

New Perspectives on the Bowl Plagues in Revelation 16

by

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Ethics statement

The author, whose name appears on the title page of this thesis, has obtained, for the research described in this work, the applicable research ethics approval. The author declares that he/she has observed the ethical standards required in terms of the University of Pretoria's Code of ethics for researchers and the Policy guidelines for responsible research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and literature review

1.1 Reason for this study

1.1.1 General

It is a well-known fact that the book of Revelation as a whole consists of many references to texts from a variety of books from Jewish Scriptures, or the Old Testament as it is known among Christians. De Silva (2002:215) states that “what is perhaps the most creative text in the Bible is also in many respects the least original at the level of ‘invention’, since many of the images, phrases and actions in Revelation have identifiable antecedents in the Jewish scriptures”.¹ For this reason the Old Testament background of Revelation has been the subject of intense scrutiny over the last few decades. There are many different approaches to the conceptual background of the symbolism used in the book of Revelation. Some studies focus their attention on the influence of one specific book from Jewish literature on the composition of the book of Revelation. Books and essays have been written on the influence of Daniel,² Isaiah³, the psalms⁴ and the Exodus⁵ on the book of Revelation for instance. Studies have also been done on the influence of a certain part of an Old Testament book on a particular smaller section of the book of Revelation.⁶ Other studies focus on the way the author of Revelation makes use of the material from the Hebrew Scriptures.⁷ There are also studies on the Old Testament background of certain parts of the book of Revelation.⁸ Finally, some commentaries put a strong focus on the Old Testament background of the book.⁹ This brief reference to some of the work done on the Old Testament background of the book of Revelation indicates how

¹ Scholars from the 1960’s to the 1970’s such as Beckwith (1967) and Jenkins (1972:21) already recognized this fact and started to explore the way John uses the Old Testament.

² Beale (1984).

³ Fekkes (1994).

⁴ Moyise (2003 [1]).

⁵ Casey (1981).

⁶ Van Ruiten (1993), for instance, wrote an essay on the relationship between Isa 65:17-20 and Rev. 21:1-5b.

⁷ Two examples are Moyise (1995) and Beale (1998).

⁸ The well-known doctoral thesis of Jon Paulien (1988) on the background of the trumpet plagues is one good example, although he only applies a method he develops in the study on the trumpet plague narrative. Sommer (2015) is also an example of this kind of study.

⁹ A very thorough commentary in this regard is the contribution of Beale (1999) on Revelation in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* series. This commentary will therefore be used extensively in the current study.

important modern scholars think the Old Testament background is. Despite all this research on the Old Testament background of the book of Revelation, it was found that no single study has been dedicated to the background of the bowl plague series.¹⁰ This study will therefore endeavour to bridge this gap in the research by looking for new perspectives on the background of the bowl plagues in Rev. 16.

1.1.2 The three septets in Revelation

The bowl plague series is one of three series of seven in the book of Revelation, each with its own use of symbolism. First the seven seals are opened (Rev 5 - Rev 8:1), the first six in quick succession and then the seventh after a break in which the 144000 are marked with a seal. The second series is a series of seven angels, each blowing a trumpet (Rev 8:2 - Rev11:19). The third series (Rev 16:1-21) is specifically called plagues (Rev 15:1) and each plague is poured out from a bowl by an angel. The second and third series are closer together and have a great deal of symbolism in common. For this reason, many scholars see the series as parallel. In both of these series, angels also play an important part. It will be indicated, however, that these two series are not so close that they necessarily share the exact same background. Although the series of trumpet plagues has been researched, more in-depth research is needed on the bowl plagues specifically. This study will attempt to determine what conceptual background most probably lay behind the symbolism in each of the seven bowl plagues in Rev.16. All words or phrases used will be investigated with care and compared to the way those phrases are used elsewhere in the Jewish Scriptures, among Jewish writers such as Philo, and also in the New Testament.

Before we commence, a note on the unity of the book, and also on the author, is needed as orientation.

1.2 The unity of the book

Some scholars use the source-critical method to argue that the book of Revelation consists of many different pieces of what Paulien (1987:11) calls “early Christian and/or Jewish apocalyptic works”. However, the argument of Paulien (1987:12) stating that the book is a single unit, appears to be a valid point, composed by a single author who used a variety of sources in a creative manner to convey his message. This is confirmed by Koester (2014:71)

¹⁰ De Villiers (2005) wrote an essay on the composition of the bowl plagues, but he does not discuss the background in much detail.

who argues that none of the attempts to reconstruct the stages of composition in the book of Revelation are convincing.¹¹ For the purposes of this study, the text will therefore be treated as a single book with a single author.

1.3 The author of Revelation

The true identity of the author of Revelation is not of primary importance to the current study. It is accepted that his name was John as he is introduced in the first chapter of the book.¹² Throughout this study he will, therefore, simply be referred to as John or “the author of Revelation”.

1.4 The Old Testament in Revelation

The visions which this author describes in his book are informed by a variety of textual sources, most notably the Jewish Scriptures or, as it is commonly referred to in research, the Old Testament. It is widely accepted that John uses Old Testament imagery throughout the book of Revelation. Paul (2000:256) summarizes this well by noting that “there is little doubt that, while Revelation does not formally cite the Old Testament, it is saturated with allusive references to it. Its language is more dependent on the Old Testament than any other work of the New.” Despite this it is also recognized that there are no quotations in the book of Revelation. This is due to the fact that there are no introductory formulas found in the book (Moyise, 2008:111).¹³ In recent years much research has subsequently been done on the Jewish or “Old Testament” background of the book of Revelation. Gregory Beale¹⁴ even wrote a whole monograph on the way John uses the Old Testament in Revelation. In this book he starts by mentioning the different studies on the Old Testament in Revelation, which were completed up to the time Beale wrote his book. Even more so, he highlights the increase in

¹¹ In support of this, Mazzaferri (1989:56), whose study examines the book of Revelation from a source-critical perspective, notes that “because of its patent unity Rev does not invite regular source criticism”.

¹² Koester (2014:66) argues that the “the most plausible view is that John was the real name of the author and he was a Jewish Christian prophet active in Asia Minor”.

¹³ Karrer (2018:232) notes that “Er zitiert sie nicht explizit mit Einleitungsformeln und schmilzt die referierten Schriftstellen und Schriftmotive in seinen neuen Text ein.”

¹⁴ G. K. Beale. 1998. *John's use of the Old Testament in Revelation*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

research on the Old Testament in Revelation in the years leading up to the publication of his book. He also confirms the fact that it is generally accepted that there are more references to the Old Testament in Revelation than in any other New Testament book (Beale, 1998:60). This monograph follows on a book by Moyise,¹⁵ which also explores the way the Jewish Scriptures are used in the book of Revelation by presenting a few case studies on the influence of the Jewish Scriptures on parts of Revelation. He ultimately ends with a discussion on the usefulness of theories of intertextuality on the way John uses Scripture.

However, the first century Jewish world of thought consisted of much more than just the Jewish canonical texts. Much of the cosmology of the ancient world also formed part of this conceptual framework, which includes the symbolism used.¹⁶ While there is much debate on the exact date when the book of Revelation was written, most agree that it is between 45 and 160 C.E.¹⁷ Koester (2014:65) notes that the traditional view is that Revelation was written around 95 C.E. when Christians were persecuted by emperor Domitian. However, he concludes that a definite date cannot be determined. For the purposes of this study an exact date is not vitally important. Whether an earlier or later date of composition is chosen, the fact remains that the book of Revelation was composed with a late first century or early second century Greco-Roman cosmology in mind, which most probably had an influence on the imagery used in the text. Commentators such as Koester (2014) emphasises specifically the influence of the Roman world on Revelation.

1.5 The apparent background of the bowl plagues

Reading through the bowl plague narrative with some knowledge of the first century Jewish-Hellenistic world, two backgrounds immediately become apparent: The Exodus plague narrative and the four ancient elements from Greek philosophy.

¹⁵ S. Moyise. 1995. *The Old Testament in the book of Revelation*. Sheffield Academic Press.

¹⁶ Walvoord (2011:34) states that “it is undoubtedly true that the final book of the New Testament, because of its apocalyptic character, contains more symbols than any other book in the New Testament”.

¹⁷ Witulski (2007:11) states right from the start of his important work on the dating of the book of Revelation that in the last 20 years before he wrote his book the dating of Revelation once again became a matter of debate. He notes that dates have been proposed ranging from 45/60 C.E. to 155/160 C.E. His own conclusion is that it is very probable that Revelation was written during the reign of Emperor Hadrian between 132 C.E. and 135 C.E. (Witulski, 2007:348).

1.5.1 The Exodus narrative

Knowing that the Hebrew Scriptures were very important to the author of Revelation, as it has been stated above, it is to be expected that significant events in the Old Testament would also play a central part in the book of Revelation. One of these significant events is the Exodus. Collins (2004:107) makes it clear that “(the Exodus) is the most celebrated event in the entire Hebrew Bible and the event that is most important for the later identity of Israel and of Judaism”.¹⁸ It is therefore no surprise to find an Exodus motif strongly embedded in Christian writings and specifically the book of Revelation (Evans, 2014:440).¹⁹ The Exodus motif is seen most clearly in Rev. 15 with the mention of plagues (Rev 15:1), Moses (Rev 15:3) and the tent of witness (Rev 15:5).²⁰ Most commentators therefore agree that there is a strong Exodus motif present in Rev. 15.²¹

Rev 15:1 serves as introduction to the seven bowl plagues described in Rev 16:1-21. Before the description of the plagues there is a reference to “the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb” and the contents of a song is provided.²² This is the only direct reference to Moses in the book of Revelation. Beale (1999:801) argues that this song is only an interlude and not

¹⁸ Evans (2014:440) agrees with this and states that “the exodus story was the single most important story in Israel’s sacred national narrative.”

¹⁹ Jenkins (1972:68) argues that the Exodus motif can be seen at a number of places in Revelation. He states that “the majority of these usages fall into five groupings: *a.* the lampstand (Rev. 1); *b.* the trumpets (Rev. 8, 9); *c.* one of the witnesses (Rev. 11); *d.* the song of Moses (Rev. 15); and *e.* the bowls of wrath (Rev. 16).”

²⁰ Beale (1999:801) argues that the “tent of witness” (τῆς σκηνῆς τοῦ μαρτυρίου) in Rev 15:5 is a direct reference to the tent of witness in Exod 38:26.

²¹ Moyise (2004:350) is of the opinion that the Exodus motif is so strong in the first few verses of Rev. 15 that the readers would expect that after the mention of a song of Moses the song in Exodus 15 would be cited. By not doing it, Moyise (2004:350) argues, John creates a so-called “dialogical tension”. Beale (1999:789) also states that the mention of the “sea of glass” strengthens the Exodus motif in Rev 15. Kovacs and Rowland (2004:168-170), furthermore, discuss the Exodus imagery they see in Rev. 15 in some detail, pointing out that they also see a strong Exodus motif here. Also refer to Du Rand (2007:466-467).

²²In a study I did on this song for a master’s degree (Scharneck, 2013) I came to the conclusion that there are probably two separate songs in the author’s mind here. The first is the song of Moses which is the song the Israelites sang after crossing the Red Sea (Exod 15) and the second song is the song of the Lamb of which the contents are given in Rev 15:3-4.

part of the plague narrative of Rev 16. Yet the Exodus motif in Rev 15 where the plagues of Rev 16 are introduced cannot be denied.²³

When looking at the actual plagues mentioned in Rev 16, however, *most of these plagues bear little, or in some instance, no resemblance to the ten plagues found in the book of Exodus.*²⁴ Furthermore, the order of the plagues differ and not all the plagues are included. This study will investigate why these differences exist and will attempt to establish what the links between the plagues in Rev 16 and the plagues in Exodus are.

1.5.2 The ancient cosmology

The Exodus narrative is discussed extensively in the works of a Greek writer such as Philo of Alexandria who is strongly influenced by Greek philosophy. He frequently brings aspects of Greek philosophy into his discussion on the Exodus plagues and other parts of the Torah.

There are a few aspects on this ancient cosmology which could play a role in the formation of the bowl plagues. The first is the traditional four elements of which the universe was seen as consisting of namely earth, water, fire and air. There are some clear references to these elements in the text of the bowl plague narrative, but the importance of the role it played will be discussed in this study. Furthermore, one also needs to question whether the links are more to the Hebrew background in the creation narrative, or to the Greek philosophical background. Another important aspect of the first century cosmology which could have played a role is the angelology and the cosmology of the heaven and the earth. Some of the ancients traditionally saw heaven as consisting of seven layers, each with guardian angel which protects that part of heaven.²⁵

1.5.3 Other aspects of the background

All the images used in the bowl plagues will be discussed in the light of the rest of the New Testament use of these images. The text of the bowl plague narrative will furthermore be explored in the light of its relationship to the rest of the book of Revelation, especially the trumpet plagues.

²³ Cf. Mounce (1998:285) who states that there are “many parallels” between Revelation 15 and Exodus 15.

²⁴ This has long since been accepted. See for instance Zahn (1986:536) who notes that the description of the seven last plagues “ist keine mechanische Kopie der ägyptische Plagen”.

²⁵ In Jewish literature this can clearly be seen in a book like 1 En. 1-36 which is commonly known as the Book of the Watchers.

1.6 Brief research history

In this section the most important research on the book of Revelation, including the background of the book in general and specifically the bowl plagues, will be presented as well as discussed in terms of the relevance for the current study.

1.6.1 Research on the OT in Revelation

The discussion will start by focusing on the research of the way the Old Testament is used in the book of Revelation.

1.6.1.1 Books and scholarly articles published on the way the Old Testament is used in Revelation²⁶

In approximately the last twenty years extensive research has been done specifically on the way the Old Testament is used in the book of Revelation. Beale (1998:13-14) discusses most of the major literature on the topic of the Old Testament in Revelation which was published until the middle of the 1990's. He particularly notes the lack of work done on the Old Testament in Revelation until the late 1970's. The 1980's saw an increase in research on the way the Old Testament is used in the book of Revelation. Beale (1998) categorizes the work done on the Old Testament in Revelation in an effective way. Five of the works he refers to, discusses the specific Old Testament texts which might be alluded to in the book of Revelation – which includes his own work on the use of Daniel,²⁷ the work of Vogelgesang on Ezekiel,²⁸ the work of Paulien on the trumpet plagues in Revelation,²⁹ Bauckham's work on Revelation as

²⁶ The debate on the way John uses the Old Testament will be discussed briefly later in this chapter. This section only provides an overview of the work that has been done and the scholars whose work are deemed as most influential in this regard.

²⁷ G. K. Beale. 1984. *The use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelaiton of St. John*. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America).

²⁸ J. M. Vogelgesang. 1985. *Interpretation of Ezekiel in Revelation*. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis. Harvard University.

²⁹ J. Paulien. 1987. *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7-12*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertations Series, 21; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrew University Press.

prophesy³⁰ and the book of Fekkes on Isaiah and the prophetic traditions in Revelation³¹ (Beale, 1998:15-28). Furthermore, he continues to discuss the two works which are more concerned with how the author of Revelation deals with Old Testament material in general rather than the specific Old Testament texts which are referred to. The first is the work of Ruiz on Ezekiel in Revelation which focuses more on how the text of Ezekiel is used in Revelation instead of the specific parts of Ezekiel alluded to (Beale, 1998:29).³² Boxall also wrote on the influence of Ezekiel on Revelation, with particular reference to the influence of Ezekiel on the structure of the visions in the book of Revelation.³³ The other book that Beale (1998:41) refers to is the work of Moyise, which specifically deals with how the Old Testament is used in Revelation.³⁴ . He published a later work in which he provides a more general discussion of the Old Testament use in the New Testament. In this work he selects a few books from the Old Testament and discusses the use of each in the book of Revelation in a separate chapter.³⁵ One chapter of the book discusses the Old Testament in Revelation. A few scholarly articles also came from the research of Moyise, which all deal with the Old Testament in Revelation and the way John uses the Old Testament material available to him.³⁶ In addition, Beale (1998) published his own work on the way in which John uses the Old Testament in Revelation.

More recently Beale and Carson (2007) published a commentary on the way the whole New Testament makes use of the Old Testament. This study does not go into much depth of every text, but it does attempt to provide a synopsis of the different texts alluded to or quoted in the New Testament. Rev. 16 is no exception as it is also only broadly discussed in a few pages. Furthermore, in the chapter on Revelation Beale mostly makes use of much of the conclusions he reached in his own commentary on Revelation (Beale and Carson, 2007). For example, in the 2007 commentary he simply quotes from his 1999 commentary when he writes in terms of the content of the song in Rev 15 that “the content of the song itself comes not

³⁰ R. Bauckham. 1993. *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

³¹J. Fekkes. 1994. *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*. JSNTSup, 93; Sheffield: JSOT Press.

³² J. P. Ruiz. 1989. *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation*. European University Studies, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

³³ I. Boxall. 2007. “Exile, Prophet, Visionary. Ezekiel’s Influence on the Book of Revelation” in H. J. de Jonge, J. Tromp (eds.). *The Book of Ezekiel and its Influence*. Hampshire, England: Ashgate publishing, pp.

³⁴ S. Moyise. 1995. *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*. Sheffield Academic Press.

³⁵ S. Moyise. 2001. *The Old Testament in the New: an Introduction*. London: Continuum.

³⁶ Cf. Moyise (2002), Moyise (2003) and Moyise (2004).

directly from Exod. 15, but rather from passages throughout the OT extolling God's character" (Beale and Carson, 2007:1134). Later Beale (2012) also published a book which is meant to be used as a textbook by pastors, students and scholars on how to go about working with the Old Testament in the New Testament.³⁷

Other studies trace themes from the Jewish Scriptures in larger parts of the book of Revelation, such as the work of Michael Sommer (2015) based on his doctoral thesis where he works with the theme of the Egyptian plagues and the day of the Lord.³⁸ In this work he argues that in Rev 6:12 – Rev.16:21 John merges the Exodus plague tradition with the tradition of the day of the Lord. Another example of this kind of study is the work of Laszlo Gallusz on the throne motif in the book of Revelation.³⁹

Finally, there is the work of Martin Karrer which focusses his research on attempting to determine which LXX manuscripts were used by John. In 2018 he wrote a chapter in a book on rewriting and reception in and of the Bible where he explores the textual history of the LXX text used by John by looking at the references to some of the major prophets in Revelation.⁴⁰

1.6.1.2 Commentaries on Revelation in general⁴¹

The next body of literature which will be very important for this study is the commentaries on the book of Revelation. Every commentary discusses the Old Testament background of the text to a larger or lesser extent. Some only make a passing note whilst others go into greater detail.

³⁷ This book basically discusses his own methodology which he used when writing his books on the Old Testament in Revelation. He attempts to provide a step-by-step way in which one can identify and study an Old Testament text used by a New Testament author.

³⁸ M. Sommer. 2015. *Der Tag der Plagen : Studien zur Verbindung der Rezeption von Ex 7-11 in den Posaunen- und Schalenvisionen der Johannesoffenbarung und der Tag des Herrn-Tradition*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. Sommer (2015).

³⁹ L. Gallusz. 2014. *The throne motif in the book of Revelation*. London: Bloomsbury.

⁴⁰ M. Karrer. 2018. "Reception and Rewriting: Beobachtungen zu Schriftreferenzen und Textgeschichte der Apokalypse" in J. Høgenhaven, J. T. Nielsen, and H. Omerzu. (eds.) *Rewriting and Reception in and of the Bible*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 207-234.

⁴¹ There are more of these commentaries than discussed here, but the aim is just to discuss some examples of commentaries and their usefulness for this study. It can also be noted that by the time this dissertation was completed only the first band of the commentary of Martin Karrer in the EKK series on the book of Revelation was available. This commentary appeared in 2017, but only covers Revelation up to the fifth chapter.

Ford (1977): This commentary in the *Anchor Bible* series often discusses the different allusions to the Old Testament in Revelation and attempts to look at the influence of the Qumran manuscripts.⁴² These types of discussions will be essential to evaluate in the current study.

Giesen (1997): Is a German commentary which examines the text in detail, taking into account the Old Testament texts alluded to in the book.

Aune (1998): The commentary of Aune (1998) in the *Word Biblical Commentary* series provides a detailed discussion of the Greek text of the book of Revelation and discusses the text critical aspects at play. The author gives a good indication of the texts which he thinks are alluded to in every chapter of Revelation.

Beale (1999): Of all the work that has been done on the Old Testament in Revelation, the commentary of Beale (1999), which was published as part of the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (NIGTC) series, is the most detailed study. This commentary still provides one of the most thorough investigations into the texts behind many of the imagery and allusions in Revelation done thus far. In this commentary he attempts to indicate what Old Testament texts might be alluded to in almost every verse of Revelation. Despite Beale (1999) having some presuppositions which influences his interpretation of the texts and impacts on the Old Testament texts he thinks John alluded to, his work will be very useful for this study.

Van de Kamp (2000:356-360): He discusses the Old Testament background of the text of Revelation in detail and points out the text which he thinks are alluded to.

Blount (2009): The commentary of Blount (2009) is another commentary which provides a very in-depth analysis of the Old Testament texts at play in Revelation. Similar to the commentary of Beale (1999) it is a very detailed exposition of the text of Revelation.

Koester (2014): In his discussion of the text of Revelation he focusses much more on the Greco-Roman context as background to the text, instead of the Jewish Scriptures.

Berger (2017): This German commentary is one of the most recent commentaries on Revelation and it appeared in the Herder series. Berger also refers to links to the Jewish Scriptures, but his focus is more on the interpretation of the text by ancient writers throughout the centuries.

There are other commentaries on Revelation which do not go into as much detail of the Old Testament background of Revelation as Beale (1999), but which still attempts to show that they did indeed take it into account by referring to specific Old Testament texts in certain instances and discussing some Old Testament motifs.

⁴² For an example cf. Ford (1977:256-257) where he discusses the possible influence of some of the Qumran manuscripts on Revelation where references to the Exodus can be found.

Du Rand (2007): Despite this commentary by Du Rand (2007) being aimed at the popular market, the work has been done very thoroughly and also falls into this category. His main aim with the book is to make the book of Revelation accessible to the non-expert readers of the Bible and in the process, he provides valuable discussions on some of the imagery found in Revelation.

Then there are also the commentaries which are least helpful for a study such as this, namely the commentaries which are almost exclusively concerned with analysing what the different parts of Revelation mean within the context of the book itself with only passing references to the Old Testament.

Caird (1966): Caird's commentary on Revelation is indeed quite old. However, it is still used by commentators as it discusses the text of Revelation in a very detailed and systematic manner.⁴³ Still he does not go into any detail on how John uses the Old Testament or what texts he alludes to.⁴⁴ Caird's detailed discussion on the themes from the Old Testament will still be useful in this study.

Mounce (1978): He points to some Old Testament texts where the reference to the Old Testament would be obvious, but without going into much detail.

Witherington (2003): The same is true for Witherington (2003:206) who goes into no detail of what Old Testament texts are behind the song in Revelation 15 and only states that "the song is a patchwork quilt of OT phrases, and it contents owes more to Deut. 32 than to Exod. 15."

Kovacks and Rowland (2004): This commentary also falls into this category as they broadly discuss each chapter of Revelation, with only a few notes about the Old Testament background.⁴⁵

1.6.1.3 Scholarly articles published on Revelation 16

Since Revelation 16 contains the popular reference to "Armageddon" which is commonly seen, especially among more evangelical churches, as the day on which the world will literally end, many scholarly articles have been published on the interpretation and Old Testament

⁴³Caird, G. B. 1966. *The Revelation of St John the divine*. Londen: A & C Black.

⁴⁴ Cf. Caird (1966:198-210).

