12-24-23

Revelation 12:1-6

So, how many of you have ever read these verses in Revelation and considered them to be an account of the Christmas story? Indeed, that is exactly what they are. This is a rendering of the first advent of Jesus, but it gives a graphic portrayal of the tremendous conflict that surrounds it.

We are just finishing the advent season where we consider the two comings of our Saviour, calumniating in the celebration of Christmas. We dedicate each of four weeks to hope, love, joy, and peace; all of which point us to Christ. In Him, we have these things even on this earth; but we look forward to a time when we will have all these things without the marring by sin and evil.

I think, that as Christians, over the course of centuries, we have developed a view of the birth of Christ as bathed in light and gladness. We have our manger scenes with a happy Joseph and Mary adoring the Christ child. There are shepherds there, who are gazing in wonder at the baby the multitude of angels told them about. Even the farm animals are clean and quiet in the presence of Jesus. Our scene often has the three wise men present with their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh; even though we don’t really know how many there were and they didn’t show up for about two years.

Having said that, I don’t mean to take away from the way we celebrate Christmas. I hope to add to it. Christmas is a wonderful time to focus on Christ and all the good things His birth brought to us. It is a time to exchange gifts in honor of the perfect gift of Jesus that was given to us. Jesus is the light that came into the world and He has made it possible to celebrate the joy of salvation with gladness.

But keep in mind that as we have discussed the last two Sundays, that Jesus is a Warrior-King. Yes, His first advent was as a helpless baby boy; but He never gave up His deity; He was still a Warrior-King. This view of the first coming of Christ given in Revelation shows us that even His coming as a baby was part of a war. There was, and still very much is, a cosmic, spiritual war going on. There is a very real fight between God’s forces of righteousness and satan’s forces of evil.

Of course, this is not a war where we bite our nails wondering who will win; Jesus already delt the death blow to satan on the cross. Even before that, the victory of God was never in any doubt; He is the everlasting all-powerful creator God of the universe. The battle now rages to see whose prisoner each of us will become: will we be a prisoner of Christ or will we be a prisoner of satan. Each has its eternal consequences.

As we look into our verses for today, it is not my intent to explain each and every detail, but to focus on the main, more obvious points and how they relate to the birth of Christ on that first Christmas. As I’ve mentioned before, the best way to interpret Revelation is as literally as possible. This still leaves room for metaphor, allegory, and spiritual interpretations. We just need good reason to do so.

Well, in these verses we are given good reason to do so. The first verse begins with “*A great sign appeared in heaven*.” So we are told immediately that we are dealing with signs; that what we read is symbolic. We see the same type of phrase in verse 3. These verses are dealing with reality; but in a symbolic way. Elsewhere in this chapter and in the rest of the Bible we are given hints and leadings about what these symbols mean. As we will see, the first five verses are primarily a picture of what has already happened and verse six takes place in the future.

During this revelation of Jesus given to the apostle John, John looks into heaven and he sees, “*a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*” Obviously there is not going to be any woman wearing the sun and walking around on the moon. These descriptors tell us who the woman is. She is the nation of Israel. As we have already read, this woman gives birth to the Christ child. Because of this, there are some who will teach that this woman is Mary, the mother of Jesus.

But if you look at the symbolism and continue reading this chapter, you will find that it is impossible for this woman to be one person. For example we are told in verse 17, “*So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children.*” This is certainly not referring to the four other sons of Mary and Joseph and their daughters. These are the remaining faithful Christian Jews who are alive at the time of the tribulation.

Nor is the woman the church. Remember that Jesus started the church; the church did not beget Jesus.

To find the main relationship between the woman and the nation of Israel you have to go back to Genesis 37:9-11 where Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, relates a dream to his family. It says in part, *Now [Joseph] had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”* In the immediate context, the sun was Joseph’s father Jacob, the moon was his mother Rachael, and the stars were his eleven brothers. Them all bowing down to him was a prophecy of what would happen when Joseph became a ruler in Egypt and his family came to him seeking food.

You can make the connection between this and what John saw in the vision. Jacob was renamed Israel by God and he was the sun in Joseph’s dream. The woman, being clothed with the sun, shows her intimacy with the nation of Israel. She is associated with the moon, Rachael, who was the primary wife of Israel. And of course the crown of twelve stars represents the twelve tribes of Israel. The woman represents the nation of Israel.

*[A]nd she was with child; and she \*cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.* It is so important for we as the church to keep in mind that Jesus was born an Israelite. He comes from the nation of Israel. They are the people He primarily came to save. Yes, He is the Saviour of the world; but the nation of Israel are the chosen people of God and it is to them He sent the Saviour. If Israel would have accepted their Saviour, they could have evangelized the world; which is what they were supposed to have been doing since the beginning. Because Israel rejected Jesus, the doors of the church were opened to the Gentiles immediately.

Israel has been in pain and needing a Messiah since the very beginning. The patriarchs could see the promises of God from a distance, but they would have to wait beyond this lifetime to receive them. Israel became slaves in Egypt; they needed to be saved. As soon as they witnessed the parting of the Red Sea and crossed over to freedom, they began to complain and demonstrate their absence of faith; they needed a Messiah.

God had promised Abraham that through him all the nations would be blessed. From then on, Israel was in the pains of labor to bring forth the Messiah, Jesus. God would see to it that the promised Saviour would arrive just in time. And satan knew it.

