

REVELATION – SERMON 47

WONDERS IN HEAVEN

Revelation 12:1-6

INTRODUCTION

- When asked by Queen Victoria to provide evidence of the existence of God, British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, replied, “The Jew, your majesty.”
- No other people have been so severely persecuted for such a prolonged period, and yet survive, and even flourish
- Even unbelievers must marvel and confess that there is no natural explanation for their continuance
- The Scriptures reveal to us not only the Sovereign Hand behind their perseverance, but also the satanic hand behind their persecution
- This chapter marks the beginning of a new section of revelation (12-14) in which John is shown important characters and events of the final half of the tribulation
- Chapters 12-13 describe “the great actors for good and evil in the last days” (Walter Scott), while chapter 14 reveals the Lamb standing on mount Zion in preparation for his reign
- Those characters are: the woman (12:1-2,6,13-17); the dragon (12:3-4,9-10,13-17;13:2,4); the man-child (12:5); Michael (12:7); the beast out of the sea (13:1-8); the beast out of the earth (13:11-17)

- We have here a “behind the scenes” portrayal of the great struggle between light and darkness that has been engaged for 6000 years, and will reach its climax during this time
- The information here also provides us with a clear picture of the furious satanic hostility against God at this time, which helps us to better understand the severity of the coming vial judgments
- Some regard this chapter as one of the most difficult to interpret in the entire book, yet by following sound rules of hermeneutics, the correct meaning can be determined
- Already in Revelation, we have been shown the ministries of two groups of believing Jews during the first half tribulation – the 144,000 (7:1-11) and the two witnesses (11:1-13)
- In this chapter, we are shown what will happen to the entire believing nation in the second half of the tribulation
- In these opening verses, we will examine three characters: the woman, the dragon and the child

I. THE RADIANT SPLENDOR OF THE WOMAN (1-2)

A. A great wonder

1. The Greek word (*semeion*) indicates a “sign”, and is the first of seven occurrences in the book (chs. 12-19)
2. The use of this term instructs us that what follows is to be understood symbolically, not literally; and that where this term is *not* used, we should take those parts literally

B. A woman

1. There are four women portrayed in Revelation—Jezebel (2:20-23), the woman clothed with the sun (ch.12), Mystery Babylon (ch.17,18), and the Lamb’s wife (ch.19)

2. There are many false interpretations concerning this woman
 - a. Romanism teaches that Mary is the woman, yet Mary never fled to the wilderness for 1260 days (v.6)
 - b. Protestant amillennialists teach that the “church” is the woman, however the church did not produce Christ, but Christ the church (Matthew 16:18)
 - c. Cults teach that their own particular sect is the woman

C. Her true identity as the nation of Israel

1. The imagery of the sun, moon and stars are drawn from Joseph’s dream representing his family which became the nation of Israel (Genesis 37:9-10)
 - a. Just as the heavenly bodies declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-6), so too was Israel to witness God’s glory to the world (Deuteronomy 7:6)
 - b. During Christ’s reign Israel will fulfil this role (Isaiah 2:2-3; Isaiah 49:6)
 - c. Clothed with the sun indicates protection (Psalm 84:11)
 - d. The sun and moon are also signs (Genesis 1:14) whose perpetuity serve as a witness to Israel’s preservation as a nation (Jeremiah 31:35-37) and God’s faithfulness to his covenant with David (Jeremiah 33:20-23)
2. The “man-child” (Christ) came forth from Israel
 - a. In his incarnation, Jesus entered the world through God’s chosen nation of Israel (Isaiah 9:6-7; Romans 9:4-5)

- b. Her “travail” speaks of the agonizing and longing of God’s people for centuries (even for 4,000 years from Eve to Mary), waiting for the promised Messiah, his defeat of Satan, his kingdom of righteousness, and the “consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25)
- c. There are numerous ties here with the account of the fall in Genesis 3

II. THE RAGE OF SATAN AGAINST THE WOMAN (3-4)

A. A great red dragon

1. The word “dragon” occurs 13 times in Revelation
2. In this chapter, “dragon” and “serpent” are used interchangeably for the devil (see vv.9,13-17)
3. Red indicates war, bloodshed and death (cf. 6:4; John 8:44)
4. Seven heads and crowns represent seven kingdoms or world powers
 - a. This may describe Satan’s dominion over the kingdoms of the world throughout history (Luke 4:5-6)
5. The ten horns are ten kings in the final kingdom of the beast (Daniel 7:7,20,24; Revelation 13:1; 17:12)

