CHAPTER 9

The Air Combat between Michael and the Dragon
Revelation 12:7–12 in Relation to Similar Texts from the New Testament

Rob van Houwelingen

1 Introduction

The dragons of the ancient world are quite different from the drones of the beginning of the twenty-first century. Yet, in some respects there are also similarities: they are invisible for a long time and they can become suddenly fatal. In chapter 12 the book of Revelation reports a visionary experience of John on the isle of Patmos: he witnessed an air combat between the archangel Michael and Satan. Satan appears in the form of a dragon, having features of the monster Leviathan (Rev 12:3; cf. 13:1; 17:1, 7, 9). Two otherworldly armies faced each other; they represent the good and the evil forces that are in the air. As a result of this air combat the dragon was cast out. An enigmatic vision! What prophetic message did the first audience hear in this passage by the end of the 1st century? They were Christians in the seven churches of Asia Minor. As later Bible readers how can we connect this passage with similar texts from the New Testament, in which the elimination of Satan is announced?

2 Structure of Revelation 12

2.1 A Cosmic Conflict

First we must view chapter 12 of the book of Revelation as a whole. Here the conflict between the Dragon and the Woman is mapped out. They are two figures who had appeared to the visionary eye of John at the very beginning of the chapter. Verses 7–12 interrupt this line, putting the conflict into a framework: it is a cosmic conflict, full of significance for the inhabitants of both heaven and earth.

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1 See also the contribution of Henk van de Kamp to this volume. He deals particularly with Rev 12:3–6 and 13:1–10, while the present contribution focuses on 12:7–12.

Verses 10–11 are usually considered to be a brief hymnic interlude about the consequences of the appearance of the Dragon for believers (cf. 13:9–10). They are threatened by a great danger. According to Van Henten, different historical contexts are possible: a lawsuit in a Roman court, or mandatory participation in religious festivities, requiring a sacrifice or demonstration of loyalty to the emperor.³

The vision from Revelation 12 can be structured as follows:⁴

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Introduction</th>
<th>Two signs: the Woman and the Dragon</th>
<th>verses 1–3</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Fleeing of the Woman persecuted by the Dragon</td>
<td>verses 4–6</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>War in heaven</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>Hymn</td>
<td>verses 10–12</td>
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<td>A’</td>
<td>Fleeing of the Woman persecuted by the Dragon</td>
<td>verses 13–16</td>
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<td>B’</td>
<td>War on earth</td>
<td>verse 17</td>
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### 2.2 Observations
The proposed structure leads to two primary observations:

a. The hymn in verses 10–12 is no interlude, but provides essential background information, background music and interpretation. One could think of the function of a chorus in a Greek drama.⁵ According to Van de Kamp, we are here as close as one can get to the experience of the early Christian community. They could ask why they were experiencing

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⁵ Humphrey, "To Rejoice or Not to Rejoice?,” 121, referring to Aune's commentary (see footnote 23).