⁴⁵ The commentary of Morris (1989) can also be added here.

background of “Armageddon”. Some of these essays simply attempt to provide an explanation of the meaning of Armageddon to non-scholarly readers.⁴⁶ However, there are also articles which attempt to find the exact Old Testament background of the word.⁴⁷ Other papers look into what exactly is intended by the reference to Babylon in Rev 16-17.⁴⁸

Academic articles which will also be useful are essays which discuss specific motifs in the text of Rev 15 and 16. One example is the article of Giesen (2012) who discusses the Christological title “Lamb” in Revelation.⁴⁹

1.6.2 The debate on the way Old Testament is used in Revelation among recent scholars

In terms of the hermeneutical discussion on the Old Testament in Revelation a whole debate exists. Although it is not the primary focus of the current study, it is still important to have a brief look at the debate in order to be open for any presuppositions which the researcher might impose on the text he is working with.

1.6.2.1 Quotations, allusions and echoes

In 1988 Paulien published an article in where he argues for the need for objective criteria which can be used when identifying references to the Old Testament.⁵⁰ The central question centres around the way in which John makes use of Old Testament material. As previously mentioned, in scholarly circles it is common knowledge that Revelation contains no citations⁵¹ from the Old

⁴⁶Cf. for example Crawford (2009:101-107).

⁴⁷Day (1994) makes an argument for the most commonly accepted origin of the word, namely that it refers to the *Har Megiddo* in Hebrew or the “mount of Megiddo”. This view is challenged by Jauhiainen (2004:382) arguing that the context of the book of Revelation should play a larger role in determining the meaning of *Har Megeddon*.

⁴⁸Biguzzi (2006:371-386) looks into the merits of the arguments of scholars proposing Babylon as reference to Jerusalem. In the end he concludes that the traditional view of Babylon as reference to Rome is indeed the best view according to all evidence.

⁴⁹ Giesen, H. 2012. “Der Christustitel ‘Lamm’ in der Offenbarung des Johannes und sein religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergrund” in Labahn, M. and Karrer M. (eds.) 2012. *Die Johannesoffenbarung: Ihr Text und ihre Auslegung*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, pp 173-196.

⁵⁰ Paulien, J. 1988. “Elusive allusions: the problematic use of the Old Testament in Revelation” in *Biblical research XXXIII* (1988), pp 37-53. In this essay he summarizes the findings of his doctoral dissertation which was completed earlier in the same year.

⁵¹According to Paulien (1988:39) a “citation” is understood to be a phrase taken from the Old Testament with an introductory formula attached to it which is used by the author to indicate to the

Testament while the Old Testament still plays a big role in the book of Revelation.⁵² The Old Testament references found in Revelation are usually called “allusions”. The challenge Paulien (1988:37) had, was that everyone used their own criteria to determine what an allusion or reference to the Old Testament would be. Some scholars, whose work he studied, found many allusions whilst others only found a few and this indicated to him that there is a need for all scholars to come to some sort of an agreement of what an allusion consists of. Paulien (1988:39-40) identifies four types of Old Testament references: “citations”, “quotations”, “allusions” and “echoes”. Only the last two are found in the book of Revelation. In the context of Revelation specifically, the difference between allusions and echoes is that an allusion is a deliberate reference to an Old Testament text, even though it is only a few words which correspond to the specific Old Testament text. An echo on the other hand is on a subconscious level, where the author refers to an Old Testament text simply because it is a common phrase or idea to him and not because he deliberately wants to make use of the Old Testament.⁵³ Paulien (1988b:41) proceeds to determine what the objective criteria would be for a phrase to be called an allusion as opposed to an echo. He argues that for an allusion to be fully understood, its Old Testament roots needs to be established, because the original text and context would have implications for the way the text is to be understood within the new setting.

Ian Paul also wrote an essay on the use of the Jewish Scriptures.⁵⁴ He clearly differentiates between deliberate allusions by John and allusions which are made unconsciously simply from the Old Testament text which fills his mind (Paul, 2000:260). He suggests that it might be that John did not deliberately allude to any specific Old Testament texts. This distinction is important because it has implications for the current study. The fact that this study is looking for the sources behind the plagues in Rev 16, suggests that the assumption which John might have alluded consciously and deliberately to the Old Testament even though he did not use introductory formulae. To Beale (2012:31) the definition of an

readers that what follows is taken from another text. Examples of such introductory formulae might be ἀλλὰ τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ (“but this was spoken by the prophet Joel”) in Acts 2:16 or γέγραπται (it is written”) in Matt 4:6.

⁵² Cf. Paul (2000:256).

⁵³He still uses these same criteria for determining allusions and echoes in his much later work aimed at the popular market (Paulien, 2004:136-138). In this book he explains exactly how to go about finding allusions and echoes and determining what the level of certainty is when one suspect there might be an allusion present (Paulien, 2004:148).

⁵⁴ I. Paul. 2000. “The use of the Old Testament in Revelation 12,” in Moyise, S. (ed.) 2000. *The Old Testament in the New Testament: Essays in honour of J.L. North*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, pp. 256-276.

allusion is “brief expression consciously intended by an author to be dependent on an OT passage”.

Mathewson (2003:311-325) argues in his article for a transition from attempting to establish what exactly would be intentional references to the Old Testament and what would be unintentional references in the book of Revelation. His argument is that it is indeed a very subjective process which is limited by the interpreter’s ability to recognize where John intentionally referred to the Old Testament.⁵⁵ In his view it is not always possible to know for sure as the text of Revelation is a very “allusive” text (Mathewson, 2003:316). He also points to the fact that John may refer to a text which appears to the reader as an intentional reference while John just used words known to him without the intention to refer to a specific Old Testament text. He therefore argues for an approach which rather seeks to investigate the significance of these Old Testament references within the context of the book of Revelation (Mathewson, 2003:324). Beale (2012:31) continues to believe that allusions can be identified, despite there always be degrees of probability. However, he does not think it is a good idea to distinguish between allusions and echoes in terms of creating a set of criteria for each.

For the purpose of this study it is accepted that John did indeed sometimes intentionally refer to the Jewish Scriptures and that these references should be identified. There are also times where it appears that the language or imagery used is taken from the Jewish Scriptures, but not deliberately referred to. It has to be emphasised, however, that it is often very difficult to determine whether a reference to a particular Old Testament text was deliberate or not. Considering that the main purpose of this study is not to determine whether the links are deliberate or not, but rather whether there are links at all, this is not the greatest concern. Therefore, when a reference is called an “echo”, it does not imply that there is overwhelming evidence that the reference is on a subconscious level. It simply implies that a link is noted. The same applies for references to texts from outside the body of texts regarded as sacred or Scriptural by Jews, such as the works of Philo or the work of Enoch, which will frequently be noted in this study.

⁵⁵ Paul (2000:261) also criticizes Paulien for not taking into account enough the subjectivity behind the process of determining allusions. He proposes other criteria for establishing allusions and classifies it as “verbal allusion to words; verbal allusion to themes; thematic allusion to words; thematic allusion to themes”.

1.6.2.2 The way the Old Testament is used in Revelation

It is at this point where the work of Moyise (2003) becomes significant to take this discussion to the next level, answering to the call of Mathewson (2003), who addresses the question of intertextuality in Revelation and whether the Old Testament contexts of texts alluded to did indeed have an impact on the way the author of Revelation used these texts. Moyise (2003:392) speaks of continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament context and the new setting in Revelation. He uses the work of some previous authors to demonstrate how some would argue for continuity⁵⁶ and others for discontinuity.⁵⁷ If one argues for total discontinuity between the broader contexts from which a phrase is taken in an allusion and the new setting, one could argue that it is not necessary to determine the Old Testament text from which an allusion is taken. If, however, one argues for continuity, then the Old Testament context will play an essential role and it will make it necessary to determine the exact text from which the allusion was taken in order to fully comprehend what the author of Revelation intended) when he used a text from the Old Testament. That is why this discussion is so important before undertaking a study on the background of a certain part of Revelation.

Moyise (2003:392) argues for an approach which is somewhere between the two extremes mentioned above. He explains his point of view in the following way:

The Old context does not *determine* John's meaning because the text has been set free from its previous textual moorings and now exists in a new context. However, neither is it true that John can make texts mean whatever he likes, for the old text brings with it connotations and associations that *influence* the new setting. Thus, there is a dynamic whereby the new affects the old and the old affects the new (Moyise, 2003:392).

In 2004 Moyise published an article, illustrating this point of view by analysing the song in Revelation 15. In the article Moyise (2004:349-350) argues that there is a "dialogical tension" between the Old Testament text and the New Testament setting. According to that point of view John lets his readers expect to see an allusion from the Exodus narrative when he uses Exodus imagery in the setting of the narrative he is writing at that specific point. He then does not allude to the Exodus narrative in the verses that follow and does so deliberately in order to

⁵⁶Beale (1999) and Fekkes (1994) are according to him examples of scholars supporting continuity (Moyise, 2003:391) and he is right as Beale (2012:13) openly states: "...my position lies on the side of those who affirm that the NT uses the OT in line with its original contextual meaning".

⁵⁷Vos (1965) and Vogelgesang (1985) are examples of scholars who argue for discontinuity.

create this so-called “dialogical tension” where the readers expect one thing and receives another (Moyise, 2004:360). In that sense the Old Testament setting is still at play, but in a very subtle way. Moyise (2004:360) thus argues that the readers are left in expectation, almost disappointed, until he returns to the Exodus setting in the next chapter with the bowl plagues. Thus John places the texts in a new setting, while not completely severing it from its old setting.

In an earlier paper Moyise (2002) explains the differences between his view and the view of Beale (1999a) more clearly when he discusses the debate which took place between himself and Beale on the matter of how John uses the Old Testament. In his opinion Beale (1999a) claims that John does not give new meaning to the Old Testament texts he alludes to, but rather a “new significance”, while Moyise himself would argue that John does give new meaning to a text, while that new meaning is not completely different to the meaning it had in its original context (Moyise, 2002:3). He further explains that according to the modern view of texts where only the intention of the original author would be a valid interpretation, John does actually “misappropriate the Scriptures”, because he uses the Old Testament texts to say new things, things the original author might not have thought would be the way he meant those words (Moyise, 2002:5).

Moyise (2002:16) exposes a presupposition of Beale that can be seen in a great deal of his work. This presupposition is that John does convey the intentions of the original authors of texts which he alludes to and used in the book of Revelation. It appears that Beale (1999a) will not see beyond this presupposition and will go to great lengths to prove that his presupposition always holds true.⁵⁸ Moyise (2002:21) concludes his article by affirming that he does not think that John uses Old Testament texts in any way he wishes and gives it the meanings he sees fit, but John does give it meanings that the original authors would not have had in mind.

In a later work, aimed more at the popular market than at the scholarly world, Paulien (2004:140) argues that the type of reference to the Old Testament also plays a role in the amount of continuity present. When it comes to an echo, for example, the Old Testament

⁵⁸An example pointed out by Moyise (2004:359) is where Beale (1999:794) argues strongly that Deut 28:59-60 is one of the texts alluded to in the song in Rev 15:3-4, because of the strong sense of judgement in Deut 28. The phrase *μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου* is, according to Beale (1999:794), an allusion to the phrase *πληγὰς μεγάλας καὶ θαυμαστὰς* in Deut 28:59 (LXX). He seems convinced that this is the case as this reinforces the theme of the judgement of the Lord that he argues very strongly is present in the text because the plagues are meant as judgements as it was the case in the Exodus plagues. If he is correct, it implies that John changed the word *πληγὰς* to *ἔργα* when writing down the song. It does not make sense why John would want to do that, especially since it has been indicated earlier in this chapter that the exact phrase *μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου* is also found in Tob 12:22. It appears that Beale (1999:794) is so convinced that the theme of the song is a theme of judgement that he is willing to ignore evidence which contradicts his argument.

context of the text echoed has no impact on its meaning in the new setting in Revelation, because an echo is by its very nature a reference to the Old Testament of which John himself is not even aware (Paulien, 2004:137-138).

Finally, the work of Bauckham (1993) has to be mentioned here as it appears that his view does not fit into any of the extremes mentioned by Moyise (2002) or Beale (1999a). It appears to be somewhere between the view of Beale (1999a) and Moyise (2002). Bauckham (1993: xi) argues that John is clearly aware of almost every single Old Testament word he uses, and he deliberately uses it with the purpose of making the true meaning of these Old Testament texts clear to his readers. He does so by employing methods of exegesis that was commonly used among Jewish interpreters of his time. He states the intention of John as “writing what he understood to be a work of prophetic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures and disclosed the way in which it was being and was to be fulfilled in the last days” (Bauckham, 1993:xi). The assumption he has of John wanting to convey the original meaning of the texts, his view is closer to the view of Beale (1999a). However, because he thinks John uses ways of interpreting texts that were common for his time, he is more in agreement with Moyise (2002:21) who states that “he was simply doing what all first-century interpreters did”. Moyise (2004:358), however, questions the validity of some of these methods which Bauckham (1993:xi) argues John used. Taking everything into consideration it appears that Moyise’s (2002) argument on John’s use of Scripture is the most convincing.

The argument Collins (1977) puts forward should also be noted here. She does not work with allusions as such, but rather with ideas and themes within different traditions. In her essay she makes use of the case of Rev 16:4-7 and indicates how John used a source with an affinity for Hellenistic motifs and adapted it to also incorporate Jewish motifs. She makes use of other examples as well to ultimately conclude that

any apocalyptic work reflects elements of the religious tradition with which its author primarily identified. At the same time, however, those traditional elements have often been modified through the author's experience of the thought-worlds of other ethnic or cultural groups in his environment. Future work on the origins and history-of-religions context of apocalyptic writings should pay careful attention to both facets of the cultural process at issue — continuity and innovation (Collins, 1977:380-381).

In this study it is accepted that John deliberately makes use of the Old Testament and that allusions can and should be identified if one wants to come to a full understanding of the book of Revelation. It is therefore also accepted that he takes the Old Testament context of the texts he uses into account, despite him giving them new meaning. Indeed, the argument of Collins

that the world of thought in which John found himself had to have an influence on his use of Old Testament texts will also be taken into account. Once again, this holds true for references to texts other than the Jewish Scriptures as well.

1.6.3 Work on the Greek ancient cosmology

As it has been noted, the whole text of the book of Revelation and specifically the text of the bowl plagues, reflect the cosmology of the world in which the book was composed. In this study two major aspects will be looked at: a) the role of the four natural elements which the whole universe consisted of according to ancient Greek thought and b) the ancient view of heaven and the role of the angels which lived in the heavenly sphere.

In terms of references to the ancient elements, the possible links to the Greek world will be explored as this has not been done before. The four ancient elements are earth, water, fire and air. All of these elements are seen clearly in the bowl plagues. The works of Philo will be very useful in examining how the elements were seen in the first century and what role it played. Since it is accepted that the Exodus narrative played an important part in the book of Revelation, especially the work of Philo on the life of Moses will be explored.⁵⁹ Extensive research has been done on the classical elements as it is presented in ancient writings. Fire and sun both produce heat and are therefore often linked. In this case some research on the worship of the sun-god Ra also needs to be taken into consideration. The *Encyclopaedia of the archaeology of ancient Egypt* edited by Bard, which was published in 2005 is of great importance. The work of Fideler,⁶⁰ which explores the influence of ancient cosmology on early Christian symbolism, will be an important source to use.

In Revelation references to angels are often made. The seven trumpet plagues and the seven bowl plagues are all executed by angels, each delivering the judgement from God. It is evident with regard to the plagues that the idea of angels has no connection to the Exodus events.⁶¹ In different literature different lists of archangels can be found. In most of the ancient literature there are seven archangels. For example, in 1 En. 1-36, or the Book of the Watchers as it is also referred to, angels play a significant role. Dingman (2002:321) has argued that this book had a big influence on later Jewish literature, and it could therefore possibly have had an influence on Revelation. The dictionary on the angels, written by Davidson (1971) will be a

⁵⁹ Philo, *De Vita Mosis I* and *De Vita Mosis II*

⁶⁰ D. R. Fideler. 1993. *Jesus Christ, son of God: ancient cosmology and early Christian symbolism*. Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House.

⁶¹ Fischer (2007:91) clearly indicates that angels play no significant role in the Exodus narrative. The angel is inserted in a few places as part of a later redaction of the text.

helpful aid in identifying the different archangels and their functions. Sullivan (2004) also did an important study on angels in ancient Jewish literature and the New Testament. An important point he makes with regard to the current study is that angels were the only beings able to cross the line between heaven and earth (Sullivan, 2004:236). Berner (2007:408-409) makes the important point that “from what we learn in 1 Enoch and the Book of Daniel, the archangels feature primarily as God’s supreme agents in fighting the wicked throughout history, in revealing the mysteries of the world and the hidden course of history to the chosen ones.” This is also in line with the way angels act in Revelation, especially in terms of being the agents of God which fight with the enemies of God. In Rev 16 it is the angels who pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.

1.6.4 Conclusions drawn from the literature review

From this discussion it is evident that while many commentaries, especially Beale (1999), discussed the Old Testament background of the bowl plagues, no single study has been devoted to a thorough investigation of the possible Old Testament texts which lie behind the seven bowl plagues of Revelation 16, while Paulien (1988) devoted a doctoral thesis to studying the Old Testament background of the trumpet plagues.⁶² In the literature review there is a clear indication that there are still some questions about the Old Testament background of the bowl plagues which need to be addressed.

1.7 Identifying the gap in recent research

The question that needs to be addressed is what research has specifically been done on the bowl plagues in Revelation and where the gap in the research is? After searching in all locations possible, with all means available to the researcher and after several discussions with a few specialists on the Old Testament in Revelation it became clear that no single piece of research has been devoted to an in-depth study of the bowl plagues in Revelation and the background of this part of the book of Revelation. However, this does not mean that the subject has not been exhausted in commentaries, which extensively point to the Old Testament background of the texts in Revelation.⁶³ Therefore a brief look will now be taken at some of the

⁶² Paulien, J. 1988. *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8:7-12*. (Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 11). Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press.

⁶³ The most exhaustive in this regard is the commentary of Beale (1999).

research which has been done on the Old Testament background of Rev 16 by presenting a summary of the arguments made out in some of the most prominent works.

From the outset it can be noted that most scholars agree that the plagues of Rev. 16 is based on the plagues in the book of Exodus. They correspond quite substantially with the trumpet plagues in Rev 8-11.⁶⁴ In what follows the individual plagues and some of the arguments on their background among the commentaries will be broadly discussed.

1.7.1 The first bowl plague (Rev 16:2) - painful sores

Mounce (1998:293) argues that this plague is the same as the sixth plague from Exodus (Exod 9:9-11). He also refers to Job 2:7-8, 13 where Job tells about the pain these sores cause. Beale (2007:1135) agrees with this but adds a little more detail by saying that the boils plague in Exodus is summarized in Deuteronomy 28:27,35 as an “evil sore” as it is called in Rev 16:2.⁶⁵ Blount (2009:295) agrees with Beale and McDonough (2007:1135) that the punishment given needs to be in proportion to the sin and that the people who has the mark of the beast gets marked by painful sores.⁶⁶

1.7.2 The second bowl plague (Rev 16:3) - the sea turns to blood

To Mounce (1998:293) the first Egyptian plague plays a role here. According to him, it refers back to the second trumpet plague but more intensively, since the corresponding trumpet plague only affects one third of the world.⁶⁷ Beale (1999:815) focuses on the emphasis of the similarities between this plague and the second trumpet. He states that “both texts are based on the Exod 7:17-21, where Moses turns the Nile into blood and the fish in it die”.⁶⁸ Blount (2009:295) explains that the general view of most commentators is that this plague is a reference to the Exodus plague where the Nile and all water in Egypt turned to blood (Exod 7:17-21). He describes this plague of blood as more “radical” as it is said to be the blood of a

⁶⁴ Cf. Harrington (1993:163), Mounce (1998:291), Blount (2009:294).

⁶⁵ See also (Beale, 1999:814) who states that “the sore here represents some form of suffering, presumably like that entailed by the spiritual and psychological ‘torment’ of the fifth trumpet”. He also refers to Josephus (*Ant.* 2.304) and Philo (*Mos.* 1.127-28), who both write about the suffering caused by the exodus plagues.

⁶⁶ Cf. Reddish (2001:303).

⁶⁷ See also Blount (2009:295).

⁶⁸ Reddish (2001:303) thinks that John divides the exodus plague into two plagues. This is an interesting and quite unique point of view of which the merit will have to be looked into a bit more.

corpse. Aune (1998:884) notes that in the ancient world, blood was something which could cause purification and pollution.⁶⁹

1.7.3 The third bowl plague (Rev 16:4-7) - rivers and springs turn to blood

This plague also has a corresponding trumpet plague.⁷⁰ Beale (1999:816) argues that this plague (just as the second trumpet) has the implication of a drought that strikes the land. Mounce (1998:294) refers to Ps 78:44 which refers to the water which turned to blood and made the water from the streams undrinkable.⁷¹ To Blount (2009:295) this plague completes what he calls the “metamorphosis” where all water is turned to blood.⁷²

Beale (1999:819) argues for a very figurative interpretation of the “blood” in Rev 16:6 and states that “both occurrences of ‘blood’ in v. 6 represents not only literal death but degrees of suffering”. He further maintains that Isa 49:26 is probably alluded to in verse 6 and he substantiates it for his figurative interpretation. Another text which he views as being “echoed” here is the text of Ps 78:3, 10, 12 LXX.

1.7.4 The fourth bowl plague (Rev 16:8-9) - the sun is allowed to burn the people and they then curse the name of God

Blount (2009:209-300) states that this plague is broadly parallel to the fourth trumpet plague where the moon and the stars are disturbed. The only Egyptian plague which could correspond to this plague is the plague of darkness. Reddish (2001:306) argues that “John modifies the exodus tradition so that a different result occurs - scorching heat, instead of darkness”.⁷³ The corresponding trumpet plague is also darkness according to Mounce (1998:296). Mounce (1998:296) argues that this is an indication of the power of God who can make the sun do what

⁶⁹ Other places where it is said that water is polluted by blood are according to him Isa 15:9 and 2 Macc. 12:16.

⁷⁰ Blount (2009:295) states that this “new vision recalls the trumpet plague where the star of Wormwood fell from the sky and contaminated a third of the earth’s fresh water (8:10-11).”

⁷¹ To Rossing (1999:152) this stands in contrast to the “invitation to drink from the springs of water of life in the New Jerusalem”.

⁷² To Aune (1998:884) this plague is a clear allusion to the Exodus plague of water which was turned to blood (Exod 7:14-19).

⁷³ To him this is punishment of the followers of the beast is put over against the protection God promises to his people in Ps 121:6; Isa 4:6; 25:4-5 and 49:10 where he assures them that the sun will not harm them (Reddish, 2001:306).

He wants it to do. Aune (1998:889) notes that there is an ancient myth about the earth being scorched by the sun preserved in Ovid. *Metam* 1.749-79, 2.1-366. Whether this myth is part of what John has in mind will need be investigated in more depth.

The fact that the people curse God for this according to Rev. 16:9 shows that they hardened their hearts just like the Pharaoh did. To Blount (2009:300) the blasphemy of Rev. 16:9 is the opposite of giving God the honour and glory⁷⁴ and therefore God responds in a fair way according to Lev 24:16.⁷⁵ Beale (1999:823) has a slightly different view as he interprets this blasphemy as a refusal to give God the glory he deserves.⁷⁶ They do not want to confess that the things which are happening is done by God. Aune (1998:889) argues that this idea of the people who do not want to repent is part of the reference to the exodus events where the Pharaoh's heart was also hardened in response to the plagues which came over the land of Egypt.

