

OBSERVATION STUDY SERIES

REVELATION

THE WOMAN AND
THE DRAGON

12:1-6

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The Woman and the Dragon

Have you ever seen Matryoshka nesting dolls? They are a set of wooden dolls decreasing in size placed one inside another. In the 1,990's I was a professor at a Bible college in Ukraine; one year I picked up a set. Mine is a little Ukranian family with the papa on the outside, the mama inside the papa, and the eldest son inside the mama. When you open the eldest child you find another smaller child, and so on, until you finally reach the baby, who is inside all the others.

My son, Caleb, reminded me that I have used my Matryoshka set in the past as an illustration of the seals, trumpets and bowls in Revelation, so here goes... The seals, trumpets, and bowls are all part of the seven-sealed scroll (the papa doll), but the seventh seal (the mama doll) has seven trumpets inside of it and the seventh trumpet (a child doll) has seven bowls inside of it (more children).

The difference, of course, is that instead of decreasing in size like the Matryoshka set, the trumpets end up being “bigger” than the seals which they came out of, and the bowls end up being “bigger” than the trumpets they come out of. The further you go “inside” of the original holder, the greater the intensity of the next judgment.

Revelation 11:14 just told us the second woe (sixth trumpet judgment) was past and the third woe (seventh trumpet judgment) was coming quickly. The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, which meant the third woe had arrived. Then, verses 15 through 19 gave us a general summary of the events the seventh trumpet will produce.

We are now ready to observe Revelation 12:1-6, which is another interlude. Remember, there are interludes between the sixth and the seventh seals, and between the sixth and the seventh trumpets. This interlude is between the sixth and the seventh trumpets (Although the seventh angel has sounded his trumpet, the judgments have not yet begun. Revelation 15 will take up where Revelation 11:15-19 leave off and then Revelation 16 will begin the actual bowl judgments. There will be one interlude after another until then.) Are you ready? Let's go.

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth. Revelation 12:1-2

This interlude includes two signs, the first one is a woman. This is important to note—the text identifies the woman as a sign—this is not a literal woman. The Greek word for “sign” is *semeion* and means an indication, especially ceremonially or supernaturally. It

comes from *semaino* which means to indicate or signify. The woman is a mark, or a token, by which something is known or distinguished. Isn't it amazing how clear the text makes it that this is not a literal woman? We don't have to wonder or guess, we just have to listen carefully to what the text tells us about her.

The sign of the woman appeared in heaven. In other words, John was merely listening, but he was watching a heavenly vision. (Remember, Jesus' angel was communicating (signifying by visions) the things which must soon take place to His bond-servant John.) And to make sure John saw the signs clearly, they were put on the biggest screen in the universe—God's heavens. (The Greek word for "great" is *me-gas* and means large or big.) Trust me, John did not need to put his reading glasses on to see this!

Let's observe the sign of the woman. She was clothed with the sun. The moon was under her feet. There was a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and she cried out in pain because she was in labor and about to give birth.

Before we talk about the meaning of the sign, let's observe the rest of the scene to help us understand the sign correctly.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. Revelation 12:3

As dazzling as the sign of the woman had been, the second sign was no less dramatic, and it was dreadful to boot. A huge red dragon, a fascinating giant serpent, appeared before John. It had seven heads and ten horns. Each head wore a diadem, which (according to the Greek) is not a victor's crown, but rather the emblem of a ruler.

And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child. Revelation 12:4

The dragon used his tail to sweep away one third of the stars of heaven and throw them to the earth. He stood before the woman, who was just about ready to have her child, because he intended to devour her child as soon as it was born.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne. Revelation 12:5

The woman had a son who was ultimately going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Her son was caught up to God and to His throne.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Revelation 12:6

Then the woman fled into the wilderness because God had prepared a place for her there. He provided nourishment for her in the wilderness for 1,260 days. Do you hear a little “ding, ding, ding”? Yes, we have seen that time phrase before, haven’t we?

