A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 45: The Seal Judgements, Part 13
April 16, 2023
Instructor: Steve Schmutzer

Review:
NOTE: We have had two weeks off from class and then last week was a special Easter lesson. That means it's been one month since we had our regular study in A Biblical View of the End Times.

A. I think a review of is in order to get us all back up to speed.
   1. We are presently learning about the Seal Judgements which are found in ***Revelation chapters 6-8***
   2. We've studied the first six of those seven judgments, and now we are preparing to study the last one, #7.
   3. The first five Seal Judgments, while they bring about unprecedented events, can still be understood as an intensification of events that history, including our present time, has already recorded.
      a. That is the reason why I have explained them this way: The first five seals are not so much speaking of God's wrath upon man, but rather man's wrath upon man.
      b. Yes, God permits it, and so indirectly these Six Seal Judgments are FROM God, but that is because everything that takes place on earth is sovereignly <u>permitted by God.</u>
      c. However, this dynamic changes with the 6th Seal Judgement. The Sixth Seal Judgment clearly introduces a supernatural or a direct God-ordained element into the mix.
         - For example, in the 6th Seal Judgement the sky or the atmosphere is split open so unsaved humanity can briefly see the Lord on the throne and the wrath of the Lamb. This is a supernatural event.
         - This is permitted by God so that the depraved masses will know who is behind the Tribulation Judgements to come.
         - There are also various unprecedented cosmic disturbances in the Sixth Seal Judgement including a massive earthquake that affects all points on earth.
         - There is an asteroid shower, volcanoes, and an envelope of thick dust and debris that infuses the atmosphere.
         - This is all to say, the events of the Sixth Seal Judgment are NOT the result of man's wrath upon man as the prior Seal Judgments were.
         - Rather, the Sixth Seal is a clear turning point, a marker, a shot from a starting gun if you will.
         - That's why a number of prophecy scholars and teachers, and I put myself in this smaller group, do not see the Tribulation starting until about or around the point of this 6th Seal Judgment.

NOTE: Previously I said I'd be going back and outlining why I feel the bulk of these Seal Judgments occur in that gap of time BETWEEN THE RAPTURE AND THE START OF THE TRIBULATION. We're going to do that now.

I. As we've learned, the first five seals present mankind, <u>now facing the sudden absence of the church and the corporate restraint of the Holy Spirit</u>, totally turning on itself and destroying itself. How do we understand this better?

A. Turn to ***2 Thessalonians 2:1-9.*** There are several important points to make here:
   1. This passage is marked by the topical point Paul makes in ***vs. 1,*** *"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him…."*
   2. (NOTE: As with all ambitions to properly understand God's Word, a responsible contextual analysis is important.)
   3. In this passage, Paul is writing about the Rapture. He states this clearly in the opening verse.
   4. This theme of the Rapture is a hub in this portion of God's Word. Paul wrote this topical statement to point everyone's noses in the same direction.
   5. That means the bulk of what follows in that chapter is associated in some way with that pivotal event when true believers are *"gathered to Him."*

B. **IMPORTANT:** With the church saints gone, and with them the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit acting through the Body of Christ ***(Cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:7),*** Satan will have unfettered opportunity to influence the world and achieve his goals.
   1. In fact, this is implied quite clearly in ***vs. 7*** where we read, *"….the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the ONE who now holds it back will continue to do so till HE is taken out of the way."*
   2. So, here we see three key points being made:
      a. First, lawlessness is already at work in our world today. Things are bad already, but this lawlessness has not fully manifested as it will at some future point.
      b. Second, that lawlessness is being held back by ONE.
      c. And third, when that ONE, referred to here by the pronoun HE, is *"taken out of the way,"* it is only then that this present lawlessness we see will achieve its fullest impact.
   3. And we know from ***vs. 9*** that the arrival of the antichrist is in accordance *"with the work of Satan."*
   4. So, let's use some common sense and logic here. Clearly, there is ONE (known also as a HE) who has power to keep Satan's ambitions restrained until a pre-ordained moment in time. Obviously the only ONE who can have this kind of power and control over Satan is God.
   5. Moreover, this passage makes it clear that it is the Holy Spirit, that one-third part of the triune nature of the Godhead, THROUGH the presence of the church on earth, that is holding back this lawlessness from its fullest expression and impact.

