

# **READING THE 'WOMAN' OF REVELATION**

## **12 AS ΣΟΦΙΑ (WISDOM)**

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Bachelor of Theology (BTh)

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper is guided by my experience of bearing witness to my wife's birth pangs when she gave birth to our children. It was the part of life in which no man could intervene to help ease the pain. But the labour needed to progress in order for her and myself to feel the real joys and happiness of a new life being brought into this world. This reflects in the Woman in the Book of Revelation 12 as ΣΟΦΙΑ (Wisdom), God's wisdom to compare pain and suffering with joy and happiness. This symbolic or metaphoric vision could help Christians today to be patient and endure forever, with their testimony of Christ, when facing trials and tribulations of life knowing that, beyond this life, God will reward us with eternal joy and celebration.

This paper is presented in three chapters.

Chapter 1 will examine the historical background, review the literature of scholarly findings, and present the methodology of narrative criticism.

Chapter 2 is the exegetical analysis of the text using narrative criticism, with one eye on historical interpretations and the other on another possible interpretation, such as the finding of wisdom, which has not been directly named, but alluded to, by scholars such as Lee and Harrington.

Finally, Chapter 3 discusses, concludes, summarizes, reflects, and proposes the next stages in the development of this topic.

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is **11,500** words in length, excluding the footnotes and bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgement of the source.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## DEDICATION

To my Family: My parents *Taefu Maa Pele & Leleiga Taefu Maa Pele*; Reverend (Retired) *Litala Tuimauualuga & Levei Tuimauualuga*; who prayed endlessly and supported us while we were in Malua, to achieve success. My wife *Airona*, and my kids: *Litala Jr., Cyrus Pele*, and my prince *Preston Maa*.

My brothers and wives, sisters and husbands and their children; in New Zealand and Samoa.

To my beloved mom who is in better place; *Leleiga Taefu Maa*, who showed and taught me that GOD is The Way to achieve anything good in life. I miss you mom.

Thank you for your prayers and support.

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*FAAFETAI, FAAFETAI TELE LAVA!*

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## INTRODUCTION

I found mention of the event of the Woman in birth pangs in the Book of Revelation 12 intriguing as a student of New Testament Studies. Maybe the impetus for my interest was the pregnancy of my wife and bearing witness to the birth pangs she experienced when giving birth to our children. My immediate response as a husband was to ease her pain and to protect her from any and all harm. Unfortunately, this was the part of life where no matter how much I wanted to intervene, the labour or birth pangs needed to progress, in order for her and myself to feel the real joys and happiness of a new life, a new creation being brought into this world. Thus, I was just astounded by God's wisdom to juxtapose pain and suffering with joy and celebration. Maybe this is what the Woman in birth pangs symbolizes; patient endurance through times of trouble in order to experience the thrill of victory in the hope of a new life to come represented by the birth of the child. It was this event in my life which helped to inspire my exploration of Revelation 12 to establish whether the Woman in birth pangs and wisdom could be seen as one and the same, or somehow interrelated.

Upon considering the text, the placement of this event in the Book of Revelation, as the mid-section of the progression of John's telling of God's revelations he witnessed at Patmos from Revelation 1, is interesting. This event is considered by other scholars as a visionary flashback<sup>1</sup> to events that happened in Revelation 1 – 11. The questions evoked for me were:

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<sup>1</sup> This explanation refers to the structure of Revelation given by Brian Blount. Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 183.

Why is this Woman in pain in this part of the Book of Revelation – and why not in the beginning?

What happens to this Woman occurs before the telling of the pouring out of the seven bowls – the seven bowls is widely interpreted as a symbolic reference to the pouring out of God's wrath after all warnings have been given beginning from Revelation 1.

Is there a connection between the pain experienced by this Woman and the pouring out of the seven bowls?

Secondly, the revelation of this Woman in birth pangs is described at the beginning of Revelation 12 with the adjective *μεγα* (great). Thus, the vision about this Woman appearing in Heaven alludes to the importance of this Woman figure to John and its centrality to John's purpose of God's revelations as told and shown in the Book of Revelation.<sup>2</sup> According to Biblical scholarship, women were not highly regarded in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is surprising to read about the significance attributed by John to a feminine figure as part of understanding God's plan of salvation and judgment for the world. For if they were not important, why does John use a woman to convey an important message for the early Christian communities in the Diaspora? Various interpretations have explored the significance of this woman as a

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen D. Renn, ed. *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words - Word Studies for Key English Bible Words Based on the Hebrew and Greek Texts* (Peabody Hendrickson Publisher, 2005), 425. In relation to a position, it describes supreme importance, honour and a majestic scene in the sight of God. Benjamin L. Merkle, Andreas J. Kostenberger, and Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek - an Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001), 411-14.

<sup>3</sup> S. J. John L. McKenzie, "Woman in the near East, Greece and Rome," in *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1965), 935.

representation of many things in this part of the Book of Revelation – such as Israel, Mary, Eve, and Church. However, when reading her story and the imageries used to describe her, my mind recalls the creation in the Book of Genesis, and also remembers womanly wisdom of Proverbs and how a woman was the first of all creation and assisted in God’s creation of the world. In addition, the description of her fragile and weak countenance, compared to the great and powerful description of the dragon/devil/Satan in Revelation 12, alludes to how Ecclesiastes and Corinthians depict man’s wisdom as being folly to God. These thoughts encouraged me to explore Revelation 12 a new and to see if *σοφία* (wisdom) can be used to interpret the Woman in this chapter. The interpretation of this woman as *σοφία* evokes for me the desire to seek more understanding of who this woman in birth pangs is, and her role and function in the Book of Revelation.

The interest in the consideration of this woman as *σοφία* came from my understanding of some of the apocalyptic and wisdom writings that personified *σοφία* as a woman. For example, the Book of 1 Enoch 42: 1&2 says “*Wisdom could not find a place in which she could dwell; but a place was found for her in the heaven. Then wisdom went out to dwell with the children of the people, but she found no dwelling place. So wisdom returned to her place and she settled permanently among the angels.*”<sup>4</sup> Another example is the Wisdom of Solomon 7:12 says “*I rejoiced in them all, because wisdom leads them; but I did not know she was their mother.*”<sup>5</sup> Another

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<sup>4</sup> Issac E, "1 (Ethiopic Apocalypse of) Enoch (Second Century B.C. - First Century A.D.): A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 33.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Enns, "The Wisdom of Solomon," in *The New Interpreter's Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha*, ed. Walter J. Harrelson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 1430.

example is the book of Sirach 6: 23 which says *“For wisdom is like her name; she is not readily perceived by many.”*<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the seven questions I seek to explore in this paper are:

1. What role(s) did women play in the society in which the Book of Revelation arose and how have those role(s) influenced her depiction of being in birth pangs in Revelation 12?

2. Is the author sarcastically typecasting the Woman as God’s folly to illustrate the inability of man’s wisdom’s to save himself?

3. Is the author of Revelation alluding to a past encounter between the “woman and the dragon” (large winged-snake) from the Fall of Creation in Genesis, to rewrite the ultimate outcome of history?

