

The 7th Trumpet has sounded and the eternal age has come, 11:15.

Chapters 12 - 15:4 take us again through the sweep of history but in a different way. The emphasis is not here on God's warning judgements on the "earth dwellers" but rather on **the conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the Kingdom of Light**. The conflict for individual believers and communities is characterised by witness, persecution, and martyrdom as well as the challenge to follow the Lord in holiness and faithfulness. All of this is taking place in **the context of a cosmic battle** that is, for the most part hidden from our eyes. **These visions pull back the curtain** and allow us to look behind the scenes. The "signs" are a symbolic way of revealing this reality, enabling us to interpret events in the visible world.

They take us beyond the surface explanations – historical, political, economic or sociological – to the spiritual forces that work through human agents, unsuspected but very real, 2Cor. 10:4-5, Eph. 2:1-2, 6: 11-13.

We are introduced to **the characters** who are central to this conflict and whose activities will be described in the following chapters.

- The **dragon/serpent/devil**
- The **beast from the sea** (the political beast)
- The **beast from the land** (the religious beast)
- The **image of the beast**
- **Babylon**

Once again the climax is the end of the age, judgement on those who have chosen the kingdom of darkness, 14:8-20, and celebration by the redeemed saints before the throne of God, 15:2-4.

"A great sign ... another sign", v1, 3.

Both signs appear in the heavenlies – they are symbolic of the spiritual reality that lies behind the visible events on earth. One is greater in importance than the other.

A glorious woman who is pregnant with a male child, v1-2,

The connection goes back to Genesis 3: 14-16. This child is the Seed promised to the first woman and whose story pervades the book of Genesis and the rest of Scripture, c.f. Gal. 3:16, 29. Gen. 3 inaugurated the great conflict between the woman and her seed and the serpent and his seed.

The woman is Israel (particularly the faithful ones) the nation set apart for this very purpose, described in the Scriptures as God's wife. **Joseph's dream** contained these symbols, immediately recognized as referring to the family of Israel, Gen. 37:9-10. The bride in S of S 6:10 is pictured in the same way.

God's wife is now about to become the mother of His children – her offspring, v17. Israel is described as being in labour but failing to bring forth the child, Isaiah 26:16-18. Now by the intervention of the Holy Spirit He is conceived and born, Luke 1:35, Isaiah 7:17 – the great sign. There is a similar metaphor as the disciples (faithful Israel) enter a period of sorrow as the Seed Himself passes through death to resurrection, John 19-22.

She and her children are subsequently the church, Jewish and Gentile, v13-17.

She is seen here from God's point of view and in consideration of her destiny, Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 21:2, 9-11, 22:3, just as God saw redeemed Israel, Jer. 31:3-6. Her pain in childbirth is symbolic of the painful struggle in the OT times to preserve the nation from physical destruction (Egypt, Haman in Esther, Antiochus Epiphanes etc.), and spiritual desertion (idolatry etc.).

This will continue until the end of time until the curse of sin, and its ultimate causes, is finally removed.

The dragon is also the **serpent, the devil, and satan** – deceiver and accuser, v9-10. Many of the surrounding nations had myths about monsters, dragons and serpents – symbolic of chaos, evil and destruction. These seem to be "folk memories" buried deep in the human consciousness of the great wound in creation. These myths point to the truth of a real devil, portrayed in Revelation in the "mythic language" of symbols.

The dragon is powerful (great), making use of his tail c.f. 9:10, 19, and is **fierce/destructive** (fiery red). He has **seven crowned heads** – his rival claim to ruler-ship over creation, and ten horns (power). He is a counterfeit version of the Lamb c.f. 5:6, 19:12, seeking control by means of naked force. The Lamb has been

given authority by virtue of His obedient suffering. The same symbolism is used for his chief servant, the beast from the sea, 13:1

The dragon has attracted a huge multitude of the stars (angels) to follow him and then casts them down to the earth, presumably to bring trouble to and through rebellious human creatures. There is no detail but they are likely to be the same principalities and powers to which Paul refers in Ephesians 6 and possibly the demon spirits that we encounter in the Gospels and Acts. **They act as his agents – he is powerful but is not omnipresent.**

The dragon is aware of the danger posed by the unborn child – he had repeatedly tried to break the line of promise and to disqualify Israel from fulfilling her high calling of bringing forth the Seed. He tried to nip the whole thing in the bud, using a current “mini-beast” (Herod) as a willing agent, v4 c.f. Matt2:16.

The male child connects with Gen. 3:15 and is obviously the Messiah. Psalm 2:9 reveals that He holds the position of King by appointment of God (the Father) and fast forwards to the end of time and the final victory. **If He is not destroyed at birth ultimate defeat stares the dragon in the face.**

The Messiah is triumphant, v5.

Only His birth and ascension are described. Knowledge of Jesus’ life, from The Gospels is assumed. The point is that He succeeded in His mission to destroy the works of the devil, 1John 3:8, John 12:27-33, 14:30, Luke 22:53, John 16:11, Col. 1:13, 2:15.

The flight and protection of the woman, v6.

In Revelation it is not uncommon to interrupt a scenario on earth, move to the heavenly perspective, and then complete the earthly sequence. This verse simply tells us that the woman flees and is protected for a particular period of time. Verses 7-10 provide the “heavenly “explanation and then we have further information about the woman’s experience on planet earth.

The link between what takes place on earth and events in the heavenlies is repeatedly emphasized.

It seems incongruous that the ascension of the “child” to the throne of God should result in danger for the woman. After all Jesus has won and the dragon has been defeated. Jesus has triumphed by means of total trust and obedience and absolute loyalty to the will and purposes of the Creator.

The accuser might nevertheless claim that He had certain advantages, not available to other creatures.

