

Who is the woman of Revelation 12:1-2? “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: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”

We should begin by noting that we are dealing with symbolism here. First, the woman “appeared” in heaven (1). This is the language of revelatory visions: something appears which a prophet sees. Second, the woman is not *literally* “clothed with the sun,” with “the moon under her feet” and “a crown of twelve stars” on her head (1). This is the symbolism of a vision. Third, this is a “wonder” or, more precisely, a “sign” (1). The image of the woman is not itself the reality; it is a sign pointing to the reality.

What is the overall impression of this “sign” of the woman? The woman is radiated with glorious light! The light of the sun envelops her, the light of the moon shines under her feet and the light of 12 stars sparkles in her crown (1).

This is clearly heavenly light. The woman is a sign “in heaven” (1) and the heavenly bodies of the sun, moon and stars all emit a heavenly light. This light from heavenly luminaries forms the woman’s clothing (the sun is her attire), indicates her dominion (the moon is under her feet) and declares her royalty (12 stars are embedded in her crown).

The Roman church claims that this woman is Mary. Thus Revelation 12 is abused to serve Mariolatry, the idolatrous veneration of the mother of our Lord. This Scripture is twisted (II Pet. 3:16), as if it were proof that Mary is “the queen of heaven”—a pagan title denounced in the Old Testament (Jer. 7:18; 44:17-19, 25). The imagery of Revelation 12:1 has also been used in European Union publications.

Though the woman’s giving birth to a male who is Christ (2, 4-5, 13) would fit with Mary, other statements in Revelation 12 do not square with her. Mary did not flee to the wilderness after giving birth to our Lord, nor was she nourished by God there for 1,260 days or a time, times and half a time (6, 14).

The truth is that the woman in Revelation 12 is the church for it fits all the relevant data. First, the number of the church is 12 and the woman has “a crown of twelve stars” (1). Second, the church gives birth to Christ according to the flesh, and is persecuted and nourished by God (4, 6, 13-17). Third, the church has heavenly glory (1).

The heavenly glory of the church is her holiness. The gracious Spirit of the Lord Jesus makes her beautiful. He conforms her to the image of Christ her husband and head, and consecrates her to the living God. Hers is a victorious holiness so that the church wears a “crown” (1). Hers is a reigning holiness for she rules over all things by virtue of her union with Christ. Hers is a heavenly holiness for the church has been born from above.

Do you understand the “sign” of the glorious woman, the church according to her new nature in Christ? Or do you lightly esteem and despise the Lord’s beloved people and congregation? While the false church is a whore (Rev. 17), the true church is a beautiful woman clothed with the sun (Rev. 12)!

Rev. Stewart

The Old Covenant and the New Covenant

A reader asks, “How does one answer the dispensationalists who point to the fact that God’s covenant is called a ‘new covenant’ in distinction from the covenant of the old dispensation that is called ‘old’ (Heb. 8:7-13)?”

It ought to be understood that dispensationalists must make a separation between God’s covenant with Israel in the old dispensation and His covenant with His people in the new dispensation, a church gathered not only from the Jews but also all the nations of the Gentiles. They are looking for support of their denial of infant baptism. Dispensationalists admit that baptism is a sign of the covenant but they deny that God’s covenant with Abraham is essentially the same as God’s covenant established in the new dispensation.

Both covenants have different signs: the covenant in the old dispensation had circumcision as its sign and the new covenant has baptism as its sign. The former is the “old” covenant; the latter is the “new” covenant. Hence, although Abraham’s seed with whom the old covenant was established was the nation of Israel, the new covenant is established only with believers. And infants cannot be believers. Even the Old Testament promises of the covenant were only for national Israel; the new covenant has different promises—so goes the dispensationalist argument.

The reader asks a question which is crucial regarding the whole heresy of dispensationalism. Do the words “old” and “new” refer to *entirely different* covenants, unrelated to each other and wholly different from each other? Or do they refer to essentially the *same* covenant? The dispensationalists hang their position on a broken hook. The entire system of dispensationalism stands or falls on whether or not the Bible speaks of two covenants that are *fundamentally different* from each other.

Scripture is twisted by their argumentation. That assertion is clear from the fact that the Bible uses the word “new” not only to describe something that is completely different from everything else but it also uses the word “new” in the sense of “altered” or “changed.” Two examples from the Word of God immediately come to mind.

The first is Scripture’s use of the expressions “old man” and “new man.” These are the terms used in Ephesians 4:22-24. The Bible has a similar passage in Colossians 3:9-10. There are other references to the truth of the old man and the new man in those passages that speak of the battle between the flesh and the spirit in our daily life. I refer to such Scriptures as Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:17.