1.7.5 The fifth bowl plague (Rev 16:10) - darkness on the land

This plague is in line with the ninth Egyptian plague according to Mounce (1998:297). Beale (1999:823) agrees with this and adds that the exodus plague is a "polemic against the sun god Ra, of whom the Pharaoh was believed to be an incarnation".⁷⁷ He also points out that some scholars are in favour of a more figurative perspective of this plague, yet still believe that the darkness itself causes pain and suffering. Once again, the people blaspheme the "God of heaven". Despite Blount (2009:301) mentioning that there is a similar exodus plague, he does not focus as much on the parallel exodus plague as he does on the darkness which overcomes the throne of the beast. He refers to Isa 8:19-22 where it is said that anyone who trusts in another source of power will be thrown into darkness and anguish.

1.7.6 The sixth bowl plague (Rev 16:12) - the Euphrates River dries up

There is no parallel to any plague from the exodus narrative. However, according to Mounce (1998:297) there is a correspondence to the sixth trumpet plague where six angels which were bound up at the Euphrates are set free to slaughter one third of the world's people. According

⁷⁴ He notes Isa 52:5 as support for this statement.

⁷⁵ Beale (1999:823) argues that this blasphemy is an indication that the followers of the beast became like him, because outside Rev 16 blasphemy is only attributed to the beast.

⁷⁶ He notes that the name of God is often used in the Old Testament to refer to the honour of God.

⁷⁷ He further elaborates on how severe the exodus plague of darkness was according to the text of Exodus but also texts such as Wis 17-18. Also cf. Reddish (2001:307).

to Beale and McDonough (2007:1135) this is a reference to the final judgement of Babylon and the restoration of Israel “which itself was patterned after the drying up of the Red Sea at the exodus (cf. Exod. 14:21-22 with Isa. 11:15; 44:27; 50:2; 51:10; cf. also Josh. 3:16; 4:23)”.⁷⁸ He refers to Old Testament prophecies which say that “this judgement would include the drying up of the Euphrates River (Isa. 11:15; 44:27; Jer. 50:38; 51:36; cf. Zech. 10:11).”⁷⁹ According to him this judgement was fulfilled by Cyrus (Isa 44:27-28) who apparently went through the Euphrates after he dried up the water and defeated the Babylonians.⁸⁰ Although this will be explored in detail in the chapter of this study on the sixth bowl plague, it has to be noted here that the actual text of Isa. 44 says nothing about Cyrus “dividing” the river nor does it say that it is specifically the Euphrates.

Blount (2009:302) does not refer to Cyrus at all but states that this plague is an ironic twist of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus, because in Exodus the Red Sea dried up to allow the Israelites to escape, while the drying of the Euphrates allows the enemies of the Romans (the Parthians whom the Romans were never able to conquer) to enter Roman territory and attack them.⁸¹

Beale and McDonough (2007:1135) state that the frogs mentioned in Rev 16:13 is a definite reference to the Exodus plagues as there is nowhere in the LXX a mention of frogs (βάτραχοι) which is not within the context of a reference to the Exodus plagues.⁸² The fact that the frogs go out to the kings of the world is to Beale and McDonough (2007:1136) a significant link to the Exodus plague of frogs where the king is first affected by frogs.⁸³

⁷⁸ Cf. Beale (1999:827).

⁷⁹ Reddish (2001:308) adds the text of Josh 3:14-17 where the Israelites passed through the Jordan river.

⁸⁰ As source for this he notes Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.190-191; Xenophon, *Cyr.* 7.5.1-36 and *Tg. Jer.* 51:36, 41-44; 4Q169 Frags .1+2, 3-9.

⁸¹ He provides a few texts to show that this idea is also present in the Old Testament namely Ps 106:9; Isa 11:15-16; 51:10; Jer 50:38; 51:36 (Blount, 2009:302).

⁸² He mentions texts such as Exod 8:2-13; Ps 77:45; 104:30 and Wis 19:10. He also refers to Josephus, *Ant.* 2.296-298; Philo, *Sacrifices* 69; *Migration* 83; *Moses* 1.103-106, 144). Reddish (2001:309) considers other possible explanations for John’s use of frogs such as the fact that they might have been considered ritually unclean because of the purity law in Lev 11:10. Another possibility is that frogs were seen as bringing death and seen as evil spirits in some ancient religions such as the Zend religion and Zoroastrianism. He finally concludes that the frogs are more likely used because of the strong exodus motif in this chapter.

⁸³ To him Ps 104:30 (LXX) confirms this.

Blount (2009:303) does not interpret verse 13 as part of the sixth plague, but rather as interlude to the seventh and final plague. He agrees with Beale and McDonough (2007:1136) that this plague is a reference to the second exodus plague, namely the plague of frogs. Furthermore, he agrees with the texts of the Psalms mentioned by Beale and McDonough (2007:1136).

1.7.7 The seventh bowl plague (Rev 16:17-21) - the air is effected which leads to noise and thunder and an earthquake

The significant fact about the final bowl plague is that it corresponds with the final trumpet plague in that it brings an end to history. It all ends in Rev 16:21 with extremely large hailstones falling on the people. Mounce (1998:304) argues that this is a common way for God to punish people as seen in Josh 10:11 and Ezek 38:18-22. To Beale and McDonough (2007:1137) this bowl, which affects the air, is a continuation of the reference to all the exodus plagues as used in the trumpet plagues and the rest of the bowl plagues. The hail-plague is specifically observed here according to them and is an allusion to that plague in the exodus plagues.⁸⁴ Blount (2009:307-308) does not say anything about whether he agrees or disagrees with Beale and McDonough (2007:1137) on the reference of the final plague, but on verse 18 he argues that the wording about the uniquely large earthquake reflects the language found in Dan 12:1 “which forecasts tribulations such as had never been seen”. As the day of the unique tribulations in the book of Daniel is also the day when the faithful will be saved, Blount (2009:308) argues that this imagery is not only about judgement, but also about salvation, in Daniel and in Revelation.⁸⁵ He continues to explain that the hail refers back to the first trumpet in 8:7, but even more to the blast of the seventh angel (11:9) even though it is a lot more intense this time. He argues that just as the Pharaoh did not repent after the hail (Exod 9:13-26) the followers of the beast also did not want to repent. They ultimately pay the price for that.⁸⁶

Reddish (2001:314) points out that the presence of God is often associated with lightning, thunder and rumblings in the Old Testament (Exod 19:16 and Ps 18:7-19) while it is to Beale

⁸⁴ They add that Philo calls the hail-plague and other plagues, “plagues of heaven and air” in *Moses* 1.114, 119-120 (Beale and McDonough (2007:1137)).

⁸⁵ Cf. Aune (1998:900).

⁸⁶ Cf. Beale (1999:842) where he describes in some more detail the idea of the unique tribulation in the other Biblical texts. He basically states that other places in the Bible and ancient literature where this idea can be found are: Matt. 24:21; Mark 13:19; 1QM 1.11-12; Josephus (*War* 5.442); 6.428-29; 1 Macc. 9:27; and *Assumption of Moses* 8:1.

(1999:842) signs of the last judgement. He argues that the mention of these sounds is a reference to Exod 19:16-18, where the “Sinai theophany” is described.

Beale (1999:845) touches on a very important question which will be addressed in this study, namely the question of why the hail plague is put last in the bowl plagues. His view is that:

Bauckham argues plausibly that the Exodus 9 plague of hail is being combined with the cosmic phenomena surrounding the Sinai theophany of Exodus 19, alluded to in Rev. 16:18. Therefore the plague of hail together with the Sinai phenomena are placed last in Rev. 16:17-21 because the theophany is a more climatic event in Exodus and is placed there after the plagues. For some reason the hail has come to be associated with the Sinai theophany phenomena and therefore has been placed last with it.⁸⁷

1.8 Research question

In the discussion in the previous section it is evident that almost all commentators identify strong links between the Jewish Scriptures in this bowl plague narrative, especially the Exodus narrative. The main question which will be asked in this thesis is whether there is more to the background of the book of Revelation than what has thus far been identified, with specific reference to the bowl plague narrative in Rev 16. Some questions leading from this are the following: Can more texts from the Jewish Scriptures be identified as being part of the background? Furthermore, does the background of the bowl plagues consist of more than just the Jewish Scriptures? What other texts or traditions might have influenced John on a conscious or subconscious level? All of these are some of the questions which will be explored in this thesis.

1.9 Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study is that there is indeed more to the background of the bowl plagues than what has thus far been identified in scholarly works.

⁸⁷ As a possible reason the hail became associated with the Sinai theophany, he mentions the events described in Josh 10:11 where the Amorites were struck with hail. Beale (1999:845) sees as further confirmation of this view the fact that the hail stones are also called “very great” in Joshua. Ezek 38:19-22 is also at the background here.

1.10 Methodology

The study will be done employing the diachronic method of research, as opposed to the synchronic method. The diachronic method is usually used to study texts in a historic-critical way, while “synchrony is taken as being outside of the historical framework and limited to ‘literature as such’” (Hong, 2013:527). The basic principles of this method will now be discussed.

1.10.1 Diachronical method

Koester (2014:61) states that “modern historical criticism began with the assumption that Revelation was shaped by the context in which it was written.” The context is, of course, a historical context and therefore a historical approach is very important. The historical-critical method of Biblical interpretation has generally been used up to the middle of the previous century and is still in use today in certain areas of Biblical research. Marshall (1977:127-130) indicates why a historical-critical method is necessary by pointing out the different “historical problems” encountered in the Biblical text. These are, according to him, discrepancies between parallel narratives, for instance in the synoptic gospels; a comparison with non-biblical material where the Bible has a different account of events described in other literature; historical improbabilities; supernatural occurrence; creation and modification of material in the early church; literary genre and insufficient evidence for certain events happening. The identification of these problems led to the historical-critical method which was supposed to be used to provide answers to the problems. Since the historical problems are often so different in nature, the historical-critical method developed into different sub disciplines. One of the people who did a study on the historical-critical method, as it was in use around that time, is R.C. Briggs whose work was first published in 1969 with a final reprint in 1979.⁸⁸ The work of Briggs will be used, although somewhat dated, as it is still one of the useful expositions in English on the historical-critical method available today and provides a good overview of the different sub disciplines of this method of analysis of a text. Briggs (1973:27) defines the areas of the historical-critical method as textual criticism, form criticism (*Formkritik*), source criticism (*Literarkritik*) and redaction criticism (*Redaktionsgeschichte*).⁸⁹

⁸⁸ In this study the 1973 reprint will be used as this was available to the researcher.

⁸⁹ Tuckett (1987), who will also be referred to in this section as his book is a more recent source, largely follows the same outline as Briggs (1973) in his discussion on New Testament research

The purpose of the historical-critical method was to interpret a text according to its development over time.⁹⁰ In later years the emphasis has shifted from the history of the text itself to the history of its social context. The question then became: What is the message of the original author of a Biblical text to his intended readers, by taking those first readers' historical context into account? This is where the social-scientific criticism developed strongly, which is still to a great extent in use today.⁹¹

As noted in the introduction to this section, due to the nature of the current study, which seeks to determine the background behind a text and therefore the development of the text, the traditional diachronic approach will be used as method to analyse the development of the text.

The sub disciplines of the historical-critical method that will be used in this study are the following:

a) *Formkritik*: Formkritik (form criticism) is the study of the *oral traditions* behind a text (Travis, 1979:153). Tuckett (1987:96) states that: "...source criticism considers the smaller units of tradition".⁹² Therefore, form criticism is the study of what lies behind the written text and what the situation was where these smaller "units of tradition" developed. This method of study in the New Testament was first used to study the Synoptic gospels in an attempt to find out what common source was used (McKnight, 2011:22). With bodies of texts such as the Synoptic gospels and the creation narratives, where there are parallel texts, a source-critical analysis can be done much easier than when you have only one text. This subsection of the method will be difficult to make use of in the current study.

methodology. Hong (2013:542-543) confirms this outline of the different subdisciplines of the historical-critical method.

⁹⁰Lyons (2010:209) refers to G. Aichele, P. Miscalland R. Walsh who states that historical criticism attempts to identify the original intention of the author by means of an array of methods. The idea is that this interpretation will be agreed on by everyone as it has been proven in an objective way. Of course it is commonly accepted today that there is no such thing as pure objectivity and a final interpretation which is accepted by everyone will never be found (Croy, 2011:xxxi).

⁹¹ Opposed to this is the synchronic method which looks at the text as such and is not all that interested in the historical setting of the readers (Hong, 2013: 528).

⁹² Tuckett (1987:96-100) discusses the different types of oral traditions which lies behind the gospels to indicate what exactly form criticism attempts to do. For this study, however, the oral tradition behind the gospels is not all that important although the principal laid down by Tuckett remains important.

c) *Literarkritik* and *textual criticism*: *Literarkritik* (literary or source criticism) is the study of the development of different *textual traditions* leading from the oral sources. It investigates the textual traditions used in a specific text during the formation of that text.⁹³ Tuckett (1987:78) states that the synoptic problem is the most important example of a source-critical problem in New Testament studies, but he also refers to other books which depend on each other as examples of this method of analysis.⁹⁴ According to him source criticism is used to address two kinds of problems. The first is where two books clearly have some similar material and the question is then asked which comes first or which should be used as a source. The second challenge is where there is clearly a source used, but the source is not known and the problem is to try and identify this source (Tuckett, 1987:79).⁹⁵ In this study especially the latter will be important when looking for the source(s) used in Revelation 16. The hypothesis is that it might be some unknown source that needs to be found or identified.

In his discussion of the second problem Tuckett (1987:84) says that the problem first arises when it becomes evident that a source is used, like when the vocabulary used in a specific part of the text differs from the vocabulary used in the rest of the text. In Revelation 16 there are a number of indications that a source or sources has been used as it has been discussed earlier in this chapter.

Looking at textual criticism, Lemmelijn (2009) indicates how the lines between textual criticism (which is part of historical criticism) and literary criticism (which is part of the synchronic method)⁹⁶ have in recent years become very blurred. Lemmelijn (2009:3) argues

⁹³ Tyson (2011:41) states that some scholars also believe that the sources may also consist of oral traditions. According to most scholars, however, oral traditions do not fall within the scope of source criticism.

⁹⁴ Wenham (1977:140) also mainly makes use of the synoptic gospels to indicate the function of source criticism and indicates how form criticism can be applied when multiple parallel texts are available to the researcher.

⁹⁵ Powell (1989:3-4) distinguishes between the aims of literary criticism and historical criticism as methods. To him the differences are mainly fourfold. The first difference is that literary criticism is interested in the final form of the text, while historical criticism is interested in the way the text was formed. In the second place, literary criticism is a way of studying what holds the text together, rather than analysing the different "units of tradition" behind the text. In the third place Powell (1989:81) argues that historical criticism "treats the text as a means to an end rather than an end in itself." Literary criticism, however, is concerned with the text and the text itself is the object of study. The final main difference between literary criticism and historical criticism according to Powell (1989:82) is that literary criticism is interested in the effect of the text on the reader, rather than focussing mainly on what the author wanted to say with the text as it is the case in historical criticism.

⁹⁶ Cf. Hong (2013:527).

that the focus in literary criticism has until recently been on studying the formation of the final form of the text and how that text came together. However, textual criticism was more concerned with the studying of the transmission of the final form of the text, examining how different scribes changed the text at certain places for different reasons or as Briggs (1973:30) puts it: “textual criticism is a scientific discipline that attempts to restore the original document which has perished”.⁹⁷ In the view of Lemmelijn (2009:3-4) this clear distinction is not possible as she argues that the transmission of the text has started even before there ever was a final form.⁹⁸ She cites the work of Stipp (1990:16-37) to support her argument. He argues that the distinction in the focus of textual criticism and literary should probably be removed and that in essence both are focussed on the same thing.⁹⁹ Both are concerned with the formation of the final form of the text as there is in actual fact no final form of the text. Both textual criticism and literary criticism deals with the search for the reception of the sources of the sources. In other words it can be said that to search for the “original” text is to search for the sources - be that papyri, clay tablets or other manuscripts - that has most probably already been copied and changed a numerous times before they were used in the “original” text we are looking for in both textual criticism and source criticism. In fact, Epp (2011:83) makes a valid point that every manuscript with its scribal alterations was seen and used as “the original” because as far as the scribe who made “corrections” or alterations was concerned, he restored the text to the original form by changing it. Therefore, the focus of textual criticism is no longer the search for the “original” text, but rather to study the transmission of the text in an attempt to get to the earliest of textual traditions. Epp (2011:83) proposes a new definition for the discipline of New Testament textual criticism (it can also be applied to Old Testament textual criticism) namely:

New Testament textual critics, employing aspects of both science and art, study the transmission of the New Testament text and the manuscripts that facilitated its transmission, with the unitary goal of establishing the earliest attainable text (which serves as a baseline) and, at the same time, of assessing the textual variants that

⁹⁷ Epp (2011:79) points out that even earlier textual criticism was mainly used to identify and correct errors in the manuscripts used.

⁹⁸ In other words, she does not think there is an “original” whole manuscript or text.

⁹⁹ Lemmelijn (2009:7-12) also discusses the point of view of Rabe (N. Rabe, ‘Zur synchron definierten alttestamentlichen Textkritik’, 76–94) who argues for a “synchronic textual criticism” where the focus is on one specific manuscript. The goal of textual criticism is to determine where scribal errors are in terms of among others punctuation and legibility and to attempt to correct these mistakes with the help of external textual evidence. Lemmelijn (2009:12-13) also offers good criticism on Rabe’s arguments and convincingly argues against his distinction between literary criticism and textual criticism.

emerge from the baseline text so as to hear the narratives of early Christian thought and life that inhere in the array of meaningful variants.

While the main aim of this study is not to address the text critical question on either the text of the bowl plagues or the Exodus plagues, the method could play a role when searching for new perspectives on the background of the text of the bowl plague narrative. There is a possibility that a particular textual tradition of the Exodus plague narrative is closer to other traditions. Therefore, the work of Lemmelijn (2009) will need to be used. Some work has also been done on the text critical considerations of the text of the book of Revelation.¹⁰⁰ The most thorough commentaries deal with issues on a text critical level in the text as well. These insights will be taken into consideration in the discussion of the text.

d) *Redaktionsgeschichte* (redaction criticism): Collins (2011:59) cites John Barton's definition of redaction criticism as follows: "Redaction criticism is a method of biblical study that examines the intentions of the editors or *redactors* who compiled the biblical texts out of earlier source materials. It therefore presupposes the results of source and forms criticism and builds upon them."

Redaction criticism questions the final stage of the formation of the text as it is available. Hence, redaction criticism is the study of the manner in which the final author used the textual traditions available to him and how he puts it together to convey a certain message (Tuckett, 1987:116).¹ Tuckett (1987:116) argues that the method of redaction criticism started with the work of Marxsen on Mark, Bornkamm on Matthew and Conzelmann on Luke. All of these scholars recognized that the gospel writers were people with their individual ideas and consequently these ideas had an impact on how they put their works together. Each of them lived under unique circumstances and wrote their gospel with specific people in mind. The purpose of redaction criticism is to point out how this redaction of sources by the different New Testament writers took place (Tuckett, 1987:118). Tuckett (1987:126) recognizes that most of his discussion on this method centres around the synoptic gospels because the method was developed to study the synoptic gospels in the first place. This does not mean that redaction criticism cannot be used in other books of the Bible. When there are no written sources available to compare the text with it becomes difficult to know where redactional activity took place. Collins (2011:65) still thinks it is possible to identify sources when for instance looking for a difference in style. Source criticism comes into play in this study, as it has already been

¹⁰⁰ See for instance M. Karrer. 2015. "Textgeschichte und Demarkationsprozesse der Johannesoffenbarung" in S. Alkier, T. Hieke and T. Nicklas. 2015. *Poetik und Intertextualität der Johannesapokalypse*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, pp. 45-70.

hinted at in a previous section. As example is where Collins (1977:380-381) argues that the reference to the elements is actually part of a source used by John.

1.10.2 Synchronic method

1.10.2.1 Intertextuality:

Song (2006:610) refers to Phillips (1991:78-79) who argues that not much theoretical reflection has been done on the role of intertextuality explaining the “thickness of Biblical texts”. Song (2006:610) then continues to state that in his view, this is still the situation in research on Revelation. Scrutinizing the available literature - or lack thereof - on the topic this appears to be true and therefore a theoretical discussion on intertextuality will be necessary here. Paul (2000:258) states that “intertextuality, as an approach, does not provide a method for interpretation, so much as highlighting the importance of considering the relation between the new context and the old in interpreting allusion and citation.”

Song (2006:608) states that the concept of intertextuality was first developed by Julia Kristeva who argued that every text consists of many other texts.¹⁰¹ While historical criticism is looking for the historical origins and background of both the text alluded to and the text in which the allusion is found, intertextuality focuses on how the alluded text and the alluding text influence each other (Song, 2006:611).

Beale (2012:39-40) argues that it is preferable not to use the term “intertextuality” when referring to the Old Testament in Revelation, as much of the theory of intertextuality is too focused on the response of the reader to the interpretation. He proposes that the terms “inner-Biblical exegesis” or “inner-Biblical allusion” should rather be used to avoid this connection. It is an important remark to take into consideration when working with the Old Testament in Revelation. It is evident that Beale wants to keep the historical dimension in the method of intertextuality. In this sense he confirms what is noted by Hong (2013:523) that both the synchronic method and the diachronic method is concerned with something historical, yet with different aspects of the historical dimension. It is in this sense that intertextuality is important for the current study.

1.10.2.2 The way the Old Testament is used in the New Testament

Many scholars have theorized on how the Old Testament is used in the New Testament. Before undertaking a study on the Old Testament background of a text, it is important to have a brief

¹⁰¹ J. Kristeva. 1984. *Revolution in poetic language*. New York: Columbia University Press.

look at some of these theories and how these will have an influence on the methodology of the current study.

Ellis (1977:199) starts his discussion on the way the Old Testament is used in the New Testament by referring to the reasons why one writer would use the material of another writer namely: "To obtain the support of an authority (Mt. 4:14), to call forth a cluster of associations (Mk. 12:1f.) and to achieve a literary or stylistic effect (Tit. 1:12)." He points out that the texts are taken mainly from the LXX, but also from other texts such as other Greek versions, the Targums or it could be the author's own translation of the text. To him, the manner in which the cited or alluded texts in the alluding document varies from the source it has been taken from, "become an important clue to discover not only the writer's interpretation of the individual Old Testament passage but also his perspective on the Old Testament as a whole."

Today we know it is not that straightforward as the variations are often caused by the use of a differing source text by the author than what is available to us today. We cannot make assumptions based on an author's interpretation of a text simply on the way he would have changed the wording of the texts he cited or alluded to, too easily. There is the possibility that the writer used a different source and then never changed his source.

Steyn (2011:2) argues right in the beginning of his work on the *Vorlage* of the explicit quotations in Hebrews that any study of the Old Testament in the New Testament must first look at the specific texts which are used, where it comes from and how they were chosen.

There are various ways to identify references to the Old Testament and based on these ways, scholars have varying arguments. Considering the literature above, the debate on the way John used the Old Testament has been touched upon with reference theories of intertextuality. This study is concerned with the texts used by John in the account of the bowl plagues in Revelation 16 and therefore it is important to know the ways in which New Testament writers in general used the Old Testament.

1.10.3 Methodology to be used

When studying one specific part of text in detail, as it will be the case in this study, it is required to look at the text from various angles and explore many different possibilities on the background of the text. Therefore, the method used in this study will make use of insights from different methodological strategies. Each of the seven bowl plagues will be compared to the Exodus plague it might probably correspond to. Next the most significant phrases will be compared to the way in which phrases were used in a wide variety of ancient texts to look for possible parallels. Specifically, the way ancient cosmology possibly influenced the specific plague will be studied. In the process, a proper comparison between the bowl plagues and the

trumpet plagues will also be done. Attention will also be given to the role of angelology on the plagues.

