

11.

THE MANCHILD

Continuing on with our discussion of this most important theme of how God is working to establish His kingdom on this earth and defeat His enemy, let us read together from the book of Revelation, chapter 12, verses 1-11.

“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. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. 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. And she bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her child was caught up to God and to 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.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now, salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death."

Let us begin our investigation into the meaning of this important vision with the question: Who is this manchild? There are two possibilities to consider here. The first option is that this could be referring to Jesus Christ. Our main clue to the identity of this manchild is found in verse 5 where we read that he is destined to "rule all nations with a rod of iron."

Whoever he is, he has been selected by God to rule over the earth. In Revelation chapter 19 we are told about a rider on a white horse who will rule the nations with a rod of iron (vs 15). Clearly this is a reference to Jesus Christ coming to establish His kingdom on the earth. Therefore, the first possibility is that this manchild could be the Lord Jesus.

However, there is also a second option which must also be considered as to the identity of the manchild. In Revelation 2:26,27 we read: "And he who overcomes, and keeps my works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations – he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the potter's vessels shall be broken to pieces."

So here we see that there is a second possibility. There is another "person" or group of persons to whom this same authority will be given. Consequently, the manchild could also be a group of followers of Jesus Christ who have demonstrated through their life and "works" (vs 26) that they are faithful and, therefore, have "overcome." From now on in this writing we will refer to them as "overcomers."

If this "manchild" is Jesus Christ, then the "woman" who gives birth to him would have to be Mary. Historically, Jesus was not caught up to the throne of God "as soon as he was born" (Rev 12:4) to avoid being devoured by the dragon. Also, we know that Mary did not "flee into the wilderness" after Jesus' resurrection for "one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

In fact, just a few months after the crucifixion, she was specifically mentioned as being in the "upper room" with the other disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). Therefore, without stretching and twisting the words of the Bible beyond all recognition, the "woman" cannot be Mary and, therefore, the "manchild" cannot be Jesus Christ.

This, then, leaves us with our second possibility. The manchild here must be a group of "overcomers" to whom Jesus Himself promised that they would rule the nations with a rod of iron. This understanding is further strengthened when we read that the manchild (singular) is later referred to as "they" (plural). In verse 11 of this chapter we see that "*they* overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Thus, this one manchild, in the course of the vision, is revealed as being a group of many spiritually victorious individuals. The identity of the "woman" would then have to be the church or some kind of collection of God's people.

The arrival of this group or "manchild" before the throne of God has a surprising result: it provokes a war. Suddenly, Michael and all of his angels are fighting against the dragon and his group of angels. When the battle is over, Michael's forces have won and the devil is thrown out of heaven along with his fallen angels.

This leads one to ponder another important question. If Michael has the necessary forces and power to defeat the devil and throw him out of heaven, why wasn't this done before? Why hasn't he been thrown out long ago?

Of course there are some Christians who think that the devil has already been cast down out of heaven. However, this cannot be the case. Here we read in the book of Revelation, at the end of the "church age," that the devil still is "in heaven" (Rev 12:3). We also know with certainty from other scriptures that the devil and his angels are "in heavenly places" (Eph 3:10, 6:12) right now, reigning with authority over this earth. The devil is indeed the prince of the powers of the air (Eph 2:2).

Therefore, when Jesus said that He had seen "Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk 10:18), this must either be a prophetic foresight or a description of how he rebelled against the Most High for the first time.

NO "PLACE" FOR THEM

So, let us consider here what it is about the manchild's arrival before the throne of God that precipitates this war. Verse 8 of this chapter gives us our necessary insight. Here we read that there was no "*place* found for them (the devil and his angels) in heaven any longer."

Before the arrival of the manchild, it seems that Satan and his forces had some kind of "place" in heaven. But when the manchild arrives, their places have been taken over. Those who have been authorized to replace these evil rulers have finally come. This then, apparently gives Michael and his angels the right to fight against the devil's hordes, win the battle, and finally throw them out.

Right now, the devil and his evil hosts are reigning over the earth from their positions of power in "heavenly places." But there is going to come a day, perhaps very soon, when "the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven shall be shaken" (Mk 13:25).

You will remember from chapter 5 that the angels are sometimes referred to as "the stars of heaven" (Job 38:7,

Dan 8:10). Although this has not yet happened, it is something which Jesus prophesied and it will come to pass. The present rulers of this world will have their place in the heavens taken away and their authority removed.

What then is it about this manchild that is so special? In verse 11 we read that “they overcame him [meaning the devil].” This select group of men and women is essential to God’s plan because they are those who were victorious in their Christian lives. They are those who have wrestled against the “principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Eph 6:12) – and won. They are those over whom the power and the temptations of the devil have no influence. Therefore, they are qualified to rule over the earth with Christ, taking the place of the present evil, spiritual rulers.

