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Revelation Review

Revelation Chapters 8-12

Prayer: *Father, I just again thank you for your grace, I thank you for your goodness, I thank you for this book that we're reentering, the book of Revelation. Lord, there's so much there, there's so much that is difficult to grapple with and understand. I just continue to pray for your Holy Spirit's presence, that you would guide us, direct us as we review. There's an enormous amount of information going forward, so I just pray it doesn't overwhelm. I pray you would guide and direct us by your Spirit's power and that it would be of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are finishing our review of Revelation and the very first one that we did a couple weeks ago that was looking at chapters 1 through 8 and this review we're going to be looking at 8 through 12 so that we can get back to where we were actually last spring when we left off. But first I want to comment about what's happening in the nation of Israel.

Any discussion of Revelation is going to include a discussion of end times and that's always going to include a discussion about Israel. And all of us know of the grim news that unfolded this past week of how Hamas launched a major attack on Israel by first invading a dance party and then slaughtering wholesale men, women and children and the savagery we know of that attack was beyond belief. Women and the elderly and children, even babies were slaughtered like the slaughter we read of in the Old Testament accounts of Israel and her enemies. We know that right now Israel is in the process of formulating its response and caught in the very middle of this are those Palestinians, among them Palestinian Christians, who are being held willingly or unwillingly we don't know by their own government in Gaza who's not letting them flee to avoid this coming counterattack.

Shortly after the attack, Elvia sent me a text of Prime Minister Netanyahu's response to the attack, and among other things he said this, which I think is incredibly notable. He said: "We have survived Pharaoh. We survived the Greeks. We have survived the Romans. We have survived the inquisition in Spain and the pogroms in Russia. We have survived Hitler. We have survived the Germans. We have survived the Holocaust. We have survived the armies of seven Arab countries. We have survived Saddam. We will continue to survive today's enemies as well. Think about any other time in

human history! Think about it: for us, the Jewish people, the situation has never been better! Let's face the world. Let us remember: all the nations or cultures that once tried to destroy us, today no longer exist and we still live! Egypt? The Greeks? Alexander of Macedonia? The Romans? Does anyone speak Latin these days? And the Third Reich? And look at us: Bible Nation, the slaves of Egypt, we are still here. And we speak the same language! Before and now! The Arabs don't know it yet, but they will learn that there is a God! As long as we maintain our identity, we will be here forever!"

Well the one thing that the book of Revelation states unequivocally is that not only the Arabs but the entire world is going to learn that there is a God, and Israel for better or for worse lies at the center of that Revelation. And you know, you can explain what's going on in Israel right now in dozens of different ways all having to do with geopolitics and economics but the bottom line is that Israel still defines the essence of the battle that we Christians are part of.

And when we look at Revelation we see all of these incredibly awful things, stuff that Benjamin Netanyahu catalogued, from Pharaoh in Egypt through the Holocaust to the attack that just took place last Saturday, but he still says, "Look at us, Bible nation, slaves of

Egypt, we are still here!" And they are still here. But it's because God is a God of miracles and yet still people refuse to believe that God is behind those miracles. I mean over and over again in the book of Revelation we see God exacting extraordinary judgments on the world and the world in spite of worldwide plagues, in spite of worldwide destruction, refusing to repent.

After God's clear judgment leaves the world in tatters, still mankind refuses to acknowledge him. *Revelation 9* says: *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, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

See, the bottom line is God acknowledges that he's at war with his very creation and this is a war that cost God his own son and yet still this world resolutely resists any and all attempts to see that hand of God at work. And we've already seen that play itself out in our own day. We've seen that play itself out in the very nation of Israel. I mean, one of the greatest miracles that has ever taken place in the history of mankind is the birth of that nation. But you know, the average person on the street, he doesn't know and he genuinely doesn't care.

Let me just reiterate the history of this miracle. See, in A.D. 70, Rome decided that's it, we're done with Israel, they're a bunch of rebels, we're going to just wipe them off of the face of the earth. They decided to put an end to Israel and they slaughtered them wholesale. They absolutely destroyed their temple and they sent the whole nation into exile. And it's exactly as God stated would happen. This is what he said in *Deuteronomy 4:26*. He says: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you today -- speaking to Israel -- that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.*

And we know God did exactly that. We know Israel was a nation that was scattered for twenty centuries throughout the entire world and then suddenly in 1948 it's born again out of a Holocaust to become what is essentially the fourth most powerful nation on earth, but it's a nation that's constantly surrounded by enemies. I mean could there ever be a more obvious display of the sovereign hand of God on this planet? Never, never in history has a nation been fully destroyed and scattered throughout the world for twenty centuries. I think of the Aztecs, think of the Mayans, think of the possibility of them suddenly coming together in Arizona, I

mean, how impossible is that? When they're gone, they're gone. They scatter, they intermarry, they disappear. There's only been one exception in the history of mankind -- that would be the nation of Israel. It disappeared only to suddenly find itself reborn all as the result of a Holocaust, of a concerted effort to eliminate them from the face of the earth.

