3:21; Col. 3:10).

In his Revelation commentary, J. Preston Eby connected the white stone of Revelation 2:17 with *bdellium* of Genesis 2:11-12, and so, with the garden of Eden.⁵⁵ He wrote:

In our text in the book of Revelation the white stone is mentioned in connection with the hidden manna. Both are given together to the overcomer! In itself, manna was a reminder of Eden: for even while God's people were in the wilderness on their way to the promised land

⁵³Deuteronomy 27:2-8

⁵⁴Garland, *Op. cit.*

⁵⁵<http://www.sigler.org/eby/REV45.htm>

of abundance and fullness, the Lord rained down manna from heaven and their food was plentiful, delicious, and easy to obtain – as, of course, it had been in the Garden. But, there is a deeper truth yet! Just in case any might fail to get the connection, the Holy Spirit recorded that the manna was the color of bdellium (Num. 11:7) – the only occurrence of that word apart from its original mention in the book of Genesis! And this plainly tells us the color of bdellium, since we are told elsewhere (Ex. 16:31) that manna was white! Both manna and bdellium were white!

Wesley's Notes on Numbers 11:7 state:⁵⁶

11:7 As coriander - seed - Not for colour, for that is black, but for shape and figure. Bdelium - Is either the gum of a tree, of a white and bright colour, or rather a gem or precious stone, as the Hebrew doctors take it; and particularly a pearl wherewith the Manna manifestly agrees both in its colour, which is white, Exo 16:14, and in its figure which is round.

Several older commentaries connect *bdellium* with a pearl.

The Geneva Study Bible says:⁵⁷

Numbers 11:7

And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of {e} bdelium.

(e) Which is a white pearl, or precious stone.

The Net Bible,⁵⁸ and *GNU Webster's Dictionary*, 1913⁵⁹ both say that the word *bdellium* is thought to denote "pearls." *The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible* says:

and the colour thereof as the colour of bdelium; not an aromatic gum, which Pliny speaks of, which is clear as wax, for that is black or blackish, and not white as the manna; besides, this should be read, not "bdellium", but

⁵⁶<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/wesleys-explanatory-notes/numbers/numbers-11.html>

⁵⁷<http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/geneva-study-bible/numbers/numbers-11.html>

⁵⁸<http://net.bible.org/dictionary.php?word=Bdellium>

⁵⁹<http://www.wordnik.com/words/bdellium>

"bdeloah", and is a precious stone, and, according to Bochart, the pearl; so Ben Melech observes, that it is a precious stone; some say the diamond, and others a round white stone, which they bore and join stones together, and make a chain of, he doubtless means a pearl necklace; though Jarchi says it is the crystal, and so the Jewish writers commonly; (See Gill on 2:12); hence it appears the manna was very pleasant to look at, being of a round form, and of a pearl or crystal colour.

Navigating the Bible even translates the word for which the KJV has *bdellium*, as: "with a pearl-like luster."

Numbers 11:7

The manna was like coriander seed with a pearl-like luster.

The "white stone," that Jesus promises his saints, I think probably refers to the pearl which Jesus spoke of in his parable of the merchant who sold all he had, in order to acquire one pearl of great price, which represents gaining entry into the kingdom of God.

Matthew 13:45-47

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

In Revelation 21:21, the gates in the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem each consist of one pearl. "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl."

Labour to enter into rest

We are to labour, to enter into *rest*, the promised inheritance, which is a lasting one. This involves faith in the word of God.

Hebrews 4:11-12

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and

spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Peter said the saints have escaped the corruption that is in the world.

2 Peter 1:3-4

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

In the Olivet discourse, Jesus warned against following anyone trying to lure us away to a desert, or to some secret place, to find the truth.

Matthew 24:26-28

Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

The place Jesus said we should flee to is not a literal wilderness, but he said "flee to the mountains," referring to the promises of God to the saints.

These words of Jesus show that involvement in an obscure sect is not how to follow Christ. The light of the gospel will shine from the east to the west; it will be seen all over the world.

An angel said to John, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."⁶⁰

The two wings of an eagle given to the woman represent an understanding of prophecy. In her second flight to the wilderness, equipped with the powerful wings the eagle, she finds her place, where she is nourished. This follows the victory of the saints over the serpent.

An eagle is a predator which feeds on serpents! When the scriptures became widely available, and were translated into the languages of the people, there was

much opposition from the established churches and clergy, yet the church was given spiritual nourishment from the scriptures. Many denominations arose, because of varying interpretations. The word itself was translated and distributed around the world. When she flees to the wilderness possessing the wings of eagles, which represent the divine point of view, the prophecies of scripture may be properly interpreted and understood.

Copyright ©2010 by Douglas E. Cox
All Rights Reserved.
[tcc@sentex.net]

The last version of this file is available at:
<http://vinyl2.sentex.net/~tcc/dload/ww.pdf>

Version date: September 29, 2010

Also see:
Who are the Two Witnesses?
<http://vinyl2.sentex.net/~tcc/dload/WTW.pdf>

⁶⁰Revelation 19:10