

**The Eagle's Wings of a Great Eagle in  
Revelation 12:14—  
Who or What Does It Represent?**

“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.” (Revelation 12:14)

How would Christian Jews, familiar with Old Testament history, apocalyptic language, and symbolism, have interpreted the words “two wings of a great eagle” in reference to Revelation 12:14? Would they have immediately known the interpretation thereof? Or, would it be as much of a mystery to them as it is to us?

The original audience, more than likely, understood apocalyptic language quite well. Whereas we would have greater difficulty because we are far removed by time and culture. Also, we have been inundated by speculative

interpreters who have not been completely honest with Old Testament symbolism.

First-century Christians would have been acquainted with this topic about the “eagle’s wings.” They would also recall the following verse in connection with the subject at hand.

“Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.” (Exodus 19:4)

This is what Albert Barnes says about this verse, “Both in the law [Deut. 32:11] and in the Gospel [Matt. 23:37], the Church is compared to fledgelings which the mother cherishes and protects under her wings: but in the law that mother is an eagle, in the Gospels ‘a hen’; thus shadowing forth the diversity of administration under each covenant: the one of power, which God manifested when He brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and led them into the promised land; the other of grace, when Christ

came in humility and took the form of a servant and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.”

The Keil & Delitzsch commentary basically shares the same view as the aforementioned, “The words of God [Exod. 19:4.] refer first of all to what He had done for the Egyptians, and how He had borne the Israelites on eagles’ wings; manifesting in this way not only the separation between Israel and the Egyptians, but the adoption of Israel as the nation of His [special] grace and favour. The ‘eagles’ wings’ are figurative and denote the strong and loving care of God. The eagle watches over its young in the most careful manner, flying under them when it leads them from the nest, lest they should fall upon the rocks, and be injured or destroyed...”

Jewish New Testament saints would also be familiar with this verse found in Isaiah 40:31, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings

as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint.”

The word “eagle” appears twenty-five times, and the word “eagles” appears nine times in the KJV of the Bible. The Hebrew word for “eagle” is *nesher* and means eagle, vulture, griffon-vulture. The New Testament word for “eagle(s)” is *aetos* and appears four times. Thayer defines the term as 1) an eagle: since eagles do not usually go in quest of carrion, this may [be] a vulture that resembles an eagle; 2) an eagle as a standard (Roman Military).

According to Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, “The eagle was thought to molt and renew his feathers, and with them his strength, in old age.” In 2 Samuel 1:23, it says that “Saul and Jonathan... were swifter than eagles.” Jeremiah 4:13 speaks about the horses of Nebuchadnezzar as being “swifter than eagles.” In Lamentations 4:19, Jeremiah the prophet writes, “Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven.”

The word “eagle” is used in a good and positive sense in Revelation 12:14. In the following case, it is the opposite; it is used in connection with judgment: “The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, *as swift* as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand” (Deuteronomy 28:49).

Matthew 24:28 says, “For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.” Clarke believes that the “carcase” represents the dead Jewish nation who rejected Christ and that the “eagles” were a representation of the Roman armies’ insignia.

The prophet Ezekiel presents an unusual image, “As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle” (1:10). The Pulpit Commentary presents the following thought regarding the

four faces and what they represent: “that the human face may have connected itself with the thought of the Son of man who shared in the glory of the Father; the ox with that of his sacrifice; the lion with that of his sovereignty over Israel, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah [Rev. 5:5]; the eagle with that of his bearing his people as on eagles’ wings, into the highest heavens [Exod. 19:4; Deut. 32:11].”

Wesley says, “Each face is compared to what is most excellent in its kind, man excels in wisdom, lions in strength, the ox in patience and constancy of labour, the eagle in speed and high flight” (John Wesley’s Notes on the Bible). What others would call, the “Fathers”, “identified them with the four Gospels: Matthew the lion, Mark the ox, Luke the man, John the eagle” (JFB - Ez. 1:6). The Pulpit Commentary says this “patristic interpretation, which finds in the four living creatures the symbols of the four evangelists, must be considered as the play of a devout imagination.”

The Bible has some intriguing things to say about the “eagle.” The book of Job says, “Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?” (Job 39:27). It also speaks about “The way of an eagle in the air” (Prov. 30:19).

In Revelation 12:14, “to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle.” What does this figurative/apocalyptic language represent according to its contextual, historical usage? If this is still a future prediction, can it mean or represent anything beyond its historical contextual boundaries? Revelation 12:14 is speaking of deliverance given to the “woman,” but who or what is the “deliverer”?

Joseph Benson’s Commentary says, “so the church was supported and carried, as it were, on eagles’ wings: but the similitude is the more proper in this case, an *eagle* being the Roman ensign, and the *two wings* alluding probably to the division that was then made of the eastern and the western empire.”

The next commentary agrees with Benson, “‘*the two wings of the great eagle.*’ Alluding to [Ex. 19:4]: proving that the Old Testament Church, as well as the New Testament Church, is included in ‘the woman.’ All believers are included [Isa. 40:30, Isa. 40:31]. *The great eagle* is the world power; in [Eze. 17:3, Eze. 17:7], *Babylon* and *Egypt*: in early Church history, *Rome*, whose standard was the *eagle*, turned by God’s providence from being hostile into a protector of the Christian Church. As ‘wings’ express remote parts of the earth, the *two wings* may here mean the east and west divisions of the Roman empire” (JFB).

According to the previous two commentators, Revelation 12:14 is fulfilled, or is it still a future prediction? Or, is it to be played out more than once for the individual or the corporate church at large, such as a multiple fulfillment scheme would require? Indeed, when it comes to prophecy, one thing is certain, many that try to decipher it often become quite careless. The rule



should be: the more difficult the setting or genre, the more controls, and safeguards are needed. For example, we need to make sure “speculation” isn’t part of the equation.

What can we say about Revelation 12:14 that is foundational to Bible truth? In other words, what are the obvious or underlying tenets and basic scriptural components that this verse clearly conveys? One such subject is deliverance.

The subject of deliverance and a deliverer is a grand foundational theme. Without question, there is a deliverance taking place in Revelation 12:14. Who is, ultimately, the deliverer? Who, ultimately, makes deliverance possible? Who delivers God’s people? The means may differ, but the deliverer remains the same.

Exodus 3:8 says, “And I am come down to deliver them...” Judges 3:9 says, “And when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord raised up a deliverer...” In 2 Samuel 22:2, it

says, “And he said, The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer.” Acts 7:35 says, “This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send *to be* a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.”

God is the Deliverer. God is in the business of deliverance. Has God ever delivered you? Has God ever sent anybody to deliver and help you? The focus is not the means but the source.

Isaiah 63:9 says, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.”

Psalm 91:1-4 says, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee

from the snare of the fowler, *and* from the  
noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his  
feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust:  
his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler.

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