And not only was it reborn as a nation, its capital Jerusalem was back then on the lips of virtually every world power and today it's on the lips of every world power. Just consider what Zechariah wrote thousands and thousands of years ago about Jerusalem. In *Zechariah 12:3* he said: *On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples. All who lift it will surely hurt themselves. And all the nations of the earth will gather against it.*

Well, fast forward thousands and thousands of years and just look at this week, we have Hamas in Gaza, we have Hezbollah in Lebanon, we have Syria itself all launching attacks against Israel. And you say why? Well, it's because the prince of this earth hates everything about his enemy Jesus Christ and that includes the very people that he came from, and that devil knows precisely where the book of Revelation is unfolding.

You know, you can explain all of Israel in terms of geopolitics or you can explain it in terms of a nation that is chosen and protected by God in spite of the fact that they rebelled against God by rejecting his Messiah. Well it's something God laid out specifically in Romans 11, I mean, God who knows all things, he was not shocked, he was not surprised by Israel's rejection; in fact, it's a classic Romans 8:28. God used once again this evil thing for good. You see, Israel's rejection meant that the gospel went wholesale to the rest of the world and that includes us. We're the beneficiaries of that. I mean, even their rejection of God was used by God for good. *Romans 11:11 says: So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.*

See, Israel is still part of God's plan and this entire world still hates them for no other reason than their connection to a God whose plan is unfolding before our eyes. We say, okay, well, if it's that obvious, how come the world doesn't see it? How come they don't acknowledge it? Well, God addresses that as well. He says in *2 Corinthians 4:4: The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

You know, we say where was there a Holocaust? Why is it that Israel after thousands of years is still the subject of irrational and oftentimes, as we've just seen, murderous hatred? It's just stunning that this very week after the scenes of Hamas's savagery was broadcast to the world there was a crowd of over a thousand protesters who gathered in Australia.

This is what the *New York Post* says about that. It says: "Around 1,000 protesters gathered outside Sydney's iconic performing arts hall late Monday carrying flares and Palestinian flags and chanting 'Gas the Jews,' 'F-k the Jews' and 'Allahu Akbar' (Arabic for 'God is great'), the troubling footage shared by the Australian Jewish Association showed."

Over 80 different student groups -- not individuals -- groups at elite universities like Harvard and Berkeley came out not in support of Israel but in favor of Hamas and its savagery. So it begs the question, I mean, why do the Jewish people occupy this unique place in all of history? Well, how about it's because from the very start they were God's chosen people, the very people that the King and Savior of this world came from. You have to understand this is a world that hates everything about Christ and his kingdom. This is a world that absolutely includes the people that Jesus came from in its hatred. And this world also knows deep

down inside that judgment is coming. In fact, God said as that time draws near the enemy's going to grow more and more frantic. He says in *Revelation 12:12*: "*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!*"

Well our first review took us through the first seven chapters of Revelation. We saw there the judgment, the start of the judgment that God is intending to bring. Chapters 8 through 12 detail the unfolding of those judgments as they are descending on planet earth. And again this review, this is basically a fire hose. I'm going to be giving you what was ten or so hours of material in ten minutes. There's 13 messages that I've done so far on this and if you feel this wash of information coming over you and it gets very confusing, just understand that there's individual breakdowns of all of these things. Just go to sermonaudio, they're all on sermonaudio there.

But if you remember, the judgment started out with seven seal judgments, and the first four of those judgments were the four horsemen. They were followed by the plea for the saints that were under the altar of God for God to at last give them the justice that they had been denied, and God tells them to wait till the last martyr's going to be slain. But then John says in *Revelation 6:12*,

it says: *When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"* If you need any proof of the loathing that human beings have for their creator, it's right there. They're basically saying, oh, that the mountains and the rocks would fall on us rather than turn and repent.

