

REVELATION 12

David Baker, prepared for the Presbytery fellowship word, 28 November 2021
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Introduction

Hello, everyone. In our series of studies over the past two months, we have been considering the marriage of Christ and the church. We have also been considering the motherhood of the church.

More recently, we have considered how children receive 'the blessing of Abraham' in believing families that belong to the community of the church as 'the bride of Christ'.

We know that the blessing of Abraham is the promise of the Spirit.

So, these children receive the Holy Spirit, and they are *born of God while still in their mother's womb*.

It has been necessary for us to consider these various subjects before we come to consider Revelation Chapter 12, and John's vision of the woman and the manchild, because it is not possible to understand this vision without first understanding the nature of the blessing of Abraham in believing families.

John's vision of the woman and the manchild

In this session, we will begin to consider the meaning and the significance of John's vision that is recorded in Revelation Chapter 12. I will begin by reading the key verses, and then come back and make some comments on the various elements in this vision.

'Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.' Rev 12:1.

So this woman is in heaven, or the heavenly places.

'Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth.' Rev 12:2.

So, she is a mother and she is in heavenly places; but she is also mortal and on the earth, because she is experiencing the pain associated with labour, and is bringing forth children.

'And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems [or crowns] on his heads.' Rev 12:3.

This is Satan; the great red dragon is Satan.

And the seven heads and ten horns describe his administration over the nations of the world, which is the seventh world kingdom.

'His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

'She bore a male Child [or a manchild] who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne.'

Another way of saying, 'caught up to God and His throne' is 'raised to sit with Christ in the Father's throne, in the heavenly places'.

'Caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days,' which is three and a half years. Rev 12:4-6.

The identity of the woman who is the great sign

The first point when we consider this passage is that the apostle John *saw a great sign in heaven*.

He described this sign as 'a woman'.

Our first question, then, is, 'Who is this woman?' And, like many prophetic passages of Scripture, this vision has been the subject of much theological debate. Some have suggested that the woman in this vision is Eve. Others have suggested that the woman in this vision is the nation of Israel. Another view is that the woman in this vision is Mary.

The woman is the church, the bride of Christ

Once we look at all of the various elements of this prophetic vision in Revelation Chapter 12, it is clear that the woman is the church, the bride of Christ, and the mother of sons of God.

Remember, the bride of Christ is also described in the Scriptures as 'a city', and the bride city is called 'the heavenly Jerusalem', or 'the Jerusalem from above'.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said that the Jerusalem from above is *the mother of us all*. He was

saying that as a son of God - that Jerusalem from above is the mother of sons of God.

In the first case, when we consider that the woman is seen to be with child in the heavenly places, this precludes all of those other interpretations that I mentioned before. So it precludes interpreting the woman as Eve or the nation of Israel or Mary.

The 'woman' is not Eve

We know that Eve was a type of the church, in relation to the way that she was formed and fashioned from the rib that was taken from the side of Adam. She was formed and fashioned to be a comparable helper for him.

And, as the helper comparable to Adam, she was called to be 'the mother of all living'. However, because of her deception and then Adam's disobedience, she did not have any children in the context of the garden of Eden.

We know the garden of Eden did have an element of heavenly places, because of Adam and Eve's fellowship with Yahweh each day at the tree of life. But Eve did not end up having children in that context.

Her children were not born in heavenly places. Their only connection to the heavenly places was through the word of the Lord that was proclaimed to them by the cherubim at the gate of the garden of Eden.

Eve, in her deception, presumed that Cain was a manchild from the Lord. But Cain was most certainly not the manchild that we are looking at in Revelation Chapter 12.

The woman is not the nation of Israel

In the same way, the nation of Israel did not have access to the heavenly places.

Rather, the glory of the Lord resided between the wings of the cherubim above the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of the tabernacle. And the Lord promised to speak with the nation of Israel from the doorway of the tabernacle.

So, children born under the Old Covenant were also not born in heavenly places.

Like Isaac, who was called 'a son of promise,' the children who were born in believing households, who walked after the faith of Abraham and Sarah,

did receive the adoption while they were in their mother's womb.

