

Unlocking the Book of Revelation

Part I Soon & Apokalupsis

“The *revelation* of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must *soon* take place” (Rev 1:1)

Many Christians find that the Book of Revelation is the most difficult book in the New Testament to understand. More than one person has abandoned trying to make sense of its vivid imagery. Yet, the opening verse informs the reader that Jesus intends to reveal himself in the passages that follow. How does this declaration makes sense in a book that is so puzzling it seems incomprehensible?

On the other hand, the figurative language of the book has led to some very fanciful interpretations. For example, the passage in Revelation 9:16: *“The number of troops of cavalry has twice ten thousand times ten thousand,”* was interpreted by Hal Lindsey as a prediction of an impending invasion of 200 million Red Chinese soldiers. Others have suggested that the number of the beast from the earth, 666 (Rev 13:18), identifies President Ronald (6) Wilson (6) Reagan (6) because he had six letters in each of his three names. It is doubtful that this interpretation came from a Republican!

Biblical fantasizing is a mouth-watering delight to Hollywood as it provides a springboard for apocalyptic movies designed to titillate moviegoers. So Arnold Schwarzenegger saves the end of the world by preventing a woman from being impregnated by the seed of the antichrist. Nor should we forget those intrepid heroes Bill Murray and Dan Akroyd who saved New York City from the peril of a 500-foot Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man. Being imaginative can be fun, but it is certainly not serious biblical exegesis.

Much of the difficulty in understanding the book of Revelation comes from disconnecting it from the rest of the Bible. This is understandable in one sense because we tend to think of and even identify the books of the Bible as separate works. After all, they were composed by different human authors spanning many centuries. However, the Bible is primarily a work of divine composition. Therefore the inspiration of the Holy Spirit provides a unifying context that organically connects each of the books of Sacred Scripture. From this perspective, the books that make up the Bible should be viewed as the chapters of an integrated work, must be interpreted in connection with one another. This is especially true of the book of Revelation, which constitutes the last chapter. Thus, if Revelation is read as a stand alone work it is incomprehensible.

Unfortunately, many readers of Revelation are not that familiar with the earlier chapters. They may not even have read them. This is a serious obstacle to understanding Revelation because it draws on numerous earlier biblical passages.

Merrill C. Tenney, for example, identified 348 clear Old Testament references in the Book of Revelation.¹ David Chilton argues that the Book of Revelation was intended to be read at Christian worship in tandem with the prophecy of Ezekiel.²

Revelation and Ezekiel Parallels³

1. The Throne-vision (Rev 4/Ez 1)
2. The Book (Rev 5/Ez 2-3)
3. The Four Plagues (Rev 6:1-8/Ez 5)
4. The Slain under the Altar (Rev 6:9-11/Ez 6)
5. The Wrath of God (Rev 6:12-17/Ez 7)
6. The Seal on the Saint's Foreheads (Rev 7/Ez 9)
7. The Coals from the Altar (Rev 8/Ez 10)
8. No More Delay (Rev 10:1-7/Ez 12)
9. The Eating of the Book (Rev 10:8-11/Ez 2)
10. The Measuring of the Temple (Rev 11:1-2/Ez 40-43)
11. Jerusalem and Sodom (Rev 11:8/Ez 16)
12. The Cup of Wrath (Rev 14/Ez 23)
13. The Vine of the Land (Rev 14:18-20/Ez 15)
14. The Great Harlot (Rev 17-18/Ez 16, 23)
15. The Lament over the City (Rev 18/Ez 27)
16. The Scavengers' Feast (Rev 19/Ez 39)
17. The First Resurrection (Rev 20:4-6/Ez 37)
18. The Battle with Gog and Magog (Rev 20:7-9/Ez 38-39)
19. The New Jerusalem (Rev 21/Ez 40-48)
20. The River of Life (Rev 22/Ez 47)

I intended to offer interpretative keys that will open up this wonderful gift from the Holy Spirit. However, I will not be giving a commentary on the entire book. For those of you who wish to dive into a deeper understanding of Revelation, I recommend the commentaries listed below in the footnotes.⁴ Now let's turn to two key words found in the first verse of Revelation: "soon" and "revelation".

¹ *Interpreting Revelation*, p. 101.

² *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 22.

³ *The Days of Vengeance*, p. 21.

⁴ Michael Barber, *Coming Soon: Unlocking the Book of Revelation*. This is a very readable commentary presented in everyday language by a fine biblical scholar. The research is first rate. The commentary is relatively short, only 289 pages.