4. What role does the woman play in this new outcome?

5. Furthermore, who is this “Woman” to whom John refers in Revelation 12?

6. What is her identity as a historical figure, or even as a figurative metaphor in understanding how God dealt with his people from the Old Testament times and into the current age of the writing of Revelation?

7. In knowing her identity, how does that help to further explain and demonstrate John’s purpose(s) for writing Revelation?

Chapter 1 will examine the historical background, review the literature of scholarly findings, and present the methodology of narrative criticism.

Chapter 2 is the exegetical analysis of the text using Narrative Criticism, with one eye on historical interpretations and the other on another possible interpretation, such

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<sup>6</sup> Dianne Bergant, "Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach," *ibid.* (Abingdon), 1462.

as the finding of wisdom, which has not been directly named, but alluded to, by scholars such as Lee and Harrington.

Finally, Chapter 3 will discuss, conclude, summarize, reflect, and proposes the next stages in the development of this topic.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides the context upon which my re-reading of the “Woman” found in the Book of Revelation 12 is based. I will begin with a brief historical background to provide the dating, social location, and purpose of writing. It will then be followed by a brief literature review to examine what has been written about the woman and to locate her as a historical person within the writings of Judaism and/or early Christianity as Mary the mother of Jesus, Eve the mother of humanity, her corporate identity as Israel, and her metaphorical identity as wisdom. Finally, the chapter will conclude with the methodological approach of narrative criticism and how it answers the research questions.

#### **1.1 Brief Historical Background**

This section of the chapter provides a brief historical background of the Book of Revelation to ground the reading of the text to a social and cultural location from which stemmed important ideas and concepts that have shaped the thematic purpose of this book. It includes the date of writing, its social setting, and the purpose of it been written.

Revelation is apocalyptic literature.<sup>1</sup> In fact, it bears the title *αποκάλυψη* (apocalypse) which was a style of writing that attempted to reveal a long-anticipated truth of prophetic significance about the end time through visions.<sup>2</sup> It has been widely accepted by many scholars that Revelation was written as a reminder of God's dealing with his people from the past, into the present as well as encompassing the future with much apocalyptic imagery, when there was a great persecution of Christians during the reign of the Roman Empire.<sup>3</sup> This is similar with Minton's view, that apocalyptic writing continually appropriates the past in order to explain the trials of the present and provide a glimmer of future hope for those who perceive themselves to be under persecution or in exile. The Emperor Domitian, as many scholars have recorded began to force the people of the Empire to worship him as a living God and to call him "Lord" and "God."<sup>4</sup> This went against the religious beliefs and principles of Jesus'

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<sup>1</sup> Apocalyptic Literature is highly stylised form of literature, with its own conventions of symbolism and terminology, continually feeding Old Testament sources. It is a literature of dreams and visions, often centred in a vision of the Heavenly throne room. Apocalyptists never intended to depict the End in literal terms. In their attempt to portray a future salvation which transcends ordinary historical experience, they seem to have borrowed symbols from Canaanite myth and from the mythology they encountered in the Eastern Diaspora and in Hellenistic Palestine. Apocalyptic Literature often exhibits a close but critical interaction with the international culture of its time. J. D. Douglas, "Apocalyptic," in *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 53.

<sup>2</sup> Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> Those who supported this view are: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Justyn Martyr, Eusibius and others. Those who argued the view that it is not seduction but other reasons are: Brian K Blount, *Revelation – A Commentary*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009); Loren L Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, WUNT 2/167, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003; Neil Elliot, *Liberating Paul. The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994); Richard, Bauckman, *New Testament Theology: The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 36; Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1999.) and others.

<sup>4</sup> The emperor worship was not enforced by the law, but was performed to satisfy the needs of the people and also was a sign to signify the great terrified action of the emperor. These include people's freedom, security and wealth.

followers. Unfortunately, the Roman Empire began to target and persecutes the followers of Jesus for disobeying the law of the Emperor.<sup>5</sup>

Interestingly, research of this time period shows that there was no specific law of persecution against Christians by the Roman Empire in the First Century CE in Asia Minor, even in the time period of the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE) which, as recorded by the majority of scholars was the time the book was written.<sup>6</sup> Under Domitian, in any case, there was no systematic persecution, and certainly no omnipresent threat hanging over the lives of Christians.<sup>7</sup> There was no law specifically directed towards Christian Worship. However, nothing was said about a law discriminating against Christian Worship. Research has shown that during that time, all other orders of worship were allowed for anyone to worship who they wanted to worship, however, they had to also worship the Roman Pantheon of Gods as well.<sup>8</sup> It is through the writings of the Early Church Fathers in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE<sup>9</sup> that we find evidence of this great persecution of Christians in the Early Roman Empire.<sup>10</sup>

The purpose of the Book of Revelation was to be a support and relief for the Christians to keep their faith in God during this hardship and persecution. However, modern scholars note that the persecution of the Christians was not as once first

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgement*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 193.

<sup>6</sup> Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, Bible & Liberation Series (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 117.

<sup>7</sup> Petra von Gemunden, "Revelation 12," in *Sustainability and Globalization*, ed. Julio de Santa Ana (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 29.

<sup>8</sup> Brian K Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 8-14.

<sup>9</sup> CE stands for Common Era

<sup>10</sup> David Aune, "Book of Revelation," in *Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1997-98), 1126. Includes: Clement, Tertullian, Origen, Justyn and others.



thought. It was more of a seduction of the Roman Empire and its worship. For those who worshipped the Roman Empire and adhered to the Roman way of life found worth and status within society and the Empire. The traditional understanding of seduction is ‘to lead astray in order to engage into illicit sexual activities’.<sup>11</sup> My intention here is neither to discuss nor elaborate on sexual acts, rather, to explore and critique the means or methods, effectively the form of seduction used in this given context.<sup>12</sup> There were many privileges and freedoms given to those who worshipped Rome, whereas those who did not were less fortunate. In support of this review, some scholars accepted and promoted the historian’s records which affected the interpretation of the true reality in the social setting of the people in Asia Minor during the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>13</sup>

According to these historians’ views,<sup>14</sup> the purpose of Revelation was to strengthen the faith of those Christians that were being seduced by the Roman Empire to persevere by continuing their non-violent and faithful witness of Jesus Christ in the midst of pain and suffering at the hands of others, i.e., the Roman Empire and the Jewish leaders.

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<sup>11</sup> Robert Greene, *The Art of Seduction* (London: A Joost Elfers Book, 2001), 239.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Greene offers a variety of descriptions but I preferred one which is: To seduce is to enter the victim’s spirit (p. 219) and to create suspense (p. 241). To enter the spirit is to play by their rules, enjoy what they enjoy, adapt yourself to their moods. To keep them in suspense is to lead the seduced along and create a calculated surprise by giving the victim a thrill with a sudden change of direction.

<sup>13</sup> Wes Howard-Brook and Anthony Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire*, 88. Virgil – he is the one who make known to you that Caesar Augustus, the son of god, has to build a golden kingdom at this time ... till the land beyond the stars. Aelius Aristides (a preacher from Asia Minor) – Has not enough words to describe Rome ... would no one has to look at it as it is ... its nations shines their beauty ... paradise ... its law attracted the faith of the people to their gods. Edward Gibbon (Britain Historian) – In Roman Empire there is peace, freedom and the wealth of all the people and it nations.

