

Is There a Place of Refuge?

This world is about to be plunged into a holocaust more terrible than the eyes of man have ever seen! This horrible period, the time when Satan's wrath reaches its peak just before the end of this age, was described by Amanuwal Ha'Mashyach in Matthew 24:21-22: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

Yahuwah will be forced to supernaturally intervene on this earth to prevent man's total annihilation. This intervention will be brought about by Amanuwal Ha'Mashyach, who will return in glory and power to re-establish Yahuwah's government on earth and set up the Kingdom of Yahuwah.

But what will happen to Yahuwah's Assembly during the Great Tribulation? Will Yahuwah protect his people wherever they are during the Great Tribulation, as some claim? Of course Yahuwah can, but will he? Yahuwah could have miraculously protected Noah and his family for the more than one year they were in the ark, but he didn't choose to. Noah and his family had to go into the ark, their "place of refuge." Yahuwah could have supernaturally protected Lot and his family in Sodom, but instead Yahuwah sent angels to lead him out of that wicked city, so Lot and his family could go to their "place of protection."

It is not what Yahuwah could do, but what he will do, that counts!

No "Place of Nourishment"

Just what does the Scriptures say about all this? Does the Scriptures say, "The Assembly is going to flee to a place of safety"? In order to better understand this subject, we need to review four different but related events.

Early Assembly Migrated

The first event occurred as a result of Amanuwal's warning in Luke 21:20-21 (compare Matthew 24:15-22): "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in.... the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter there into."

This prophecy was fulfilled after events in Judea in the fall around the year AD 66. Jerusalem was surrounded and besieged by the Roman army under Cestius Gallus. After a few days, for no apparent reason, the siege was lifted and the Romans departed from the area.

Immediately after this, two and a half years before General Vespasian and the Roman forces returned and besieged Jerusalem starting at the Passover around AD 69, the true Assembly did leave Jerusalem and fled to the mountains of Judea for protection.

The Greek word in Luke 21:21 means "to escape or run away, to take flight" (not flying in the air).

The only ancient reference to this “escape” is found in the writing of Eusebius, who lived from about AD 260 to 340. Eusebius said the Assembly went to Pella – it was in the end of winter around AD 69, Pella is northeast of Jerusalem beyond the Jordan River, south of the Sea of Galilee.

“But the members of the assembly in Jerusalem were instructed by a prophecy, revealed to the leaders, to abandon the city before the way and to take up residence in one of the cities of Perea which was named Pella. From Jerusalem the followers of Mashyach migrated to Pella” (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, III, 5).

In fact, shortly before the autumn around AD 66 a “sound” was heard in the Temple, of a great multitude saying, “Let us remove hence.” This incident was reported by the Jewish historian Josephus, who said it occurred on a Pentecost (see Josephus, Wars, book VI, chapter 5, section 3 for the report on this and other unusual events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem).

That first move or migration of the Assembly was no emergency “flight” as described by Luke and Matthew, but it made protection possible for the Assembly during and after the fall of Jerusalem.

Those in Judea Flee

The second event we need to understand involves this same prophecy. There will be an end time fulfillment of text in an urgent, emergency escape. “Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Matthew 24:16-21).

There are certain points we should notice here. This refers to people of Yahuwah in Judea. Those people of Yahuwah’s Assembly who are in this geographical area when the abomination of desolation or surrounding of Jerusalem, comes to pass must literally flee for their lives! They will not even be able to go back into their homes to retrieve clothing, food, Scriptures or family. Those left inside their homes will have to flee in the same manner.

People in this circumstance will be in such danger that they must not call attention to the fact that they are fleeing, or they will be captured and unable to escape. They must flee, run away, escape to the mountains. Jerusalem is surrounded by hills or mountains; these mountains may not be the ultimate destination, but would have to be passed through to ultimate protection.

Assembly Fled to the Wilderness

The third prophecy we must understand concerns Yahuwah’s Assembly’s from around AD 325 to about 1585. Notice Revelation 12:6: “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of Yahuwah, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.”

This scripture describes the Assembly after Mashyach's ascension to Yahuwah's throne (verse 5) and before the end-time "war in heaven" (verse 7).

In this case the woman also "fled" ("fled" here comes from a Greek word related to the word translated "flight" in Matthew 24:20). The period mentioned is 1,260 days, which in this place prophetically refers to 1,260 years according to the "day for a year" principle found in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:5.

The Assembly in this text flees into the "wilderness," a solitary, lonely, desert place.

