

BOOK OF REVELATION

Lesson 25 - Chapter 12

Today we start a new section (if we can call it that) of the Book of Revelation. Sometimes it can be helpful to organize a Bible book into sections for the purpose of study in order to help us get a better overall picture of it, even though no doubt the author didn't necessarily construct it with that thought process in mind. Nonetheless, provided we stay true to the words and concepts presented, there is no harm and some advantage to such an approach especially when the subject matter is deep and complex.....and in this case it surely is.

Before we do that however, let's take just a few minutes to sum up where we're at since it was a few months ago that we opened our Bibles to the Book of Revelation. The Apostle John, one of original 12 disciples of Christ, received prophetic visions from God while he was banished by the Roman authorities to the Island of Patmos. He was given one specific instruction by God that is critical to our understanding and perspective of this apocalypse: ^{CJB}Rev 1:19 ¹⁹ **So write down what you see, both what is now, and what will happen afterwards.**

That one short sentence commands that John's job is ONLY to write down what he sees. He is not to interpret, he is not to comment, he is not to rework it or make these visions his own. And yet the bulk of modern Bible commentators approach Revelation as something John created out of his own mind to set forth his own agenda and to offer his own vision of the present and future. Some even see it as little more than a coded diatribe against Rome. So as we study this, the final book of our Bible, we have a critical choice to make: are the contents what John claims it is....direct, unadulterated, truthful and profound visions from God? Or, is this John's personal work that is along the lines of the letters he wrote to Believers that gives us 4 books in the New Testament (not counting Revelation)? I, for one, trust our Bible as God's Word and so I go with the former: the Book of Revelation is John faithfully recounting the visions he was given, without modification, and often he was clueless as to what those visions meant to impart; but he didn't sink to speculation or guesswork. He left that up to his future readers.

The first visions he was given amount to the famous 7 letters to 7 Believing congregations in Asia. Each letter gave the pertinent church (actually they were synagogues at this time) God's perspective of their spiritual condition as a community of Believers. Some came with commendation; others came with condemnation. Divine warning was also involved, and the warning usually took the form of demanding change within the congregation or by certain individuals within the group, or their salvation would be canceled.

Next John was given a glimpse of Heaven where he saw the Ancient One (God the Father) seated on a throne with the Lamb that was slain (God the Son, Messiah Yeshua) standing before Him. Clearly a hierarchy was established with the Father's preeminence and the Son's subservience. In God's throne room stood 4 unique living beings, full of all-seeing eyes, that guarded God's throne and who held great authority. There were also 24 Elders present whose main job seemed to be praising and worshipping the Most High. Without doubt these were

Levites that had accepted Yeshua as their Savior.

The Ancient One held out a scroll with 7 seals on it as a mighty angel asked of no one in particular "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" There was no response because no one in Heaven had the merit....that is until the Lion of Judah, the Lamb that was slain, stepped forward. The 24 Elders broke into a song of praise singing to the Lamb and confirming that "You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals". As the Lamb began removing the seals, one by one, each broken seal revealed a consequence. The first 4 opened seals sent forth a group of horses, each of a different color, and each carrying a rider on its back that was given the duty of bringing chaos to mankind. These are best known as The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Altogether the 7 seals are said to be 7 judgments from God; however I take exception to that notion. The first 4 seals (the 4 Horsemen) do not bring God's supernatural wrath down upon mankind. Rather they stir up and excite the evil inclination that is present within all humans and thus the wickedness that we do to one another on a regular basis increases exponentially upon the sending of these 4 Horsemen. Wars increase, so famine increases. Because famine increases, plagues and disease increase. And the result is violence and death and destruction on a heretofore unprecedented scale worldwide.

When the 5th seal is opened God's wrath not only doesn't happen, it is specifically said to be postponed. It is revealed to us that residing under the Heavenly altar are countless souls of those who were martyred for their trust in God and in Yeshua, and they were asking God to do justice and avenge their deaths. They were given white robes, meaning they were purified. And then they were told they'd have to wait a little longer before the Lord brought justice to their killers.

