

The Woman and the Dragon

A biblical-theology of Genesis 3:15

Revelation 11:18 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.

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

² She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.

³ And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

⁴ His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.

⁵ She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

⁶ and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

(Revelation 11:18-12:6)

Prelude: Drama of Redemption

Michael Horton writes, “I was raised in a church that loved the Bible. Sunday school was more than just punch and cookies. There were “sword drills” (think of the game show *Jeopardy*, but all about the Bible) where we competed to test our Bible knowledge. Yet with all of this knowledge of the Bible, I never knew how it all fit together. There were

lots of interesting (and some not so interesting) stories. But I never heard the big story that moves with dramatic force from Genesis to Revelation.”¹ I think a lot of people can relate to this, perhaps on different levels. For some, the Bible was simply a list of rules to follow, and Jesus was the model. For others, they were taught theology and how to think better about God. But quite often, in one case or the other (and other options as well), there is no consistent (or even concerted) attempt to convey to people what has been called The Drama of Redemption. There is no big story, just parts that don't fit together in our minds.

But story can't be where it's at, right? I mean, most stories are fiction. If you tell someone that the Bible is a story, they will think it must not be true, like an Aesop Fable or a Superhero movie. Also, stories aren't practical. They don't tell me what to do with my life and that's what church is for, isn't it? Well, in fact the Bible does tell a grand story. It does tell you what to do, but not the way a lot of people think it does. More than anything, the story it tells is absolutely true, even though much of it seems impossible, and this is the reason it has also been called The Greatest Story Ever Told. Today, we are going to look at this story.

¹ Michael Horton, *Core Christianity: Finding Yourself in God's Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016).

We will do it from what may be **the two most distilled passages** that get to the heart of this story. The first is **Revelation 12**. The second is what I take to be God's own thesis statement of the Bible—**Gen 3:15**. As we will see, Revelation 12 is perhaps the most obvious connecting passage to what one recent writer said is, “**with the possible exception of John 3:16,**” the most “**crucial and definitive**” verse in the Bible.²

The Drama of Genesis 3:15 **is set** in the pristine world of Genesis 1-2, in the creation of God who made all things good. Specifically, we are in his holy temple-garden, Eden, where he put the man, **Adam**, to serve as his prophet, priest, and king under the terms of the covenant of works. Here, we also find his helpmate-bride, **Eve**, whom God made from the side of the man when he put him to sleep and took one of his ribs to form the woman. Finally, here we find the **Serpent**, the Nachash, the one who takes the narrative arc and fills it with tension and conflict. The man, the woman, and the serpent are the initial actors, and they have all fallen into great sin, defying God's laws and bringing about the curse upon the pristine world.

² **Derek Thomas**, “The Significance of Genesis 3:15,” Ligonier (Feb 23, 2018), <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/significance-genesis-315/>.

The verse reads, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (**Gen 3:15**). **Martin Luther** called this the “**first gospel**” (*Protoevangelium*). He was the first to do so in a gloss of his Bible translation in 1522. There, he also called it **the last judgment**.³ Going back all the way to the Second Century A.D., **Irenaeus** (*Against Heresies* 3.23.3) used a similar description of the verse calling it an implied promise of salvation and yet the very same thing as Jesus saying, “**Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire**” (**Matt 25:41**).

The verse is a **curse**—upon the serpent *and his offspring*. It is a **promise** of blessing to the woman *and her offspring*. Notice that **children** are in view. It tells of a **coming war** between the two and of a **victory** of one over the other. Pregnancy and a war and a victory of the seed of the woman over the serpent. That is the story of the Bible. Of course, how it unfolds gets very detailed and extensive and we can’t tell

³ **John L. Ronning**, *The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics*, A Dissertation to Westminster Theological Seminary (1997), 1. https://www.academia.edu/37058145/THE_CURSE_ON_THE_SERPENT_GENESIS_3_15_IN_BIBLICAL_THEOLOGY_AND_HERMENEUTICS. Another Dissertation on this that discusses Rev 12 is **Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole**, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15: an Exegetical and Intertextual Study,” A dissertation to Andrews University (2002), https://www.unasp.br/ec/sites/centrowhite/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/The-Seed-in-Genesis-3_15_-an-Exegetical-and-Intertextual-Study.pdf.

that whole story today. Thus, we will hit the highest of highlights by moving to Rev 12.

In the last book of the Bible we read of a **woman** who is pregnant and gives birth while a great **dragon** stands before her seeking to devour her **child**. The first six verses set up the story:

- 12:1 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.
- 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth.
- 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.
- 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it.
- 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,
- 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.

Does this sound at all like Genesis 3:15?

Now, curiously, though we saw last time that the unit of thought of the chapter **centers** upon **vv. 9-10** and that literally the entire book pivots around these two central verses, these first six verses are **their own self-contained unit** as well. Essentially you have **a three-part unit** moving from the pregnant woman to the dragon awaiting the birth and back to the woman who gives birth and flees.

