

ISRAEL'S TRAVAIL AND TRIUMPH

Revelation 12

Introduction:

Since before time began, even before Adam and Eve were created, God has had a plan to deal with sin and to redeem mankind. And ever since the fall into sin in the Garden of Eden Satan has done his utmost to thwart that plan. And for much of history, Satan's attempts to derail God's plans has involved attempts to destroy God's chosen people, the Jews. As David Levy says in his book on the Revelation,

"Throughout history, demonically inspired despots like Haman and Hitler, filled with fanatical hatred, have attempted genocide of the Jewish people. The Jews often stand before their history in sober silence, stunned and numbed by the unmitigated brutality that their eyes have seen but that their minds find difficult to believe."

Twice I have walked through the corridors of Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, looking through tear-filled eyes at the brutal reminders of Satan's relentless attempts to eradicate the world's Jewish population.

Levy - *"In Revelation 12 Satan's strategy is unmasked as he tries to annihilate Israel during the second half of the Tribulation period, known as 'the time of Jacob's trouble' (Jeremiah 30:7)."*

This morning we are returning to the book of Revelation and will be looking at chapter 12. However, as it has been a couple of months since we left our study in this prophetic book I think a bit of review is in order.

Revelation Review

The book of Revelation was written by the Apostle John near the end of the first century, shortly before John's death. At the time John was exiled to the island of Patmos, having faced fierce persecution for his faith and for his testimony regarding Jesus Christ (see 1:9). The purpose of the book is given in the very first verse – *read it*. The basic outline is seen in 1:19 – the things that you have seen (past), those that are (present), and those that are to take place after this (future).

The earlier part of chapter 1 is John's record of what he has already seen—a vision of the eternal Son of God in all of his glory and majesty. He is seen standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands, which represent seven churches. He is seen holding seven stars, which represent the elders or leaders of those seven churches. He identifies himself as the first and the last, the living one. He is the one who died yet is alive forevermore—the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

Chapters 2-3 contain letters from the risen Christ to those seven churches. This is those things that are. As we looked at these seven churches, it seemed clear that the characteristics of these churches, both positive and negative, can be seen within the church of Jesus Christ throughout every part of the church age. Some of these churches were strong and faithful in the face of difficult and trying times. Some were apathetic and careless in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Some were doing all the right things yet were cold and lifeless, spiritually dead. One can see all of these characteristics in the church of every age.

Chapter 4 introduces a new scene. John was transported to heaven to receive a vision of the things that must happen after this. *Read 4:1*. One of the first things we observe as we begin to read chapters 4-5 is that the church, the body of believers, is no longer on the earth but is in heaven, gathered around the throne of God, praising and worshipping the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb.

Chapter 5 – the Lamb, Jesus Christ, is presented with a seven-sealed scroll, which contains the future endtime events—primarily the judgments God is sending on the earth to punish those who have rejected the truth. As the seals are broken and the scroll is opened, various calamities and disasters come on the earth. During this time many people turn against the dominant thinking and choose to trust Jesus Christ, risking their very lives because of the hatred of Satan and his demonically inspired ruler, the Antichrist.

Because of time, we are not going to go through all the details of those seven seals, which begin in chapter 6. Suffice it to say that as each of the seals is opened, the situation on earth becomes more difficult, as greater and more intense judgments are poured out on the earth. With the opening of the seventh seal, in ch. 8, we are introduced to a new se-

ries of judgments, these unleashed by seven angels with seven trumpets.

Chapter 8 takes us through the first four of the seven trumpets, which bring disaster upon the earth—the vegetation and the water, the sea and even the sun, moon and stars are affected. Chapter 9 reveals the next two trumpets, which introduce demonic torment on all the inhabitants of the earth—those who have opposed God and embraced the world system.

Before the sounding of the seventh trumpet, chapter 10 mentions another series of judgments, identified as seven thunders, but it appears that these are so horrible and so intense that John is instructed to not even write down what he has seen.

At the end of chapter 11, the seventh trumpet is sounded. Ch. 11:19 tells us that at this point... *Read Rev. 11:19*. The sounding of this seventh trumpet is the beginning of one final series of catastrophes which are portrayed as seven vials or bowls of God's judgment—seven final plagues that God is going to send upon the earth. They begin over in chapter 15-16.

At various places in between we find other events which do not add to the timeline of the Tribulation period. They are explanations of other happenings which are going on at the same time as these judgments are being poured out on the earth.

For example, chapter 7 is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seal – the sealing of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses, and the multitude of tribulation saints who have been martyred for their faith. Chapters 10-11 are another interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpets, where John is given visions of other events that are taking place. Chapters 12-14 also fill in a great deal of additional information about events during this seven year Tribulation period. That is where we are picking up our study today. We will spend the time we have remaining in the 12th chapter of Revelation.

In this chapter, God draws back the curtain on a scene that involves a great conflict both in heaven and on earth. At the center of that conflict is Israel, God's chosen nation. Let's have a look...

The Participants in the Conflict

"...a great sign appeared in heaven:" The word "sign" in the KJV is "wonder." It is defined as "a sign, portent, i.e. an unusual occurrence, transcending the common course of nature" It indicates "...signs portending remarkable events soon to happen."

