

# AN ELEVATED VIEW OF THE “WOMAN”

## PART I – REVELATION 12

Revelation 11:15-19 ends a distinct series of eschatological prophecies that began in 10:1. In that finale the seventh trumpet sounded, Christ received His kingdom (11:15; cf. Daniel 7:14, Revelation 10:7), and a choir of 24 redeemed elders sang a beautiful victory anthem, revealing that redemptive history had closed. The open temple, exposing the Most Holy, was devoid of activity, signifying that all mediatorial work had ceased. Revelation 18:16 repeats the same theophany noted in 11:19 – dramatically announcing earth’s end. Both represent the same time period.

In John’s apocalyptic book, messages are often repeated. With each new “cycle,” information is expanded, and new details elevate God’s holy insights. All mushroom into an amazing saga that anticipates our immediate future. The churches, seals and trumpets all contribute very distinct messages oriented to God’s last generation.

As we move into Revelation 12, God again initiates one of those new series of visions. This “block” of communiques, covering chapters 12 through 14, is filled with special symbols, themes and clocks, detailing the last war between Christ’s followers and Satan’s – the saints and the wicked!

### Revelation 12 – Preface to 13 and 14

The structure of this chapter gives us insight into God’s thinking priorities relative to the good versus evil conflict.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Woman</b> Pure Christian Community Appearing righteous</p>
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Dragon – out to harm the woman:  
War – Heaven      War – earth  
(historical)      (against woman)  
(Wilderness experience 1260 Days)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Woman</b> Remnant Community Acting righteous</p>
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Satan, Devil, Serpent – out to harm the woman:  
Great wrath – persecution of seed (the remnant)  
(Wilderness experience  
Time, times half – 3½-year expression)

This is the chapter 12 “story outline” of how God’s **pure church** unfolds:

1. Ideal church – woman symbol (vs 1)
  2. Christ child imagery validates its ideals (vss 2-3, 13)
  3. Woman–church flees (into wilderness) from the dragon (vs 6)
  4. Saints (brethren/members) of that church described (vss 10-11)
  5. Woman persecuted – flees (into wilderness) from Satan (vss 13-14)
  6. Nature of persecution (vss 15-16)
  7. All-out war against woman’s children (vs 17) (later detailed in Revelation 13)
  8. Characteristics of the remnant (vs 17; cf. 10-11)
- } Same time

Noting this sequence and structure helps to understand the two timing statements within chapter 12 – **and** how to associate them with chapters 11 and 13, where similar “clocks” are also addressed.

1260 days (vs 6) represents a “three-and-a-half-year” period the woman is in the “wilderness” (vs 6). This is the same period as 11:3, which God allotted for the gospel to go to planet earth.

Time, times, half (vs 14) is a critical time of “final opportunity” for God’s church. This is based on feast cycles that end at Atonement – deliverance. This **coincides** with the period of 42 months of 11:2 and 13:5, when persecution is rampant and **replicates** Daniel 12:7’s details.

The 1260 days and *time, time, half a time* represent the **same** three-and-a-half-year period frequently noted in Daniel and Revelation. It is the “time appointed” at the “time of the end” presented in Daniel 11:35 and 12:4 and 9. This is, now, how the seer begins:

***“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” (Revelation 12:1).***

*“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven;” (vs 1)*

The word for “wonder” is also translated as a “sign.” The sign (*semeion* – G) is a divine missive, signaling that major apocalyptic timing issues are about to commence. For this woman it announces that God’s church is cleansed from sin, has complete Christ-like purity, at a distinct point in time, immediately preceding the consummation (Luke 21:11, 25; Acts 2:19).<sup>1</sup>

This **first** of two wonders in this chapter is called a “**great** sign” that John notes in the heavens (*ouranos* – G), likely representing the visible sky he could observe. The “**great**” image is contrasted elsewhere with the “great” dragon (12:3, 9), the “great” city (11:8, 16:19, 18:16-17), “great” Babylon (14:8, 16:19, 17:5, 18:2-3) and the “great” harlot (17:1, 19:2). Shortly, God calls the dragon in the same sky another sign – but **not** a “great” sign.

Again, how did God portray this “great sign?”