Well, the six seal judgment is followed by the trumpet judgments and after six of those judgments have taken place, as I said last time, the earth is in absolute shambles. Half of its population is dead, the seas are polluted beyond measure as is all of the fresh water; the sun, the moon and the stars have been diminished, there's monstrous creatures that have boiled out literally from the pit of hell, and in addition there's a 200-million man army that's

been raised and we don't even know if it's populated by human beings or monsters from hell. We don't know from the text.

We do know that the earth at this point is absolutely shattered by the judgments of God; and again, this is how it reacts. *Revelation 9:20: 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, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

You see, what's remarkable and directly observable by anybody on planet earth even today is that people are willing to embrace blindness about events that are occurring right in front of their nose. I mean, it reaches the end stage at this point in Revelation 9, literally the earth is crumbled beneath everyone and they still absolutely refuse to acknowledge God and they cling instead to their idols of gold and silver, bronze, stone and wood.

But you know, you can make that argument even today. I mean, you can make that argument about the supernatural appearance of Israel in 1948 as something that people also willingly turned a blind eye toward. And the fact that Israel has survived when no other

civilization ever has, it points overwhelmingly to a supernatural origin and sustenance of this nation and yet people absolutely refuse to believe that. You know, just last week I talked about the spiritual principle that says if you reject truth, you begin to lose the ability to perceive truth; and the more truth you reject, the more that ability to perceive truth diminishes. Folks, I think we're seeing that happen in realtime.

And as we go back to the book we see as we come to the end of the sixth trumpet judgment, it produces yet another interlude or pause before the seventh judgment. And we find John is once again the speaker and he's no longer in heaven where that last vision took place. He's now back on earth and he describes seeing this enormous angel. This is what he says in *Revelation 10*. He says: *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. He had a little scroll open in his hand.*

Now at first you might think, well, this angel must be the Lord Jesus himself. The language seems similar, different descriptions of him, says his face was like the sun, his legs were like a pillar of fire; but we know this angel is not Christ because later on in the same chapter the angel swears to Jesus himself. And what he

declares to John is he says to John what is known as the seven thunder judgments. And strangely enough that's all we know. That's all we know about the thunder judgments. I mean John hears them all, then he's got his pen in his hand, he's about to write them down and he's told by the angel, *"Seal up what the seven thunders have said, and do not write it down."*

So for reasons known only to God, John is prevented from revealing what he's learned about these seven thunder judgments. And so obediently he puts down his pen, he seals the information then he starts to say something really bizarre. He says: *"Go, take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."* And this scroll, it's referred to as "the little scroll" or "the book" or "the little book" and because John is told to use it to prophesy to many nations, we assume that this scroll here is actually referring to scripture. But then he says: *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."*

So we're scratching our head, we say, okay, what does that mean? What does it mean to take scripture and eat it? Well, it turns out it's the very same question that we raised about the bread and the cup on communion Sundays when I repeat the phrase that Jesus

uttered when he said, *"This is my body; take and eat."* I think in both instances what Jesus is saying in communion itself and what he's saying to John here is that we are to take Jesus and his word into our very being. We are to make it part of us in the same way that what we eat becomes part of who we are.

You know, it's a cliché to say, "You are what you eat," but that same principle applies to scripture as well. You become what you take in from God's word. And the more you make it a part of your being, the more it begins to flow from you effortlessly. You can't read the scripture like it's a novel. You have to read it like your life depended on it, because it does. I think of what Jesus said in *Matthew 4:4*, he said: *But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

So here's John, he's instructed to eat the scroll, and just as he's promised it's sweet in his mouth, it's bitter in his stomach.

Revelation 10:10 says: *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.* Chapter 10 ends with John's instruction that applies to us as equally as it applies to him. He says: *And I was told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."*

Just to realize, that doesn't mean John alone; that is something for all of us. *"You must prophesy about many peoples and nations and languages and kings."* People think prophesy is speaking about the future; it's not just that, that's a small fraction of what it is. Prophesy is proclaiming the truth. And what God is saying here is your task is to prophesy. Your task is to share these truths with your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues, your relatives, all those folks who are saying, "What in the world is going on?"

John's given yet another instruction at the start of chapter 11. He's told he's to measure the Lord's temple. *Revelation 11:1-2* says: *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, 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."* Another head scratcher.