But when the 6th seal was broken, God's wrath broke out beginning with a terrifying disturbance of the cosmos that had even the bravest of men preferring to be killed rather than enduring it.

Suddenly there was an unexpected interlude in the narrative as we were introduced to 144,000 selected individuals who were sealed for God's protection. This group consisted of 12,000 from each of Israel's 12 tribes; in fact, each tribe was named. After the interlude the 7th seal was broken and more wrath was sent upon the earth.

Having completed the cycle of the 7 Seal Judgments, a new set of judgments called the Trumpet Judgments is introduced; and of course, there are also 7 of them. The first Trumpet judgment affected the dry land, the second one the oceans, the third one our fresh water sources, and the fourth one the sky above us.

When the 5th Trumpet was sounded the Abyss under the earth was opened and demons in the form of strange locust-like creatures swarmed upward to the surface. The Abyss is not the place of the dead; rather it is the place where evil, rebellious spirits are locked up. These locusts were sent to harm human beings but they did not harm plant life. And they did not kill; rather they inflicted unbearable, incurable pain over a period of 5 months. This judgment was given the secondary name of "the first woe".

Now a 6th Trumpet was blown and with it came an order for 4 angels who stood along the Euphrates River to allow, or perhaps in some way to lead, a massive satanic army of 200 million across the river and into Israel. The death and destruction inevitably spread, as wars do, beyond the immediate area of the fighting until fully one-third of all human beings on earth die. If we apply that to the population of earth as it is today, that means something on the order of 2 1/2 billion people will be killed. It is believed that as many as 80 million people died in World War II. This means that 30 times more people will be killed as a result of this conflict than died in WWII.

Then, as with the Seal Judgments, after the 6th in the series of Trumpet judgments there is an interlude. This interlude (that we find in chapter 10) begins with another appearance of a divine being called The Mighty Angel. I feel certain that this a manifestation of God and is what was called The Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament. This Mighty Angel then swore to Heaven that there would be no more delay until the hidden plan of God was brought to completion, as the intent and purpose of the Gospel took its full effect. This Mighty Angel held a very small scroll in his hand and he ordered John to eat it. The scroll essentially was an oracle from God that John was to digest. At first the scroll tasted sweet, but then it went sour in his stomach. This means that on the surface the oracle delivered to John on the little scroll was welcome news; however as it took fuller effect, it turned to extreme sorrow.

Chapter 11 continued with the interlude. John was given a vision of the 3rd Temple in Jerusalem and told to measure it. However the outer courts were reserved for gentiles and so they were not be part of the measurement exercise. Next John was shown that there would be 2 mysterious witness that God would send to prophesy. Prophets were always sent to give warning to God's people of impending disaster if they didn't shape up and turn from their sin. Therefore it is no wonder that these 2 witnesses operated in Jerusalem. They were given a protected period of 42 months to prophesy, and then that protection was removed. The world, and the Jewish people, blamed the 2 witnesses for all the calamities that had been happening and were overjoyed with the Anti-Christ killed them. They were so detested that the Jews set aside their strict laws of burial and allowed their bodies to lay right where they cut down: in the city streets of Jerusalem, for 3 days. But at the 3 1/2 day mark, God breathed the breath of life into those corpses and they came alive and were raptured up into Heaven. Very likely these 2 witnesses were Elijah and Moses.

Following that, God caused a great earthquake to hit Jerusalem and the immediate surrounding area that caused 7000 people to die and a tenth of all structures to collapse into rubble. This ended the interlude, so now the 7th Trumpet was blown and the 7th and final Trumpet judgment happened. It is dubious to call what occurred a "judgment" in the way we usually think of it because what we read is that it is at this moment that God declares that the Kingdom of God is now the new ruling government of planet earth. But also that it was time to end and repay the rage of the gentile nations who had rebelled against Him and troubled His people for century after century. John is shown the Ark of the Covenant inside the Heavenly Temple to reinforce that all the covenants and promises that God has made to the Hebrew people remain intact and in force. That ends the first section of Revelation and brings us to chapter 12.