David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*. This fine Presbyterian scholar is no longer with us, but his commentary is worth reading. Unfortunately, it is no longer in print and copies are expensive.

Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible New Testament, "Revelation."* This pithy commentary is very well done. It makes understanding Revelation accessible to those who will not read a full-blown commentary.

“Soon”

Note that the stated purpose of the book is to show things that “must *soon* take place.” The Greek word that is translated as “soon” has the meaning of “speedily,” or “quickly” (See: Lk 18:8; Acts 12:7; 22: 18; 25:4; Rom 16:20). The emphasis on “soon” is also evidenced in subsequent passages (Rev 1:3; 22:6-7, 10, 12, 20). This word choice makes no sense if the message is primarily about the end of the world – an event that has not yet occurred. Attempts to explain away this obvious difficulty by citing Peter, “with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet 3:8), is unsatisfying.

In the Old Testament God’s coming often meant that he was coming in *judgment* (Is 19:1; 26:21; Jer 4:11-13). During the last week of his earthly life Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple: “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (Mt 24:2). Later he added: “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place” (Mt 24:34). The Greek word translated as “generation” refers to a period of 40 years. Jesus died in 30 A.D. and he came in judgment on Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 A.D. when both were utterly destroyed.

Thus, the book of Revelation looks primarily to Jesus coming “soon” in judgment on Old Testament Jerusalem and its Temple. In describing the coming destruction Jerusalem is identified: “their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, *where their Lord was crucified*” (Rev 11:8). Subsequently, Jerusalem was called “Babylon” (Rev 14:8; 17 & 18). However, from the perspective of Revelation and Matthew 24 the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem also looks to the end of the world. Ancient Jews viewed the Temple as a microcosm of the universe so it was natural to view its destruction in connection with the world destruction.

What, then, is the meaning of the following passages? “The sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place” (Rev 6:12-14).

In these verses John employs stock biblical de-creation language that announces, “*Your time is up,*” as is evident in the citations below:

- *Sun* - turns black, i.e., gives no light (Ex 10:21-23; Job 9:7; Is 5:30; 24:23; Ez 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; 3:15; Amos 8:9; Mic 3:6; Mt 24: 29; Mk 13: 24; Lk 21:25)
- *Moon* - is defiled, turns to blood (Job 25:5; Is 13:10; 24:23; Ez 32:7; Joel 2:10, 31; Mt 24: 29; Mk 13:24; Lk 21:25)
- *Stars* - falls to the earth (Job 9:7; Eccl 12:2; Is 13:10; 34:4; Ez 32:8; Dan 8:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Mt 24:29; Mk 13: 25; Lk 21:25)
- *Firmament* - the heaven vanished like a scroll (Is 34:4; 54:6; Ps 102:25-26;

- *Land* - Every mountain will be removed (Job 9:5-6; 14:18-19; 28:9-11; Is 41:5; 15-16; Ez 28:20; Nah 1:4-8; Zeph 2:11; Dan 9:16; Mt 17:21; 21:21; 24:20; Mk 11:23)

“Revelation”

John’s use of the Greek word *apokalupsis*, “revelation,” exposes another layer of meaning in addition to that discussed above, namely, Jesus the Lord of history coming in judgment. In the ancient Jewish wedding ceremony that lasted seven days, the *apokalupsis* was the climax of the festivity. The bride and groom arrayed as a queen and king would be carried aloft to the wedding chamber where, after the guests respectfully withdrew, the *apokalupsis* or “unveiling” occurred. The marriage was then consummated as the two “become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). John’s use of this marital imagery in the first verse of Revelation is profoundly significant.

From the biblical perspective God’s revelation is not viewed primarily as data, truths, facts, and doctrinal or prepositional statements as useful as this might be. God’s revelation is a Person, Jesus Christ, who enters into a covenantal relationship with us. The terms the Bible uses to depict the covenant are “family bond” and “marriage.” Therefore, God’s revelation draws us to “know” (Gen 4:1, 17, 25) Jesus in the covenantal-marital bond by which he forms a marital relationship with our souls. This is accomplished through worship, a central theme of Revelation.

Part II The Seven Letters Chapters 2 and 3

One of the challenges in understanding the Book of Revelation is grappling with the multiple layers of meaning that are imbedded in this amazing work. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the seven letters addressed to seven churches in chapters two and three.

