

Artemis and Wonder Woman: Artemis Ephesia and 1 Timothy 1-2

The NT epistles are like listening to one half of a phone call. The more we learn what's happening on the other side of the call the more we know about the part we can hear. In 1 Timothy Paul writes to his protégé in Ephesus and addresses what are clearly some very difficult situations. In this presentation I'm going to highlight Artemis Ephesia, which is the goddess Artemis as she was worshiped in Ephesus. The big idea is that Artemis Ephesia was worshiped in unique ways in Ephesus contemporary to 1 Timothy's composition, and that unique worship should deeply impact our exegesis of the text.

This work is based largely on that of Dr. Sandra Glahn who is on the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary. Dr. Glahn published a few articles around 2014 and 2015, and presented a summary of the work in 2019, which is available for you to listen to on the CBE website¹. In addition she has a new book on this topic coming out in November. She has been gracious enough to answer some of my questions, so you might consider this a preview of her new book. Hopefully when it comes out and you read it this will be a faithful presentation.

Here is a big picture analogy of Sandra's work: Artemis Ephesia is kind of like the character Wonder Woman, at least in terms of character versions. Here is Wonder Woman in her original form, published in 1942.² She's a private investigator with a secret identity. By the 1970's she's a part of the Justice League, and you could watch her on Saturday mornings as part of the Superfriends.³ Here you see her flying her invisible jet. She blocks bullets with her bracelets. Finally some of you may have watched the most recent DCU versions, where she is much stronger, relies on far less

¹ "Artemis of the Ephesians in First-Century Ephesus and Ramifications for How We Read 1 Timothy." *CBE International*. Accessed April 7, 2023. <https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/artemis-ephesians-first-century-ephesus-and-ramifications-how-we-read-1/>

² *Wonder Woman (1942-) #41*, 1950. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://www.dcuinfinite.com/comics/book/wonder-woman-1942-41/c8e6c0b9-2f70-4da2-9a2f-500eb508cf4d>.

³ *Super Friends (TV Series 1973–1985)* - *IMDb*, n.d. Accessed March 23, 2023. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0069641/>.

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technology, and is far more of a warrior character with a more developed backstory.⁴ These are the same character, but they're not the same Wonder Woman. Glahn's work suggests that this is exactly what we see with Artemis Ephesia. She's Artemis, but a very particular Artemis. And those peculiarities shed light directly on 1 Timothy 1 and 2.

Glahn takes inspiration from Immendörfer's work on Ephesians. His conclusion is that Paul is directly attacking Artemis worship in Ephesus without explicitly naming the goddess. His hearers would quickly and easily unpack his allusions and references without needing her named outright.⁵

So let's start with the basic Artemis, as we might find her in most of the Roman empire. Artemis is one of many fertility goddesses. In much of the empire this would have been associated with fertility, childbirth, child rearing, and other motherly roles. However, she is an extraordinarily popular one. Pausanias, an ancient travel writer, mentions Artemis with a plethora of titles, second only to Zeus across the Roman empire.⁶ Artemis is born near Ephesus, and the Ephesians took this as a sign of ownership. Artemis is the firstborn of twins coming 9 days before her brother Apollo. Artemis is born fully formed, as all gods and goddesses are and therefore is fully aware of her brother's traumatic birth. Her mother Leto "writhes in pain" for 9 days before Apollo arrives, which deeply impacts Artemis. She rejects childbirth as an option for her and informs her father that she has no interest in what her mother has just gone through. Virginity becomes her permanent state, so much so that she has Zeus make her immune to Aphrodite's arrows.⁷ In addition she informs her father that she will not force mortal women to endure such should they ask her for help. Glahn's assertion is that this is heightened in the Ephesian version of Artemis, making her a very specific type of fertility goddess.

⁴ *Wonder Woman*. Action, Adventure, Fantasy. Warner Bros., Atlas Entertainment, Cruel & Unusual Films, 2017.

⁵ Michael Immendörfer, *Ephesians and Artemis: The Cult of the Great Goddess of Ephesus as the Epistle's Context*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. 2. Reihe 436 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 313.

⁶ Sandra Glahn, "The Identity of Artemis in First-Century Ephesus", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172 (September 2015): 327.

⁷ *Ibid*, 319.

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Artemis is focused on being a savior in the birthing process, and a fierce protector of women who choose not to bear children.⁸

Artemis Ephesia is not a motherly figure, and she is not the type of fertility goddess who is particularly interested in the success of a woman in becoming pregnant or the motherly acts of child-rearing. This Artemis is more of a tom-boy, assertive and martial. She accepts offerings of clothing and jewelry in exchange for protecting pregnant women from long, painful births. She will either deliver them or let them die quickly from her gentle arrows".⁹ Artemis Ephesia in this light is a goddess whose role as a savior, and especially a savior of women is a centerpiece of her identity. Glahn makes a strong case for the evidence that Artemis Ephesia was considered the savior of Ephesus.¹⁰ This is the specific incarnation of Artemis standing in the background of Paul's letter to Timothy.

