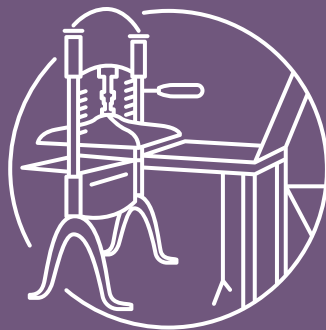


Organized for Service



Week Six

inTro



Read This Week's Passage:
Revelation 12



See videos at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH06-a

ORGANIZING THE CHURCH

The Reformation began a long process of rediscovering truths that were lost in the Dark Ages. When it ended in the late 1700s, the United States became the epicenter of Christian progress. In the 1830s, earnest believers from a wide variety of Christian churches began rallying around the hope of Christ's return, and in the 1840s and 50s, the early Adventist pioneers made key doctrinal breakthroughs that shaped our history and message. At that time, the fledgling movement was held together by shared beliefs and the magazine *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, which communicated beliefs and connected believers.

Publishing was an integral part of early Adventism that made a legally organized association vital. The publications needed to be attached to an official entity and the church needed to avoid registering property in an individual's name. Slow steps were taken toward organizing their publications and congregations. They needed to adopt the correct beliefs and then establish the proper structure to facilitate sharing the message with the world.

Adventist congregations in Michigan formed the first state conference in 1861. In the next few years, believers in New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota followed suit, and in 1863, state conferences worked together to form the General Conference. The church had officially been organized into three successive levels.

Our church's structure has been developed further since 1863, but our purpose remains the same: to spread the gospel around the globe. This week we will briefly look at the purpose and essence of God's end-time church.



inScribe

Write out Revelation 12 from the translation of your choice. If you're pressed for time, write out a portion of the primary passage. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map it.



Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw **Arrows** to connect words/phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

Have we grown stagnant in our church's growth? If so, how can we reverse it, and if not, how can we prevent it?

How can we remain humble when we are part of such a significant history and prophetic identity?



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THE FAITHFUL WOMAN AND THE UNFAITHFUL WOMAN

We have already looked at Revelation 12 in our studies on the great controversy and the spirit of prophecy, but returning to it here, we will see that the prophetic rise of the end-time church is yet another key theme of the chapter. To understand this theme, we must go back beyond the Millerites to when Protestantism was first emerging.

As the reformers uncovered groundbreaking Biblical truth, they felt compelled to break away from the Roman Catholic Church, which had been the only stable pillar of European society for almost a millennium. The Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, and other congregational churches formed as a result of believers following truths they were discovering from the Bible. During the late 1700s and early 1800s many turned toward God with their whole hearts through the writing and public appeals of great Bible preachers such as John Wesley (whose followers became the Methodist church) and George Whitfield. These revivals, which are collectively known by church historians as the Great Awakening, paved the way for the birth of the Adventist movement in the 1840s and the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1860s. Each reformer and revivalist discovered new truths. Revelation 12 alludes to these discoveries using prophetic symbols and outlining the forward momentum of God's church through history. It also points out the key identifying marks of God's people.

Though both play a significant role in end-time events, the pure woman of Revelation 12 presents an extreme contrast to the harlot woman seen later in chapter 17. The pure woman is sober, clothed with the sun, bears a crown of twelve stars, and stands on the moon (12:1) while the harlot woman is intoxicated, arrayed in scarlet and purple, precious stones, and pearls with the name "Babylon" and "Mother of Harlots" written on her forehead (Rev. 17:4, 5). The harlot woman commits fornication with the kings of the earth and is seen riding atop a scarlet beast that has seven heads and ten horns (vv. 2, 3).

In the Bible, a faithful woman represents a faithful church or people of God (Jer. 6:2; 1 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:20–27), while a harlot woman represents a church that is no longer faithful to God (Jer. 3:1; Hos. 1:2). With this understanding in mind, we see that in Revelation, the pure woman represents the true church while the immoral woman represents a counterfeit. In the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, one represents the church God uses to proclaim His final message to every nation and people group in the world (Rev. 14:6) and the other represents the movement that leads the masses to accept the last great deception (Rev. 13:13, 14).

Revelation 10, 12, and 14 are three key chapters that expound on the history, message, and global reach of the remnant church. Revelation 10 prophetically reveals the rise of God's final movement, Revelation 12 contextualizes this movement within the great controversy and reveals key identifying marks of the remnant, and Revelation 14 articulates the final message God's people will deliver to the world in preparation for Jesus' return (Rev. 14:6–12). These chapters of Revelation give us clear qualities to help us know exactly what kind of church to look for.

RESTORING THE ORIGINAL

Revelation 12 is the story of a woman who is victorious over an enraged dragon. It represents an overview of church history from the birth of Christ to the final events with a section in the middle that deals with the origins of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. The first five verses deal with the church in its early phase around the birth of Christ with verse six outlining the prophetic time period of 1,260 years of persecution that would come upon the church.