The study will therefore entail an in-depth discussion of each of the seven bowl plagues separately. One chapter will be devoted to the introduction of the bowl plagues in Rev. 16:1 as well as the first bowl plague. Every subsequent chapter will deal with the next plague. In the discussion of each bowl plague the different *Stichwörter*, or key phrases, will be analysed in the light of their use in different bodies of literature. In the first place the connections to the Hebrew Scriptures will be discussed and each bowl plague will be compared to an Exodus plague which has been linked to it by modern scholars. The aim will be to determine whether the bowl plagues are exclusively based on once specific Exodus plague or if the search for the background of the plague needs to be broadened. Furthermore, links to the New Testament will be discussed, with specific reference to the connections to the trumpet plagues. The possible influence of the works of Philo of Alexandria on each bowl plague will also be scrutinized. The reason for this is that Philo often writes about the four natural elements. Connections to angels in other ancient literature will also be looked for and the possible influence of the four ancient elements in Greek philosophy will be investigated. Every chapter will end with a summary of the findings of that specific chapter. The last chapter will consist of a summary of the conclusions of all the chapters.

Chapter 2: The introduction to the bowl plagues and the first bowl plague - Rev 16:1-2

2.1 Introduction

As previously pointed out in chapter 1 of this study, different commentators have different arguments on where exactly the bowl plague narrative starts. As the focus of this study is on the bowl plagues itself, this chapter will include an analysis of the opening verse of the bowl plagues (Rev 16:1).¹⁰² The chapter will start by scrutinizing the text of Rev 16:1, some of the most important words in the verse and discuss the verse as a whole. Thereafter Rev 16:2 will also be discussed in detail.

Hence, the main aim of the chapter is to do a thorough analysis of the direct introduction to the seven bowl plagues (Rev 16:1) and then in particular the text of the first bowl plague (Rev 16:2), by exploring different motifs found in these verses. The possible background of the bowl plague of boils and connections to other literature will be explored. The importance of the classical element of earth will be highlighted in particular and it will be indicated that the element plays a more important role in the first bowl plague than what commentators are prepared to admit. Questions which will be looked at are among the following: What is the difference between “earth” in the introduction to the bowl plagues in Rev 16:1 and “earth” in the description of the first bowl plague in Rev 16:2? What is the connection between the earth and the boils, or why does the bowl which is poured out on the earth cause boils on the followers of the beast? What is the possible influence of the views of Philo? None of these questions are discussed in detail by any modern scholars.

2.2 The angels receive the command to pour out the bowl plagues (Rev 16:1)

2.2.1 The text

The seven bowl plagues are directly introduced by the following words in Rev 16:1:

¹⁰² It is not within the scope of the current study to examine the broader introduction to the bowl plagues found in Rev 15.

Καὶ ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ¹⁰³ λεγούσης τοῖς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλοις· Ὑπάγετε καὶ ἐκχέετε τὰς ἑπτὰ φιάλας τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰς τὴν γῆν.

And I heard a great voice from the temple saying to the seven angels: "Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

The bowl plagues start with a command to the seven angels to pour out their bowls of wrath on the earth. Contrary to heaven, in the book of Revelation, the earth is not seen in a positive light.¹⁰⁴ The command to pour the bowls on the earth, comes from the temple.¹⁰⁵ This same voice from the temple is heard again just after the final bowl is poured out (Rev 16:17).

In Rev. 16 there is no specific reference to the fact that these bowls are seen as plagues. They are simply called the bowls of wrath.¹⁰⁶ In Rev 15:1, however, the trials of Rev 16 are described as the seven last plagues (πληγὰς ἑπτὰ τὰς ἐσχάτας) which will complete the wrath of God. These plagues are in the possession of seven angels who get the command to unleash their plagues one by one in Rev 16. In Rev 15:7 the image of Rev 15:1 is justified further by the description of one of the four living beings giving the seven angels seven bowls which is said to be full of the wrath of God. The connection to the plagues is then picked up in Rev. 16:1 with the mention of the bowls.

In Rev 5:8 the 24 elders are said to be holding a harp and a golden bowl full of incense.¹⁰⁷ These golden bowls are the prayers of the saints. Pattermore (2004:98) argues for a strong link between the bowls in Rev 15, Rev. 16 and these bowls in Rev 5. The implication of the correspondence he identifies is that the plagues in Rev 16 are most probably intended to be

¹⁰³ Ἰῆ^A substitutes ναοῦ with οὐρανοῦ. Beale (1999:813) notes that this is most probably because a large voice usually comes from heaven in the book of Revelation.

¹⁰⁴ McDonough notes that "the earth has strong negative connotations throughout most of Revelation."

¹⁰⁵ To Schüssler Fiorenza (1989:99) referring to the temple as the temple in heaven is typical of the Johannine tradition.

¹⁰⁶ To van de Kamp (2000:357) the bowls are sacrificial bowls used in Old Testament times in the temple when sacrificing to God. He notes that there is no place in the Old Testament where God's wrath is connected to the pouring out of a sacrificial bowl, although the idea of the pouring out of a sacrificial bowl is well attested in the Old Testament. The action of pouring the bowls out points to the completeness of the action. God pours out his complete wrath on the earth.

¹⁰⁷ MacLeod (2007:458) notes that "grammatically the expression "having each one" (ἔχοντες ἕκαστος) could include both living creatures and elders. However, there is no indication elsewhere that the cherubs have a priestly function, whereas the elders (i.e., the church) do (cf. v. 10)".

the answer to the prayers of the faithful. His argument is valid, because when bowls are mentioned again, it is the bowls filled with the wrath of God. Furthermore, the bowls filled with prayers and the bowls filled with the wrath of God are found in close proximity to a song sung by the saints. Finally, in Rev 16 it becomes clear that the bowls of wrath are poured out on the beast and his followers, at least partly, as reaction to the suffering they caused for the saints.

2.2.2 *Stichwörter* and key phrases in verse 1:

- **μεγάλης φωνῆς ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ**

The big voice from the temple is most probably the voice of God¹⁰⁸ which comes from the temple.¹⁰⁹ This voice gives a command to the seven angels, namely, to pour out (ἐκχέετε) their seven bowls. Thomas (1995:246) continues to highlight that the word μέγας occurs in this chapter more than in any other chapter in the book of Revelation. To him this means that John wants to highlight “greatness” because this is the final plagues series and is the beginning of the end for the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. Indeed, this is the final, climactic series of plagues, which are exceptionally serious in nature.

- **ἑπτὰ - “seven”**

The number seven stands central in the book of Revelation. It is generally accepted that the number seven indicates completeness and wholeness. There are three series of seven plagues in the book as a whole: the seals, the trumpets and the bowls. The series of seven

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Koester (2014:646), who also notes that in “in John’s cultural context a voice from an earthly sanctuary might announce divine wrath, call for amending relationships with heaven, and warn of imminent catastrophe.” See also Aune (1998:882). Beale (1999:812) notes four possibilities: an angel, a cherub, Christ and God, but then argues that the voice must belong to either Christ or God. In his 2015 shorter commentary on Revelation he strongly argues that it has to be the voice of God (Beale, 2015:329). Lichtenberger (2014:213) agrees with this view and primarily uses Isa. 66:6 as the foundation for the argument. Also refer to Thomas (1995:246). Giesen (1997:349) takes a more neutral stand by simply noting that the voice comes from God, but it is not necessarily the voice of God. In his opinion it is not possible to be certain that it is the voice of God. Berger (2017:1144) notes that according to Philo (*Migr.* 47) Israel saw the words of God as light.

¹⁰⁹ Fekkes (1994:201) suggests that this might be an allusion to Isaiah 66:6 which also contains a reference to a voice from the temple.

plagues on the bowls is the last of these series. On the significance of the number seven in the book of Revelation, a great deal of research has been done.¹¹⁰

- εἰς τὴν γῆν – “on the earth”

The reference to the earth appears quite frequently in the book of Revelation. Its first appearance is in Rev 1:5 where Jesus is described as the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. In Rev 5:3 the classical cosmology is in view when heaven, earth and the area under the earth is mentioned.¹¹¹ Stars are said to fall to the earth in Rev 6:13 and in Rev 6:8 death and *hades* are said to be given a quarter of the earth. McDonough (2008:183), however, correctly suggests that it is notoriously difficult to determine exactly how John sees the earth. Nowhere is the earth described in much detail. We only read about what happens to the earth. Still, it does appear that the earth is seen as the region of the universe where humans and animals normally live as opposed to heaven where God lives.

There are, however, instances where earth is merely the land or soil and set over against the sea as in Rev 7:2 where there is a reference to four angels who have the power to damage the earth and sea.¹¹² In Rev 7:3 these angels are commanded by another angel not to damage the earth, sea and trees. The word appears to be used in the same way in Rev 8:7 in the first trumpet where hail and fire, mixed with blood were thrown to earth and in Rev 9 the word is used in both ways. In Rev 9:1 a star is said to fall from heaven to earth and in Rev. 9:4 the command is given again not to damage the grass of the earth or any green thing or any tree.¹¹³

These different ways in which the earth is seen occur alternating throughout Revelation in no clear pattern. What is important for the purposes of this study is that the seven angels are given explicit orders to pour out the bowls of the wrath of God *on the earth*. It seems like in Rev 16:1 τῆς γῆς is used in the general sense where it refers to the place where all human

¹¹⁰ Collins (1996) did thorough research on cosmology and eschatology in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism. She explains the use of the number seven in ancient Jewish and Greek writings and the implications that has for the understanding of the number seven in Revelation. See for instance her discussion on the seven stars (Collins, 1996:105).

¹¹¹ Jordaan (2013:2) wrote an essay on the cosmology of the book of Revelation where he accepts the argument of other scholars that John refers to the whole creation by referring to the different parts out of which it is made up, namely heaven, earth and sea.

¹¹² See also 10:1 where this is so clear that most English translations translates τῆς γῆς not with “earth” as usually, but with “land” versus “sea”.

¹¹³ To Philo (*Mos.* 2.119) the flowers on the priest’s robe refers to the element of earth, because flowers come up from the earth (Steyn, 2013:5).

beings live. In this general sense it clearly refers to the whole physical world.¹¹⁴ Also included in the reference to the “earth” is the sea, the air and the moon, sun and stars.¹¹⁵ The bowls being poured out on the physical world affect humans too (Harrington, 1993:163). In Rev 16:2 the first bowl is indeed then poured out on the earth. However, that is the only bowl poured out on the earth. The next bowl is poured out on the sea. This creates the impression that in Rev 16:2 it is used in the specific sense as to refer to the land or the soil or specifically the earth as opposed to the other elements of water, fire and air.¹¹⁶ Giblin (1998:508) also sees the earth as “encompassing the worldwide empire of Babylon”.

- **ἐκχέετε φιάλας – “pour out (the seven) bowls”**

The word φιάλας is only used in Revelation in the New Testament with the first occurrence in Rev 5:8 where the bowls full of incense, is described. The next occurrence is in Rev 15:7 and from there on the word is only used in relation to the anger of God. The bowls are said to contain the anger of God or the plagues which are directed against Babylon.

In the Old Testament the word is always used in the context of the temple and it appears that φιάλας is a technical term for this specific type of instrument used in the sacrificial rituals of ancient Israel and Judah.¹¹⁷ Bowls of oil and wine were poured out (ἐκχεῖν) on the altar.¹¹⁸ Gallusz (2002:27) indicates that in the Hebrew Scriptures the pouring out of a bowl can be either positive (the bowl of God’s blessings) or negative (the bowl of God’s judgement). In his view “the bowl in these passages represents the fullness of YHWH’s judgment on the wicked”.

Koester (2014:652) argues that this pouring out of the bowls is linked to the followers of the beast who poured out the blood of the followers of God. He states that the whole religious way of doing is turned around in that it is not the worshippers who are pouring out sacrificial bowls to God, but rather God who pours it out on the people. To Beale (1999:813) the pouring out of the bowls is a figurative way of describing how the judgement of God is “executed” on

¹¹⁴ According to Blount (2009:294) the angels “are to go forth into the world and cosmos”.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Wikenhauser (1966:146) who notes that earth here is in opposition to heaven.

¹¹⁶ According to Lichtenberger (2014:214) the first bowl is poured out onto the “Festland” or mainland. According to Fowler (2013:236) the earth is rather symbolical for the “world-system of Satan in which religion functions.” Of course the created world is also inhabited by followers of the beast, but it is not exclusively the realm of the beast. People following Christ also live on the earth. Refer to Thomas (1995:248).

¹¹⁷ Blount (2009:294) argues that the author of Revelation deliberately uses this word which “has strong cultic implications”.

¹¹⁸ See Aune (1998:883) for a detailed discussion on the use of the verb ἐκχεῖν in the Old Testament.

earth.¹¹⁹ Beale and McDonough (2007:1135) make an important remark concerning the bowls and the earth: “Just as the pouring out of the sacrificial blood represented the cleansing of the tabernacle from defilement of sin, so the pouring out of the bowls cleanses the earth from the defilement of sin through judgment.” This confirms that the “earth” in verse 1 is used in a general sense and has all that has been created in view. God is now cleansing what he created using these libation bowls which are poured out by the angels. In the rest of the bowl plagues the focus will be on specific parts of this creation.

- θυμός – “wrath”

In the New Testament this word is used mostly in the book of Revelation. Outside of Revelation it is used once in each of the following books: Luke, Acts, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Hebrews. Not once, in any of these books, is it used in connection with God. It always refers to the wrath of people. In the book of Revelation, however, the word is used 10 times and often, as in this case, in direct relation to God who is described as full of wrath against Babylon.

Despite the word θυμός not being used in relation to God often in the New Testament, it is used frequently in the Old Testament in relation to God, and multiple times to describe the emotions of God. God gets livid when his people worship other gods and commit idolatry.¹²⁰ This already hints at the response to the fourth bowl plague where it is said that people keep refusing to give God the glory.

2.2.3 Summary

The actual start of the bowl plagues happen with a command from God to the seven angels holding the seven bowls with the wrath of God – like priests would be holding the bowls, standing in front of the altar in the temple. It appears that God has had enough of this resistance from the followers of the beast and he is now going to make an end to it. The angels immediately obey Him by starting to empty their bowls on the earth. It appears that in the first verse of Rev 16 earth is seen as the whole world and not specifically the land or the element of earth. Each angel has a specific target on earth which he aims at and which is affected by

¹¹⁹ Whether the bowl plagues are to be seen as final judgements or only warnings to repent is a matter of debate among scholars. Hendriksen (1940:116), for instance, does not think that the bowl plagues are judgments. In his view “they are charged with serious warning”.

¹²⁰ See for instance 2 Chron. 34:25.

the contents of his specific bowl. The first angel targets the earth or the land. It is the effect of this bowl which will now be discussed in detail in the rest of the chapter.

2.3 The first bowl plague

2.3.1 The text of the first bowl plague

Greek text¹²¹

Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ὁ πρῶτος
καὶ ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ
εἰς τὴν γῆν·
καὶ ἐγένετο ἔλκος
κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν
ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους
τοὺς ἔχοντας
τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου
καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας
τῆ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ.

Translation

And the first went
and he poured out his bowl
on the earth.
And there came sores,
bad and evil (painful),
on the people
who had
the mark of the beast
and who were worshipping
his image.

¹²¹ In this section there are no text critical considerations worth noting.

2.3.2 *Stichwörter* and key phrases

2.3.2.1 εἰς τὴν γῆν – “on the earth”

The fact that this bowl is poured out “on the earth” means that the bowl affects all human beings and all land-living creatures.¹²² However, the bowl does not have a universal effect and only those with the mark of the beast and those who worship his image are affected.

2.3.2.2 ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς ἔχοντας χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ. – “on the people who had the mark of the beast and who were worshipping his image”

This is a reference to the beast, which is said in Rev 13:16 to give a mark containing the name and the number of the beast to all people.¹²³ This mark was on the right hand and on the forehead. Without this mark it was impossible to take part in any commerce. The people who are affected by the first bowl are the people who chose to receive the mark of the beast and therefore commit themselves to the beast.¹²⁴ They were also forced to make an image of the beast. Rev 16:2 is therefore obviously strongly linked to Rev 13 as Sommer (2015:186) correctly indicates.¹²⁵

¹²² Hoffmann (2005:205) delivers some critique on the notion among certain scholars to see a link between the angels and the stars. Part of their argument would rest on the fact that one of the bowls is poured out on the sun and that the idea is strengthened by the fact that the first bowl is poured out onto the earth. Hoffmann (2005:205) dismisses this idea quite strongly and argues that the arguments for links to the Old Testament are stronger and therefore the link to the stars is “very unreasonable”. He is only willing to admit that there may have been astronomical influences in the Old Testament texts referred to, but in his view John definitely did not refer to the stars himself.

¹²³ Cf. Koester (2014:646). Refer to Davis (1973:150) who notes that Rev 16:2 “certainly presupposes 13:16-18”.

¹²⁴ Casey (1981:166) notes that it is common in the book of Revelation to show your loyalty to a specific higher power by the use of a mark or a name. However, the way χάραγμα is used in here is only used to show loyalty to the Antichrist and those who are aligned with him.

¹²⁵ He also sees similarities with Dan. 7.

2.3.2.3 καὶ ἐγένετο ἕλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν – “and there came a sore (which was) foul and evil”

The sore is the direct result of the first bowl being poured on the earth and, as mentioned, it only came on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. It is important to note that the word ἕλκος is in the singular. Evidently it is not multiple sores but one sore which came on the people. It might be one, big and agonizing sore which came upon the people, or alternatively one type of sore.¹²⁶

ἕλκος in the New Testament

Other than in Revelation the word ἕλκος is found only in one other place in the New Testament and that is in Luke 16:20 in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus is said to have multiple sores which the dogs would lick. In Revelation the word is only mentioned elsewhere in Rev 16:11 where the people are said to curse God because of their sores. This will be discussed in a later chapter of the current study.

ἕλκος in the Jewish Scriptures

In the LXX sores are frequently mentioned, especially in the law codes where purity laws and rituals are discussed. The word ἕλκος is a translation of the Hebrew word מִנְשָׁה which means “boil” or “sore”. Besides the well-known occurrence in Exodus, which will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter, the word is used in many other contexts. The Egyptian sores mentioned in Deuteronomy are seen as a very specific kind of skin condition. In Deut 28:27 it is said that the Lord will strike the people with the sores of Egypt, and other skin conditions such as wild scab and itch. These conditions are all incurable.¹²⁷ A little later in Deut 28:35 it is said that the Lord will strike the people with an evil sore on the knees and the legs. These conditions are also incurable and cover the whole body from the foot to the head. This seems like a different type of sore compared to the type of sore making the Egyptians ill which is mentioned in Deut 28:27. Sommer (2015:184) is convinced that there are “literarischen Verbindungen” between Rev 16:2 and these two texts from Deuteronomy. He does not,

¹²⁶ Thomas (1995:248) writes that “this is an inflamed and running sore that refuses to be healed”.

¹²⁷ It is unclear from the text whether it is the last condition mentioned from which you cannot be healed or if it is all the conditions mentioned in the text. It is possibly all conditions as they are all considered serious.

however, discuss the matter in any more detail other than mentioning that his view is supported by other scholars.

The law code of Lev 13:18-23 also mentions boils (ἔλκει) among some other skin problems such as leprosy, which appears to be more serious than boils. In fact, in Lev 13:20 it is said that a sore can become leprous. In contrast to those in Deut 28:27, 35 these boils in Leviticus appear to be curable or something which can heal over time.¹²⁸

Prov 25:20 refers to a sore which is painful when sour wine is put on it. This could be a general open wound. In Job 2:7 the Satan is said to inflict Job with evil sores (ἔλκει πονηρῶ) which covered his body from his foot to his head. Apparently, this is the same kind of sore mentioned in Deut 28:35 which is said to cover the sole of the foot to the crown of the head. It appears to spread over whole the body as it is said that it starts at the knees and the legs and eventually covers the whole body. Boils were definitely known to be deadly. In 2 Kings 20 God tells Hezekiah that he will die. It is not evident immediately what the cause of his death will be, but in verse 7 Isaiah tells Hezekiah to put a lump of figs on the boil and then the boil healed. Clearly Hezekiah fell ill of the boil and he almost died because of it.

At is important to note that boils caused ritual impurity. Kalmanofsky (2016:252), in her discussion on the incurable sore in Jeremiah, notes that “regardless of whether it is a result of sin, sickness indicates and mandates distance from God”. Ford (1975:261) notes in this regard that the mark of the beast and the sores of the first bowl plague are in contrast to each other. The mark of the beast allowed people to engage other people in trade, while sores would prevent people from engaging with others as they would be seen as impure.¹²⁹ Kalmanofsky (2016:255) further notes that “mutilation of one’s enemies was common practice in the ancient world.” The whole aim of doing physical harm to one’s enemies was to put the victim in a lower social position. Causing the enemy to receive an infection would show clearly what goes on inside of them and would lead to aversion among others who witness this infection.

Parallel to this, it is helpful to consider the difference between the effect of a wound and an infection or disease. Admittedly, in Jeremiah there is no reference to a boil (ἔλκος), but Kalmanofsky’s discussion on the wound given to Israel by God according to Jeremiah is important to take note of. She considers why Jeremiah would write about the pain of Israel as an infection rather than a wound.¹³⁰ In her view, one of the most important reasons is that an infection comes from inside the body while a wound comes from outside. To talk about Israel as having an infection, therefore points to something which is wrong inside of the nation

¹²⁸ Cf. Lev 13:18.

¹²⁹ Refer to Ford (1975:270).

¹³⁰ She still does not think that it is made explicit in Jeremiah whether the pain Israel went through was because of a wound or an infection (Kalmanofsky, 2016:261).

(Kalmanofsky, 2016:260). She writes that “boils arise on the body as physical markers of Israel’s internal corruption.” In the same way the boils which came over the people who worship the beast would be an indication of their own corruption. This infection only causes disgust and resentment by others which is a very strong “incentive for reform” (Kalmanofsky, 2016:261). While they already carry the outside sign of their allegiance to the beast, the boils indicate the internal corruption of those who bear the image of the beast. Despite none of the consulted scholars mentioning this, the impurity which is caused by the boil in the first bowl plague, might be linked to the unclean spirits proceeding from the mouth of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet.

Summary of the use of ἔλκος

To summarize this short discussion on boils, it appears that there are basically two “kinds” of boils written about in the Old Testament: Those that are general skin diseases which occur naturally on the one hand and those that are inflicted by supernatural powers or beings. The second kind appears to be more serious and has a bigger impact on the body. These are often not curable. It is not always used as punishment as can be seen in the case of Job, where Satan is the one who causes the boils. However, when God inflicts boils, it is usually as punishment or as warning in the case of the Egyptian plague of boils. Often it is punishment against Israel for very serious sins such as not being obedient to the commandments of the Lord (Deut 28:27), which includes idolatry. The idea is to convince the people to repent from their wicked ways and return to a life of loyalty to God. Occasionally God also uses boils to punish his enemies or the enemies of his people. The effect remains aversion from other people. To inflict the followers of the beast with boils is therefore no small punishment.

2.3.3 Connections to the trumpet plagues

It is interesting to compare this verse, specifically with reference to the mark of the beast, to Rev 9:3-4.¹³¹ Most scholars see a strong connection between the two sections.¹³² Rev 9:3-4 contains the description of the fifth trumpet where locusts came from the smoke which rose from the bottomless pit darkening the sun and the air. These locusts were given authority or power like the scorpions of the earth. In verse 3 they are told not to harm the grass of the earth

¹³¹ Cf. Koester (2014:653) who notes that these people with the mark of the beast expected not to be harmed but the beast’s followers, but now they are harmed by the wrath of God.

