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Revelation 12

So last week in chapter 11 we read about the two witnesses who God raised up to preach and they were given supernatural powers and protection as they proclaimed the Gospel to the world. But when God was through with them, they were killed. Then their bodies lay in the street for 3-1/2 days and all the world saw them there dead.

But then God raised them from the dead and all the world witnessed that as well, and then they were translated or taken up to heaven. And again all the world saw it and they knew it was God who had performed this miracle. But still yet they didn't turn to God.

And then in verse

15 Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

16 And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God,

17 saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.

So the seventh trumpet sounds and all of heaven knows what is about to occur. They all know that this is the last round of judgements, which is

about to be unleashed upon the earth and they all also know that the final victory is at hand.

And then of course in verse 18 we were told that the nations or the people on earth are angry when God's wrath is finally unleashed. But of course they're angry with God about something they ought to be angry with themselves about. They everyone had the same opportunity others had to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior, but they rejected the free gift of salvation. And so now, they're about to suffer the consequences for their unbelief.

And so those who have believed will be rewarded by God, while these people who have refused to believe, will be destroyed and spend eternity in hell.

And then in the very last verse, in verse 19.

19 Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail.

So the last thing John sees in chapter 11 is the opening of the temple in heaven and inside he sees the Ark of the Covenant, which symbolizes of course the righteousness of God. And then he sees lightning and hail and he hears the thunder and he feels an earthquake and so all of senses tell him that God's final judgment of the earth and all of its' people, are at hand.

And so tonight we come to chapter 12 and of all the chapters in the Book of Revelation, this one may be the hardest to understand, because it's also the chapter which contains the most symbolism.

Now, over the course of the next three chapters, we're going to be introduced to seven key characters.

First is a woman who represents Israel.

Second is the dragon who represents Satan.

Third is a male child who refers to Christ.

Fourth is Michael who represents the angels.

Fifth is Israel, who represents the woman's seed.

Sixth is the beast out of the sea who is the world dictator

And then seventh is the beast out of the earth, the false prophet and religious leader of the world.

So look at verse 1.

Revelation 12:1, Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

Now, I told you when we started this study in Revelation that everything we read, we're to take literally, if possible; and we're to interpret the scripture literally, unless we're told different.

Well, here we're told different. Verse 1 starts out by telling us that a great sign appeared in heaven. And by the way, this is the first of seven signs that we're going to see from here to the end of the book.

So what is a sign?

Well, if you're traveling down the highway and you see a sign on the side of the road that says, "Welcome to Panama City Beach. You don't pull up to the sign and get out and climb up on it and say we're here! At least not without drinking a whole lot of antifreeze! You wouldn't do that.

No, those of us in our right mind know that this sign is pointing to something else. It's pointing to the boundary where the city of Panama City Beach actually begins. But the sign itself is not the city or the beach.

And so this sign John sees in heaven is pointing to something else. And what is the sign?

Well, verse 1 says it's a woman. A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head is a garland or crown with twelve stars.

And so if the woman is a sign, then we have to determine who she represents?

Well, we know she can't represent the church, because the church is never symbolized as a woman in the Bible. The church is referred to as the bride of Christ many times, but never as just a woman.

But now, all throughout the Old Testament, Israel is referred to as a woman, more specifically the wife of God. And sometimes she's referred to as a disloyal wife, sometimes she's referred to as an unfaithful wife, and sometimes she's even called an adulterous wife; but in the end of course, God will bring her back to Himself and she will be a faithful wife.

And so the woman here is no doubt the nation of Israel. She is a symbol of Israel.

And then it says this woman is clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

Now, her being clothed with the sun speaks of her glory and brilliance and dignity; which will be her characteristics only after she's redeemed in the end. In other words, she will shine brightly in the end after Jesus returns to redeem her.

The moon under her feet again speaks to her being exalted above the whole earth and again this will only come to pass in the end. And the crown of twelve stars, well, that obviously refers to the twelve tribes of Israel. And so this woman is a symbol of Israel. And then in verse 2 we're told she's with child.

2 Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Again, this is an Old Testament imagery that describes Israel. Look at

Isaiah 26:17 As a woman with child Is in pain and cries out in her pangs, When she draws near the time of her delivery, So have we been in Your sight, O Lord.

18 We have been with child, we have been in pain; We have, as it were, brought forth wind; We have not accomplished any deliverance in the earth, Nor have the inhabitants of the world fallen.

We read similar scriptures in other places in Isaiah; and also in Jeremiah and Micah. Israel is depicted as a woman in labor, crying out in pain as she gives birth. And just like a woman in labor, the nation of Israel has experienced much pain in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah.

And of course they missed His first coming. They didn't recognize Jesus for who He was when He came the first time and therefore they're still in pain; and they're still experiencing pain like a woman in labor. And this week on the news we're seeing them experience more of that pain as they're being attacked from all sides at once. And then verse three.

3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

And so a second sign appears and with it a new character emerges. This time it's a dragon; a great red dragon to be exact. And in verse 9 we're told who this dragon symbolizes. He represents that serpent of old, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world.

And so it's not really a dragon that John sees, but someone with the characteristics of a dragon. The red of course depicts the fierceness and destructive nature of Satan's character. Jesus Himself in John 8:44, called him a murderer. And so he's a liar and a deceiver and murderer. And he's the one driving all these terrorist nations in the world and he's the one responsible for all the bloodshed and so the red depicts death and bloodshed.

And then it says he has seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.