Chapter 12 begins a new sequence of visions that John received. Many Bible scholars say that this sequence continues until verse 5 of chapter 15. G.K. Beale goes one step further and subdivides this section of Revelation into 7 divisions. He identifies those 7 divisions by noting that each is marked by the words "and behold" or "and I saw". The divisions are:

- 1) The conflict of the serpent with the woman and her seed (chapter 12).
- 2) The persecution by the beast of the sea (Chapter 13:1 - 10).
- 3) The persecution by the beast of the land (Chapter 13:11 - 18)
- 4) The Lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion (Chapter 14:1 - 5).
- 5) The proclamation of the Gospel and of judgment by three angels (Chapter 14:6 - 13).
- 6) The Son of Man's harvest of the earth (Chapter 14:14 - 20).
- 7) The saints' victory over the sea beast and their victory song (Chapter 15:2 - 4).

I don't necessarily hold with his exact choice of terms nor claim that there isn't another or perhaps better way to subdivide Chapters 12 - 15; but his has merit and there's no need to nitpick. That he identifies 7 divisions he says is not coincidental or arbitrary because we've just come from a section of the Bible that speaks of 7 Seal judgments and 7 Trumpet judgments. So 7 divisions is logical and fits the pattern. Again, take it for what it's worth.

Regarding chapter 12, the overall picture is of how it is Satan that is behind the evil that has engulfed humanity and the earth. The Devil may not be the direct persecutor of God's people....whether those people are the Israelites or Believers, gentile or Jew....however he is the source (on a spiritual level) of the trials and tribulations that pagan mankind has directed at God's worshippers over the centuries. And yet we see that God only allows certain boundaries of space and time for Satan to operate within. Often he is given well defined limits of where and when he is permitted to carry out his wicked rebellion. For instance in chapter 11 we saw that as badly as Satan wanted to kill the 2 witnesses, God wouldn't let it happen until the predetermined time of 3 1/2 years elapsed for the 2 witnesses to complete their task of prophesying; and it had to occur in Jerusalem.

We've discussed in earlier chapters that Revelation is a mix of the literal and the symbolic. In fact sometimes some of the information can be simultaneously literal and symbolic. What can be difficult is sorting out which parts are to be taken literally, and which are to be taken symbolically. Depending on how much weight one assigns to the literal or symbolic side of the balance scale will have a great deal to do with how one interprets Revelation. But make no mistake: there is but **one** correct way to understand Revelation and that is what we're searching for (although I have no doubt we'll not achieve it with any kind of perfection). We may not know for certain which way is correct until these events begin to happen; and yet if we set aside predetermined doctrines and manmade prejudices we'll no doubt get closer to the truth.

So I can tell you with a fairly high level of confidence that Revelation chapter 12 is, on balance, mostly symbolic. But of the course the real challenge then becomes what does each of these several symbols symbolize? And I maintain that, as always, the same way these symbols were used in other places in the Old Testament (and at times the New Testament) is how we are to understand them here as opposed to assigning them entirely new or unique meanings.

I mentioned last week that several hundred years ago when the Bible was divided into chapters and verses that while the intention was good, at times the execution was less than ideal. It is my contention that the final verse of chapter 11 should have been the first verse of chapter 12. So as we read chapter 12, I'm going to include chapter 11:19.

READ REVELATION CHAPTER 11:19 - 12:18

The scene of chapter 11:19 takes place in Heaven and so does the scene of chapter 12:1. The Ark of the Covenant is revealed (figuratively, not literally, since nothing physical exists in Heaven), and then a great sign is also revealed in Heaven. Understanding the connection between these 2 verses helps us to positively identify the symbolism of the sign of the woman clothed with the sun.