Every believer has the life of Christ in him by God’s wonder work of regeneration. That new life is called the “new man.” But we are a new man only in principle. We also,

while in this world, possess and are the “old man.” The old man is that depravity of our body and soul that remains in us till death or the Lord’s glorious return. I am both the old man and the new man. The old man is myself but so is also (and especially) the new man. Though Scripture speaks of an old man and a new man, I remain one person.

The figure of a butterfly may help us understand this. Prior to weaving its chrysalis, the butterfly is an ugly worm. Yet it emerges from its cocoon as a beautiful butterfly. The worm and the butterfly are the same insect. Over the period of being in the cocoon, the worm gradually changes into the butterfly.

So it is with us. We are ugly totally depraved sinners. Gradually, over the course of our Christian lives, we are changed more and more into glorious saints. For a time, we are both a worm and a butterfly, as it were. We become a beautifully perfected saint only when we finally emerge from the “cocoon” of this life at our glorification.

“Old” and “new” can be said of the same worm/butterfly. “Old man” and “new man,” when applied to the regenerated elect, cannot refer to two different persons any more than the old covenant and the new covenant refer to two separate covenants.

The second example is Scripture’s references to the new heavens and the new earth. At the coming of Christ, this present creation, heaven as it now is and this present earth, will not be annihilated. They will be changed so that even the creation shall be made new—the renewed creation of both heaven and earth. The new creation is not an entirely new creation, totally different from the present heaven and earth—even though it is called a “new heavens” and a “new earth” (Isa. 65:17; 66:22; II Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1). This present creation is the same creation that will be transformed and renewed when Christ returns upon the clouds of heaven.

God created both heaven and earth at the beginning. Adam was formed as the head of the creation. Adam sinned and the devil won control of the earthly creation. His attempt to take over heaven failed and he was thrown out of that realm. He now concentrates his attention on becoming the sole ruler of this earthly creation. It sometimes seems that he is successful in his attempt, for sin becomes greater and greater as God’s commandments are more and more rejected and despised in our time.

Christ died to redeem this earthly and heavenly creation, as well as His church. He will become Head over all—in the new creation in which heaven and earth become one. That the earth was created after the pattern of the heavenly (enabling our Lord to speak of the kingdom of heaven in parables in terms taken from this earthly creation) is a temporary arrangement, for both heaven and earth are God’s creation. Jehovah saw that all He had made was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). That is, all that He had made was perfectly suited to His eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.

God is not going to permit Satan to steal His creation away from Him. That would make Satan look as if he were stronger than God and one who could prevent Him from accomplishing His purpose in His own creation. When the wicked become ripe for judgment, and the last elect is born and brought to saving faith in Christ, God will realize His purpose in publicly making Christ the Head of all of earth and heaven, for

all is redeemed in His cross (Col. 1:20; Eph. 1:10).

We are promised a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness shall dwell (II Pet. 3:13). But both shall not be “new” in the sense that the old heaven and the old earth will be annihilated, for then God’s work in the “old” heavens and the “old” earth would be a failure. But it will be “new” because, by a wonder of God’s grace, wisdom and omnipotence, heaven and earth will be formed out of the old creation and made more glorious than ever—as the everlasting dwelling place of Christ and His church.

In the first creation, Adam was head on earth and Satan was a mighty angel in heaven. Both sinned and fell. This was part of Jehovah’s eternal purpose, and serves the incarnation and cross of the only begotten Son, ensuring the salvation of the elect church to the glory of God. At the end of this age, Christ will be manifested as Head of both heaven and earth, but it is a unity that is “new” for it is formed out of the “old.”

How could it be different? The same wonder occurred at the time of the flood. The pre-deluvian world was under the curse and had become ripe for judgment. The post-deluvian world was significantly different from the old (II Pet. 3:4-7) and with it God established His covenant, of which the rainbow was a sign. Yet it was essentially the same world. The covenant with the creation was an everlasting covenant, and will be fully realized in the new heavens and the new earth.

How could it be different? While on earth, Jesus could tell Philip, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Later, Christ died and was buried in a body like ours in all things except sin. But in heaven, in His exalted human nature, He is an even greater and more glorious revelation of the invisible Triune God.

How could it be different? When the resurrection of our bodies takes place, we will not be given completely different bodies. We shall be raised in the self-same bodies, which are now glorified. Our bodies will be made like unto the body of Christ (Phil. 3:21).

Why is it that the whole brute creation groans and travails in anticipation of its redemption (Rom. 8:19-22)? Is this because it is to be annihilated? Of course not. The “new” creation in Christ shall be the redemption of the “old” creation.

This is also our hope and the object of our longing (23-25)—we who are still in the old body of this death with only a small beginning of the new obedience. By God’s grace, we persevere in the confidence that we shall be transformed into the likeness of our wonderful Saviour. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (I John 3:2-3). I will be perfectly changed from old to new but I will always remain I.

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