

CHAPTER 5

The Heavenly Woman

We have already referred to the woman who was about to give birth, who appears in chapter 12 of Revelation. Let us now take a closer look at her:

A great and wondrous sign appeared in Heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in Heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment

it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to His throne (Revelation 12:1-5).

This heavenly woman is referred to as a great and wondrous sign. She is a sign like many other signs in Revelation, because that is how God has chosen to communicate with us through this book. But she is a “*great and wondrous sign.*” That is, she is a sign of special significance. This heavenly woman portrays something to us of the eternal purposes of God. Who is she? There are many answers to that question, and all of them are right! But in this chapter I will try to piece some of them together.

The Redeemed Community

First of all, her clothing gives us a hint as to who she is. She is clothed with the sun. She has 12 stars on her head, and under her feet is the moon. When we look into the Word of God, we find that there are people who are described in that same kind of way. Do you remember when Joseph had a dream of his ultimate authority? He dreamed of his own rise to power, and in his dream his father, mother, and brothers bowed down to worship him. In his dream he saw the sun, the moon, and 11 stars bowing down to him, and he was the twelfth star. The sun, the moon, and 12 stars represent the Israel of God. This is the beginning of the covenant community. This is the first generation of a nation that God is going to call his own, and it is described as the sun, the moon, and 12 stars. So, we are seeing God’s historic purpose. We are seeing the beginnings of God’s desire to bring His Word, His covenant,

and His revelation to the ends of the earth. But the idea goes on to become more focused.

When we consider that wonderful poem in Scripture known as the Song of Solomon, we find a glorious love epic. It is the recounting of a relationship between the great king and the Shulammite maiden. It is speaking of the wooing and the winning by a king whose heart is captured by the beauty of the one he desires. Others join the chorus to give expression and meaning to the poem. It is full of significance. Song of Songs is not just a love manual; it testifies of Christ and is a picture of our relationship with Jesus. It is a picture of the bride and her response to the heavenly bridegroom. The friends who form the chorus of this great love song describe the maiden:

*Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon,
bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?*

(Song of Solomon 6:10)

Chapter 19 will speak to us specifically of the bride, but here, as in other parts of Revelation, we have a kind of pre-introduction for this woman in the heavens is also the bride. She represents the redeemed community, and it is the redeemed community in intimate relationship with her Lord.

Miracle Children

God's plan and purpose have always been to have His people bring forth spiritual offspring. When God created Adam and Eve, His mandate to them was to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth. God's will and purpose was that the whole earth would be populated with people just like Jesus.

That is God's eternal purpose. It has not changed. Just because down through the years people have failed, it does not mean for a minute that God has failed or adjusted his purpose or changed His plan. God is still seeking to fill the earth with his offspring.

In fact, God made it clear to Abraham that through His seed all the earth would be blessed (see Gen. 12:1-3). Have you noticed how God, in the Old Testament, introduces Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? That is how God makes Himself known. But there is an interesting thing about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God confirmed His covenant with each one of them and promised each of them that through their seed His blessing would come to the earth. The most amazing thing about that is that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all married barren women. You would think that if God's purpose was to fill the earth with heavenly offspring, He would make sure that his servants married very fertile girls! But all of them married barren women. How strange, then, that God, who is looking for birth, increase, and multiplication, should choose to have His servants marry women who had no ability to reproduce. He's not exactly making it easy for himself! But the lesson it teaches us is important. The children that God wants to produce in the earth are all the result of miracles. God is looking for miracle children. God wants those who are born not in the natural way, but in a spiritual way.

When Jesus came into the world, John tells us,

He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive

Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God (John 1:10-13).

The children that Jesus came to bring to life are miracle children. They are not just those who are born, they are those who are born again, born of the Spirit. God has always been seeking for Himself miracle children. When Israel had settled into the land, it was a very seesaw kind of history. Sometimes they were on the offensive and making great progress, and sometimes they were on the defensive and overpowered by the might of an enemy. God in His mercy and grace would raise up judges for them who would deliver them from the power of the enemy. One of the most remarkable judges raised up by God is a man called Samson. Samson, of course, was born of a woman who was barren. It was a miracle birth, because it is those who are born by miracle who are able to deliver God's people and fulfill God's purpose. God is looking for miracle children who will overcome the powers of darkness and who will bring in the Kingdom of God. One of the great works that Samson did was to pull down the temple of the foreign god and to see it collapse in absolute disarray, bringing death to his enemies and the land into a period of peace.

At another time when there was not much prophecy, when visions were rare, God answered the prayer of a barren woman and allowed her to conceive and bring forth a son. This boy would be dedicated to the Lord from his birth and would be brought up in the presence of God, in the environs of the tabernacle. His home was to be the place where God was, even

though there was no word, and vision was rare. There was, nevertheless, a sense of God's presence. Before the lamp went out, God spoke to Samuel, raising him up and letting not one of His words fall to the ground. He established him as a prophet in the land, and he turned the people away from Philistine domination. This man was the forerunner of the Kingdom and the anointer of David, the man after God's own heart.

