A Biblical View OF THE END TIMES

THE SEAL JUDGEMENTS, PART 1

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Review:

- Generally, we are working our way through a timeline of the prophetic Scriptures. A few rabbit trails here and there have supported this chronological approach.
- We've completed a thorough study of the antichrist, including his rise to political power, some of his career highlights, and various of the conflicts he is part of. We have more to learn about the antichrist in some lessons ahead….
- One of the important rabbit trails we had to chase to its conclusion led to some interesting insights about Jesus Christ's Second Coming - - and how that will play out according to the Bible.
- (And) with our last lesson, we examined a series of prophetic wars that are likely going to happen soon. We examined how the destruction of Damascus, Syria; the destruction of Ammon, Jordan; and the destruction of Elam (ancient western Iran), are all probably inter-related.
- We saw how all these events are likely (directly or indirectly) tied to the ***Ps. 83*** conflict which may flare up in fulfillment of that passage very soon.
- I indicated at the conclusion of our last lesson that we would now start to study the seven Seal Judgements. They are the first set of 21 judgments outlined in the book of Revelation, and they FOLLOW the Rapture.

NOTE: To help us properly understand the nature and purpose of the Seal Judgments, we need to take a bit of a running start - - **Turn to *Revelation Ch. 5.***

NOTE: We are still proceeding in a chronological pattern – we are moving through the events of Bible prophecy along a timeline. In doing so, we now find ourselves needing to wade through parts of *Revelation* for the next few weeks….

BACKGROUND:

It can be argued that no book of the Bible reveals the glory of Jesus Christ in more splendor and detail than the book of ***Revelation***. Yet – and likely **because** that is the case - no book of Scripture has been more misrepresented, misinterpreted, and maligned than THIS book.

I personally believe Satan does not want us to understand the content of ***Revelation***. And if you evaluate the posture of most churches towards ***Revelation,*** I suggest to you that Satan is achieving his objectives through their weaknesses. The book of ***Revelation*** enables us to….

- Understand the future (for faithful believers, that increases their hope and joy).
- ***Revelation*** helps us to comprehend Jesus Christ as the only all-powerful judge and ruler. Any lesser, tamer, or abbreviated view of Jesus Christ serves Satan's purposes MUCH better.
- When our view of Jesus Christ is limited, our view of ourselves is always expanded. And vice versa is also true. It's two ends of a seesaw here….
- This is the principle behind that statement John the Baptist gave in ***John 3:30*** when he said, *"He must increase, but I must decrease…."*
- That is why the key to Revelation is found in ***Rev. 1:1*** which reads, *"The Revelation of Jesus Christ…."* The book of ***Revelation*** is FROM Him and it is ABOUT Him. It is about revealing the person and work of Jesus Christ.
- ***Revelation*** uncovers truth about Jesus in ways no other part of Scripture shows. He is magnified, glorified, and justified in ***Revelation*** in ways no other book reveals.
- Which explains why ***Rev. 1:3*** says, *"Blessed is the one who reads it, hears it, and takes it to heart…"* **(3 step process here: reads, receives, and responds).**
- This is a key argument that we need to approach ***Revelation*** literally. If the wrong assumption is made that ***Revelation*** is apocalyptic and symbolic (this is the view of many churches today) then this blessing makes ZERO sense.
- We've reduced Scripture to having a 'placebo effect.' It's not the divinely inspired Word of God anymore….

QUESTION: "What are the events leading up to *Chapter 5*?"