I'm of the opinion and it's held by still others that Jesus is referring to the utter destruction that took place when the temple was destroyed and what that produced; it produced this hardening of the hearts of the Jewish people. The reason why I say that is because Jesus made a very important comment in Luke's gospel about

that same event, about the destruction of the temple and the scattering of the Jewish people, and he prophesied about that event some 37 years before it happened, but this is what he said in the gospel of Luke. He says: *For these are days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written. Alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! For there will be great distress upon the earth and wrath against this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.*

Well, that specific language is the same language that we just read in Revelation 11 with reference to Jerusalem. It says: *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.* And so we wonder, we think, okay, what is God trying to say here? And then we remember what Paul said in Romans 11. Paul says Israel is going to have its heart hardened until the time of the end when God would open up their eyes and their ears and the truth of the gospel would then be proclaimed in Israel. This is what Mitch Glaser is attesting to, that he sees more and more Jews every day coming to the knowledge of Christ. And what he's saying is it's all happening according to plan. And this is how Paul laid out that plan in *Romans 11:25*. He says: *I do not*

want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

So we're back to Jesus telling John that only to measure the temple itself and he acknowledges the outer court, that part that's open to the Gentiles. He says it's going to be trampled on for a lengthy period of time. And again, he says: *"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. And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth."* These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Well, we saw last time that the olive trees represent truth and light that will come from two chosen witnesses, mostly everyone is agreed that it's Moses and Elijah. They were the two saints who met with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration before his crucifixion. It says these two prophets are going to prophesy for three and a half months at the official beginning of the tribulation. God says they're going to operate under my strict

protection. I'm going to give them supernatural power to not only protect themselves but to afflict the earth even further.

And so for three and a half years they're proclaiming the gospel by prophesying to the nations and as they do, they're completely protected by God from all of the consequences and the consequences are enormous. You see, they've been given the power to torment the earth, having the ability to shut up the sky from rain, to pollute the earth's oceans, turning it into blood and to inflict the earth with all kinds of additional plagues. For three and a half years these two prophets have this power. But at the end of that time we get introduced to the beast himself, to the antichrist. And the antichrist is the one who's going to rise up and take those two prophets' lives. *Revelation 11 says: 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.*

And this is the start of the antichrist's reign on earth. At this point he becomes the hero. He's a hero having slain those two prophets who were tormenting the earth. And in fact, those two prophets were so hated that a brand new holiday, scripture says, is established. It's almost like Christmas. This is what *Revelation 11:10* says: *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.

So the antichrist, again understand the antichrist, it's not Satan; it's somebody who's directly empowered by Satan. The antichrist insists that these bodies not be given the respect of a burial. Instead he wants those bodies put on display for the edification of all those who dwell on earth. And that term, "those who dwell on earth" that's really a technical term. It doesn't mean that you dwell on the planet. What it means is that you buy totally into the earth and its system.

And at this point, there's really a mixed bag. There's going to be those who are still coming to know Christ but there's those who hate everything about Christ and his kingdom and those are known as "those who dwell on the earth." Just picture the scene. They're wildly celebrating the death of these prophets who have been prophesying for three and a half years and wreaking havoc and then suddenly, according to God, the breath of life returns to the prophets and terror once more grips those who dwell on the earth.

We see the prophets taken up to heaven itself and it gives way to the next trumpet judgment to be unleashed. Verse 12 says: *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. 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. The second woe has passed; behold, the third woe is soon to come.

Going all the way back and again, I know you're getting just a fire hose of information here. And again, take your time and just look at some of the other messages if you don't get what's being said. But that first woe, it was these demonic locusts that boiled up literally out of the pit of hell. The second woe is this earthquake that's described by God at the end of the chapter. It says: *Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.*

And before this earthquake takes place he describes yet another spontaneous outbreak of worship in heaven. It says: *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever."* And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, *"We give thanks to you,*

Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign."

So what are we to make of all of this? What are we to make of the two prophets who basked in God's absolute protection for three and a half years and suddenly the antichrist comes up and just wipes them out? Well, the one take away that I get out of all of it is that, you know, in God's economy, you are absolutely immortal until the moment you die. God says he sovereignly controls every one of all of our days literally from the womb to the tomb. *Psalm 139* says: *Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

Those two prophets, they had to know they had a precise number of days on the earth, but they had a huge advantage over us, you see, they knew what to expect at the moment their life on earth ended -- it was ended by that beast -- because they had already been in heaven. They knew something we constantly forget. Also they knew something that Jesus constantly had to drum into the disciples by asking them in *Matthew 10*: *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."* See, they

knew the very same God who determines whether a sparrow falls also determines the length of days that all of us have, and it's Jesus who bought that comfort for us with his blood.

