

# Is There a “Place of Safety” for the Church—Part Three

*Will the church of God be given a specific place of safety in a wilderness during the troubling times that are prophesied to come upon this world before the return of the Christ?*

From a biblical perspective the doctrine of a “place of safety” is a cultivated teaching formed from a misleading and questionable interpretive methodology imposed upon certain verses in the Bible. This doctrine has to a significant extent resulted in a diversion from what is stated in Scripture, with the consequence being that many assumptions are made and some important issues are glossed over by reason of the doctrine of a place of safety.

To begin, we see that the teaching of a “place of safety” assumes there will be only one safe place on earth for the church in a time of future tribulation, and this argument is based in part on a grammatical issue, which points out that the words “wilderness” and “place” are singular in the text of John’s vision. This view of a singular place then leads to the assumption that only a portion of the “church” will in some way be able to gather in one place from all over the globe in a time of worldwide persecution in the future.

However, such an argument carries little weight given the scope of the vision and the numbers of nations and peoples that are understandably involved in John’s prophecy regarding the symbolic woman who is driven into a wilderness.

Therefore, what we should consider—given the scope of these geopolitical events—is that this “wilderness” ought to first be understood in the collective or overall sense, and so this wilderness does not have to represent only one place on earth for all the peoples associated with this prophecy. We get the

sense of this wider view of world events from the typology of Jeremiah's prophecy when he projected forward the future conditions of Israel and Judah in the context of the Babylonian era under King Nebuchadnezzar.

For Jeremiah wrote that: "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. Behold, I will send for many fishers, saith the Lord, and they shall fish them; and after will I send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain, and from every hill, and out of the holes of the rocks [Gk., *sela*, 'craggy rocks']" (Jer. 16:15-16). [Author's emphasis throughout.]

This gives us the sense that John's vision is more representative of world conditions, and also conditions of a region or even a country, and thereby it does not necessarily refer to a singular place for all the peoples of this prophecy—and certainly not for the church—with the understanding that the church will in various ways be entirely swept up in all these events that will transpire in the future.

Now, because the doctrine of a place of safety puts forward the idea that the woman who flees into a wilderness is the church, we see another questionable issue being raised in regard to the "remnant of her seed," because the doctrine of a place of safety also assumes that this remnant is the church of God.

However, such an assumption does not reconcile certain distinctions made about this remnant who are said to "keep the commandments of God," noting that the symbolic "woman" who is forced to become a refugee and flee for her life into a wilderness is not said to keep the "commandments of God." Making for a notable distinction that is not addressed by the doctrine of a place of safety, because this teaching does not

adequately define what is meant by the “remnant of her seed” and what is meant by the keeping of the “commandments of God” in the context of a lineal issue (seed) respective to the peoples of this prophecy.

Bringing us then to consider what is meant by the “testimony of Jesus.”

For we see that the “remnant” of the symbolic woman’s “seed” is said to have the witness of Jesus.

Now, the reason the Apostle John was on the Isle of Patmos was for the “testimony of Jesus,” and in this regard we also see that the angel who spoke to John—claiming to be a fellow-servant like John—was also “of the brethren who have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev. 19:10). (The testimony of Jesus is said to be the “spirit of prophecy”.)

Meaning that not only did John and the angel have this responsibility, perhaps burden, but there would also be others—brethren—who would have this testimony or witness of Jesus.

Something that is also not said of the woman who flees into a wilderness for three and one-half years as a result of political persecution inspired by Satan.

Notably, then, John also writes of those who are a “witness of Jesus,” which is sometimes translated as “testimony of Jesus,” noting that the words “witness” and “testimony” can be represented by the same Greek word *marturia*, which may also be in context translated as “martyr” (Rev. 7:6; 20:4). A concept that is applied in some measure to the “remnant of her seed” who are said to bear this same responsibility and purpose as did John—that is they will have the testimony or witness of Jesus (Rev. 1:9).

However, in this case, we should not think that these “brethren” are martyrs because of death—even though it may

come at the conclusion of their testimony—but rather they are witnesses by reason of their testimony, which would reasonably require evident works and deeds as proof of their witness. Or, we could say that it is not their death that makes them martyrs or witnesses of Jesus, but rather it is the nature of their testimony made evident by works and deeds that shows that they have the “testimony of Jesus” (Jn. 10:25; Acts 2:22; 4:33; Rev. 11:3-8).

Bringing us then to ask a question.

Is this “remnant of her seed” the church of God?

Simply, we should not assume that this “remnant” that has the testimony of Jesus is representative of the collective incorporated organization of what is commonly understood to be the assembly or church of God. Nor should we assume that this remnant is a complete collective and representative political grouping of the modern-day descendants of the Commonwealth of Israel. This is understandably so based on the fact that the scale of this “remnant” and the number of those who have the testimony of Jesus is not directly addressed in John’s prophecy regarding the woman who flees into the wilderness (Zech. 14:2-4).

However, we can discern from what is implied in other related prophecies and from what was stated by the angel to John that this responsibility is placed upon those chosen to give evidence of Jesus at a time when the symbolic woman is in the wilderness for three and one-half years.

