

## CAN WE IDENTIFY GOD'S TRUE CHURCH TODAY?

**Introduction** The ancient Greeks had a story about the escape of Theseus from the Cretan labyrinth. This baffling maze had been built by Daedalus, the famous architect, and no man had ever been able to enter it and find his way out again. Theseus, a young Greek hero, had plunged into the labyrinth, slain the fearsome Minotaur who lived at its centre, and now faced the problem of finding an exit through the seemingly endless corridors of the bewildering maze. Happily, a friendly Cretan maiden had placed in his hands a ball of silver thread, which Theseus had played out as he entered the maze, and which now guided him as he made his escape.

How like the predicament of thousands of frustrated men and women today, as they view the wilderness of warring sects and denominations, each of which claims to be the one true Christian Church!

Here is a baffling labyrinth, indeed! But where can we find a silver thread to guide us safely through the tangled maze? God has provided an infallible guide that is available to every man. It is "the sure word of prophecy".

**II Peter 1 : 19:** "As a light that shineth in a dark place."

In this lesson we will study the prophecy of Revelation 12, which enables us to identify God's true Church with satisfying assurance.

**Discussion** Let us open the Bible and read the whole of this chapter. Then we will study it verse by verse under three headings:

### 1.—THE THREE LEADING SYMBOLS OF REVELATION 12

(See Chart No 40—*The Woman and Dragon of Revelation 12*)

We are not left to guess at the identity of the three leading symbols in this chapter. The keys to their identity are found within the chapter itself. We will begin with the Dragon, because he is the easiest to identify.

#### The Great Red Dragon—Symbol of Satan

V 9 calls him "that old Serpent, called the Devil and Satan". There is no room for guesswork here. God has given us the exact meaning of this symbol, and his identity is the master-key to the other two. But Satan never appears in public. He always remains invisible. He gets his work done through human agents—people who are willing to become "gloves" for Satan's hand. At the time of John's vision, the most effective instrument Satan had on earth was Pagan Rome.

NOTE: "THE THIRD PART OF THE STARS OF HEAVEN" (v 4), is an obvious reference to the company of apostate angels whom Satan drew with him in his original rebellion against God. See vv 7-9, where John's mind is carried back momentarily to the original "war in Heaven" as a result of which Satan and his angels were cast out. Vv 10-12 describe how yet another great victory over Satan was won at Calvary's Cross, when a mighty shout of triumph rang through the courts of Heaven. (See John 12:31.)

#### The Sun-clothed Woman—Symbol of God's True Church

Throughout the Bible, God's favourite symbol for His Church is a pure and beautiful woman (Jer. 6 : 2; II Cor. 11 : 2). The symbolic woman of Revelation 12 agrees perfectly with this general Bible picture.

"Clothed with the Sun"—the robe of Christ's righteousness.

"The Moon under her feet"—the written Word of God, which reflects light from Christ, as the moon does from the sun.