I said last time that the meaning of the revealing of the Ark of the Covenant in Heaven is that all of God's covenants and promises to Israel remain in force and intact, even if at times it may only be on the spiritual level. That is, during times when the Jerusalem Temple is not standing and the Priesthood is dissolved (as in our day) means that large segments of the Torah cannot be observed; however that is merely the earthly, physical reality. In Heaven that is not the case. The earthly, physical Ark of the Covenant had gone missing for around 7 centuries by the time of John the Apostle, the writer of Revelation; but the Ark's source, essence, and highest meaning were to be found safely in God's heavenly Temple. It is somewhat ironic that in reality, from the Lord's perspective, His promises, covenants, and presence were not tied to or dependant upon that golden chest that sat in the Holy of Holies for so many centuries before it was carried off by an enemy. Rather that chest was but a symbol, built by human hands, of the reality that God's promises, covenants, and presence were tied to, and resided in, Heaven. In my earlier lessons on the Torah, I gave this strange paradigm the name of The Reality of Duality. And the premise is that God's will is present first in Heaven before it appears physically on earth. And whatever appears on earth, especially when it's of a physical nature (such as the Wilderness Tabernacle or the Ark) it is but a shadow of its Heavenly counterpart.

So to understand who the woman of verse 1 is, we must first answer the question: to whom were God's promises and covenants directed? When we consult the Torah we find the unequivocal answer: to Israel. No divine promise or covenant was given to gentiles except by means of extension through those given to Israel. Thus the woman represents Israel. While I say that with full confidence, I also acknowledge that much of the institutional Western Church says that the woman is The Church (inherently meaning gentile Believers...Christians). Catholics say that the woman is Mary, mother of Jesus. Why is that said? In a word: Replacement Theology. That is, Replacement Theology is a church doctrine that insists that every covenant and promise made between God and Israel has been taken from Israeli and transferred to the gentile Church due to Israel's lack of faithfulness. I've covered this issue with

you too many times to repeat; so I'll only say that Replacement Theology is the worst sort of doctrinal error and is explicitly anti-Semitism in action and intent.

So if the woman is Israel, what is all this about her being clothed in the sun, her feet standing upon the moon, and wearing a crown of 12 stars? Clearly all of these elements are symbolic; but symbolic of what? There is no academic consensus. Some scholars see an allusion to the pagan sun goddess, which was a widespread and very popular cult during the 1st century A.D. Other scholars see the sign of the Zodiac in all of these elements. And, indeed, these sorts of pagan religious concepts had crept into parts of Judaism by John's time; they are even found in mosaics on the floors of synagogues. However it seems awfully unlikely that John would employ pagan symbols to symbolize heavenly things in his Apocalypse; and if he did, then perhaps we should regard it as suspect. Rather, both of these theories based on paganism regarding the symbolism of the sun, moon, stars and the woman herself come from scholars who forget one important fact: these visions are from God. John was merely tasked with writing them down, faithfully. While the visions were John's, the content was God's. So we don't have a simple Hebrew fisherman from Galilee writing down God's oracles and visions of the future according to Greek myth and pagan culture.

Let's address the matter of the 12 stars on her crown. Biblically stars are often figurative of angels. Christ Himself is called the bright morning star. So could the crown with the 12 stars that the woman is wearing be representing 12 angels? And if it is, then how does that square with the woman symbolizing Israel? Tough questions. However the answer can be arrived at fairly confidently if we but turn our Bibles back to the Torah. The symbolism of the sun, moon, and 12 stars can be directly traced to Genesis 37:9 nearly word for word. This is the story of young Joseph speaking about a couple of dreams he had.

^{CJB} **Genesis 37:5-11** ⁵ *Yosef had a dream which he told his brothers, and that made them hate him all the more.* ⁶ *He said to them, "Listen while I tell you about this dream of mine.* ⁷ *We were tying up bundles of wheat in the field when suddenly my bundle got up by itself and stood upright; then your bundles came, gathered around mine and prostrated themselves before it."* ⁸ *His brothers retorted, "Yes, you will certainly be our king. You'll do a great job of bossing us around!" And they hated him still more for his dreams and for what he said.*