*“a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (vs 1)*

The first Biblical allusion to a “woman” being a community of God’s people came in Genesis 3:15. That was a prophecy anticipating the conflict between Satan and the woman (God’s people). God later depicted a woman-bride as Zion (Isaiah 61:10; 62:3, 5) and, when with a crown of beauty, “restored Israel” (Isaiah 60:19-20). She had been a barren woman, but now gives birth (Isaiah 54:1). Paul reminded the Corinthian church that God espoused them as a bride to Christ (II Corinthians 11:2; cf. Hosea 2:19; Jeremiah 4:31; Micah 4:10, 5:3; II John 1). Thus, this woman imagery is a “great sign” to God, because she belongs to Him. This pure woman will later be described as His “wife,” who “hath made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7b) for marriage to the Lamb.

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<sup>1</sup> Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), p. 231.

This lady represents God's people – the body of Christ – symbolizing a community of Godly, loyal people.<sup>2</sup> She is the "Lord's chosen church."<sup>3</sup> This **symbol** will emerge into a **literal** body of holy people just before the end comes.

"clothed with the sun," (vs 1)

This stellar brightness echoes the beauty of Christ's glory (1:16, 10:1, 21:23, 22:5). It reveals this woman's heavenly association.

Later, this bride is "granted" the gift of being "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints" (Revelation 19:8).

*"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isaiah 61:10).*

At the end of time God's Church "will be a happy, united family, clothed with the garments of praise and thanksgiving – the robe of Christ's righteousness."<sup>4</sup>

"Those who receive Christ as a sin-pardoning Saviour are clothed with His garments of light. He takes away their sin and imparts to them His righteousness. Their joy is full."<sup>5</sup>

"Christ has made us ambassadors to make known his salvation to the children of men, and if we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and are filled with the joy of his indwelling Spirit, we shall not be able to hold our peace. The truth will be poured forth from hearts all aglow with the love of God. We shall long to present the attractions of Christ, and the unseen realities of the world to come. We shall reflect the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness."<sup>6</sup>

This woman is arrayed with the sunlight of Christ's holiness – His righteousness – described elsewhere as beautiful, white raiment.

"and the moon under her feet," (vs 1)

The Greek word for "moon" is *selene*. It is used mainly in the New Testament in an eschatological context (cf. Luke 21:25, Revelation 21:23, I Corinthians 15:41). In ancient times it represented idiomatically "something that wanders" (because it moved across the heavens). **Standing** on an object also means having **dominion over** it.

With this as the only celestial body assigned to planet earth and with the woman standing on it, the moon is no longer capable of movement. The church, symbolically, has dominion over all earthliness at the end of time. Evil can no longer influence her. She has "victory over the world."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p. 456.

<sup>3</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, February 26, 1914.

<sup>4</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Child Guidance*, p. 568.

<sup>5</sup> White, Ellen G.; *A Call to Medical Evangelism and Health Education*, p. 26.

<sup>6</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, March 4, 1889.

<sup>7</sup> Mare, W. H.; *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 273.

*“and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (vs 1)*

The crown is *stephanos* (G), which is one of victory. A battle was won. Again, she is the victor. This illustrates **when** the **church** has been rewarded for her victory (2:10; 3:11; 4:4, 10; 14:14). This crown reveals that the church has risen above all opposition to her faith.<sup>8</sup>

The “twelve stars” are generally assumed to represent the twelve tribes of **spiritual Israel** that make up God’s last-day church (the 144,000 – Revelation 7:4-8; cf. Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 3:4-9; Romans 1:28-29, 10:12).

Stars in prophecy represent leaders of God’s people. In the Old Testament the little horn magnified himself to the “host of heaven” and cast down some of the host and stars to the ground (Daniel 8:10). These celestial “objects” are later defined as “the mighty and the holy people” (8:24). Earlier in Revelation, Jesus told John that the “stars” (“the mystery of the seven stars”) in His right hand were “the angels of the seven churches” (Revelation 1:20). This refers to their leaders (Matthew 11:10, Luke 7:24, James 2:25). The 144,000, made up of those twelve tribes, are God’s last-day leaders in finishing the gospel work. All the collective symbols of this woman suggest **that** she is that body of believers.

Later, she is described in greater detail as the 144,000 in 14:1-5. There, she is identified as a virgin, symbolic of the “community of the faithful” who are saved, embodying the purity of that community that had witnessed through an untainted faith.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that from this verse alone we can conclude that this is an end-time church:

1. She has gained a victory over the world.
2. She is clothed with the righteousness of Christ.
3. She has already been given a crown of victory.
4. That crown is made up of twelve “stars” or leaders of God’s people.
5. The imagery parallels the sealed “church” of Revelation 7.