¹³² Jenkins (1972:70) for instance argues that the first three bowl plagues are “similar to the trumpets”.

or any green thing or tree, but only those who do not have the seal of God (τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ θεοῦ). Note specifically the connection between the earth and the seal/mark which occurs here, even though it is the seal of God in this case. In Rev 9 it is only described in the opposite way of Rev 16. The locusts may not harm the earth, but they must harm those without a seal/mark. In Rev 16 the earth is directly affected and those who do have a seal/mark are harmed. It is clear that the earth plays an important part in both these plagues and particularly in the first bowl plague.

There might be a connection to the first trumpet plague. Van de Kamp (2000:357) argues that there is indeed a connection to the first trumpet plague (Rev 8:7) in that something is also poured out on the earth, although it is hail, fire and blood and not the contents of a bowl. This is in line with the view of Beale (1999:809) who also perceives the first bowl plague as parallel to the first trumpet plague. The connection appears to be for them in the fact that both these plagues affect the earth in some way (Beale, 1999:808). That is, however, almost the only correspondence between these two plagues other than that they are at the start of their respective series of plagues.¹³³

2.3.4 A comparison between the Exodus plague of boils and the bowl plague of boils

When reading about the sore in the context of plagues one immediately thinks about the sixth Egyptian plague,¹³⁴ which is the plague of boils. In the following section a comparison between the plague of boils in Egypt and the plague of boils in Revelation will be provided in order to determine (a) whether the plague of boils in Revelation is indeed based on the plague of boils in Exodus and (b) to what extent the one might be based on the other. Important differences and correspondences will be discussed in detail after which some other significant matters will be highlighted.

¹³³ This is confirmed by Stefanovic (2002:30) who indicates the “earth” as the main corresponding factor between the first bowl plague and the first trumpet plague. Thomas (1995:247) also cautions against seeing a too close relation between the trumpet plagues and the bowl plagues. He argues strongly that “[the bowl plagues] do not go back in time to retrace the same period as the seals and trumpets”. Paulien (1987:365-381), in his discussion on the first trumpet plague, does not indicate any parallels to the first bowl plague.

¹³⁴ Most scholars identify strong links between this bowl plague and the plague of boils in Exodus. Baker (2000:269) for instance writes: “translated in this way it evokes the plague of boils and sores (Exod. 9.9)”. Refer to Faley (1999:133). Also Sommer (2015:185) reckons that the word ἔλκος primarily comes from the reception of the sixth Exodus plague.

The LXX text of the Exodus plague of boils (Exod 9:8-11):

8 Εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν καὶ Ααρων λέγων λάβετε ὑμεῖς πλήρεις τὰς χεῖρας αἰθάλης καμιναίας, καὶ πασάτω Μωυσεῖς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐναντίον Φαραω καὶ ἐναντίον τῶν θεραπόντων αὐτοῦ,¹³⁵

9 καὶ γενηθήτω κονιορτὸς ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ἔσται ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τετράποδα ἔλκη, φλυκτίδες ἀναζέουσαι, ἔν τε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς τετράποσιν¹³⁶ καὶ ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου.

10 καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν αἰθάλην τῆς καμιναίας ἐναντίον Φαραω καὶ ἔπασεν αὐτὴν Μωυσεῖς εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἔλκη φλυκτίδες ἀναζέουσαι, ἐν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς τετράποσιν.

11 καὶ οὐκ ἠδύναντο οἱ φάρμακοὶ στήναι ἐναντίον Μωυσεῖς διὰ τὰ ἔλκη· ἐγένετο γὰρ τὰ ἔλκη ἐν τοῖς φαρμάκοις καὶ ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου.

“8 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh.

9 It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.”

10 So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals.

11 The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the land of Egypt.”

The Egyptian plague of boils is caused by the ash (αἰθάλην) that Moses is ordered to throw toward the heaven (εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) which will become dust (κονιορτός). This dust, in turn, will cover Egypt (vs. 8-9) and cause boils on the people.¹³⁷ In verse 10 it is said that Moses did this and he threw ash from the oven “in the air”/ “toward the heaven” (εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν) which then caused blistering sores (ἔλκη φλυκτίδες ἀναζέουσαι) to bubble up on both people and “the four footed creatures” (τοῖς τετράποσιν).

¹³⁵ “καὶ ἐναντίον τῶν θεραπόντων αὐτοῦ” is added by the LXX and does not appear in the Hebrew text. According to the presentation of the textual witnesses of the plague-narrative in Exodus by Lemmelijn (2009:279) this addition is not supported by any Hebrew manuscripts.

¹³⁶ The words “ἀναζέουσαι, ἔν τε τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἐν τοῖς τετράποσιν” is added in the LXX and is not supported by any other textual witnesses (Lemmelijn, 2009:280).

¹³⁷ Note the opposites here: the ash is thrown towards **heaven** and it becomes dust which causes boils in the **land** of Egypt.

2.3.4.1 Important correspondences

1. The sores are called ἔλκος in both Exodus and Revelation. The same type of sore that God used in the plague in Egypt appears to be used in the first bowl plague.
2. In both plagues the earth or the land (τῆς γῆς) is mentioned. In Rev. 16 the bowl is poured out on the earth (εἰς τὴν γῆν) and in Exodus the dust is said to come over the whole land of Egypt (τὴν γῆν Αἰγύπτου). In the Egyptian plague of boils the land or earth plays an important part. Not only is it specifically emphasised that the boils came over all the land of the Egyptians, but dust is what causes the boils. This might be why the first bowl plague in Revelation is said to be thrown on the earth.
3. In both instances some kind of land-dwelling animal is mentioned which is directly or indirectly affected by the plague. In Rev 16 it is the beast (θηρίον) and in Exodus it is the four-footed animals (τοῖς τετράποσιν). The bowl plague, however, affects the follower of this animal, while it is the animals themselves which are affected in the Exodus plague.¹³⁸
4. A further important link between the broader passage of the bowl plagues and the Exodus plagues is that in Rev 15, which sets the heavenly scene for the outpouring of the bowl plagues, refers to a song of Moses.¹³⁹ Furthermore the author of Revelation says that he saw something which appeared to be a sea of glass mixed with fire. To many scholars this sea of glass is a reference to the Red Sea in the Exodus narrative,¹⁴⁰ although others do not see any connection to the Red Sea here.¹⁴¹

All of these correspondences make it clear that the Egyptian plague of boils influenced John in some way when he was writing about this first bowl plague. However, the discrepancies are strong enough to conclude that the first bowl plague is not entirely based on the Egyptian plague of boils and that other influences are at play as well.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ To Gallusz (2002:35), this is actually the main point of difference between the two plagues.

¹³⁹ In his M.Th. thesis Scharneck (2013) argued that the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, both mentioned in Rev 15:3 are two separate songs namely the song of Moses in Exodus and the song of the Lamb of which the wording is stated in Rev 15:3-4. This is in contrast to most prominent scholars who argue that it is the same song with two names of which the content is found in Rev 15:3-4.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. for instance Beale (1999:798) and Du Rand (2007:464).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Koester (2014:631).

¹⁴² Mangina (2010:186) refers to the correlation between the bowl plagues and the Exodus plagues “a very loose one”.

2.3.4.2 Important differences

The most important differences between the plague of boils in Egypt and the plague in Rev 16:2 are the following:

1. There is no mention of dust or ash in the bowl plague in Revelation.

In the Exodus plague the boils break out on the people after Moses threw ash in the air which became a fine dust, settling on the people and causing boils. It is unclear what the relationship is between the boils and the ash.¹⁴³ What is important is that there is no mention of this in the first bowl plague.¹⁴⁴ Casey (1981:166) argues that John does indeed make use of the Exodus tradition but he modifies it in light of texts such as Ps 75:8; Jer 25:15; Jer 49:12; Ezek 23:33; Hab 2:16.¹⁴⁵ Instead of using dust, which is thrown in the air, as source of the boils, John uses the idea of a cup from these texts as a source. It may, however, also be that the reference to earth in the first bowl plague is parallel to the dust in the Exodus plague.

2. In the bowl plague in Revelation there is no reference to blistering sores (ἔλκη φλυκτίδες), but rather a foul and evil sore (ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρόν).¹⁴⁶ Deut 28:15-45, however, lists some bad things which will happen to the people if they turn away from the Lord. In this list (in verse 35) there is a reference to the boils of Egypt (ἔλκει Αἴγυπτίῳ). A few verses later in verse 35 boils are mentioned once again, but without the reference to Egypt and it is

¹⁴³ Durham (1987:121) confirms this by stating that “there is no obvious link between the furnace-ash flung toward the sky and the settling dust that brings infection.” Meyers (2005:85) also indicates no apparent connection between the ash and the boils except for mentioning the possibility that the ash might come from the oven where the bricks were made. She admits there is not much evidence to substantiate this possibility.

¹⁴⁴ Gallusz (2002:35) argues that the ashes are replaced by the bowl in Revelation.

¹⁴⁵ All of these texts do contain references to a cup and often this cup is full of wine. These cups are associated with great trials and tribulations. For instance, in Ezek 23:33 the cup is called a cup of destruction (ποτήριον ἀφανισμού). In Hab 2:16 the cup is said to cause honour being turned to shame. Koester (2014:646) agrees with this and notes the same texts as being the background to the idea of the bowls which are poured out.

¹⁴⁶ Beale (1999:814) places a great deal of emphasis on the suffering which is caused by the sores, linking this suffering to the suffering caused by “torment” of the fifth trumpet. To him the mention of blistering sores in Exodus and foul and evil sore in Revelation are actually a correspondence as both causes suffering to the people. The suffering which the Exodus plague caused is not mentioned explicitly, but it is implicit. Beale (1999:814) indicates how ancient writers make the implicit suffering caused by the sores explicit by linking the sores of the Egyptian plagues to torment. As examples he refers to Josephus and Philo on this matter.

called ἔλκει πονηρῶ (an evil sore).¹⁴⁷ Even though the two references are in close proximity to one another in the text, it does not mean that both refer to the same outbreak of boils. Looking at the expression ἔλκος κακὸν καὶ πονηρὸν as a whole it must be noted that nowhere in the Old Testament (or New Testament, other than Rev 16:2) is ἔλκος referred to as both πονηρός and κακός. There is also no other place in the Old or New Testament other than Rev 16:2 where the word κακός is used to describe ἔλκος. The reason for the difference might simply be that John did not have the text of Exodus at hand and simply referred to the plague from what he can remember and then describes the boils as he sees it in his vision.

3. It is important to note that in Exod 9 the word is in the plural (many sores) whilst in Rev 16 it is in the singular. When looking at the differences between boils in the singular and plural in the Old Testament, one needs to note that the Masoretic text uses the word יִשׁ in all of the studied cases in the singular, as well as in Exod 9. The LXX text translates it with the plural form (ἔλκη) and it does so consistently (four times to be exact) in the plague narrative in Exod 9.¹⁴⁸ However, in Deut 28:27 where there is a reference to the Exodus plagues, the LXX translates the word with the singular form (ἔλκει). In fact, the only place where יִשׁ is translated with the plural form is in the plague narrative in Exod 9. It is unclear why the LXX would translate a Hebrew word, which is in the singular, with a Greek word in the plural.¹⁴⁹ One can possibly conclude from this, is that even though the author of Revelation might

¹⁴⁷ This leads Beale (1999:814) to argue that “the bowl’s effect is based on the literal Egyptian plague of boils, which is summarized in Deut 28:27, 35 as an ‘evil sore’”. This simple deduction is problematic since the boil is not called evil in verse 27. After verse 27 the list of the bad things which will happen to Israel if they choose to turn away from the Lord continues, mentioning new things. It is quite likely that the boil, mentioned in verse 35, is another type of boil. Besides, it is only called πονηρός and not κακός in Deut 27:35.

¹⁴⁸ Lemmelijn (2009:60-62) indicates that the Hebrew manuscript at her disposal for Exod 9:9 (MSamP4Q^m) differs from the Greek text in that the Hebrew uses the singular and the Greek the plural form. Similarly this is the case with Exod 9:10 and 9:11 where the Hebrew manuscript is MSamP. As this is not a significant difference and the Hebrew word does not occur very often, this specific difference is not explored in further detail by Lemmelijn.

¹⁴⁹ Lemmelijn (2009:281) unfortunately does not assist in providing details on the LXX manuscripts she consulted and to which she simply refers as “LXX”. Looking at different LXX manuscripts could shed light on the question as to why a Hebrew word in the singular is translated in the plural. She provides valuable input by pointing out that there are no Hebrew manuscripts with different readings than the Masoretic text, this means that until other textual evidence is provided it can be assumed that the translators of the LXX probably did not make use of another *Vorlage* when they translated the book of Exodus.

have referred to the Exodus plague of boils in this specific case, he clearly did not make use of the LXX in a strict way by using the exact same grammatical forms.

Another point that should be considered in this regard is the appearance of the word ἔλκος in the New Testament. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the only place outside of Revelation where the word appears, is in Luke 16:21 and then it is in the plural (ἔλκη). In Revelation it appears again later in the bowl plague narrative and then also in the plural, but then the reference is to many people with sores. This could refer to many people with one sore each, or to many people all with many sores.

An important matter to take into consideration here is that Philo (*Mos.* 1.128) uses the word boil in the singular. He sees the plague of boils as many boils converging into one single boil covering the whole body of the affected person or animal. This is more in line with the reference to the plague of boils found in Deuteronomy than the actual LXX translation of Exodus. Philo (*Mos.* 1.127) describes the plague in the following way:

at God's bidding, ashes from a furnace, which Moses scattered in the air, and then dust suddenly fell upon men and the lower animals alike. It produced an angry, painful ulceration over the whole skin, and, simultaneously with this eruption, their bodies swelled with suppurated blisters, which might be supposed to be extravasations from inflammation lurking beneath.¹⁵⁰

Analysing Philo's depiction of the plague of boils as a whole, it becomes clear that he takes elements from both the Exodus and Deuteronomy account of the plague. On the one hand he uses "boil" in the singular form and mentions that it is incurable, in line with the account in Deuteronomy, on the other hand he describes the severity of the plague in a way which appears to be more in line with the Exodus account of the plague of boils.

4. The sores caused by the first bowl affect specifically those people who have the mark of the beast as well as those worshipping his image,¹⁵¹ while the sores caused by the Egyptian plague affect all humans and also (four-footed) animals within the land of Egypt.¹⁵² In Exod

¹⁵⁰ Translation by Colson and Loeb (1984:343).

¹⁵¹ Van de Kamp (2000:357) notes that "de plaag wordt niet zomaar in het wilde weg losgelaten, maar bewust gericht op die categorie *mensen die het merkteken van het beest dragen en zijn beeld aanbidden*." He makes the connection between the punishment and the sin. The sin is having a mark (the mark of the beast), therefore the punishment is also getting a mark (Van de Kamp: 200:358). This is in line with the view of Beale (1999:814) and most other commentators.

¹⁵² To Casey (1981:166) this is a significant matter, although he does not elaborate on why it would be so significant.

9:11 it is said, however, that the boils were on the magicians and all the land of Egypt according to the LXX.¹⁵³ In Exodus the plague, therefore, affects all living creatures within the bounds of Egypt.

5. In Rev 16:2 the bowl is emptied on the earth and this causes boils on the people while in Exod. 9 the boils are caused by dust being thrown in the air.

2.3.4.3 Some significant matters

2.3.4.3.1 Philo's division of the plagues

In his division of the plagues in different subsets, Philo (*Mos.* 1.97) divides the plagues into four groups according to the person responsible for the execution of the specific plague. The plague of boils, the sixth Exodus plague (which Philo puts seventh), stands alone in the division of Philo as the only plague which is brought about by both Moses and Aaron together.¹⁵⁴ It is significant to Philo that Aaron is mentioned here, as he sees Aaron as being put in charge of all things coming out from the earth.¹⁵⁵ He writes that:

Rightly indeed was this chastisement committed to the two in common: to the brother because the dust which came down upon the people was from the earth, and what was of earth was under his charge; to Moses because the air was changed to afflict them, and plagues of heaven and air belonged to his ministration.¹⁵⁶

Merely from the grouping of the plagues it can be deduced that in the view of Philo the element of earth is a significant matter in the sixth Exodus plague. This has to do with the mention of dust as it will be indicated in the next subsection.

¹⁵³ It is interesting to note that the LXX translates *ובכל-מצרים* ("and all Egyptians") with *καὶ ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου* ("and in all the land of Egypt").

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Houtman (1996:17).

¹⁵⁵ This specific matter will be discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁶ The translation is from Colson (1984:343).

2.3.4.3.2 Dust in the Egyptian plague

In the Egyptian plague dust (κοιιοτρός) plays an important role. The question is whether the author of Revelation specifically referred to the earth in the first bowl plague because of the word “dust” in the Exodus plague. It is well known that when something falls in dry soil with some force it causes dust to rise up.

The word κοιιοτρός means “dust”. Dust can be any type of fine material spreading in the air. In the gospels the word is almost exclusively used where Jesus tells the disciples to shake the dust of a town, who do not accept them, off their feet (Matt 10:4, Luke 9:5, Luke 10:11).¹⁵⁷ In Luke this action is said to be a testimony against that people.

In the LXX the word is used to describe any fine material like in Deut 9:21 where it is stated that the calf will be grinded until it becomes fine dust. In Job 21:18 dust is the fine straw which is blown around or the fine material left over on the threshing floor after corn has been grinded. Dust can, however, also be used to refer to fine, dry soil, which is blown around like in Nah 1:3 or in Ezek 26:10 where the horses are said to be so many that the dust (from under their feet) will cover its enemies.

It is clear from this short exploration of the use of the word κοιιοτρός that it does not necessarily carry the meaning of fine soil, but rather the meaning most often attached to the word. Taking only the Exodus account of the narrative of the Egyptian plague of boils into account, it is therefore not justified to see κοιιοτρός as anything more than fine ashes. Philo (*Mos.* 1.129), however, sees a strong connection between dust and the element of earth, as dust proceeded from the earth.¹⁵⁸ As already explained, he sees the involvement of Aaron in this plague as significant, but to be expected as he connects Aaron with the element of earth.

Only taking the Biblical evidence into account, it can be deduced that the use of κοιιοτρός in the Exodus plague is probably not what led the author of Revelation to incorporate the idea of *earth* into the first bowl plague. If, however, Philo’s exegesis is taken into consideration, it changes the matter entirely as Philo clearly connects dust and earth. Could it be that the author of Revelation was somehow familiar with the tradition as represented by Philo and in light of that tradition connected earth with the plague of boils because of the mention of dust in the Exodus plague of boils?

¹⁵⁷ Cf. Bauer (1958:875).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Steyn (2013:5).

2.3.5 Other places in the Old Testament where boils are mentioned

Most of the other places in the Old Testament where the word ἔλκος is used have already been discussed. There are, however, two more places where the word appears, which need to be noted in this study.

In Job 2:7 Satan is said to inflict Job with ἔλκει πονηρῶ. Wall (1991:196-197) argues that this text in Job is the basis for the plague of boils in Rev 16. Beale (1999:814) dismisses this view of Wall on the fact that Job was not punished for sins and that the Exodus plagues were clearly here in John's mind rather than any other text. Although Beale's criticism makes sense, the argument of Wall cannot just be dismissed, as the character of Satan plays a role in Job as it does in Revelation. Still it seems unlikely that Job is in the background of Rev 16.

In 2 Kings 20:7 the sickness that Hezekiah had is identified as a ἔλκος, which must be healed by the application of a lump of figs.

2.4 Angels

A final matter which warrants attention is the angels. Ford (1975:260) notes that the angels in the bowl plagues can be named and says that the first angel's name is Kushiel which means "rigid one of God". She does not provide any explanation as to why this is the case. Looking at Davidson (1971:168) he notes that Kushiel is "one of the 7 angels of punishment and a 'presiding angel of Hell'". According to one source that Davidson mentions, "Kushiel 'punishes the nations with a whip of fire'". It remains unclear why Ford would think Kushiel is the first angel. He does not even appear in any of the lists of archangels as first (Davidson, 1971:338). An angel which is first in one of the lists of seven archangels, according to Davidson (1971:339) in *The Hierarchy of the Blessed Angels*, is Raphael. What is interesting about Raphael is that his name means "God has healed" and in 1 En. 40 he is "one of the 4 presences, set over all the diseases and all the wounds of the children of men" (Davidson, 1971:240). Admittedly Raphael is credited with the healing of wounds and not the inflicting of wounds, but this does not imply that John could not have alluded to him here. The similarities between the angel pouring out the first bowl, causing a painful sore on people, and the first archangel, who is connected to wounds and disease, are indeed striking. It might be that John deliberately wants to portray the angel who heals the people of God, as the one who harms the enemies of God's people.

2.5 Conclusions

The account of the outpouring of the bowl plagues starts with a command by a big voice from heaven. The fact that it is a big voice is widely accepted to indicate that the voice is that of God. God gives the command to the seven angels, each holding a bowl, to pour out their bowls on the whole creation outside of heaven. It is clear that a contrast between heaven above and earth below is pictured. Heaven is the place of God's throne and the earth is everything under heaven, everything which falls within the kingdom of the beast. In the book of Revelation, the beast attempts to take that power from God over creation. God reacts swiftly by taking on the beast and his followers. He launches an attack on those who decided to follow the beast, showing clearly who is more powerful. In the first verse "earth" is therefore used in a general sense, referring to all creation. It will be indicated that the earth is at this stage of the book under authority of the beast.

After the command from heaven specific parts of creation are targeted in sequence. The first bowl causes a boil to erupt on the skin of those bearing the mark of the beast, making them impure. It has been indicated that Kalmanofsky (2016:260) appears to be correct in her assessment that an infection in the ancient world indicated internal corruption which cause those infected to be ritually unclean. The possibility was noted that this ritual impurity might be linked to the unclean spirits of the sixth bowl plague. In ancient thought the worst effect of a skin infection was not the pain, but the repugnance from the community and the change in social status it brought about.

Throughout this lengthy discussion on the first two verses of Rev. 16 it has been indicated that the earth plays a very important role in the first bowl plague.

2.5.1 Connections to the Exodus plagues

The Exodus plague of boils does indeed play a partial role in the bowl plague of boils. A few connections between the two plagues have been pointed out. The most significant of these is the fact that both contain a "plague" which affects people and causes ἔλκος on the affected people. In both of the plagues "earth" also plays a role.

Yet it remains clear that the first bowl plague is not directly taken over from the fifth Exodus plague as there are too many differences. Where John did indeed make use of the Exodus plagues, he alludes to aspects of both the Deuteronomy account of the events and that of the Exodus account. The nature of the sores, the way the plague is brought about (in Exodus with ashes thrown in the air and in Revelation with a bowl poured out on the earth) and those affected by the plague are all important differences between the first bowl plague and the fifth Exodus plague. In fact, apart from the three above mentioned correspondences,

there is not much else connecting the first bowl plague and the fifth Exodus plague. This leads to the conclusion that there had to have been other influences on John's thinking. One possibility which has been discussed is the work of Philo on the Exodus plagues.

