

The "him" in Daniel 11:40 relates to a power whose location (not necessarily religion) corresponds to that of the king in verse 36. At the time of the end this power is Turkey, and the former Ottoman Empire. Yet, as Daniel 11:40 shows, at the time of the end the king of the south and king of the north also reappear. As the time of the end progresses, the king of the north comes against "him" and takes over his territory. In so doing, the king of the north takes on the mantle of the little horn of the goat. In taking over the eastern Mediterranean the king of the north will be a latter-day equivalent of the Eastern Roman Empire, based in Constantinople (Istanbul). For this reason, this power is symbolised as the dragon in Revelation 16:13.—N.B.

Jesus' "perfect sacrifice"

I have read Brother James Willey's* article "The 'Why' question" ([Dec. 2005, p. 473](#)) with great interest and would like to pose two questions:

- 1 Have we Bible authority for using the phrase "perfect sacrifice" as properly defining Christ's atoning work? I know it is part of Christadelphian jargon, and Brother Willey uses the phrase no fewer than four times in his article. Various words (Hebrew and Greek) are used quite often to present the ideas of 'perfect' and 'sacrifice'; but never in a direct way, so

far as I can see, are the two brought together as "perfect sacrifice". So, are we properly empowered to do so?

- 2 Jesus himself resisted the idea that he was "good" during his natural life (Mt. 19:16,17) and no doubt had in mind the "sin-stricken nature" to which Brother Willey refers. Is there not an incongruity in equating 'sin's flesh' with perfection? And is not perfect (either on Jesus' part or ours) an adjective that can only be applied to flesh by God's grace after, but not before, resurrection from the dead and/or final judgement?

I am simply asking the questions.

Bill Guy
Preston

In referring to Jesus' "perfect sacrifice", are we not thinking of his perfect obedience, resulting in a perfect character? Although he bore our imperfect nature, he overcame that nature to become the sacrifice acceptable to God. Hebrews 5:8,9 says that Jesus "learned . . . obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him", and 2:10 speaks of him being made "perfect through sufferings". As such he was the perfect sacrifice.—T.B.

* We apologise for misspelling Brother Willey's name as Wiley in the article itself.—T.B.

Understanding Revelation 12

2. The interpretation of Revelation 12:1-4

David Green

In the [first part](#) of this study we looked at the general meanings that can be attached to the symbols used in Revelation 12, and the history of the relevant political and religious events relating to the time of fulfilment indicated by the vision. We are now in a position to begin to fit the details of the vision recorded in Revelation 12 to the historical events outlined in the first article.

BEFORE WE OFFER a detailed interpretation of Revelation 12:1-4, we will look at three matters:

- [The structure of the vision](#)
- [The dual aspect of the woman](#)
- [The dual aspect of the dragon.](#)

The structure of the vision

An important structural characteristic of the apocalyptic visions needs to be considered. This feature is that the Divinely purposed end may be revealed first, before the details of the political, military and religious changes that are involved in bringing about that result. A good example of this occurs in Revelation 11:15-17. Here the end result of the seventh trumpet is announced first before the seven last plagues of God's wrath are revealed that bring about that Divinely determined end (15:1; 16:1).

Similarly, in Revelation 21:1-8 we are shown the final result to be attained at the end of Christ's millennial reign, when there is "no more sea" (v. 1), that is, no more mortal population.¹ In

the remainder of chapter 21 and the first part of chapter 22 there follows the description of New Jerusalem as it is in the thousand-year reign of Jesus, when nations consisting of mortal people are still in existence (21:24; 22:2).

Applying this important structural principle to Revelation 12, the “great wonder [wondrous sign, NIV] in heaven” described in verse 1 must represent the end result of a development that brings a major part of the Christian church into the ruling heavens of the Roman Empire.

The dual aspect of the woman

Why is it that in Revelation 12:1 the vision shows the church as a woman in the political heavens, glorified and powerful, and yet by verse 6 she is seen fleeing into the wilderness? The answer lies in the fact that the Christian church split into two distinct sections, the majority exercising power and the minority being persecuted. So it was that one woman became two.