Chapter 4 of this lesson looked deeper at the time period mentioned in Revelation 12:6, 14 as well as what the earth symbolizes in verse 16. For review, the time period when the woman (or church) was fleeing from persecution was from A.D. 538 to 1798. The earth that helped the woman represented places of refuge where persecuted people could find relief—places such as the United States of America, a land that allowed people to worship freely without a state sponsored religion or denomination. After 1798 a time of great religious awakening occurred especially in North America. As the religious bodies were able to grow unshackled by religious persecution, many movements grew organically. One such group was Millerite Adventism, which transformed into Sabbatarian Adventism and eventually became the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The struggle between the woman and the dragon reaches a final confrontation in verse 17. Satan is angry at the woman (church) and turns against the remnant of her seed with terrible ferocity. A “remnant” is the last part of something larger, no different from the original. In the original church in the book of Acts, we see the two characteristics that verse 17 mentions: keeping the commandments of God and having the testimony of Jesus. The early church kept all the commandments, including the Sabbath, and they had the gift of prophecy manifested in several prophets and prophetesses throughout Acts. We also see that the early church was driven by the commission to take the gospel to the whole world (Acts 1:8). The early sisterhood of churches made certain decisions together (see Acts 15), and the book of Acts and the New Testament epistles record many instances of the sisterhood sharing resources and leaders. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the churches worked closely together to maximize their missionary ability. They had true Christian fellowship, evangelized tough areas, and had strong leaders who were willing to sacrifice immensely to drive the work forward.

If the remnant is to be like the original, we can expect God’s end-time remnant people to keep *all* the commandments, have the gift of prophecy, and be organized for mission. Early Adventist leaders saw the need to organize and structure the church to advance our mission and message around the world.



inTerpret

After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks overall seem to point to?



What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What other characteristics do we see in the early church that we can expect to find in the remnant church?



Read more at
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What relationship do the following verses have with Revelation 12?

Ephesians 5:22–30

1 Corinthians 12:12–31

Colossians 1:18

John 10:16

Ephesians 2:20, 21

John 17:21

Acts 20:28–30

Revelation 14:6–12

What other verses/promises come to mind with the primary passage?

Review your memorized verse from Revelation 12.

FAITHFULNESS DURING A WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE

Jesus plays a central role in Revelation 12, mentioned in verses 4 and 5 as the male Child who would rule all nations with a rod of iron. These verses also describe the early church that would birth Jesus Christ, the foundation and rock of Christianity throughout history. Elsewhere, we see the fingerprint of Jesus in His dealings with the church. Verse 6 lists two things that were done for the woman (church) who fled into the wilderness: First, God prepared a place for her in the wilderness. This alludes to God's constant care for His people even through dark days of persecution and violence. Second, God provided food for her during the 1,260 years she was in the wilderness. God spiritually sustained His church through the toughest times of spiritual famine through His Word.

The reality of a wilderness experience is fairly common throughout Scripture. Moses is a key example of this. God taught him patiently and tenderly during his forty-year stay in the desert. He had many things he needed to unlearn and other things he needed to learn before God could use him to deliver Israel out of Egypt. As he spent time away from the limelight of Egyptian royalty, God was able to teach him. The children of Israel had to spend their own forty years in the wilderness learning to follow God. While they were there, God faithfully fed them every day with miracle food from heaven. In the New Testament, Paul also spent some years in the wilderness before he was prepared for active ministry and missionary travels.

A wilderness experience can shelter us from the heat of battle, allow us time for reflection on setbacks, or prepare us for active ministry. Whatever God's purpose was, He made sure His people were physically sustained during the 1,260 years in the wilderness so they could learn spiritual lessons and grow in faith. It was after this time in the wilderness that the woman of Revelation 12 assumes the title of the remnant and goes forth to proclaim the end-time message.

Had God brought you to a wilderness-type experience? If so, don't be disheartened; He has a plan in store for you. God has proven His constant faithfulness to us. May we in return be faithful to the plan He has for our lives.



inVite

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.



In what ways did Jesus' wilderness experience prepare Him for ministry and what lessons can we as a church learn from that?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through these texts?

Prayer Response:



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www.inverseible.org/SDAH06-6



Review the memory verse.
How does it apply to your
life this week?

After this week's study, what are
some personal applications you
are convicted of in your life?

What are some practical
applications you must make in
your school, family, workplace,
and church life?



Read more inSight from the
Spirit of Prophecy at
www.inverseible.org/SDAH06-7

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHURCH

"The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to 'the principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10....

"The church is God's fortress, His city of refuge, which He holds in a revolted world. Any betrayal of the church is treachery to Him who has bought mankind with the blood of His only-begotten Son. From the beginning, faithful souls have constituted the church on earth. In every age the Lord has had His watchmen, who have borne a faithful testimony to the generation in which they lived. These sentinels gave the message of warning; and when they were called to lay off their armor, others took up the work. God brought these witnesses into covenant relation with Himself, uniting the church on earth with the church in heaven. He has sent forth His angels to minister to His church, and the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against His people.

"Through centuries of persecution, conflict, and darkness, God has sustained His church. Not one cloud has fallen upon it that He has not prepared for; not one opposing force has risen to counterwork His work, that He has not foreseen. All has taken place as He predicted. He has not left His church forsaken, but has traced in prophetic declarations what would occur, and that which His Spirit inspired the prophets to foretell has been brought about. All His purposes will be fulfilled. His law is linked with His throne, and no power of evil can destroy it. Truth is inspired and guarded by God; and it will triumph over all opposition.

"During ages of spiritual darkness the church of God has been as a city set on a hill. From age to age, through successive generations, the pure doctrines of heaven have been unfolding within its borders. Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theater of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts." (Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles* [1911], 9, 11, 12.)



Share insights from this week's memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.



Why do you think the commandments and the gift of prophecy are the two identifying marks in Revelation 12:17? Why not choose something else?

What characteristics from the church in Acts do we need to regain?

How do we reconcile the fact that many died during the 1,260 years with the promise that God would provide for His church during this time (Rev. 12:6, 14)?

Why does God lead people through wilderness experiences?

What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of having an organized world church? How can the drawbacks be overcome?

How do we keep the gospel movement going and not grow stale in our church communities?