



# THE BOOK OF REVELATION

## 7: HEROES and VILLAINS -

### THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN

### THE WOMAN CLOTHED IN SCARLET

#### PART ONE



## ABOOK OF CONTRASTS

Throughout Revelation, John sets before his readers a series of contrasts.

- The Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit and the Unholy Trinity, of Dragon and of Beasts.
- Those who worship the Lamb and those who worship the Beast.
- The holy city of 'Jerusalem' and the unclean city of 'Babylon'.

**AND**

- The Woman clothed with the sun and the Woman clothed in scarlet.

## PART ONE



### THE WOMAN CLOTHED WITH THE SUN (Chapter 12).

A new character is introduced to us in chapter 12v1: 'A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven' (i.e. in the sky), 'a woman clothed with the sun...'

Specifically the woman is described as:-

- Being clothed with the sun
- With the moon beneath her feet
- With a crown of 12 stars on her head
- About to give birth
- Under threat from the dragon

## CHAPTER 12

Before describing the last seven plagues that will complete the wrath of God (15v1), John turns aside for a moment to give a clear explanation as to the underlying cause for the persecution of the Church and to encourage those suffering for their faith about the certain final outcome. Although Satan is cast down, the struggle continues, first against Israel, then against Jesus and finally against the Church (Jn.15v20). It will be a savage and brutal struggle but it is the death throes of a defeated enemy, whom God will judge and overthrow (ch.15-19) and will result in reward and blessing for those who have been faithful and true (ch.20-22).

## SO WHO IS THIS WOMAN?

Firstly she is Israel, or more accurately the faithful and true Israel, the Messianic Community, which 'gives birth' both to Jesus – the '*male child who will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre*' (v.5; cf 2v27; 19v15). But because the Early Church saw complete continuity between the People of God who were Israel becoming the people of God who were Christians, whereas at the beginning of the Chapter the Woman is indeed Israel, at the end of the Chapter she is the Church, the 'mother' to the believers - '*the rest of her offspring*' (v.17). As Paul says to the Church in Galatia, '*But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.*' (Gal.4v26) and describes Christians as being offspring of Abraham, the '*father of us all*' (Rom.4v16; 9v8; Gal.3v7). And he also employs the

imagery of being like an expectant and a nursing mother amongst the Thessalonian believers (Gal.4v19; 1 Thess.2v7). In contrast the Woman clothes in scarlet will be described as the 'mother of prostitutes' (Rev.17v5). We shall see that there is an overlap between Israel, Zion and the New Jerusalem, in this female imagery.

The Woman is in the pains of child birth: 'The true Israel in her pre-Messianic agony of expectation' [Kiddle: The Revelation of St. John]. However, Jesus also uses the same metaphor of the pains of childbirth when He speaks of the apostles' experience before the Resurrection and Ascension (Jn.16v20-24).

## FEMALE IMAGERY OF ISRAEL

- **As a Wife** (faithful or otherwise):

Isa.54v1,5-7; 50v1; 62v4-5; Jer.3v20.; Ezek.16v8-14.

And most poignantly, the Book of Hosea, where the prophet is told to take to wife a woman called Gomer, who either is, or who will become a prostitute, thus demonstrating the unfaithfulness of Israel; the agony of God, Israel's 'husband'; the faithfulness of God. (Hos. 1v2-3; 2v14-20). The Lord actually speaks of a '*spirit of prostitution*' that has infected the people and has led them astray (Hos.4v12; 5v4).

- **As a Bride:**

Isa.49v18; 61v10;; 62v5; Jer.2v2

- **As a Pregnant Woman:**

Isa.26v17-18; Jer.4v31; 13v21; Mic.4v9-10; 5v3.

## FEMALE IMAGERY OF THE CHURCH

2 Cor.11v2: the pure betrothed virgin

Eph.5v23-32: the wife

Rev.21v1-2: the bride

And think of the parables that Jesus told connected with weddings, or the first miracle at Cana.

## THE CHURCH AS THE NEW AND TRUE ISRAEL

Rom.9v6-8.

Gal.3v14; 4v21-31; 6v16.

Phil.3v3.

And perhaps most telling of all, 1 Ptr.2v5,9:

*'...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.'*

In these two verses Peter unambiguously transfers the call of Israel onto the Church, referencing as he does the call upon Israel right back in Exodus 19 and Israel's special status as being 'chosen' by God in Deuteronomy 7. *'Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (Ex.19v5-6).

*'For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession'.* (Deut.7v6).

However as Paul is swift to point out, most especially in Romans 9-11, this does not mean that Israel no longer has a place in God's heart or a place in His plans and purposes. What it does mean is that the people of God are now all those (of any and every race) who *'hold to the testimony of Jesus'* (Rev.12v17).