6. That's why Paul states that certain things cannot happen until *"we are gathered to Him (or Jesus Christ)."*
7. The Holy Spirit indwells the church today, that body of true believers that began on the original Day of Pentecost in ***Acts Ch. 2.***

II. So, what is the impact of the church on the world today? Or, what should it be?

NOTE: (This is worth a lesson in itself, however I'll just hit the high points).

A. This issue, this question, is the source of much discussion and controversy within the Christian community. There are basically two sides, and each side feels they are in the right.
   1. On one side are those who spend many hours writing to their Congressmen, picketing abortion clinics, campaigning for nationalist candidates, trying to change school and city boards, demonstrating against changes to alcohol laws, and boycotting certain movies.
      a. They are using all means available to them to try to influence and improve our culture and leadership to to align it more with Christian values or a Christian worldview.
   2. On the other side are those who take Jesus' words, *"My kingdom is not of this world"* ***(Cf. John 18:36),*** and this group essentially checks out of society.
      a. They refuse to vote, they refuse to get involved, and they generally disdain all efforts to positively impact today's culture.

   3. There is a balance between these two points that we need to strive for and be sensitive to. Some have illustrated it with the analogy of a train station.
      a. We, the Christians, are waiting on the station platform to board the northbound (heavenly) train. It's a messy station: graffiti, trashy posters, and garbage is everywhere.
      b. All around us are people also standing on the platform, but they are preparing to board the southbound train, and they are unaware of their tragic destination.
      c. Now, should we spend our time and energy pleading with them to switch trains, or do we tidy up the train station instead?
      d. I think the answer is clear. Those who choose to tidy up the culture for culture's sake are missing the point.
      e. They are misunderstanding the reason God put us in this world, to be His witness to the lost and condemned.
   4. Now, that does not mean there is not a place for certain social or political activisms. I disagree with those who 'check out' of culture and do not seek to have any influence upon it.
      a. I know people (as a case in point) who have recently decided they will no longer vote. They feel, and justifiably so, that our elections are rigged and fraudulent to the core.
      b. They absolutely are! We do not have a legitimate President in office as one case in point, and Arizona does not have a legitimate Governor.

Pennsylvania does not have a legitimate Senator. These examples, and others like them, are obvious to anyone who reviews the facts.

c. However, that should not keep us from doing our civil duty, and voting. We need to do what we are supposed to do and then leave the results to God.
d. Our tax system is also very corrupted. That much is clear. It was in Jesus' time too. But, Jesus also said we should *"Give to Ceasar what belongs to Ceasar"* in ***Mark 12:17.***
e. Even when laws and leaders have become inherently corrupted, that is not necessarily a reason to resist or revolt. It's best to evaluate what our response should be on a case-by-case basis.
f. The bottom line is we are called to be the *"salt of the earth"* in ***Matthew 5:13.*** Among its other attributes, salt preserves and flavors. I believe the application is for us to preserve our society and to season the culture in which we live.
g. We are also called to be light that *"shines before men"* in ***Matthew 5:14-16.*** In other words, we are called to show good deeds.
h. Those good deeds must be evident to those around us, and by doing so we expose the darkness.
i. So, clearly the Bible teaches we are to have a positive impact on our society and culture, and we are not to check out instead.
j. Once again, it is our greatest calling to have a spiritual impact on the eternal destinies of others. <u>This is our priority,</u> and this is the impact of the Gospel we are to proclaim.

III. It becomes clearer what Paul is referring to in the passage I read in *2 Thessalonians Ch. 2.*

A. When the church is supernaturally removed from earth in The Rapture, what is also removed with it is the influence we have as a corporate body of believers.
   1. The salt is gone, and so is the light.
   2. We are no longer around to preserve society, season the culture, shed light on darkness, vote for the right candidates, stand up for law and order, resist tyranny, and so on and so on.
   3. With the church suddenly gone, so goes the corporate influence of the Holy Spirit that indwells the Church.
   4. IMPORTANT: The Holy Spirit is not absent since, as part of the triune Godhead, He is omnipresent. But the tools, the human agents through which He operates, have been removed.
   5. Without the compass of the Church present to point true north, the world goes truly south. It descends into an unprecedented tailspin.
   6. The world's leaders fully turn against humanity, man's wrath is upon man as I said at the beginning of this lesson. There is nothing to stop or slow any of this.