Again, does this represent the church that is initially depicted as the 144,000? The weight of evidence suggests that this **is** the portrayal we are to observe!

**“And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered”** (Revelation 12:2).

The Roman Catholic Church has gone out of its way to try to prove that this is Christ’s mother, Mary. There is no Biblical basis to affirm that she was such a morally perfect “mother.” Furthermore – there is no inspired Scripture to show that Mary had dominion over the earth. Only Catholic tradition asserts such claims, including other Marian dogma, such as the Immaculate Conception.

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<sup>8</sup> Beale, G. K.; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary; The Book of Revelation* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – 1999), p. 627.

<sup>9</sup> White, Ellen G.; *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 406.

This is a pivotal verse, however, to guide our end-time understanding. The focus is on a “community of faithful” – an end-time group of believers who **have been** victorious over Satan. But why then is she declared as “with child” and in “labor pains?” Note: Her imagery doesn’t start with a “pregnancy,” per se. The vision – the “great sign” – **begins** with her crying out in pain, ready to “deliver.”

Fortunately, there are helpful illustrations elsewhere to draw upon:

In John 16:19-22 Christ compares the **grief** of his disciples over his impending death to “a woman about to give birth [who] has sorrow.” But then **joy** comes after the birth of a man child (His resurrection). In John 16 the disciples represent the mother, the messianic community. This connection is echoed by noting that both John 16:22 and Rev. 12:2 allude to prophecies in Isaiah 26 and 66, where a woman in labor brings forth the rebirth of the nation Israel (Isa. 26:16-18, 66:7-9).<sup>10</sup> These are Christological metaphors, moving forward God’s redemptive plan.

This “corporate understanding” expands in other Old Testament illustrations, representing Israel as a pregnant mother whose **birth pangs** are the deliverance from foreign captivity and oppression (Isaiah 26:17-18 LXX; Micah 4:9-10, 5:3; cf. Hosea 13:13).<sup>11</sup>

There is additionally something unique about John’s descriptive imagery. The word for “**travail**” is from the verb *basanizo*, which reflects a form of torment. The New Testament uses this word for **suffering under persecution** or trial (Matthew 8:6, 29; 14:24; Mark 5:7, 6:48; II Peter 2:8).

In Revelation it is used for suffering inflicted by satanic powers (9:5) or by God’s judgments (11:10, 14:10, 20:10). This appears to be our key to unlock this travailing woman. *Basanizo* is used **nowhere else** in the Biblical narrative as referring to a woman suffering **birth pains** – except here!<sup>12</sup>

Intriguingly, this word and its cognates are used in extrabiblical literature **only** for distress of God’s people under persecution (e.g., 2 Mac. 7:13).<sup>13</sup>

Collectively, her cry, travail and pain of deliverance depict this end-time church as suffering persecution, called “birth pangs.” But this travail **will result** in a birth. It is anticipated that she will deliver a man child. The 144,000, under great difficulty, will “bring forth” a “creation” after its kind.

### **Understanding this “Child” from the Chapter’s Introductory Structure**

The victorious church is about to give “birth” to a “man child.” The dragon stands before the woman, who is ready to be delivered, to devour her child as soon as it was born. “**And she brought forth a man child**” (12:4b, 5a). Though we hear an immediate echo from Mary giving

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<sup>10</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 630.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 629.

<sup>13</sup> Thayer Lexicon – *basaizo*.

birth to Jesus, with Herod killing the little children, trying to eliminate Him, the story *is* an end-time metaphor, a “great sign!” Who, then, is this child?

This persecuted church, representing a **spiritually restored** body of believers, “delivers a baby.” Conflict exists as to **who** this **son** is, having been birthed **by** a “community of faith.” Scholars suggest three possibilities. Carefully look at these – they all have merit:

1. Salvation
2. A special remnant of believers
3. The historical Christ child

Looking **first** at this church giving birth to a “child of salvation” has its precedence in the book of Isaiah.

The setting is when God’s people, Israel, the “community of faith,” fail to bring forth salvation to the land. *“As a woman with child and about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, O Lord. We were with child, we writhed in pain, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth; we have not given birth [of salvation] to people of the world”* (Isaiah 26:17-18 – NIV).

Then, in verse 20, to those remaining loyal (*“Go, my people, enter your rooms and shut the doors behind you; hide yourselves for a little while until his wrath has passed by.”* – NIV) the closets or rooms suggest the wilderness of Revelation 12. “Go my people” suggests a paternal directive to protect the faithful from persecution. “Seek the protection I have provided for you.” God says, “Hide for a little moment.” This alludes to fleeing to the wilderness for 1260 days or time, times and a half of time in Revelation 12:6 and 14.