Hundreds of years later, darkness had again descended upon the nation; they were no longer under Philistine domination, but now the great power of Rome had devoured the people of God. There was no prophetic word. The last word that had been spoken by a prophet is recorded for us, and it is a sad and startling thing. If you go to the last book of the Old Testament and turn to the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament and find the last verse in the last chapter of the last book, and read the last word in the last verse in the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament, it is the word *curse* (see Mal. 4:6). What a terrible way to finish! What a terrible way to end! It is interesting then that when Jesus began his public ministry, the first word out of his mouth was *blessed*.

But the last prophetic word that came ringing from the heavens and reverberated in the ears of those who had ears to hear was "curse." Many years later, God answered the prayer of an old priest, and God had compassion on a woman who had been so long without children that her nickname was Barren (see Luke 1:36). She conceived and brought forth a son, John the Baptist, who would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah. The interesting thing about all three of those miracle boys is that each one of them was a Nazirite. Each one of them was dedicated solely to the Lord.

Samson, we are told, would be a Nazirite from his birth. It was said of Samuel that no razor would touch his head. That is one of the signs of the Nazirite. John, we are told, would drink no strong drink or alcohol. That is another sign of a Nazirite. These three men, dedicated to the Lord, committed to the Lord and His purpose, were miracle babies who brought in the Kingdom. For just as Samuel had anointed David as king, so John baptized Jesus and saw the Spirit of God coming upon him. They were forerunners of the Kingdom.

God has always been looking for the birth of miracle children who would bring in the Kingdom. Of course, the ultimate miracle child is not the one who is born out of a womb that is barren, but one that is born out of the womb of a virgin. So when we see this heavenly woman, we are seeing Manoah's wife, we are seeing Elizabeth, we are seeing Hannah, we are seeing those who bring forth the deliverer. And so we are, of course, seeing Mary. But in a sense we are also seeing more than that; we are seeing God's purpose acted out in a heavenly drama.

The Seed and the Serpent

When the curse came on the ground because of sin, there were also punishments inflicted on the man and on the woman who had sinned. The man would, by the toil and sweat of his brow, bring forth his bread. But "*to the woman He said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'*" (Gen. 3:16).

This heavenly woman we see in Revelation 12 is in travail. She is in pain and is crying out. Her pain is greatly increased

in her desire to bring forth children (see Gen. 3:16). So she is also Eve, the mother of all. But she is Eve in this sense: she is giving birth to the seed of the woman who will crush the serpent's head. This woman is in travail to bring forth the seed that will bring deliverance to a fallen world.

There are two kinds of children in our world, children of God and children of the devil. I am making that kind of statement continually because we need to understand that there is a clear and undeniable division between those who are of God and those who are not of God. There is no middle ground. There is no fuzzy edge. It is a clear-cut distinction between those who belong to God and those who do not. Jesus makes it very clear that even those who boasted in their ancestry, who said that they had Abraham as their father, were actually of their father the devil (see John 8:31-44). We can have no compromise. There has to be a clear distinction. That is one of the things that the Book of Revelation is about. Many still live in Babylon, but the call goes up, "*Come out of her, My people*" (Rev. 18:4). There is a sense of separation between that which is of God and that which is not of God. We have to maintain that separation, not in an exclusive and ghetto-type mentality that takes us away from the world; we are to be in the world, but not of the world; we are to be those who reach out to the world but do not compromise with the world.

In other words, we are to be like Jesus was. Jesus was accepted by sinners, but He was not affected by sinners. Jesus was not tainted by their sin, although He felt himself free and at liberty to go among them, because how can you win them if you are not among them? He maintained a clear distinction. The Bible tells us He was a friend of sinners, but it also says He was

separate from sinners. That is how the Church has got to learn to be. We do not bring down our standards to make our message more acceptable to a sinful world. When the Spirit of God moved in the early church, when death came to Ananias and Sapphira, nobody dared join, but then it says the Lord added (see Acts 5:13-14)! We do not need to be afraid that our standards, our message, and our practices will be offensive to people. If we are doing it right, they will be! But if we are doing it right, God will add to us those who are being saved.

A Heavenly People

Returning to the woman in Revelation, we must note that she is located in the heavens. She is a heavenly woman. She is not earthbound, taken up with the affairs of this world. She is a woman who has her heart and her mind set on things that are above. The Church is a heavenly people. But it is more than this, even. The heavens speak not only of our destination but our origin. Let me explain.

The Book of Revelation is a book of contrasts. It is about two women, two cities. We find similar contrasts if we turn to the fourth chapter of Galatians. Paul is contending with a church that has become legalistic. There are two things that God despises: sin and legalism. When I read the Scriptures, it seems to me that He seems to despise legalism even more than sin. He hates legalism, and so Paul confronts the Galatians with their legalism and brings them a message from the Word. He brings them a picture from Scripture:

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other