

Revelation 12:1-6 - Who Is This Woman?

The Woman, the Dragon, and the Male Child

I. Introduction

A. Revelation 12 begins a major new movement in the book.

B. Chronologically, the story appears to move _____.

1. Jesus has already died, risen, and been enthroned long before John's visions begin. Chapter 12 returns to the arrival of the Messiah.
2. John is not always moving along a _____ timeline. Revelation repeatedly revisits the same conflict from new perspectives.
3. The change in perspective is _____. Chapters 6 through 11 showed conquest, war, famine, martyrdom, judgment, and opposition on earth.
4. Chapter 12 now asks what lies behind those events. The answer is _____.

C. Revelation exposes a deeper antagonist: The dragon identified later in the chapter as "the ancient _____," "the _____," and "_____ " (12:9).

D. 3 Central Figures of the Conflict in Revelation 12:1–6

1. A glorious _____ in labor
2. A terrifying _____ positioned to destroy her offspring
3. A _____ child destined to rule the nations

Genesis, Exodus, Psalms, Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and Zechariah all stand behind the vision.

John's controlling story is Israel's Scripture. He takes _____ recognizable in his world and places it inside the biblical story of the Creator, Israel, Messiah, Satan, Exodus, covenant, and kingdom.

Controlling Insight: Revelation 12:1–6 retells the story of the Messiah and the covenant people from heaven's perspective so that persecuted believers can understand the _____ conflict behind their _____ experience.

II. Revelation 12:1–2

The Woman Clothed with the Sun: Covenant Glory, Messianic Labor, and the People of God

A. “A great sign appeared in heaven” tells us how the image should be read

1. John calls the woman a “great sign.” The word is _____, meaning a sign, portent, or visible phenomenon that points beyond itself to a deeper reality. The dragon in verse 3 is also called a “sign.” John therefore tells his audience from the beginning that these figures function _____.
2. The woman is real in the sense that she represents a real _____ and _____ reality, but the picture communicates that reality symbolically.
3. Some interpreters have attempted to connect Revelation 12:1 with the constellation _____ because the woman appears “in heaven,” and ancient Greeks sometimes used language of signs for celestial phenomena.
4. John proceeds to interpret his imagery through Scripture and the story of the Messiah, not through a _____.
5. Calling the woman a sign also means the central question is not initially, “What individual woman does John photograph?” The question is, “What _____ does this woman signify?”

B. “Clothed with the sun” portrays extraordinary glory

1. In apocalyptic symbolism, clothing frequently communicates _____ and _____.
2. White garments=signify _____ and purity.
3. Royal or splendid=_____ and status.
4. Here the woman’s garment is _____.
5. The image does not mean she possesses divinity independently of God. Revelation remains uncompromisingly _____. Her glory is derivative, not intrinsic.
6. She is clothed in splendor because of her relationship to God’s _____ purpose.

THE WOMEN CONTRASTED

Woman in _____ (Chapters 17-18)

1. dresses herself in purple, scarlet, gold, jewels, and pearls
2. glory is commercial, imperial, and _____ - _____
3. magnificence comes from economies of _____

Woman in Chapter 12

1. glory is _____
2. magnificence framed by _____

C. “The moon under her feet” communicates _____, not _____

1. The moon is beneath the woman’s feet. In ancient symbolic language, placing something under one’s feet indicates _____, victory, or elevated status.
2. Biblical Background:
 - a) Psalm 8:6
 - b) Psalm 110:1
3. Here the entire cosmic scene surrounds the woman. Sun above and around her, moon beneath her, stars crowning her. She stands in a position of extraordinary _____ within creation.
4. Some older allegorical interpretations have tried to assign an independent meaning to every element. The immediate text gives no interpretive key for those specific equations.
5. The strongest observation is the total picture: the woman is represented with cosmic _____ and covenantal _____.

D. The crown of twelve stars points strongly toward Israel and covenant completeness

1. The woman wears “a crown of twelve stars.” The word for her crown is _____, the crown or wreath associated with victory and honor.

TWO CONTRASTING CROWNS

Dragon

1. wears diademata, symbols of _____ sovereignty
2. crown represents his pretensions to rule

Woman

1. wears a stepanos, symbol of honor and vindication.

E. Significance of 12 throughout Revelation

- twelve _____
- twelve _____
- twelve _____
- twelve foundations
- multiples of twelve in the 144,000
- twelve kinds of _____ associated with the tree of life

F. Twelve signals the completeness of God's covenant people.

1. The strongest Old Testament background for the sun, moon, and stars is Joseph's _____ in Genesis 37:9–11. Joseph sees the sun, moon, and eleven stars bowing before him. Jacob interprets the celestial figures in relation to the covenant family. Revelation reuses this family-cosmos imagery when depicting the woman who gives birth to Israel's Messiah.
2. We should be precise, however. Genesis 37 has _____ stars in addition to Joseph, whereas Revelation explicitly gives the woman _____. John is not copying Joseph's dream mechanically. He develops the imagery into the conventional covenant number twelve. The picture now portrays the covenant community in its _____.

G. The pregnant woman stands in the tradition of Daughter Zion (vs. 2)

1. For a reader steeped in Israel's Scriptures, a woman laboring to give birth immediately evokes the _____. Israel, Jerusalem, and Zion are repeatedly personified as women, wives, mothers, and women in labor.