- A. Sign in heaven: Woman in labor, vv. 1–2
- B. Sign in heaven: Dragon awaiting birth, vv. 3–4
- A'. Woman gives birth and flees, vv. 5–6⁴

Curiously, the same three-part structure appears in the chapter as a whole:

- A. Dragon and woman, vv. 1–6
- B. Dragon expelled from heaven, vv. 7–12
- A'. Dragon pursues woman, vv. 13–16

Though we find **all the same parts as Genesis 3:15**, looking at it this way it is tempting to say that it must not be telling the whole story, because **where is the victory promised** to the woman and her seed? That's the point of **vv. 9-10** where Satan is cast out of heaven and the Son of God rises up to take dominion, having now taken salvation and

⁴ **Peter J. Leithart**, *Revelation*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, vol. 2, The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments (London; Oxford; New York; New Delhi; Sydney: Bloomsbury; Bloomsbury T&T Clark: An Imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2018), 11. The following two chiasms are from p. 12.

power and his kingdom and all authority because he threw down the Evil One.

Therefore, **both** passages give **the same good news**. Both give **the same bad news**. Both have **the same characters** and as we will see these imply both a corporate and individual fulfillment—the woman (Eve), the Serpent (Satan), and their offspring. Today, we will look at the three characters themselves and focus in on the birth of the offspring of the woman. Next time, we will look at the war and the victory her seed has over the serpent.

The Dragon

Because he appears first in the temptation story of Genesis 3, we begin with the **Dragon**, the great enemy of the human race. He has many names in our two texts: one in Genesis and four in Revelation. In **Genesis 3:1** he is the **Nachash**. Usually rendered as “**serpent**,” the word can also be translated as “**Shining One**,” as in **Isaiah 14:12**’s, “**Lucifer**” (Light-Bearer; Vulgate), “**Day Star, son of Dawn**.” Both the image of a shining heavenly being and that of a reptile are being utilized in the telling of the story. The angelic creature has slithered his way into the Garden where, with the venom of a viper, he lies and deceives the mother of humanity.

Revelation 12:3 uses a different name. It calls him the dragon. When it does this, it refers to this title as “a sign” which “appeared in heaven.” We will talk about the significance this being a sign later. But there is a biblical history of this dragon.

The first time the Greek word appears in the LXX is in the confrontation between Pharaoh and Aaron and Moses. “Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a *drakōn*” (**Ex 7:9**). The Hebrew equivalent is *tannin*, which in English here is always translated as “serpent.” A dragon is a serpent. Think scales and forked tongues found on both and you get the idea. Now, we just saw the serpent in Genesis 3, but with a different Hebrew term—*nachash*. Serpent is also a second term John uses in **Rev 12:9**. There, he is called the “ancient serpent,” referring to the creature in the Garden.

It is important to look a little more at this term dragon. In **Psalms 74:13-14** it symbolically represents Egypt and the Pharaoh. The dragon was behind the slavery of Israel! “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters (*tannin; drakōn*) on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan (*livyathan; drakōn*) you gave him as food

for the creatures of the wilderness.” Notice three things here. First, *drakōn* translates two Hebrew words. The first is *tannin*, which we have seen is a serpent. But now it is translated as a sea monster. The second is *livyathan*, which is why they translated it as sea monster. Leviathan is a terrifying dragon sea-monster, as we learn in Job (Job 41). Second, it has many heads, like a hydra. That’s how John describes this dragon. It is great, red (the color of blood), and has “seven heads” (a similar creature is in Dan 7:4-7) with seven diadems and ten horns (Dan 7:7-8). Third, the LORD “crushed the heads.” This is exactly the curse to the serpent in Gen 3:15.

Now, this crushing was a past crushing. The heads were crushed, because it was talking about the Exodus and Egypt. But these same terms come together in a very important and related verse: Isaiah 27:1, which for him is still future. He calls it the Day of the LORD. “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan (*livyathan*; *drakōn*) the fleeing serpent (*nachash*), Leviathan (*livyathan*; *drakōn*) the twisting serpent (*nachash*), and he will slay the dragon (*tannin*; *drakōn*) that is in the sea.” This is the

last days punishment of the dragon being predicted. But as it calls him the Nachash, it must refer to **Genesis 3:15**! Thus, you can hear that the dragon in the OT is both defeated and yet to be defeated.

Two more notes about the **Dragon and Leviathan**. *Drakōn* comes from the word *drakein* form (an aorist active infinitive) of *derkomai* which means “to look at,” “gaze sharply at,” in other words to perceive or to watch. Interestingly, that could make it a **watcher** (a creature described as serpentine looking in intertestamental literature). Think about Smaug just watching his horde of gold for centuries, never moving, until Bilbo and the dwarves come to his lair.

