

The Remnant

by Desmond Ford

Question: Who are the remnant spoken of in Rev 12:17?

Answer: Keep in mind that some translations have “the rest of her seed,” reminding us that remnant does not mean something in and of itself distinct but rather something reflective of and continuous with what has gone before. So the remnant of the last days is identical in nature with the church of preceding times.

This, of course, is as it should and must be. True Christians preserve the testimony given by Jesus and testify to him by word and deed. Thus the true church in all ages treasures the Scriptures (all of which are in one sense the testimony of Jesus inasmuch as it was He who spoke through the prophets and apostles. See 1 Peter 1¹⁰⁻¹¹) proclaims the gospel of justification by faith alone and is obedient to the known will of God.

Remember the meaning of Jesus is “Jehovah saves,” and the essence of his testimony in all ages is the plan of salvation, i.e., the gospel message. As regards “the commandments of God,” mentions in this verse, it is wrong to limit it to merely the Decalogue. Baptism, the Lord's Supper, and many other items in the ^Ggospels and the ^Eepistles must be included. To this end consider the word of Paul in 1 Cor 14:37: “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.”

Thus Revelation 12:17 is just one way of saying that the true church of all ages proclaims the gospel and the law of God, calling for faith and obedience, as justification and sanctification are offered to all. ~~You~~^{You} limit “the commandments of God” just to the Decalogue is wrong, and similarly to exclude the Decalogue is similarly wrong.

When we speak of “the true church,” we do not refer to any denomination, for the New Testament knows no such. There is but one family of God though its [^]embers are scattered among many groups. According to the New Testament, “no man can call Jesus Lord save by the Holy Spirit,” 1 Cor 12:3. Thus anyone owning Christ as Savior and Lord is a member of his family, of his church.

This is true though not all believers see the particulars of duty alike. Many earnest Christians have not been baptized by immersion, though the New Testament does teach such a mode for the ordinance. They are none the less God's children, for our God does not recognize as his children only those whose exegesis of Scripture is always perfect. He looks at the heart, the inclination, the will, and where there is the intent to please God and obey his known will, there that person is regarded as a keeper of the commandments of God. Neither is perfection called for, as this as well as the preceding matter of accurate knowledge would exclude all of us.

X Observe that in Luke 1:6,20, we have humans described as perfect before God, keeping all his commandments, although their understanding of the will of God and their performance of it was defective. Thank ^God the condition of heaven is the acceptance of the perfect righteousness of Christ, not our tattered, begrimed human robes of character.

X When we read in Rev 12:17 of "the rest (remnant) of her seed," we need to ask who the "her" refers to. In the preceding verses we have the vision of the resplendent woman who brings forth both Christ and his believing brethren and sisters of all ^{time}ages. The "her" is the church of all ages beginning from the coming of the Messiah in one sense, but in another taking in all believers from the dawn of time. (The symbolism of the moon in verse one is an allusion to the Old Testament era which shone with the reflected light of gospel promise from the time of Gen 3:15 and its pledge of the coming Redeemer and his victory.) Those who wish to make the remnant a denomination in verse 17 are faced with the impossibility of needing to do the same with verse one.

Revelation 12:17 speaks of the dragon's final "war" against the body of Christ and this war is portrayed in the final verses of the next chapter. The day is coming when all on earth will be forced by the combined forces of apostate government and apostate church to bow to humanistic religion rather than the testimony of Jesus in Scripture. The test of those who claim to be proclaiming the gospel of God will be their refusal to disobey God whatever the human pressure put upon them.

X In all ages sanctification (obedience and the character thus wrought out) has been the sign of justification, but **not** its method or precursor. When we read of the sign in "the forehead and the hand," this is an allusion to such verses as Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11:18; Exodus 13:9,16. Do not miss the obvious relationship between the mark in the forehead and hand, and the divine requirement that the laws of God be "as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes." Exodus 13:9 To this the Jew responded by his phylacteries, thus literalizing what God intended as symbolic. X

X The final conflict foretold in the closing verses of Revelation 13 will manifest the remnant of the woman's seed, in other words, God's true children. Not yet has this conflict in its universal nature transpired, and therefore none can claim yet to be in the company foretold by Revelation 12:17.

X A parallel verse to Rev 12:17 is 14:12. Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Observe the parallel in Revelation 13:10. "Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints." In the preceding verse is a pictorial presentation of persecution, and it is this persecution which finally makes manifest the remnant church of God. Revelation 14:12 compared with verse 9-11 tells the same story that the company spoken of will appear in the final conflict at the very end of earth's history.

2 As an excellent and well-known book of ^{the} last generation, *Questions on Doctrine*, affirmed—
all genuine Christians today are potential members of that eschatological remnant.