A. As we've learned, in ***chapters 2 & 3*****,** John is instructed to write letters to 7 different churches. These are 7 real churches that existed in seven real cities in John's time.
B. But they are also representative churches, because each is unique, and each one represents churches of all phases of church history. In all the history of the church age, there have always been **these kinds of churches**.
C. But these seven churches ALSO provide a commentary about church history itself. If we evaluate the attitudes and performance of the greater church over the last 2,000 years, we find these things follow the specific arrangement of these seven churches.
D. Each of these seven churches receives a special word from the Lord. Each one had issues to which God had provided a unique message. That's why, collectively, this is His ministry, His message, to the church age.
E. And that is why each of the 7 messages ends with, *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says* ***to the churches****."* (Note the plural – the message **to each** is a message **for all**).
F. Now – I say all that to say this, AND THIS IS IMPORTANT. The church is mentioned 19 times in chapters 1-3, then that term is absent till ***Revelation Ch. 19*** when the marriage supper of the Lamb is discussed.
G. Meantime, in the intervening chapters, John admonishes with the warning, *"If anyone has an ear, let him hear."* There's no more ***"to the churches"*** anymore ***(Cf. Rev. 13:9).***

H. That follow-on phrase *'to the churches,'* had been a consistent and common element in the first three chapters. (What are the implications? - the Rapture has happened.)
I. NOTE: There **is** the mention of *"saints"* in the intervening context ***(i.e. Rev. 13:7 & 10).*** These saints, however, are those who will get saved during the time on earth **after** the church has been taken into heaven. We'll learn about that.
J. This whole premise that the church is shown to be absent on earth in ***Revelation Chapters 4-18*** is further supported by the Jewish customs and traditions surrounding marriage, and how the groom comes for the bride and takes her away to be with him.
K. And that is why, in a type (or 'representation') of the Rapture, John is told in ***Rev. 4:1*** to *"Come up here..."* He is transported in a vision to heaven where his description of the throne environment is very similar to ***Ezekiel Ch. 1.***
L. All of that said, this now brings us to ***Rev. Ch. 5*** which is important to understand the dynamics of that time which follows the Rapture (review it as I speak). Here is a basic 4-point outline to help us understand this chapter:

A. The Scroll
B. The Search
C. The Savior
D. The Song

A. The Scroll (vs. 1)

1. In ancient times they didn't have books where pages were cut and bound together.
- Prior to the invention of the book, there were scrolls and these were a single long parchment (papyrus / vellum) usually rolled up from both ends.

2. But this scroll has some unique characteristics:
- It was written inside and on the back. Like inside a book, and on the cover.
- It was sealed up with seven seals. Wax is generally used, sometimes clay.
- After the scroll was written, it was rolled up. In some manner – usually on the edges - the scroll was sealed repeatedly until it was finally closed.
- You could not access the contents unless you broke a seal and then another, and so on until the full writing was clear. That prevented people from looking at the document without proper authorization.

3. In ancient Eastern cultures, and up through the time of the Romans, important documents were treated in exactly this manner, specifically:
- Wills and testaments
- Contracts (usually deeds or titles) – most **common** use of this approach
- A portion of text would be written and then sealed with a different witness signing at each sealing until the whole document was complete.
- More witnesses meant more importance was assigned to the document.
- In this case, 7 seals are used, representing 'perfection or completeness.' It was common in Roman times to seal deeds with 7 seals.

- Considering the context of ***Revelation***, and in view of historical precedent, it's possible this scroll represents a contract or a deed, probably about ownership or rights. The details are to remain unknown to all but the authorized party.

4. An example of this sort of transaction and document is seen in ***Jeremiah 32:7-15.***
- Around 586 BC when Babylon was conquering Judah – invasion had already begun.
- But God instructed Jeremiah to purchase land from his relative (worthless in light of the invasion and pending captivity) to demonstrate God's faithfulness.
- Terms and protocols of this deed are outlined – similar to ***Rev. Ch. 5***

5. I feel this scroll in ***Rev. Ch. 5*** likely represents God's will and deed to give the earth to Jesus Christ.
- Affirms His prophetic promise seen in ***Psalm 2:7-9.*** That reads as follows:

"I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You The nations for Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

- Here is the promise from the Father to the Son in ***Ps. Ch. 2***, and here's the title deed the Father holds in His hand in ***Rev. Ch. 5.***
- The prophetic End Times context and language are clear. The time has come for the Son to rightfully take back the earth and reign.