Let’s go back and unpack the main things out of this passage. If you start with the clearest and most obvious details of prophecy, you sometimes have to start in the middle, as is the case here.

When you observed verses 1 through 6, did you discern anything that was very clear? I mean, you might have a pretty good idea of who the woman is, or even the dragon, but is there someone whose identity leaves no doubt, even at first glance? What about the male child in Revelation 12:5? He couldn’t possibly be anyone else except Jesus Christ, the Messiah! No one else has ever, or will ever, rule all the nations—only the Son of the Most High God!

Let’s look at a couple of cross-references just to make sure.

From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. Revelation 19:15

A cross-reference which nails the identity of the One Who will rule the nations with a rod of iron is in the same book we are observing—Revelation. (The rule of thumb when cross-referencing is to first choose valid cross-references within the same book, then the same author, then the same testament, if possible.)

You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware. Psalm 2:9

A secondary cross-reference is Psalm 2:9, in which the “You” is clearly, and without any doubt, referring to the Son of God—Jesus Christ, the Messiah. (By the way, Psalm 2 is an amazing Psalm which is referring to the exact same time period we are observing in Revelation. If you would like to study it inductively, we have a free Observation Bible Study Guide available on our website WORDCenterMinistries.org. Click here to go to our Psalms page.)

The male child, the Messiah, is destined to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. Although He was born over 2,000 years ago, He has not yet fulfilled this prophecy (although He will soon).

The male child, the very Son of God, was caught up to God and His throne at what is commonly called the ascension. Check out the following cross-references.

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said,

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” Acts 1:9–11

...which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places... Ephesians 1:20

Now you might have noticed that Revelation 12:5 does not seem to be in chronological order. That’s okay, jumping around in time is not all that uncommon in prophecy. However, if we think through the sentence thoughtfully it actually follows historical order. The phrase “who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” is actually a parenthetical insert—it is defining the male child. Then it continues with the main thought of the sentence using the conjunction “and”. In other words, you could read the sentence without its parenthetical insert and have a complete thought. “And she gave birth to a son, a male child, and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.” The information about him ruling all the nations, although just as important, is an inserted explanation. Punctuation is not in the original autographs, and has been added by translators. If they had used parentheses the sentence would have looked like this.

And she gave birth to a son, a male child (who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron) and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.

When John wrote Revelation, the woman had already given birth to a son (past tense) and her child had already been caught up to God and to His throne (past tense) but He was yet to rule all the nations with a rod of iron (future tense). I hope that makes sense. It is perfectly clear as it is written, but sometimes we read through Scripture too quickly and simply do not take the time to observe it carefully and thoughtfully.

Alright... I think we have Revelation 12:5 figured out. Now, let’s see how the clear information in that verse helps us to figure out more of the passage. Let’s interrogate the text and see what we can see.

Let’s look at Revelation 12:1-2. Since the male child is Jesus, it makes sense to ask who the woman who birthed Him is. Although some might jump to the conclusion that the woman is Mary, Jesus’ earthly mother, the entire context must determine the answer. Think about how the woman was described—she is clothed with the sun, the moon is under her feet, and on her head is a crown of twelve stars, which is a *stephanos* or victor’s crown.

Look at this cross-reference from Genesis.

Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” Genesis 37:9

Joseph, one of the sons of Jacob, or Israel, had a dream and related it to his brothers. The same ingredients are seen—the sun, the moon, and eleven stars (note the missing star). When Joseph related the dream to his father, Israel knew what the meaning was immediately. Look at the interpretation below.

He related it to his father and to his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have had? Shall I and your mother and your brothers actually come to bow ourselves down before you to the ground?" Genesis 37:10

There are other cross-references we could go to but this one will suffice for now because we are not going to base our identification of the woman in Revelation solely on cross-references.

In Joseph's dream, the sun was Israel, the moon was his mother, and the eleven stars were his eleven brothers. When you add Joseph, we have the twelve sons of the man Israel, who became the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel.