Most Christians had a lax attitude towards involvement with the state and were happy to receive the support and favour of Constantine. Consequently a close relationship developed between the emperor and many of the bishops. Though Constantine favoured the church with large-scale benefactions and much financial support, even to the extent of allocating an extremely generous proportion of provincial revenues to church charity, he did not make Christianity the sole official religion. However, his support, together with that of later emperors, paved the way for Christianity to become the established religion of the empire at a later date.

A minority of Christians belonged to various other groups, the leading one in the fourth century being the Donatists.² They were followers of a bishop of Carthage named Donatus, and were said to have “an intense zeal for purity of living and separation from worldly affiliations”.³ They opposed state interference in church affairs, preached against alliance with the state, and condemned those who had gone down that road. Their differences were both social and doctrinal, though they are said to have affirmed the same creeds. This resulted in their excommunication as heretics by the majority party, who claimed to be the ‘Catholic [universal] Church’.⁴ The emperor, regarding it as his imperial duty to maintain a united church, was influenced against them by the Catholic bishops and denied them recognition.

However, this minority who dissented from the Catholic position remained relatively im-

mune from persecution because they were most numerous in the more distant and less populated areas of the Roman Empire. They constituted the woman in the wilderness, whilst the Catholics, supported by the emperor, were represented in symbol by the woman in heaven.

The Donatist cause was supported by peasant warriors called Circumcellions. These wandering bands of seasonal farmworkers were themselves enthusiastic Donatists, but their acts of terrorism and brutal violence often embarrassed the more God-fearing members of the community: “They were desperate fanatics and a symbol of the distressful economic condition of many in the fourth century”.⁵

The history of the dragon

In interpreting the vision of Revelation 12 it is necessary to understand that, just as the woman changes character, so does the dragon. Originally the Roman dragon supported paganism and persecuted the Christian church (the woman). There followed an intervening period when there was divided rulership of the empire, together with a division of interests between those supporting paganism on one hand and those supporting Christianity on the other. Gradually the pagan dragon lost power and was eventually replaced in the political heavens by a Christianised dragon that supported the apostate Christian church but persecuted those Christians that were regarded as heretics.

Because of the way in which the pagan dragon eventually changed to a Christian dragon, a difficulty arises, since it is not possible to have one or two thirds of a dragon on earth and the rest in heaven. In terms of the symbology used, the dragon has to be all in heaven or all on earth.

Detailed interpretation

The main outline of the interpretation of the first part of Revelation 12 is set out in two tables, [Table 1](#) dealing with verse 1 and [Table 2](#) with verses 2-4. More detailed comments are given in the main text.

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1. Compare the “sea” of our times (Lk. 21:25) and the “many waters” of Revelation 17:1,15.
 2. See Table 3 in [Part 1, Nov. 2005](#), p. 433.
 3. *The Apocalypse Epitomised*, H. P. Mansfield, p. 154.
 4. The first known use of the description ‘Catholic Church’ is found in the writings of Ignatius, c. A.D. 105.
 5. *Creeds, Councils and Controversies*, J. Stevenson, p. 26, 1989 edition, SPCK.

Table 1 The interpretation of Revelation 12:1	
Symbol	Meaning
The great sign (“wonder”) of a woman in heaven	The woman represents the apostate Christian church elevated to a position of power in the political heavens of the Roman Empire. Starting with Constantine’s support, the church eventually developed into the established religion of the empire. The first verse depicts the end result brought about by the events that are symbolically represented in the subsequent verses.
Clothed with the sun	The church, basking in the rays of imperial favour, was invested with authority, power and influence by imperial Rome. As a moon shines by reflecting the sun’s light, so the elevated church was the newly risen Christian moon shining in the Roman political heavens, being illuminated by the Roman emperor.
The moon under her feet	Organised paganism, represented by the moon, cast out of the ruling heavens and trampled under foot by Christianity.
On her head a wreath or crown (Gk. <i>stephan</i>) of twelve stars	The coronal wreath symbolises victory, in this case victory over the religious powers of paganism. The twelve stars represent the twelve autocratic Caesars who were the shining lights of the empire from Julius Caesar, the first Caesar, through to Domitian, who was Caesar when the Revelation was given to John.