QUESTION: How can we describe the heritage or the right of an eternal God? The earth is already His, so putting this matter in terms of how we normally think of 'inheritance' is not the best way to regard this.

- Rather, this scroll reveals <u>how</u> He will **take back** what is His. Not <u>why</u> it is His, but <u>how</u> He will **redeem** His rightful possession. Certainly, this scroll affirms man's sinful condition and his need for a redeemer.
- This key point is missed if this scroll is seen as containing descriptions of the earth, the universe, and descriptions of God Himself as a human-type heir.
- It is better to understand it considering His qualifications as a Redeemer and having descriptions of His judgments and His vengeance. The purging power of God's wrath is detailed out.
- Remember, our Lord is a JUST God. **Nobody** will stand before Him and disagree with Him. God goes to extraordinary lengths to show Himself and prove Himself as a JUST God.
- Prior to the final bowl judgments, God's justice is praised ***(Cf. Rev. 15:3-4; Rev. 19:1-4.)*** The martyred saints under the altar also praise His justice in ***Rev. Ch. 16.*** His justice is clear.

B. That was 'the Scroll,' now, let's look at 'The Search' *(vss. 2-5; READ)* – The operative question here is *"Who is worthy to open the scroll?"*

1. In other words, "Who is worthy to have the rights that are detailed in this scroll – the rights to reign and rule?"

- The desire to rule the world is longstanding. Certainly, Satan started it all, and he continues to inspire those same goals.
- From a human perspective, there was Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan, Napoleon, Hitler, Lenin, Stalin,….and more recently the World Economic Forum, and…..Wal-Mart.
- And some day there will be the Antichrist, the most powerful figure to ever represent Satan on this planet. He will subdue all opposition and set out to conquer the world and take it, so to speak, away from the hands of God.
- None of the past rulers succeeded, and none will! None of them are "*worthy.*"
- Turning to the other side, we might talk about righteous or capable men that we assume would be capable of ruling the world - - but none of them are qualified either, and ***Rev. 5:3* affirms this!**

2. But **verse 3** says he not only has to be <u>worthy</u>, he **also** has to be <u>able.</u>

- This verse is basically asking, *"Who has the ability? Who can overthrow Satan? Who can destroy sin? Who can remedy the curse on the world and the curse on the human body and mind? Who can do it? Who is able?"*
- Then John weeps because nobody could be found **(vs. 4) - -** (the Greek word 'oudeis' **(oo-DICE)** means "no **one**" or "no **thing**." So, not even an angel could open the scroll.)
  - Perhaps we can now better understand why John cried. The record was full and complete. The entire human race was sinful, unworthy, and unable.
  - In effect, it's easy to imagine Satan saying to God, *"The people of earth are mine! The facts are recorded. Look at the record which shows what these sinners have done. They have broken your law and they deserve to die."*
  - One of the elders ***(Cf. vs. 5)*** confronts John about his weeping….and He tells John that Jesus Christ is worthy to open the scroll.
  - And who would know better than one of the 24 elders what it meant to be redeemed? (recall, the 24 elders represent the church – already in heaven).

C. Now we move to 'The Savior' *(Cf. vss. 6-7; READ)* - Jesus is the only one worthy to receive the scroll and to open it.

1. Some observations about "*the Lion"* in ***vs. 5.*** This is the first of several key descriptive phrases I want to examine within this whole larger passage.
   - ***"…the Lion of the tribe of Judah"*** – recalls Jacob's blessing on his son Judah, giving him leadership over his brothers **(*Cf. Gen. 49:8-10*).**
     - Jacob prophetically gives the scepter of kingship to Judah and makes him the tribe of kings, and from which the King of kings will come.

- (Looking back): It is interesting to note that God never intended Saul to establish a dynasty; he came from the tribe of Benjamin.