The adoption is the right to the full inheritance of the son of God, and that includes the inheritance of an incorruptible and immortal body.

But those children were not yet born of God; nor were they caught up to God to become members of His household while they were still in the womb. So, they were not raised and seated in heavenly places.

The woman is not Mary

Further to this, even though Mary was blessed with the great privilege of being the mother of Jesus, and the angel Gabriel did say to her that she was 'blessed among woman', the birth of Jesus did *not* take place in the heavenly places.

Rather, Jesus was born lower than the angels. He was born under the Law Covenant, and, in fact, when we consider the birth of Jesus, it really highlights the way that Yahweh the Son emptied and humbled Himself to be born as the son of Man in the humblest of circumstances.

When He was born, His mother wrapped Him in swaddling cloth and laid Him in a feed stall among the animals, because there was no room for them and no other form of accommodation. This was the humblest of places.

In contrast to this, the woman in Revelation Chapter 12 is seen to be with child in the heavenly places.

The only woman who fulfils this description is the church as the bride of Christ. The bride of Christ is the heavenly Jerusalem.

The marriage of Christ and the church happened on Mount Calvary

One of our key points in this series of studies is that we are not waiting for the marriage of Christ and the church at some point in the future.

Rather, the marriage of Christ and the church happened on Mount Calvary on the day of Christ's offering; on the day of His crucifixion.

This is when Jesus laid down His life, and the Father, through the Holy Spirit, formed and fashioned the church from Christ's physical body to be His wife and to be His comparable helper.

That is when the *marriage* took place.

And when the offering of Jesus Christ was finished, He committed His Spirit into the hands of the Father. He took His seat in the Father's throne even while His physical body still hung on the cross.

Significantly, when He took His seat in the Father's throne, this is when He took all of us, as sons of God and members of His body, to be with Him in heaven. This is when we were raised and seated with Him in heavenly places.

Likewise, this is when He took the church as His bride; the church that had been formed from His physical body by the Father.

He took the church to also be with Him in the heavenly places. This is why we see the woman in heaven.

Following this, we know that the soldier thrust a spear into His side, and blood and water and the spirit of grace and supplication flowed from where Christ was now seated in the Father's throne, through His physical body on the cross.

This river is 'the river of the water of life'. It is the fountain for sin and uncleanness, and also the source of eternal salvation. This river will continue to flow for eternity.

And the river of the water of life that flowed from the side of Christ is the full *provision* for our participation in the finished offering of Christ.

It is the full provision for our cleansing and our sanctification as sons of God, who then serve the Father as priests in His temple. It is also the full provision for our cleansing and sanctification as the members of the body of Christ, and as those who belong to the community of the church, which is the bride of Christ.

The church was seated with Christ on the day of His offering

The key point is that the church was raised with Christ to be seated with Him in heavenly places on the day of His offering.

The church was not raised into heavenly places on the Day of Pentecost.

On the Day of Pentecost, we see the bride city coming down out of heaven from God, as a bride adorned for her husband.

We know that this was the first manifestation of the bride city, because we read in the book of

Revelation that the foundation of its wall was the twelve apostles.

So, on the Day of Pentecost, the church was not being raised into the heavenly places. The church was raised with Christ on the day of His *offering*.

Then, on the Day of Pentecost, we see it coming down, out of heaven, from God.

Now, recognising that the bride city is coming down, out of heaven, it is called 'the Jerusalem from above', or 'the heavenly Jerusalem'.

In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul said that 'we have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'. Heb 12:22.

In the next verse, he said, 'We have come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven.' Heb 12:13.

So this is the woman whom John saw in heaven, who then becomes the mother of sons of God. So she is in heaven and she is with child.

The identity of the manchild

Now we are going to talk about a broad overview of the manchild. The biggest objection to saying that the woman described in Revelation Chapter 2 is the church is the view that the manchild can only refer to Jesus Christ.

That is, if the manchild is Christ, it precludes the woman being the church, because the church did not give birth to Christ.

