

BRINGING FORTH THE KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: Revelation 12:1-6.

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 there appeared another wonder in heaven, and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to 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. 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. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand, two hundred and threecore days.

Keep my commandments, and seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion; seek not for riches, but for wisdom, and behold the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you.

One of the most controversial and least understood books of the Bible is the apocalyptic book of Revelation. In many respects its chronology is unintelligible. Much of its symbolism is understandable only after one has acquired a considerable background of history, a knowledge of other prophecy, and a deep spiritual insight. But some of the figures are relatively plain and easily interpreted. Such a figure is the figure of the woman in chapter 12.

Practically all commentators are agreed that the woman of the 12th chapter of Revelation represents the church. The dragon which waited to devour her child has been specifically interpreted to mean some definite historical character, or loosely interpreted to mean the power of evil and of darkness -- the power of the devil who works through men. The woman is clothed with the light of the sun, the light of the gospel of Christ which gives light to all men. Beneath her feet is the moon, the Mosaic law, which has no light of its own, but reflects the light of the gospel as the moon reflects the borrowed light of the sun. Thus far there may be minor disagreement on details, but general agreement is that the woman is the church.

When we come to consider what is represented by the man-child which the woman was to bring forth, there is a much larger area of disagreement. Many commentators follow the generally accepted theory that the man-child is Christ. According to the figure in Revelation, the woman produced the child. We have agreed that the woman is the church. Did the church produce Christ, or did Christ produce the church? If the church produced Christ, it must have been the Old Testament church, which by Jesus' time had gone so completely into apostasy that Jesus rejected its representatives -- the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes. If it was the Old Testament church which produced Christ, that was not his church, for at the beginning of Christ's ministry it is evident that his church did not exist on earth; he declared, "I will build my church." That is future tense; and one does not build what is already built. No, the church did not produce or bring forth Christ; Christ produced the church. Therefore Christ could not be the man-child who was born of the church.

Elsewhere the church is frequently characterized as the bride of Christ. Paul draws a parallel between Adam and Christ, saying, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." As all physical life on their earth stems from Adam and Eve, so all spiritual life on this earth stems from Christ, the second Adam, and his bride the church.

The church, as the bride of Christ, transmits the life of Christ, by means of her regenerating, life-giving sacraments and ordinances, administered through her authoritative priesthood. The church seeks out, organizes, and endows with life those people of all nations and kingdoms who should belong to the body of Christ, who may become a part of kingdom. As husband and wife are one flesh, the church and Christ are one body; the church is the body of Christ through which his life is transmitted. The task of the church is to bring forth the kingdom, by seeking the souls who are potential members of that kingdom, by giving them the ordinances of regeneration, by teaching, selecting, organizing, unifying them, and out of them shaping the kingdom which shall rule all nations with a rod of iron. There is only one thing which the man-child can consistently represent with fidelity to all the aspects of the figure of speech -- and that is the kingdom, which is to be produced by and within the church.

The man-child was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. If the man-child is the kingdom, composed of those born-again, regenerated saints who have received the life of Christ through the ordinances of the church, then this verse agrees perfectly with Revelation 2:26,27: "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of Iron:" also with Daniel 7:27; "The kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions (margin "rulers") shall serve and obey him."

Does this interpretation -- that the man-child is the kingdom -- fit the facts? One commentator I have read, who believes the man-child to be Christ, says that Christ was the only person ever caught up to heaven, and to God's throne. But is he? Are not those saints who have overcome taken home to God at death? Have they not still the life of Christ in them, and the hope of a glorious resurrection? Were not all the martyrs who died faithful to the life of Christ which was in them, caught up to heaven, and to God's throne? It was the faithful, those endowed with the true life of Christ, who suffered in the great persecutions of the Christian church -- not those who adjusted their thinking to the evil powers of paganism.

The early church did bring forth an infant kingdom, composed of a few men who lived in kingdom relationships to each other, who lived according to kingdom laws, economic, social, and spiritual -- a few men in whom nothing -- not even martyrdom -- could extinguish the life of Christ. But before this infant kingdom could grow to any size, it was caught up to God to save it from being completely destroyed by the dragon who stood waiting to devour it. The church which was the bride of Christ fled to the wilderness, away from men, where she could no longer do her work of gathering and preparing and selecting souls for the kingdom of God. Here she was to remain for a thousand, two hundred and three-score days, or prophetic years, while the kingdom -- the life and power and authority of Christ, and the saints who had received it, remained with God.

The task of the church and of its members today is not to build the kingdom. There are some material or physical aspects of the kingdom which will have to be supplied by the toil of men. But the essence of the kingdom is spiritual -- is the life of Jesus which is transmitted through his church, with its authority and its ordinances. Jesus is not a polygamist. He does not have several hundred wives, or churches, all bringing forth his offspring. No one can bestow the life of the kingdom save Christ himself. No one can transmit the life of his kingdom save his church, the bride of Christ.

The task of the church today is to gather out those souls who will accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who will obey his laws and ordinances, who will join his church, and who will receive the regenerating life of the kingdom. The task of the church today is to so nourish this life that in God's good time the kingdom may be brought forth, composed of those selected materials or members of the church who have become worthy to form the kingdom. The task of every individual member is to yield himself to this new life, to obey the laws by which it may be transmitted to him, and grow within him, and then to seek others with whom to share this life, that the infant kingdom may grow to maturity, and eventually rule all nations with a rod of iron.