<sup>14</sup> Gwyther, *Unveiling Empire: Reading Revelation Then and Now*, 88.

## 1.2 Literature Review

This section examines and reviews the identities proposed by scholars of the Woman in Revelation 12. The author of Revelation specifically mentions the identity of the Woman within the text. However, as the genre of writing appears to obscure historical identity in favour of metaphorical description, this chapter has been subdivided into five sections to discuss the predominant identities of the Woman as well as the promotion of a new identity consistent with traditional Jewish teachings.

### 1.2.1 The Woman as Israel

The majority of the scholars I have found so far have identified the Woman as Israel. The reason for this is because Israel represents the chosen people of God, to which He promised to be born a Redeemer of mankind, the Messiah, whom Christians have accepted as Jesus Christ.<sup>15</sup> Alternatively, Max J. Lee's view is that the Woman represents Jacob, Rachael and his twelve sons in Genesis 32:9.<sup>16</sup> Harrington also has his own different view; he regards the Woman as a bride, the Heavenly Jerusalem in

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<sup>15</sup> H. A. Ironside, *Revelation: An Ironside Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2004), 122., M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation - a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Kentucky Westminster John Knox Press, 1973), 152., Leon Morris, "Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary," in *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 205., George R. Beasley-Murray, "Revelation" in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. R. T. France D. A. Carson, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 1441., Thomas Hale, "Revelation," in *The Applied New Testament Commentary: Applying God's Word to Your Life* (Great Britain: David Cook 1996), 980., Dr. Richard Booker, *The Lamb and the Seven-Sealed Scroll: Understanding the Book of Revelation Book 2* (United States of America: Destiny Image Publisher, Inc., 2012), 212., Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 204., Max J. Lee, "Revelation," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, Baker Books, 2012), 1611-12.

<sup>16</sup> "Revelation," in *The Baker Illustrated Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 1611-12.

contrast to harlot Rome.<sup>17</sup> Lee and Harrington both believe the Woman was the co-creative partner of Israel and God.

### 1.2.2 The Woman as Virgin Mary

The scholars Boring and Murray mentioned that the Virgin Mary is symbolised by the Woman based on their Catholic understanding that the Virgin Mary was the channel of Jesus Christ's inauguration into the world.<sup>18</sup> As important a figure that Mary has played in Catholicism, or at one time in the universal church, it is very difficult to imagine that her veneration as an important religious figure during the early years of the 'Jesus movement' became a universally accepted truth. Furthermore, in the writings of the early church fathers, Mary is mentioned only occasionally and primarily in contrast to Eve.<sup>19</sup> Justin Martyr (d.c. 165) and Irenaeus (d.c. 202) contrasted Mary's obedience with Eve's disobedience.<sup>20</sup> The apocryphal Gospel of James, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and especially Athanasius affirmed Mary's perpetual virginity. This doctrine was accepted by both Western and Eastern Churches from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century onwards.<sup>21</sup> With such a late dating for the significance attributed to Mary, the mother of Jesus, it is unlikely that Revelation 12 is referring this wisdom figure to Mary.

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<sup>17</sup> O. P. Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Sacra Pagina - Revelation* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1993), 128.

<sup>18</sup> Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation - a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 152.

<sup>19</sup> Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (Rome: Ignatius Press, 1999), 161.

<sup>20</sup> Alister E McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 57.

<sup>21</sup> F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, "Mary, the Blessed Virgin," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1047 - 48.

### 1.2.3 The Woman as Eve

Tom Wright is one of the few scholars to identify the Woman as Eve. Wright acknowledges Eve as the ‘mother of all’ as mentioned in Revelation 12: 17 ‘...and went off to make war on the rest of her children.’<sup>22</sup> Daniel J. Harrington<sup>23</sup> supported this view, but in a larger context from the first book of the Old Testament. While the sin of the first Eve resulted in hate between her offspring and the serpent, the serpent will be struck down in connection with the Messiah’s birth, life and teachings. Another effect of Eve’s sin was pain in childbirth for women, so the new Eve cries out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth. And just as Eve was declared “the mother of all living” in this age or world, so the Woman of Revelation 12 will be the mother of all those who live in the new age or in a world inaugurated by Jesus the Messiah.

### 1.2.4 The Woman as the Church/People of God

Hale, Osborne and other scholars regarded the Woman as the Church and the People of God. Their views are based on the setting of the Book in the time of great persecution in which the majority of the scholars believed, although founded to be historically inaccurate.<sup>24</sup> This is one of the interesting identification of the Woman provides a concept of the Church/People of God as the body of Christ that has suffered and will suffer, but eventually be vindicated through a glorious resurrection. Furthermore, it promotes the Pauline idea that Christ is the head and the

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<sup>22</sup> Tom Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Great Britain: Ashford Colour Press, 2011), 107-08.

<sup>23</sup> Daniel J. Harrington, *What Are We Hoping For?: New Testament Images* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Boring, *Revelation: Interpretation - a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 152., Hale, "Revelation," 980., Beasley-Murray, "Revelation " 1441., Osborne, *Revelation Verse by Verse*, 204.

Church/People of God as the body as being-one in Christ. It provides an understanding that encourages and provides hope in times of struggles and tribulation in our Christian life journey. Yet, it seems very advanced and indicative of a well-established Church Father doctrine and theology beyond the late 1<sup>st</sup> Century and early 2<sup>nd</sup> Century's dating of Revelation.

### 1.2.5 The Woman as Wisdom

After reviewing the aforementioned historical interpretation of the Woman, I was inspired to examine it a little deeper and closer to the identity-beyond its historicity, but from the perspective of the Woman being a theological metaphor for wisdom. As mentioned above, Lee and Harrington allude to the Woman as creative partner of God in establishing the people of God through the use of 'Heavenly Jerusalem' in contrast to the deviant Rome. As mentioned in the Introduction, some of the apocalyptic and writings on wisdom personify *σοφία* as a woman, which strongly inspired me. For example, Greco-Roman goddesses were clothed or crowned with stars. Apollo's mother Leto wears a veil of stars.<sup>25</sup> Ancient coins picture the Ephesians Artemis with stars and a crescent moon.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Johannine School promotes the idea of the word being made flesh and the personification of Wisdom that Proverbs 8:22 states "*The Lord created me at the beginning of his work...*" Could these and others be evidence which suggests that the Woman can be viewed as the *σοφία*, the co-creative partner of God that is personified in the Child

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<sup>25</sup> R. H. Charles, *Critical and Exegetical of Revelation of St. John* (Edinburgh: T. & T Clarke, 1920), 315-16.

<sup>26</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myths in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula MT: Scholars for Harvard Theological Review, 1976), 63.

that God took to Himself, and in which Enoch testifies that dwelled in Heaven, was searching for a place to dwell on Earth but found nowhere, thus was taken back to Heaven. ‘Co-creator’, according to the Oxford Dictionary is someone who creates something jointly with another person or people. This meaning reflects the Woman (*σοφία*) as a person or deity level figure who joins God in some way with the creation of the world and even intervenes in human history from time to time. It seems that the appearance in the vision of the Woman in Heaven means that she is divine and perfect as well as belonging to God.

