

Text: Rev. 12:1-6

Title: "Christmas symbols from heaven"

Time: 12/3/2017 am & 12/10/2017 am

Place: NBBC

Intro: Christmas is a season of symbols. The best symbols of Christmas point to the true meaning of the holiday. We enjoy a Christmas tree in the Hobi home because it reminds us of the man blessed by the Lord as a tree planted by the rivers of water, which bears fruit in its season, whose leaves do not wither, and which prospers in the Lord's blessing. The evergreen tree is a symbol of everlasting, abundant life, and Scripture tells us that this was one of the purposes behind Christmas—to provide dead sinners the opportunity to live again. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The Christmas tree reminds us of that truth.

One of the iconic Christmas tree symbols of the season is the Charlie Brown Christmas tree. Unlike many of the recent Christmas specials, that popular show took the time to explicitly pronounce the true meaning of Christmas. Charles Schultz insisted on the part of that show where Linus recites the Luke 2 Christmas account. His producers were not sure that CBS would go for that, and they did not, but they were so far behind their production schedule that the TV producers did not have time to get that part out of the film.

We are officially in the Christmas season, so I would normally postpone our continued study of the Book of Revelation to focus on this special seasonal theme. But it turns out, we can do both this morning. We can continue our study of Revelation and focus on important Christmas themes. Revelation 12 is a Christmas passage. It contains a great Christ-

mas symbol that appeared to John in the heavens (v. 1). The passage is all about the birth of Christ, so it is a Christmas passage. It is Christmas viewed with the help of heaven's symbols, so I have titled our study of it this morning, "Christmas symbols from heaven." I would like us to notice three of these.

I. God's love for Israel is a Christmas theme from heaven's symbol of the woman (vv. 1-2).

Illustration: Last September a Youtube video went viral that referenced these verses. The video explained how that on September 23 the constellation Virgo, which mythology has seen as a woman, would line up with the sun, with the moon under it, with the 9-star constellation Leo, and with 3 other planets for 12 stars total. Jupiter would be in Virgo, and then move out of it, thus depicting a woman giving birth to a child. The video said this was the Revelation 12 sign in heaven, although they were somewhat unsure about the significance of it.

There are some reasons we want to avoid interpreting Revelation 12 that way this morning. This is the first sign in heaven, but it is not the only one. We actually have two signs in heaven that appear together in this passage (v. 3), and then there is another one in 15:1.

What we learn from 12:3 and 15:1 is the fact that these signs in heaven have little to do with constellations. Nothing happened to a third of the stars on September 23rd. The angels of chapter 15 are not constellations, and so that is not what we should see here either. In fact, the Bible speaks of looking to the stars for special revelation as a form of paganism rather than a good way to interpret our Bibles (Deut. 4:19, "And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when

thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.”).

Application: So rather than looking to the stars for help interpreting this passage, we need to look to Scripture. The principle of Bible interpretation called the analogy of Scripture tells us that unclear Scripture passages can be best understood when read in the light of clear Scripture passages. Two such clues from Scripture help us understand that the woman of the sign of Revelation 12 is Israel.

(1) First, this woman is clothed with the sun, has the moon under her feet, and wears a wreath of twelve stars, and we are immediately reminded of Joseph’s dream about his father Jacob, who was the sun, his mother Rebecca, who was the moon, and his brothers who were the other eleven stars (Gen. 37:9). These are descriptions of Israel’s beauty as the betrothed wife of Yahweh. Solomon illustrates God’s view of Israel as he praises his wife’s beauty in Song of Sol. 6:10, “Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun?”

(2) Second, this woman is pregnant with a male child, and her pregnancy has caused her many labor pangs. The Old Testament describes Israel as a pregnant woman experiencing labor pangs: “Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies” (Mic. 4:10).

And so what does all this say about heaven's view of Israel? It says that God loves Israel. It says that God promised that Israel would bear a son in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed. The seed of the woman was promised even in Gen. 3:15. A promised descendent was also promised Noah's son Shem, and then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then Judah, and then David.

Ultimately, God kept His promise when Isaiah 7:14 was fulfilled: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." God loves Israel as the human mother of Immanuel. Paul did too (Rom. 9:5, "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."). God loves Israel as the human mother of His own Son Jesus Christ, "God with us," "God blessed forever."

This sign from heaven in Revelation 12 is about Israel, because it speaks of that time during the Great Tribulation, the last 3.5 years, when Israel will be betrayed by the anti-christ but then saved by the man child born to them. God loves Israel, and God is going to save Israel in the days of antichrist's dominance.

It is remarkable that the Lord still loves Israel. That love was evident even in the early days of the Pentecost revival and the birth of the church.