Leviathan has a cousin word in Ugaritic. *Lītānu* means “the twisting one” or “the wreath-like” or “the circular.” Leviathan probably consists of the words *levi* (“joined to”) and *tan* (“serpent”).⁵ Considering these things, if you are familiar with it, you cannot help but think of the **Ouroboros**, a symbolic representation known from the most ancient times all across the world that depicts the Milky

⁵ The Hebrew form is related to the root *lavah* (“to cleave”) and the Arabic root is *lawā’* (“to bend”). Hence, the twisting or coiling of a serpent.

Way, that densest part of our galaxy that looks like it incircles the world and at one point looks like a serpent swallowing its tail (see below). The point being, both terms have supernatural and **astronomical** connotation.



לוייתן (Leviathan read right to left)
Jewish New Year post card,
1915, Alain Roth

The third term John uses is “**the devil.**” He says that “the ancient serpent” is called the devil. Why? Devil means **adversary.** This is the term used in **Matt 4:1** where Jesus is tempted in like fashion to our parents in the Garden by “the

devil.” Curiously, in [John 8:44](#), Jesus says that the Pharisees are *children* of the devil. He is their father. This is a clear allusion to [Gen 3:15](#) and the “seed” of the serpent. They were his adversaries just like the serpent was Eve’s. In [1 John 3:8](#) we learn that the devil has been sinning since the beginning. Again, that is a clear allusion to [Genesis 3:15](#).

Interestingly, Peter says, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion.” “Devil” there is *diabolos*. “Adversary” is *antidikos*. An antidikos was an opponent in a court of law, i.e. a prosecuting attorney. This takes us to the final term for the dragon: Satan. Satan means “accuser,” which is the main role he has in [Revelation 12:10](#). In the OT, it is a special office in the divine council carried out as they hold court. That role is a prosecuting attorney. This is why he is called Satan in [Job 1:6](#) and [2:1](#). A trial in heaven is being held and Job is in the dock. Satan is seeking to convict him; God is defending him.

There is one more curious connection with the serpent and [Genesis 3:15](#) worth discussing. It has to do with Beelzebub, the term used for Satan ([Matt 10:25](#); [12:24-27](#); etc.). It has Baal as its root, and it means “Lord [Baal] of the Flies” or possibly “Lord of the House.” The Aramaic targum of Genesis 3:15 uses a word for enmity that is different from

the Hebrew. It is essentially an idiom for “**enemy**.” The word is almost identical to that of Beelzebub.⁶ All these names then tell you about the same creature, the supernatural archenemy of heaven and earth, the one who tempted us into sin and was cursed by God until the day he is defeated by the seed of the woman.

The Woman (Part I)

Next, we come to **the woman**. We know who the woman in Genesis 3 is. She is Eve, “**the mother of all living**.” Who is the woman in Revelation? As with the dragon, it begins by telling us that there was “**a great sign ... in heaven**.” Again, I simply note this, and we will return to it later. It is important.

Next, her description is that she is **clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars (Rev 12:1)**. The closest language we have to this is found in Joseph’s dream. “**Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were**

⁶ Compare the targum’s wbbd-l[b] with בעל־זבוב. Ronning explains, “There is a certain resemblance to the name of the arch enemy Beelzebub (less so to Beezebul), *ziayin* in the Hebrew being often found in Aramaic cognates as *daleth* ... and could therefore be a way of identifying the snake with Satan.” John Ronning, Dissertation, 18-19.

bowing down to me” (Gen 37:9). It is very clear in this story that the brothers take the eleven stars to be themselves. That’s why they want to kill Joseph, because he is telling them that they will bow down to him—the twelfth star. If they are the eleven, then Jacob would be the sun and Rachel would probably be the moon, since she is his mother.

Now, these twelve brothers become the tribes of Israel. And, Jacob has his name changed to Israel. Because of these associations, many say that the woman is a symbolic representation of Israel. Being clothed with the sun and moon and having the stars on her head is a way of describing the whole nation. Dispensationalists take this a step further and say she is *only* the nation of Israel (or those representing her).

On the other hand, this woman is pregnant. In fact, she is crying out in birth pains and is about to give birth (12:3). For this reason, older Christians which carried over especially into Roman Catholicism say that this woman is Mary. They tie this to the fact that the child born “rules the nations with a rod of iron” (5), which is obviously referring to Christ via Psalm 2. They also tie this to the previous verse, which we saw last time rightly begins this section.