This brings us to the next sign John saw, a great red dragon. The identification of the dragon is easy because we are told who he is down in verse 9, “*And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world*.” The phrase “*serpent of old*” shows that this is the very same one who was in the Garden of Eden where he deceived Adam and Eve.

In verse 4 we are told that his tail swept away a third of the stars. Again, this is part of the symbolism of the vision. Satan manage to seduce a third of the population of the angels into following him in his rebellion against God. These are what we call the fallen angels; the demons, the powers, the principalities. These are the actual beings behind much of the evil that takes place. And make no mistake, these spiritual beings are as real as you and I.

As we mentioned, the male child born to the woman, is Jesus the Christ. Satan is set to kill this child as soon as possible. He made several attempts to do so. But the Christ was supernaturally protected throughout His life. Even before Jesus was born, Mary was in danger of being stoned according to the Law of Moses. In a diabolical attempt to slay Him, king Herod sent to Bethlehem having all the male children under two years of age killed. There were several times in His life where Jesus was close to being stoned. But in each instance, His time had not yet come.

Even when satan appeared to succeed at Jesus’ crucifixion, he had only helped bring about his own defeat. No wonder he is furious. Jesus died on the cross exactly according to God’s plan and Jesus laid down His life; it was not taken from Him.

As verse 5 tells us, Jesus was born to Israel, His life was successful, He accomplished what He came for, and He will return one day to rule all the nations with absolute authority. This verse skips over Jesus’ life during His first advent and His death and resurrection and goes straight to His ascension. This is where Jesus was caught up to God and to His throne.

These verses are mainly a look back to things that have already happened. Let’s just glance at verse 6 which suddenly looks to the future and is actually explained in more detail later in this chapter. Jesus was caught up to heaven, but the woman, Israel, is still here. Satan can no longer reach Jesus, so he turns on His “mother”.

We know that Israel has been under attack throughout history. Satan attacked them before Christ was born because he simply tried to stop the birth of Christ by wiping out the people. They have been under attack even up to now. Hopefully, none of us will ever forget what was done to the Jews under Hitler. Even now, most of the world is arrayed against them, somehow justifying the Hamas attack as Israel’s fault. The prince of this world is satan and most of the people are his followers. We should not be surprised that the world hates God’s chosen people.

What this verse tells us is that during the last three and a half years of the tribulation, God will somehow hide the people of Israel who have turned to Jesus as their Messiah. He will hide them and care for them supernaturally until Jesus comes back as Warrior-King to establish His rightful rule over all the nations of the earth.

Looking over these verses we see battle and turmoil. There is a tremendous war going on right now for the souls of men and women. And the birth of Christ caused a tremendous escalation in the fight. The Kingdom of God had come to the earth and it didn’t come in from the edges of the conflict. Jesus and His Kingdom dropped right into the middle of enemy territory. That is where we are now.

In the life of Jesus, something new takes place that shows the battle has entered another level. In the Old Testament we read of supernatural control of the weather; of food being multiplied; of people being healed; even of the dead being raised. But there is no casting out of demons. With just a word, Jesus commanded the forces of evil, even satan. A man of the Gadarenes possessed by thousands of demons was no match for the Son of God. What we see is physical evidence of the spiritual conflict that is taking place. We know that it is real.

While the defeat of satan has been secured, the war isn’t over until God creates the new heavens and the new earth. We are part of it whether we want to be or not. The worst thing we can do is ignore it. Ephesians chapter 6 lets us know who our real enemies are and gives us the armor and weapons we need. 2 Corinthians 10 reminds us that the first place to fight for is our minds. We must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Paul tells us in Romans 12 that we should always be renewing our minds and not be conformed to the world. Remember that not all the evil comes from satan; our natural inclination is to evil.

This Christmas I hope and pray that you have a wonderful and joyous time; be it quiet or filled with family and friends. Enjoy the lights and the decorations and the gifts. Keep focused on Jesus as we celebrate His birthday. Think about Joseph and Mary when they had some time to reflect on this precious baby whom they could not comprehend. Think about the shepherds who did make their way to this stable to gaze on a King. Think even on the wise men who made a long journey in order to worship who they knew was a King.

Keep in mind that the coming of Christ did bring reason for hope, love, joy, and peace. Just don’t let your guard down. Evil will not rest until the final moment when satan is cast into the lake of fire.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, while we await Your future coming as the One who will rule the world in righteousness, we praise You for Your first coming to bring us redemption. You have clothed Your people in Your own righteousness so that we may stand before You unafraid when You come with Your iron scepter. Because of Your grace and mercy, we will be able to live in Your Kingdom of righteousness.

I pray Lord that You would keep us mindful of the reality of the spiritual realm and of the very real conflicts taking place there. If we are aware, we can be more understanding of the frustrating things taking place in this world; be more aware of the necessity of our involvement by prayer, renewing our minds, and loving others. We will understand the rage of satan and that he is not to be trifled with; even though he is defeated and his ultimate end is certain.

And now Lord, would You please bless each and everyone of us. Give us a happy Christmas filled with good things. And most importantly, give us that peace and joy that can only come from knowing You personally as our Lord and Saviour. Thank You Jesus for what You have done. And thank You for all that You will do according to Your promises.

We pray in the blessed name of Jesus

Amen