

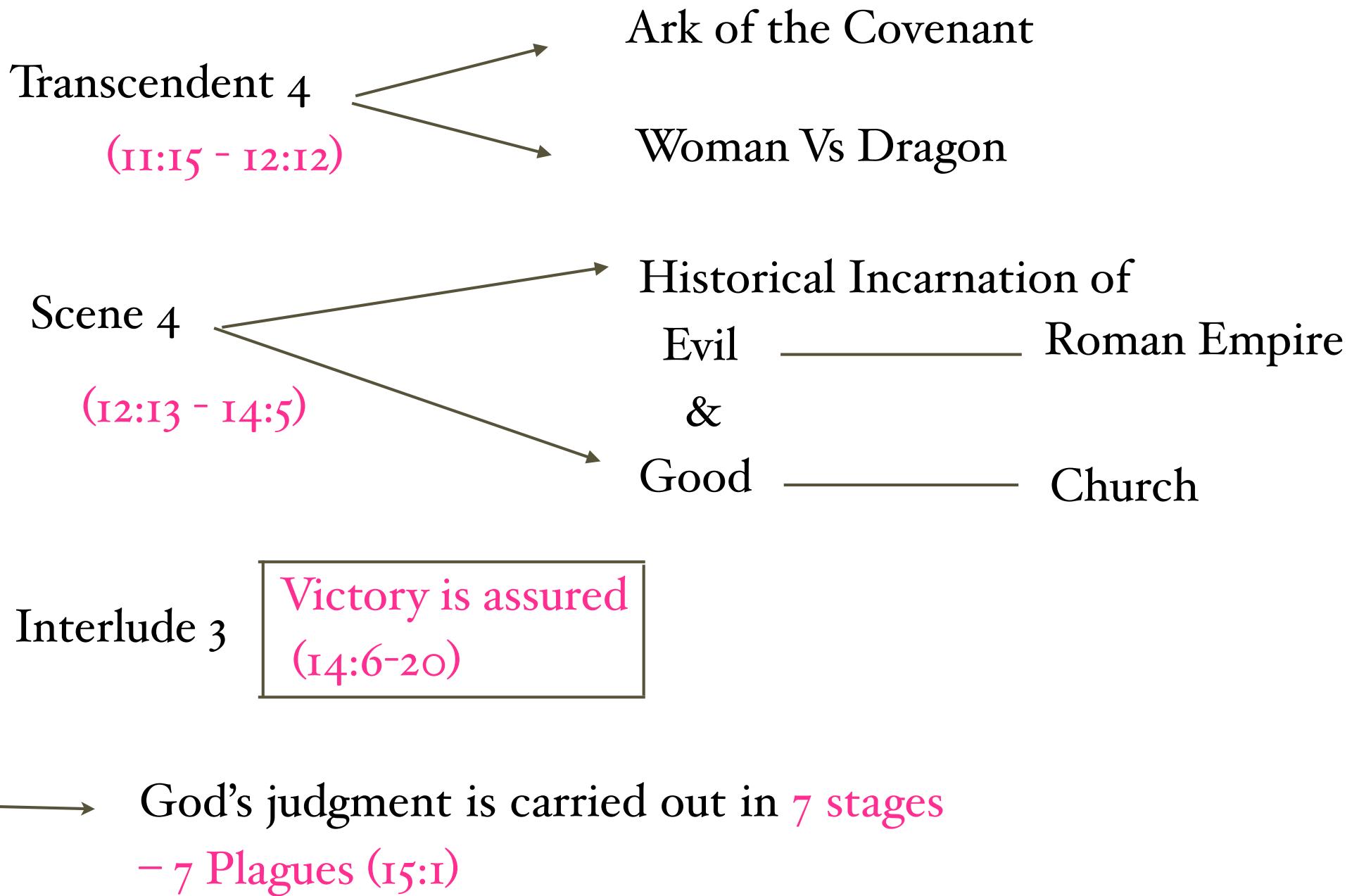
## Apocalypse 12:13 - 14:5

SCENE 4 : Forces for evil and forces for good.

INTERLUDE : Dramatic Preview : Apocalypse 14:6-20



‘Then the 7th angel blew his trumpet’(II:15)



## Apocalypse 12:13-14    1. The dragon

So when the dragon [12:3] saw that he had been thrown down to earth [12:9], he pursued the woman [12:1] who had given birth to the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle [Exodus 19:4; Isaiah 40:31], so that she could fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to her place where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time [Daniel 7:25; 12:7].

