

WEEK SIX

SEVEN TRUMPETS, SEVEN THUNDERS, SEVEN BOWLS, AND TWO WITNESSES

We've now at the halfway point of our study of Revelation. As we've made our way through, we've begun to pick up on some of the rhythms of this book and some of the ways that we read apocalyptic literature. So what have we learned so far?

Perspective: Early on we saw that the title of this book - the *apocalypse* of John - means "revealing." What happens in Revelation is that the curtain is pulled back on all that is happening in human history and we receive a divine perspective on the affairs of churches, rulers, and the travails of life after the fall. In chapters 2 and 3 we received a divine perspective on the Church. In chapters 4 and 5, we were taken into the place of divine perspective: the throne room of heaven. In chapter 6, we were given a perspective that showed us that even if it seems that the world is out of control, God remains in control. And in chapter 7 we were allowed to see just how secure those who belong to Jesus are.

Symbols: We're starting to get the hang of the way that Revelation communicates to us. We've seen amazing images of Jesus that demonstrate to us his goodness, his power, and his love. We've come across numbers that are more than numbers - they point to completion (like the number 7), to magnitude (like 144,000), and more. And we've seen so many other things - lions and lambs, horses and creatures - that point us back to the Old Testament and how God keeps the promises he made there.

Order: We're starting to learn that Revelation doesn't read like other books. As it gives us a God's eye view of the world, it doesn't read like the narratives of 1 Samuel or the Gospel of Luke. It is showing us what is happening now and also what will happen, but it's doing so from a number of angles and perspectives. And so sometimes things don't happen in chronological order. We move from scene to scene, from scrolls opening to people being sealed and then now to trumpets and bowls. John is most concerned to show us what is true in a way that strengthens us to persevere and be faithful, not to give us a newspaper account.

Each of these things that we've learned will come in handy as we look at this next part of Revelation. We've grouped these passages together for a handful of reasons. First, the beginning and end of this section are similar to one another. Having seen what Revelation is telling

us through the seven seals, we'll see that something similar is happening in the seven trumpets and the seven bowls. Second, because we're covering all of Revelation in 11 weeks, we'll have to move pretty quickly at times. And third, studying these sections of Revelation together allows us to get a big picture understanding of Revelation that will be a foundation for you any time you come back to this book in the future.

So let's turn to Revelation again. This week we'll do something different than we've done the previous weeks: rather than looking at the same passage twice in two "Personal Study" sections, we'll look at three different passages in three distinct "Personal Study" sections.

REVELATION 8:6-9:21 (ESV)

Now the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

7 The first angel blew his trumpet, and there followed hail and fire, mixed with blood, and these were thrown upon the earth. And a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up.

8 The second angel blew his trumpet, and something like a great mountain, burning with fire, was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. 9 A third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

10 The third angel blew his trumpet, and a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. 11 The name of the star is Wormwood.^[a] A third of the waters became wormwood, and many people died from the water, because it had been made bitter.

12 The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night.

13 Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, "Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!"

9 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.^[b] 2 He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. 3 Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone. 6 And in those days people will seek death and will not find it. They will long to die, but death will flee from them.

7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces, 8 their hair like women's hair,

and their teeth like lions' teeth; 9 they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with horses rushing into battle. 10 They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails. 11 They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.[c]

12 The first woe has passed; behold, two woes are still to come.

13 Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, 14 saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand; I heard their number. 17 And this is how I saw the horses in my vision and those who rode them: they wore breastplates the color of fire and of sapphire[d] and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. 18 By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths. 19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents with heads, and by means of them they wound.

20 The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, 21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.

PERSONAL STUDY PART I: THE TRUMPETS

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 8:6-9:21 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

As we read this section, the first question that comes to mind is once again, "When?" Within the Revelation, this passage comes just after the opening of the final seventh seal. We might expect, then, for this new section to describe events that take place after the series of seven seals is finished. Let's look at the Bible to see if this assumption lines up with what we see in the Bible.

Read Revelation 8:10-12. These third and fourth trumpets trigger events having to do with the heavenly bodies. Now go back to the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12-17. What do we read has already happened to the heavenly bodies there?

