

Revelation 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

4 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before

the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

5 And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

The Woman

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Seven Series

As we begin our study of Revelation, Chapter 12, I want my readers to understand that I certainly have no personalities in mind, and I do not want you to have any persons in mind. The Bible does speak plainly against that which is wrong, and I merely desire to tell people the truth from God's eternal Word.

In a previous study, "Introduction to the Revelation," we studied the first chapter in order to find the historical period where the Revelation was to begin. We have some leaders today who say it all concerns past history. There are others who say it all belongs to the future, to some supposed millennial age. By reading the first chapter of Revelation, however, we find the initial point: Calvary. The very first chapter of Revelation takes us from the first coming of Christ to the second coming. John made this very plain by referring to the shedding of Christ's blood on the Cross, purchasing His own church with His own precious blood, making us kings and priests that we should reign on the earth. Then in verse 7, John wrote, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him. . . ." The entire Revelation is very plain if we will open our hearts and let God speak to us.

The reason we go now from Chapter 1 to Chapter 12 is really simple and practical. The Book of Revelation is more than "abstract" prophecy and church history: it is very up to date in that it depicts the experience of every Christian. The reason that Chapter 12 is both a simple and a practical place to begin is that Revelation is written in seven series of visions.

It is not a book to read chronologically from the first chapter through the last. The first series is the first three chapters, which are the letters that John was to send to the seven churches of Asia. In the fourth and fifth chapters, John was caught up in the Spirit (never leaving the Isle of Patmos) and received from God a vision of God's throne. The fifth chapter also contains the opening of the book sealed with seven seals inside and out. The next two series are found in the sixth through the eleventh chapters, in which the Lamb opens each seal, and in which seven angels sound a trumpet each.

This brings us to the twelfth chapter, where a new series begins. This series shows the parental phase of the church and the foes that work to devour her converts. The church needs to hear this up-to-date message from Patmos. Even as the church works hard to reach souls for God, there is an enemy who lays the

ground work for their destruction the very hour they are converted. We need to realize that unless we pray for them and endeavor to reveal the truth to them of how the devil works, many of them can be lost.

The thirteenth through the nineteenth chapters describe many false systems of religion. The devil works through them to deceive millions, making them feel that each one of these is the Church of God. The true-hearted man stands back puzzled, asking how all of these can be the church with their divided efforts and divided teachings. The twentieth chapter of Revelation is a series in itself, showing how the dragon is bound and cast down. Chapters 21 and 22 present the last series, a clear vision of the church in "the evening time," the days in which we live. So, we begin this study in the twelfth chapter because it is the beginning of a series.

Disrobing Deception

This series deals with a great part of the battle between good and evil. As we study it, we will see it disrobe the false religions that have deceived men in the past and which are still deceiving men today. The truths in this series will make manifest the thoughts of men's hearts.

Just as many came to Jesus

cloaked in false religion, religious men today may appear as fine Christians. Jesus said they were "whited" on the outside, but His preaching revealed their true character. What really was on the inside, got on the outside when they became so angry that they were ready to push Him over a cliff! We are living in a time where supposed truth has been so watered down that it does not even stir the devil. He can enter many religious assemblies and feel right at home. In some cases, he even takes the pulpit! Whenever truth appears, however, plain as it is, it will yet stir the devil as much as it ever stirred him in ages past. You see, the devil has not changed, even though he would like to make us feel he has been converted, and when the truth is put on him, he is as mean, dirty, corrupt, and deceptive as he was in Eden. So, the Revelation will do more than just teach us ecclesiastical history: it will make manifest the thoughts of men's hearts.

By the end of this study, we all ought to have found our true position before God. We will know who is the church and who is not the church. When Revelation portrays war between good and evil, it portrays the warfare between Christianity and anti-Christianity (which is not merely "un-Christianity"). One of the many false theories taught concerns an "antichrist" some say will come one day in the future. If we will return to the sound Bible teaching found in 1 John 2:18, however, we will know that there are many antichrists in the religious world, not just one. Nowhere does the Bible speak about one antichrist. The Bible mentions many antichrists. What does the expression "antichrist" mean? Well, the true Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, so an antichrist is a false way, a false message with no life. Religion is full of these false ways, offering men and women optional ways to Heaven, that require no real Christian, godly, holy living.