Illustration: The last book written by John Bunyan, the famous Baptist forefather and author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was a volume titled, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved*. It was a sermon on Luke 24:47, "And that repentance and remission of

sins should be preached in his name among all nations, *beginning at Jerusalem.*” On that text, Bunyan had this to say:

“That these Jerusalem sinners were the biggest sinners that ever were in the world, I think none will deny, that believes that Christ was the best man that ever was in the world, and also was their Lord God. And that they were to have the first offer of his grace, the text is as clear as the sun; for it says, ‘Beginning at Jerusalem.’ . . . One would have thought, since the Jerusalem sinners were the worst and greatest sinners, Christ’s greatest enemies, and those that not only despised his person, doctrine, and miracles, but that, a little before, had had their hands up to the elbows in his heart’s blood, that he should rather have said, Go into all the world, and preach . . . among all nations; and, after that, offer the same to Jerusalem; yea, it had been infinite grace if he had said so. But what grace is this, or what name shall we give it, when he commands that this repentance and remission of sins, which is designed to be preached in all nations, should first be offered to Jerusalem; in the first place to the worst of sinners!” (p. 7).

What amazing love is this indeed, that God views Israel as the beautiful mother of His Son, whom they crucified, that He might ultimately save and redeem them. God’s love for Israel is His saving love for the sinner.

How must a sinner respond? Bunyan has the answer: “Sinner, here thou dost hear of love; pray thee, do not provoke it, by turning it into wantonness. He that dies for slighting love, sinks deepest into hell, and will there be tormented by the remembrance of that evil, more than by the deepest cogitation of all his other sins. Take heed, therefore; do not make love thy tormentor, sinner.”

Will you, Sinner, trust God's love to save you from your sins, or continue to presume on His love in service of your own wantonness? Be not deceived, God's love is not mocked.

II. Satan's hatred for Christ is a Christmas theme from heaven's symbol of the dragon (vv. 3-4).

Illustration: You will remember from Matthew's account of the wise men that Herod was troubled to hear of the Messiah's birth, and all Jerusalem with him. He ordered that all the babies of Bethlehem two years old and under were to be killed. That is just one order of one king, but we see in it the terrifying influence of the great red dragon of this passage.

Application: He has seven crowned heads and ten horns. These are further explained in chapter 17, so we will not dwell on that part of the sign now. Our passage tells us that he caused a third of the stars of heaven to fall. These are likely the beings called his angels in verse 9. There we learn plainly who the dragon is. He is "that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." Think of the destruction described by that last phrase - "which deceiveth the whole world."

Our passage says that he is the *great* red dragon. That greatness was powerfully described by Joseph Seiss in his comments on this passage: "With what carnage and misery has he overflowed the earth! There has never been a murder, but he caused it. There has never been a sanguinary war, but he instituted it. There has never been a death-scene, but it is traceable to him. Every blight of human happiness, every failure of human peace, every sorrow of human life, has come from him. All the fiery passions that rankle in men, and break forth in deeds of violence and blood, are his in-

spirations. Never a being has been perverted from the beneficent object of its existence, never a soul has lost its Creator's image or gone down to perdition, never a life has been disabled or extinguished, never a heart has been broken or a wretchedness enacted, of which he is not the primal cause. All graves, all tears, all mutilations and dismemberments of earth's families, nations, or the race, are results of his doings and malignity."

Are you aware that you have an adversary this morning that is effectively deceiving the whole world? He hates Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life. He hates the followers of Christ. He dominates this world as its god, and if you have no adversary in him or his world, you are simply not a follower of Jesus Christ. You are part of that world that he has deceived, and apart from true salvation in Christ from his world, he will destroy you with it.

III. Christ's victory over Satan is a Christmas theme from heaven's symbol of the child (vv. 5-6).

Illustration: Bryan and Anna's hymn (verse 4): "From the darkness Satan's zeal has bruised with death the Savior's heel. From a cross of crimson red our Savior crushed the serpent's head."

Application: Satan bruised the heel of Christ at the cross, but Jesus crushed the head of the serpent when He arose and ascended on high. He is going to shepherd the nations someday, and he tells members of local churches that they need to prepare to do the same (Thyatira - Rev. 2:24-29). We overcome by saving faith, but to rule and reign, we need to hold fast in the face of opposition and hardship (vv. 25-26; 1 Kings 12:7 tells us what that looks like).

Conclusion: Revelation 12 promises that when Satan attacks Israel during the second half of the Great Tribulation, she is going to find a place prepared by God for her protection (v. 6). That made me think of John 14:1-6. Let's conclude by reading again about our place of protection. Is that place of protection your destiny this morning? Have you come to the Father by Christ alone, the way, the truth, and the life?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*