B. This brings me to some of the things we are already seeing right now that are hints of what is to come:
   1. The globalists desperately want a one-world leader. They openly talk about this. They are not calling this individual the 'antichrist,' but the Bible makes it clear that's who this person will be.
   2. The globalists, to bring about this one-world governing system, have to destroy any shred of nationalism that exists today.
   3. NO country can be strong if their plans are to succeed. This especially means the United States which has traditionally been the hub of the world's strength. That's why the globalists hate President Trump and his followers who support an "America First" agenda.
   4. In order to bring about this one-world ruling system, with themselves at the top of this progressive-socialist structure, the globalists are deliberately trying to create chaos.
   5. They need to weaken the masses, destroy the means and institutions by which individuals succeed and have their independence, and they want to depopulate the world.
   6. This is why we are seeing intentional pandemics, intentional attacks on the food system, and intentional economic ruin.
   7. It's why we are seeing a sharp increase in conflicts, deceptions, and various efforts designed to introduce gender confusion and health decline.
   8. These are things we are seeing today in our own time. These are the goals of lawlessness and the deeds of the globalists and the progressive socialists.
   9. There is no doubt here. We live in times when mankind is clearly showing an increase in corruption, and a desire for destruction and deception.

IV. What the Seal Judgments are all about is: All these things will markedly exacerbate with the opening of the first five seals AFTER the Rapture. NOTE: It is AFTER the Rapture, and AFTER the church is gone.

A. It is AFTER the restraint of the Holy Spirit through the corporate body of believers has been *"taken out of the way."*

B. It is AFTER these things that the signs of the globalists' goals we see today will become full-fledged agendas that will be out in the open with no opposition.

C. That's why the Seal Judgements are significant for what they bring about. It is "man's wrath against mankind."

D. I believe, as I have shared before, that there is a gap of time between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. We don't know how long that gap of time will be, but I believe it is in that gap that these Seal Judgements (most of them) take place.

E. **QUESTION:** So what does the Bible tell us will happen in that space of time?

F. The very first thing that happens after the Rapture is the antichrist arises on the world stage.

1. We don't know how long it will be after the Rapture that he emerges, but it seems to be a short amount of time according to God's Word.

2. We do know several things about his arrival from the Scriptures.
    a. Paul tells us in ***2 Thessalonians 2:8*** that *"he will be revealed"* AFTER we have been gathered to Jesus Christ.
    b. So, any speculation about who the antichrist is at this time is pretty fruitless. The world won't know until AFTER The Rapture.
3. We know from ***Revelation 6:1-2*** that the antichrist goes out to conquer and to achieve political and governing goals.
    a. From Scripture, he appears to be a powerhouse of a leader with tremendous persuasive and oratory ability.
    b. He will be effective to a large degree because Satan will convince the world to get behind him. He will appear to bring a measure of peace according to ***Revelation 6:4.***
4. We also know from ***Daniel 8:8-9*** that the antichrist, this ultimate globalist / socialist leader, will arise from that part of the world that comprised the ancient Seleucid and Assyrian Empires. Basically somewhere around northern Syria / southern Turkey). This is that part of the world which was part of the Eastern Leg of the Ancient Roman Empire, so the "Roman" origin idea is still intact.
5. We know from ***Daniel 7:7-8,*** and from ***Revelation Ch. 17*** that the antichrist will arise from within a group of ten leaders.
    a. The Bible refers to this group with the designation *"as kings."*
    b. Within a larger contextual study, it does not appear that they are conventional leaders over a nation or a territory, but they do possess great wealth, influence, and power. That's why they are noted to be *"as kings"* and they fully back the antichrist and his rise to power.
    c. Presently, I feel these are probably oligarchs or technocrats or some other prominent individuals who hold massive sway and influence within the inner circles of the globalist agenda.
    d. NOTE: The Bible says we will not know who the antichrist is, but it is quite possible that we can rationally speculate on the identity of these oligarchs that will be given power "*as kings."*
6. We know from various Biblical passages that the arrival of the antichrist is a matter of deception:
    a. Back to ***2 Thessalonians Chapter Two,*** but this time ***vss 9, 10, and 11***
        - The arrival of the antichrist is in accordance with *"counterfeit miracles"* ***vs. 9***
        - The arrival of the antichrist is accompanied by *"every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing"* ***vs. 10***
        - The arrival of the antichrist is part of a *"powerful delusion"* ***vs. 11***
    b. And in ***Daniel 8:23,*** the antichrist is called a *"master of intrigue,"* and two verses later in ***vs. 25*** it says *"He will cause deceit to prosper…"*
    c. In ***Matthew 24:5*** it states that *"….many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many."*
        - The greater counsel of God's Word positions the antichrist as a figure who is accepted "instead of Christ"