Men have various ways to test whether a religious teaching is true or not. Some of them say it is true if it makes you speak in some language nobody knows. Others say it is true if it gives you good feelings. There is only one way to put a test on a man's message: does it produce holy, godly lives? That is what truth was given for, and that is what it will produce.

Visionary Images

What John saw, he saw in a vision. He did not see actual happenings. Some people, for example, think John saw the devil cast out of Heaven in Revelation, Chapter 12. He never saw any such thing. John saw visionary images while on the Isle of Patmos. Rome tried to boil him in oil, but they could not kill him, so they banished him to the Isle of Patmos to starve to death. The Bible says that John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and the Lord appeared to him, telling him to write what he saw, not what he heard (Revelation 1:10-19). He said further that God signified it to him. The word signify means "with signs." So, as John sat on the Isle of Patmos and looked over the Aegean Sea, God used the heavens as if they were curtains. He pulled the curtains of darkness back and a beautiful panoramic vision began to unroll before John. Then God told him to write down what he saw.

The Book of Revelation is a vision. In Revelation 9:17 John said, "And thus I saw the horses in the vision. . . ." He did not see actual battles, or real horses: he saw a vision. The Revelation is a verbal account of the vision John had. Two of the three objects that we want to examine in this study are the star-crowned woman and the man child.

Revelation 12:1-2, 5 reads: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with

child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne."

Remember, John saw this in a vision, a panorama spread across the sky. Here God began to give him a vision of the reign of the church and how she overcame her foes. Now, the literal school of interpretation is frustrated in this part of the vision, for we would have a hard time literalizing this picture!

Think of it: a star-crowned woman clothed with the sun. This has to be figurative language. With our knowledge of the size of the planets, it is foolish to think that a literal woman could stand on the literal moon, clothed with the literal sun. The sun, which is about 93,000,000 miles away, will burn you severely if you but lie out in it in the middle of the day: who could clothe himself in it? Every literal star is much bigger than this whole earth, so who could wear a crown of twelve of them? We must remember that God told John He was going to signify this message, or give it to him in signs (or figurative language).

The Holy Mother

This woman is the most beautiful part of John's vision. Whenever anyone sees her and knows her, he is convinced that she is the most beautiful sight in the Book. When John described her as star-crowned, sun-clothed, and standing on the moon, he pictured her as possessing every luminary of heaven, every avenue of light. The sun, moon, and stars are the avenues of natural light, and in this vision, every avenue of light worked through this beautiful woman. This woman symbolizes the holy mother church of the New Testament, the Church of the Living God, the church that Jesus purchased with His Own blood.

Remember that in Galatians

4:22-31 Paul set forth an allegory, using Abraham's two wives and two sons to symbolize the two covenants. Mount Sinai was where the Law was given, but Mount Zion is where the Gospel goes forth. Let us refer to this passage again to see why this woman, the church, is spoken of as a mother.

Paul wrote in Galatians 4:22-26: "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman [Ishmael was the one by the bondmaid, and the other by the freewoman was Isaac], But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

Here Paul used Mount Sinai to show us the old Law and the literal Jewish nation. He used an allegory to show that they are in bondage. In verse 30 Paul said God cast them out as a nation, owning them no more as exclusively His family, His people. Then he used Mount Zion to show us the Church of the Living God.

The Hebrew writer did the same in Hebrews 12:22-23 when he wrote, "But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . To the . . . church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven. . . ."

Who Is the Church?

Who is the church of the firstborn? In Acts 20:28 Paul said to the Ephesian elders, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseer, to feed the church of God, which he [Christ] hath purchased with his own blood." The church of the firstborn is

the Church of the Living God. She is spoken of in the Bible as the mother of us all. She is the New Jerusalem, the house of God in the New Testament.

Those twelve stars are the twelve apostles of the Lamb. They were present in the beginning of the primitive church, radiating forth the light. Revelation 1:20 tells us that the stars are the ministry.

The moon under her feet symbolizes the Old Testament light. This symbolic moon perfectly mirrors the natural moon. There would not be any light from the moon if there were not a sun to shine on it. The moon at night only reflects the light it catches from the sun. Even so in figurative language there would not be any light for us in the Old Testament if there had not been a New Testament.