III. Key Old Testament Backgrounds

- A. Isaiah 26:17–18 — God's people are _____ to a pregnant woman writhing and crying out in labor.
- B. Isaiah 54:1–3 — Barren Zion becomes a _____ of many children.
- C. Isaiah 66:7–9 — Zion astonishingly gives birth.
- D. Micah 4:9–10 — Daughter Zion is told to writhe and cry out like a woman in labor.
- E. Micah 5:2–5 — The birth imagery is connected with the _____ of the ruler from Bethlehem.
- F. Jeremiah 4:31; 6:24; 30:6 — Labor pains depict Zion's _____ and _____.

This prophetic background is enormously important. The woman's contractions are the covenant labor pains of the people from whom God's promised ruler emerges.

The woman therefore carries Israel's long history of waiting _____ her body.

Her labor says: Messiah comes out of a history of covenant _____ and covenant _____.

IV. Who is the woman? 3 major interpretations

A. Interpretation Option 1: The woman is Israel

1. The argument is straightforward:
2. The sun, moon, and stars recall Genesis 37:9–11 and the family of Israel.
3. Israel gives birth historically to the Messiah.
4. The Old Testament repeatedly represents Israel or Zion as a _____.
5. The twelve stars strongly suggest the twelve tribes.
6. The woman later experiences _____ from the dragon.

Strength:

This interpretation takes the Old Testament background extremely seriously and explains how the woman can give birth to Jesus. Jesus emerges from Israel, from Judah, and from David's line.

Limitation:

If the woman means _____ Israel and nothing beyond ethnic Israel, the latter part of the chapter becomes harder to explain. Revelation 12:17 describes "the rest of her offspring" as those who keep God's commands and hold firmly to the testimony about Jesus. The symbol appears to develop beyond a simple ethnic identification.

For that reason, "Israel" is an essential answer, but the question remains whether it is the _____ answer.

B. Interpretation Option 2: The woman is _____

1. The Marian interpretation has a long history in Christian theology, particularly within _____ tradition. It is not

unreasonable. Mary is, after all, the _____ Jewish woman who gave birth to Jesus.

2. Mary can _____ Israel because she is the daughter of Israel through whom the Messiah comes. She can also function typologically in relation to the church because she represents faithful _____ of God's promise.

Catholic Typology and Mary

3. Catholic theology has sometimes seen an ark-Mary typology here, comparing Mary's bearing of Christ with the ark bearing the signs of God's _____.

Strength:

Mary is the concrete historical mother of the male child. Any corporate interpretation of the woman ultimately passes through her actual motherhood.

Limitation:

The woman as described _____ Mary's individual biography. The cosmic clothing, twelve-star crown, Zion's birth pangs, wilderness preservation for 1,260 days, and the later multitude of her offspring point toward a _____ identity.

The best form of the Marian reading sees Mary as a personal _____ of the larger _____ woman.

C. Interpretation Option 3: The woman is the _____

Several features support it:

1. Revelation regularly represents God's people _____.
2. The woman survives after the Messiah's _____.
3. Satan later persecutes her and her offspring.
4. Revelation 12:17 explicitly describes her children as those who keep God's _____ and maintain the _____ of Jesus.

The difficulty appears in verses 1–5. If “the church” means only the post-Pentecost Christian community, the sequence becomes awkward.

Historically, Christ gives _____ to the church rather than the church giving _____ to Christ.

D. Strength:

It explains the woman's ongoing story after the Messiah's enthronement and the dragon's later persecution of Christians.

E. Limitation:

A strictly post-_____ definition of "church" struggles to explain how the church gives birth to Jesus.

The church interpretation therefore works much better when "church" is used in the _____ sense of God's covenant people across the biblical story rather than as an institution _____ only after Easter or Pentecost.

F. Interpretation Option 4: The woman is _____, the whole covenant people of God

1. This is the interpretation that _____ integrates the full range of evidence.
2. The woman represents the _____ of God in their covenant continuity. Before Christ's _____, the symbolism concentrates on Israel and Zion, the community from whom the Messiah emerges. After Christ's _____, the same woman continues as the persecuted covenant community whose offspring are defined by _____ to Jesus.
3. This reading does not _____ Israel. It actually _____ upon Israel. The woman could not give birth to Israel's Messiah if Israel were removed from the symbol. Nor does it require denying Mary's importance. Mary is the concrete Jewish mother through whom the corporate promise becomes historical flesh.

A useful formulation

4. The woman is Daughter Zion, the covenant people of God, historically embodied in Israel as she brings forth Messiah and continuing as the Messiah-confessing people whom the dragon persecutes. Mary stands at the historical _____ of that corporate symbolism as the actual mother of Jesus.
5. That formulation allows the symbol to operate the way Revelation's symbols frequently operate: _____ grounded, _____ layered, and _____ expansive.

V. Most balanced conclusion

The woman should not be reduced to one modern denominational debate. Her primary symbolic identity is the covenant people of God viewed as Mother Zion, rooted unmistakably in Israel.

The important question for Revelation is not whether Mary, Israel, or the church “wins” the identification contest. God’s Messiah emerges from God’s covenant people, and the people associated with that Messiah become the object of the dragon’s hostility.