### **1.3 Methodology/Narrative Criticism**

In order to analyse the Woman in Revelation 12, I have selected narrative criticism as my preferred method of analysis. Narrative criticism allows me to focus on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the story in order to unmask and reveal the most fitting identity of the Woman in the overall evolvment of the narrative from beginning, middle, and end. Fidelity to the text is the instrument in narrative criticism – this chapter offers a brief outline of the preferred method and elements in which it is associated. In particular, I have chosen the study of Elizabeth Struthers Malbon on John’s narrative to guide this methodological journey.

Narrative criticism, in the scholarly world, is any attempt to critically analyse a series of stories. A profound description by Malbon, equivalent to Powell<sup>27</sup>, is that narrative criticism is a new approach to biblical studies derived from literary

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<sup>27</sup> Mark Allan Powell, "Narrative Criticism," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, M.I.: Paternoster Press, 1995), 239.

criticism.<sup>28</sup> To understand this criticism is to take heed of the relationship between the story and the discourse. The story asks the ‘what’ and the discourse asks the ‘how’ question and, together, they are integrated to give the content of a narrative.<sup>29</sup>

Malbon considers that the story contains specific elements such as character, setting and plot. Her new movement in literary criticism adds the fourth element, rhetoric, which identifies the story-as-discourse. The rhetoric answers the question, how does the story make meaning to us? Thus the story of the ‘Woman’ (Revelation 12) will be interpreted through the lens of story as discourse.

### 1.3.1 Story-as-Discourse/Elements

Malbon asserts that discourse is how the story is told; focusing on the beginning and ending of the narrative or, the rhetoric.<sup>30</sup> The discourse contains the literary nature of the story useful for critique. It is the interaction of the implied author and the implied reader that makes it distinctive from its content.<sup>31</sup> In the same manner, Seymour Chatman describes the discourse as the ‘expression’ of the narrative.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *"Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean,"* in Mark and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies, ed. Janice Capel Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 23. According to Malbon most scholars of the New Testament studies ask the ‘what’ question when reading a text. For example ‘what is going on in the story?’ The ‘what’ assigns to be historical in source, form, and redaction-criticism.

<sup>29</sup> Malbon, *"Narrative Criticism: How Does the Story Mean,"* 24. I am not intending to disqualify the historicity of literature but to seek possibilities to alternative readings. Malbon otherwise provides a new approach that sidelines the ‘what’ question and gives us what she calls a ‘paradigm shift in biblical studies’ that supplies internal meanings of texts, not referential meaning. The paradigm shift is a new way of asking ‘how the story presents’. It deals with absolutely the text itself and the way it communicates to us. This is called ‘a narrative discourse’ or ‘a story-as-discourse’.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>32</sup> Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (New York, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 19, 151.

Chatman adds that discourse also refers to narrative statement that expresses questions, commands or intentional declaration.

The elements of narrative criticism that will guide this paper are: Setting, Characters, Plot, and Rhetoric. Before I explore different elements or aspects of the story as discourse I offer three questions that will be answered in my exegesis. What meaning(s) is being relayed by the pericope extract of Biblical text in its final form? Does this story serve a purpose within the narrative with the preceding and proceeding stories? What lesson is taught?

## **Summary**

The use of narrative criticism will allow for a close investigation of the text in order to establish an alternative reading that examines the identity of the Woman to whom John is referring as being viewed from the lens of wisdom, based on the discourse, plot, characters, and rhetoric of John. What is her identity as a historical figure, or even as a figurative metaphor in understanding how God dealt with his people in this section of Revelation? In knowing her identity, how does that help to further explain and demonstrate John's purposes for writing Revelation? The next chapter is an exegetical examination of the identity of the Woman to determine whether she can be viewed, metaphorical or actual being, as wisdom. Furthermore, each element of narrative criticism used will be briefly explained before the exegesis.



## CHAPTER TWO

### EXEGESIS OF REVELATION 12: 1-17

This chapter contains the exegetical work of the text using the four elements of narrative criticism as explained in Chapter 1. The interpretation will be guided by my idea of the Woman as *σοφία* (wisdom) explained earlier, as a perspective to see or approach the text. Similarly, Jerry L. Sumney, viewed Revelation 12 as two interwoven stories, with one inserted into the other, which is similar to Mark's use of intercalation in several places in his Gospel.<sup>1</sup> But, I have considered Revelation 12 not just as two stories with an intercalation of the 'Michael and the dragon' story, but as a vision of three separate parts or stories:

Part 1: Verses 1-6, describing a Woman in the pains of childbirth and a dragon waiting to devour her child, but, the child was carried away to God and the Woman fled to the wilderness on Earth.

Part 2: Verses 7-12, describing a war breaking out in Heaven between Michael and the dragon, in which the dragon was defeated and cast down to Earth.

Part 3: Verses 13-17, describing the dragon's pursuit of the Woman who bore a child and since it could not get her, made war with the rest of the Woman's children.

The significance for me in the division are the markers that begin verse 7 and verse 13. Verse 7 begins, *Καὶ ἐγένετο* (And then), a transitory conjunction<sup>2</sup> to illustrate

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry L. Sumney, "The Dragon Has Been Defeated," *Revelation 12 Review and Expositor* 98(2001): 104.

<sup>2</sup> Conjunction has multiple functions in a sentence such as transition, continuity, and contrast. Vaitusi Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga, "Towards a Samoan Postcolonial Reading of Discipleship in

a break in thought between the former and the latter. Verse 13 likewise begins similarly, *Kaì ὅτε* (And when), another transitory conjunction. Thus, these breaks allow for a reading that separates the narrative into three individual pericopes or parts. In addition to a division according to language, the use of this division into three parts continues a dominant writing style in Revelation which promotes sets of threes or triads. For example, the seven seals (Chs.6-8), the seven trumpets (Chs.8-11), and the seven bowl (Ch. 16). Also, each these seven events contain sets of three. For example, the seven seals reveal the first four seals as Horsemen; the next two seals reveal a divine and earthly occurrence, with seal five concerning souls under an altar, and seal six regarding a great earthquake. Before the opening of seal seven, there is a great event in the explanation of the 144,000<sup>3</sup>, and another break in the story, before continuing the act of opening all seven seals. Three distinguishable divisions are found in this section of our narrative. Their significance will be discussed later in the plot and rhetoric section of this narrative.

I begin by reviewing at the settings, the situations where the story takes place and their significance. This will be followed by an analysis of the characters or people within the story and their interactions with the Woman. Following, will be a review of the plot of the story and how it progresses from its beginnings, as seen in the

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the Matthean Gospel" (The University of Auckland, 2014), 84. See also Stephanie Black, *Sentence Conjunctions in the Gospel of Matthew: Καὶ, Δέ, Τότε, Γάρ, Οὖν, and Asyndeton in Narrative Discourse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 144-78.