The kind of energy that sought to destroy Christ wants to destroy the church (the ‘woman’, see 12:2). The church is still journeying, and so finds itself in a desert. God, however, gives to the disciples of Jesus the power to rise above the temptations of evil and to come to him. Once again John uses an animal image, the eagle, to signify the incomprehensible nature of God’s protective activity.

‘The saints shall be given into his power for a time, two times, and half a time’(Daniel 7:25; 12:7).

‘The woman was given the two wings of the great eagle.’

Exodus 19:4

You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.

Isaiah 40:31

‘Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles.’

## Apocalypse 12:15-16

Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman, to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman; it opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth.

The dragon (12:3) has been thrown down to earth (12:9). It is deceptive, taking on the subtle and tempting form of a **serpent**. Water seems to be just what is needed to transform the desert. However the temptations faced by the churches of Asia Minor to accommodate with the Roman Empire are intended to sweep the church away. This ruse fails.

## Apocalypse 12:17-18

Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus. The the dragon took his stand on the sand of the seashore.

Having failed to deceive, evil shows itself in its real colours, no longer as the serpent but as the dragon. It stands in readiness for conflict with the church. Fittingly the dragon stands on the sand of the sea, for it comes from chaos to destroy God's creation (see 4:6): 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers' (Genesis 3:15).

## 2. The beast from the sea. Evil incarnate in the Roman Empire

Apocalypse 13:1-3

And I saw a beast rising out of the sea [the Roman maritime empire, see 17:7-14] with ten horns and seven heads; and on its horns were ten diadems, and on its heads were blasphemous names. And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And the dragon gave it his power and his throne and great authority.

John's imagery comes from the description given in the Book of Daniel (7:3-8, 21) of the empires which subjugated Judah.

One of its heads seemed to have received a death-blow, but its mortal wound had been healed.

At the time John is writing, some thought that the Emperor Domitian was a reincarnation of Nero. John seems to be alluding to this with his picture of the mortal wound that has been healed.

## Apocalypse 13:4-6

In amazement the whole earth followed the beast. They worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast [‘Michael’ = ‘Who is like God?’], and who can fight against it?’ The beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months [3.5 years]. It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

The arrogance and blasphemy uttered by the dragon is also modelled on Daniel (11:36): ‘The king shall act as he pleases. He shall exalt himself and consider himself greater than any god, and shall speak horrendous things against the God of gods. He shall prosper until the period of wrath is completed, for what is determined shall be done.’

## Apocalypse 13:7-10

Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. It was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life (3:5) of the Lamb that was slaughtered.

Let anyone who has an ear, listen [from the letters, see 2:7]

If you are to be taken captive, into captivity you go;  
if you kill with the sword with the sword you must be killed.

Here is a call for the endurance and faithfulness of the saints.

The essential theme of the Apocalypse

### 3. The beast from the land - local false prophet favouring empire

#### Apocalypse 13:11-14

Then I saw another beast that rose out of the earth; it had two horns [power, 5:6] like a lamb [appears as a disciple of Christ] and it spoke like a dragon. It exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf, and it makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound had been healed [Nero-Domitian, 13:3]. It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of all [Elijah; see decoding 19:20]; and by the signs that it is allowed to perform on behalf of the beast, it deceives the inhabitants of earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that had been wounded by the sword and yet came back to life.

This beast is a symbolic depiction of the false apostles who have already featured in the letters to the churches.

## Apocalypse 13:15-16

It was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right arm or the forehead.

Those who refuse to worship the emperor and his image are being handed over to be killed. Those who follow the Roman way are slaves of Rome, in their way of living ('marked on the right arm'), or in their way of thinking ('marked on the forehead').

## Apocalypse 13:17-18

so that no one can buy or sell who does not have the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is 666.

The enigmatic 666 with which John concludes this passage has given rise to much speculation. One suggestion is that 666 refers to the emperor Domitian, the ‘re-incarnation’ of Nero (‘the moral wound that has healed’, 13:3,12). Hebrew letters have a standard numerical equivalence, and the title Neron Caesar in Hebrew does in fact add up to 666. Such an interpretation fits well with the thrust of the passage.

$$N = 50; R = 200; W = 6; N = 50 \ // \ Q = 100; S = 60; R = 200$$

Apocalypse 13:18     Its number is 666.

A second suggestion appears at first sight to be farfetched. It is, however, typical of the way in which the Rabbis enjoyed playing with numbers. According to this suggestion the number 666 is linked with the Hebrew word for truth: 'emet which has a numerical equivalent of 441 , numbers which when added come to 9. Because of its special mathematical qualities and its link with the word 'truth', 9 was considered the divine number. The link comes about because  $6+6+6=18$ , and  $8+1=9$ .