If this section of Revelation is meant to be read chronologically (i.e., events taking place in later verses of Revelation are necessarily events that take place later in time), do you think things would be described in this way?

If it appears that Revelation 8:6 and the seven trumpets don't follow immediately after the seven seals in time, then what does it mean? In order to answer that question, we should look for some other kind of relationship between these two stories. Take a look at the two columns below that put the two passages side-by-side. Fill in the blanks for the seven trumpets.

<i>Seals</i>	<i>Trumpets</i>
<i>First Horseman</i>	
<i>Second Horseman</i>	
<i>Third Horseman</i>	
<i>Fourth Horseman</i>	
<i>Cry of the Saints</i>	
<i>Judgment on creation</i>	
<i>Silence and then Censer</i>	

As you compare the two sets of seven side-by-side, do you see ways that they are arranged similarly? Do they follow a similar pattern? Do they have similar transitions between sets of events, or similar 'pauses' in the series? For example: when we discussed Revelation 6 we grouped seals 1-4, seals 5 and 6, and then noted how 7 was different. Is something similar happening here?

As you read through the seven trumpets and their effects, what number (or fraction) appears again and again? Recalling that numbers in Revelation often have symbolic purposes, what do you think this particular number might mean for what is happening in these seals? (If you're not sure, it's okay to guess - we'll come back to this in the teaching.)

The fifth seal is perhaps the most vivid and even frightening of the various seals. Let's take some time to begin to understand what is taking place in this particular part of the passage. First, let's try to understand who it is that is causing all of these bad things to happen. In 9:1 we read about a "star fallen from heaven to earth." Read Luke 10:18 as a cross reference to this passage. Who do you think is unlocking all of the evil things that take place next?

Second, let's try to make sense of what is taking place with the locusts in this passage. Let's look at where this image has been used previously in the Bible. First, let's look at the first place in Scripture we come across locusts: Exodus 10. Read Exodus 10:3-6 - to what end does God send the locusts on Pharaoh and Egypt?

The locust imagery appears again in our Bibles in the book of Joel (just after Hosea and before Amos in the Old Testament). Take some time to read Joel 1:1-2:14. In Joel we find the literal event that took place in the Exodus reinterpreted. Joel wrote warning the people of God that Babylon was coming to invade Jerusalem as an act of judgment against the disobedience and wandering of God's people. But we also know that when Jerusalem fell, there was no literal plague of locusts. What do you think that locusts symbolize in Joel's writing (a symbol that Israel would clearly have understood from their knowledge of Exodus 10)?

In 9:4-6 we read that the authority of the evil that takes place is limited. Who do we know will be completely protected from this evil? Take a moment to hold on to that truth as a promise to you as someone who trusts in Jesus. That verse is meant to comfort you when you might grow afraid about what you're reading.

PERSONAL STUDY PART II: THUNDER AND WITNESSES

REVELATION 10:1-11:14 (ESV)

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, 3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded. 4 And when the seven thunders had sounded, I was about to write, but I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down." 5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven 6 and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, 7 but that in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me again, saying, "Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." 9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10 And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter. 11 And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."

The Two Witnesses

11 Then I was given a measuring rod like a staff, and I was told, "Rise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship there, 2 but do not measure the court outside the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations, and they will trample the holy city for forty-two months. 3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. 6 They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. 7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them,

8 and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, 10 and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. 11 But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them. 13 And at that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

14 The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 10:1-11:14 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

This section of Scripture begins with another set of seven. This time it's not seals or trumpets - it's thunder. But when John goes to write down what he's seen like he does with the seals and trumpets, what happens?

It is significant that John is commanded not to write down what he saw and heard concerning the seven thunders. What do you think it means that in a book of Scripture that many people use to predict the future, God intentionally doesn't allow us to do that? Read Matthew 24:36 alongside this passage.

As we look at chapter 11, a great deal hangs on how we understand the central image of the two witnesses in 11:3-4 and what their story means. Like so many parts of Revelation, this passage refers us back to the Old Testament. Read the passage below, from Zechariah 4:1-14.

And the angel who talked with me came again and woke me, like a man who is awakened out of his sleep. 2 And he said to me, "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. 3 And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." 4 And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these, my lord?" 5 Then the angel who talked with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." 6 Then he said to me, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. 7 Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain. And he shall bring forward the top stone amid shouts of 'Grace, grace to it!'"