B. The tail of the dragon

1. The opening of v.4 describes the primeval rebellion of Lucifer
 - a. This took place shortly after the creation week (Genesis 1-2), and before the fall of man (Genesis 3)
 - b. Lucifer was created in great power, wisdom and beauty as the “anointed cherub that covereth”, but in his pride

he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven, becoming Satan and the devil (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:13-18)

2. “Stars” in this instance refer to angels (cf. Job 38:7; Revelation 9:1)
 - a. In his rebellion, Satan persuaded one-third of God’s “innumerable company of angels” (Hebrews 12:22) to follow him, becoming “devils” and “evil spirits”
 - b. Since then, some of them have been chained in hell (2 Peter 2:4), and some have been bound in the Euphrates River (Revelation 9:14) due to certain sins
 - c. Multitudes still roam the world today doing Satan’s bidding, who is the “prince of devils” (Matthew 9:34)

C. The dragon vs the woman

1. Satan, knowing the promise of the coming “seed of the woman” that would bruise his head, has sought throughout history to destroy this seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15)
 - a. Cain’s murder of Abel (Genesis 4:8; 1 John 3:12)
 - b. The corrupting of the human race (Genesis 6:4-13)
 - c. Pharaoh’s slaughter of the Hebrew males (Exodus 1:16-22)
 - d. Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, and her attempt to destroy all the seed royal (2 Kings 11:1-3)
 - e. Haman’s attempt to exterminate all the Jews (Esther 3:6)
 - f. Herod’s “slaughter of the innocents” in his attempt to eliminate the King of the Jews (Matthew 2:16-18)

2. Though Satan failed to devour the man-child, he has continued to persecute the woman (Israel), and the last 2000 years of history catalogue efforts to destroy the Jews, which continues in our day (12:13)

III. THE ROYAL SON OF THE WOMAN (5)

A. The “man-child”

1. This describes Christ’s humanity
 - a. In his incarnation, Christ was fully God and fully Man, in one Person
 - b. He had no earthly father (Matthew 1:20), but was born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:34)
 - c. The word of God was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:1,14)
2. This describes Christ’s condescension (Philippians 2:5-8)

B. His rule

1. This is fulfilled in 19:15
2. The word for “rule” is related to “shepherding, guiding and feeding” as a shepherd
3. The rod of iron shows that when Christ comes to take his kingdom, it will be with great force and violence against his enemies (Psalm 2:8-9)
4. His saints will rule with him in his kingdom (Revelation 2:26-27; 20:4-6)

C. Caught up unto God

1. This describes Christ's ascension (Acts 1:9-11)
2. He is now seated at "God's throne", awaiting the day of his coming to take his kingdom and throne (Revelation 3:21; Hebrews 1:3; 10:12)
3. In this description of Christ's work, this present church age is entirely omitted, showing that God's focus during the tribulation is upon Israel, while the church is absent following the rapture

IV. THE RIGHTEOUS SAVIOUR OF THE WOMAN (6)

A. The woman flees to the wilderness

1. This event will take place at the midpoint of the tribulation when the antichrist breaks his covenant (Daniel 9:27), desecrates the temple (2 Thessalonians 2:4), and severely persecutes Israel
2. Christ gave instructions to flee into the mountains when this happens (Matthew 24:15-21)
3. More details of this event are given in 12:13-17
4. The wilderness is thought by many to be the ancient city of Petra in Edom (modern-day Jordan), an impenetrable citadel that can only be entered through a narrow ravine

B. God will protect them

1. He prepares them a place where they will be hid (Isaiah 26:20-21)
 - a. God fed Israel in the wilderness in the past, and he will do it again
 - b. "They" may indicate that he will use sympathetic Gentile nations to sustain the Jews at this time

2. He feeds them
3. The duration of their flight to the wilderness is 1260 days or 3 ½ years (Daniel 7:25)

CONCLUSION

1. We are reminded here of God's covenant love for the children of Israel and the glorious future he has in store for them (Zechariah 8:20-23)
2. It is impossible for someone to both love God and hate the Jews
3. The book of Revelation is an *unveiling* of things to come, in which we are given a "behind the scenes" view of the spiritual forces of light and darkness
4. We are all too prone to become fixated with the day to day affairs of this life and lose sight of the great spiritual warfare we must be engaged in
5. We need God to open the eyes of our understanding, that we would be vigilant in battle against our enemy, and that we would be diligent in labouring for our Lord
6. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12)
7. Despite all the efforts of Satan over 6000 years to overthrow God's promises, he has failed
8. Those who belong to God enjoy his constant protection; they are hid by him (Colossians 3:3), and he prepares a place for them (John 14:2)