

20th Century Bible Course

LESSON TWENTY-NINE

Dear faithful Student:

The prophetic drama of Revelation 12 is set in the wilderness experience where the saints are sheltered for 1260 years. It reaches its climax in Satan's struggle against God's remnant people who will be living in the last days. We cannot afford not to know what God is trying to reveal to us in this prophecy.

Isn't it a paradox that the very struggle to keep truth alive through the ages has resulted in the divisions of Christianity that we know today. Oh, friend, I have determined long ago to find a people willing to stand guard over Bible truth though the heavens fall! And evidently there is such a group, for they are described in the final verses of the chapter we are about to study.

The blaze of the Reformation that began centuries ago has not entirely dimmed. Its brightest days are still ahead. It will burst into a blaze of glory in these final days of earth's history. I want to have a part in it, don't you?

Let us humbly pray that God's Spirit will indeed lead us into an understanding of the important points of this chapter, so that we may discover who God's remnant people are and be numbered among them.

Faithfully yours,

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 29: GOD'S CHURCH-THE DEPOSITORY OF TRUTH

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 12

A Chinese exchange student registering at an American university was puzzled by the question on the entrance form: "What is your religion?" His answer, written in the little English he had learned, was "Confusion."

There are thousands who are not followers of Confucius, who could truthfully write that their religion is "Confusion." Many people do not really know what they believe. With close to 250 different denominations, how can anyone be sure he is in the right church? Or doesn't it matter, as long as you believe in Jesus Christ.

Part 1-- THE CHURCH

1. What is the church called, and who is the head of the church? Ephesians 1:20-23

2. Who are members of Christ's body? 1 Corinthians 12:27

3. How does one become a member of the body of Christ, His church? (verse 13)

4. How many churches (bodies) does God have? Ephesians 4:3-6 _____

Part 2-- THE CHURCH AND TRUTH

1. Where is God's "depository of truth"? 1 Timothy 3:15 _____

2. With what does God equate truth? 1 Timothy 2:3,4 _____

The more a person studies the Bible, the more he realizes that in God's thinking, truth takes top priority. Why is truth so important? For 6000 years Satan-the rebellious angel-- has been waging unceasing warfare against God. His weapons are insinuations, lies and subtle doubts. It is his determination to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9) -if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24)! God cannot use these weapons, for He cannot lie. Deception is foreign to His character. He must rely only upon truth, for He *is* truth (John 14:6).

Our salvation depends upon which side we choose to join. No wonder God says He wants everyone to come to a knowledge of truth, for only by knowing the truth about God's character of love and Satan's of sin and hate, can we hope to make an intelligent choice. We are no match against the shrewd, subtle deceptions of heaven's enemy.

3. Upon what does our ultimate freedom depend? John 8:32 _____

4. Why are so many going to be lost? 2 Thessalonians 2:9,10 _____

Incredible, but true! Lost because they were not interested enough in truth to be able to detect Satan's deceptions and errors! What a tragedy! Apparently a love for the truth is something that we can develop. And must develop, if we wish to be saved.

Thought question: If our salvation depends upon knowing truth, do you think God would make truth so complicated that very few could understand it? _____

5. What is truth? John 17:17 _____

Jesus said, "I am the way, the *truth*, and the life" (John 14:6). "The *words that I speak* unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). How then, can we know truth? By studying His Word-the Scriptures.

6. How many are given an opportunity to know truth? John 1:9 _____

Titus 2:11 _____

Light is truth. Light is God's Word (Psalm 119:105). It follows, then, that darkness is the opposite, or error and falsehood (Ephesians 5:8, 11).

7. What attitudes toward truth are dangerous?

a. **Outright rejection of opportunities to learn truth.** Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for _____; because thou hast _____, I will also reject thee."

b. **Refusal to obey known truth.** Hebrews 10:26 "If we sin _____ after we have received the _____, there remaineth _____."

c. **Putting off our response to truth.** Hebrews 2:3 "How shall we escape, if we _____ so great salvation."

Is there any insurance against being deceived? Thank God, there is! Jesus Himself

gave us several clues and safeguards. If we follow each of these, we need never fear about following the wrong leader.

- a. Hosea 4:6. Take every opportunity that comes to you to learn truth.
- b. Proverbs 4:18; John 5:46, 47. Recognize that truth is progressive. God does not guarantee to help us understand new truths if we have not yet acted on what He has already revealed to us. Perhaps that explains why Paul said that there are some who are ever learning," and "never able to come to a knowledge of truth" (2Timothy 3:7). Burn this principle deep into your mind: *The reception of truth as it is offered is the indispensable prerequisite for understanding and receiving additional truth.*
- c. John 7:17. BEFORE you study the Scriptures, commit yourself to follow truth, whatever the cost. If you do this Christ has promised to help you distinguish between truth and error.

8. What will Christ's true followers do? John 10:27 _____

Can we follow Jesus and walk with Him and be going in a different direction than He? Impossible! "Can two walk together, except they be agreed"? (Amos 3:3). We cannot walk with Jesus unless we are willing to follow *Him* wherever He may lead.

Thought Question: Can a person hang on to error-known error-and be following Jesus? _____
Why? _____

9. Is truth still truth if it is tampered with? Romans 1:25 _____
What does it then become? _____

10. What did Christ say about doctrines based on tradition? Mark 7:7-9 _____

Part 3-- GOD'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

1. What was God's church called in Old Testament times? Acts 7:38 _____

In every hour of earth's history, God has had an organization to represent His cause.