The church has risen above the Old Testament light, standing in the sun, the New Testament light. The Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament) were given to govern God's people through the long night before Christ came. The Bible speaks of that Old Testament age as a long night, but there was to be a day come when the sun of righteousness would arise, as Malachi said He would (Malachi 4:2-6). Through the preaching of John the Baptist and then the coming of Jesus Christ in His first advent, the sun arose, thank God!

Much of the confusion in the religious world is caused because men do not understand the Law, what part it played, and how much greater light there is in the Gospel of Christ, this perfect law of liberty. We have moved from an old yoke of bondage to a perfect law of liberty. The old Law was against us, ever saying, "Thou shalt not"; but the new law says, "If you love me, you will . . ." (John 14:15, 21). When Christ sheds His love abroad in our hearts, His yoke is easy. The old Law was galling, but Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matthew 11: 30). Revelation 12:1, then, is a picture of the church hav-

ing risen above the Old Testament teaching.

Clothed With Christ

Being clothed in the sun means she has put on Christ. Paul wrote in Romans 13:14, "But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh." The morning-time church, in her pristine glory, did exactly that. That is the reason why they had power to turn the world upside down while too often we can't do it.

We have too much provision made for the flesh today. We are supposed to be doing a spiritual work and living spiritual lives, but too often we limit Christ to what we can do in the flesh. Jesus Christ can do as much for modern man as He has done for any people in any age in the past. If we can get people to crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, we will have the same results the primitive church had.

The woman clothed with the sun pictures the pristine glory of the morning-time church. She had a glory that shook the world; she commanded the attention of the world around her and stirred the devil to such a degree that he did his best to wipe out the church. God let him go to his most extreme limit, but the church went right on victoriously. Too often modern Christians are afraid to take the devil to his limits.

Many times God is ready for us to do a much greater work for Him than we allow Him to use us to do. As we consider the glory of the morning-time church, we need to look at ourselves. How do we compare with them? As the church stands above Old Testament standards, she stands in the light of the New Testament standards, and she radiates it through the twelve stars around her head.

The stars are not the head, they adorn the head, shining forth light to a lost and dying world. When I think about God's greatness and the woman clothed with the sun, the

moon under her feet, and crowned with twelve stars, my mind goes to Jesus' words on several occasions. In John 9:5 He said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," but in Matthew 5:14 He said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." The church is what He pointed to, that city of God that God has put in the top of the mountain!

If the church will let her light shine, she cannot be hidden. A man once told me, "You need to be careful, Brother Wilson, for people can't see the church." I said, "Listen, don't talk about not seeing it—you can't hide it!" If the church will be the church, she cannot be hidden, and men will see her light. This is why the devil works on us to bring us to a substandard, position on some points. The world has read the book, so they know what the church is supposed to be like. When the saints live a substandard life, they hide the church.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 that if men are lost, it is because the devil has blinded them. Satan blinds them by putting a veil over their eyes. This veil comes from saints not living right. The church brings the veil over their minds, and men fail to see the light as God would have them see it.

A Fruitful Church

We continue reading in Revelation 12:2, "And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." This shows us that the primitive church was a fruitful church and the Church of God still is a fruitful church. Whenever the Church of God becomes unfruitful, when she is not bringing in new members, when there are no converts, it is time for her to look into the mirror of God's Word and find her trouble. Paul taught in Romans 7:1-4 that we become dead to the Law by the body of Christ in order to be married to Him who is risen from the dead (Jesus Christ) to bring forth fruit to Him.

Now, the church is the bride of Christ, and when someone comes in old-time repentance and is truly born again, he becomes a member of the bride of Christ. When we are inducted into one body, the church, through the Holy Spirit, we become members of the bride of Christ, and we are married to Him for one reason: to bring forth fruit unto the Father. The church is a fruitful church.

Our text, verse 5, says, "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne." Many commentators feel that the man child she brought forth was Christ, but this is a mistaken notion. The church did not bring forth Christ: Christ brought forth the church! When the church was born, the "labor room" was Mount Calvary. When the Roman soldier pierced Christ's side, out flowed blood and water, and the Bible says He purchased the church with His own precious blood (Acts 20:28). The man child is not Christ.

In Isaiah, Chapter 66, the prophet foresaw this same event. We must remember that primitive Christianity did not have a New Testament to study. Most of the truths, therefore, that are set forth in the New Testament—even in the Revelation—are truths that the writers through the Holy Spirit carried from the Old Testament. Isaiah, many hundreds of years before the Revelation, saw this very day that John saw in Chapter 12. He saw this very woman bring forth a man child, so if we will study this prophecy, we will more clearly understand the symbolism in Revelation 12:5.