- ***"…the Root of David,"*** - God established the eternal dynasty through David, who was from the tribe of Judah.
  - In the Old Testament, the coming Messiah is called both the "shoot" and "branch" that will spring from Jesse's root to restore David's dynasty **(*Cf. Isaiah 11:1)***
- ***"…has triumphed"* -** literally the Greek word means to 'overcome.' Jesus faced the most extreme adversity, paid the highest price for our sin that anyone could pay, and he overcame the odds.

2. Some observations about the Lamb in ***vs. 6:***
   - Is this how the exalted Son of God looks – like a baby sheep with multiple horns and eyes? Of course not.
     - It is obvious John uses symbolic language to describe the same figure he depicted earlier as having white hair, eyes like blazing fire, feet like fine bronze, and a mouth giving way to a two-edged sword ***(Cf. Rev. 1:14-16),*** the same image which made John fall down as though dead!
     - It's the same *"Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"* ***(Cf. John 1:29).***
     - ***Isaiah*** depicts Him as *"a lamb led to the slaughter"* ***(Isa. 53:7),*** and *"bearing the iniquities of all mankind"*
   - John's view of Jesus as a slain lamb is to convey the key truth that Jesus' suffering and death is both a great sacrifice and a great victory.

NOTE: I want you to notice some significant consistency in Scripture.

- It is significant that the glorified Jesus Christ seen here in ***Revelation*** still bears the marks of His crucifixion.
- Jesus challenged Thomas to examine and touch His scars ***(Cf. John 20:27)*** after His resurrection.
- John's description of Him as *"a slaughtered lamb"* ***(here in vs. 6)*** still shows the scars. That is also consistent with….
- ….Zechariah's prophecy of the glorious physical advent of the Messiah, who has been *"pierced"* ***(Cf. Zech. 14:10).***

QUESTION: Why does Jesus retain His scars when we are assured of having perfect bodies in the future? Two reasons seem clear.

- **First**, Jesus' scars are an everlasting testimony of His sacrifice for us.
- **Second**, we are cautioned that many false Messiahs will arise, and so Jesus' scars authenticate Him.
- When Jesus returns, His crucifixion scars will identify Him as the true Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world ***(Cf. Rev. 13:8).***

- **(next phrase) The seven horns.** In scripture, horns symbolize great power. David writes ***(Cf. Psalms 18:2)***, after the Lord rescues him from his enemies, *"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my mountain where I seek refuge, my shield and the* horn *of my salvation"*
  - No doubt, the seven horns on the Lamb in John's vision represent – in some fashion - the full power and authority of Jesus.
- **The seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth.** The phrase "seven spirits" ties back to ***Rev. 1:4*** and may be translated *"the seven-fold Spirit."*
  - There are many debates about what these seven eyes mean. I take this to be a reference to the completeness and power of the Holy Spirit in Christ.
  - This *'seven eyes'* imagery draws heavily from OT passages like ***Zechariah 3:9 and 4:10*** where the *"seven eyes"* are stated to be the eyes of the Lord that range to and fro across the whole earth.
  - It also parallels the sevenfold spirit described in ***Isaiah 11:1-2,*** and again, the emphasis here seems to be on Christ's place in the Godhead and His authority as the One who has all the fullness of the Spirit. It reads:

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—"

D. (and now we get to) 'The Song' – this is about sincere worship that is honest, it has integrity, and sincerity, and it is pure. ***(READ vss. 8-14).***

1. When Jesus says, "I'll take that scroll, I'll redeem the earth and claim what is mine," ***(vs. 7),*** then all heaven begins the halleluiahs again that are first seen in ***chapter 4.***
   - It's not a familiar hymn this time ***(Cf. Rev. 15 where they sing the Song of Moses),*** but it is described as a 'new song.'
   - The four living creatures and the 24 elders respond immediately, falling prostrate before the Lamb in clear acknowledgement of His worth and deity.