Do you remember how we spoke of God’s plan from the beginning? How He created mankind with the purpose that they would submit himself to Him and recover the lost earth from the reign of the devil? Also, do you remember how, when the majority failed to do His will, He then turned to a select group of overcoming people through whom He could accomplish His purposes?

Well, here we see that in the end, God will succeed. He will, living in and living through men and women who are submitted to Him, demonstrate His authority to the universe. “To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known through the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph 3:10).

Unfortunately, it seems that these evil spirits know much more about this than we do. Many Christians have difficulty understanding why the devil is fighting against them at all. Why should he care if God wants to fill heaven with a bunch of human beings whom He redeemed from the earth? Of what importance is it to Satan if many people become born again?

The significant factor here is that everyone who receives eternal life, becomes a potential threat to his kingdom. Every newborn spiritual babe has the potential to grow to maturity, submit themselves completely to God,

and become a threat to the devil's empire. Every believer has the capacity to overcome. Each and every child of God has the Most High residing in them and, therefore, has the possibility to live victoriously in this world.

You see, there must be some finite number of fallen angels who are working with Satan. Revelation 12:4 mentions that he draws one third of the "stars" to earth with his tail. So logically, God must need the same number of human beings who have overcome to take the places of these evil beings in the rulership of the world.

Although this idea about a certain number may not be exactly correct, it seems important that God would have at least this many overcomers through whom He can rule. These, then, will take the places of those evil spirits who are today exercising authority over the earth.

At this point, when the man child is caught up, Satan is totally, practically defeated. Notice please the song which is sung after this event, starting with verse 10 of chapter 12: "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their [soul] lives to the death" (Rev 12:10,11).

Praise God! Now is come salvation and strength and the Kingdom! At last the Kingdom of God is manifested in victory!

This, then, explains why the devil and his hosts are fighting against you and me. They are constantly trying to get us discouraged, get us to give up or to give in to their constant temptations. They are battling to cause us to sin in some kind of way. It may be gross sin such as fornication, adultery, theft etc. or simple, "innocent" sins such as gossiping and criticizing others, losing our temper, coveting something someone else has, proud thoughts, or any such thing. Then, as soon as we bite the bait and sin, they go running off to the throne of God to accuse us. In verse

10 of our passage we see that we are being accused before God day and night.

But why are they accusing us? It is to demonstrate to the Most High that they are winning. It is to show that they are overcoming us with their power and we are succumbing to their temptations. This is essential to them because as long as they can deceive us and have their little (or big) victories over us, they can prove to God that we are not qualified to take their places.

Although we can be forgiven and are still loved by God, this does not negate the fact that when we sin, we reveal to the watching universe that we are not yet qualified to reign in place of the present evil forces.

Are you being tempted and tested in your daily life? Are you in some situation which seems very difficult, if not impossible, to bear? Does it seem as if there is no way out, except to sin? Don't do it! God can give you the grace to withstand any and all trials and temptations. You will never be happy outside of God's perfect will. The universe is watching. In fact, the creation itself is groaning in travail, like a woman about to give birth, waiting for the mature sons of God to be manifested (Rm 8:19).

Babies are nice. Sometimes, they are cute and cuddly. Yet, it is the mature sons and daughters who are useful to do work and help the family. So it is in the house of God. Our Father is looking for those who will be faithful, those who will continue to follow Him through every circumstance and trial, those who will allow Him to demonstrate His victory in their lives.

How we live is essential, not only for own benefit, but also for the kingdom of God and even for the whole creation. Our daily choices have many consequences. God's plan for His children is not just to give them a new birth and then whisk them off to heaven. No, His intentions are much more profound than this. What God is planning requires our complete cooperation and faithfulness.

His will is to establish His authority over the earth, over both the inhabitants and the territory. He will do this

through His representative, man. The weak, frail vessel whom the devil despised and defeated in the Garden of Eden will, through the grace of God, finally overcome God's enemy and have dominion over the earth.

God is working in and through human beings to defeat His enemy. When His work is accomplished in us, we become mature sons of God who are able to resist the efforts and temptations of the evil one.

In I John 2:13 we read about a group of believers who are called "young men." These ones, John says "have overcome the wicked one." When Christian men and women submit themselves to God every day and begin to live more and more in Christ's victory, the very gates of hell begin to tremble. The principalities and powers see more and more saints being made ready. They see that their deceptions and temptations are no longer working and that they are being defeated by lowly human beings who are submitted to, and full of, the living God.