Priority given to the woman (v. 1)

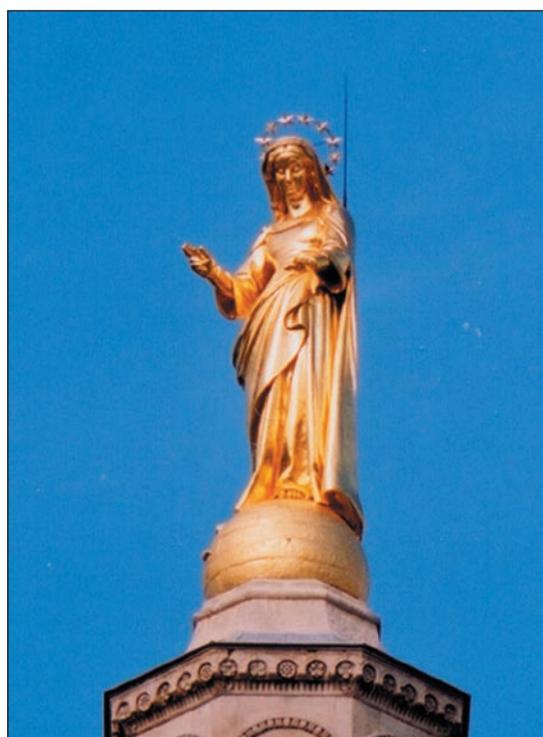
Since the pagan Roman dragon existed long before the church (the woman) was given a place in the political heavens by Constantine, the question arises as to why the vision shows the woman appearing in heaven before the great red dragon appears (vv. 1,3).

The explanation lies in the fact that it is the woman who is the central figure or key player in the action of the chapter, in that she gives birth to the man-child who casts the pagan dragon out of the Roman heavens. As a result she develops into a powerful apostate church that becomes responsible for the death of the saints over a long period of time. That end in view is shown in the first verse, and the events that lead up to it are detailed in the subsequent verses.

In verse 1 the woman is depicted from man’s point of view, whilst in chapter 17 she is shown as seen in God’s eyes. There she is described as “the great prostitute” who is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (vv. 1,6, NIV).

The woman clothed with the sun

From A.D. 310 Constantine used the inscription “SOLI INVICTO COMITI” on all his coinage to proclaim that the sun god was his comrade. Translated into English, this inscription reads, “To the Sun, the Unconquerable Companion”.



PICTURE: JOHN RAMSDEN

Statue, depicting a woman with a crown of twelve stars, at the Palace of the Popes, Avignon, France, where the papacy was exiled from 1307 to 1378.

Those elders of the Christian Church who supported Constantine, and accepted alliance with the state, were clothed not only with imperial favour and authority but in a sense also with the mantle of the sun god. In fact, according to Henry Chadwick, "Constantine's coins long continued to be engraved with the symbolic representation of the Sun",⁶ even though his letters from A.D. 313 show beyond doubt that he regarded himself as a Christian.

Chadwick further comments: "Constantine was not aware of any mutual exclusiveness between Christianity and his faith in the Unconquered Sun. The transition from solar monotheism (the most popular form of contemporary paganism) to Christianity was not difficult. In Old Testament prophecy Christ was entitled 'the sun of righteousness' . . . Moreover, early in the fourth century there begins in the West . . . the celebration of 25 December, the birthday of the Sun-god at the winter solstice, as the date for the nativity of Christ".⁷

The moon under the woman's feet (v. 1)

Treading under foot is a Biblical figure for subjection, as can be seen from a number of passages, such as Joshua 10:24; Psalm 8:6; 91:13; and 1 Corinthians 15:25,27. The moon of the Roman heavens originally represented the power and authority of paganism, supported by the emperor. The ecclesiastical (Catholic Church) woman, backed by the Emperor Constantine and all subsequent emperors apart from Julian the Apostate, replaced this. Consequently the pagan moon is depicted as being under the woman's feet, and in its place Catholicism became the new moon of the Roman heavens, having been elevated to a position of influence and honour. It should be noted that, though Constantine made no attempt to suppress paganism, later emperors did so by decree, if not by action.⁸