2. **Jesus is worthy to receive something:** (7 things are listed in the full embodiment of this true worship: ***Cf. vss. 12-13***):
   a. **Power.** The Greek word here is 'dynamis,' from which we get "dynamite." He holds all authority, and He has the power to vindicate His holiness and punish evil.
   b. **Riches.** During His earthly ministry, Jesus shows no interest in building personal wealth. But we will cast the crowns He has given us at His feet, for He deserves all that can be given Him.
   c. **Wisdom.** Jesus was often accused of being mad, or even demon possessed. Jesus always endures the slander and disrespect of those who are wise in their own eyes. He is *"the only wise God," **(Cf. Rom. 16:27).***

d. **Strength.** Jesus not only saves His own but keeps us by His infinite power ***(Cf. 1 Peter 1:5).***
e. **Honor.** He is seated at the Father's right hand, in the highest place of honor.
f. **Glory.** His humble life and many sorrows are replaced by the glory of heaven's throne room.
g. **Blessing.** He is to receive all blessings from the grateful recipients of His grace.

NOTE: All that background now brings us to ***Chapter 6:1-2.*** In this session, we'll set the tone for the Seal Judgements, and we'll dive into Seal Judgment #1 next week **(READ!).**

NOTE: Let's look at the big picture (we need to understand the Seal Judgments).

A. General view

- My view of the Seal Judgments is not a conventional one. The conventional view is these Judgements happen INSIDE the 7 years of the Tribulation.
- I believe, as Bill Salus does (and now it seems more are starting to see it this way) that the Seal Judgements take place – at least mostly! – within that unknown gap of time BETWEEN the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation (much more on this in coming lessons).
- There **must** be a gap of time between these two points. The Rapture does not happen at 8AM, the antichrist is a prominent political figure on the world scene by 8:30AM, and he confirms a covenant with Israel at 9AM. Not reasonable!
- Moreover, the Bible clearly lays out the antichrist's rise as a process over time. There are multiple reasons to see an unknown gap of time between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation. So, either….
  - **The Bible is totally silent on this gap of time** – and God decides He's not going to reveal any details about this timeframe, or….
  - **The Bible gives us the details chronologically just as it has already and as it will continue to do –** this is the position that makes the most sense.
  - The Seal Judgments are about what happens just AFTER the Rapture and BEFORE the Tribulation.

B. Now, this is an unprecedented time right after the Rapture.

- Our planet has endured multiple cruel times of war, famine, disease, destruction, dictatorship, chaos, etc. – BUT NEVER LIKE THIS!
- God's purpose is to shake humanity loose from its false sense of security, to cause mankind to repent, and to turn to Him for salvation.
- We cannot imagine the chaos and dynamics after the Rapture, but we'll see in the lessons ahead that God's Word gives us some riveting insights.

C. *Revelation Ch. 6* begins the first of three sets of consecutive judgments outlined in the book of Revelation.

- Seven seals ***(Rev. 6:1-8:1)*** – these are all opened by Jesus Christ, the Lamb
- Seven trumpets ***(Rev. 8:2-11:19)*** – these are all dispensed by angels
- Seven bowls ***(Rev. 15:5-16:21)* –** these, too, are dispensed by angels

NOTE: Some scholars see lots of overlap with these 21 judgments (running concurrently). This, IMO, does not conform to a plain reading. Especially with all the *"after this"* elements.

- An ordinary reading of the text strongly suggests an orderly sequence, with trumpets coming from out from the 7th seal, and so on. (i.e. like fireworks where smaller rockets come out of a larger one)
- We will generally follow this order that the book of ***Revelation*** lays out.

D. First seal introduces us to first of "the four horsemen of the apocalypse"

- These horses and their riders are dramatic pictures or representations (symbols) of literal facts, dynamics, and events taking place on this planet.
- It is not God's intention to convey individual personalities, but 'forces' or 'conditions' in the world (i.e. peace [perhaps "deception"], war, famine, pestilence). **This is a consistent intention.**
- For example, the 4th horse has riders called 'death,' and 'hades,' and death is not a person any more than 'famine' is (we studied this).

