

102 WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN—REV 12:1-6

INTRODUCTION: The woman clothed with the sun is the vision of the Kingdom of God, untouched by conflict and where radiant perfection reigns. In contrast is the first century world where Christian trials and suffering dominate (vv 2-6). The timeline of this passage extends 70 years from the birth of Jesus to the last days of the Old Covenant. Three narratives appear to be joined together: #1. The travail of Israel and Mary, #2. The travail of the Lord Jesus, #3. The travail of first century Christians. We will seek to show that this passage was meant to give assurance to first century believers; although suffering was their lot for a time, they were being lovingly provided for by God.

1. Scripture: *And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.* Rev 12:1

Comment: The woman clothed with the sun is a picture of the redeemed—the people of God in their perfection. She is at peace and highly exalted, clothed in glorious light. The moon, representative of the times and seasons of the Old Covenant feast days, are fulfilled and at her feet. She is crowned with twelve stars, a symbol that unites the Old and New Covenants. It is a picture of transcendent glory with no conflict. This reality remains constant even through the suffering in the rest of the text.

Supporting scriptures:

- A. "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Mt 13:43
- B. "The Jerusalem that is above is free, which is the mother of us all." Gal 4:26
- C. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me...will have the light of life." Jn 8:12
- D. "To you who fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings." Mal 4:2
- E. "Arise, shine; for your light has come, and Yahweh's glory has risen on you..." Is 60:1

2. Scripture: *She was pregnant and crying out in the pain and agony of giving birth.* Rev 12:2

Comment: It appears we are meant to see three themes in this one brush stroke. Israel and Mary gave birth to Jesus in suffering. Jesus gave birth to the gospel in suffering. The gospel gave birth to the Christian movement in suffering.

Supporting scriptures:

- A. **Travail of Mary and Israel:** Holding the baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon prophesied: "This Child is appointed for the falling and rising up of many in Israel, and for a sign spoken against—and a sword will also pass through your own soul—so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." Lk 2:34-35
- B. **Travail of Mary:** "Because Joseph her [Mary's] husband was a righteous man and was unwilling to disgrace her publicly, he resolved to divorce her quietly." Mt 1:19
- C. **Travail of Israel:** "Anna, a prophetess...who did not depart the temple, serving with fasting and petitions night and day...was speaking concerning Him [the Messiah] to all those waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem." Lk 2:36-38
- D. **Travail of Jesus:** Jesus said, "Now My soul has been troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour?' But because of this I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name!" Jn 12:27-28
- E. **Travail of Christians:** "A great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem..." Acts 8:1

3. Scripture: *Then another sign appeared in heaven: a huge red dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and seven royal crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars from the sky, hurling them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, ready to devour her child as soon as she gave birth.* Rev 12:3-4

Comment: Because of its size and power, the dragon is the most terrifying of images. The seven heads and ten horns give this red dragon an added dreadful impression that escape is impossible. In Preterist Papers #101, we posited that the red dragon represents the High Priesthood and the Herod Dynasty. The New Testament documents these rulers' opposition to the promise to Israel and Mary, to Jesus and to the disciples. Think of the attempt to kill the infant Christ child, the false accusations against Jesus leading to His crucifixion and the persecution of early Christians.

Supporting scriptures:

- A. **Herod was the dragon:** "An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying... 'Take the Child and His mother and flee into Egypt... for Herod is about to seek the child to destroy Him.'" Mt 2:13
- B. **The High Priests were the dragon:** "When the Chief Priests and their officers saw him [Jesus], they shouted out, 'Crucify Him! Crucify Him!'" Jn 19:6
- C. **Herod, grandson of Herod the Great, was the dragon:** "Now at that time, Herod the king put forth the hands to mistreat some of those of the church. And he put to death James the brother of John with the sword." Acts 12:1-2

4. Scripture: *And she brought forth a son, a male, who is about to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.* Rev 12:5 (Berean Lit. Trans.)

Comment: This verse is often translated to say that the Son will rule the nations. However, a more accurate rendering of the Greek is, "the Son will shepherd the nations." The shepherd king guides his people invisibly, into His righteousness often through suffering. We must add that the idea of imminence is often omitted in many translations presumably because of futurist assumptions. (See P.P. #25 Bias in Translation.) Translated properly, Jesus was about to rule the Kingdom of God. The New Covenant began in AD 70. Meanwhile, Jesus led His disciples step by step to the end of the Old Covenant age (Mt 20:28).