Could the woman be the nation of Israel? Absolutely. Did Jesus come from the nation of Israel. Absolutely—He was an Israelite. The Messiah, Who was prophesied from the beginning of Genesis, would come from the nation of Israel. It was the Messiah, or the Coming One, Who would rule over all the nations with a rod of iron—Jesus of Nazareth would be that Messiah. So, we can see that the woman is Israel and she gives birth to the Messiah.

Now let's consider Revelation 12:4-5. Another sign appears in heaven and incredibly, it is a gigantic red dragon. Our next question needs to be, "Who, or what, is this dragon?" A few verses from now (in our same chapter) hold the answer.

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Revelation 12:9

Well, that settles that! The great red dragon, without any doubt, is the serpent of old, the devil, Satan, himself. The great red dragon is revealed with seven heads and ten horns, with seven diadems on his heads.

In prophecy, horns represent the power of kingdoms. Satan's agent, the beast (the anti-christ) will be seen in Revelation 13:1 with seven heads, ten horns, and seven diadems on his horns (although note the difference—the beast's diadems are on his horns, not his heads). Daniel also portrays the fourth beast (who is actually the anti-christ) with ten horns. We will understand a little bit more when we are a bit farther along in Revelation, but for now, remember that the diadems are those of a sovereign, not just a victor.

We know the "who" of the male child, the woman, and the great red dragon. We know the "when" of Revelation 12:1-2 and Revelation 12:5. Let's look at the "when" of Revelation 12:3-4.

Satan's tail swept away one-third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. This refers to the time in antiquity when he was able to persuade other angels to defect from God's heavenly kingdom. They would no longer abide in heaven; God allowed Satan to take those renegade angels with him to the earth.

This verse, like so many others in prophecy, leaps forward in time. While the dragon and his followers defection happened beyond the horizon of time in the past, the time when the dragon (Satan) stood before the woman (Israel) who was about to give birth (in order to devour her child when he was born) happened around two millennia ago, when BC (before Christ) turned into AD (*anno Domini*—in the year of our Lord). Think with me for a moment... What form did the dragon (Satan) take at that time? Who tried to kill Jesus when He was born? King Herod. The dragon (Satan) was controlling Herod at that point.

Revelation 12:4 flows perfectly into Revelation 12:5. The male child, Jesus of Nazareth (the Messiah), was born a little over 2,000 years ago in the midst of an assassination plot by Herod. It was unsuccessful because God, the Father, had a plan that could not be thwarted. The plan's earthly climax (this earth; that is) has not yet taken place, but it will soon. God's Son, the Messiah, will rule all the nations with a rod of iron for 1,000 years.

Just a thought, do you remember hearing about this rule earlier in Revelation? In Revelation 2:26-27 Jesus promised to give the overcomers authority to rule over the nations with a rod of iron, just as Jesus had been granted authority from His Father to do the same (rule over the nations with a rod of iron).

Okay, let's continue. Revelation 12:6 begins with "Then the woman fled into the wilderness..." When is "then"? It is after the woman gave birth to a male child, and after her child was caught up to God and to His throne (but before He begins to rule all the nations). Then, sometime after Jesus ascended to the Father, the woman fled into the wilderness. Can you see how Scripture is interpreting Scripture? Some people want to believe that the woman is Jesus' earthly mother, Mary. We could see from earlier verses that it had to refer to Israel, not Mary, but this verse once again nails it for us. This verse could not possibly apply to Mary, but it most definitely applies to Israel.

God prepares a place in the wilderness for the woman. In this place which God has chosen and prepared for Israel, she will be cherished and nourished by her God.

Why will she need to be provided for in such a supernatural way? She will be fleeing to this refuge in the wilderness because all "hell" will be released to go after her...

And how long will she need to be in this safe haven? For 1,260 days. Remember the math—on a Jewish calendar, 1,260 days equals 42 months and 42 months equals 3 1/2 years... 3 1/2 years is exactly half of Daniel's 70th week that Israel will spend trying to survive the Great Tribulation...