Here is what happened historically: The Assembly was severely persecuted during the reigns of both Emperor Diocletian and Emperor Galerius from around AD 303 to 313, especially in the eastern provinces (see Revelation 2:10).

Then around AD 325 Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea. Catholicism became the state religion. In order for Yahuwah's Assembly to fully obey Yahuwah and put into practice their beliefs, they had to "flee" from the centers of influence and into the less-populated areas.

In the early period of this "exile" the true followers of Mashyach were most numerous in what today is eastern Turkey, then Armenia. In later centuries they were found in scattered areas of the Alpine regions of Europe, especially in the mountains and small valleys, still away from major population centers.

Around 1585, which was 1,260 years after 325, the threat of foreign religious domination of the throne in England ended. This brought to a close the period when the Assembly had to carry on in the wilderness, or less populated, lonely areas of Europe and Asia Minor, instead of the greater population centers where Catholic and later even Protestant churches flourished.

The fourth related event we need to understand concerns the very end time, just three and a half years before Amanuwal's return.

The Assembly that Flies to Her Place

After the war in heaven pitting Michael and his angels against the devil and his angels (Revelation 12:7), Satan is cast to the earth and starts a new, vigorous persecution against the Assembly (verse 13).

After this we read: "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" (verse 14).

Note that the woman (The Assembly) is given two wings of a great eagle, that she might "fly." Here the Greek word literally means "fly" (as a bird or plane does), not flee or escape by other means "fly" (as a bird or plane does), not flee or escape by other means. She flies to "her place," which could imply ownership. Here she is nourished (fed physically and spiritually) for three and a half years ("time, and times, and half a time").

Verse 17 shows that there are certain others in the Assembly who do not make this flight. They face not just persecution from Satan but war with him, and there is no indication of divine protection for them.

Are There Many Places?

The Scriptures say the Assembly will go to "her place" (verse 14). The word place is singular, not plural, so it must be just one place. Where is that one place? It is said to be in "the wilderness." That indicates a solitary, sparsely populated area.

This place of Yahuwah's protection may quite possibly be in the area anciently occupied by Edom, Moab and Ammon, since that area will escape the final invasion of the king of the north (Daniel 11:41). Other prophecies show that this same area will later be taken over by people from the east (Ezekiel 25).

Several texts, including Isaiah 16:1-4, 33:13-17 and 42:11-12, indicate this wilderness area might be the place. The area has been inhabited at various times over past millennia and is noted for the many manmade caves cut out of its reddish rock.

If this is the place where Yahuwah takes his people in the end time, it will be found to be very inhospitable. The temperatures in this desert area are extreme in both summer and winter, and even from night to day.

Truly a "Place of Protection"?

Wherever the place, will it be a place of safety? It will apparently be safe from Satan. But it will not yet be Yahuwah's Kingdom. Those who go will not yet have "endured to the end." They will not yet have it made. They will still be able to sin and fall away. To some the "place of refuge" could prove to be a place of danger and the place where they finally lose out on salvation.

In this place it will be necessary to live together in peace and harmony 24 hours a day for about three and a half years.

How will the Assembly go to "her place"? Even though the scripture seems to indicate air transportation, that is not the only possible explanation. A similar statement is found in Exodus 19:4: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." The ancient Israelites never heard of modern air transportation. They walked out of Egypt!

Just who will go to this place, away "from the face of the serpent [Satan]"?

Who Will Be Taken?

Luke's gospel gives further information about who will escape "all these things": "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

Who are these people "accounted worthy" to escape?

Those worthy will be watching. In plain language, they will be observing world, national and local events, especially as they relate to prophecy, so that they will not be caught unawares by the snare that will trap the rest of the world.

Those worthy will be praying always – each day – not neglecting this essential part of their lives. Their prayers of intercession, prayers for help, prayers for forgiveness and prayers for Yahuwah's Kingdom to come will be continually going up to Yahuwah.

These people will become worthy through Amanuwal's sacrifice and forgiveness of sin, and not as a result of their own "worthiness."

Matthew adds other points that we should notice (Matthew 24:42-51). Those who are ready will be doing Yahuwah's work, giving "meat in due season." They will, in other words, be doing their part in teaching the good news to the world as a witness.

They will be giving of themselves, not trying to get from others. Such people who are giving their lives in Yahuwah's service will save their lives: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24).

Those, who are trying desperately to save their own lives by going to a "place of safety", without Yahuwah's intervention may find that such safety will not be provided for them. So in ALL things WAIT ON YAHUWAH! There is a place of protection and nourishment but it is Yahuwah's who takes them there!