Now, some have argued that because the consolidated commonwealth no longer exists, and because there was only a remnant of the commonwealth in the Middle East at the time of Jesus’ ministry, and because the commonwealth is an unrecognized political entity today, that it is permissible for churches and denominations to assign an interpretive meaning to the “woman” depicted in the vision that was given

to the Apostle John. That is to say that some have stated in a matter-of-fact manner that this symbolic "woman" is the church because a symbolic woman is always or nearly always representative of the "church" in biblical prophecy, and therefore the woman of John's vision who flees into a wilderness is by interpretation considered to be the church of God.

But is this so of biblical prophecy?

Or, is this supposedly so because an interpretive methodology has been improperly placed upon the vision given to the Apostle John?

When we examine the prophetic works of what is called the "Old Testament" we find that the word "woman" is most often used in the literal sense, even when explaining the pain of national correction or troubles by comparing these things to the travail of a woman giving birth to a child. We also find in the works of the prophets of Israel and Judah that Mount Zion is made analogous to a woman (the daughters of Zion), as well as Jerusalem, and the same could be said of the house of Israel and the house of Judah (divided commonwealth). (Egypt, Samaria and Sodom are sometimes indirectly analogized to a woman in limited contexts, and Stephen refers to Israel as the "church" (Gk., *ekklēsia*) in the wilderness in the time of Moses (Acts 7:37-38; Rev. 11:8).)

However, we do not find any analogy among the prophets of Israel and Judah that allows us to conclude that a symbolic "woman" represents the church in regard to John's prophecy, and we do not find that the ancient prophets of Israel and Judah were ever directly addressing the modern-day organized collective body of the church at all. Therefore, such an argument cannot be imposed upon John's vision of a woman who flees into a wilderness, because this is a conclusion based on an interpretive methodology, which reassigns different meanings to the words of the prophets, rather than accepting

the words of the prophets as found in the Bible. (There are prophecies in the works of the prophets regarding the life of Jesus.)

Bringing us then to the apostolic works of what is referred to as the "New Testament."

Here again we do not find any analogy among the apostles that makes the symbolic "woman" of John's vision to be the church, but we do find in the prophetic work called Revelation that a "woman" is likened to the people of Israel in the narrower context of the tribe of Judah. Noting also that in no case does the book of Revelation directly associate a symbolic woman of John's prophecy with the church of God. (Some church denominations claim that the "harlot" depicted in Revelation is a "false" church, which is an ill-defined term, and in some cases they would claim without evidence that this is the Catholic Church.)

Nonetheless, there are those who claim that the church is allowed to make this interpretative relationship between the "woman" in John's prophecy and the "church" of today based on the writings of the Apostle Paul.

Now, we will note that in a qualified and limited context the church is indirectly analogized to a woman by the Apostle Paul, who himself created a direct analogy related to his personal work as an apostle and minister of Christ. He also used an indirect analogy in discussing the nature of governance in the church, but the analogy can't be taken further to say that a "woman" always or nearly always represents the church in biblical prophecy. Because we see that the Apostle Paul did not use it in this manner prophetically or in a direct sense to the congregations beyond his personal work as an apostle of Jesus. (Paul also analogized himself as a "father" to the church (I Thes. 2:11).)

We will also add that some have further interpreted Paul's analogy—beyond the scope of his personal work—to give themselves a supposed advantage to claim that the church is also the “bride of Christ,” while allowing themselves to further assume that this is sufficient evidence in itself to say that the symbolic “woman” of John's vision is the church of God.

However, it should be pointed out that the phrase “bride of Christ,” like the phrase “place of safety,” is not to be found in Scripture.

Instead, what we discover from examining the Bible is that according to the angel who spoke with John the “bride” is a literal “city”—because it has definable dimensions and borders—and so John wrote that the angel “carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:10). (The “righteousness of the saints” is made analogous to the adornment of the bride, and not to the bride herself that descends out of heaven from God (Rev. 15:6; 19:8).)

Thus, it is this city—the New Jerusalem—that is referred to as the “lamb's wife,” and not the church of God (Rev. 21:2, 9).

Allowing us then to say that from a biblical perspective the church is an earthly concept based on a calling, and therefore the church is made analogous to the “body of Christ.” And taken one step further we see that this analogy relates to the function of the church, which is composed of the called and not solely the converted, because the converted are considered to be the brothers and sisters of Jesus in Abraham.

Therefore, those who walk by the spirit of God are the children of God and co-heirs of the kingdom of God with Jesus, but they are not stated to be the bride of Jesus now or in the future because the church is not literally the body of Christ.

Bringing us then to consider the words of Jesus who said: “they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Lk. 20: 35-36). Making it obvious by the general application of what Jesus said that Jesus is not expected to marry his brothers and sisters in Abraham, who are all to be qualified by God to receive the promise of the kingdom of God.

Therefore we may conclude that the symbolic “woman” in John’s prophecy cannot be said to be analogous to the church, and so it may be further concluded that the wilderness to which the “woman” flees is not a “place of safety” for the church of God.

However, despite the biblical evidence to the contrary there are those who will continue to embrace the doctrine of a “place of safety,” which compels them to search for such a place in the pages of the Bible. But as the Scripture does not specifically name this place, we see again that an interpretive methodology is used to create such a place, to the extent of making its historical forerunner to be the ancient community of Pella, and its future place to be in a harsh rocky area of southern Jordan in the archaeological city of Petra.  **(Continued in part four of this series.)**  
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## [Resources & Notes](#)

Also see: [Is There a “Place of Safety” for the Church—Part Four](#)