<sup>3</sup> The prophetic significance of the number 12 was noted in terms of how it related to the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples which illustrated all of God's people. In the end-times, God will have an army of 12 times 12,000--a total of 144,000 witnesses--special disciples who will prepare the world for Christ's final return (Rev. 7:2-3). John saw an angel carrying the official seal of the living God that is used as a mark of ownership. The seal was placed upon 144,000 people to identify them as the redeemed and true servants of God. These people will be secure from the mark and actions of the beast, as well as exempt from the judgments of God that will come upon the earth. Dr. Stephen E. Jones, *Understanding Biblical Numbers* (Clovis: Harvestime International Press, 2015), 63.

division of my pericope into three parts. These three parts are also symbolic of the beginning, middle, and end of the story. This captures nicely the movement of the narrative as an explanation of the narrative's event as a whole. Finally, the last section of this chapter will focus on the rhetoric of the story and the author's ultimate intent in placing this story within the larger story as a possible explanation of what is occurring in the lives of the Woman's children or, as I have been alluding to, for the children of *σοφία* (wisdom) the woman in Revelation 12.

## 2.1. Setting

As Malbon indicates, setting refers to time and space. It is the question of when and where the event takes place. It determines the reaction of characters involved in the story, organizes the story into its different scenarios, and serves a purpose in demonstrating how the movement of the stories from one scenario to another helps solidify the Author's thoughts and ideas with respect to significance and importance in conveying a message.

The setting of this particular pericope or narrative unit of Part 1, takes place in the mind of John the author, who sees a vision of two portents or signs in *οὐρανῷ* (Heaven):

1) A great portent with "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." However, the Woman is pregnant and crying out in birth pangs (NRSV).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See New Revised Standard Version - Revelation 12: 1

2) Another portent appeared, not great like the first but just another with “a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads.” His greatness is seen in how his tail swept across the heavens and threw down one third of the stars to Earth (NRSV).<sup>5</sup>

The vividness of these descriptions will be discussed later in the section about the characters, but this Heavenly scene does not end here. It continues with the Woman giving birth to a *υἱὸν ἄρσεν* (male child) that is to *ποιμαίνειν* (to tend, to shepherd, to lead to pasture, to rule over) all nations with an iron rod. This is an interesting observation, because the Woman’s description was divine yet filled with pain and agony, almost defenceless. This first part of the narrative ends with the Woman’s *τὸ τέκνον* (child) being *ἡρπάσθη* (caught up/carried away) to God and his throne while the Woman was sent to the *ἔρημον* (wilderness), a place prepared by God to be *τρέφωσιν* (fed, nourished, supported, and, cared for) for 1,260 days.

Thus the setting of the story transitions from Heaven to Earth in the *ἔρημον*, where God would provide for the Woman for 1,260 days. The significance of the number 1,260 days for me lies in that it is specific and particular, almost as to convey that God’s providence for his people as being finite, and will end, with the understanding that his people cannot hide forever from the rest of the world in the wilderness. However, in returning to the setting, the interesting movement for me is the transition from the divine to the earthly realm. The narrative begins with a glorious vision of a woman clothed with the astrological cosmos, yet writhing in pain, but concludes with her protection and care while on Earth. In reading this transition and

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<sup>5</sup> See New Revised Standard Version - Revelation 12: 3

keeping in mind how I see the Woman as *σοφία* (wisdom), Heaven according to the ancient Hebrews was the place of the stars, sun, and moons and of birds in Gen. 1:20; and Deut. 4:17 and it is the abode of God found in 1 Kings 8:30, and where God is enthroned as recorded in Isa.66:1.<sup>6</sup> Heaven is God's workstation; a place where all the machinations of the universe begins, which is important for *σοφία* to be present, especially if she is the first of all things created, as in the creation of the universe as described in the Book of Proverbs 8: 22. Her writhing in pain symbolizes a new birth, as an allusion to the New Heaven and New Earth that is to come later in Revelation. After she gives birth to this new creation, that creation or child is carried away to God, until the time that the new creation is to be introduced at the end of time to shepherd, protect, and rule all nations with a staff of iron. The return of *σοφία* to Earth is another play on the idea of God carrying to himself, like the child, so is the Woman who *ἔφωγεν* (sought shelter/safety) in the arms of God on Earth, as the *ἔρημον* (wilderness) has become synonymous with the place where God is found. This is seen in God's journeying together with the nation of Israel in the Book of Exodus to Deuteronomy, as well as when Elijah fled and escaped the wrath and punishment of Jezebel and sought solace in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:4ff). It is also the return of *σοφία* to the original creation to counsel, console, and encourage for the aftermath of Part 2 as seen in Part 3.

The setting of Part 2 takes place in Heaven but concludes with the dragon on Earth. It is the war between the protector of Heaven in Michael and his angels, against the darkness that is the dragon, which is also called the devil. As darkness comes face

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<sup>6</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1996), 408.

to face with the divine, it is subdued by Michael and his angelic army and cast down to Earth. In successive narratives, there are two entities that exit Heaven and are brought to Earth. We have *σοφία* in Part 1 and now the dragon in Part 2. However, the point of interest is that *σοφία* was returned home to her safe haven, Earth, while the dragon was cast down as if to continue a battle that was started in the divine realm; but is now on Earth against the fictive representations of God's divinity in *σοφία* and creation. Furthermore, according to the *φωνήνμεγάλην* (great voice) in Heaven, the defeat of the dragon/devil that is the symbol of evil and darkness comes with a consequence. The consequence is that its time on Earth would be limited. However, it did not stop him from displaying his *θυμὸνμέγαν* (great wrath) upon *σοφία* and her descendants. This sets up in Part 3 a face to face encounter between *σοφία* and her children and the dragon/devil before it is permanently subdued.

The setting for Part 3 and the final chapter of the encounter is Earth. The event begins with the dragon setting out for revenge for what God's army (Michael and the Angels) did to it. Thus, the dragon's initial focus was *σοφία*, the first amongst creation (Proverbs 8:22) for she was God's divine protector like Michael on Earth. However, for all the dragon's greatness and power, he could not subdue God's wisdom, *σοφία*, therefore he sought to destroy not only *σοφία* but her children, God's creation on Earth. In an attempt to drown her with a massive flood, the Earth came to *σοφία*'s rescue and saved her, thus restoring and reaffirming God's creation. The dragon/devil, knowing that *σοφία* could not be harmed and/or destroyed; he thus focused his attention on her children and the Earth. In Revelation 12, John portrays a summary of the battle that was raged by the dragon upon God and his wisdom which created and populated the Earth, the descendants. The shift in setting is a portrayal of what is to

come in this final episode of the descendants' dealings with the dragon/devil. The shift from Heaven to Earth, Heaven to Earth, and now Earth, needs to be concluded stylistically. Thus the conclusion of this story is the further fall downwards, thus the fall of the dragon/devil downwards into the bottomless pit and eventually the fiery lake of sulphur, as seen later in Revelation 20. The initial throwing down into a pit of the dragon/devil/Satan that brings peace for 1000 years (20:2) and his eventual downfall and destruction when Satan/devil will be thrown down "into the lake of fire and sulphur...forever and ever" (20:10). Although the dragon thought that his power was enough to rule Heaven and Earth, it was *σοφία* that reminded it of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence.

## **2.2. Characters**

This section will identify the characters of the narrative unit; they are those with names, nicknames, portrayals and are known within the narratives by their words and actions. They also are recipients of what others speak to or about them. They help unfold a plot of a narrative through juxtaposition. This will help to shape and explore how my reading of the Homan as *σοφία* contributes to the overall plot, rhetoric, and themes being put forth by John.