8 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 9 "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the

foundation of this house; his hands shall also complete it. Then you will know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you. 10 For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel.

“These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.” 11 Then I said to him, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” 12 And a second time I answered and said to him, “What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?” 13 He said to me, “Do you not know what these are?” I said, “No, my lord.” 14 Then he said, “These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.”

Thankfully, Revelation has already told us what the lampstand symbolizes. Look at Revelation 1:20 to remind yourself what they are. Lamps were fueled by olive oil in the Ancient Near East. What does the proximity of the lampstands to a renewable source of fuel say? What is John ‘showing’ us about the Church?

If we’re reading Revelation 11 correctly as a parable of the Church’s life in the world, what does the rest of Revelation (v.6-12) tell us about what the Church can expect?

PERSONAL STUDY PART III: THE BOWLS

REVELATION 15:5-16:21 (ESV)

After this I looked, and the sanctuary of the tent of witness in heaven was opened, 6 and out of the sanctuary came the seven angels with the seven plagues, clothed in pure, bright linen, with golden sashes around their chests. 7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever, 8 and the sanctuary was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the sanctuary until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple telling the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."

2 So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.

3 The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became like the blood of a corpse, and every living thing died that was in the sea.

4 The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. 5 And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say,

"Just are you, O Holy One, who is and who was,
for you brought these judgments.

6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink.

It is what they deserve!"

7 And I heard the altar saying,

"Yes, Lord God the Almighty,
true and just are your judgments!"

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. 9 They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory.

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish 11 and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. They did not repent of their deeds.

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, to prepare the way for the kings from the east. 13 And I saw, coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs. 14 For they are demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty. 15 ("Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed!") 16 And they assembled them at the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The Seventh Bowl

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake. 19 The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell, and God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 And every island fled away, and no mountains were to be found. 21 And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people; and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 15:5-16:21 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God or particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

We find ourselves with another set of 7 here: after the 7 seals, the 7 trumpets and the 7 thunders, now we have the 7 bowls of wrath. The consecutive sets of 7 are helpful in that they help us to see similar patterns and give all of the vivid and sometimes overwhelming imagery order in our minds. But they are also helpful in that they allow us to see differences. Take a moment to think about the 7 bowls of wrath. In what ways is this set of 7 different than the previous sets of 7?

In the seals and trumpets, how much of the earth was affected by what took place in the various things that happen? With the bowls, what takes place now?

In the previous sets, God did not author the acts that took place. Revelation goes to some length to point out how God permitted fallen powers to have some domain, circumscribed just how much they could do, and all this while having full control over them to restrain them. But here in chapter 16, something different seems to be happening in the first four seals. What do you read is taking place?

This last passage is heavy and perhaps difficult for us to read. But once again it is helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of the first people to read this book and for whom it was originally meant. So put yourself once again in the perspective of a first-century Christian. Throughout your life as a follower of Jesus you have felt the weight of persecution from Roman Empire - the longest-running dominion that the world had known. This reign meant that you have lost your livelihood and your sense of security. You can remember the names of relatives and friends who had lost their lives because of this reign of terror. You read about the great

powers of the world assembling in the verses about the sixth bowl. And then you read about these evil, ungodly empires finally coming to an end in the passage on the seventh bowl. How would you have felt?

Take a moment to reflect on God's judgment - often something we speak of with discomfort and fear. Think back to some of the worst things that have happened in human history - the Holocaust, or the Armenian genocide, or the systematic kidnapping and selling of Africans that took place in the slave trade. What is judgment in that perspective? Can you give thanks that God puts an end to this kind of evil and sadness?

GROUP DISCUSSION

During the first part of our study we looked at the 7 trumpets. How can the blowing of these trumpets and their effects (which sound and feel terrible by the way) serve as gracious gifts from a merciful God?

Revelation 10 depicted a scroll that tasted sweet but then turned bitter. It shows us that it is always a gracious and merciful gift from the Lord whenever He chooses to reveal anything of Himself or His ways to us. However, some things are bitter to receive and process. Not all things that will eventually be for our good feel good when we have to experience them. How does this picture help prepare us for what the church is described as having to experience in Chapter 11? Does this provide you any comfort or give you a helpful framework as you read the book of Revelation?