**Secondly**, let’s look at the lady, giving birth to a special **remnant** group of people. The dragon wasn’t successful in hurting the man child – therefore, he again turned against the woman or church. *“And the dragon was wrath with the woman”* (Revelation 12:17a).

The word “remnant” (*loipon* – G) is masculine and would coincide with the “man child” imagery.

The man child, therefore, can be seen as the corporate eschatological body of saints, the remnant, who will be saved. Isaiah matured this concept:

Isaiah 66:7: She travailed, she brought forth ... she gave birth to a male (*zakar*)

Isaiah 66:8: Zion travailed, she also brought forth her sons (plural).

The singular “male” and the plural “sons” both refer to “Israel” – God’s people.<sup>14</sup> The concept of a **remnant** being saved (Romans 9:27) is throughout the whole Bible.

**Finally**, the most frequent application of the pregnancy and man child is that it represents Christ. This brings us to the helpful structural imagery in this chapter. Though we will look later at the other “sign in the sky” – the red dragon – its portrayal is instructive:

1. Revelation 12 clearly reveals that the dragon is in an end-time setting – BUT

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<sup>14</sup> Beale, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

2. It **reviews** the history of Satan, beginning at the time when there was “war in heaven” (vss 4, 7).
3. Then forwarding to his hostilities against the Christ child (vs 4).
4. Finally, his end-time panic (vs 12) and war against the remnant (vs 17).

This same format is used with the “woman clothed with the sun” (vs 1). She is symbolic of the end-time church, the 144,000, later seen on Mt. Zion – who births the remnant. **But** her story begins with the birth of Christ. Thus, we have, again, a sweeping history that draws on more than one symbolic application.

When we see the amazing spectrum of how God designs these messages, the elevating spiritual themes raise our thoughts into a higher and more beautiful plane. The man child draws us to Christ, instructs us as to what we may become through redemption and sets the standard for God’s final church – a woman clothed in the righteousness of Christ, who bears witness to planet earth!

***“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” (Revelation 12:5).***

God’s church, shown as pure and holy, had its historical basis in Jesus, the Christ child. The imagery is rich, with God first declaring Him, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psalm 2:7). God’s love for us was partly defined by sending His “only begotten Son” into the world (John 4:9; cf. John 1:18). That “Son” came into the world through a maiden of Nazareth, Mary. Gabriel told her not only what His name should be but, again, noted that He would also be called the “Son of the Highest” (Luke 1:31-32). Then Gabriel announced, “that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”

Daniel was told that his name would also be “the Son of Man” (7:13). Isaiah embellished this one hundred years earlier in a prophetic metaphor where a woman named Zion gives birth to “sons.” This stunning imagery of her children (plural) suggests that the “remnant of her seed,” as noted here in Revelation 12:17, fulfilled that Old Testament prophecy! That **is** the prophecy we see being reviewed here.

The historical **basis** of this end-time church reflects on the Christ child that remained untainted by the dragon – Satan – and was **“caught up** unto God, and to his throne” (vs 5). That fulfilled Christ’s own prophecy that “the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30). It alludes to the “two witnesses,” who **“ascended up** to heaven in a cloud” at the end of time (11:12).

Not only was Christ “caught up” to God and His throne, but we are also told that He was to “rule all nations with a rod of iron.” This was prophesied by David in Psalm 2:9, ruling from Mount Zion (2:6). Since we have more than one meaning to Revelation 12, could we also find God’s church in partnership with the Son in **such an iron rule?**

To that Thyatiran church, filled with evil, a promise to its anticipated remnant:

***“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; as the vessels of a potter shall they be***

*broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father”* (Revelation 2:26-27). The overcomers are described in masculine terms, sharing the same rule with Christ.

The conviction will deepen that the “man child” is **primarily** symbolic of the “**remnant**” of her seed. That is why Daniel made precision clear that the “kingdom which shall never be destroyed” belongs to **both** Christ (7:14) and the saints (7:22). We have moved from the birth to the ascension, to the *parousia*, in one fell swoop, now noting that this “iron rule” in 19:15 will not occur until the eschaton.<sup>15</sup>

(To be continued)

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*EndTime Issues...*, Number 134, February 9, 2012

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<sup>15</sup> Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 463.