Specifically, they use some interesting ark of the covenant typology,⁷ specifically that which occurs in the story where the ark comes to Jerusalem (2Sam 6) and the birth of Jesus (Luke 1):

Typology of Mary and the Ark	
2 Samuel 6	Luke 1
The Ark traveled to the hill country of Judah to rest in the house of Obed-edom (1-11)	Mary traveled to the hill country of Judah (Judea) to the home of Elizabeth (39)
Dressed in a priestly ephod, King David approached the Ark and danced and leapt for joy (14)	John the Baptist (a priest) leapt for joy in his mother's womb at the voice of the Virgin Mary (Lk 1:41)
David asked, "How is it that the Ark of the LORD comes to me?" (9)	Elizabeth asked, "Why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (43)
The Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom for 3 months (11)	Mary remained in the house of her cousin Elizabeth for 3 months (56)
The house of Obed-edom was blessed by the presence of the Ark (11)	The word "blessed" is used 3 times in Luke 1:39-45 concerning the Virgin Mary at Elizabeth's house.
The Ark returned to its sanctuary and later placed in Jerusalem where the presence and glory of God was revealed in the Temple (12; 1Kg 8:9-11)	Mary returned home from visiting Elizabeth and eventually came to Jerusalem where she presented God the Son in the Temple (56; 2:21-22)
David offers a sacrifice to the LORD (13)	Mary offers a sacrifice to the LORD (2:24)

⁷ The modern thesis was proposed by **René Laurentin**, *Structure et théologie de Luc I-II I* (Paris: Gabalda, 1957), and recently defended in **Jan M. Kozłowski**, "Mary as the Ark of the Covenant in the Scene of the Visitation (Luke 1:39-56) Reconsidered," *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 31/1 (2018): 109–116, https://www.academia.edu/36729282/Mary_as_the_Ark_of_the_Covenant_in_the_Scene_of_the_Visitation_Luke_1_39-56_Reconsidered_in_Warszawskie_Studia_Teologiczne_31_1_2018_pp_109_116. Dominic Unger did a six part series in *CBQ* between 1949-50 (see bib). See also **Scott Hahn**, *Hail, Holy Queen: The Mother of God in the Word of God*, 1st ed. (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Image Books; Doubleday, 2001). Also, see my sermon "Worshiping the King: Leviticus 9:24-10:2."

The Ark Contains	Mary Contains
The Word of God in Stone	The Word of God made flesh
The Rod of Aaron the high priest	The Great High Priest, the branch of righteousness
The bread manna from heaven	The Bread of Life from heaven

Some church Fathers sometimes made these connections.⁸ However, most of them saw Jesus as the fuller the antitype of the ark. Furthermore, when you press the language of fleeing into the wilderness after her child is caught up to God, this doesn't fit anything we know about Mary.

Some have made connections to **Eve** (Mary is a “new” Eve) in part because Genesis 3:15 is so close to this passage. Others have talked about **Sarah** or **Hannah** or Manoah's wife because of their amazing births. Some of these suffered a kind of metaphorical wilderness experience. So how should we answer? I would argue that **in and of themselves, none of these are wrong.**

Eve gave birth to a child. She thought the **seed** of the promise would be Cain, but it turned out to be Seth. Through Seth, Noah was eventually born. And to Noah was

⁸ “Church Fathers on Mary as Ark of the New Covenant,” Catholic Fidelity <https://www.catholicfidelity.com/apologetics-topics/mary/church-fathers-on-mary-as-ark-of-the-new-covenant/>. But, see also a rebuttal of many of these citations from **TurretinFan**, “Pedding Imitation Patristics,” *Alpha/Omega Ministries* (Mar 17, 2009), <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/roman-catholicism/pedding-imitation-patristics-rays-at-it-again/>.

given a new promise of the **seed**. “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you” (**Gen 9:9**). This is a re-establishment of the seed-promise given to Eve, both of which came in the context of a covenant. A covenantal **seed** promise continues with Abraham (**Gen 15:18**), Isaac (**Gen 26:4**), and Jacob (**28:14**), all of which have their offspring likened to stars (**15:5; 26:4; 37:9**). This covenantal promising of a **seed** continues through the kings (**2Sam 7:12**) and priests of Israel (**Num 25:10**). In this way, you have lots of mothers of the seed which is represented by Israel—the bride of the LORD in the OT. Obviously, Mary is a very special example of this woman, because she gave birth to God in human flesh.

Interlude: The Child

Now, this is precisely what is being spoken of here in **Revelation 12:1-5**, though **the parallel later on** takes the imagery much further. Before finishing with all that this woman represents, I want to take a **look at this child**.

People like to say that John has no birth narrative. That’s incorrect. I would argue that **he has two**. One is very short

in the first chapter of John. The other is here, not at the beginning of Revelation, but right at its center! They mutually interpret one another.

The short birth narrative is **John 1:14**. “**The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.**” That’s less than ten words! How is this a birth narrative? In two ways. **First**, the **Word becoming flesh** is the movement of the Word of God who was in the world prior to the incarnation as the Angel of the LORD now taking on human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary. **Second**, the Word “**dwelt**” among us. Or perhaps better, he tabernacled among us. How, in human flesh? He is the temple of the NT.