As indicated above, Catholic Christianity did have a setback when Julian the Apostate came to the throne, being sole emperor from November 361 to March 363. Though he supported paganism, his general policy towards Christians to start with was, according to F. J. Foakes-Jackson, one of "scrupulous toleration". However, when he began to realise that his attempt to revive paganism was a rather hopeless undertaking, he started "to annoy the Christians by all means in his power". Foakes-Jackson sums up Julian's life and reign as proving "conclusively that Christianity must of necessity be the religion of the Empire". He

comments that the words the Christian historian Theodoret put into Julian's mouth, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean", were true even though Julian may never have uttered them.⁹

Crowned with twelve stars (v. 1)

Since the sun and moon mentioned in this vision relate to the symbolic heavens of Roman rulership, the twelve stars with which the woman is crowned must also belong to that same system. It is interesting to note that there were twelve Caesars who reigned over the whole of the Roman Empire up to and including Domitian, who was in power at the time when John received "The Revelation of Jesus Christ". The first of these twelve was Julius Caesar, from whose family name the term 'Caesar' was derived. He became the first autocrat of the Roman Empire and was also the first deified emperor.

The suggestion is that the twelve stars represent this group of twelve successive Caesars who had been in their days the shining lights of the Empire. They were all emperors with high aspirations, showing star-like, heavenly qualities.¹⁰ The Roman historian Suetonius, who died some time after A.D. 122, wrote a history of the lives of these twelve Caesars.¹¹ The fact that the woman had been crowned with twelve stars signified her investment with authority and power by imperial Rome.¹²

The casting down of the stars by the dragon's tail (v. 4)

The symbol of stars being cast down from heaven is used in Daniel 8:10 to describe the removal of

6. *The Penguin History of the Church*, Vol. 1, *The Early Church*, p. 127, 1993 edition.
7. *Ibid.* p. 126.
8. See Table 3 in [Part 1, Nov. 2005](#), p. 433.
9. All quotations in this paragraph from *History of the Christian Church to A.D. 461*, Foakes-Jackson, third edition, 1902, pp. 361,369.
10. See "Which interpretation of the twelve stars?" by Sister Joan Lewis. Copies available on application to the present writer at David@dgreen79.freeserve.co.uk or 79 Highdale Avenue, Clevedon, BS21 7LU. This paper shows that the alternative view given in *Eureka*, that the stars represent the twelve emperors from Augustus to Nerva, does not fit so well as the view expressed above.
11. *The Twelve Caesars*, Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, translated by Robert Graves, Penguin Books. Michael Grant has also written a book entitled *The Twelve Caesars*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1996.
12. *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Alfred Nicholls, The Christadelphian, 1988, p. 73.

Table 2 The interpretation of Revelation 12:2-4	
Symbol	Interpretation
v. 2. The woman is seen to be with child. A normal pregnancy lasts 280 days.	The Christian church was called to be the chaste bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2), but it became pregnant with the seeds of error (Rev. 2:20-23). 280 years of developing error dating from the church's foundation in A.D. 33 brings us to A.D. 313 for the birth of her child.
v. 2. The woman cries out in pain.	This represents the Christian church before her elevation to power in the Roman world, as portrayed in the first verse. Pain may be associated with the last ten days of pregnancy. This corresponds to the ten-year period of violent persecution of Christians initiated by the pagan emperor Diocletian in A.D. 303.
v. 3. A great (enormous, NIV) red dragon in heaven.	The political and military power of pagan Rome. By the third century the Roman army commonly used the purple-red dragon standard in place of the eagle. The colour red symbolises both the sinful and warlike natures of this power. Scarlet or purple was also the distinguishing colour of Roman emperors, consuls and generals.
v. 3. The dragon has seven heads, crowned with diadems	Rome had seven consecutive forms of government, the sixth form (the imperial rule) existing in John's day (17:10). Diadems are a symbol of authority. Crowned heads imply a time before the Western empire split up into separate nations.
v. 3. Ten horns not crowned until 13:1.	The future nations to arise in the West from the barbarian invasions (c. A.D. 476).
v. 4. The dragon's tail drew a third of the stars, casting them to the earth.	Through the antagonistic tail-waving actions of Maximin, who at that time ruled the Eastern third of the empire, the stars of that third were cast out of the ruling heavens by Licinius (313). A possible problem in this interpretation arises because verse 4 seems to imply that the stars were cast down before the birth of the man-child in 312. This will be considered further in Part 3 .
v. 4. The dragon was ready to devour the man-child at birth, but failed.	Both Galerius and Maxentius had appreciated the threat posed by Constantine and sought to destroy him before he came to full 'birth' in the Roman heavens. Eusebius in his life of Constantine informs us that Galerius laid many snares for Constantine, but that he providentially escaped them all. ¹³ After this, in A.D. 314, Licinius plotted to devour Constantine, and this resulted in the "war in heaven" of verse 7.