This book of Revelation details this cosmic battle between the kingdoms as it unfolds, but every one of us here, every single one of us has or is going to have our own battle with a sentence of death that every one of us was born with. We've just borne witness of that with Andy. And as hard as that was and is, we know exactly where Andy was headed. And you know, many of us have loved ones who want no part whatsoever of Jesus. We have loved ones who count themselves among those who dwell on the earth. And I've seen it over and over again, they enter eternity just like they do in Revelation, shaking their fist at God. And so I'll say it again, we who know Christ have no idea the blessing that we have received.

As chapter 11 draws to an end, it says: *The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.* So the elders, they fall on their face, they speak of Jesus like we would speak of some super hero who literally saved the earth from evildoers because that's just what he did. He embraced death itself on our behalf, taking the sin of

the world onto himself as our perfect sacrifice so that we by faith could stand spotless before a holy God clad not in our own righteousness but with Christ's righteousness instead, something given to us by faith. So we can have the very same confidence that those two prophets had because we have the very same God and the very same gift of salvation that they once received.

And finally we have chapter 12. If you think this stuff was hard to grapple with, hold on to your seat as we just -- I'm just going to read to you chapter 12 again just to see what we've been dealing with. It says: *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. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 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. 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, 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. Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And*

the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 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. 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. 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. 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!" 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. 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. The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 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. 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.

You know, God says that this is a book that is to be read, not just to be reading as you're sitting in your pew but to be read aloud. And he says so because there's images that God wants you to have in your head, and then he goes to the place where he begins to describe what those images actually mean.

He says the dragon is making war not just on a child but he's making war on the rest of the woman's offspring who in this verse are "*those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.*" Well, okay, that one's actually kind of easy, that's obviously the church. So then we ask, okay, who is the dragon attacking? Is it the woman clothed in the sun, is that Mary? Is it Israel? Is it the church? Well, the answer is to all three, yes. Every one of them is legitimate, every one of them can be represented in that vision, because all of them: Israel, Mary and the church, are all being attacked by the dragon because they all have an integral part in this ongoing war between the kingdoms.

And you know, this chapter by far is the hardest one to grapple with because it's moving constantly from image to image, from time to time in ways that even commentators struggle mightily to try to

grasp. What we see in this chapter is the whole story of the gospel recapitulated in terms of fantastic images, and this is where the church finds itself today. It finds itself in a place prepared by God called "the wilderness" or "the desert" and it's awaiting the next move of the enemy.

This is *Bakers New Testament Commentary*. This is what it says. It says: "Three factors emerge from spending time in a desert: a person is completely dependent on God to provide the material and spiritual necessities of life; the desert is always a temporary place; and last, the desert is a place where God trains his people spiritually and prepares them for service. Thus, the members of the church depend on God to be their provider and protector; they also realize that their stay on earth is but temporary; and they know that they are being trained for more extensive duties."

You see, that statement hits the nail on the head. You see, our stay on earth is temporary and we are right here, right now, being trained for what's coming next. We know the dragon's been pursuing the woman because we know that the nation of Israel has been relentlessly pursued throughout the entire world. And again we ask, why is it this one people group is singled out throughout all the history? What is the one thing that marks Israel as different from any other group other than the fact that the Messiah himself

comes from that nation? See, the Messiah is an existential threat to the ruler of this world. And he's made that very clear, I mean, *1 John* tells us: *The reason the son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.* I mean it falls perfectly in line with this war against the kingdoms and Satan's understanding that his end is going to come from that nation Israel. And as usual, what the devil intended for evil -- the Holocaust -- God superintended for the creation of the nation of Israel. And it's yet another expression of this battle between the kingdoms.