2.5.2 Connections to the writings of Philo

In this chapter Philo has been mentioned several times. The emphasis on the first bowl being poured out on the earth appears to connect to Philo who saw the four traditional elements of nature as very important. In the coming chapters this will be explored in more detail. Two specific links to Philo's discussion of the fifth Exodus plague have been noted: 1. He also appears to mix the Exodus and Deuteronomy account of the plague of boils in his discussion of the Exodus plague of boils in his work on the life of Moses. 2. Philo connects the Exodus plague of boils strongly to the earth for two reasons: In the first place he sees the dust in the Exodus plague as part of the element of earth, although the dust comes from the ash of the furnace in the Exodus account of the plague of boils. In the second place the involvement of Aaron in the execution of this plague has to do with the presence of the element of earth. This would explain why the bowl, which is poured out on the element of earth, leads to boils on the people who are in opposition to God.

2.5.3 Connections to other plagues in Revelation

Most scholars indicate a link to the first trumpet plague. Clearly the first bowl plague follows up on the first trumpet plague, but the only connection in the text is the fact that both affect the earth and both stand first in their respective series of plagues.¹⁵⁹ What none of the consulted scholars mention, is that there appears to be a link to the fifth trumpet which mentions the seal of God as well as the earth, despite it being in the negative (the earth, or the greens sprouting from the earth, must not be harmed).

It is clear that there are indeed some connections between the first bowl plague and the trumpet plagues. These connections are not direct and systematic. The bowl plague can therefore not be said to be based on one specific trumpet plague.

2.5.4 Angels

It was indicated that Ford (1975:260) appears to be incorrect in her assessment that the angel pouring out the first bowl is Kushiel. The links between the first angel in the bowl plagues and

¹⁵⁹ Malina (1995:137) indicates the reference to the land as an important factor in determining why the plagues are in the sequence they are.

the archangel, Raphael, are much stronger since he is first in one of the lists of archangels and he is connected to disease and wounds, even though he is the healer. It might be that John deliberately wanted to state that the angel who heals the people of God, hurts the enemies of God's people.

2.5.5 Final conclusions

It is clear that there are a number of possible texts serving as the background of the first bowl plague. The most obvious is the Egyptian plague of boils and specifically the connection between the earth and the breakout of evil sores on the enemies of God. It is Philo who specifically links the dust in the Egyptian plague to the element of earth, raising the question: Is there a possibility that John somehow had access to the same traditions which Philo makes uses of in his writings?

Chapter 3: The second bowl plague (Rev 16:3)

3.1 Introduction

After the first bowl is poured out, causing the outbreak of boils on the people bearing the mark of the beast, the second bowl plague is poured out on the sea (θάλασσαν) causing the sea to turn to blood. This blood is specifically said to be like the blood of a corpse and it causes every living thing in the sea to die.¹⁶⁰ It immediately recalls the first Egyptian plague where the Nile turns to blood. The question remains how strong those connections are? What other texts also played a role in the formulation of this verse?

Death clearly plays a strong motif in this bowl plague. There are two words which denote death: νεκροῦ and ἀπέθανεν. It is interesting to note that Beale (1999:815) sees the death of humans as a result of the sea turning to blood as “figurative, at least in part, for the demise of the ungodly world’s economic life-support system”. The sea is therefore seen as symbolic for the people who do not worship God. As the sea changes to be like the blood of a corpse, the people will also die. The reason why he makes this assumption, is based on the fact that everywhere else in the book of Revelation where the word αἷμα is used, it is used with reference to the suffering of people, whether good or bad.

A further consequence is that the sea does not supply life anymore in terms of food or water.¹⁶¹ The sea, which is usually a rich source of food, is now useless as everything in it is dead.

¹⁶⁰ Van de Kamp (2002:358) explains that due to the blood being like that of a corpse it must be thick and clotted.

¹⁶¹ Beale (1999:815) adds that the probable meaning of the second trumpet plague and the second bowl plagues is that everything in the sea dying means that the biggest source of wealth of Babylon, as a country which was strongly dependant on the sea for its subsistence (as described in Revelation 18), is now destroyed, leading to economic chaos and people becoming very poor. The whole economy of Babylon is impaired because of this plague and it ultimately leads to the fall of the empire.

Van de Kamp (2002:358) argues that one of the biggest challenges for Babylon with the sea turning to blood is that the sea cannot be used for drinking water. Of course the salty water from the sea was always undrinkable, so it appears that he reads a bit too much into the text here.

3.2 The text of the second bowl plague

Greek text (Rev. 16:3)

³Καὶ ὁ δεύτερος¹⁶² ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ
εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν·
καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ,
καὶ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν τὰ¹⁶³ ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ.

Translation

And the second poured out his bowl

on the sea.

And it became blood like death/corpse

and every living being in the sea died.

3.3 The Egyptian plague of blood

Owing to the turning of water to blood immediately brings the Egyptian plague of blood to mind, the connection to this plague will be discussed first.

3.3.1 The text of the Egyptian plague of blood

Most scholars see the Egyptian plague of blood, the first Egyptian plague found in Exod 7:20-21 (LXX), in the background of the second bowl plague.¹⁶⁴ The Egyptian plague of blood probably does play a role in this plague to some extent, but that role must not be overestimated. As it will be indicated, there are some clear differences between the second bowl plague and the first Exodus plague.

¹⁶² Some manuscripts add the word ἀγγέλος here, in an attempt to confirm that it is an angel pouring out the bowl. While it is added in the descriptions of all subsequent plagues, for an unknown reason it is not added in the description of the first bowl plague (Beale, 1999:816). However, this has no pertinence on the current study as it is accepted that the implication of the bowls are all poured out by one of the angels receiving the command in Rev 16:1.

¹⁶³ The article τὰ appears out of place. Beale (1999:816) notes this as the reason why some manuscripts change it to τῶν and some simply omit it.

¹⁶⁴ To name but a few of the most important commentators on Revelation: Beckwith (1967:681), Fekkes (1993:80), Aune (1998:884), Beale (1999:814), Reddish (2001:303), Koester (2014:647), Lichtenberger (2014:214).

The text of the Egyptian plague of blood looks like this:

καὶ ἐποίησαν οὕτως Μωυσῆς καὶ Ααρων, καθάπερ ἐνετείλατο αὐτοῖς κύριος· καὶ ἐπάρας τῆ ῥάβδῳ αὐτοῦ ἐπάταξεν τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ ἐναντίον Φαραω καὶ ἐναντίον τῶν θεραπόντων αὐτοῦ καὶ μετέβαλεν πᾶν τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ εἰς αἷμα. 21καὶ οἱ ἰχθύες οἱ ἐν τῷ ποταμῷ ἐτελεύτησαν, καὶ ἐπώρυσεν ὁ ποταμός, καὶ οὐκ ἠδύναντο οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι πιεῖν ὕδωρ ἐκ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, καὶ ἦν τὸ αἷμα ἐν πάσῃ γῆ Αἰγύπτου.

And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded them; and Aaron having lifted up his hand with his rod, hit the water in the river before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and changed all the water in the river into blood. And the fish in the river died, and the river stank thereupon; and the Egyptians could not drink water from the river, and the blood was in all the land of Egypt.

3.3.2 Correspondences

There is only one real correspondence between the bowl plague and the Exodus plague. In both plagues water is turned to blood causing the death of the creatures living in that water (Exod 7:18,21).¹⁶⁵ However, in the LXX the verb τελευτάω is used instead of the verb ἀποθνήσκω which is used in Revelation. τελευτάω is an euphemistic expression for death, which actually means “it came to its end”.¹⁶⁶ The fish in the river came to their end. In the second bowl plague all living things literally died and fish is not specifically mentioned. The foul smell, which is noted in Exodus by the word ἐπώρυσεν, might be implied by the mention of the blood being the blood of a corpse.

3.3.3 Differences

Three important differences can be noted:

¹⁶⁵ Van de Kamp (2002:358) notes that where the sea is usually significant to the lives of the people, it is now full of death. There is no oxygen for any of the life in the sea, therefore nothing can live.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Liddell and Scott (1996:1771).

3.3.3.1 The type of water

In the Egyptian plague of blood there is no mention of the sea.¹⁶⁷ Only the rivers and springs are mentioned. Nonetheless, Beale (1999:814) clearly sees the Exodus plague as the primary background to the second trumpet and the second bowl plague, which both refer to the sea turning to blood. He indicates that Philo (*Mos.* 1.100) adds the fact that humans also die (over and above the fish which is mentioned in the Egyptian plague) because of the Nile turning to blood.

3.3.3.2 The nature of the blood

The second difference is in the nature of the blood. In the Exodus plague the blood is simply said to be blood, without any attempt to describe the blood in more specific terms. The author of Revelation uses more descriptive language in his description of the severity of this plague. According to Blount (2009:295) this is simply because John “radicalizes” his version of the plagues.

3.3.3.3 The way the plague was brought about

The Exodus plague was brought about by Moses striking the water in the river. The bowl plague was caused by an angel pouring out a bowl containing the wrath of God into the sea.

3.3.4 Summary

From this discussion, it is clear that the Exodus plague of water turning to blood is not the only background of this text, even though it appears to consist of a significant part of this background. The most prominent words and concepts used in the description of the second bowl plague will now be analysed in the light of other ancient sources, in an attempt to see what other texts might be at the background of the second bowl plague.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Ford (1975:270).

3.4 *Stichwörter* and key phrases

3.4.1 εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν – into the sea

The second bowl is poured out into the sea and not on the earth like the first bowl. It confirms what was noted in the previous chapter that “earth” in Rev 16:1 refers to creation in general and that the angels then target specific parts of the earth with their bowls.¹⁶⁸ The word θάλασσα is a word which is used quite often in both the Old and New Testament with a whole array of cultic connotations.

3.4.1.1 The Hebrew Scriptures

The word θάλασσα is used widely in the LXX to denote the water which surrounds the land and it is a translation of the Hebrew word יָם. In the first creation narrative in Gen 1:10 it is said that the water under heaven, which was gathered together in one place so that dry land can appear, was called “seas”.¹⁶⁹ Du Preez (2002:48) emphasizes that in the first creation narrative the sea is explicitly portrayed as part of what God created as good, something which provided joy to God along with all the other parts of the creation.

This is the same way in which the sea is portrayed most often in narrative literature in the Hebrew Scriptures. The sea is usually a large body of water which can be surrounded by land like the Dead Sea (Num 31:12 - θάλασσα ἡ ἀλυκή - litt. “the salty sea”) or which can be the great water dividing continents. The ocean is sometimes called the “great sea” (ἡ θάλασσα ἡ μεγάλη) as in Josh 15:47 – “Asiedoth, and her villages, and her hamlets; Gaza, and its villages and its hamlets as far as the river of Egypt, and the great sea is the boundary.” This verse serves as a good example of how the sea is often used as a boundary to an area of land inhabited by a specific tribe of people, due to the fact that it is such a large geographical feature.

In the Exodus narrative the sea plays an important role because the Israelites escaped from the Egyptians via a route that was opened in the Red Sea (θάλασσαν ἑρυθράν). The Hebrew for Red Sea is actually the “Reed Sea” (יַם סוּף). This narrative is recounted several

¹⁶⁸ To Koester (2014:647) this act of pouring out the bowl on the sea is a parody on the Roman people who poured out offerings in the sea before a long journey on the sea to appease Zeus and secure their favour. However, in this case it is not the people who pour out the bowl, but rather an agent of God and it does not lead to favour but death.

¹⁶⁹ Walton (2009:51) notes that the primordial sea “is the principal element of the precreation condition”.

times in the Old Testament. The events at the Red Sea are always connected to the redemption given to God's people.¹⁷⁰

A very interesting occurrence of the word θάλασσα is in the description of the decoration of the temple in 1 Kings 7. In 1 Kings 7:10 (LXX) states that

καὶ ἐποίησε τὴν θάλασσαν δέκα ἐν πήχει ἀπὸ τοῦ χείλους αὐτῆς ἕως τοῦ χείλους αὐτῆς, στρογγύλον κύκλῳ τὸ αὐτό· πέντε ἐν πήχει τὸ ὕψος αὐτῆς, καὶ συνηγμένοι τρεῖς καὶ τριάκοντα ἐν πήχει ἐκύκλουν αὐτήν.

And he made the sea, ten cubits from one rim to the other; the same was completely circular round about: its height was five cubits, and its circumference thirty-three cubits.

τὴν θάλασσαν is a translation of the Hebrew קמח תה-תא שי which can be translated as “the casted/molten sea”. In some translations it is translated as “the sea from cast work”.¹⁷¹ Clearly this is not a reference to any natural body of water, but rather to an ornament placed in the temple built by king Solomon. The specific ornament is mentioned again in the next verses noting that the “sea” or the basin was standing on twelve oxen, each facing in another direction. In 1 Kings 9:27 the word θάλασσα is used in the customary sense again where it is said the King Solomon built ships and got some seamen to use the ships to go and collect gold from Ophir. Later in the narrative on the kings of Israel the sea in the temple is again mentioned where king Ahaz removes the sea from its base of oxen and puts it on a base made of stone (2 Kings 16:17). In the book of Chronicles, the same use of the word is found.¹⁷² In Isa 52:17 the sea in the temple is said to be made of bronze. Caird (1966:65) refers to this sea as a “cosmic symbol representing the primeval ocean of the creation myth”.

The psalms deal with the sea in a more poetic way and employs ancient mythology connected to the idea of the sea in the compositions.¹⁷³ Ps 73:13 (LXX) is a good example and especially relevant to this study of Revelation where the sea is seen to be the place where the sea monster lives:

¹⁷⁰ For instance Neh 9:9; Jud 5:13; Ps 65:6 (LXX); Ps 73:13 (LXX), Ps 77:13 (LXX).

¹⁷¹ The 1933 Afrikaans translation of the Bible. The 1983 Afrikaans translation calls it a water bowl and it is also translated as a basin in some English translations. The New English Translation reads: “He also made the large bronze basin called ‘The sea.’”

¹⁷² See for instance 2 Chron 4:2.

¹⁷³ Court (2000:58) argues that “in Revelation, as in Hebraic traditions, the underlying thought is of the sea as an alien element, associated with Tiamat in the Babylonian antecedent of the creation myth”.

σὺ ἐκράταιωσας ἐν τῇ δυνάμει σου τὴν θάλασσαν, σὺ συνέτριψας τὰς κεφαλὰς τῶν δρακόντων ἐπὶ τοῦ ὕδατος.

You established¹⁷⁴ the sea in you power, you broke the heads of the dragons in the water.

Whether this is a reference to the Exodus redemption is uncertain, but in the book of Revelation a dragon is also an important figure and is one of the “evil triad” mentioned later in the bowl plague narrative. Thayer (1995) notes that the word δρακων in the Old Testament is the same word used as metaphor for the devil in Revelation.¹⁷⁵ In Ps 77:13 (LXX) the word is a reference to the Exodus passing through the sea. The psalmist mentions the Red Sea specifically in Ps 135 (LXX).¹⁷⁶ In other poetic texts such as Job 38 and 41 the sea in general is described in poetic language but not much mythology is involved in these texts.¹⁷⁷

It is important to note that the sea in the Hebrew Scriptures, which is of particular importance to this study, is the impact of human actions on creation, including the sea. In Hosea 4 a list of the sins of the people of God are made and then it is noted that these sins have a direct impact on creation (Du Preez, 2002:49). In Hos 4:3 it is specifically noted that “even the fish in the sea are perishing”.¹⁷⁸ Du Preez (2002:49) quotes Mays (1969:65) who points out that “when the people of God break covenant, the whole creation suffers the consequences of their sins.” It is not only the wrongdoings of God’s people which have an impact on creation. In Nah 1:4 it is said that God “threatens the sea and dries her up”¹⁷⁹ because of what the enemies of the people of God do.¹⁸⁰ It is not stated explicitly that God punishes them by damaging the sea, but God is obviously seen as giving the people what they deserve by harming their source of food.

Looking broadly at the sea in the Hebrew Scriptures, it appears that the sea is not necessarily the big ocean between continents, but any larger body of water (Ford, 1975:271). What is significant is that from many of these texts it appears that God not only created the

¹⁷⁴ The Hebrew text reads “broke open”/ “divided”. The LXX therefore has a variant reading here.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Beale (1999:789) who connects the sea of glass in Rev 15 in the context of the judgement of Babylon to the cosmic sea monster of the Old Testament.

¹⁷⁶ Other poetic texts where the Red Sea is mentioned includes Wis 10:18; Isa 19:5.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Boxall (2006:226).

¹⁷⁸ Nogalski (2011:75) formulates the same point in the following way: “The creation language drives home the point that breaking God’s commands affects all creation negatively.”

¹⁷⁹ Direct translation of the LXX.

¹⁸⁰ Du Preez (2002:49) argues that although creation suffers because of the actions of mankind it still resembles the good image of God and the work of his hands.

sea, but also has power over it.¹⁸¹ The sea is the great unknown and therefore strongly connected to evil powers.

For the sake of completeness, it can be noted that the word θάλασσα sometimes simply means the direction towards the sea which was westward in Jerusalem (see Ezek 42:19 as example – “And he turned to the sea (south side) and measured in front of the sea (south side), five hundred cubits by the measuring reed).”

3.4.1.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament the word is most often used in the gospels and Revelation. θάλασσα is often used as a general term for all bodies of water. Any dam, lake or the ocean could be called the sea. Most of the appearances of the word θάλασσα in the gospels fall under this category.

In the gospels the word θάλασσα is often used to refer to a very specific body of water. One example is probably the body of water which is mentioned most often in the gospels, namely the sea of Galilee. In the prophetic words of Jesus in Luke 2, the waves of the sea are said to be roaring (verse 25).

In Acts 4:24 the people are praising God as the creator of the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them. Everything that exists is therefore described in terms of three layers: the heaven above, the earth below and the sea below the earth. The sea in this text is hence seen as the body of water on which the earth was resting according to ancient cosmology.¹⁸²

The first New Testament reference to the Red Sea (Ἐρυθρᾷ Θαλάσσει) from the Exodus narrative is found in the speech Stephen gave just before he was stoned as he recounted the history of Israel (Acts 7:36).¹⁸³ In the rest of Acts the word is used to refer to specific bodies of water when people travelled on it by ship or boat. Another New Testament reference to the Red Sea is in the first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Cor 10:1 the “Red Sea” is not mentioned specifically, but the reference is clear in that “the sea” through which the ancestors passed is written about.

In the book of Revelation θάλασσα is most often used with a literal body of water in mind (Jordaan, 2013:3). The first use of the word in the book is in Rev 4:6 and is almost the same as the use in Rev 15:2 where a sea of glass is also mentioned. The difference is that in 4:6 the sea is said to be ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ (“like crystal”) and in Rev 15:2 it is said to be μεμιγμένην

¹⁸¹ Job 26:12; 38:8; 41:23; Jon 1:4; 1:15; Hab 3:15; Hag 2:6, 21; Isa 50:2; Dan 7:2

¹⁸² The word is used in the same way in Acts 14:15.

¹⁸³ Another reference is found in Heb 11:29.

πυρί (“mixed with fire”). In Rev 15:2 those who have victory over the beast are standing on¹⁸⁴ the sea of glass.¹⁸⁵ The beast in Rev 13:1 emerges from the sea, creating the appearance that the sea was also seen as the place where evil originated (Bauckham, 1993 [2]:53).¹⁸⁶ McDonough (2008:183) furthermore makes a strong connection between the sea and the “primordial chaos” and argues that that the sea is “the chaos waters out of which emerge the leaders of opposition to God”. In this regard a note about the link between the abyss and the sea in the book of Revelation is also important. Some scholars see the sea and the abyss as exactly the same place according to Jordaan (2013:6). McDonough (2008:183), however, remarks that although the abyss and the sea often have the same connotations, John still sees a clear distinction between the two, with the abyss being the place where the demons are locked up. Jordaan (2013:6) discusses the matter in more detail and also argues for a middle ground, specifically in relation to where the beast comes from. He argues that the sea and the abyss “both depict some aspect of the origin of the beast”.

In other places in Revelation the word is used in a general way to denote the totality of creation together with the earth and the heaven.¹⁸⁷ In Rev 7 angels are given power to harm the earth and the sea, but they are told not to harm the earth, sea or trees until all the servants of God are marked. Interestingly, at the end of Revelation when the new earth and new heaven comes it is said that the sea disappeared which might indicate that the sea was connected to the world of evil and that world is now finally conquered and is therefore gone from the face of the earth.¹⁸⁸ Caird (1966:65) notes that “in John’s cosmology heaven and earth belong inseparably together. When God created the universe, He created heaven and earth.” Caird (1966:65) therefore sees the disappearance of the sea in the end as an indication that the sea is part of the order which passes by.

From this discussion it looks like the sea might be connected to the beast and the antichrist in the mind of the author of the book of Revelation. This is why the sea is always targeted by God and why it disappears at the end with only a new heaven and earth left over.

¹⁸⁴ According to Koester (2014:632) they more likely stand next to the sea of glass in the way Moses and the rest of the Israelites stood next to the Red Sea after their victory over the Egyptians.

¹⁸⁵ Scholars are divided in their assessment of the meaning of this sea of glass. Beale (1999:789) notes that “the ‘sea’ here connotes cosmic evil, since it often has such a nuance in the OT and sometimes elsewhere in Revelation.”

¹⁸⁶ For this reason, Fowler (2013:237) calls the sea “the reservoir of evil”.

¹⁸⁷ Moo (2009:150) notes that “the sea is no different in this regard than any other part of Revelation’s cosmos”.

¹⁸⁸ McDonough (2008:184) states that the disappearance of the sea is “a world not only after the flood, like Noah’s, but a world beyond any threat of flood”.

3.4.1.3 Philo

When Philo (*Her.* 1.136) writes about creation he sees the whole creation as divided into the four elements, but these elements have also been subdivided. Earth was subdivided into continents and islands, water into the ocean, rivers and springs, air into the winter and summer solstices, fire into usable and unusable fire.¹⁸⁹ Philo does not appear to comment on the significance of these divisions. He only describes it in the way he thinks about it. This is an important observation to take into account, since such a clear distinction found between the salty ocean and fresh water of the rivers and springs is not found anywhere else in ancient writings. The fact that the author of Revelation also makes a distinction between sea and rivers in the bowl plagues creates the impression that he might have been acquainted with either the writings of Philo, or he might have been aware of common traditions. Looking at recent scholarly research on the book of Revelation, it appears that no scholar noticed this link.¹⁹⁰

3.4.1.4 Summary

From this detailed discussion on the use of the word θάλασσα several conclusions can be drawn:

- a) The word θάλασσα mostly refers simply to any large body of water, whether it is the ocean or a lake. The sea is often set over against the “earth” or land and heaven as part of the larger creation of God.
- b) Nowhere in the Scriptures outside of Revelation is the sea said to be turned to blood.
- c) A very specific kind of sea which plays an important role in the Bible is the Red Sea, first mentioned in the Exodus narrative. This sea is said to have been divided so that the Israelites can pass through on dry land while the Egyptian army perished in it.
- d) God has power over the sea and is able to stir it up and calm it down. Furthermore he has the power to cause the waters to divide or even dry up.
- e) The sea is connected to the concept of the mythological dragon or sea serpent. Throughout the Bible there are connotations to the evil “underworld”.

¹⁸⁹ The subdivisions are also again subdivided into more divisions (Philo, *Her.* 1.136).

¹⁹⁰ Aune (1998:865-866) discusses some of the debate around the connection of the classical elements in general and the element of water in particular to the bowl plagues, but nowhere is there any indication that these scholars make any remark on the division between salty water and fresh water seen in the writings of Philo.

- f) Other ways in which the word θάλασσα can be understood is direction (westward), and more significantly for this study it can also be the term for a cast bronze bowl of water used in the temple and stood on twelve oxen which was most probably also made of cast bronze. It is significant that this “sea” is part of the temple which is the place of the presence of God.
- g) In the book of Revelation there is reference made to a sea of glass mixed with fire. Scholars appear to be unsure as to what exactly this refers to but generally agree that it probably connects to the Red Sea to some extent.

