

Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon

Opening Hymn: #281 — “The Church”

When we hear of “women of the Bible” we naturally think of Ruth, Esther, Sara, Mary, Martha, and others. Today we want to talk about an unusual woman because she stood on the moon!

Rev. 12:1 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.

The book of Revelation contains highly symbolic language. Let’s explore these symbols and see if we can understand this unusual description.

Here’s a summary of the important features of chapter 12:

A woman is in the pains of child birth. She is intimidated by a dragon whose purpose is to destroy her child. Her child is a son, and rather than being destroyed by the dragon, it is whisked away to safety. A battle between the dragon and the son occurs and the dragon is defeated. A voice from “heaven” declares that salvation has come. The dragon finds itself where the woman is and makes trouble for her again. The woman flies away from the dragon to a wilderness there to spend $3\frac{1}{2}$ “times.” This enrages the dragon and he tries to destroy the woman with a flood of water, but no harm comes to her.

Let's look at the symbols in the first verse again:

12 Stars: The number twelve reminds us of twelve apostles. An earlier verse in Revelation interprets the symbol “star” for us.

Rev. 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches...

Sun: source of light; sustainer of life.

1 Peter 2:9 Ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So the sun represents the light of truth brought to us through Jesus.

Moon: reflects the light it receives from the sun

This symbol is not so straightforward. Some scriptures refer to the “darkening” of the moon, or of its being turned into blood, but none say exactly what the moon represents. Yet “reflecting” the sun reminds us of the types and shadows of the Old Testament because they reflect the truth.

Heb. 10:1 For the law having a shadow [or reflection] of good things to come and not the very image of the things can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

So we think the moon represents the law, or Old Testament types and shadows.

Who was the **Woman**?

- she is standing on the Old Testament word
- has the bright sunshine of the truth for her robe
- closely associated with the apostles (twelve stars are in her hair)

We conclude that she represents the early church. In verse 14 we read about an interesting symbol given to the woman:

Rev. 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness into her place where she is nourished.

To confirm that the woman represents the church, we turn to Isaiah and read about the symbol “eagles’ wings”:

Isa. 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.

Man child: This would seem to be a symbol of Jesus because:

verse 5: [And the woman] 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.

verse 7: And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.

This “man child” doesn’t represent Jesus even though verse 7 appears to call him Michael! But it can’t be Jesus. If the woman represents the early church, how could the early church “beget” and “bare” Jesus when he was here before the church existed? Another problem: If “Michael” fought and defeated the dragon, this would be equivalent to the binding of Satan; yet in verse 13 the dragon continues to persecute the woman! A loud voice announces in verse 10: “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ” yet the woman has to fly into the wilderness to escape. Clearly this is **NOT** the “time of salvation,” at least as far as the woman is concerned.

So who did this “son” (called “Michael”) represent?

The word “Michael” is Hebrew #4317 and means “Who (is) like God.” The word appears twice in the New Testament where it is simply the Hebrew word rendered in Greek. Notice that the son is set up as God. What he represents came into existence when the early church had full clear light. So it must be before the so-called “dark ages” occurred.

This “son” says salvation has come, yet the woman flees for her life which, according to verse 14, is a time, times, and half a time. This is repeated in other words in verse 6 as “a 1000, 200 and 3 score days.” Since a prophetic day equals a literal year, the woman is in the wilderness for 1260 years **AFTER** the day of salvation was announced!

Who was this new-born son? It is the papacy, called by most people the Roman Catholic Church.

- pa·pa·cy**
1. the office, dignity, or jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome.
 2. the system of ecclesiastical government in which the Pope is recognized as the supreme head.

This “son” represents a person or organization that represents itself **as God** and achieves the success indicated in verses 7 to 12.

2 Thess. 2:3,4 Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day [of Christ] shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that **he as God** sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

When Paul says “he as God” he is almost saying “Michael” [Who is like God] the name found in Revelation chapter 12.

After the war in “heaven” when the one “as God” [man of sin] fought the “dragon” we read:

Rev. 12:10,11 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 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 lives unto death.

This loud voice comes from “heaven” which is a symbol of religious control. It is the voice of papacy. It claims that its past sufferings (described in verse 2) gives it a right to claim kingdom promises, which it proceeds to do.

In the 2 Thess. text Paul mentions the “man of sin.” In verse 5 and verse 13 we read about the woman's “man-child.” Look carefully at verse 13. The word “child” is in italics which means it is translator-supplied. In verse 5 the woman brings forth a male child, but in verse 13 “the dragon...persecuted the woman which brought forth the man.” Although newly born, the child quickly becomes the dreaded “man” predicted by Paul.

“But how,” some may ask, “could anything so terrible as the papacy be said to have come from the ‘womb’ of the early church?”

Paul’s warning to the Thessalonians continues:

2 Thess. 2:7 (Weymouth) “For lawlessness is already at work in secret; but in secret only until the man who now restrains it is removed.”

1 John 2:18-20 (Concordant) “Little children, it is the last hour, and, according as you hear that the antichrist is coming, now also there have come to be many antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour. **Out of us they come**, but **they were not of us**, for if they were of us, they would have remained with us. But it was that they may be manifested that they are not all of us. And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all are aware.”

From volume 2, page 272, paragraph 1, chapter MAN OF SIN:

“These various descriptions [of the man of sin] indicate a base, subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, tyrannical and cruel character, developed in the midst of the Christian Church; at first creeping in and up very gradually, then rapidly ascending in power and influence until it reaches the very pinnacle of earthly power, wealth and glory — meanwhile exerting its

influence against the truth, and against the saints, and for its own aggrandizement, claiming, to the last, peculiar sanctity and authority and power from God.”