Many people are quite comfortable with biblical passages like 1 John 4:8b that tell us “God is love.” These same people will often go on to say that they can’t imagine a loving God ever judging or punishing anyone. Passages like Revelation 16 leave them quite uncomfortable. How might you answer someone with this perspective, demonstrating that these two passages actually fit together and affirm one another?

WEEK SEVEN

THE DRAGON AND THE BEASTS

In last week's study, we began to hear hints as to why life upon the earth can be so difficult for those seeking to serve Jesus Christ. Chapter 9 gave us the image of a star falling and described the star as a "he" who was given the key which opens up a pit producing torment. From this pit comes a beast in chapter 11 which makes war on the two witnesses (the Church) and even kills them. By the time we reached chapter 16, we saw that wrath and judgement will be poured out upon this beast and his kingdom cast into darkness. But who is this star which has been cast down? Why is he so angry and why is he ruthlessly chasing the church? And when is his final defeat going to come? Let's open our bibles up to Revelation 12 & 13 as John shares with the churches, and with us, a vision of why life upon the earth contains difficulty and suffering for those trying to faithfully serve the Lord.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 12 slowly two times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: what you see and what you hear, repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God, characteristics and activities of Satan and any particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

REVELATION 12 (ESV)

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Satan Thrown Down to Earth

7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”

13 And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time. 15 The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 16 But the earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth. 17 Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And he stood on the sand of the sea.

PERSONAL STUDY PART I

When watching any great play, the audience takes note of the setting as the curtain begins to rise. In order to remember our setting for Revelation 12, we must look back a few verses. Read Revelation 11:19. Where is this vision occurring?

God's temple has been opened and John can see the ark of the covenant. This is the holy of holies! Only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, could the priest enter into this area of the temple. And now John can see it. As in previous sections, when a new place is opened, deeper revelation is about to come.

Revelation 12 opens by telling us that "a great sign appeared in heaven." We've seen John use this word, sign, before. Signs in the bible point us to deeper understandings of the larger narrative that God is writing. So this great sign of a woman is meant to give us greater understanding than just about one woman. To be sure, we see the woman to be Mary, the mother of Jesus. But as Revelation 12 continues, the sign points beyond Mary and to the Church, the offspring of the woman.

According to verses 1-2, how is this first sign described? How do these descriptions point to who the woman is and what she signifies?

There is also another sign given: a great red dragon. According to verses 3-4 how is this sign described?

Remember that we've said before that it's not so much that Revelation gives us new information, rather Revelation gives us a new way of understanding the information God has already given us throughout His Word. So let's turn back and read this same story in another context.

Read Matthew 1:18-2:23. How does Revelation 12 tell this same Christmas story? How is it different?

Revelation 12 not only begins with a very different way of telling the Christmas story, it also gives us the whole Easter story as well, quite rapidly in fact. Look at all that is contained in Revelation 12:5. Write down each event that is occurring for Jesus.

Read each of these passages. How is each one written about here in Revelation 12?

Genesis 3:15

Isaiah 7:14

Psalm 2:6-9

Ephesians 1:20-21

Verse 5 tells us that everything God promised about the Lord's Anointed has come to pass through Jesus. In one declarative sentence, the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus is depicted. Now that is succinct!

And while the promise and the victory can be so quickly written out, the battle left upon the earth lingers. The remaining verses of chapter 12 get at those deep aching questions that every believer must wrestle with at some point, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" "Why, if Jesus is on his throne, does evil still seem to persist upon the earth?" The rest of chapter 12 gives explanation for the battled experience of every believer.

According to verse 7, where does this cosmic war begin? Who is there?

Verse 10 announces that the kingdom of God has come. According to verse 11, how did that victory occur? Where did that victory occur?

The battle of heaven has been settled by work done on the earth. Have you ever thought about how intricately connected heaven and earth really are? We have been used to reading in Revelation that the things that happen in the heavenly realms have impact upon the earth. But now, the great war in heaven has been won through Jesus' redemptive work on earth.