Satisfied Babes

Read carefully Isaiah 66:7-11: "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made

to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.

"Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the Lord: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God. Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her: That ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory."

Here Isaiah prophesied several hundred years before Christ of a woman bringing forth a man child. "She," verse 10 tells us is Jerusalem, and Isaiah was here referring to the New Jerusalem. Revelation 12:5 says the woman brought forth a man child; Isaiah 66:7 says Jerusalem was delivered of a man child. Now Isaiah 66:8 expresses astonishment: "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things?" What was so amazing that Isaiah would be so surprised? We, all have seen twins and triplets—perhaps even quintuplets and quadruplets—but Isaiah saw a whole nation born in one day to one mother. That is something outstanding, beyond our comprehension.

Isaiah 66:11 talks about these babes sucking and being "satisfied with the breasts of her consolations." Newborn babes in the Church of God have a mother who can satisfy them with the breasts of her consolation. Peter uses the same kind of language: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). Now, he had written in 1 Peter 1:23 that we have been born again of an incorruptible seed the Word of God that abides forever. Such newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the Word. One sure earmark of a newborn babe is that he finds consolation and satisfaction in the truth. When people are born again, the church does not have to build gymnasiums and roller-rinks

to hold them and to satisfy them. The sincere milk of the Word does that!

The church's babes will be satisfied as they suck at the breasts of her consolations—the sincere milk of the Word. Genuine Christians, whether they are babes or mature believers, say, "Give us the Word! Give us the truth! We don't want entertainment, and if we want to be entertained, we will go somewhere else." When the saints go to the house of God, they desire the unvarnished truth of God's Word. This is what consoles, strengthens, and blesses them.

Read also 1 Peter 2:9, where the apostle says to these newborn babes, "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." Who is the holy nation? Those who are truly born again, those who are truly children of the church, become a holy nation.

A New Nation

In Matthew 21:42-43 Jesus spoke of this same concept: "Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Jesus here used figurative language, speaking of Himself as a stone and of the literal Jews as the builders who had rejected Him. As their judgment He said, "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." This does not mean that He took the kingdom from the Jews and gave it to the Gentiles. This refers to the nation born in a day.

Acts 10:34-35 identifies this holy nation that brings forth the fruit of

the kingdom. Now, this occurred after the Day of Pentecost, and even though Peter possessed the Holy Spirit, he still had many things to learn. One of them was that he had his lamp under a bushel: he thought the light was just for the Jews. He refused to help the Gentiles, so in Acts 10: 9-17 God had to take him up on a roof and three times let down a sheet with all kinds of creeping things in it. Each time, God said, "Arise and eat," and each time Peter said, "Oh, I wouldn't touch anything unclean." Finally, the Lord said to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (verse 15). Shortly after, some Gentiles knocked on Peter's door and asked him to hold a meeting. The Spirit said, "Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them" (verse 20).

Peter went to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile who had been praying for light and understanding. Almost as soon as Peter arrived, God let the Holy Spirit fall on those Gentiles, and they began to praise God. Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him; and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (verses 34-35). The kingdom was taken from the Jewish nation and given to obedient believers in every nation, to "Whosoever will." This new nation is made up of Jews, Greeks, barbarians, and every nation around the world. As we studied in Isaiah, Chapter 2, in a previous article, all nations were to flow into it, and as they flow into this new Zion through the new birth, they make up a holy nation.

In what way was this nation born at once? Isaiah 66:7, speaking of Zion, the church, the New Jerusalem, said, "Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child." This pictures Pentecost, the result of Calvary. Christ suffered on Calvary, before the church ever knew how to travail, and the outgrowth of His

suffering was the Day of Pentecost. Without the saints praying, without the sinners seeking, suddenly in a miraculous manner, as Peter preached the message, 3,000 were born into the church, the Kingdom of God. The Bible says that every nation under heaven was represented, and from those nations, 3,000 became a new nation. Within an other day, another 5,000 were saved. Within three days, there were over 10,000! In the early days of the church, Antioch had over 100,000 in the congregation. Isaiah's prophecy of a nation born in a day pictures the Pentecostal birth of the Church of God.

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