Before introducing the seven letters, John was transported by the Spirit “on the Lord’s day” (Rev 1:10), that is, on Sunday the special day of worship when Christians commemorate the Resurrection of Jesus (Acts 20:7; Lk 24:1-7). The prophet Ezekiel was also transported to different locations by the Spirit (Ezek 2:2 3:14; 11:1; 40:2). Scholars identify the important connection between Revelation and Ezekiel.⁵ M. D. Goulder sees the step-by-step pegging of the two books as the formation of a lectionary to be read together at public Christian worship.⁶

⁵ Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press (1987), pp. 20-25; Albert Vanhoye, “L’utilisation du Livre d’Ezechiel dans l’Apocalypse,” *Biblica* 453 (1962), pp. 436-476 (esp. pp. 473-476); Philip Carrington, *The Meaning of the Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1931), p. 65.

⁶ Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies,” *New Testament Studies* 27, No. 3 (April 1981), p. 350.

John describes his vision of Jesus using images from both Ezekiel and Daniel, which depict Jesus in his divinity and his humanity. Jesus' hair is white like that of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9). His voice is described like the rumbling of God's glory (Ezek 43:2). He has the appearance of "one like a son of man" (Dan 7:13). "His face is like the appearance of lightening, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude" (Dan 10:6). Jesus' long robe identifies him as the true high priest (Ex 28:4; Sir 45:8). The "keys of Death and Hades" (Rev 1:18) signify that Jesus has the power over life and death. The image of the seven golden lampstands draws from the *menorah*, the branched candelabra, which burned in the Temple (Ex 25:31-39; Zech 4:2). In Revelation it symbolizes the seven churches.

In this brief review of the preamble to the seven letters, the intricacy of Revelation is already evident together with John's allusions to five Old Testament books in just a few verses. This raises the question, why the complexity in an inspired work that aims to reveal Jesus Christ not obscure him? I believe the answer lies in the impossibility of adequately capturing the supernatural realities of John's vision with the finite limitations of human language. Faced with this impossible task, John relies on the reality of the covenant, which is the great theme weaving in and out of every book of the Bible, and multiple Old Testament images that give a glimpse of heavenly realities.

The covenant is the oath by which God weds himself to his people. This unique family bond carries with it mutual obligations and promises. It is not surprising that the biblical notion of the covenant finds a reflection in the structure of the ancient Near Eastern peace treaties between kings and their vassals. After all, culture developed from the descendants of Noah's family with whom God renewed the covenant he made with Adam. These ancient treaties had a five-part structure:⁷

1. **Preamble** – Identified the lordship of the king stressing his greatness and his nearness
2. **Historical Prologue** – Provided a review of the king's relationship with the vassal, emphasizing the blessings the king bestowed
3. **Ethical Stipulations** – These enumerate the vassal's obligations
4. **Sanctions** – The blessings for obedience and the curses for disobedience are listed
5. **Succession Arrangements** – This dealt with the continuity of the covenant in the future

Each of the seven letters can be viewed from the perspective of this covenantal structure, which is summarized in the table that follows.

⁷ Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance*, Dominion Press (1987), pp. 13-20

Covenantal Arrangement of the Seven Letters

	Preamble	Historical Prologue	Ethical Stipulations	Sanctions	Succession Arrangements
Church of Ephesus	2:1	2:2-3	2:4-5a	2:5b	2:6-7
Church of Smyrna	2:8	2:9	2:10a	2:10a	2:11
Church of Pergamum	2:12	2:13	2:14-15	2:16	2:17
Church of Thyatira	2:18	2:19	2:20-21	2:22-23	2:24-29
Church of Sardis	3:1	3:2	3:3a	3:3b	3:4-6
Church of Philadelphia	3:7	3:8	3:9	3:10-11	3:12-13
Church of Laodicea	3:14	3:15-17	3:18	3:19-20	3:21-22

There is another interesting facet to the seven letters in that each letter addresses moral issues that were challenging the seven churches. However, at the same time these evils are reflected in the history of the human race from the dawn of civilization in Eden to the apostolic age. Furthermore, these same issues will repeat in the subsequent history of the Church because humans always battle against the same enemies and temptations: the world, the flesh and the devil. Therefore, Revelation is a wake-up call that comforts the afflicted and to afflicts the comfortable. In the discussion below it will become evident how each of the letters recapitulates important segments of salvation history.