### **2.2.1. Woman (*σοφία*)**

A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and her head a crown of twelve stars. She is the mother of a son who is snatched into Heaven. Peter Blair considered that the mention of the sun, moon and stars is suggestive of the

creation story, in particular in Gen 1:16;<sup>7</sup> and we have the same view. With such an idea in mind, I was reminded of Proverbs 1:20ff, in which wisdom was characterized as a woman. Furthermore, she was also an active participant of creation, being the first created as noted in Proverbs 8:22ff. Now, in Revelation when John speaks of such a Woman in birth pangs about to give birth to a new creation, it made it obvious for me that maybe this woman needs to be seen in light of *σοφία* and how God uses this wisdom to convey the message to John and to all those adherents listening and reading Revelation.

In following *σοφία* throughout the narrative, she does not speak, besides writhing in pain, she only moves according to the will of God. After she gives birth, she returns to the wilderness, a place where God is found and provides counsel for the weary, before returning to begin or continue a journey. This idea is seen in the temptation stories of Jesus according to the Synoptic Gospel writers, Mark, Matthew, and Luke. How the wilderness, a desolate and lonely place to prepare one physically, mentally, and spiritually for the divine journey, was also a place in which healing, teaching, and counselling took place before the mission (Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13; Luke 4:14). Likewise, *σοφία* returns to where she knows God's providence and protection exists. Furthermore, in Part 3 of the narrative in which she encounters the dragon/devil, it is her children, the Heavens and the Earth that come to her rescue, in the description of the wings of an eagle and the Earth swallowing the flood that aided in her rescue. Angry and upset, the dragon/devil focuses now on the descendants of *σοφία*, her children, and her descendants. As children are representations of their

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Blair, "An Exegesis of Revelation 12: 1-6," *CTQ* 74(2001): 1.



parents and bear their attributes, the *φωνὴν μεγάλην* (great voice) in Heaven is aware that the dragon/devil/Satan's short reign on Earth is due to the fact that the children will defeat him because they too possess *σοφία* that fears and reveres God as stated in Proverbs 1:7.

### 2.2.2. Dragon

The dragon is described as a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. Such a description provides an unsurmountable foil to the unarmed, writhing in pain; pregnant woman as a contrast of strength, power, and authority. The reference to the dragon as a mythical creature, allows the author to intensify the imagery of a terrifying, destructive beast to characterize the devil/Satan, the ultimate antithesis to God. His red colour suggests bloodshed and life. The seven heads represent mountains (Rev 17:9) and the ten horns represent kings (Rev 17:12; cf. Dan 7:7-8, 20, and 24).<sup>8</sup> Yet with such overwhelming, vicious and violent attributes as also seen in a tail that “swept down a third of the stars of Heaven and threw them to the earth,” I am reminded of Ecclesiastes 9:15ff, in which Qoheleth<sup>9</sup> stated, “Wisdom is better than might; The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools.” The reason being is that the excessive exaggeration of the terror and fearfulness of this beast makes it cartoonish and very unreal. This exaggeration is used to stress a point, yet sarcastically alludes to how

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<sup>8</sup> K. A. Schneider, *The Book of Revelation Decoded* (Florida: Charisma House Book Group, 2014), 330.

<sup>9</sup> Qoheleth is the English transliteration of the Hebrew title of Ecclesiastes. Qoheleth is a Hebrew word that is translated as preacher, teacher, speaker or philosopher. Qoheleth kept an ear in readiness to hear something worthwhile; he searched high and low for appropriate insights; and he grouped the resulting sayings in an understandable way. Qoheleth collected sayings and in doing so arrived at the complete picture that life amounts to a huge zero. Chad Brand, ed. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2015), 979.

really weak the beast is. Because, for all the greatness possessed by the dragon/devil/Satan physically and descriptively, he was no match for even the slightest folly of God, the creation that didn't fear and revere, but eventually became empowered and threw him into a pit and a lake of fire and sulphur to perish forever.

### **2.2.3. The Child (*υἱὸν ἄρσεν*)**

The term used initially for the child born to σοφία is *υἱὸν ἄρσεν* (male son). This is very important, because the use of the term *υἱὸν*, generally connotes Jesus as the *υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ* (son of God). However, *ἄρσεν* adds a nuance to the child's true intentions as the inheritor, the one who will take on the attributes of both the mother and the father. Furthermore, as a male child, he also becomes an heir of his father's possessions. In this case, using the term *υἱὸν* to connote Jesus seems sensible for the bigger picture as the ultimate representative of this child. But for the smaller narrative unit, the important fact being displayed is that the male child has inherited his mother's wisdom as a descendant and offspring of σοφία. In addition to this fact, everywhere else the child is mentioned, a variance of the term *τέκνον* (child) is used. Thus, the *υἱὸν ἄρσεν*, used at the time of birthing is to reiterate that this son has inherited his mother's wisdom and was immediately taken up to God and the throne until the desired time when the New Creation is introduced, when the child will come forth to tend, lead, shepherd, and rule the nations. Is the time duration of these events associated with the 1,260 days? Perhaps it is, but to reiterate, the time is fixed and only means that it will not be for eternity, but that it will occur.

#### 2.2.4. Michael and his Angels

Michael and his angels (*Μιχαήλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ*) are mentioned as the divine representatives of God fighting against the dragon/devil/Satan in Part 2 of our narrative unit. Not much is known of Michael, only that intertextually, he is also mentioned in Jude 1:9 as the *ἀρχάγγελος* (archangel). The prefix *ἀρχ-* is also found in the term for ruler (*ἀρχόντες*). Thus Michael is the ruling angel or head angel, the first of God's divine army to fight on behalf of Him against the enemy. This is interesting as Proverbs 8:22 illustrates that *σοφία* too was the first amongst creation, just as John 1:2-3; Jesus was at the beginning with everything coming into being through Him. Is it possible that John had this idea in mind when writing this part of his vision, as an allusion or as a recollection? Returning to the narrative, Michael and his army defeat the dragon/devil/Satan and he *ἐβλήθη* (was thrown/was cast down) to Earth. The same verb "to cast" or "to throw down" is also found in Revelation 20:3; and 20:10, when referring to the other two times when the dragon/devil/Satan was thrown into a pit for a 1,000 years (20:3) and finally destroyed by being cast into the fiery lake of sulphur (20:10). The reason this is mentioned is that the last two acts of throwing down was due to a defeat by *σοφία* and her descendants that the dragon/devil/Satan waged war on during Part 3 of this narrative unit. Although it does not occur within the narrative unit, but it is inferred in Part 2 of it (12:12) when the great voice says, "*...But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*" The narrative units (Part 1-3) establish that the current time of pain and suffering is like the birth pangs, that will eventually end, and the ushering of a new creation will mark a time of celebration and joy. Thus, *Μιχαήλ καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ* foreshadow the ultimate defeat and destruction of the

dragon/devil/Satan as seen in what σοφία and her children do to them in the rest of Revelation, especially 20:3 and 20:10.