We read of the woman being given the wings of an eagle, and it's a reference to God's determination to protect his church when this tribulation begins in earnest and it hasn't started yet. For the time being what matters to us is being aware that we are at war and being prepared to go to battle, and that simply means knowing your enemy. I mean, if you are to list the three things that the god of this world detests the most, they would be: Number one, Jesus, the Messiah; number two, Israel, the place where the Messiah came from; and number three, the church that came from that Messiah. They're the three most threatening things there is to Satan and he passionately hates them. And Jesus knew full well about that hatred. I mean, while he was here on earth he instructed his disciples that hatred was going to accompany every one of their professions of faith. And time and again he warned them and he

told them to expect it. This is what he said in *John 15*. He said: *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*

I've asked it before, I say, do you ever wonder why the world hates Jesus so? I mean you think Jesus was being paranoid when he said that the world hated him first, that it hated him without cause? I've raised this very issue before, I said, why is it that all over the world, everywhere, on every corner of this globe when people feel the need to curse, they always use the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in vain? I mean, it's not like Jesus is the curse word here in the United States and Mohammed is the curse word that they use in the Middle East and Buddha is the curse word that they use in the East. It's universal. It's all over the world. People feel compelled to curse by invoking the name of Jesus Christ. I mean isn't it interesting when you consider that God felt so strongly about misusing his name that he made it one of his commandments. *Exodus 20* says: *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."* We know *Psalms 29* tells us: *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.* We also know that folks universally think it's no big deal. It's just the name of Jesus. It's almost always

spoken in an inglorious way. David said: *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* Well we know this same earth mocks that name continuously.

I think the next few verses give us a hint as to why the name of Jesus is so targeted. This is *Revelation 12:15*. It says: *The serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, to sweep her away with a flood. 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.* See, all we have to do is open our eyes, you know, just open your eyes and look around, you're going to see the flood that this serpent has unleashed. It's a flood of lies and murder.

And we go back to Jesus' description of the enemy. He says: *He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* And the shorter his time grows, the more extreme he becomes. I mean, violence and perversion and deceit and slander and lies and flat out murder, that's his stock-in-trade, and it's all rooted in his hatred for Christ and we know it's flooding every single aspect of our culture today. Never in my lifetime have we seen anything quite like it. And the most chilling aspect of the hatred

expressed towards Christ and his kingdom is not just the raw emotion of it but the speed with which it's gaining traction. I mean, deceit and slander and lies, that's the enemy's natural language. They're now just normal talking points in every area of government, politics and education, and everybody knows it.

Well, that's the bad news but we've got the good news. You see, we've been given the answer to that flood. Jesus once said in *John 7:37*: *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"* You see, the answer to the flood of filth, perversion and violence is a counter flood of everything that Christ stands for. Because there's not just one flood that is flowing through this culture, there are really two different floods. There's a flood that's coming from the dragon and there's a flood that's coming from Christ himself, and they both create a choice: There's violence or gentleness; there's perversion or purity; there's deceit or honesty; there's slander or praise; there's lies or truth; there's murder or life itself. And the good news is this: Our culture, what's right outside that door, it can offer us the flood of filth, but those who have the Spirit of Christ within them can offer a flood of life itself.

And the bottom line for us believers, what Revelation is truly

shouting out is that the war between the kingdoms, it's no longer just a cold war that's gone on for centuries. It's now a hot war, and it's right at our doorstep because the shorter the dragon's time gets, the more furious he's going to become.

Chapter 12 concludes with that precise warning. It says: *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.* And that testimony of Jesus is the same simple gospel I speak of again and again: God and man have been separated by the sin of Adam; Jesus came to heal that separation by living a perfect life and going to the cross for us; and when we by faith trust in Christ as our Savior, we inherit that righteousness as our own so that we can stand before God perfected. That's the best news this world will ever know. And for the dragon it's the worse news that he is absolutely committed to silencing. He's gone off to make war with those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. That's us, folks. And as bad and as grim as things may look to us, imagine how they look to those who have no clue what's going on. I mean I'm absolutely convinced that people are desperate to find a way out of this flood that's overwhelming them and we are the ones who are privileged with the understanding of just what that is. We're also the ones who are tasked with the

proclamation of the only good news that truly matters and that's the good news. So it's time for us to join this battle. Let's pray.

Father, I just thank you for who you are. I just, I look at the news and I just wonder how people who don't know you, who don't know this book that you've put at the end of the Bible that's cataloging everything that's unfolding, and I should say this is something that might be happening this week, it might not be for 100,000 years. Nonetheless God says we prepare as if it's tomorrow or today. And so I just continue to pray, Lord, for every single one of us, that we would join in the battle. You have called us to prophesy and that is to proclaim the truth. And Lord, we have opportunities we've never had before. We have friends, relatives and colleagues who are turning on the news and saying what in the world is going on. We have answers to that question. The world has answers. It's a flood of filth, lies, and deceit, and we have answers, it's the living water of Christ himself. I pray for your grace, peace and power and the wisdom and the courage we need to speak that truth. And I pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.