In fact, the church was *brought forth from the side of Christ*.

Now, the simplest definition of 'a manchild' is 'a son of man', who has become a son of God. A manchild is a human being.

So this is not something that belongs to the angelic administration. A manchild is a human being who has received identity in their mother's womb through procreation.

It is man - son of man; and then also child - child of God. So, it is son of man, who has then become a son of God.

And it is clear that they are a son of God, because they belong to God the Father. They are caught up to God in His throne. We know that Jesus Christ was both the Son of God and the Son of Man.

Christ did not receive His identity through procreation

However, it is not helpful or necessary to describe Him as a manchild.

The reason for this is that He was not a son of man, who became a son of God. He did not receive His identity in the womb of the virgin Mary.

His identity is Yahweh the Son. And He had identity as Yahweh the Son before He became the Son of God, and was begotten as the Son of God the Father in the fellowship of the Everlasting Covenant before the foundation of the world.

He further emptied and humbled Himself to become the Son of Man in the womb of the virgin Mary. He was a completely new creation.

The Gospels are clear that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, who first descended from heaven to become the Son of Man.

So, He was not Son of Man, becoming Son of God. He, Yahweh the Son, became the Son of God, and then became the Son of Man.

He first descended from heaven to become the Son of Man. It is not the other way round. Jesus did not need to be caught up to God and to His throne, for His own sake.

Christ descended and ascended for our sake

The key point is that *His descending journey* from the garden of Gethsemane, where He fully identified Himself with our fallen human condition, and the Father made Him to be the body of sin, was *for our sake*, to put an end to sin and death.

At the same time, *His ascending journey* from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross was also for our sake, to bring us to God.

His offering journey was not for His own sake. The purpose of His ascending journey to the Father's house was so that sons of men could be born as sons of God, and then be caught up to God and His throne, through participation in the fellowship of His offering.

And when a son of God is baptised into Christ, and is baptised into the fellowship of His offering, they are raised with Him to be seated with Him in the Father's throne in heavenly places.

The loss of the gospel of sonship

One of the reasons that it is assumed that the manchild in Revelation Chapter 12 must be Jesus Christ, is that *the gospel of sonship has been lost*.

What I mean by that is that it is assumed that Jesus Christ is *the only son of God*, and that every other believer is a forgiven and then, at best, regenerated, son of man.

There is no understanding that sons of men are born as sons of God!

Jesus said to Nicodemus - and this is the focus of the gospel of sonship - that, unless you are born from above, you cannot *see* the kingdom of God.

And then, unless you are born of water and of the Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Even more specifically, it is not possible to understand the woman and the manchild described in the book of Revelation without understanding that children who are conceived to believing parents within the community of the church *are born as sons of God*.

They are also caught up to God to become members of His household in heaven, *while they are still in their mother's womb*.

Every child conceived to believing parents is a manchild

When we do understand this - and this is our key point - and the true nature of a manchild, we see that every child who is conceived to believing parents, and is therefore born as a son of God while still in the womb, *is a manchild*.

That is, they have *received identity* as a son or daughter of man when they are conceived.

That is the major distinction that we are making between a manchild and Jesus Christ, because He did not receive identity through procreation.

A manchild does receive identity through procreation. But then, immediately after their conception, they are *adopted* by the Father, *regenerated* by the Son, and then *given the Holy Spirit*.

So they are *born of God* while still in the womb.

This simple definition of a manchild removes all of the mystery that is often associated with this subject.

Isaiah proclaimed, concerning the birth of a manchild to a believing woman who is part of the

community of the church, by saying, 'Before she was in labour [before she began to experience natural birthing pains], she gave birth; before her pain came, she delivered a male child [or a manchild].' Isa 66:7.

This means that the child was conceived and then born as a son of God, and crying, 'Abba! Father!' while still in the womb; well before the child is then naturally born into this world, and they begin to cry, as they take that first gasp of air in the delivery ward.

In the same way, they are caught up to God while still in the womb. So they become a member of His household, and their citizenship is in heaven, well before they are born into this world, and their birth certificate is filled out as a citizen of this world. Isaiah rejoiced, 'Who has heard such a thing?' Isa 66:8.