But this word “**tabernacled**” along with several other clues from Matthew and Luke (*the timing of Herod’s death*, the *birth of John the Baptist*, the *typology of the Feast of Tabernacles*), led many Puritans and Reformers to speculate on the timing of Jesus’ birth. Specifically, they said, Jesus was born **sometime during the Feast of Tabernacles**, in September.⁹ John Gill is a good representative.

⁹ **Joseph Mede** (1586-1639), **John Lightfoot** (1602-1675), **Nathaniel Lardner** (1684-1768), John Gill (1697-1771), **Abraham Rees** (1743-1825), and according to **Turretin** (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, vol. 2 [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997], 337), also **Joseph Scaliger** (1540-1609), **Sethus Calvisius** (1556-

It is ... likely [Jesus was born] in autumn, some time in the month of September, at the feast of tabernacles, which was typical of Christ's incarnation; and there seems to be some reference to it in John 1:14, *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt, or tabernacled* among us; the temple of Solomon, a type of Christ's human nature, was dedicated at the feast of tabernacles: and as Christ, the passover, was sacrificed at the very time of the passover; and the Holy Ghost was given on the very day of Pentecost, typified by the first-fruits offered on that day; so it is most reasonable to suppose, that Christ was born at the feast of tabernacles, a type of his incarnation; and which feast is put for the whole ministry of the word and ordinances, to be observed in gospel times, Zech. 14:16.¹⁰

Now, Gill did not believe you could know exactly when that date occurred. However, thanks to a rediscovery of a form of prophecy used in ancient times called “[astral prophecy](#),” and [modern computers](#) fit with astronomical software, many are now arguing that this is no longer the

1615), [Mathieu Beroald](#) (1520-1576), [Matthew Henry](#) (1662-1714), and others. See my paper “Jesus and Sept 11.”

¹⁰ [John Gill](#), *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, New Edition., vol. 1 (Tegg & Company, 1839), 552.

case. The key is understanding that the woman and the dragon are “signs ... in the heavens.” Signs here are astronomical things.¹¹ To put this a different way, seeing the woman *merely* as any or all of these women we have discussed thus far is not enough. The same goes for the dragon. As we have seen throughout our study of Revelation, both of these signs are actually represented in the constellations of the sky.

Biblical astral prophecy has its roots in Jacob who tells Reuben, “The firstborn [son or man]” who is “unstable as water” (Gen 49:4), and in Judah whom he says will be a lion and the sceptre will not depart from him (Gen 49:9), and in Joseph whom he calls a bull (6) and in Dan whom he calls a serpent (17). He is pegging these four tribes to the four cardinal signs of the zodiac: Aquarius (the water-man), Leo (the lion), Taurus (the bull), and Scorpio/Ophiuchus (the serpent) in a prophecy.¹² Judah, of course, is a messianic prophecy of the Lion of Judah, Jesus. Curiously, Dan, the serpent, will become associated with the antichrist.

¹¹ The term “sign” is astronomical and denotes zodiacal constellations. See Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1448.

¹² See my sermon “The Worship of God (Rev 4:1-11).”

Another Messianic prophecy is also related to the stars. Balaam says, “A Star shall come out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel” (Num 24:17). Recall that the Magi were looking for the star of the coming king and that they followed it all the way to Bethlehem (Matt 2:2ff.). How did they know to follow a star? My belief is that they learned this from Daniel who became the chief of the Babylonian magicians (Dan 4:9). What exactly were they seeing or looking for? This is where Revelation 12 comes in.

They are looking for signs in the heavens. Specifically, they are looking for a woman, clothed in the sun with the moon under her feet and twelve stars on her head near a dragon. The following has been proposed in various forms now by quite a few scholars.¹³