Taking everything into consideration, it seems as if the “sea” in Rev 16:3 refers to the ocean, the large body of water which is opposed to the dry land, while some of the cosmic elements might also be at play in this reference.¹⁹¹

3.4.2 αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ - “blood like that of a corpse”

There are many different arguments as to what the exact reference of the mentioned blood is. Beale (1999:816) does not believe that the idea of the sea being full of blood due to wars is very prominent in this text, Koester (2014:647) however thinks that it is of significant value. To him the sea is usually full of blood after wars on the sea and in Rev 16, the wars which caused the sea to turn to blood are the same wars which led to the end of the kingdom of the beast. This corresponds with the view of Ford (1975:271) who notes the possibility that “the author may have been influenced by the amount of bloodshed in Palestine during the Roman War”. Decock (2004:158) sees the blood in this verse as a symbol of the divine vengeance associated with the day of the Lord.

The question on this specific phrase is where does it originate from? Was it something simply made up by John for stronger effect, or are there any connections to other texts? Most recent studies focus on the severity of the plague which is specified by the idea that the blood is like that of a corpse, in other words thick and dark with the very strong smell of decomposing bodily material.¹⁹² No one refers to possible connections to any other texts except for the Exodus plague of blood and the second trumpet which will be explored later in this chapter.

The idea of the “blood of a dead (person)” does not seem to be parallel to that of the Old Testament. Noam (2009:243) confirms this in his article on “corpse-blood impurity” in the

¹⁹¹ There does not appear to be enough evidence to confirm the view of Beale (1999:815) who argues that the sea is a figurative reference to “ungodly humanity”.

¹⁹² Cf. Koester (2014:647) and also Beale (1999:814).

Bible.¹⁹³ In the Mishnah, however, there is no dispute over whether touching the blood of a corpse can make one impure. Midrash Sifre Zuta interprets Num 19 as saying that touching the blood of a corpse can make one impure. In his quest to find an answer as to where this tradition comes from, Noam (2009:248) finds that in two of the Dead Sea scrolls¹⁹⁴ it is said that touching the blood of a corpse can make you impure. The temple scroll is formulated the same as Midrash Sifre Zuta. Noam (2009:250) argues that this clearly implies that “the Temple Scroll and Sifre Zuta had in their text of Num 19:16 a reading that included in the list ‘or a corpse, or a human bone or a grave’ as well as the words ‘or blood’”. This addition did not find its way to the Masoretic Text or disappeared in later manuscripts. The other possibility he mentions is that both the Temple Scroll and the Sifre Zuta interpreted their text in this way and that is where the addition comes from (Noam, 2009:250). Either way, for this study it is important to note that while there might be no Old Testament reference to the blood of a corpse, it is clear that the idea was not totally absent in ancient literature. In Jewish exegesis it was commonly accepted that touching the blood of a corpse will make you unclean and therefore the concept of the blood of a corpse was fairly common in John’s time. Aune (1998:884) confirms this by noting that “in the ancient world, blood was paradoxically both a source of pollution and the means of purification”.¹⁹⁵ Considering that it has been indicated that the previous plague caused boils on the people, making the followers of the beast unclean, it is highly probable that this bowl plague also has to do with impurity instead of just extremely smelly blood.

¹⁹³ The title of the article poses the question about the “lost Biblical reading” of “corpse-blood impurity”. He starts his article by pointing out that the blood of a corpse is not mentioned in the purity laws of Numbers 19 which deals with the dead and impurity.

¹⁹⁴ Twice in the war scroll (1QM 9:7-9 and 1QM 14:2-3) and once in the temple scroll (11Q19 50:2-3) on which he places strong emphasis (Noam, 2009:248-249).

¹⁹⁵ Cf. also Kraft (1974:205) and Decock (2004:159).

3.4.3 πᾶσα¹⁹⁶ ψυχὴ ζωῆς¹⁹⁷ ἀπέθανεν – “every soul having life died”¹⁹⁸

To Harrington (1993:163) this phrase simply refers to the totality of the destruction as opposed to the partial destruction in the trumpet plagues (Rev 8:9).¹⁹⁹ Hartman (2013:195) draws attention to the problems posed when attempting to define the word ψυχὴ as it was understood in koine Greek. In the Old Testament ψυχὴ and ζωὴ and the idea of death is often used in the same verse and connected to each other, but never in the same way as in Rev 16. The soul of people is what enables them to live. Therefore, these two concepts are closely linked.

It is a common poetic way of speaking, when things are not going well with a person and he/she is deeply troubled, to say that his soul (ψυχὴ ἢ) is troubled or near to death and his life comes close to the underworld (ᾠδῆς). In Ps 87:4 (LXX), for example, the psalmist says that his soul is full of troubles (κακός) and his life draws near to hades (ᾠδῆς) (לויש in Hebrew), in other words, he feels close to his death. The same idea is found in Job 33:22: “His soul (ψυχὴ) approaches death and his life (ζωὴ) to hades.” Another occurrence of this phrase is in Sir 51:6 where the wording is almost exactly the same as in Job 33:22.²⁰⁰ It is interesting that the ψυχὴ goes to death and then ζωὴ enters hades.

A more significant example of the use of this phrase is in Job 36:13-14:

καὶ ὑποκριταὶ²⁰¹ καρδίᾳ τάξουσιν θυμόν· οὐ βοήσονται, ὅτι ἔδησεν²⁰² αὐτούς.
ἀποθάνοι τοίνυν ἐν νεότητι ἢ ψυχὴ αὐτῶν, ἢ δὲ ζωὴ αὐτῶν πιρρωσκομένη ὑπὸ
ἀγγέλων²⁰³

¹⁹⁶ Ford (1975:271) sees two possibilities of the meaning of πᾶσα. The word can refer “‘everyone’ or in the plural ‘persons’”. It is not clear what exactly she would think the difference is between the two options.

¹⁹⁷ Beckwith (1967:680) notes that this is a genitive of quality.

¹⁹⁸ A general observation about the phrase in general is that it looks like ψυχὴ and ζωὴ are separate ideas in the Old Testament although it is in one body. It is therefore interesting that the two ideas are so closely connected in Rev 16:13 as if it is only one single thing.

¹⁹⁹ The connection of the second bowl plague to the second trumpet plague will be discussed later in this chapter.

²⁰⁰ In this specific occurrence the idea that Hades is below is explicitly stated.

²⁰¹ The Hebrew word חַיָּה basically has the meaning of “without God”.

²⁰² This word is a translation of the Hebrew word גִּישׁ which is used to express the action of crying out for help specifically to God.

²⁰³ Everything after ζωὴ in this verse is not in line with the Masoretic text and provides a variant reading. The words πιρρωσκομένη ὑπὸ ἀγγέλων is therefore added by the LXX.

*The hypocrites in heart store wrath, they don't cry out because he bound them.
Therefore, let his soul die in their youth and their life wounded by angels.*

In this text there are quite a few connections to Rev 16 in general. The first is the word θυμός (“wrath”) which is in this case ascribed to “the hypocrites in heart”. In Rev 16:1 the wrath comes from God. In the broader context of Job 36, the word “hypocrites” probably refers to the people who pretend to believe in God but to disobey his commands.²⁰⁴ They don't actually believe in God. These people do not cry out to God because they are bound by him. This reminds of the people affected by the bowl plagues that do not repent but rather curse God in Rev 16:11.

In verse 14 the souls of the people who are hypocrites in heart is said to die at a young age and their lives are wounded by angels. In this single verse there are therefore four words corresponding to Rev 16:3, namely ἀποθνήσκω, ψυχή, ζωή, ἀγγέλων, ἄγγελος. Furthermore, there is a strong correspondence between the previous verse to the broader context of the second bowl plague. Taking all this into consideration it appears that there is an allusion to these verses in Rev 16:3.

Philo (QG. 1.56) refers to the man as a “living soul”: “But God formed a man out of the clay of the earth, and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul”.²⁰⁵ He also refers to “all beasts of the field and birds of the heaven” as living souls.²⁰⁶

It is important to note that ψυχή is a translation for the Hebrew word נפש (also translated as “life”). נפש and דם (blood) is often closely connected in the Old Testament and sometimes דם and נפש is seen as the same concept which makes sense, because when something's blood has run out they have no life left in them.²⁰⁷ In the second bowl plague blood and soul are also closely connected. The sea became like blood and every living soul died. That which gave life, now causes death.

It appears that apart from Rev 16:3, John 12:25 is the only other verse in the New Testament where ψυχή and ζωή are used together. In that verse Jesus warns that every person who loves his soul (ψυχή) will lose it and whoever hates his soul in this world will keep it for eternal life (ζωή). There seems to be the idea here that ψυχή and ζωή are not two entities as it is in the Old Testament, but ζωή is rather an attribute of ψυχή which appears to be in line

²⁰⁴ The Hebrew word from which it is translated actually means “godless”.

²⁰⁵ Philo (QG. 1.56). Also Philo (Leg. 1.31).

²⁰⁶ Philo (Leg. 2.9).

²⁰⁷ Refer for example to Deut. 12:23: כי הדם הוא הנפש (“for the blood is the life”).

with the use of the words in Rev 16:3. This might be a development in thought, or a specific way of thinking in the Johannine literature.

Taking everything into consideration, it appears that a living soul can be a reference to a human being or an animal. Koester (2014:647) agrees with Beale (1999:815) that in this specific instance the reference is not to humans, but rather to creatures living in the sea. As it has been hinted at in the introduction to this chapter, to Beale and Campbell (2015:331)²⁰⁸ the true effect of this plague is that it causes economic problems for the people affected by the plague.²⁰⁹ Specifically the death of everything in the sea implies that the whole sea-trade industry, which was important to the Romans, would be destroyed.²¹⁰ This would also impact on the lives of the people making a living from the sea.²¹¹ The question is, however, whether the beings living in the sea are only literal fish and other creatures living in the sea, or does it also refer to the mythological creatures which were thought to live in the sea? Boxall (2006:227) is the only scholar mentioning the possibility. He formulates it in the following way: “But in this final cycle of plagues the writing is on the wall for this realm of evil and chaos: every living thing must include those dark creatures lurking in the deep, threatening the order of creation and the peace of humanity.”

In the bowl plague narrative, there are many references to cosmic characters, especially later on, which will be explored in more detail in the coming chapters. This supports the argument of Boxall. If the sea is seen as more than just the literal sea, the symbolic creatures might also play a role here. It is impossible to say with absolute certainty whether John did not think of the cosmic sea creatures when writing about the living beings. The strongest argument against the view of Boxall is probably the fact that there is no precedent in ancient literature for referring to anything other than physical beings as having living souls. This is underscored by the view of Paulien (1987:384) who argues that in the second trumpet the reference to ψυχῆ in relation to fish is an indication of “theme of de-creation” which he sees present throughout the trumpet plagues. In the bowl plagues the focus is strongly on creation as it is creation that is targeted by this plague.²¹² Another argument against the inclusion of cosmic characters in

²⁰⁸ In agreement with Beale (1999:815).

²⁰⁹ Cf. also Osborne (2002:344).

²¹⁰ Moo (2009:160) also argues that the Babylon’s “economic exploitation” is closely linked to the sea. In his view the disappearance of the sea in Rev 21:1 might imply the final destruction of the economy of Babylon.

²¹¹ See also van de Kamp (2000:358).

²¹² The presence of this theme in the bowl plagues will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter of this study.

the reference to the living souls is that the beast and his allies noted in the bowl plagues do not perish until much later in the book of Revelation.

3.4.4 Connections to the second trumpet plague

The similarities between the second trumpet plague and the second bowl plague cannot be ignored and it is therefore rightly emphasised by many scholars. In Rev 8:8 the consequences of the second angel's trumpet, is that a mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, causing one third of the sea to become blood, one third of the creatures in the sea to die and one third of the ships to be destroyed. Especially Beale (1999:814-815) strongly emphasises the correspondence between the second bowl plague and the second trumpet plague (Rev 8:8-9).²¹³ He calls the similarities "striking". To him the strong correspondence between the two means that "the same kind of judgement" is present in both. Still, the differences also need to be highlighted. Koester (2014:654) remarks that "this (the bowl plague) goes beyond an earlier plague, when one-third of the sea was affected." To Beale (1999:815) the extent of the damage is the most important difference between the two plagues.²¹⁴ This is not the only difference, though. In the second trumpet plague the creatures which died as a result of the plague are described as κτισμάτων τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ, τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχάς (creatures in the sea having souls) and not "living souls" as in Rev 16. Furthermore, the effect of the second trumpet plague is that a third of the ships are also destroyed while there is no mention of ships in the second bowl plague. Finally, the cause of the destruction also differs. The damage done to the sea after the second trumpet is blown, is caused by a burning mountain thrown into the sea. On the other hand, in the description of the second bowl plague the damage is simply caused by one of the bowls filled with the wrath of God poured out into the sea.

3.5 Other possible connections

Finally, two more possible connections to ancient literature will be discussed.

²¹³ In his later shorter commentary on Revelation, Beale again emphasises the links to the second trumpet plague (Beale and Campbell, 2015:330).

²¹⁴ To Beale (1999:815) this just goes to show that what is partially applied can also be applied universally to the whole kingdom of the beast.

3.5.1 Papyrus

Aune (1998:884) mentions what he calls “a distant parallel” found in a papyrus written in Coptic which reads: “I am Jesus Christ, I have taken a cup of water in my hand....I have poured out my cup of water into the sea. It split in the middle.”²¹⁵ Whilst there might be a connection to the Exodus narrative in this specific reference, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that John had this in mind.

3.5.2 The archangel

The second archangel in the Book of the Watchers is the angel Raphael. What is interesting about Raphael in this context is that according to Davidson (1971:240) he is credited as the angel who stirred the waters at the bath of Bethesda in John 5. There is, however, no further evidence linking Raphael with the second bowl plague in Revelation.

3.6 Preliminary conclusions

In this discussion on the third bowl plague, a number of intriguing matters are discovered, which have not been identified by other researchers:

3.6.1 The background of the plague

While there are clear correspondences between the second trumpet plague and the second bowl plague, clear differences are also evident. Therefore, the background of this plague has to be explored on its own. From the outset it was acknowledged that the Exodus plague of blood clearly had some influence on John in the formulation of the second bowl plague, but there were definitely other influences as well. Some important differences between the two plagues have been identified.

3.6.2 The significance of the sea

Considering the description of the bowl plague itself, it has been indicated that the word “sea” is a word with several different meanings. There are many possible ways to interpret the word

²¹⁵ The papyrus he refers to is London Ms. Or. 6796[4].6796; Kropp, *Zaubertexte* 2:57-58, which is described in the *Annual Egyptological Bibliography* (1965:91) in the following way: Originally the *oratio* was a prayer of Mary to save the apostle Matthew but the text has been altered for magical purposes.

in the context of the book of Revelation. The sea can simply be a fairly large body of water like a lake or the ocean, often serving as a boundary to the land of a specific tribe or nation. Of course, in this sense the sea in the Exodus narrative is called to mind where the Israelites escaped from Egypt by passing through the Red Sea (θάλασσαν ἔρυθράν). However, as it has been indicated, none of these bodies of water which are referred to as “sea” is ever said to be turned to blood. The “sea” in the temple does not seem to play a role here as the focus in the bowl plagues is on nature, yet it is interesting to note a sea within the setting of the Old Testament temple which has the same overtones as the heavenly throne room of God in Revelation. The fact that the sea is also connected to ancient mythology, the same kind of which is at play in the book of Revelation is an interesting point. The sea could therefore be seen as the great unknown where evil forces reside. It was therefore a place to be feared. Another important fact regarding the sea which has been pointed out is the effect the acts of people have on creation, specifically the sea. It has been indicated that the actions affecting the sea are the actions of both the people of God and the enemies of his people. This, in turn, directly affects their source of food.²¹⁶

General observations in the way the sea is seen in the Hebrew Scriptures and how it connects to Rev 16 implies that there are three connections: In the first place the fact that God has power over the sea is clearly at play in Rev 16. Secondly, it is obvious that the sea is turned to blood because of the actions of the followers of the beast. Their livelihood is attacked as they depended on the sea to make a living. Finally, the sea as place of the great unknown and place where evil forces reside, definitely plays a role in the book of Revelation. It is not noted explicitly in Rev. 16, but elsewhere in the book of Revelation, the sea is strongly connected to the beast as the beast emerges from the sea. The evil powers therefore come from the sea to attack the people. By attacking the sea, God also attacks the home of the evil forces. The fact that the attack on the sea causes it to turn to blood like that of a corpse, is most probably a reference to the impurity of the corpse-blood so that people are not allowed to touch the water.

It was also indicated that outside of Revelation, in the New Testament the sea is not referred to in any significant way other than what has been discussed thus far. In the rest of the New Testament the main use of the sea is simply to refer to a large body of water.

An important matter which has been mentioned briefly, but which is very important for this study is the matter of ancient cosmology and the elements of the universe. Especially the way Philo describes the divisions he sees within the different elements. No other scholar comments on the striking parallel between the way the author of Revelation divides the different types of water (salty and fresh) into separate entities and the way Philo does it. This

²¹⁶ Decock (2004:169).

leads to the impression that John was either acquainted with the works of Philo or that there was an independent tradition of which both Philo and John were aware of.

3.6.3 Living souls

After having explored the different references to living souls in ancient literature, the conclusion was reached that living souls are most probably a reference to only the literal living creatures in the sea, as the focus is strongly on the elements of creation. It is also highly unlikely that the cosmic creatures are included as they remain undefeated in Revelation until much later in the book. Paulien (1987:384) argues that ψυχῆ in the second trumpet plague refers to the fish in the sea and this reference is an indication of the theme of de-creation. Creation is important in the bowl plagues and this theme will therefore be examined in more detail later in this study. In this regard one allusion which has not been identified by any of the scholars consulted needs to be highlighted. It was evident that Job 36:13-14 contains quite a few commonalities with the bowl plagues in general, but more specifically with the second bowl plague.

3.6.4 Final summary

Ultimately, what is most important on the background of the second bowl plague is that it targets a very specific part of creation, namely the waters of the sea. In line with the view of Philo who draws a distinction between the salty waters and the fresh waters, this bowl affects the actual element of water as opposed to earth, fire and air which are all affected at some point in the bowl plagues.

Chapter 4: The third bowl plague (Rev 16:4-7)

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Introduction to the chapter

The third bowl plague also has an effect on water.²¹⁷ However, this time it is not the salty water of the seas but rather the sweet waters of the springs and rivers which are affected. To Beale (1999:816) the implication of this plague is that a famine comes over the land.²¹⁸ In his heading to the third bowl he summarizes his view on this bowl plague as: "God punishes the persecutors of his people economically." He also sees the blood as symbolic for death and suffering, stressing that this judgement has an effect on every person who is involved in the persecution of the saints. Beale (1999:817) continues to connect the suffering the saints endured to economic suffering and notes that the churches in Asia suffered from economic problems at the time in which he thinks Revelation was composed. The same economic suffering caused by the persecutors therefore comes back to them.

The third bowl plague is different from the first two, in that the readers are given some more information after stating the target of the bowl and the effect the contents of the bowl have. As with the first two bowls, the text will be analysed in detail in an attempt to determine where the ideas behind it might originate from. The Old Testament background as well as connections to other Greek literature will be explored. Looking at the text, it appears obvious that the Egyptian plague of blood played a large role here, but it is important to look at other possible influences as well. It will be argued that the background to this plague might be much broader than just the first Exodus plague. Particularly, the question will be asked whether there are links to a tradition in the works of Philo.

The two responses to the third bowl plague will then be analysed to see whether that may shed some more light on the background of the text.

4.1.2 Source and new material

Before we commence with the discussion on the text, it is important to note that there have been some arguments from a source critical perspective on this specific part of the text which need to be taken into consideration. Collins (1977:374) argues that verse 4, describing the

²¹⁷ Van de Kamp (2002:358) groups the first three visions together and therefore this is to him the concluding vision in the first group of three visions.

²¹⁸ He does admit that famine can also indicate a broader kind of suffering.

bowl being poured out and the effect it has on the people, is material taken over by John from an older source. Verse 5-7, however, is John's own composition for a number of reasons. In this regard she disagrees with Betz (1969:140-142) who argues that verse 5-6 is part of the source material used by the author of Revelation in which there was a stronger emphasis on the four ancient elements in Hellenistic thought (Collins, 1977:375). For the purposes of this study the text will be treated as a single unit.

4.1.3 The structure of the bowl plagues

One needs to discuss the structure of the bowl plagues at this stage in the light of an essay by De Villiers (2005). He argues convincingly that the first three bowls form a "triad", which means this bowl plague is the concluding plague of the first part of the bowl plagues. The next four plagues are then grouped together as the second part of the bowl plagues. He provides numerous reasons for grouping the first three plagues together, starting with three corresponding words/phrases, and then stating a few matters relating to the content of the text (De Villiers, 2005:200-202). In terms of content, De Villiers (2005:201-202) reasons that the three plagues are connected in terms of objects that struck - earth, sea and rivers are all related to the earth as opposed to the air. In particular, his view on the objects struck by the bowl is worth mentioning and will be challenged in this chapter. The two responses are also in his view the conclusion to the first part of the bowl plagues and then, finally, the voice from the altar links back to the introduction to the bowl plagues which "creates a ring composition (temple, altar, temple)" (De Villiers, 2005:202).

4.2 Discussion on the text of the third bowl plague

4.2.1 The text

Greek text (Rev 16:4-7)

⁴Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ

εἰς τοὺς ποταμοὺς

καὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων·

καὶ ἐγένετο²¹⁹ αἷμα.

²¹⁹ Some manuscripts change this verb to a plural to align it with the multiple bodies of water mentioned in the text.

Translation

⁴And the third poured out his bowl
in the rivers
and in the springs of waters
and it became²²⁰ blood.

4.2.2 *Stichwörter* and key phrases

There are several words or phrases which play an important role in the description of this bowl plague.

4.2.2.1 ποταμούς και τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων – “Rivers and springs of water”

The first of these is the water on which the bowl is poured out. The water is specifically said to be the waters of the rivers and springs. This is opposed to the water of the sea which is affected in the second bowl plague. In the gospels the river most often mentioned is the river Jordan. In the rest of the New Testament outside of Revelation the word ποταμός only appears twice: in Acts 16:13 and 2 Cor 11:26, in both instances denoting rivers in general. In Revelation it is used with apocalyptic overtones as in Rev. 12:15 and 16 where water is said to be poured out like a river from the mouth of the serpent. In Rev 22:1 the concept of a river is connected to the concept of life. This is the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament where these concepts are connected. The word πηγή (spring) is often connected to ζωή as it will be indicated, but not to ποταμός and ζωή.

Other than the normal references to rivers in general, in the Old Testament and apocryphal literature, there is one occurrence worth considering. In Jud 2:8 it is said that the river will be filled with corpses after a war: καὶ ποταμός ἐπικλύζων τοῖς νεκροῖς αὐτῶν πληρωθήσεται – “and the overflowing rivers will be filled with their corpses”. This is an important reference as the effect of the second bowl plague is that the sea turns to blood like that of a corpse. Obviously, it was common in ancient times that the rivers were full of corpses after an intense battle. Still there is no evidence to suggest that John alluded to Jud. 2:8 in his description of the bowl plagues. There are other general references to the river Nile like in Amos 8:8 and Isa 19:5, but these do not have any specific Exodus motifs connected to them.

²²⁰ Beale (1999:817) notes that some manuscripts change the singular ἐγένετο to plural to match with the two different sources of water. He proposes that the original reading is accepted and that it be translated as “there came about”.