### 2.2.5. The Earth

The Earth as a character is connected to the idea that the descendants of σοφία were creation, as she was the first and aided in Earth's birth. Thus, when speaking about the descendants of σοφία, the Earth and Heavens take on the attributes of their mother. Furthermore, Earth is also seen to participate in the story by taking on human-like qualities in order to aid in the assistance and safety of their mother, σοφία. In Revelation 12:16, *"But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth."* This characterization of the Earth allows for a reading of the Earth in this narrative unit as a character, and thus plays an important part in moving the story along to demonstrate how it further infuriates the dragon/devil/Satan to the point in which the new focus was now the children of σοφία.

### 2.2.6. The Children (σπέρματος)

The last character within the story is the σπέρματος αὐτῆς (her seed/her descendants/her children) in Revelation 12:17. This interesting depiction of σοφία's offspring's being referred to in the Greek as her σπέρματος (seed) instead of her τέκνοι (children), further emphasizes the idea of creation and the seeds representing all that was created not only humanity, the caretaker of creation. Thus the onus is on humanity to τηρούντων τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ (maintain the commandments of God) and ἔχοντων τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ (hold the testimony of Jesus). Thus the σπέρματος is the

last line of defence to finally defeat the dragon/devil/Satan keeping God first and foremost and holding steadfastly to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

### **2.3. Plot**

The plot, as Malbon suggests, is a derivative of the interaction between the characters and setting as well as between the characters themselves to create conflict which unfolds within the story as it moves from its beginning; to the end. Thus, the plot are the events within the story that helps us to understand the entrance and exits of various entities and how together they point to the what of the narrative, or in other words, the story is about.

If Revelation 12 is considered as a whole narrative unit divided into three parts, as mentioned earlier, those three divisions could also help to demarcate the beginning, middle and ending of the story. As discussed earlier with the setting and the transitions from Heaven to Earth what ultimately ensues? To the interactions between the Woman and the dragon; Michael and his angels and the dragon, to finally the dragon and the Woman and her children. The plot illustrates a three-fold engagement between the dragon/devil/Satan and the Kingdom of God, the divine agents of God, and – the created of God. The movement between these three stories helps to situate a narrative that does not correspond to a chronological ordering of events within a specific time and space; rather, it offers a suggestive commentary of how to view the events occurring in history with God's dealings with the dragon/devil/Satan/evil/darkness, etc. Eventually, for all the great power and destructive capabilities afforded the dragon in the Heavenly and earthly realms, its ultimate destruction is sealed. No matter what the dragon does, God's *σοφία* has already illustrated what will become of those who

go against and oppose God. In Revelation 12:12 as the *φωνὴν μεγάλην* (great voice) in Heaven proclaimed, “*Rejoice then, you Heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!*” Although the narrative unit concludes with the dragon making war on the *σπέρματος* of *σοφία*, the message is clear, “patiently endure” and remember your “first love” as John wrote to the Church in Ephesus 2:1-7, for the time will come when the dragon/devil/Satan will be destroyed for a 1000 years and then finally for good, as he is cast into the fiery lake of sulphur.

## 2.4. Rhetoric

Rhetoric is the integration of characters, settings and the plot to offer persuasive ways to read a certain account or text. The idea, by Malbon, is for the author to persuade the reader, in order for the reader to ‘understand’, ‘share’ and ‘extend’ what the author implies.

When the setting, characters, and the plot are placed together in the story, the persuasive argument resonating for me as a reader of this text, is the admonition to be patient, to endure and hold tight to God during the storm. The setting of Heaven and Earth helps to put the battle between good and evil into perspective as a reassurance that no matter where evil comes from, it can never overcome goodness. Furthermore, the characters that enter and exit the stories speak of the same idea, especially when contrasting the Woman and the dragon. For the Woman to symbolize and represent *σοφία*, I find this reading perspective to be very empowering and reliable in the understanding of the text. For if *σοφία* is to be understood as the reverence of God, then the acknowledgement of God and respecting and fearing Him above all else, will

always overcome evil/darkness/the dragon/the devil/Satan. Thus, if the *σπέρματος* of *σοφία* continues to profess and promote this idea, then no matter how cunning, great, powerful, vicious, and violent the dragon may appear to be, its time is limited and its destruction will cease. As Ecclesiastes 9:13ff and 1 Corinthians alludes to, “*Wisdom is better than might;*” God’s wisdom has already put everything into its place and order before the great Revelation that is the Second Coming of Christ.

Finally, when the plot is included in this integrative reading, there is a story that begins with a divine confrontation between God’s creative act and the dragon as a way to insinuate a perfect creation that is made imperfect with the intervention of the dragon to devour and destroy God’s creation as personified in the story of Creation found in Genesis. The second part of the narrative unit focuses on the battle between the agents of God and the dragon as a symbol of Evil. In the end God always wins out, but it is not without its consequences as a third of the stars are struck down to Earth. In the final part of the narrative or the ending of the story, the dragon seeks God’s *σοφία* as a way to end his suffering and to secure victory over God on Earth, but even that is futile, as all of his actions are stopped by the descendants of the *σοφία*. Thus, the final push to overcome God was through the *σπέρματος* of *σοφία* which wages on as the narrative ends. However, as the longer narrative of Revelation is continued in Chapter 20, it is apparent that the dragon/devil/Satan falls and falls mightily. Not only is their influence subdued for 1,000 years, but it is eventually cast into the fiery lake of sulphur to disappear forever from God’s creation. In the end, the persuasive argument being made by John is for patient endurance and to return to God if you have forgotten Him due to the allure and seduction of the great dragon.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this final chapter, I discuss the importance of the narrative through my idea of *ΣΟΦΙΑ* in the vision of the Woman in Revelation 12. The meaning of the shifting of setting by John, the interactions of the characters and the significant acts that helps to move the plot along within this narrative unit, although still within the realm of apocalyptic literature as a vision given to John.

#### 3.1. Discussion

In using the idea of *σοφία* to read the vision of the Woman found in the narrative of Revelation 12. The main question of this paper ask, whether the Woman in Revelation 12 was an historical figure or even a metaphor in understanding how God dealt with his people from the Old Testament and into the current age of the writing of Revelation? After the exegetical work, this reading is possible based on the textual evidences of this narrative. Thus, I have expressed that the woman as the *σοφία* of God could be another way to read the Woman in Revelation 12. The Woman was the Wisdom of God which dealt with the people from the Old Testament to the current age of the writing of Revelations. What is meant by this is that God's wisdom has moulded, nurtured, and guided history with the outcome already known to God, but revealed to his people through visions and revelations to explain how history will eventually unfold by the end of time, and where his people ought to be by that time.



Earlier in the thesis, I discussed *σοφία* and how she is personified as a female who the Lord created at the beginning of his work according to Proverbs 8:22 to act as his co-creative partner. She was involved in the creation of all things and knows all things especially of their beginning and eventual ending. In addition to being created at the beginning, Proverbs 1:7 also testifies that the origin of her inception was the fear of God. Thus, in the beginning she was created to instil a fear of God, not so much in the term of to be afraid and to stand afar from, but in the sense of to respect and revere as the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. Furthermore, Enoch testified that she dwelled in Heaven and was searching for a place to dwell on Earth and was eventually taken back to Heaven. These descriptions have been made known and grounded my earlier reading of the Woman from Revelation 12.