1. Ephesus: the Garden of Eden and judgment on false prophets (2:1-7)

John employs language that recalls *Eden* in the Book of Genesis. Jesus announces Himself as the *Creator*. In John's gospel Jesus is also depicted as the Creator: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (Jn 1:3). Here he is the one "who holds the seven stars in his right hand." Jesus "*walks among the seven golden lampstands*" in judgment, just as God walked in Eden (Gen 3:8). Jesus reminds the church that it has "*fallen*" and threatens to remove the "lampstand from its place" just as Adam and Eve were removed from Eden (Gen 3:24). However, if they conquer they can "eat from the **tree of life** (Gen 2:9; 3:22) that is in the *paradise* of the Lord."

2. Smyrna: the Patriarchs and judgment on the enemies of Israel (2:8-11)

In describing the situation in Smyrna, John draws from scenes in the lives of the *Patriarchs*. In the expression “who died and came to life” John recalls the resurrection of *Isaac* from Abraham’s dagger (Gen 22:1-14; Heb 11:17-19), *Joseph’s* salvation from the death of slavery and imprisonment (Gen 37:18-36; 39:20 - 41:45), and *Israel’s* freedom from the death of bondage in Egypt. The Patriarchs experienced “tribulation” and “poverty” as wandering aliens. The persecution by the false Jews in Smyrna is reminiscent of Ishmael’s persecution of Isaac (Gen 21:9; Gal 4:22-31). Slander caused Joseph to be cast into prison (Gen 39:13-20), but he was given a crown as prime minister of Egypt. Finally, the ten plagues in Egypt are portrayed in the ten days of tribulation.

3. Pergamum: the Wilderness and judgment on a false prophet and a evil king (2:12-17)

In the letter to Pergamum imagery is borrowed from Israel’s wandering in the desert. References are also made to “*manna*” and the “*white stone*” with a “*new name*” worn by the High Priest (Ex 28:9-12). Reference is also made to the false prophet *Balaam* and the evil king *Balak*, whom the Jews encountered before entering the Promised Land. As the chosen people approached Canaan from the east, the Moabite king, Balak, sent for Balaam to curse Israel.

Balaam practiced divination (Josh 13:22). Rooted in Balak’s request was the pagan superstition that specific incantations could drain an enemy’s power. God intervened, first telling Balaam not to go, then warning him, and lastly causing Balaam to bless rather than curse Israel (Num 24-25). God’s protection also forced Balaam to proclaim that no occult power can harm God’s people. “For there is no enchantment against Jacob, no divination against Israel” (Num 23:23). After Balaam’s attempts to curse Israel resulted in his blessing Israel, he devised the crafty scheme to get God to curse Israel. He advised Balak (Num 31:16) to employ Midianite women to seduce the Israelites into adultery and idol worship. Although initially successful, the plot ultimately failed when the priest Phinehas drove his spear through the bodies of Zimbri, the Simeonite, and Cozbi, the Midianite woman, in the very act of idolatrous intercourse. God doesn’t call wimps to be priests!

4. Thyatira: Davidic dynasty and judgment on the royal harlot (2:18-29)

This is the longest letter to the seven churches. Imagery of the Davidic monarchy is utilized in addressing the church in Thyatira. Jesus uses his title, the *Son of God* to emphasize that he is the promised fulfillment of the great king who would come from the Davidic line (Acts 2:24-36; 13:22-23; Ez 34:23-24; 37:24-28; Hosea 3:5; Jer 30:9; Ps 2:7; 89:19-37). *Jezebel*, the Phoenician princess who married King Ahab, is mentioned. She was the woman who led God’s people into apostasy (1 Kgs 16:29-34; 21:25-26). She

supported 850 prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:19) and suppressed worship to Yahweh (1 Kgs 18: 4, 13). Elijah's dramatic confrontation with the prophets of Baal is dramatically narrated in 1 Kings 18:20-40. Both she and those who commit adultery with her are threatened with *tribulation* (2 Kgs 9:22).

Jezebel was killed when she was hurled from a window to the pavement below. Jeru then rode over her corpse, which was eaten by dogs (2 Kgs 9:33-37). The letter also recalls the three and a half years of punishment God visited upon Israel (1 Kgs 17:1; Jas 5:17). The expression "power over the nations" (Rev 2:26) alludes to sharing in the messiah's reign (2 Sam 7:19; 8:1-14; Ps 18:37-50; 89:27-29), which finds an echo in the concluding verse which evokes Psalm 2:9.

5. Sardis: Judgment on the monarchy and judgment on the dead (3:1-6)

In this letter John borrows imagery from those events in the history of the monarchy which led to the destruction of Solomon's temple and captivity in Babylon. Key expressions like: "*alive*," "*dead*," "*awake*," "strengthen what remains," and "a few names" recalls the prophetic language about Israel's apostasy, judgment and the faithful remnant (Is 1:5-31; 2: 12-21; 6:9-13; 26:20-21; 65:8-16; Jer 4:5-31; 7:1-7; 12-15; 8:11-12; 11:9-13; Ez 37:1-14; Mic 1:2-7; Zeph 1).