I believe in these days their efforts are becoming ever more desperate as they see the day coming when God's mature sons will be manifested for all the universe to see (Rm 8:19) and then take their place as the rulers of this world.

Can you see from this short explanation why our daily living is so important, both to God and to us? Every little detail of our lives, all our attitudes, words, and actions are being carefully monitored by many different beings. There is indeed "a great cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1). Whether we like it or not, whether we want it or not, we are involved in a battle for the control of the earth. Every child of God is involved in this struggle.

Consequently, it is not sufficient to simply have an appearance of righteousness, perhaps being a "regular" church attender, giving up a few "gross" sins, or doing a few things for God. Now we see that it is essential for every child of God to actually allow Jesus Christ to reign over every aspect of their being. He must be Lord of our thoughts, our words, our attitudes, and our actions. He must be the One who is being seen in and through every

aspect of our lives. We must enter into the Kingdom of God today! Only by allowing the life of God to dominate and predominate in our whole being will we experience being an “overcomer.”

Hopefully, this will help clarify for all readers why we often encounter so much difficulty trying to live a Christian life. The powers of hell are arrayed against us. The forces of the enemy are constantly trying to show that their “place” is secure as the rulers of this world. Yet, our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome them all. He has run the race before us (Heb 6:20) and exhibited God’s victory.

Therefore, since He now lives in every one of His children, He can show forth this same victory in our lives. No one is too weak. No one is unable. Consequently, when we appear before the judgment seat of Christ, there will be no acceptable excuses.

The most awesome power of the universe lives inside of us. The man Christ Jesus who overcame every temptation of the devil and exhibited God’s life and nature to the world is now living within every believer. All we need to do is submit our lives to Him completely and allow Him to dominate every aspect of them. In this way, His victory will be manifested through us.

Amazingly, these same trials and tribulations which the devil is trying to use to defeat us are also being used by God. What the devil tries to do to tempt us and discourage us, our Father is using for our good. He is using our difficulties to purify our lives. All the tribulation through which we pass, gaining the victory by the power of Jesus, serves to transform us into the image of Christ.

Our difficulties work to expose the sin within us. Then, as we repent and give ourselves more completely to God so that He can do His work in us, we are changed more into His likeness. You see, even the devil is being used by God to accomplish His purposes upon the earth. So don’t be discouraged, everything is working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes (Rm 8:28).

THE WOMAN

Since we have discovered together that the “manchild” of Revelation 12 is a group of overcoming believers, how are we to understand the woman who gives birth to him? While this woman could be a kind of “composite” of various things, such as Israel, new covenant believers, all of creation, etc. it seems plain that the group of God’s people whom we know as “the church,” must at least be a part of this “woman” if not the complete woman.

It is the church which is cooperating with God to generate overcoming believers. It is through the church that God will display His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10). And so it is the church that must make up at least the major part of this group.

However, as we examine the church as she is today, we are brought to an unfortunate conclusion. Not all who are part of her are living in spiritual victory. Many Christians are not living in God’s kingdom today – that is they are not permitting Christ to rule over every aspect of their lives.

Although they may be born again, they are not taking advantage of the opportunity to allow the life of God to prevail in them and live through them. Their lives still exhibit much of the old nature. Many of their pursuits are worldly and much sin is still in evidence. Consequently, they cannot be thought of as being part of the manchild, but merely part of the woman. They are not exhibiting the overcoming life and Jesus’ victory over the devil.

We notice in verse 14 that when this woman is rescued from the dragon and taken to the wilderness, she is in need of nourishment. She needs feeding. Possibly this would be a reference to the fact that many in the “body” today are not getting the food they need. They are not growing to maturity and victory partly because of the lack of proper spiritual food.

It is there in the wilderness that she is “nourished” with some kind of sustenance which will help her. I don’t know

how it is that God is going to accomplish all these things, but it is interesting to see how God is caring for all of His people, even those who are not yet where they should be in terms of growth and maturity.

This brings us to an interesting observation. A woman who is pregnant is a person who has inside of her another person. There is a body within another body. When the child is male, he has the potential to be stronger than the one who gives him birth.

Applying this to the church today, we could begin to suspect that within this "woman" who in many respects does not appear to be fulfilling the purposes of God by overcoming the forces of evil, exists another "body." Within the woman who might be seen to be somewhat weak, lives a strong, overcoming manchild. This would be true not only of the church of our day, but is a situation which, no doubt, existed since the early days of the church.

Consequently, when looking at the church as a whole and the unprepared state in which we find many believers, we should not be discouraged. We can have confidence in God, that, in the midst of what might seem a mess, He is working to accomplish His purposes. He has many of His own, just as in the days of Elijah (I Kings 19:18) who are succeeding in overcoming and having the testimony of His victory.