Now, if you've been paying attention in our study of Daniel, you already know who these seven heads are. They're the world empires that have dominated the nation of Israel and much of the world over the course of many centuries, and we studied the history of most of those dynasties in our study of Daniel.

They were of course Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome and the future empire of the antichrist, which will come to power during the last days during the time of the Tribulation.

And then the ten horns represent the ten member confederation that will make up the final empire of the antichrist.

The seven diadems, which will later on become ten diadems, are the crowns on the king's heads, which rule the world during each given time period. And they become ten when the **final** empire rises up during the last days and then they will represent the ten leaders of the ten nation confederation that will make up the antichrist's empire.

And then verse 4 says

4 His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

This of course is a reference to the time in which Satan and one-third of the angels who were deceived by Satan into following him, this is the time where they were thrown out of heaven to the earth.

Now, we know, that for now, Satan still has access to God in heaven, but one day that will change and he will be forever banned from ever approaching God again. And we'll talk about that time going forward.

But for now he still has access and he uses that access to blame God's people every time they slip up and he's forever asking for permission to sift those who love and serve God. And evidently God still grants him that permission from time to time.

And then it says the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

And of course we know that all throughout history Satan has been determined to persecute the people of God. And through various leaders and nations Satan has done that and is still doing that; yet God has preserved them as a nation and will continue to preserve at least a remnant to the very end. And then in verse 5

5 She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.

6 Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

So in spite of all Satan's efforts to stop it, the woman, Israel, did eventually give birth to a Son. And His name of course was Jesus, a

descendent of David, and it happened just like God had prophesied it would happen. And so Jesus was born and He was of Jewish lineage. He was a son of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Judah and a descendant of David.

And though Satan would like to stop what comes next, that also will take place just as God has said. One day soon, Jesus will return to this earth and He will be crowned the King of Kings and Lord of Lords and He will rule the nations with a rod of iron from His throne there in Jerusalem and He will quickly and immediately deal with any and all sin or rebellion that might occur.

But even still, Satan won't give up. He's going to fight to the very end. And in the very end, during the last 1,260 days or 3-1/2 years, Satan will wreak havoc on God's people and on the nation of Israel and the world like never before. And he's going to try and kill as many people as possible, especially the Jewish people. But again God will preserve a remnant. And they will flee the city and escape to the wilderness and there God will protect them and provide for them until it's all over.

But there will be many, in fact two-thirds of them won't survive and will be slaughtered. And then in verse 7, a war breaks out.

7 And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, 8 but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer.

Now, the truth is there has always been war in the heavens between Satan and his demons and God and His angels. This goes on constantly behind the scenes in the spirit world. And though we can't see, we can sense it and we know it's real, not just from God's word, but from life's

experience. There is a constant battle going on for people's souls and to disrupt the Christian's ability to serve and to witness for Christ.

But this is a battle like has never been before and it's going to be fought behind the scenes during the tribulation period. The Bible says that Michael and his angels will be forced to war with the Dragon who is Satan. It's a battle we know that is instigated by Satan. And though we don't know exactly how angels fight with each other, we do know from scripture that they do.

In fact, again in our study of Daniel in chapters 10 and 12, we read of how the angel was delayed in coming to Daniel and how the angel Michael had to help that angel. And so we know they battle even today, but this will be the battle of all battles. And of course God's angels will prevail and Satan and his demon angels will be forever banned from heaven. Verse 9 says

9 So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

10 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has

come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”

So Satan and his fallen angels are cast out of heaven once and for all. And then John hears a voice. We're not told who the voice belongs to, but it's most likely the voice of those who had been martyred during the tribulation and are now in heaven. And the verses that follow support that, especially verse 11, which says that they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

In other words, they gave their lives to follow Christ.

And so now with Satan gone, no doubt heaven is a better place! But the earth just got a lot worse, because now Satan knows his time is running out. And he knows that his time is limited and so he's about to step it up. Look at verse 13 and following.

13 Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child.

Though Israel and the people of God have been persecuted in one way or another really since before they left Egypt, they've never been persecuted like they will be when this time comes during the last half of the tribulation period. That's why Jesus Himself calls it the Great Tribulation period in Matthew chapter 24. Satan hates Israel, not because they're Israel, but because they're God's chosen people. And because their survival is critical to carry out God's ultimate and perfect plan.

And so to protect His chosen people, God intervenes in verse 14

14 But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is

nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

So He makes a way of escape and He makes a promise to protect at least a remnant of the people.

But again, Satan doesn't stop, he devises a plan to try and drown them and it says he sends a flood to destroy them. Look at verse 15.

15 So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.

Now, again in the Old Testament, the idea of a flood many times refers to trouble in general. In other words, a great flood of trouble is going to come upon these surviving Jews. And though we don't know how he does it or exactly what all the details are, it appears that Satan somehow will come against the people who are hiding like a flood, but again, God will make a way of escape for His people.

And then verse 16 says,

16 But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

And so in some way it appears that God will use the terrain of the earth to protect them and whether it's a massive earthquake that opens up the ground and swallows up all of Satan's armies or some other supernatural feat of God, somehow God will protect them and save them from Satan's attempt to kill them.

And then in the last verse, verse 17.

17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And so Satan, since he can't get to this remaining remnant of God's chosen, he turns his attention to all other believers, whether that's the 144,000 thousand or the remaining Gentile saints, or whoever; he goes after anybody who proclaims to be a follower of Christ, and anyone who has refused to worship him and to take the mark of the beast.