⁹ *He had another dream which he told his brothers: "Here, I had another dream, and there were the sun, the moon and eleven stars prostrating themselves before me."* ¹⁰ *He told his father too, as well as his brothers, but his father rebuked him: "What is this dream you have had? Do you really expect me, your mother and your brothers to come and prostrate ourselves before you on the ground?"*

¹¹ *His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.*

So we can let Scripture define itself and not have to speculate. Joseph speaks of the sun, moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him in a dream. When Joseph tells his father, Jacob called Israel, about his dream his father is incredulous and says: "do you really expect me, your mother and your brothers to come and prostrate ourselves before you?" It is true that Joseph

mentions only 11 stars and not 12, but that is because he is one of the 12 brothers and thus is only alluding to 11 of them who will bow down to him. So the sun is to be seen symbolically as Israel's father, the moon symbolically as Israel's mother, and the 12 stars as symbolically the 12 tribes of Israel. In other words, Israel is to be understood as meaning the 12 tribes as well as their immediate ancestors who are part of the covenant promise. At the least that includes Jacob and his 2 wives and 2 concubines. And it could well mean to include Isaac and his father Abraham, since the line of covenant promise begins with Abraham, is continued on through Isaac, then through his son Jacob, and on to Jacob's 12 sons: the 12 tribes of Israel.

Chapter 12 verse 2 goes on to explain that the woman was pregnant and in labor. Here is where we run into a passage that seems to be both literal and symbolic. Few would argue that this part of John's vision depicts the birth of Messiah Yeshua. Since we know He was born by His mother Mary (Miriam in Hebrew) in what is described in the Gospel accounts as a typical child birth (even if His conception was anything but typical), then in one sense the woman of verse 1 is Mary. However this entire matter, presented symbolically, is giving us a far bigger picture. The picture is that the Savior of all mankind is coming from a specific people: Israel. The Messiah would be Hebrew, and not gentile. And in yet another sense, Israel's grand purpose for having been created and set apart for God was to produce the Redeemer and new Lord of the world so that He would displace the old Lord of the world....Satan. Thus from that perspective Mary is rather incidental in all this and if the point was to glorify Mary, it would have been simple enough to call her by name.

So while it is true enough that an individual woman, Mary, gave birth to Jesus Christ, the OT also regularly uses the term "woman" as a collective figure. And that collective figure typically symbolizes the new, redeemed, and idealized Jerusalem and Israel. In fact, generally speaking when the idea is to speak about the new redeemed Israel, the term used is Zion. Zion (redeemed Israel) is often spoken of figuratively as a woman and her husband is Yehoveh (again, symbolically). I want to give you some scripture passages about Israel being symbolized as a woman whose husband is God in order to make this important point.

^{CJB} Isaiah 54:1 *"Sing, barren woman who has never had a child! Burst into song, shout for joy, you who have never been in labor! For the deserted wife will have more children than the woman who is living with her husband," says ADONAI. ² Enlarge the space for your tent, extend the curtains of your dwelling; do not hold back, lengthen your cords, make your tent pegs firm.....*

⁵ *For your husband is your Maker, ADONAI-Tzva'ot is his name. The Holy One of Isra'el is your Redeemer. He will be called the God of all the earth. ⁶ For ADONAI has called you back like a wife abandoned and grief-stricken; "A wife married in her youth cannot be rejected," says your God.*

⁷ *"Briefly I abandoned you, but with great compassion I am taking you back. (Isa. 54:1-7 CJB)*

^{CJB} Jeremiah 3:20 ²⁰ *But like a faithless woman who betrays her husband, you, house of Isra'el, have betrayed me," says ADONAI."*

^{CJB}Micah 4:9-13 ⁹ *Why are you now crying out? Don't you have a king? Has your counselor been destroyed, that you are seized with pain like a woman in labor?* ¹⁰ *Be in pain! Work to give birth like a woman in labor, daughter of Tziyon! For now you will go out of the city and live in the wilds till you reach Bavel. There you will be rescued; there ADONAI will redeem you from the power of your enemies.* ¹¹ *Now many nations have gathered against you; they say, "Let her be defiled, let's gloat over Tziyon."*

¹² *But they don't know the thoughts of ADONAI, they don't understand his plan; for he has gathered them like sheaves on the threshing-floor.* ¹³ *Get up! Start threshing, daughter of Tziyon! "For I will make your horns like iron and your hoofs like bronze." You will crush many peoples and devote their plunder to ADONAI, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.*

So in the OT prophecies, the depiction of Israel as a woman was common. And thus the woman who is in birth pangs in Revelation chapter 12 is symbolic of Israel.