6. Philadelphia: Return from Exile and judgment on the synagogue of Satan (3:7-13)

The language employed in this letter reflects the Jews return from Exile under *Esra* and *Nehemiah*. The imagery used of the synagogue and the rebuilding of the Temple and Jerusalem also reflects the prophecies of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Like those returning exiles, the Christians in Philadelphia have "little power" (Rev 3:8). The conflict the exiles experienced from "false Jews" on their return to Jerusalem (Esra 4; Neh 4, 6; 13) is reflected in the expression: "Those of the *synagogue of Satan* who say that they are Jews and are not" (Rev 3: 9). "The *hour of trial*" (Rev 3:10) alludes to the persecution suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes (1 & 2 Maccabees; Dan 8;11).

7. Laodicea: Pharisaical Judaism and judgment on the Lukewarm (3:14-22)

The image of foul water, boastfulness of its wealth and self-sufficiency while oblivious to its inner poverty and nakedness, captures the pride of *Pharisaical Judaism*. Jesus distinctly portrayed this spirit in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector praying in the Temple (Lk 18:8-14). Three times in Matthew's gospel, Jesus calls the Pharisees "blind guides" (Mt 14:14; 23:16; 23:24). The warning that Christ will vomit them out of His mouth is a reference to the covenantal curse of Lev 18:24-28.

Conclusion

The important message of the seven letters can be summarized in one word – Repent! That message was not heeded. As a result these once thriving churches fell away from the Gospel, were overrun by Muslim armies and are under Muslim control today. Consider who were in the apostolic church in Ephesus: St. Paul, St. John the Evangelist, the Blessed Mother, Apollos, three daughters of the Apostle Philip, and Mary Magdalene. Today, there is no church in Ephesus!

Part III Unlocking the Book of Revelation “A Woman Clothed with the Sun” (Rev 11:19-12:2)

The “woman” of chapter 12 captures dual senses representing Mary, the mother of Jesus, and “Daughter Zion” as depicted by the prophet Isaiah.

Mary

Chapter 11 ends with another of John’s remarkable heavenly visions:⁸

“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple.” This was followed by a theophany: “and there were flashes of lightening, loud noises, peals of thunder, and earth quake, and heavy hail” (Rev 11:19).

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred object in Israel. It was holy because it contained: the ten commandments, some of the miraculous manna that fed God’s people in the desert, and the rod of Aaron that had blossomed to witness his priesthood. The ark also signified God’s intimate presence among his people, especially when the glory cloud (*shekinah*) descended on the ark and filled the tabernacle (Ex 40:34-38).

The ark led Israel to the Promised Land (Num 10:33-35), across the Jordan River (Josh 2:2-3, 11-17), and in the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6:4-17). King David placed the ark prominently in the Tabernacle after he established Jerusalem as his capital. His son Solomon enshrined the ark in the Temple, where it remained for about 400 years until Jerusalem and the Temple were captured and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

However, the ark was not listed among the spoils captured by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:13-17), because it was hidden by the prophet Jeremiah on Mount Nebo (2 Macc 2:5). It would remain hidden “until God gathers his people together again and shows his

⁸ It’s important to recognize that the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible are not part of the inspired text. The chapters were devised by Stephen Langton in 1206 A.D. The verses were added by Robert Etienne in 1551 A.D. Therefore these arbitrary partitions are irrelevant in interpreting passages.

mercy” (2 Macc 2:7). Therefore, John’s vision of the ark was remarkable because the ark had not been seen for almost five centuries, but now it was in heaven. What did it look like?

John gives a surprising depiction in the next verse:

“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” (Rev 12:1).

This prophetic imagery presents the ark of the covenant of the Old Testament as a type that foreshadowed the true ark, namely, Mary whose virginal temple (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) housed: the new law - God’s Word made flesh, the true manna – the Eucharist (Jn 6:32, 35), and the “merciful and faithful high priest” Jesus Christ (Heb 2:17).