Supporting scriptures:

- A. *He will shepherd them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken in pieces—just as I also have received from My Father.* Rev 2:27 (Berean Lit. Trans.)
- B. "Yahweh is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit." Ps 34:18
- C. "As they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." Acts 1:9
- D. "Yahweh said to me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your father.... You shall break them with a rod of iron. You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'" Ps 2:7-9

5. Scripture: *And the woman fled into the wilderness, where God had prepared a place for her to be nourished for 1,260 days.* Rev 12:6

Comment: Jesus instructed his followers to leave Judea when they saw certain signs. In Matthew, he warned that when they see the defilement of the temple, Christians should flee. In Luke, he warned that they should leave Judea when they see armies encamped outside Jerusalem. Interestingly, Josephus, a Jewish historian and eye-witness to the war, reports two events in the fall of AD 66 that fit these descriptions. Concerning the Matthew warning, Josephus reports that the temple priests unlawfully denied gentile temple sacrifices as well as turning from their priestly duties to prepare for war. Concerning the Luke warning, Josephus reports that the leader of Syria brought a Roman legion to Jerusalem in a pre-war effort to put down the Jewish rebellion against Rome. The commander inexplicably withdrew after a few days to return to Syria. We believe the Christians left the city for the duration of the war after these events occurred. Eusebius, a 4th century historian, reports that Christians went to Pella, a town in the Decapolis. The Roman and Jewish War lasted 3 ½ years, that is, 1,260 days (based on a 360 day year). Vespasian entered Palestine with the Roman army in the spring of 67 and Titus captured Jerusalem in the late summer of 70.

Supporting scriptures:

A. Sign—defilement of the temple: “When you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination of desolation’ spoken of by the prophet Daniel (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” Mt 24:15-16

B. Sign—armies surrounding Jerusalem: “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, you will know that her desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country stay out of the city. For these are the days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.” Lk 21:20-22

6. Documentation of defilement of the temple, the Roman army and flight to Pella (Rev 12:6).

A. Josephus reported violations of God’s law in the temple in the fall of AD 66: “At the same time Eleazar, the son of Ananias the high priest, a very bold youth, who was at that time governor of the temple, persuaded those that officiated in the Divine service to receive no gift or sacrifice for any foreigner [this was against God’s Law]. And this was the true beginning of our war with the Romans.” Wars 2.17.2. “Those that ministered about the temple [priests] would not attend their Divine service, but were preparing matters for beginning the war.” Josephus, Wars 2.17.4

B. Josephus reported of the pre-war effort of the Syrian army to put down the rebellion in Jerusalem in the fall of AD 66: Cestius Gallus, governor of Syria, inexplicably withdrew his army from action against Jerusalem and was attacked and defeated in his retreat. That’s when many residents of Jerusalem rightly surmised it was only a matter of time until the Roman emperor would send the full weight of the Roman military against the Jews and so they fled the city. We believe that this was when the Christians escaped to the town of Pella in the Decapolis. Josephus stated, “After this calamity [defeat of Syrian army] had befallen Cestius, many of the most eminent of the Jews swam away from the city, as from a ship when it was going to sink.” Josephus, Wars 2.20.1

C. Eusebius, a 4th century church historian, reported the Christians’ flight to Pella: “The whole body, however, of the Church at Jerusalem, having been commanded by a divine revelation given to men of approved piety there before the war, removed from the city to a certain town beyond the Jordan called Pella. Here, those who believed in Christ removed from Jerusalem as if holy men had abandoned the royal city itself and the whole land of Judea.”—Eusebius, Church History (See “Flight to Pella” Wikipedia.)

Closing thoughts: Meditation on this passage gives us priceless truths. Believers are always the “woman clothed with the sun” regardless of circumstances. Suffering is a necessary part of the journey. We must never fall prey to believing the “prosperity gospel” or that inimical spiritual forces or even worldly rulers have power over us. We live in relationship with our loving shepherd King, growing in dependence on Him as we admit our weakness. Jesus said, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” Jn 16:33

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