2. What did Jesus say indicating that He would establish a church? Matthew 16:15-18 _____

It was upon the great truth stated by Peter-that Christ was the Son of the living God - that the Christian church was to be built. Jesus is called the "chief corner stone" in Ephesians 2:19, 20, and "the Rock" in 1 Corinthians 10:4. Christ is the only foundation on which the true church can be built (1 Corinthians 3:11).

3. What instructions did Jesus give that showed He intended His church to have an organization on this earth? Matthew 18:15-18 _____

The apostle John was given a remarkable prophecy that outlined the history of God's people from the days of Christ to the end of time (Revelation 12). Before you answer the next several questions, read Revelation 12. This symbolic prophecy gives an overview of the history of the church in the Christian age.

4. Describe the beautiful woman in this prophecy. Revelation 12:1 _____

5. Who is Zion? Isaiah 51:16 _____

6. What does God use to symbolize His people, or Zion? Jeremiah 6:2 _____

God uses the symbol of a pure woman to represent His church, or people. Paul called the church at Corinth a "chaste virgin" (2 Corinthians 11:2, NT 164 [129]). The woman of Revelation 12 depicts the history of the Christian church in its battle with Satan.

7. Who is the great red dragon? Revelation 12:9 _____

8. How is Christ portrayed in this prophecy? (verse 5) _____

9. How did the devil try to destroy Christ as soon as He was born? (verses 3, 4; Matthew 2:1-16) _____

Satan worked through Herod, who, though a Jew, was appointed king by Rome.

10. Because Satan knows His days are numbered, what does He do to the church (the woman)? (verses 12-14) _____

11. Where did the woman (church) flee to escape the 1260 years of persecution? (verses 6, 14) _____

Verse 6 gives the time period as "1260 days." In a previous lesson you learned that in prophetic time, a day stands for a literal year (Lessons 20, 26). In spite of the winds of persecution, truth has never been completely extinguished. Even through the Dark Ages there were a few who loyally carried the torch of truth.

"Then in the days of the Reformation one truth after another was uncovered and polished bright. One Reformer after another contributed to the growing light and gathered followers about him as he marched forward. Unfortunately, there was a tendency for these followers to stop wherever their leader stopped in the search for truth. . . . *And so we have our denominations*" (George E. Vandeman, *A Day to Remember*, pp. 64, 65).

The story of Revelation 12 is not yet finished. Evidently the blaze of the Reformation that began centuries ago has not entirely dimmed. Its brightest days are still ahead. I want to have a part in that, don't you?

12. Against what part of the true church does Satan direct his wrath and final warfare? (verse 17) _____

We live in the days of the remnant, or last segment of God's people. As they carry His torch of truth in a world of skepticism and unbelief, a world of compromise and immorality, they will feel the assaults of the arch-rebel with an intensity never before experienced.

13. What two characteristics does God's remnant, or last-day church have? (verse 17) _____

Here are the identifying characteristics of those who stand firm for truth. "The remnant of the church, like the remnant of a bolt of cloth, will exhibit the same *weave* of doctrinal exposition, the *same pattern* of obedience, the same *color* of spirituality, as the original. It is the same truth that angered the dragon in the days of the apostles, the same truth for which the Waldenses, the Huguenots, and others, laid down their lives. The woman in white was forced to flee into the wilderness, but God preserved her there. It is the greatest story of wilderness survival ever told. The church stands today, undaunted and unafraid, proclaiming truth, the same truth, to this last generation. Fearlessly she stands for the *commandments of God* and the *testimony of Jesus*, facing the rising wrath of the dragon" (George E. Vandeman, *Planet in Rebellion*, pp. 404, 405).

14. Which commandment does nearly the whole Christian world ignore?

Exodus 20:8-11 _____

In general, Christian churches agree upon nine of the ten commandments. God said His people will keep the commandments. Can a church which keeps only nine of the ten be called a commandment-keeping church? James says, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). God's true people will keep *all* His commandments. If a church does not keep all ten commandments, it cannot claim to be the "remnant of her seed," for it lacks one of the two identifying characteristics that God has given.

There are several flags in the world that have stars on them, but there is only one which has 50 stars on it. There are a number of flags with red stripes, and some with blue stripes, but only one flag with seven red stripes and six white stripes. Just as an American can easily recognize his flag by certain specifications, so the earnest inquirer for truth, by noting certain specifications, can easily and with certainty locate God's true people today.

The great lesson of Revelation 12 is that Satan, cast out of heaven for his rebellion, wages continuous warfare against Christ, the Son of God, against God's people, and against the divine law of God. The keeping of the commandments of God will be one of the things that will identify God's remnant people. Is it any wonder that Satan will seek to discourage them by bringing reproach and trouble upon them?

15. Are all God's people in one church today? John 10:16 _____

16. What did Jesus say His sheep would do? (verse 27) _____

Two neighbor boys were herding sheep, one on a small plateau, the other on a nearby knoll. A fierce storm forced the boys to take refuge under an overhanging rock, their sheep crowding close to them. After the storm the lads found it impossible to separate the two flocks. At last, fearing their fathers' censure, they started home. Halfway down the mountain the boys parted, each taking the path to his own home. As the sheep came to the fork in the trail they, too, separated, each one following his own shepherd.

Does God need a computer printout to know who are His? Or need He only take note of which shepherd each person follows? Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice, . . . and they follow me." The proof that we are His sheep is that we follow Him, that we join the right flock! There is coming a great separation day when the sheep will be placed on the right and the goats on the left. By standing firmly for truth today we will gain the necessary strength to be true to God and the principles of truth when the crisis over God's law comes to a head. May God help us to be on His side.