A type (*typos* in Greek) refers to a person, place, event or institution in the Bible that foreshadows a greater reality that God will make known in history. For example, Joshua is portrayed in the book of Joshua as a new Moses who led the Hebrew people into the Promised Land. In the New Testament the Temple (Mt 12:6), Jonah (Mt 12:41, and Solomon (Mt 12:42) are depicted as types of Christ. During the forty days spend in the desert, Jesus reenacts Israel’s forty years of testing in the wilderness. Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey amid shouts that proclaimed him “King” (Lk 19:28) and “Son of David” (Mt 21:6) captures the typological symbolism of Solomon’s coronation ride into Jerusalem (1 Kgs 1:38-40). St. Paul presents Jesus as the new Adam (1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:12-21). Peter sees the flood in the time of Noah as a prefiguring of the waters of baptism (1 Pet 3:20-21). The above examples are a small sampling of the Christological, ecclesiological, sacramental, and Mariological typology found in the New Testament.

That Mary is the “woman” of Revelation 12:1 is supported in the description of her son, “a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron” (Rev 12:5). The allusion to the “rod of iron” is drawn from Psalm 2:9, which celebrates the enthronement of the Davidic kings. Additional confirmation is found in Luke’s Gospel, which also depicts Mary as the ark of the covenant.

When the angel Gabriel described Jesus’ miraculous conception, he declared: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you” (Lk 1:35).

The Greek word that is translated as “overshadow” is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for the cloud overshadowing the tabernacle. The tabernacle was a type of the Mother of God⁹ and the cloud represented the Holy Spirit.

⁹ Mary is properly called the Mother of God because, as all mothers understand, she gave birth to a Person, in this case the divine Word made flesh. However, this title does not in any sense imply that Mary is above God or anything other than a creature.

The depiction of Mary as the true ark of the covenant becomes even clearer when St. Luke describes Mary's journey to visit her cousin Elizabeth. He intentionally draws a parallel between the ark of the covenant going to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6 and Mary visiting Elizabeth.

- Mary goes to town in the hill country (Lk 1:39); the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:12,15-16)
- Mary stays in house of Zechariah (Lk 1:40); the ark stays in the house of Obededom (2 Sam 6:10)
- Both John and David leapt, danced, with joy (Lk 1:41; 2 Sam 6:14)
- Elizabeth said: "And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me?" (Lk 1:43); David said: "How can the ark of the Lord come to me?" (2 Sam 6:9).
- Mary rejoices (Lk 1:47); People rejoice (2 Sam 6:12)
- Loud cry (Lk 1:42); Shouting (2 Sam 6:15)
- Mary remains with Elizabeth for three months (Lk 1:56); the Ark remains in the house of Obededom for three months (2 Sam 6:11).

One may wonder why John chose to identify Mary with the title "woman" and not her given name. The Apostle is following the practice of Jesus who twice addressed his mother with the prophetic title "woman" at two important times in his ministry. The first was at the wedding in Cana, when Jesus began his public assault on the kingdom of Satan (Jn 3:4), and the second occurred when he completed it on Calvary (Jn 19:26). Jesus was clearly connecting his mother with the prophecy of Genesis 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the *woman*, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." The woman's seed is Christ. Mary is the "woman" who will cooperate in her son's victory over the devil. This connection is seen in two Old Testament types of Mary.

The first is Jael who drove a tent peg into Sisera's head (Judg 4:21). Subsequently, she was praised, "Most blessed of women be Jael" (Judg 5:24). The second type was Judith. She took Holofernes' sword and "severed his head from his body" (Judith 13:8). She received similar praise from Uzziah who said to her, "O daughter, you are blessed by the Most High God above all women on earth" (Judith 13:18). The typology is fulfilled in St. Luke's Gospel when "Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Lk 1:41) and was prompted to exclaim to Mary, "Blessed are you among women" (Lk 1:42).

Daughter Zion

In Chapter 12 of Revelation, John also draws on passages from the prophet Isaiah. The restoration of God's people is described as a *woman* in labor: "Like a woman with child, who writhes and cries out in her pangs when she is near her time" (Is 26:17). The sacred author uses similar imagery at the end of the book: "Before she was in labor she gave

birth; before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son” (Is 66:7). In Revelation we read: “She was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery” (Rev 12:2).

John is showing us that in her total submission to God and in her cooperation with her son, Mary is Daughter Zion, the icon of the Church, and the mother of all believers: “Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the *rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus*” (Rev 12:17). Daughter Zion is not only destined to be the mother of those redeemed from the Gentiles, she is also both virgin bride and fruitful mother: “For as a young man marries a virgin, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Is 62:5). Jesus is the son, the God-man, who became the new Adam to redeem us, and in the process making Mary the new Eve.

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