In Matthew 22:14 Jesus teaches us that: "...many are called, but few are chosen." What does this mean? What are these "few" chosen for? Why is it only a few? Since the death and resurrection of Christ, our Lord has been calling many millions of individuals to Himself.

However, as we have already stated, even though many are coming to Christ every day, only a few of these many are entering into the victory which He has purchased for them. Just a very few believers are succeeding in overcoming the forces of evil. It seems that the majority are not exhibiting a righteousness in their daily lives which is qualifying them to substitute for the principalities and powers who are now in control.

Therefore, these are not qualified to reign. It is only those who have a testimony (Rev 12:11) before God and the watching universe, showing that they have been faithful, who can take over the positions of the satanic legions and reign. Therefore, it is only these that can be "chosen" by God for this task. It is only the overcomers who will be chosen by God to exercise His authority over the planet and eventually over the universe.

We cannot continue on here much further without an important word of warning. When we begin understanding these things, there is the possibility of an error into which many of God's people have fallen. That is that some begin to think of themselves as being "overcomers." Along with this thought comes another one which is that others are not as spiritually advanced as they are.

Innumerable groups, "churches," and individuals who begin to understand this and similar truths, begin to suppose that because they understand them, then they must actually be what they see. The truth is that God is revealing to them the goal, not their position in the race. They may see what God wants but not where they actually are.

This is a serious mistake. It is not ourselves who will decide whether or not we will enter into God's coming Kingdom. We are not the judges of ourselves or of others. When we begin to think that we are better or more advanced, this is proof that we have then fallen from a humble attitude and, thus, are no longer living in the Kingdom. When we begin to imagine that we and/or our little group who agrees with us are some kind of spiritual elite, we have become disqualified from entering the Kingdom by our pride and arrogance.

SPECIAL OFFERS

Even though the door to the Millennial Kingdom of Jesus Christ is open to all believers, not all choose to enter in. For various reasons, many of God's children refuse His rightful Lordship over their lives and, instead, live largely for themselves and the pleasures of this world.

Perhaps it is for this reason that in the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ issues many calls to the “overcomers.” When speaking to each church, He states their attributes and their shortcomings and then makes some very special offers to those who are willing to overcome – those who have “ears to hear” (Rev 2:7).

By the time the book of Revelation was written, it had become apparent that not all believers were going to be obedient and so, again, God sends forth a call to those few who would respond to Him and promises them special rewards (See Rev 2:7,11,17,26-28; 3:5,12,21).

There should be no doubt from reading these verses that many of the rewards which are mentioned here apply to the coming Kingdom. The verses which speak of ruling the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 2:27) and sitting with Him in His throne (Rev 3:21) are obvious references to sharing Christ’s authority during His Millennial reign. The passages which mention having the right to eat of the tree of life (Rev 2:7) and eating of the hidden manna (Rev 2:17) show the feasting aspect of the Kingdom experience.

A couple of other “overcomer” promises which relate to the Kingdom are the one which mentions being clothed in white raiment and the one in which Jesus promises to confess the faithful believers’ names before His Father and the angels (Rev 3:5). You may remember that we have already discussed in chapter 9 whom the Lord will or will not confess knowing in that day.

Jesus is calling to men and women today, to anyone who will listen, to overcome. He is saying: if you overcome you will feast with Me; if you overcome you will reign with Me; if you overcome I will reward you with more than you can even understand or imagine.

Finally, through these overcomers, God’s original commission to mankind is fulfilled. Here is a group of individuals, made in the image and likeness of God, who have had and will have dominion over the earth. They conquered the hostile forces which were upon it. They did not live according to the rulership of Satan, but according to

God; and in so doing, they gave Jesus Christ the right to claim this earth as His own and set up His Millennial Kingdom upon it.

These people wanted Jesus Christ more than they wanted the devil or any part of his kingdom and were willing to sacrifice even their lives to see God's Kingdom brought to this earth.

Praise God for such men and women who were willing to pay any price to see the kingdom of this world transferred to Jesus Christ, thus fulfilling His prayer to the Father, "Thy kingdom come... in earth, as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).

Now let me ask you, will you be one of these? You have the opportunity. Jesus' call to the overcomers has gone forth to all who have ears to hear. The door is closed to no one but you must be willing if necessary (and it probably will be) to give all for the sake of the Kingdom.

If you are ready and willing, God is ready and He will enable you to live in this way. His life, living within you, will become in you all that you need to overcome the world, Satan, "self," and sin – all the things that are standing in the way. May God by His tender mercy grant you the willingness to live for Him until He comes.