This is a most remarkable thing, but it is not mysterious. 'Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?'

The church is clothed with the glory of God

Returning to our consideration of the woman as being the church, the apostle John described her as being 'clothed with the sun'.

'Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.' Rev 12:1.

Now, the sun describes the glory of God the Father. And we remember that when John saw Jesus Christ seated among the seven lampstand churches, he described all of the various elements of His glory, and said that His face was 'shining like the sun in its strength'.

This means that the full glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now, we know that the light of the glory of God that shines in the face of Jesus Christ is then ministered to lampstand churches through the seven stars that Christ holds in His right hand.

The lampstand churches then reflect and focus that light. In this way, the glory of God in the face of Christ becomes the light of lampstand churches as the bride of Christ. This is the light of the bride city. It is the light of the city that is set on the hill, that cannot be hidden.

John described the light of the bride city by saying, 'Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, "Come, and I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife". And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God [this is 'the city set on a hill'] having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone.' Rev 21 9-11.

Interestingly, that connects us back to the description of God the Father, as He takes His seat in His throne, and initiates all the events that belong to 'the time of the end'.

The church in heavenly places is still mortal and on earth

Continuing we read, 'Then being with child, she cried out in labour and in pain to give birth.'

So, even though the church is in heavenly places, the church is still mortal and on earth.

We know this because the travail of the church involves pain. This will not be the case in the new heavens and the new earth. But it is the case now.

The principle of the manchild belongs to this present age. This is the time when sons of men are called to become sons of God.

In the age to come, there will be the multiplication of identities for eternity, because the righteousness of sonship will increase forever and ever.

However, the multiplication of identities in the new heavens and the new earth is not through procreation. It will not be the multiplication of sons of men, through procreation, who then become sons of God by new birth. So it is not the manchild dynamic.

It will be the multiplication of sons of God *through offering*.

Two dimensions of the motherhood of the church

Talking about the travail of the church now, we have been considering that there are two dimensions to the motherhood of the church.

The first dimension is the bringing forth of godly seed in believing families.

And the second dimension is the evangelistic ministry of the church.

And there is a unique and specific *travail* that is associated with each of these dimensions of motherhood.

For example, each believing family in the community of the church will be familiar with the unique *travail* that is involved in raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Even though our children have received the divine nature while they are still in the womb, because of our faith, there is still a whole process of *travail* that is necessary to see them become mature sons of God, who have a root in themselves.

We considered in our last session that, as Christian parents, we are raising our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is our responsibility and accountability to ensure that all of the elements of salvation that belong to the 'prevenient grace phase', if you like, we are establishing in them; we are laying those elements as foundations in the lives of our children.

Paul nominated all of those foundations in Hebrews Chapter 6.

Likewise, talking about the evangelistic ministry of the church, there is a unique form of *travail* that is involved in seeing believers who have become sons of God, as the outcome of the prevenient grace of God - the life of God has germinated in their hearts because of the prevenient grace of God - negotiate the issue of 'stony' and 'thorny ground', so that they are fully established as firstfruits Christians on 'good ground'.

As a messenger of Christ, Paul identified with this unique *travail* when he said to the Galatian believers, 'My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you.' Gal 4:19.

Now, we know that the church has been in *travail* to bring forth sons of God since the Day of Pentecost.

In this regard, when we look at John's vision in Revelation Chapter 2, we could say that it is a summary vision that is relevant for the entire church age.

However, we also know that it has a particular application for the days in which we live.

The primary application of the vision is during the reign of the seventh world kingdom

Its primary application is for the church, during the reign of the seventh world kingdom. We know this for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that John identified the specific nature of the warfare that the woman and the manchild will experience. He said, 'And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems [or crowns] on his heads.' Rev 2:3.

We know that the fiery red dragon is Satan himself, and that Satan is the ruler of this world. We know it is Satan, because we read, 'So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan.' Rev 2:9. That is very specific: 'called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.'