Sufferings are painful. The Thessalonians were anxious for the kingdom, and evidently some there were already saying the “day of Christ” had already arrived. Paul said this faction to proclaim the kingdom as set-up and themselves as rulers, already worked within their midst. Eventually they succeeded in setting up a false kingdom upon the earth.

The dragon.

Rev. 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast with him.

This seems to say directly that the dragon is Satan, but if that were true, we have some problems:

- If the dragon represents “Satan,” then the papacy casts Satan down to the earth from his former residence in “heaven.”
- Verse 3 gives the dragon seven heads and ten horns. Do you think Satan has many heads and ten horns?
- If the woman and the her son are symbolic, the dragon is probably also a symbol.

What does the dragon represent?

- It was in existence before the woman's son [which is a symbol of the papacy].
- It wanted to destroy Christianity before the papacy was established.

We believe the dragon represents pagan Rome. Of course pagan Rome was an instrument of Satan just as the papacy is an instrument of Satan.

- pagan** 1. one of a people or community professing some other than the Christian religion (applied to the ancient Romans, Greeks, etc., and sometimes the Jews)
2. one who is not a Christian, a Jew, or a Mohammedan.
 3. an irreligious or heathenish person. (taken from the Latin, *paganus*, meaning civilian; so called by the Christians because he was not a soldier of Christ)

This “dragon” has seven heads and ten horns. These seem to symbolize time divisions within this civil power and there isn’t enough time to explore this aspect now.

In verse 4 the dragon casts one-third of the stars of heaven to the earth. Because the 12 stars represent the 12 apostles, we can say that the symbol “stars” represent great religious personalities, or leaders. How were these particular “stars” cast to the earth? They were “drawn” or attracted; they were not wrenched from their place in “heaven” against their will. What does this teach us?

It seems that to avoid persecution, some of the early Christian leaders voluntarily associated themselves with pagan Rome to avoid persecution. Suffering can be painful. This explains the rapid rise of the papal system once it started. The leaders rationalized their cooperation by saying, “We deserve these rewards for being so faithful to the Lord.”

Satan tempted Jesus by offering him all the kingdoms of the earth. That offer didn't work with Jesus — but it certainly did work with the man-child! And he delivered on his promise: the papacy came to dominate the entire western world

In Revelation chapters two and three, there are seven messages given to the churches. Each message could be considered as directed to the true church at a different time period. It has been said that as the 12th chapter opens, we are in the “Smyrna” phase. Here’s the message to that church:

Rev. 2:8-11 (Weymouth) To the angel of the Church at Smyrna write as follows: These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last — who died and has returned to life. Your sufferings I know, and your poverty — but you are rich — and the evil name given you by those who say that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but are Satan's synagogue. Dismiss your fears concerning all that you are about to suffer. I tell you that the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be put to the test, and for ten days you will have to endure persecution. Be faithful, even if you have to die for it, and then I will give you the Crown of Life.

This is a good description of the “woman” during the time the man-child is in control of everything.

Rev. 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times and a half a time, from the face of the serpent.

The “wilderness” condition of the church all during this “reign” of the papacy is similar to Paul's admonition:

Heb. 13:13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

Our scripture says this condition would last a “time, times and a half a time.” This is the equivalent of $3\frac{1}{2}$ times. A “time” is 360 prophetic days (12 lunar months of 30 days or one Jewish year). $3\frac{1}{2}$ times 360 results in 1260 prophetic days or, applying the day-for-a-year rule, 1260 literal years.

This is the same period of time noted in verse 6 as “a thousand two hundred and three score days” which in plain English is 1260 days. It is literally the same time as Elijah was in the wilderness some of which time he was fed by ravens (see 1 Kings 17). Elijah would, of course, be a type of the church.

In Revelation chapter 13 verse 5, referring to the “beast” John saw we read:

Rev. 13:5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Most expositors of Revelation, including Br. Russell, date these 1260 years from AD 539 through 1799, when Napoleon took the pope prisoner. The French revolution coincides with the ending of this time, and it helps explain the 15th verse:

Rev. 12:15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

Water is a symbol of truth and ordinarily we would not expect truth to be associated with Satanic forces. But nothing was too extreme to stamp out those who were still faithful to the Lord. The ending

of the dark ages we associate with the French Revolution, but instead of swallowing up the church in anarchy by the rush of freedom and truth which swept over the people, we read:

Rev. 12:16 And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

Conclusion

We have suggested what appears to be a reasonable explanation for this 12th chapter of Revelation. Let us review what we have learned, “translating” these symbols into ordinary language.

The early church, which was longing for its deliverance from suffering and pain, was thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament writings. It had the full light of the gospel and the writings of the apostles. But Pagan Rome at that time was far from contented to let the fledgling church alone. It stepped up its persecution to the point where many left the church and joined forces with the Roman system. Sometime after the death of the apostles, the forces that had been at work in the church to produce the kingdom on earth, bore fruit. Although Rome would have liked to destroy this new life immediately, almost miraculously did it survive. It grew so powerful that the once omnipotent Roman system gave way to a new church/state system where religion became fashionable. “Christ's kingdom has come,” was the proclamation. But this was no help to the remnant of the true church because this new power sought just as actively to destroy it. For 1260 years the true church is protected by God while the counterfeit kingdom has its day. The devil fails to harm the church no matter what he does.

Our story which started so dismally for the woman, turns out to have a happy ending. Let us continue to look forward enthusiastically to the time when we can share in blessing all the families of the earth in the real kingdom. Let us not grow weary because the time for the full establishment of the kingdom seems to tarry. Growing weary proved to be disastrous for the early church. It could be equally unfortunate for us as well.

Closing Hymn: #324 — “Cause for Gratitude”

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