

Revelation 12:1-15:4

The story of God's people in conflict with evil

Two great signs appear in Heaven. The first is a woman who is about to give birth who represents the people of Israel or the early church (John, the author, would have regarded these as equivalent). The second is a dragon who represents a sea monster (Leviathan), the serpent and Satan. The Dragon wants to devour the child but God takes the child up and offers the woman protection.

There is a great Battle in heaven between the angels and the dragon. The angels win and the dragon is cast down to earth. A voice from heaven proclaims that victory has been achieved by those who have continued to bear witness to God and who have been prepared to die for their faith.

Having been cast down to earth the dragon summons two beasts. The first comes from the sea (the primordial chaos). It represents the Roman Empire which has taken power over all people, except God's people. Even they have no power and have to accept being taken into captivity and even execution. They need to respond to this with endurance and faithfulness.

The second beast is subordinate to the first beast and represents all those subordinate states, organisations and individuals that collaborated with the Roman empire. It forces all people to take on the mark of the beast on their forehead as the only way to participate in the Roman economy.

Then John sees an army of 144,000 with the name of God written on their foreheads. These are singing praises to God and playing their harps. They are pure and undefiled (as were the lambs and doves that were offered for sacrifice in the Temple).

Three angels appear offering a choice to all people to turn to God and worship him or face eternal torment without rest if they continue to follow the beast. A voice from heaven blesses those who follow the Lord and promise them rest from their labour.

There are then two visions of a harvest. The first is of the God's people being gathered up like a grain harvest. The second is of those who refuse God being gathered up and trampled in the winepress of God's wrath.

Final vision in this section is of those who had been victorious over the beast singing praises to God and playing on their harps.

Precis heavily influenced by chapter on Revelation in [The Oxford Bible Commentary](#).