## CLOTHED WITH THE SUN, HER FEET RESTING UPON THE MOON AND CROWNED WITH TWELVE STARS...

*'Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?'* (Song of Solomon 6v10).

'She [the true Israel, the Messianic Community] comes standing upon the Old Testament revelation of reflected light and clothed with the New Testament revelation which is the sun shining in its strength' (Torrance: The Apocalypse Today).

And so the stars represent not any astrological symbol but the 12 patriarchs, the 12 tribes of Israel (Gen. 37v9). They may also represent the 12 apostles, cf Jesus' statement about the apostles sitting on 12 thrones (Mt.19v28). One covenant of grace received by faith begun tribes of Israel and continued through the Church. And in this page we get a glimpse of the Church as Paul describes her in e.g. Eph.3v9-11. This is the crowning glory and authority that belongs to the People of God, the faithfulness of God to His plans and purposes that stretch down over the centuries and move towards their triumphant climax!

## BUT

*'As a pregnant woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain, so were we in your presence, Lord. We were with child, we writhed in labour, but we gave birth to wind. We have not brought salvation to the earth, and the people of the world have not come to life.'* (Isa.26v17-18).

Israel was unable to bring salvation to the earth. That was to be the ministry and calling of her male child, who will rule the nations and who sits upon the throne of God (12v5).

## THE FLIGHT TO THE DESERT

Having given birth to the male child and seeing him snatched out of the Dragon's jaws and taken safely to Heaven (the Ascension and see also e.g. Lk.4v28-30), the Woman herself is in danger. The 'War in Heaven' to which John refers and which we have seen already references the great rebellion of Satan millennia before, seems to be replicated once again. Satan's attempt to destroy Jesus seems to take him once again into heavenly conflict and once again he is cast down. (One might think of a great white shark leaping up out of the water in its desperate, ferocious and single minded attempt to seize its prey).

John, not for the first time, uses much Exodus imagery at this point. He describes the Woman as mounted on eagle's wings; of being taken to the desert to a place prepared for her; of remaining there for a set period of time; of being cared for and kept safe from both the dragon's first attack and the later assault by flood.

### o **Eagle's Wings:**

*'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.'* (Ex.19v4; and see also Deut.32v10-11; Isa.40v30-31).

○ **A Place Prepared:**

*'See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared' (Ex.23v20).*

It was in the Exodus that Israel was 'birthed' and it was in the Desert that she first came fully to know her 'husband' (Deut.8v2ff; Hos.2v14-16). In this context, the Desert is the place of refuge and of safety, not the Wilderness of Jesus' temptations.

○ **God's Provision and Protection:**

*'He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. 4 Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. '* (Deut 8v3-4).

Not only does God provide for the Woman but He protects her. Giving us yet another contrast, John presents a 'river of death' and then in 22v1, the 'river of life.' The flood of water that the devil sends to destroy the Church may be understood as a picture of a flood of evil or of persecution, seeking to overwhelm the believers. Alternatively John may be more directly referencing Exodus, where the People of God were threatened twice with annihilation by water, the first being the murder of the Israelite babies by being thrown into the Nile and the second being on the shores of the Red Sea in Exodus ch.1 and ch.14.

*"You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemies. In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling'.*(Ex.15v12-13 ).

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. (Isa.43v2).*

The gates / power of Hell will not and cannot prevail against the Church of Christ (Mt.16v18)!

○ **A Time, Times and Half a Time:**

The familiar 'time, times and half a time' / 3 ½ years / 1260 days / 42 months. The 42 months is neatly mirrored in the 42 resting points of the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to the Jordan River in Num.33v1-49.

And once again the emphasis on the specific length of time is given not so much to describe an actual 3 ½ years but as a guarantee that however bad the persecution might be, it is limited, will come to an end and God is on the throne. In chapters 11v2 and 13v5, the time that the Church is kept safe in the desert is the exact length of time that the persecution will last. And in Dan.7v25, 3 ½ years was the time limit set upon the oppression of the Jewish nation and the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes 168-165 BC.

## WAR IN HEAVEN AND WAR UPON THE EARTH

Once again we are reminded that the hatred and enmity of the world towards the Church stems from the ancient enmity and fear of the devil towards Jesus (cf Acts 9v4-5). And just as he attempted to destroy the male child but was unable so to do: just as he attempted to destroy the Woman - Israel but was unable so to do: so his attempt to destroy the Church in each and every generation is doomed to failure. The very testimony to Jesus, which provokes his wrath (v.17), guarantees his downfall (v.11).