One would think that this great victory would lead only to rejoicing. In the Christmas stories of the Gospels, we read that Jesus' coming excites joy and worship in the wisemen and the shepherds. But Revelation 12 shows us that not everyone is celebrating the arrival of the Messiah.

According to Revelation 12:12, how does Satan feel about Jesus' birth?

Have you ever thought about why Satan is so angry and full of wrath? Go back and read Revelation 12:7-17. Circle every time the devil is "thrown down." Underline or highlight when the kingdom of God is coming.

In case we didn't catch it the first time, John makes it abundantly clear that Satan has been thoroughly "thrown down." We won't find Satan in the throne room. He's been ejected down to the earth. He is literally writhing in his final moments before he will be permanently defeated. This time right now is all he's got left and he knows it. Isn't it interesting? The devil hates Jesus but he doesn't doubt his return. He knows assuredly that Jesus will be victorious, and thus, he makes the most of the time he's got left to wreak his terrible havoc upon those on the earth.

Since Satan cannot devour the son of the woman, he intently goes after the rest of her offspring. Twice in Chapter 12 the woman is depicted as running into the wilderness when being pursued by the devil.

Look at v.6 & v.14. What will God do for the woman in the wilderness?

Let's apply these images. A wilderness is a place of scarcity whereby your needs are exposed. If the woman is a picture of the people of God then think about what it might mean that the battle against the enemy leads the believer into a "wilderness."

According to v.6, what has God already done before the believer ever ends up in the wilderness?

What does God do for the believer while in the wilderness?

How is this great encouragement for the believer, even as we feel the press of the enemy in our lives?

PERSONAL STUDY PART II

Chapter 12 let us know that we should expect a battle in this life and confirms that believers have a real enemy. Now chapter 13 tells us how we can identify that enemy. Satan doesn't come straight at us very often. Rather he often mimics the things of God, showing up in political powers and religion - looking impressive and seemingly offering a lot, but ultimately coming to deceive and destroy.

Begin by asking God to open your eyes and heart through the Holy Spirit. Then, read Revelation 13 slowly several times. As you do, use a pen or pencil to mark anything that is noteworthy to you: what you see and what you hear, repeated words and phrases, specific attributes of God, characteristics and activities of Satan and any particular phrases or concepts that are puzzling.

REVELATION 13 (ESV)

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. 2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. 4 And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

5 And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. 6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling,^[a] that is, those who dwell in heaven. 7 Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them.^[b] And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, 8 and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. 9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

10 If anyone is to be taken captive,
to captivity he goes;
if anyone is to be slain with the sword,
with the sword must he be slain.

Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.

The Second Beast

11 Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. 12 It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence,^[c] and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. 13 It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, 14 and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of^[d] the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. 16 Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave,^[e] to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, 17 so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. 18 This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

Earlier, Satan was identified as the deceiver of the world. One of the ways in which he tries to mislead people is by mimicking the ways of God. Trace these ways that Satan attempts deception by taking on something that looks like what we see in the Lord. Notice what he tries to imitate and what his imitation ends up delivering to people.

<i>How Scripture depicts Satan</i>	<i>How Scripture depicts Jesus</i>
<i>Satan is depicted as a great dragon that works through two other beasts.</i>	<i>What is the relational nature of God?</i>
<i>Rev 13:11 - The second beast had two horns like a lamb (strength).</i>	<i>Read Rev 5:6 - How many horns (how much strength) does the Lamb have?</i>
<i>Rev 12:9 - Satan is identified as the deceiver of the whole world.</i>	<i>Read John 14:6 - How does Jesus identify himself?</i>
<i>Rev 12:15 - The serpent pours out water seeking to bring about destruction.</i>	<i>Read Revelation 7:17 - What does the Lamb's giving of water bring about?</i>
<i>Revelation 13:16-17 - The mark of the beast puts limitations on the people unless they worship him</i>	<i>Read Revelation 7:15-17 - What is promised to those marked or sealed by the Lamb?</i>
<i>Rev 13:7 - Satan comes to exercise authority over every tribe, people and nation.</i>	<i>Read Rev 5:9-10 - What does Jesus do for every tribe, people and nation?</i>
<i>Rev 13:3 - Satan has a mortal wound healed (keeps coming back in different forms)</i>	<i>Read Rev 5:6 & John 11:25-26 - Instead of being resuscitated, Jesus is resurrected! How is this different & better?</i>

Do you notice how Satan is imitating Jesus? Verse 11 says that the beast looks *like a lamb* but spoke *like a dragon*. He comes through ways that seem familiar and perhaps even offer something good. But his mission is to slander God and accuse God's people. While every promise of the Lord stands true for the believer, Satan's offers each turn up empty and lead to destruction.