- Deception, and figures of deception, are stated by Jesus Christ as being a key indicator of the signs of the end of the age, but then Jesus adds in ***vs. 8*** that these are "*the beginning of birth pains."*
- He further states in ***Luke 21:9*** about the same timeframe, *"the end is not yet."*
- A thorough study of Scripture suggests that the arrival of the antichrist is not within that timeframe known as The Day of the Lord or The Tribulation. Rather, it will come before it, during a time Jesus remarks that *"the end is not yet come."*

7. But let me wrap up this point on the antichrist by simply saying there is no direct judgement of God that I can ascertain that brings about his rise.
    a. The world today already wants the antichrist. Globalist leaders are already saying the world needs one man to lead them.
    b. The infrastructure of a globalist system is already being promoted, especially by the left or the progressive agenda. They are already trying to make this happen.
    c. So, the antichrist's physical arrival, when it actually takes place, is simply the appointment of a one-world leader that the globalists are trying so hard right now to have.
    d. Again, and you're going to get tired of me saying it, it is an extension of "man's wrath against man." We are already seeing the signs that the world, right NOW! Many people want the antichrist.
    e. Getting him will happen almost immediately after The Rapture, once the restrainer has been removed.

NOTE: The conventional view has been that ***Revelation 6:1-2,*** the First Seal Judgement and the arrival of the antichrist, marks the start of The Tribulation. There are several things I need to say in response to that idea:

8. There is nothing in Scripture to support this view that the First Seal Judgement starts The Tribulation.
9. If anything, the Scriptures suggest the contrary.
    a. The antichrist will need to have risen on the world stage first, he will need to have established his abilities, and he will need to gain the reputation as a political powerhouse to qualify as the one to *confirm the covenant* with Israel in ***Daniel 9:27. (***NOTE: This is the event that starts The Tribulation).
    b. Remember, the antichrist must arise from within a group of ten individuals, and in that process, three of those individuals will be *"uprooted"* according to ***Daniel 7:8.***
    c. They will be done away with somehow. This is clearly a change, a process that will occur, though we cannot know how long all of it will take (days, weeks, months?)
    d. But, as I said here, all this will take a certain amount of time, and furthermore, Israel is not going to sit down at the negotiating table with an unknown and unproven leader.

e. Given the issues Israel will be facing at that time, she is not going to trust or rely on a 'neophyte,' a nobody, to cut a deal that has her own national welfare at stake.
f. As we learned in past lessons, Israel will be motivated to confirm this covenant due to the events that are marked by the FOURTH Seal Judgement.
g. This places the start of The Tribulation, NOT at the time of the arrival of the antichrist, but AFTER a series of Seal Judgements have already occurred.
h. It is very difficult to see the ARRIVAL of the antichrist (which is the First Seal Judgement) as the start of the Tribulation. Yes, as I said, this is the conventional view. However, as I also said, there is no Scripture to support this view. Instead, this premise instead goes against sound reason.
i. It is, instead, the covenant with Israel that antichrist executes that begins the Tribulation according to ***Daniel 9:27,*** and I believe this takes place at some point AFTER his debut on the world stage. Once he has proven himself, and once Israel perceives a need to enter into this covenant deal.
j. Putting all this in another way: It is not the ARRIVAL of the antichrist which starts The Tribulation, but a specific ACTION of the antichrist which does.