the Jewish authorities by the Romans in A.D. 70. In Revelation 12, however, the event relates to the casting out of the pagan Roman authorities and supporting aristocracy, such as governors, administrators and military leaders, from their positions of authority in the ruling heavens.

The situation of the Roman Empire being divided into three parts fits in well with the symbol of the dragon, which, like the crocodile, has three main parts to its body: head, torso and tail. The head represents the western third, as the headquarters of the empire was located there at Rome, the torso represents the middle (Illyrian) third, and the tail the eastern (Asian) third.

The dragon's behaviour, as described in verse 4, is typical of the crocodile, which when on land may seek to disable its prey with a blow from the tail. In the terms of this vision it is the *tail* of the pagan dragon that casts down one third of the stars by ejecting the princes, governors, generals and the rest of the aristocracy of the pagan Roman heavens from their positions of power. During the period when the empire was divided into three parts, there were a number of events that would involve the casting down of one third of the stars. These are set out in [Table 3](#).

The only one of these that fits the pagan dragon depositing pagan stars, as seems to be required by

Table 3 Alternatives for the casting down of a third of the stars (Rev. 12:4)		
Head (at Rome)	Torso	Tail
Western third	Illyrian third	Eastern third
Defeat of Maxentius by Constantine in 312	Defeat of Licinius by Constantine in 314	Defeat of Maximinus by Licinius and annexation of his territory in 313
		Defeat of Licinius by Constantine in 324

verse 4, is the event in A.D. 313 when Maximinus, ruler of the Eastern (Asian) third and therefore the dragon's tail, attacked Licinius but was defeated. Later the same year he died and had his territory annexed by Licinius.

A less likely alternative is to take the first part of verse 4 as symbolising the war in heaven that brought the Christianised dragon to full power. In this case it is the Christianised head of the

dragon that is the motivating power behind the action and the tail is only mentioned so that the symbol is true to life.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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13. *Dissertations on the Prophecies*, Thomas Newton, London, 1826, p. 602. Nowadays Eusebius is not considered very highly in academic circles as his writings were propaganda for the Christian cause.

PICTURE COURTESY OF BIBLE MAGAZINE



The Milvian Bridge, scene of the battle in 312 in which Constantine defeated Maxentius to gain control over the Roman Empire in the West.



PICTURE: JOHN RAMSDEN

This mural is to be found in the undercroft of York Minster. Note that the soldiers are carrying a dragon as their standard. The body of the dragon, but not the head, is red in the original. York was the important Roman city of Eburacum, where Constantine was crowned emperor.

Citizenship

Trevor Maher

Citizenship and its consequent rights and responsibilities is an important issue today. How might this affect our position as members of Christ's body? Believers must always remember that their true status is that of citizens of the Kingdom that God is to set up over the earth.

IT HAS BEEN the practice for over a year now for immigrants to Britain who have been granted the right to adopt British citizenship to go through a citizenship ceremony. At this ceremony participants promise loyalty to the UK and pledge to "respect its rights and freedoms, to uphold its democratic values and observe its laws faithfully". There is also an oath to "be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen

Elizabeth II, her heirs and successors according to the law". For those who object to the swearing of an oath there is the option to affirm. Many aspects of such a ceremony and its undertakings are what we would expect any government to require of people wishing to live in the UK and to receive its benefits, such as Social Security, the National Health Service, education for children, protection of the law, etc.

There are reports that the UK Government is considering extending these citizenship ceremonies to its existing subjects when they reach the age of eighteen. Young people would be required to swear allegiance to their country and would receive a certificate to mark the occasion. Again, those who wish to could affirm rather than swearing an oath. The present Home Secretary,