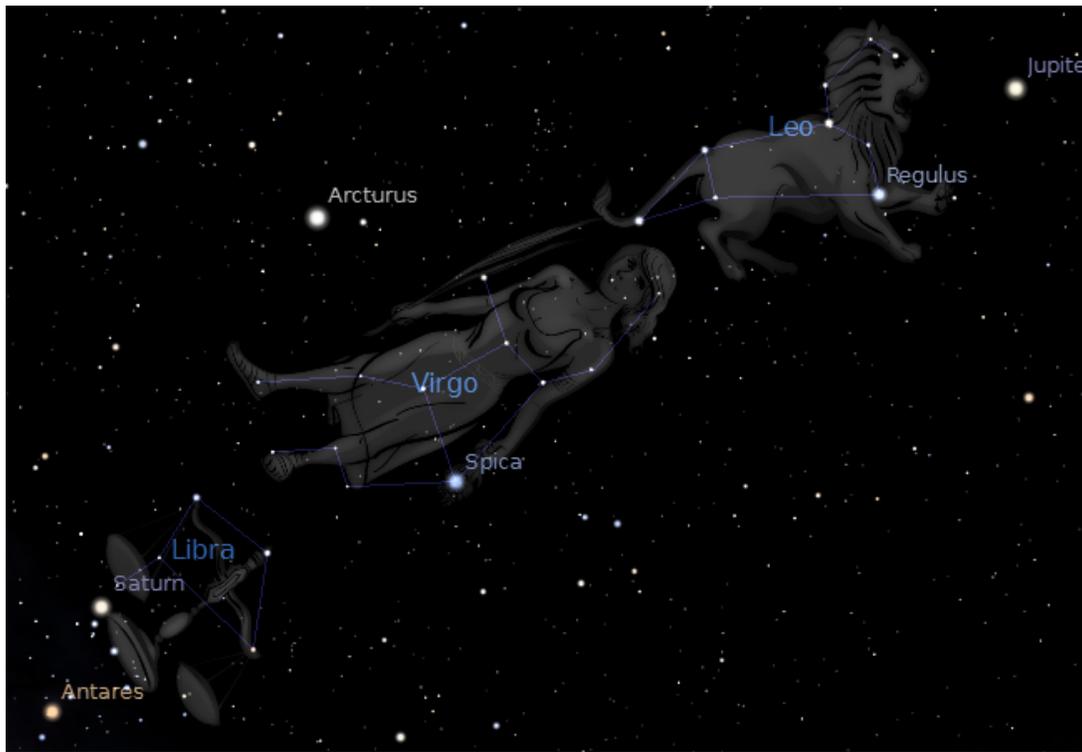
¹³ Ernest L. Martin, “The Time of Jesus’ Birth,” Ch. 5 of *The Star that Astonished the World* (1991), <http://www.askelm.com/star/star006.htm>. Endorsed by F. F. Bruce and others; Frederick A. “Rick” Larson, *The Star of Bethlehem*, Mpower Pictures, Stephen Vidano Films (2007), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exmbuX1NffU>; Richard B. Sorensen, “The Star Gospel,” (2011), https://www.academia.edu/42296729/The_Star_Gospel.; Michael Heiser, “The Birthday of Jesus Christ (September 11, 3 BC), *YouTube* (May 13, 2012), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWsPWkFz_14 (Heiser has also written about this in his novel *The Portent*). Others who see constellation significance but not necessarily this date are Pepler, Aune, Leithart, and other commentaries.

Skeptical refutations that I find lacking are Dwight R. Hutchison, “Revelation 12:1-17: ‘The Woman Clothed with the Sun,’” (2019), https://www.academia.edu/40606582/Revelation_12_1_17_The_Woman_Clothed_with_the_Sun; Colin Nicholl, “What Is Wrong with Rick Larson’s ‘Star of Bethlehem’ DVD Documentary,” Union (), <https://www.uniontheology.org/resources/doctrine/jesus/what-is-wrong-with-rick-larsons-star-of-bethlehem-dvd-documentary>.

Virgo (the Virgin!) has twelve stars above her head that are associated with her. For twenty days, Virgo is clothed with the sun, astronomical language meaning that during this period of time, the sun rises in her constellation. This happens every year, even as it does in the eleven other sign of the zodiac at other times of the year.

The sun through Virgo (actually near her mid-section), is an image of a royal birth (ala Jesus “the Sun of Righteousness” prophecy in **Malachi 4:2**). Jesus, of course, is the child who is born, and Jesus is the “star of Jacob” as Balaam put it (**Num 24:17**), or the **Lion of Leo/Judah** as Jacob put it (**Gen 49:9; Rev 5:5**). His Star was fixed to Jupiter, the “king” of the planets, and to Regulus, the “king star,” which is Leo/Judah’s main star (see picture below). Curiously, Leo is the constellation just above Virgo.