A few rhetorical-relational points stand out here, as we try to paint a picture of the situation Paul is responding to, based on what we have from him in the epistle.

First, a peaceful and quiet approach to learning and leadership is clearly a goal for Paul. Paul wants things less contentious there. The emphasis in the second chapter on a quiet, peaceful attitude from both men and women, and especially leaders, is clear. Whatever is happening here is very upsetting to this congregation and given the Ephesian response to challenges to Artemis in Acts it is not a stretch to imagine her as a focal point for this conflict.

Second, we find an abundance of Artemis Ephesia's titles directly applied to both Jesus and God. Glahn asserts these are not typical of other Pauline epistles and are very

⁸ Ibid, 451.

⁹ Sandra Glahn, "The First-Century Ephesian Artemis: Ramifications of Her Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, no. 172 (December 2015): 457.

¹⁰ Sandra Glahn, "Identity", 331.

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intentionally chosen to target the goddess as she was worshipped locally. In her upcoming book Glahn writes:

Artemis's main titles were listed previously as follows: first throne; queen; lord; savior; and god. Another was "manifest." These are of particular interest when considering their overlap with titles Paul attributes to Christ in 1 Timothy. Four out of the six appear almost immediately in chapter 1, which has only twenty verses. "Manifest" appears in chapter three.

One can find all the of her titles in the Pauline corpus. But it appears the apostle purposely loaded the introduction of this letter [1 Tim] with titles for the true God that directly challenge Artemis without naming her directly :

Titles for Artemis	NT Titles for God
Regal: queen	"King Immortal, Eternal" (1:17)
Lord	"Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 2)
Savior	Savior (vs. 1)
God	"God our Savior" (v.1; "God the Father (v. 2; "the Blessed God" (v. 11)

One might expect to find overlap in titles of gods, but what is unusual is Paul's use of four of the six right at the beginning, particularly since his doing so borrows from a vocabulary outside his norm. Paul usually refers to Jesus as "Christ Jesus," "Jesus Christ," "Christ," "the Lord," or "our Lord." Yet when writing to Timothy in Ephesus and Titus in Crete, Paul emphasizes the title "Savior."¹¹

Third, the mention of feminine modesty, with a focus on clothing and jewelry, would also point toward Artemis priestesses.¹² Paul's call to modesty here is not about sexual attraction but class status.¹³ If this is a targeted statement then Paul focuses on a woman with status outside the church and a very visible way to flaunting that status.

¹¹ Sandra Glahn, *Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023).

¹² Glahn, "Ramifications", 457.

¹³ Ibid, 456.

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Fourth, Paul's use of situational language, paired with the use of *authentain*, implies a reference to a specific woman who might well need a strong, militaristic rebuke. A worshiper of Artemis Ephesia could very likely be taking the Amazons as role models!¹⁴

Fifth, the mention of Adam and Eve's creation would certainly be heard as a corrective to Artemis' origin story. Artemis has status as the firstborn, but Adam was born first in a Jesus-centered creation story. Artemis followers from Ephesus were likely encountering the Genesis narrative as the grounding creation story for the first time, and Paul could very well here be undermining Artemis Ephesia's birth narrative rather than establishing some cosmological hierarchy for men and women.¹⁵

And finally, the statement that "women will be saved through childbirth" cuts to the core worry for any pregnant woman in Ephesus. Given the great danger that childbirth presented to women this might certainly be a landmine for the Ephesian congregation. Rejection of Artemis would remove from women the promise of an easy birth or quick painless death. It attacks a core aspect of the identity of Artemis Ephesia and strikes at the foundational authority of the woman being rebuked. Paul tells the congregation "You don't need this woman's influence with Artemis Ephesia to survive your pregnancy."¹⁶ Glahn believes the phrase "this is a trustworthy statement" from 1 Timothy 3:1 should be connected to 1 Timothy 2:15, and that Paul is assuring them the statement about women's assured safety is still true, but not because of Artemis.¹⁷

Perhaps no figure loomed larger in the lives of Ephesians than Artemis Ephesia. Certainly she was a core point of the Ephesian identity. If Glahn is correct the Ephesian articulation of Artemis is a distinctive character, and as Paul targeted his letter towards a protégé facing a disruption of worship he painted a picture contrasting Artemis Ephesia with that of Jesus Christ the Savior. 1 Timothy's good news is that Jesus is

¹⁴ Glahn, *Identity*, 331.

¹⁵ Glahn, "Ramifications", 463.

¹⁶ Ibid, 465.

¹⁷ Ibid, 468.

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Lord and Savior, and appeasing Artemis is no longer necessary. His restriction of a woman in the congregation could well be a specific admonition of a fervent Artemis supporter rather than a universal condition. This too is good news!

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