The significance of this recap of *σοφία* in John's narrative was to situate how the narrative unit should read. The changes from Heaven to Earth and what is to come? John utilizes time and space to show his readers the beginning, middle, and ending of the story. The relationship between the Woman, and the dragon; Michael and his angels and the dragon, later the dragon and the Woman and her children. The example proves the bond between the devil/Satan and the Kingdom of God, Heavenly representatives of God, and what was-created by God. The activity between these three stories helps to explain the story that the events are not chronological order within a specific time and opportunity; instead, to offer an idea of the way to perceive historical events as well as God's dealings with the devil/Satan/evil/dark, and so on. As a result, the great power, and the power which made the dragon to Heavenly and earthly kingdoms, his greatest destruction was sealed. As a result, for all the great power and devastating potential abilities of the dragon in the Heavenly and earthly

realms, its final destruction is sealed. God's *σοφία* has already illustrated what will become of those who go against and oppose God.

The narrative analysis shows wisdom as the Woman, as a way to show a great deal in this story; about the interaction between the dragon and the people, and especially the people in their belief in God, and what happens in their heart while being seduced by the trappings of the Roman Empire. Yet the visions are intended to help the people understand that, they do not have to fear Rome but that they must return to fear God, because that is where they find the true reward, the eternal reward that comes to them if they repent and return to God.

It also reminds readers that sometimes they may feel weary and tired because of the problems of life; however, pursuit of wisdom in the wilderness is the mark of seeking God's wisdom.

This wilderness is where people must go to remove themselves from environments clustered with worshipping other gods and religions, to find true peace and God's wisdom. From this peaceful place, one can find strength to stand firm as a witness of God and the Gospel and to continue daily lives in a relationship with God. It is where one can renew strength and faith in the Lord just as Jesus went into the wilderness to pray during his ministry.

It also reflects the collaboration between the creation and the descendants of wisdom. It provides a sense of how intelligent children may work together to protect their mother from her enemies. But this is the wisdom God has given to the believer and stays with them so that they can work together, to help and strengthen one another. Yet, the mentioning of the 1,260 days, reminds us that we cannot hide in the

wilderness forever from the problems and difficulties of this world. The wilderness is the place where one finds the strength to carry on and face problems fearlessly. God gives us the strength to face trials and tribulations in seemingly insurmountable and difficult times in order to test our faithfulness and help our testimony of Jesus Christ to remain intact as we experience the success of the New Jerusalem.

The result of the research is clear to me that Revelation 12 is John trying to convey an important message to the readers. He is not trying to mount challenge or gather the people against Rome, but Revelation 12 is more about creating and stoking the fires of faith in Christians at this time of seduction. It is the wisdom of God in which one must put one's faith, for the wisdom of God has been realised in the defeat of the dragon or the darkness. The true wisdom that people must have, the wisdom in fearing God, for the wisdom of man will come to an end, but the wisdom of God is eternal.

### **3.2. Conclusion**

In conclusion, narrative criticism provides a possible option to explore the Woman in Revelation 12. I conclude that the reading of the Woman as the Σοφία of God in Revelation 12 gives one of many ways to better understand this vision of her from the lens of a Christian reader and believer. However, this is not an effort to nullify the traditional interpretation of the Woman already in place but to widen the scope and understanding of how these visions were sayings/metaphors/symbolism that the writers of the Book of Revelation assembled to craft the story we have in its final form. Based on this final form, what can be assumed as a possible interpretation based on the narrative of the vision from beginning, middle, and end?

Based on my findings, I believe that the Bible continues to speak to us today regarding the recent events affecting our churches and faith communities. The vision of the Woman in Revelation 12 has much the same purpose as the whole book. The visions are considered to help the readers understand and interpret their experience of being Christians seduced by the beauty of the Roman Empire in order to give them hope and to encourage perseverance. In Revelation 12 they are given images of the unusual size, power and recklessness of the opposition. But Christians are assured that the wisdom or the fear of God has conclusively defeated Satan. The wisdom of God and this defeat of evil are accomplished and secure. There is no doubt about the final outcome because the final battle has already been fought and won. This means that the place of Christians with God is secure, their greatest victory over the powers of evil or darkness is certain.

John draws on well-known and powerful imagery in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century to interpret the situation his readers faced. The terrible images serve to assure the readers that Satan has been finally defeated; his defeat is forever recorded in Revelation 20: 3, 20: 10. Yet, despite the certainty of the outcome, the battle still occurs on Earth, and the beneficiaries of God's wisdom still suffer and die because Satan is determined to do as much damage as possible while he still has a chance. John assures his audiences including us (descendants) that the future of those who fear God is secure.

John's audiences knew all too well, that the ultimate victory does not ensure that Christians and those who fear God are trouble free. They were significantly disadvantaged by being beneficiaries of wisdom, even when they were not being violently opposed. John proclaims that, while the people of God may be seduced by a

‘dragon’, that is never the last word, because the wisdom of God represented by Michael and his angels foreshadowed the ultimate defeat and destructions of the dragon. So, the admonition is that Christians must remain faithful. To deny God’s wisdom or fear is detrimental to humankind. By describing the total defeat of Satan, John has shown how foolish it would be to reject God’s wisdom and surrender to Satan’s demands.

John also puts the struggle by the children of Σοφία into a worldly perspective. Their problems are not isolated events with any broader meaning, but manifestations of the struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. Thus, their faithfulness must be seen to have significance far beyond their individual circumstances. Their decisions are part of a greater struggle that includes God’s wisdom, Michael and his angels and children, and all those who support maintaining wisdom. These decisions all stand to protect Σοφία (wisdom) from Satan.

The final outcome of the contest between good and evil has already been established. Worldly seduction is evidence that the forces of evil are increasing in a last, desperate attack; an attack which is impossible to succeed. Christians must hold fast to their testimony of Jesus Christ because, even if it costs them their life, their eternal reward of joy and happiness with God is assured. The ultimate question facing readers is whether to remain on the side which will be victorious.

The vision again is to encourage the readers of Revelation 12 to remain faithful to the gospel. By interpreting their experience as he has, John makes faithfulness to the confession of Christ and maintaining separation from the world the only reasonable choice. Failing to adhere to the commandments of God means that one

denies the wisdom to fear God and to join the side of the battle that is certain to lose, even though it appears to be powerful.

John also highlights the difference of the way of the dragon and God's way. The Kingdom of God is not represented by the success and rewards of our earthly time, which is the dragon's way. That way, all the successes of this earthly world, the pleasures of the earth are given to you instantly. God's way, as shown by John, is totally different. Some may experience the successes of this world but most will not, most will know only pain and suffering for their belief as many of the Christians faced in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

John calls for faithfulness to the Gospel in every aspect of life. And this faith means that readers will face trials and tribulations, and that there will be hardships along the way. But to keep faith in God is the way to persevere; the riches of this world do not compare to the rewards God has in store for his faithful and they will also be able to enjoy them eternally and not just for the short time here on Earth.

John reminds us that the true measure of our lives is not determined by how we fare in this world, but by our belonging to God, the God who has secured a place for us with Him when we have endured with faith. Through the visions, John encourages us to live up to our confession of Christ faithfully in the knowledge and confidence that God sustains us now, just as God nourished the Woman in the wilderness, and that God will grant us a final place with Him.

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