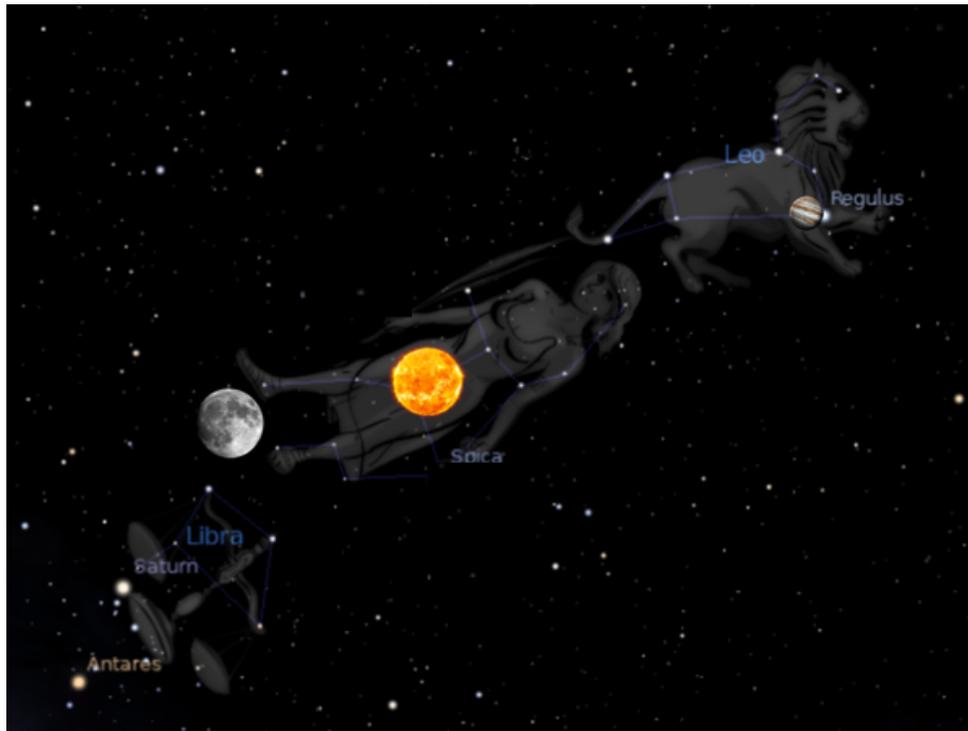
The imagery continues with **the moon at her feet**. As the heavenly bodies rotate around, the moon is seen in different places, just like the sun is. There is an 80 minute window during these 20 days of the sun rising in Virgo when the moon would appear to be at her feet. But this doesn’t happen every year. It is a rare occurrence.



Constellations Virgo, Leo (with the king star regulus), and Ophiuchus (known today as Libra)

Strangely, almost fantastically, there is only one time in all the ancient world when the sun and moon could be in Virgo like this *and* Jupiter would have aligned perfectly with Regulus. This was in the year 3 B.C. between 6:15 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. on [September 11](#) of that year (around 9 months earlier and you get Dec 25ish). Not only is the date creepy given when the Twin Towers fell, it also “just so happens” to be the date [Tishri One](#) on the Jewish Calendar. That is, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, the Jewish New Year, the Day of Trumpets, which occurs just two weeks before the Feast of Tabernacles. Even more strange, this is the very day that the Mishnah ([Sanhedrin 38b](#)) states that Adam and Eve were

created, and that the Bible says Noah came out of the Ark (**Gen 8:13**). Some were actually expecting Messiah to come on this very day. So this is the birth narrative of Jesus in John's writings and it exists both in a straight forward manner (the woman gives birth to a child who rules with a rod of iron) but also in a mystical way that once more takes us into heavenly places.



Day and Night sky, September 11, 3 B. C.

There is a **second heavenly sign** (**vs. 3**). This one involves a **great red dragon**. There are a few candidates for this, mainly because he is not involved directly with the birth-signs. One is **Hydra**. Hydra is as long as Virgo and Leo combined, and actually stands beside them in the night sky.

A second is **Ophiuchus**, a man holding a snake (Serpens) with a whipping tail, which reminds us of the dragon sweeping a third of the stars out of the sky with his tail (**Rev 12:4**). He is also next to Virgo, on the other side and to the bottom. A third is **Draco**. Draco is one constellation over from Virgo with Bootes between them. Draco is interesting because Hercules is stomping on its head. Perhaps the best candidate is **the ancient Dragon**, which was a combination of Libra (its claws) with Scorpio (the body). It is no longer recognized in modern astronomy, but this made the dragon truly monstrous in size.



No picture, but a text on this ancient dragon, “[T]he prototypical Dragon of the sky is really ancient Scorpio, originally a much larger set of stars than the present constellation. It was truly gigantic, even by celestial zodiac standards, since it originally consisted of two zodiacal signs (Libra/Claws and Scorpio). It was only relatively recently, that is, about 237 B.C., that it was divided by the Greeks, when the claws originally holding an altar were lopped off to become Libra. For the ancient Chinese tradition, the original Scorpio ran from Virgo to Scorpio.”¹⁴

Above left: Virgo and Leo with **Hydra** going their entire length. **Above Middle:** Virgo in relation to Ophiuchus (man holding Serpens) and Bootes. **Above Right:** Hercules stepping on Draco’s head. Virgo in upper-left.

¹⁴ **Malina** (1995: 161) in Leithart, 16.

The importance of this dragon-sign will be understood better next time as we look at the war described in Revelation 12. For now, it **moves us from heaven to earth** as its tail sweeps the stars out of the sky. And in this way, the woman, too, is symbolic of an earthly woman whose royal birth is being described.

