

## RETURN OF THE CHURCH FROM THE WILDERNESS

A WILDERNESS condition is one of separation from the blessings of civilization; it is a cut-off condition, a separation from the world. In the case of the Church, we read that the Lord provided her with two wings, that she might go into the wilderness 1260 symbolic days, or years. Apparently she went into the wilderness condition of her own accord, and became voluntarily an outcast from the privileges and advantages of the world's society; she underwent a general ostracism or separation.

In the account of the typical Atonement Day sacrifices we read that the scapegoat went into the wilderness, but it did not go voluntarily; it was sent away. In the antitype the faithful, consecrated class go into the wilderness voluntarily, while the others will go into it of compulsion. The two classes will have similar experiences, however. The experiences of the Church have been tribulations, brought on by reason of their loyalty to the Lord and the Truth. The Lord's people can be in this wilderness condition even while surrounded by all the affairs of the world. We are separate from the world; we are in the world, but not of it – isolated.

In the Book of Revelation we read that the Church fled for 1260 years into the wilderness, and that during a similar period of time a great system had control of affairs. This period, we understand, began in 539 A.D. and ended with the year 1799. It was a period of ostracism, called the wilderness condition, but not necessarily of persecution. One might go into the wilderness condition and not receive persecution – not be shot, not be hanged, or anything like that. Hence the wilderness condition does not include the thought of *persecution*, but merely of *separation*.

In figurative language the city represents honor, distinction and prominence in the world, while the wilderness signifies the reverse condition – that of being ignored, ostracized, etc. During the 1260 symbolic days the Church was in the condition of ostracism. The governments paid no attention to her; but on the other hand, they gave a great deal of attention to the great system which exalted itself and became "that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth" – Mystic Babylon.

### **THE RETURN FROM THE WILDERNESS**

At the end of this period, beginning with 1799, the proper conception of the Church was more nearly recognized by the world in general, when the power of Papacy was broken, when the Pope was carried a prisoner to France. Then the nations realized that they had been more or less mistaken as to the Pope being Christ's representative. From that time on the Papacy, as a great system, has not had the persecuting power, but has been compelled to vie with others. The Baptist denomination, the Methodist denomination, and others, have prospered during this period, and the world has recognized them in the same degree as it has recognized Papacy.

The Papacy did not go into the wilderness, however; but Protestantism stepped out of the wilderness condition, to be more particularly recognized by the people and **[R5628 : page 46]** by the government. This has continued for quite a while and the Bible has been more generally recognized than before. Shortly after 1799, Bible Societies began to be organized. The Bible was brought into great prominence. Old and New Testaments, God's two witnesses, were exalted to Heaven. Those who advocated the Bible came out into the full light. Bible students and Bible study became more approved than ever before. Bibles were printed and everybody favored Bible Study.

There is no Scriptural declaration that the Church will go back into the wilderness condition. Our reference to a second wilderness experience is founded upon the symbolic picture of our day that is given to us in the experiences of Elijah the Prophet. Elijah, representing the true Church of God, had been a true Prophet for some time. He was unpopular with Queen Jezebel, who had influenced King Ahab against him. The King threatened Elijah's life and he fled to the wilderness for 1260 days, or three and a half years. This was symbolical of the 1260 years during which the Church remained in the wilderness condition.

At the close of the 1260 days in Elijah's experience, he returned from the wilderness, and made a great demonstration. He made an exhibition of the priests of Baal, who had been favored by Queen Jezebel and by King Ahab. This manifestation resulted in a great exaltation of the Word of God, and a great downfall of the priests [R5629 : page 46] of Baal. From that time they were obliged to hold themselves in seclusion. The people said, "Jehovah is God."

We understand that all this particularly represents how the true Church, in 1799, manifested itself before the kings of the world, and stood up for God and the Bible. Elijah represented the true Church; Jezebel represented the Papal System and other systems closely related to her; Ahab represented the government; and the people of Israel represented the world. The Bible was forced upon Jezebel and Ahab, and everybody. The two witnesses were exalted because the people took notice of them.

## **ELIJAH'S SECOND WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE**

Coming back to the picture: Queen Jezebel represented her daughters, her kind, her family. The Prophet Elijah represented the true people of God in the present time. The Queen did not persecute him, but threatened him; and again he fled into the wilderness – not for a specified time, however. The people in general were not

under the same kind of restraint as previously. The priests of Baal never regained their influence. Elijah went again into the wilderness and was there nourished for a time; it was not the previous nourishment of the 1260 days by the ravens, but an especially provided food for a time.

To our understanding this food especially provided for Elijah, after his experience with the priests of Baal and after his fleeing from Jezebel, represents the special Message that is now feeding the people of God. After Elijah had reached the wilderness, there was an inclination on his part to feel discouraged; and he said, "Ah, Lord God! ..." – this signifying his discouragement. But the Lord strengthened him and gave him a special food, in the strength of which he went to Mt. Horeb. This mountain represents the Kingdom of God, the Messianic Kingdom. And we believe that by this spiritual food we are now brought to the time when the Kingdom is to be established.

When Elijah got to Mt. Horeb the Lord gave him three witnesses. (1 Kings 19:1-18.) The wind rending the mountains represents the present war. The great earthquake symbolically represents a social revolution, the like of which was never before in the world, and which we believe is due to come very soon. This will not come as soon as the war begins, but the war might continue while the earthquake is on. This was not all. The third demonstration was a great fire, which consumed everything before it. This represents wide-spread anarchy, which will prevail in the world, following the social revolution. Then after the fire Elijah heard the "still, small voice," representing the Divine Power, which will bring the blessings to the world.