Perhaps John is saying that the beast has the divine number, meaning that however ferocious it may appear, in the ultimate analysis, it is under God and so cannot prevail against God or destroy God's kingdom.

The three-fold repetition of the number 6, which is half 12, and one short of 7, may simply be meant to symbolise the summit of godlessness and evil for all times.

Its number is 666.

A generation later, Irenaeus, who was born in Asia Minor, and so can be expected to have been familiar with the milieu in which the Apocalypse was written, warned against wild guessing in attempts to interpret this enigmatic symbol [Adversus Haereses V.30].

John insists that ‘This calls for wisdom’ (see 5:12; 17:9). Each generation has to use similar wisdom to discern false prophecy and false propaganda in its own world.

## 4. The Lamb and those with Him

Apocalypse 14:1

Then I saw, and behold! The Lamb standing on Mount Zion! and with him the 144,000 [7:4], all those who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Prior to the final conflict between the forces of evil and the forces of good, and prior to the announcing of the hour of God's judgment (14:7), we are taken to Jerusalem, the city of God, to see the crucified and risen Christ (the Lamb, 5:6) and with him the Church, already victorious.

The 144,000 (7:4) symbolises the universal or catholic dimension of the church (7:4), comprising all those who have the crucified and exalted Jesus (the Lamb) as their lord. They are 'slaves' of Christ and his Father, having 'his Father's name written on their foreheads.'

## Apocalypse 14:1

Then I saw, and behold! The Lamb standing on Mount Zion! and with him one hundred forty-four thousand who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

## Apocalypse 3:12

'If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven.'

## Hebrews 12:22-24

‘You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is the God of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood.’

## Apocalypse 14:2-5

And I heard a voice from heaven like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. {singing is heard on earth, but needs divine enlightenment to grasp its significance}

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they sing a new song [5:9] before the throne [1:4] and before the four animal-like creatures [4:6] and before the elders [4:4]. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who have been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from human-kind as first fruits for God and the Lamb, and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless.

virgins - have not committed adultery (false gods),  
have kept their first love for God.

Apocalypse 14:6-20

## INTERLUDE : Dramatic Preview

The good will be victorious.

The wicked will be condemned.

Apocalypse 14:6-7

### i. Good will be victorious

Then I saw another angel flying in midheaven, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation and tribe and language and people [5:9; 7:9]. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.'

## Apocalypse 14:8

Then another angel, a second, followed, saying,  
‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has made all nations drink  
of the wine of her fornication’

The fall of Babylon became in Jewish literature the symbol for the fall of all those who oppose God and his chosen people (18:2-3). In the situation in which John is writing, the force opposing God’s people is the Roman Empire. This is the first of seven statements concerning God’s judgment of Rome, and of those who have been seduced by the allurements of wealth and power into opposing God.

The imagery is borrowed from Jeremiah 51:7-8

## Apocalypse 14:9-11

Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, ‘If anyone worships the beast [from the sea, Rome 13:14] and its image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his arms, he will also drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulphur [Sodom and Gomorrah] in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name’.

## Apocalypse 14:12-13

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints [key theme, 13:10],  
those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the  
faith of Jesus.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this [1:11]:  
Blessed [2nd of 7 beatitudes] are the dead who from now on die in  
the Lord’.

[response of the inspired assembly]

‘Yes’, says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labours, for their  
deeds follow them’.

## 2. The execution of judgment (14:14-20)

### Apocalypse 14:14-16 - reward of the just

Then I looked, and there was a white (1:14), cloud (1:7) and seated (4:2) on the cloud was one like the Son of Man (1:13), with a golden (1:12) crown (2:10) on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand! [judgment]

Another angel came out of the temple, calling in a loud voice to the one who sat on the cloud, ‘Use your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, the harvest of the earth is fully ripe’. So the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The first judgment, carried out by Christ himself, is of the just. He is answering the martyrs’ prayers which rise from the altar in the temple (6:9; 8:3-5; 15:5-8).

## Apocalypse 14:17-20 - punishment of the unjust

Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Then another angel came out from the altar, the angel who has authority over fire (8:5), and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Use your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for the grapes are ripe’. So the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. The wine press was trodden outside the city [heaven, the holy city], and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse’s bridle, for 1600 stadia. [stadium = 200 metres]

{ $1600 = (4 \times 10) \times (4 \times 10)$  – comprehensive (4) but essentially limited (10) }