Back to the Woman and the Defeat of the Dragon

It is quite remarkable to see the serpent, the woman, and her seed in both **Genesis 3:15** and Revelation 12. Both explain who these characters are. Both describe a birth and a war and a victory. This victory takes place, as I have said, in the center of Revelation—**Rev 12:9-10**. Again, we will look more at the war surrounding all this next time. But here are those verses just so we can understand that history is **pivoting on this greatest of all victories**. “**And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world— he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom**

of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God” (Rev 12:9-10). Indeed, the victory predicted in Genesis is now explained as *past* in Revelation, at least to a major degree. It is talking about the salvation and power and kingdom of God in Christ beginning because he has thrown down and cast out the Dragon as he was lifted up at the cross-resurrection-ascension event. This is how the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

But what do I mean by *pivoting*? For this, I want to return to the woman and child, and to another echo of Genesis 3:15 in Romans. Even with all that has been said, our explanation is *still incomplete*. Remember, victory in vv. 9-10 is a *hinge*, a pivot in the middle. Like the earth with its constellations that turn around it, so everything on both sides of these two verses are revolving around this great victory.

In Revelation 12, this includes what comes before—the *birth and the woman’s flight*, and what comes after—the woman’s flight resumed. Notice, “*The woman fled into the*

wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days” (Rev 12:6). But it says again, “The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time” (Rev 12:13-14). The context of the first flight is that the dragon sought to kill her new-born baby. Given all that this woman represented, one could think of anything from the murder of Cain (Eve’s son), to the near wiping out of mankind with the nephilim, to Egypt trying to destroy the nation of Israel, to the persecution endured by Samson and Samuel, to the birth of Messiah himself when he was two years old at the hands of King Herod. This is all *old* covenant stuff.

But in Revelation 12:5, Jesus is “caught up” to the throne of heaven and the new covenant begins. It was at this lifting up of Jesus that the devil was thrown down. This is where we resume the story of the dragon. Though defeated in heaven, “When the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman...” (13). This woman was given great wings of an eagle that she could fly from the serpent into

the wilderness to be nourished for the same period of time as before, but this time using different terms (not 1,260 days but a time, times, and half a time). The Dragon was **unsuccessful** in his attempt to destroy the woman and so he “**became furious with the woman and went off to make war on *the rest of her offspring*, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus**” (17).

Suddenly, we move from seed **singular** to seed **plural**. The One Seed—Jesus becomes many seed . . . *Christians*. Now, there has been a debate over whether the seed promise of **Genesis 3:15** is singular or plural. This is probably due in part because Paul takes the same word which is later used of Abraham’s seed and says, “**Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring**. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘and to your offspring,’ who is **Christ**” (**Gal 3:16**). Since both are singular in form, it would seem the same applies to the **Gen 3:15**.

Yet, Paul in just a few verses will say that we in Christ Jesus are all “**sons of God, through faith.**” And, **Revelation 12:17** says that the woman has more children, and surely this is not talking about Mary’s other children. Rather, it is

talking about ... *the church*. Where the woman prior to the pivot represents **Israel** (and whatever singular women may fit the picture), the woman after represents the **church**. The church is Israel—grown up in Christ.

It's fascinating to see that when Revelation says the dragon is going after "those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus," the targum of **Genesis 3:15** says, "When the children of the woman keep the commandments of the Law, they will take aim and strike you [the Serpent] on your head ..." Through his own inspired targum, John is including you, in Christ, in the promise of Genesis 3:15. And what does this mean, **practically speaking?**

The church-bride of Christ is like her husband in terms of God not promising to take her out of the world with its tribulation and suffering. We must conquer. As he endured here during his ministry for **1,260 days**, so the rest of the woman's offspring must endure for a time, times, and half a time. This can be difficult. **Wildernesses** are hard, desolate, dry places. But we have God's promises made sure.

The Apostle ends his letter to the Romans—the very last words—by saying, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (Rom 16:20). So now we can add this Apostle to that list of those who include the church as the seed of the woman—in Christ. God will not leave or forsake us. But rather, he will fight for us just as he fought against the dragon of old in Egypt as he redeemed and saved his people. For just as it says, “The earth came to the help of the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth” (Rev 12:16), to sweep her away with a flood (15), so the targum of Moses’ great Song of the Sea says, “The sea spoke to the earth, Receive your children: but the earth spoke to the sea, Receive your murderers. And the sea was not willing to overwhelm them, and the earth was not willing to swallow them up. The earth was afraid to receive them, lest they should be required from her in the day of the great judgment in the world to come, even as the blood of Abel will be required of her: whereupon You, O Lord, did stretch forth your right hand in swearing to the earth that in the world to

come they should not be required of her. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed [the Egyptians].” (Ex 15:12 PJE).

God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The promise has gone out to the seed. The story has been told and it is now being proclaimed to the four corners. He has thrown down the dragon, defeating the accuser. If you have trusted in Jesus by faith, you can no longer be accused of your lawlessness and sin before the court of heaven. And though he still rages for a while, you may be sure that the same Lord will soon crush Satan under your feet. So go forth in the power of the Gospel, keeping the commandments of Jesus, knowing that the victory is secure. May this Gospel that Christ has crushed the serpents head fill you with the power to do so.

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