A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE END TIMES

Week 61: Earthly and Heavenly Conflicts, Part 1
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Review:

A. Two weeks ago we had our last lesson in our current series, "A Biblical View of the End Times."
B. Last week, we had a special lesson on "A Portrait of the Remnant." While that had relevance to the issues we've been learning, it was a slight departure from the content we've been studying.
    1. A number of you commented that last week's lesson was helpful and meaningful for you in various ways – and I appreciate that feedback.
C. In review, the Seventh Trumpet of ***Revelation*** has sounded. This is seen in ***Revelation 11:15 – 19.***
D. Like the Seventh Seal before it, this Seventh Trumpet is a transition between the series of judgments before it, and also the series of judgements which follow it. We learned a few important things:
    1. With the blowing of the Seventh Trumpet, the announcement is made that: *"the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."*
    2. The timing of this Seventh Trumpet Judgement is roughly at the halfway point of the Tribulation. This is seen in ***vs. 14*** where we are told, *"the second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon."*
    3. The larger idea here is that the outcome of everything to come is certain.
    4. Jesus Christ will rule and reign on earth. Satan will not prevail. All of God's prophetic promises will come to pass as they were originally declared.
    5. Despite the overwhelming presence and impact of evil on earth, God has not lost control. His plan is unfolding perfectly.
    6. Also, we learned from proper deduction is the last 3 ½ years of The Tribulation is that part of the seven years in which the Bowl Judgments will take place.
    7. We looked at various supporting Scriptures which make the case that the Trumpet Judgments comprise the first half of the Tribulation, and the Bowl Judgments comprise the second half.
    8. This conclusion is NOT what is typically represented by commentators and scholars, but if one studies the issues, it becomes clear that it IS the correct Biblical view.

NOTE: Now we come to another 'transitional' element in the chronology of end times. Again, we are presented with a moment which pauses and looks around a bit, so we are given a chance to get our bearings.

E. Dr. Andy Woods likens the layout of the book of ***Revelation*** to hiking up a tall wooded mountain. For the most part, the hike is one where you are surrounded by trees, and so the greater view is concealed. Periodically, there is a clearing, and if one walks into that

clearing and looks down, a larger perspective is gained. One can see how far they've hiked and what has changed.

1. ***Revelation*** is like that. It's chronological, orderly and things take place sequentially. But occasionally, we come into a clearing. We are then permitted to look around a bit and see where we've come from and all that has taken place.

2. ***Chapter 12 of Revelation*** is one of those "clearing moments." It is here we are permitted a glance at things that are "past, present, and future" from the perspective of John who is inspired by the Holy Spirit to author this wonderful book.

3. This conforms well to the instructions given to John in ***Revelation 1:19,*** *"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later."* In other words, John is told to record things past, present, and future.

4. And so, the information contained in ***Revelation*** adopts different vantage points. ***Chapter 12 of Revelation*** is a portion of God's Word which glances around at the greater timeline: past, present, and future.

5. I say all that to set a proper tone. Why? Because a few years ago, there were a lot of false prophecies and assumptions swirling around about the details of ***Revelation Ch. 12.*** Today, I hope to correct a few of those and return us to a proper interpretation and view of the Scriptures.

I have two basic points in this outline, with each having their own issues to further explore: "Earthly" and "Heavenly" Conflicts.

I. **The Earthly Conflict *(Cf. Revelation 12:1-6):* The Woman**
NOTE: The information in these six verses glances back in time, and also forward in time. From where John is supernaturally positioned in the grand chronology, he records the past and the future.

A. *"A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven, a woman…..(etc.)* ***Cf. Revelation 12:1-5***
NOTE: These are details that are PAST. Let's review them:
1. The scene here consists of a series of signs which depict a woman struggling against her adversary, the dragon.
2. It is plain within the context and the fuller counsel of God's Word that the woman represents Israel, and the dragon represents Satan.
3. It is also clear that this is a *Jewish-cemntric scene*, but it compiles elements which go all the way back to the Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden, to the original prophecy God gave in ***Genesis 3:15,*** and to the subsequent promise of a future redeemer ***(Cf. Genesis 3:15)***

a. Here there is the promise of a redeemer, a Messiah, who will eventually crush the serpent's head (i.e. the "dragon" in ***Revelation Ch. 12)***
b. The female representation of a woman (eventually Mary, the mother of Jesus) is also underscored as the woman of ***Revelation Ch. 12*** which is then seen as Israel. Again, clear from the context.