Satan has been the ruler of this world, or the kingdoms of this world have belonged to Satan, since the fall of Adam in the beginning. Adam handed over the kingdoms of the world to Satan through his disobedience.

However, the kingdom with the seven heads and ten horns that functions under the rulership of Satan is specifically the seventh world kingdom.

The seventh world kingdom

The seventh world kingdom, as we have considered in some of our other sessions, is the United Nations. This kingdom has been ruling over the nations of the world since the end of the Second World War.

The First World War and the Second World War marked the transition from the remnants of the sixth world kingdom to the seventh world kingdom, which is the United Nations.

And 'the seven heads' represents the headquarters of the various international organisations through which the United Nations exercises its rulership over the nations of the world. The crowns are on the heads because that is where the authority rests.

Then, 'the ten horns' represent ten groups of nations that form through various alliances and agreements. This will be particularly evident in the final phase of the seventh world kingdom.

Remember, when we look at Nebuchadnezzar's statue of the world kingdoms, the seventh world

kingdom is 'the two feet with the ten toes'. So, the ten toes are relevant for the final phase of the seventh world kingdom.

This is the first thing that indicates the timing of Revelation Chapter 12.

The second reason why we know that the primary application of the vision in Revelation Chapter 12 is during the latter period of the seventh world kingdom, is that we are told that once Satan is cast out of the heavenly places, the church will then be nourished and protected by the Lord in the wilderness, for three and a half years.

'Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days,' or three and a half years. Rev 12:6.

'Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child [to the manchild]. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.' Rev 12:13-14.

So, this is three and a half years, and this is the final half of the seventieth week in 'The Seventy Weeks Prophecy' in the book of Daniel.

This is the time when the church celebrates the wedding supper with the Lord. It is the same three and a half year period when Antichrist reigns with the eighth world kingdom on the earth.

Again, this tells us that the primary application of the vision is the latter period of the seventh world kingdom.

The rod of iron is the authority of Jesus Christ in overcoming presbyteries

The third reason why we know that the primary application is during this latter period of the seventh world kingdom is that the manchild will 'receive the rod of iron'.

We have made the point that every son of man who is born as a son of God is a manchild.

However, not every manchild receives 'the rod of iron'. The rod of iron is the unique authority that belongs to Jesus Christ, to judge the nations of the world.

Through the seven wounding events that Christ experienced from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross, He was glorified as our great High Priest on that same offering journey. And through those same wounding events, when He suffered at the hands of the rulers of this world, He was also receiving the rod of iron as the authority to judge the nations of the world.

Speaking prophetically on behalf of God the Father, the psalmist declared concerning Christ, 'Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' Psa 2:8-9.

We see that the rod of iron is the authority to judge the nations of the world. When the Father takes His seat to initiate all of the events that belong to the time of the end, Jesus Christ will stand up, with His administration, as the Lamb of God, to receive and possess the kingdom of God for the sake of delivering that kingdom to the Father.

At the same time, He will begin to execute judgement on the nations of the world, as the One who possesses the rod of iron.

Significantly, at this time, He will exercise the authority of the rod of iron over the nations through the overcoming presbyteries in His right hand.

Jesus said to the presbytery in Thyatira, 'And He who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end [or until the time of the end], to him I will give power over the nations. He shall rule them with a rod of iron; they shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels.' Rev 2:26-27.

That is a direct quote from Psalm 2. 'As I also have received from My Father.' As Christ has received this authority from the Father, He gives this same authority to the overcoming presbyteries in His right hand.

This is the first reference to 'the rod of iron' in the book of Revelation. However, we know that the overcoming presbyteries are not the manchild described in Revelation Chapter 12.

The overcoming presbyteries are proclaiming the word to lampstand churches, so that those lampstand churches are sanctified and equipped as the bride of Christ, to bring forth the manchild.

The sons of God, then, who comprise the manchild, are the firstfruits of 'the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and tongue'.

Significantly, this group of firstfruits believers receives the rod of iron in relation to the judgement of the eighth world kingdom.

We will consider the way in which the Scripture identifies, and then describes, the mandate of this company, in our next session.