But now in verse 3 another character is introduced; the great red dragon. This red dragon is said to have 7 heads and 10 horns, and each of his 7 heads wears a crown. Who or what is this creature? The answer is given in verse 9.

^{CJB}Revelation 12:9 ⁹ *The great dragon was thrown out, that ancient serpent, also known as the Devil and Satan [the Adversary], the deceiver of the whole world. He was hurled down to the earth, and his angels were hurled down with him.*

So the answer is that this dragon with the 7 heads and 10 horns is Satan. We'll talk much more about this when we get to that verse; I just wanted to get the dragon identified for the moment. And we're told that the dragon (Satan) swept a third of the stars out of heaven and threw them down to earth. What or who are the stars? Just a few words ago, the 12 stars were the 12 tribes of Israel. So is this still talking about the 12 tribes, or is it actual stars in the sky, or are these stars symbolic of angels?

What I think is happening here is that John is being given a panoramic view of the past and also of the future. So some of what we are reading is future to us and some of it was in the distant past, even for John. For the moment, at least, we are being given the heavenly perspective. And while it might be hard to get our minds wrapped around it, the reality is that Heaven is a spiritual place that exists outside the boundaries of time. On earth, we are bound by time. Everything we know and everything we do has time as an inescapable prison. Thus on earth, things have to happen in a definite sequence. We express these as first, second, third, etc., or as past, present, and future. The steps of a sequence take time, whether it is fractions of a second or it is multiple centuries of time. So when we read in this passage about the dragon (Satan) and the things he does we have what in Heaven is no time at all, but in earthly terms it could be eons. And what he does is to appear as a dragon, and to appear as a creature with 7 heads and 10 horns, and he sweeps a third of the stars out of heaven, and he stands before the pregnant woman so that the instant she gives birth he can destroy her offspring. John's vision tells us many things the Devil has done and will do. However for we earthlings that are bound to time, we can only have actions that place in the past, or in the

present, or in the future. For those who reside in Heaven or are part of the spiritual realm no such distinctions or limitations bound to time occur because there is no past, present, and future in Heaven or the spirit world. So I suspect that what John saw was just as perplexing and challenging to understand and get a mental grip upon, as it is for us.

Therefore I have little doubt that the dragon's action of sweeping a third of the stars out of heaven and onto earth is, from a human standpoint, an action he took in the past. Even Christ spoke about it in temporal terms as something that had happened in the past.

CJB Luke 10:18 ¹⁸ Yeshua said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

And yet, Daniel also spoke about something similar; although it was to take place in the future. As you'll see he could not have been recalling the past.

CJB Daniel 8:8-11 ⁸ The male goat then became extremely strong; but when it was strong, the big horn was broken; and in its place arose what appeared to be four horns in the directions of the four winds of heaven. ⁹ Out of one of them came a little horn which grew extremely big in the directions of the south and east, and in the direction of the Glory.

¹⁰ It grew so great that it reached the army of heaven; it hurled some of the army and the stars to the ground and trampled on them. ¹¹ Yes, it even considered itself as great as the prince of the army; the regular burnt offering was taken away from him, and the place of his sanctuary was thrown down.

So this prophecy of Satan removing stars and having them fall to earth is speaking of fallen angels; he did it in one context eons ago (the way we deal with time on earth), and it seems that, according to Daniel, it is going to happen again in a different context and in a different setting in the future. We have no more details than that.

What about the appearance of Satan as having 7 heads and 10 horns, with each head having a crown? We'll delve into that next time.