As was mentioned earlier, Satan often works through two other beasts. Just as other parts of Scripture helped us understand the imagery of the woman and the dragon, so Daniel 7 can help us understand the imagery of the beasts and how Satan works to deceive the world.

Read Daniel 7:1-28. How does this passage help us understand this cosmic battle and what the beasts might represent?

Daniel would have likely seen the four beasts manifested in the political powers of Babylon, Persia, Mede and Greece. For John and his audience, the beast would have been the Roman empire. And just as the head of the beast receives what looks like a mortal wound but then is somehow healed, the downfall of one bestial empire only makes room for the rise of another kingdom offering power in a different form.

The beasts show how political status and powers become the servants of Satan even though they are intended to be agents of God (Romans 13). And people will worship these powers and give them their devotion to the extent that it serves their own self-interests, thus serving the purposes of Satan and not of God.

What warning does this passage give believers in terms of our allegiance and devotion to political powers?

The final verse of chapter 13 contains one of the most discussed references in all of Revelation. "Let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666." So often this verse is treated as a code that needs to be cracked. Yet we've seen throughout the book of Revelation that we do well when we see numbers telling us deeper realities that affect how we do discipleship.

So far, we have seen the number 7 all throughout Revelation to indicate completeness (Rev 5:6). That which is fully complete deserves our complete worship and devotion. The Lamb is all 7's, while this beast is 6 - 1 short of 7 (three times). In other words, whatever this beast represents, he is completely incomplete. The beast utterly falls short of the glory of God and is not worthy of our adoration.

Verse 11 also reminds us that the beast will look like Jesus (like a lamb) but will really be serving the mission of Satan's deceit (speak like a dragon). Consider how this relates to the earlier warnings given to the churches in chapters 2 and 3. Jesus is not just warning that there will be false prophets out there somewhere, but that they exist within the church. In other words, they look like they are following Jesus, but their values and way of living show that they are really full of idolatry. The way they think (the mark on their forehead) and the way they conduct themselves (the mark on their right hand) demonstrate that they take their directions from the surrounding culture rather than from the Lord.

This last point should cause us to pause and ask for wisdom. Spend some time by concluding your study in prayer. What things pull on us within the church as incomplete substitutes for full devotion of our Lord? Ask the Lord to reveal where you might be taking your cues from the culture rather than from Him? And then thank Him that He offers you grace and redemption. The accuser does not have the final say over believers. May the knowledge of the cleansing blood of Christ free us to give him our full worship and adoration!

GROUP DISCUSSION

We studied that, in many ways, the devil may be a better student of the gospel than some believers are. Satan knows Jesus is coming back and so he works hard, though his works are full of deceit and destruction. Believers, on the other hand, think Jesus will return as well, but in his gracious delay we can often become complacent, thinking that we have time to get to some things later. How might we also wake up and realize that our time is short?

Even though it is clear that the devil is intent on causing harm to Christians, chapter 12 reminds us that whatever painful place he directs us, God has already gone before us there. And not only does God make preparation for us ahead of time, but He is ready to nourish us perfectly in our desperation. If you feel comfortable, share a time when you experienced God caring for you in a “wilderness” season.

John uses the Greek word *diabolos*, or accuser, for Satan. He makes it his mission to accuse believers and often works this through making them feel weighed down by guilt and shame in their own consciences. How can we best battle these accusations, especially when they feel like they are true about us?

This passage has warned against hoping that political powers, religion or the things of this world will never give us the complete security that can only be found in Jesus Christ. They will only offer incomplete substitutes and lead us away from full devotion to the Lord. What types of powers, ideologies or parts of culture vie for your service and worship? How do the earlier visions of Jesus help you battle against this temptation and endure in faithfulness?