4. The "sign" is meant to be taken as a "sign." Here the Scriptures are telling us this is not meant to be taken literally.
   a. It is a figurative representation. It is a picture given to John that is symbolic.
   b. Most of ***Revelation*** contains details we should interpret literally, but here, the content instructs us to see this portion allegorically. And so John is shown this "sign."
5. Next, we are presented with the detail that this is about a *"woman."* There are four female figures presented symbolically in the book of ***Revelation:***
   a. First, is <u>Jezebel</u> of the church of Thyatira ***(Cf. Revelation 2:20).*** She is presented as a symbol of the apostate church, which is not taken up in the Rapture, but instead contributes directly to "the great Harlot" in ***Revelation Ch. 17.***
   b. Second, there is the woman here in ***Revelation Ch. 12*** who conceives a male child in great distress and then ultimately flees from the dragon into the wilderness. This is a picture of Israel.
   c. Third, as mentioned a moment ago, there is "The Great Harlot" woman of ***Revelation Ch. 17.*** We know from our past lessons that this woman is a symbol of the global false religious system that will rise and prevail in the immediate wake of The Rapture.
   d. Lastly, there is the Bride of Christ. That is us. That is the entire redeemed church from the Day of Pentecost to the time of The Rapture. Again, this is symbolic language.
6. But for our present purposes, we are focused on this woman here in ***Revelation Ch. 12.***
   a. She is a symbol that starts with Eve, but then becomes something that represents a specific group of individuals.
   b. This specific group of individuals is Israel, and the picture moves into the time of the end, when that woman (Israel) flees into the wilderness where she is protected by God for 1260 days, the second half of the Tribulation.

B. Next, we are given some celestial issues to consider. This woman is *"clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head."*
NOTE: Without getting 'lost in the weeds,' and without yielding to the wild astronomical speculations that have surrounded this passage in recent years, here are some basic assessments we can make:

1. Whatever the sun represents, it is an element that protects the woman in some way. *"For the LORD God is a sun and shield"* ***(Cf. Psalm 84:11)***
2. When we study the Scriptural use of the sun, we find both the sun and the moon often appear together as a *dual witness*.
3. In fact, the Bible tells us this. When God created the sun and moon, He said they would be *"for signs and seasons, and for days and years"* ***(Cf. Genesis 1:14)***.
4. Perhaps more significantly, the sun and the moon are mentioned together where God's unconditional protection and preservation of the nation of Israel is concerned ***(Cf. Jeremiah 31:35-37):***

"Thus says the LORD, Who gives the ***sun*** *for a light by day, the ordinances of the* ***moon*** *and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, and its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name): "If those ordinances depart from before Me, says the LORD, then the seed of Israel shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever." Thus says the LORD: "If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done," says the LORD."*

5. The point is this: the sun and the moon are not going away, not within the normal course of human history anyways. And so, God is saying His protection and preservation of Israel is not going to cease either.
6. Concerning the *"crown of twelve stars,"* I believe the most sensible argument is this is another key reference to Israel. In fact, one is reminded of Joseph's dream ***(Cf. Genesis 37:9-10)*** which mentions this trio of sun, moon, and stars with being a picture of Israel:

"Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

7. It's clear from this passage in ***Genesis,*** and from the greater counsel of God's Word, that the sun in this dream represents his father Jacob, the moon represents his mother, and the eleven stars represent his eleven brothers.
8. When we include Joseph as an additional star, we have our sun, moon, and twelve stars.
9. This all amounts to an important aspect in the identification of this woman in ***Revelation Ch. 12.*** The "*twelve stars"* are best understood as the 12 Tribes of Israel.

10. Next, we see this woman *"cried out in pain as she was about to give birth"* ***(vs. 2)***

NOTE: I mentioned the prophetic passage of ***Genesis 3:15*** earlier, and here I want to go back and take a more expansive view of that text. In ***Genesis 3:13-16,*** we see the fuller pronouncement of prophecies and curses that God stated in the Garden of Eden:

"And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

C. When we compare the text of ***Genesis. 3:13-16*** alongside our operative text in ***Rev. 12:1-6,*** we see several elements correlating closely:

1. A woman and the serpent ("dragon").
2. Enmity between the woman and the serpent.
3. Conflict between her offspring and the serpent.
4. A birth which brings forth the Messiah (first predicted in ***Genesis***).
5. The woman will experience labor pains.

D. I want to make a few related comments here about *"the woman,"* the *"birth,"* and so on….

1. Eve received the initial promise that a redeemer, a Messiah, would come by the seed of a woman. Again, this is from ***Genesis 3:15,*** the one verse which forms the basis of all Bible prophecy after that point.
2. See the beauty of God's sovereign plan here. See what is intended. It is "*through the same vessel by which mankind fell that the redeemer of mankind would come forth!*
    a. The woman was first to eat of the forbidden fruit, but she would have the ultimate honor of producing the promised fruit which would crush the head of the serpent.
    b. This central promise of the redeeming seed through a woman is paramount in God's plan. This is what we are seeing here in ***Revelation Ch. 12*** in John's vision.
3. And here in ***Revelation Ch. 12,*** we are given a symbol of another woman who is in labor. We know from what we've learned that this woman is representative of Israel.
    a. However, it's also here that we run into some important differentiators, and we need to go to ***Isaiah 66:7*** to see this. It's in ***Isaiah 66:7*** that we see the nation of Israel itself being born, and once again, there is the symbolism of a woman present:

"Before she goes into labor, she gives birth; before the pains come upon her, she delivers a son."

b. Unlike Eve and all other women after Eve, THIS woman in ***Isaiah 66:7*** gives birth *before* her labor pain came.
c. Here in ***Isaiah 66:7,*** we are given a picture of the suddenness of the establishment of the Jewish nation. This is at a point prior to the Millennium Kingdom ***(Cf. Micah 5:3-5; Matthew 24:8).***
d. In other words, the people of Israel, and their land, will be reborn in one precipitous moment - in a day! As the next verse in ***Isaiah 66:8)*** reads:

"Who has ever heard of such things? Who has ever seen things like this? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children."

NOTE: Here is where I need to make a couple of important points. I need to correct some very invasive and persistent heresies.

4. It has been customary within various denominations, and among various current and popular pastors and teachers, to view these passages as stating that the church will quickly spring up and spread across the world.
5. This is NOT what these passages are saying. They can only arrive at their conclusions by a choice to irresponsibly handle God's Word.
6. The Bible says quite clearly that this is the physical and ethnic nation of Israel springing up quickly by virtue of God's plan.
7. The greater counsel of God's Word also makes it plain it will be a remnant of Israel who will come to faith just before and during the Tribulation Period, and this remnant (i.e. the 144,000 Jews) that will quickly spread the message of the gospel around the world.

<u>NOTE:</u> Therefore - - the labor of the woman in ***Revelation 12*** precedes and differs from the labor of the woman of ***Isaiah 66***.

The woman in ***Revelation 12*** was in labor for long ages. She labored from the first promise given to Eve in ***Genesis 3*** until its culmination in the virgin Mary.

That's stated plainly and simply in ***Galatians 4:4-5***

> *"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."*

However, no matter how definite and clear the texts are, there will always be some who avoid the obvious and literal interpretation in favor of another view that suits what they most WANT to believe.

E. **HERE IS THE BIG PROBLEM FOR THOSE PEOPLE:** Those who attempt to make Israel mean the church therefore also conclude that the woman of ***Revelation 12*** also means the Church.

1. They are totally reversing the symbolism of the text. Tthis situation does not add up.
2. Their position suggests it is the church then which gives birth to Christ, rather than Christ giving birth to the church.
3. As you can see, this is problematic. It's blatant heresy. There is no Scriptural basis for this.
4. This is the underlying and unspoken assumption of the Catholic denomination, AND of most of the Reformed denominations, (up to 80% of the churches today).
5. It's why these churches and their leadership often get hostile when they are closely questioned about this. They cannot defend their positions without admitting they are WILLINGLY mishandling Scripture.
6. The fact is, Israel, not the Church, gave birth to Christ. In no possible sense did the Church do so.

Let's move on…

F. **Another Aspect of The Earthly Conflict – the Dragon**

NOTE: In ***vs. 3,*** another sign is introduced. This one is the dragon (Satan). These two signs are juxtaposed.

1. Together, they highlight the tension between God's promise to the woman and the unrelenting intention of the dragon to undermine God's work. This, of course, is the dynamic that was introduced all the way back in ***Genesis 3:15.*** Several observations about this dragon:
   a. "Enormous" – denotes power, influence, strength, and force
   b. "Red" – the Greek here means "fiery red" (like the 2nd Seal horse and rider): speaks of blood, carnage, and destruction
   c. We know without any doubt that this dragon is Satan. It is explained to be *"that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan"* ***(Cf. Revelation 12:9).***
   d. It's probably best to see the seven heads as representing seven sequential and historical kingdoms over which Satan has ruled.
   e. The ten horns and ten crowns most likely represent the ten contemporaneous kings which serve the antichrist, and which emerge from within this final kingdom.

- This can be concluded from ***Daniel 7:24,*** as well as from ***Revelation 17:12.***
- (One good point from a commentator): "*If the seven heads stand for seven successive world empires, the ten horns must be on the seventh head to agree with Daniel's placement of the ten horns at the time of the end."*

f. His tail flung 1/3 of the stars to earth –

NOTE: The word here means to *"move someone or something along by force."* The meaning here is quite clear, and this is a moment of PAST perspective. Satan had 1/3 of the angels fall with him. Remember, "stars" = "angels" in a number of Bible passages.

- Here, the passage affirms that Satan held considerable influence over the stars (angels). He was key in their rebellion.
- This is not about Satan's final casting out, but this is about his original fall in sin and his corruption of one third of the heavenly angelic host,
- It's important to realize that this occurred early in God's created order, <u>prior to</u> the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden.
- These fallen angels were on the earth, together with Satan, in advance of the creation of mankind.