This sign is described as a woman... *read vv. 1-2*. This is a similar image presented in the book of Genesis. In Joseph's dream the sun, moon and stars represented Jacob (Israel), Rachel, and the tribes of Israel. The description here is not of a literal woman. It is a sign, and I believe we can safely conclude that the woman represents the nation of Israel. The child being born is the Messiah, the Christ.

The second participant is shown as another sign – *read v. 3*. The dragon is symbolic of Satan, the great deceiver. Throughout the Scriptures Satan is pictured as a dragon or serpent. In order to fully understand the description of the heads and horns we would need to go back to the book of Daniel. We don't have time for that this morning, but let me just read a paragraph from David Levy to shed some light on this.

"The seven heads represent seven consecutive evil world empires controlled by Satan and leading up to the revival of the Roman Empire. The ten horns represent the ten-nation confederacy that comes out of the seventh head, which is the revived Roman Empire controlled by Satan during the Great Tribulation. The seven crowns upon his heads indicate the fullness of Satan's authority and his rule over nations, which he will give to the beast (the Antichrist) during the Great Tribulation."

Verse 4a – Satan's expulsion from heaven when he took a third of the angels with him. The latter part of verse 4 describes Satan's attempts to destroy the plan of God to save the world through the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. As far back as Gen. 3:15 it was predicted that Satan would try to cut off the woman and her seed. Levy says:

"He tried to cut off Christ's lineage by the death of Abel (Ge. 4); polluting the godly line of Seth (Ge. 6); producing a pseudo-son of promise in Ishmael (Ge. 16); destroying Israel in Egypt (Ex. 1) and in Persia (Es. 3); trying to kill Jesus in Bethlehem (Mt. 2) and Nazareth (Lu. 4); and succeeding at His crucifixion (Mt. 27). But Christ defeated Satan through that very crucifixion (He. 2:14 – "...that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,")."

Clearly, the "...male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron..." is none other than Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah. Satan did his utmost to destroy Him, but He was protected by God, and ultimately, after his death and resurrection he was caught up to heaven, where Satan could not touch him.

No longer able to do anything about the child, Jesus, Satan turns his attention to the woman. His wrath is unleashed against the nation of Israel, the woman who gave birth to the Messiah.

At this point, John sees another participant in this unfolding drama. It is the archangel, Michael, and the scene is a war in heaven between Michael, along with his angels, and the dragon with his angels, the demonic world. The angel, Michael, is mentioned only five times in the Bible—three times in Daniel, once in Jude, and here in Rev. 12. One of the roles assigned to Michael is the protection of Israel. In Daniel 9 he is referred to as "your prince..." In Daniel 12:1 we read, *"At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book."* That prophecy is really the foretelling of what we are looking at in Rev. 12 – a time of great trouble for the nation of Israel.

There are a number of things in Rev. 12:7-12 that are significant, but we don't have time to go through them all this morning. Suffice it to say that Satan and his angels are cast down from the heavens to be confined to the earth. Later they will be cast down to be held in the abyss (ch. 20) and ultimately cast into the lake of fire.

Verses 10-12 are a wonderful truth about the protection of the saints in the face of Satan's accusations. We will come back to that in a moment but first, we need to look at...

Israel's Preservation in the Midst of Conflict

When Satan has been banished from the heavens and confined to earth during the Tribulation, he launches an all-out attack against "...the woman who had given birth to the male child." This will be a time of intense hatred as Satan does everything he can to destroy Israel. He

knows that Israel is central to God's plan and he will do anything he can to thwart that plan.

Read vv. 14-17 – Even though the attack will be intense, it is clear that Israel will be protected. The second half of the Great Tribulation will be a time of great trouble for Israel. People will be forced to flee—Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 24. But there is a place in the wilderness prepared where God will keep and preserve them. (Note: many eminent Bible scholars believe that this place referred to here is actually Petra, just east of the Dead Sea in Jordan.)

Conclusion

As we wrap this up, I would like to read another paragraph from David Levy, then offer a few other thoughts that will lead us into communion. Regarding Satan's relentless attacks against Israel, Levy says:

"Knowing that his time is short, Satan will step up his persecution of Israel in these latter days. Today, Satan's strategy to proliferate a legacy of hatred against Israel is like a wound that never heals. Like the prophets of old, we must warn Israel of their impending travail and stand with the nation as it approaches the birth pains of the Tribulation. And like the prophets of old, we must bring to Israel the comforting message that there is hope and victory in Jesus, the Messiah."

Now, I would like to go back to vv. 10-12 for just a moment. This is a great hymn of praise. The occasion is the casting down of Satan during the coming Great Tribulation. But there are some truths in these verses that are relevant to us today:

1. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, who accuses believers before the throne of God day and night (Consider Job 1-2).
2. One day, Satan will be cast out, no longer able to make those accusations against us – v. 10.
3. Victory over the accusations of Satan come, not through our good deeds, but through the blood of Jesus and the word of our testimony – v. 11. When Satan says, "Look at what Gordon did today," I can only say, "You're right. I am sinful. But Jesus blood paid for my sin."

Invitation – do you have the blood of Christ applied to your life by faith?