NOTE: One way to think about this is these four horsemen really bring to light **man's inhumanity to man.** These Seal Judgements are indeed God's wrath on mankind – let's be clear about that. Be that so, sinful man makes deliberate choices which adversely affect his situation (we see this in our own time like never before) – but nothing has **ever been this bad.**

NOTE: Another thing to note, world history has shown this typical scenario many times already: socialism, globalism, elite-ism, open conflict, religious persecution, planned famine and economic ruin, hate against truth, and so on.

1. Let's talk about the 'Timing'

A. (Conventional view): This is the start of the 7-year Tribulation

- It is the signing of the 7-yr peace treaty between Israel and Antichrist ***(Cf. Daniel 9:27 –*** *"…he will confirm a covenant with many for one week…"*
  - NOTE: Some scholars used to say the Jews will accept him as a political leader, but not as their Messiah. I'm not so sure I agree with that.
  - Many Jews today believe the 'Messiah' will rebuild their temple.
  - Keep in mind, the Jews are careful when it comes to matters of national security; they will not ink a treaty with a 'nobody.'
  - The antichrist will have already proven himself on the world's stage and he will have gained credibility in their eyes.

- This ALSO suggests that the antichrist will have been a rising pivotal figure for some time. Again – this communicates that some time and process are involved.

- The conventional view is the opening of the first seal in heaven coincides with the confirmation of this covenant between Israel and the antichrist (So, the idea is there are two views: one heavenly and one earthly) – THIS IS THE START OF THE TRIBULATION. **This is the traditional view.**
- In other words, the theory is the opening of the first seal starts the ticking clock (7 years, 84 months, 2520 days – based on Jewish 30-day month) which culminates in the physical return of Jesus Christ.
- The problem is none of these ideas are directly supported in Scripture. They are all just assumed. And for the most part of the last century or so, these ideas were left alone - - they just remained unchallenged.
- Furthermore, the FIRST explicit timestamp concerning the duration of the tribulation events does not appear until ***Revelation 11:2***.
- That introduces the timeframe of **42 months** (equivalent to 1,260 days or 3.5 years), and it's clear from the context that it's **looking back** over the first half of the Tribulation timeframe. We'll be studying that….
- **Here's the bottom line:** One cannot point to any Scripture which affirms the seven-year Tribulation begins with the first Seal Judgment. But one can point to multiple passages (and we will be examining those) which strongly suggest it does not.

B. (Unconventional view – MY VIEW): Seal Judgement #1 is not the start of the seven-year Tribulation.

- While God is preparing to turn His attention to dealing with Israel once again, these 7 Seal Judgements shed light on that timeframe between the Rapture and the start of the Tribulation (HOW DO WE KNOW THAT GOD IS TURNING HIS ATTENTION TO ISRAEL ONCE MORE?)
- ***Cf. Daniel 9:24 –*** *"Seventy sevens are decreed (cut out of the timeline and set aside for a special purpose) for your people and your holy city…"*
- God's sovereign design for the 'Church Age' will be complete. The church will be raptured and out of the picture, and God begins to turn His attention to Israel once more. This is a fact that is clearly prophesied.

Another thing to note: ***Revelation*** is mostly chronological. There are few exceptions to this. We've learned that.

So, with that said, it's significant to note that the temple details (which are a fulcrum element of the covenant terms according to ***Daniel 9:27)*** are not even mentioned until ***Rev. Ch. 11.*** That's a point that's quite a bit AFTER the events of the Seal Judgments in ***Revelation.***

NEXT WEEK: Seal Judgement #1 – what are the specifics of this first Seal Judgment, and what does it tell us about the surge of globalism and the political ascent of the antichrist?

Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God's Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don't pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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