God will demonstrate to “principalities and powers that there is a whole company of “ordinary” men and women who are willing to follow the same path, overcoming him in the same way, v11,” c.f. Eph. 1:15-23 (see v21), 2:2, 3:8-11(see v10), 6:10-18 (see v12).

The corruption and curse of Genesis 3 will not only be undone but it will be demonstrated beyond contradiction that it has been done, and that He is indeed a faithful Creator, 1Peter:4:9.

God will have a people who will reject the slander and deception of the devil and remain true to Him even in the face of persecution and at the cost of their lives.

The woman is left in a vulnerable position but she, and her children, will be protected. God has provided a place for her and sustenance– in the wilderness.

In the history of Israel the wilderness, an unlikely place, was often a place of refuge – Moses, Exodus 2:15-3:1, The Exodus, Deut. 32:10-12, Jer. 2:1-6, Hosea 13:4-5, David in the wilderness of Judah, Elijah, 1Kings 19:1-18, a place of restoration, Hosea 2: 14-15. **The world is compared to a wilderness because it is the place of the devil’s activity, 1John 4:4, 5:19. Its power centres are essentially hostile to God and His people.**

The duration, 1260 days, is the symbolic number, c.f. 11:2-3. The starting point is the ascension of the “child”, so it appears to span the whole period from the ascension of Jesus until His return.

At every stage the faithful church has experienced persecution, John 15:18-25.

This will reach a climax near the end of the age and the symbolic number will have its full expression.

War in Heaven (The heavenlies) – Satan cast down to earth, v7-12 - “Rejoice” v12

This reads on from v5 and explains v6.

These events appear to have been precipitated by the completed work of Jesus, as He saw in prospect when the 70 returned from their mission, Luke 10:17-20, and anticipated just before His death, John 12:27-33, 14:30. He broke satan’s power, triumphing over him on the cross, Col. 2:15.

Satan had deceived a whole company of angels and thrown them to the earth to serve his purposes, v4. **Now satan himself is defeated in the heavenly realm**, v7-8 and no longer has access to God in his role of accuser v10, c.f. Job 1:6, Zech. 3:1-2.

Instead there is **our Advocate**, 1John 2:1-2, and **Great High Priest**, Heb. 2:17-18, 4:14-16.

Note that **God does not personally engage in the conflict** – Jesus is the Creator of principalities and powers, Col. 1:15-17, and as glorified man He is far above them all, Eph.1:19-23. **We must beware of dualism.**

Michael is the archangel who protects Israel, Daniel 12:1 so, appropriately, he is given the task of eviction.

This evokes a great outpouring of praise in Heaven, v10.

Much of satan's power rested on accusation – now any possible basis for this has been removed, Rom. 8:1, 31-34. **All possible grounds for accusation have been destroyed.**

The way into the Presence of God stands open, Heb. 10:19-22.

War on earth, v9-17 – **Woe**, v12

Satan is cast down to the earth, v9, 10, 12, 13 - **demotion and defeat.**

This does not mean that his ability to cause trouble on earth is at an end. In fact it marks a new phase in the ferocity of his **hatred and hostility**, v12. **His sphere of action is limited but he is livid and in a hurry.**

His own doom is certain and he is bent on maximum destruction. The Head is in Heaven, Eph. 1:20-23, beyond his reach so he attacks the body with relentless violence - **the woman**, v13, 17, and **her offspring**, v17.

The woman in v12 is Israel (particularly the faithful remnant). Now she is the faithful church, Jew and Gentile together, Eph. 2:11-22, **natural and engrafted branches**, Rom. 11:16-35, **one flock and one Shepherd**, John 10:16.

The brief statement in v6 is now filled out, v11-17.

“The woman fled into the wilderness”, v6. **Now we are informed about this flight**, v14 – **for the same period of time.**

She “was given two wings of a great eagle”, v14. In Deut. 32:10-11 **God is likened to a great eagle**, protecting and carrying and leading His people in the wilderness. In Isaiah 40:31 those who wait upon the LORD ... will mount up with wings like eagles.

In Rev. 12 **there is an organic union with the LORD** – His people experience His strength and presence and protection, as they abode in Him, even in the wilderness of the world, Psalm 91. They do not live in “the presence of the serpent” but in intimacy with the LORD. **He is the overriding reality.**

The initial attack is on the woman, v14. **Perhaps this refers to the initial onslaught against the Jewish church in Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2, in an attempt to cut it off before it could spread. The metaphor of a flood, threatening to overwhelm, is rooted in the Scriptures**, especially Psalm 124, and see Psalm 18:4-6. John would have remembered the storm on the Lake of Galilee. It describes overwhelming events beyond human power to help and then God's intervention. **The persecution backfired** – Acts 8:4, 9:3-22, Phil. 1:12-18.

The dragon appears to have two crucial targets – the woman and her offspring. If satan is to prevent his own destruction he must eliminate the church and the nation of Israel. This is beyond his strength, Matt. 18:18, Luke 13:35 (and many more references).

The dragon now “makes war” with her offspring, c.f. 11:7, 13:7 – **defined as those “who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus the Messiah”.** **They are faithful in life and in witness.**

His great wrath (at being cast down and made conscious of his limited time before final judgement), v12, has been magnified by failure to destroy the young church.

So **the battle is unrelenting**, with no quarter given. It is very hot at the present time.

The dragon's activity only serves to fulfil God's purpose. It demonstrates that He has a people who trust in the saving work of His Son and love Him more than life itself, v11.

The persecuted saints overcome him in the same way that Jesus did, v11 – trust, witness, and ultimate loyalty.

Spiritually they are beyond his reach, 7:4, 11:11-12, Rom. 8:28-39.