The word πηγή can refer to the source of any liquid, including blood, like in Mark 5:29 where it is said of the woman who suffered from the flowing of blood that the fountain (πηγή) of her blood dried up.²²¹ In the gospel of John, Jesus refers to what He has to give to people as living waters which will be a spring inside those who receive it, therefore a spring can also be used metaphorically. This is the same type of use found in Rev 7:17²²² and Rev 21:6 where reference to the “springs of water” which gives life is also made. The use of the word in Rev 7 is, however, not exactly the same as in the third bowl plague.²²³ In Rev 14:7 God is praised for creating heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water. It is important to note that this same order, apart from heaven, is the order in which things are affected by the first three bowl plagues.²²⁴ One could even argue that the bowl plagues start with a reference to the heaven as this is the place from which the bowls are poured out. This reinforces the argument that the focus in the bowl plagues is on creation. The distinction between the salty water and the fresh water will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

In the LXX the word πηγή is most often used to denote a source of water like a fountain or a well. When it is used in a metaphorical way it is mostly used with the meaning of abundance.²²⁵ In Prov 10:11 it is said that a fountain of life is in the hand of the righteous and in Prov 14:27 the command of the Lord is said to be a fountain of life. In Prov 6:22 understanding is called a fountain of life.

In the context of Rev 16 it appears that the reference made refers to literal water. The emphasis is clearly on distinguishing the fresh water from the salty water of the second bowl plague as part of the creation. Fresh and salty water are evident to John’s separate entities.

4.2.2.2 καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα – it became blood

Similar to the second bowl plague, the water turns to blood. The difference is that in this case it is ordinary (perhaps fresh) blood and not specifically the (rotten) blood of a corpse. In the second bowl plague the water turns to blood like that of a corpse and every living thing in the sea dies. The only effect of the third bowl plague is that the water turns to blood. This raises the question of whether the secondary effects mentioned in the second plague is implied in the third bowl or not? Does John imply that all living beings in the rivers and springs die as well or

²²¹ This is probably in line with Lev 20:18 where the word πηγή is used as euphemism for a woman’s menstrual blood.

²²² Koester (2014:423) argues that this is an allusion to Isa 49:10.

²²³ The difference is that in Rev 7 ὑδάτων is written without a definite article.

²²⁴ Interestingly none of the scholars consulted remarks on this division of the waters at all.

²²⁵ Cf. Prov 6:11 - “Your harvest will come like a fountain”

is the effect of the plague limited to the contamination of the water the people are supposed to drink?

Before attempting to answer these questions, the connection to the Egyptian plague of blood will be discussed.

4.3 The possible background of the text

4.3.1 The Egyptian plague of blood

As previously mentioned, the Egyptian plague of blood (Exod 7:19-21 (LXX)), where all water in Egypt is said to turn to blood, probably forms a large part of the background to the third bowl plague.²²⁶ The minority of scholars identify no links to the first to the first Exodus plague.²²⁷

4.3.1.1 The text of the Egyptian plague

The text of the Egyptian plague of blood has been discussed in the previous chapter. Therefore, it is not necessary to quote the text once again, but a simple comparison between the main concepts in the Egypt plague and the third bowl plague will be done to highlight corresponding notions.

Sources of water: In terms of what is affected, the third bowl plague corresponds more to the Exodus plague of blood than what the second bowl plague does. The word ποταμός appears in both plagues. In the Exodus plague there is a clear reference to the Nile and therefore it is used in the singular in Exod 7:20. In the bowl plague it is used with reference to all rivers and therefore it is used in the plural.²²⁸ The effect of the third bowl plague is that the springs (πηγάς) also turn to blood. Interestingly this word is not found in the Exodus plague, even though the Exodus plague mentions quite a few sources of water like rivers, canals, ponds, the standing water and even water in the vessels of wood and stone.²²⁹ This is a clear indication that it is

²²⁶ Aune (1998:884) calls this bowl plague “an allusion to the first plague of the Exodus in which the rivers, canals, ponds, and pools of water in Egypt all turned to blood”. This view is shared by other recent scholars such as Ford (1987:327), Beale (1999:816) and Koester (2014:647).

²²⁷ One example is Blount (2009:167; 295).

²²⁸ Cf. Thomas (1995:251).

²²⁹ The idea of the Exodus plague is obviously to state how extensive the reach of the effect of the plague is in that it affects every thing with water in it throughout the country.

not only the Exodus plague which plays a role in the background of the third bowl plague and that John does not refer to the Exodus plague by means of any kind of direct allusion.

The effect of the plague: In terms of the secondary effect of the plague, the second bowl plague corresponds more to the Exodus plague than what the third plague does. In the Exodus plague the fish are said to die after the river turned to blood, causing the river to stink. In the third bowl plague no secondary effect whatsoever is mentioned. It is only stated that the rivers and springs of water turn to blood after the angel pours his bowl into it.

To the extent in which John made use of the Exodus plague tradition, it is clear that he did not copy the first Exodus plague in any of the two bowl plagues where water is turned to blood.²³⁰ He may have alluded to it, but clearly there were other matters influencing him in his composition of the third bowl plague.

4.3.1.2 Other Old Testament references to the plague of blood

Other places in the Old Testament where references to the first Exodus plague can be found are Ps 77:44 (LXX) and Ps 104:29 (LXX). In Ps 77:44 it is said that “he turned to blood their rivers and their streams so that they could not drink from it.” The word which is translated as “streams” is the word ὀμβρήμα which is used in neither the first Exodus plague nor in the third bowl plague. Ps 77 corresponds to the Exodus plague in stating that the water was undrinkable. Ps 104 says that he turned the rivers into blood and caused the fish to die. The word ἀποκτείνω is used, which literally means to kill or to murder.

It is clear that the third bowl plague has no special resemblance to either one of these two Psalms other than the fact that the water is said to be turned to blood. However, in the response of the angel to the third bowl plague, which will be discussed later in this chapter, it is said that the enemies of God received blood to drink which might be an allusion to Ps 77:44.

4.3.2 Links to other ancient texts

Aune (1998:884) suggests that some texts referring to rivers, also the Nile, being full of the blood of conquered people after a battle, might also be considered in the third bowl plague. However, the turning of water into blood in the second bowl plague is clearly a divine act and not caused by humans who shed each other’s blood in the rivers during a battle. He

²³⁰ As noted earlier in this section, Blount (2009:167; 295) sees no connection whatsoever to the first Exodus plague but does identify a strong connection to the third trumpet plague.

furthermore points out that water turning into blood was a common ancient Roman prodigy where this peculiar event in nature is seen as a “message or warning from the gods”. Koester (2014:647) agrees with this, also seeing the Greco-Roman context in the waters turning to blood. He argues that “in the Greco-Roman context a river or spring turning to blood was a sign of divine wrath and impending disaster (Cicero, *Div.* 1.43.98; Livy. *Rom. Hist.* 22.1.10). In response, people were to discern what offense had occurred and make amends with the deity (Julius Obsequens, *Prod.* 25)”.

4.3.3 Links to the third trumpet plague

The third trumpet plague is found in Rev 8:10-11 and the text reads as follows:

Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν· καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστὴρ μέγας καιόμενος ὡς λαμπάς, καὶ ἔπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων. καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀστέρος λέγεται· ὁ Ἄψινθος. καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς ἄψινθον, καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων, ὅτι ἐπικράνθησαν.

The third bowl plague is parallel to the third trumpet where the waters of the rivers and springs are said to be made bitter, causing the people to die. There is only one significant correspondence between the two plagues, namely the fact that the phrase τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων also occurs there. The most significant difference is the scope of the impact of the plague. Unlike the third bowl plague, the third trumpet plague only affects a third of the rivers and springs and the rivers become bitter, and causes those who drink from it to die (Beale, 1999:816).²³¹ It does not become blood like the water in the third bowl plague, but rather ἄψινθος (which is translated as “wormwood”, the name of the star which fell into the water after the angel blew his trumpet).

As it has been noted in the introduction to this chapter, in the view of Beale (1999:815) both the third trumpet plague and the third bowl plague have the same effect namely economic destruction.²³² The broadening of the scope of the plague in the bowl plague is in his view an indication that “the partial economic woe if the third trumpet can be extended at times throughout the inter-advent age to the whole earth”. He is, however, the only scholar reaching this conclusion.

From this short discussion, it is clear that the third bowl plague and the third trumpet plague do not have all that much in common. Obviously, John did not just copy the information

²³¹ Cf. also Koester (2014:654),

²³² The same is of course the case with the third trumpet plague.

from the third trumpet plague and simply broadened the scope of the plague. Paulien (1987:395) therefore appears to be correct in his assessment that “we should be careful not to equate the contents of the third trumpet and the third bowl too readily.”

Looking at the second and third plague together, more insight can be gained into what the conceptual background of this plague might have been.

3.3.4 General observations regarding the text of the second and third bowl plague

3.3.4.1 Old Testament background

The second and third bowl plagues are definitely closely connected due to the fact that both have to do with water turning to blood. These two plagues are closely connected, also in their Old Testament background in terms of more than just the Exodus narrative. It appears, for instance, that there might be an allusion to Jud 2:8b (which reads “the swelling river shall be filled with their dead”) in both plagues simultaneously. Should this text be echoed in Rev 16 it would appear that John used some elements from the verse in the second bowl plague and other elements from the same verse in the third bowl plague.

Comparing both plagues with the Exodus plague of blood, the second plague appears to be more in line with the Exodus plague, because in the Exodus plague the fish died while all living creatures died as an effect of the pouring out of the second bowl. In the third bowl there is no mention of anything dying. However, looking at what is affected by the plague it is the sea in the second bowl plague, while in the Exodus plague a river is turned to blood. In the third bowl plague, rivers and springs are said to be turned to blood, connecting the third bowl plague more with the Exodus plague of blood.

All of this creates the appearance that the connection between the two plagues is very strong and that they function as a close unit. The nature of this connection will now be explored in more detail.

3.3.4.2 Salty water and fresh water as different entities

As it has been noted earlier in this chapter, scholars generally do not discuss the differentiation between salty and fresh water in the trumpet and bowl plagues in much detail.²³³ To Beale (1999:478)²³⁴ the first Exodus plague is still the main text serving as the background of the

²³³ Even Paulien (1987:389-406), who discusses the trumpet plagues in detail, never goes into the reasons for the distinction between the fresh and salty water in his discussion of the third bowl plague.

²³⁴ Also Beale (2015:174).

text. He also cites Ps 78:44, which has been referred to elsewhere in this chapter, as a text which provides even more support for this view. Others, such as Koester (2014:450) and Blount (2009:169) make no attempt to explain it. The reason could possibly be that in the two creation narratives in the book of Genesis, the sea is mentioned in the first and the fresh water coming from the earth and flowing in the rivers in the second. However, when attempting to understand why John would differentiate between salty water and fresh water in two separate plagues looking at Philo might provide clues as to what shaped the ideas John had in mind.

A very interesting observation which Philo (*Opif.* 131) makes, is that other philosophers see water in general as one of the four elements, while Moses saw it differently. Quoting Gen. 2:6 he argues that Moses²³⁵ saw the drinkable water on land actually as part of the element of earth, rather than part of the element of water. The fresh water is in his view only the glue keeping the different parts of the earth together. In the words of Philo:

But he distinguished sweet drinkable water from the salt water, assigning the former to the land and looking on it as part of this, not of the sea. It is such a part, for the purpose already mentioned, that by the sweet quality of the water as by a uniting glue the earth may be bound and held together: for had it been left dry, with no channels through the pores, it would have actually fallen to pieces. It is held together and lasts, partly by virtue of the life-breath that makes it one, partly because it is saved from drying up and breaking off in small or big bits by the moisture.²³⁶

As Philo interprets the creation narrative, only the salty water of the sea is therefore the actual element of water and not the water found on earth. The water on the earth is part of the element of earth, the glue that holds the smaller particles of earth together. This clear distinction which Philo sees between the salty water and the fresh water in the creation narrative is strikingly similar to the way John separates the sea from the rivers and springs in the bowl plague. Despite none of the scholars consulted mentioning this, it does appear as though John had similar imagery to Philo's ideas in mind when writing this text. This might also imply that the third bowl plague (and the third trumpet plague) has nothing to do with the element of water, but is rather seen as affecting the element of earth.

Philo sees the fresh water as having two very specific functions in creation. In the first place it holds different particles of earth together. Without water the earth would split up into

²³⁵ Philo believed Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch.

²³⁶ The translation is by Colson and Whitaker (1981:103, 105)

its different particles and would not bond together like mud (Philo, *Opif.* 131). In the second place the water on earth has a nourishing function (Philo, *Opif.* 132). Philo says that the fountains of the earth are like the breasts of a woman, or rather the other way around, because he specifically mentions that he disagrees with Plato that the earth imitates a human mother. It is the human mother who imitates the earth. The earth is after all known as the mother of all human beings. The fountains and springs are therefore the earth's way of feeding all things living on it, because nothing on earth can exist without moisture.²³⁷ This corresponds with 1 En. 60:22 where it is stated that:

for the waters are for those who dwell on the dry land, for (they are) nourishment for the dry land from the Most High who is in heaven; therefore there is a measure for the rain, and the angels are given charge of it.²³⁸

The reference to the angels in charge of the fresh water will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter, for now it is important to mention that there was apparently a tradition which specifically connected the fresh water and the earth. If it is accepted that John made use of these traditions, it might be that the functions attributed to the fresh water are also at play in Revelation. One of the effects of the water turning to blood will then be that it loses its nourishing function and becomes impure. It then appears, that John might have been influenced by the ideas similar to those of Philo when indicating this clear division between salty and fresh water.

Referring back to the question asked earlier, whether the implication of the link between the two plagues suggests that the living beings in the fresh water also die, one can now argue that it does not seem to be the case. The main reason for this is that the fresh water does not appear to be seen as water containing life. In the context of the third bowl plague the fresh water is only providing life.

4.4 A response from an angel²³⁹

The third bowl plague is the first of the bowl plagues with any kind of expansion to the text. There is a dual response, first by the “angel of the waters” and then from the “altar”. The first

²³⁷ Philo (*Opif.* 132)

²³⁸ The translation is that of Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012:84).

²³⁹ Ford (1987:328) is of the opinion that this is where the link to the Exodus plague narrative in the bowl plague narrative is severed. In her view the rest of the bowl plague narrative focusses on other parts of the Exodus narrative.

response will now be discussed looking first at the angel who responds, and then the response itself. The text reads like this:

⁵καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων λέγοντος·

Δίκαιος εἶ, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος, ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας,

⁶ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν, καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς δέδωκας πιεῖν· ἄξιοί εἰσιν.

⁵And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

“You are righteous, the one who is and was, the holy, who judge these things,

⁶because they have shed the blood of the saints and the prophets and they have been given blood to drink. It is their due.”

4.4.1 The angel of the waters (τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων)²⁴⁰

There is a response from an angel called the angel of the waters (τοῦ ἀγγέλου τῶν ὑδάτων). This angel is evidently already present in the heavenly throne room as his voice is suddenly heard after the plague is poured out and the waters turned to blood.

A few questions immediately arise and scholars disagree strongly in their answers to these questions. The first question is the question on the identity of the angel. Is it the angel which poured out the third bowl of wrath or is it another angel which is known to have been connected to water in some way? The second question, which relates to the first, is whether this response is a response to just the third bowl, or to the second and third bowl, in which both water is mentioned?

Some scholars note in verse 5 traces of a tradition which assigned control of each of the classical elements to a particular angel. Most of these scholars see this same tradition in Rev. 14:18, where an angel is said to have power over fire.²⁴¹ They list sources such as 1 En. 60:11-21; 61:10, 66:2, Jub. 2:2, which all note that there were specific angels with power over water. One main point of critique against this view is that in Rev 14:18 the angel is specifically noted to have *authority* over the fire: ἄγγελος...ὁ ἔχων ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τοῦ πυρός, while the angel in

²⁴⁰ Aune (1998:864) agrees with Collins (1977:372-373) that Rev 16:5-7 was not part of the original text and was added at a later stage in the formation of the text, either as new composition, a later redactor or as an insertion from another source.

²⁴¹ Cf. Sweet (1979:244), Collins (1996:115), Aune (1998:884) van de Kamp (2002:358) and Koester (2014:647). Beale (1999:818) also refers to this tradition in an endnote after his discussion on the third bowl plague.

Rev 16:5 is just called “the angel of the waters”.²⁴² The same critique can be levelled against seeing other texts in which certain angels are said to have authority over water or other elements of the creation.

Aune (1998:884) explores this tradition in more detail and states that the mention of the angel of the waters “assumes a cosmos in which the various material elements are presided over by, or are personified by, particular angelic beings”. He sees the same textual background as most other scholars, but adds texts from outside the Old Testament and apocryphal literature to his discussion on the tradition behind this angel. For instance, he notes that Rabbinic literature is familiar with an angelic figure called the “prince of the world” who has power over different areas in creation. Interestingly he calls the angels mentioned in other parts of Revelation, like Rev 7:1-2 and Rev 14:8 “lesser angelic figures who are guardians of various aspects of the cosmos.” He does not indicate why he would see those angels, which are all called ἄγγελος just like the other angels, as subordinate to angels mentioned elsewhere in Revelation. Scrutinizing the two most prominent other passages in Revelation referring to angels with power over certain aspects of creation (Rev 7:1 and Rev 14:18) it appears that Rev 7:1 is not a good example to substantiate this. Four angels holding onto four winds hardly mean that each of these angels is in any way appointed to have authority over winds in general.

When considering the different archangels in the various ancient traditions, it is evident that in none of the lists of seven archangels, has the third angel anything to do with water. Based on that information it can be argued that John did not get this idea of an angel of the waters from one of these traditions.

It is very difficult to determine which of the other texts referred to are really in John’s mind when he writes about the “angel of the waters” in Rev 16:5 and in what way this tradition plays a role in Rev 16. However, it may also well be that the “angel of the waters” is simply a reference to the angel pouring out his bowl of wrath on the waters, and nothing more. If it is understood in such a way, the word “waters” (plural) points to the two different sources of water affected by the third bowl plague. Beale (1999:817) appears to argue for this point of view by stating that the angel pouring out the third bowl is the angel with authority over the waters, because of the use of the genitive. In his opinion the response of the angel is only to the third bowl as he sees this response as “an interpretative elaboration of the third bowl”. To Koester

²⁴² Sweet (1979:244) also adds Rev 7:1 where it is said that four angels are holding back the four winds of the earth. The fact that these angels are holding the winds is far from being appointed as an authoritative figure over the wind in general.

(2014:647), however, it appears to be quite obvious that the angel speaking here is a different angel from the one who poured out a bowl of wrath on the waters.²⁴³

This is where the second question comes into account. If the angel of the waters is indeed the angel pouring out his bowl on the fresh waters then it is likely that the response in verse 5-6 is meant to be a response to only the third plague as Beale (1999:817) argues. On the other hand, if Koester is correct, then the response might be a response to more than just the third plague as van de Kamp (2002:358) and some other scholars also argue.²⁴⁴ Blount (2009:296) sees the reaction of the angel of the waters as a reaction to more than just the third bowl plague. He reasons the reaction serves as an explanation for the severity of the two plagues which, in his opinion, also affects God's people. To him both responses in Rev 16:5-7 "are an interpretive follow-up of to the first three plagues when he opens vv. 5-7 with the formulaic phrase καὶ ἤκουσα".²⁴⁵

Before coming to a conclusion on this matter, it will be necessary to first look at the actual words of the angel.

4.4.2 The response of the angel of the waters²⁴⁶

4.4.2.1 God is righteous and holy

The angel praises God as the righteous God who gave the people what they deserved by singing a hymn.²⁴⁷ With the first word uttered by the angel the whole response of the angel is summarized. What God did falls fully within the scope of his righteousness and there is no

²⁴³ It is so obvious to him that he does not even mention the reasons for his argument. His view is in line with the view of Aune (1998:647) who appears to reason this way because he sees a relationship between this angel and the ancient tradition which linked each of the different elements to a specific angel.

²⁴⁴ Thomas (1995:252) notes that the angel "controls the sea and the fresh water bodies". To van de Kamp (2002:358) "instemmende woorden van *de waterengel* sluiten de eerste groep van drie schaalvisioenen af".

²⁴⁵ In a footnote on the content of the words of the angel he once again notes that the phrase ταῦτα ἔκρινας is a reference to the three preceding bowl plagues (Blount, 2009:296).

²⁴⁶ Ford (1987:328) argues that the song in Rev 15 "anticipates the song of the Angel of the Waters which repeats some of its words and phrases".

²⁴⁷ Koester (2014:654) notes that this hymn has a symmetrical ABBA structure which is "an element of order in the middle of the chaos of the plagues".

unfairness to his actions.²⁴⁸ He had the perfect right to cause the water to turn to blood.²⁴⁹ The function of the response is best summarized by Collins (1996:210): “The acclamation of the angel of the waters indicates that at least this aspect of the cosmic destruction is understood as divine vengeance for the blood of the martyrs.” Two distinct words in this response correspond to the song in Rev 15:3-4, namely δίκαιος and ὅσιος, and warrant further discussion. Beale (1999:817) argues that δίκαιος and ὅσιος might be used with the same meaning. There are at least two instances where these words are used together in the Old Testament. In Deut 32:4 the Lord is said to be righteous and holy (δίκαιος καὶ ὅσιος κύριος). In Ps 144:17 (LXX) the same idea is found: δίκαιος κύριος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὅσιος ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ (“just is the Lord in all his ways and holy in all his deeds”).²⁵⁰ According to Koester (2014:647) “the repetition of these qualities emphasizes the fact that God’s judgement is not arbitrary but is given to those who deserve it.” Aune (1998:886) notes that while God is often called δίκαιος in the Old Testament, the same is not the case for ὅσιος which is very seldom used to refer to God.²⁵¹

The phrase ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος stands central in the first part of the response of the angel and is clearly a fixed formula as commentators point out. Koester (2014:647) links the words ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν to Exod 3:14 where the Lord says He is, who He is (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), but notes “Revelation expands this to include all of time, so that God is ‘the one who is and was and is to come’” (Koester, 2014:647). He further suggests that the reason the future is left out in this instance (as in Rev 11:7) is because the future is happening with the judgement that is taking

²⁴⁸ This view is supported by the argument of De Villiers (2015:4) that Rev 7-19 wants to encourage the believers not to fight for themselves, but trust God to punish their persecutors.

²⁴⁹ Scholars differ about the function or genre of the response of the angel. Koester (2014:647-648) indicates that some see it as a way to praise God for his judgement and therefore categorizes it as a “judgement doxology.” He lists Betz as one such scholar. Others see it as a way to show that God did the right thing and categorizes it as a “vindication formula”. Staples and Collins are two scholars he lists. Collins (1977:368) indeed affirms the view of Betz, that what the angel of the waters said can best be classified as a judgement doxology where God is praised for disasters which happened. In the apocalyptic context in which this form is used she says it can best be described as an “eschatological vindication formula” (Collins, 1977:369). A more recent scholar who appears to see it as a vindication formula is Blount (2009:296), although he says that “the material operates as a judgement doxology.” Koester (2014:648) contends that Aune (1998, 885) is correct by preferring to refrain from categorizing it and argues that “its character can best be seen in the context of the book.”

²⁵⁰ Aune (1998:886) adds Ps. Sol. 10:5 where the two words are also used together as attributes of the Lord.

²⁵¹ He further notes (but does not discuss the relevance any further) that there are inscriptions found in Asia Minor referring to “a cult of Hosios and Dikaios”.

place.²⁵² This follows on the argument of Beale (1999:817) who argues that the word ὅσιος replaces the future part of the threefold formula in this specific case.²⁵³

4.4.2.2 God's righteousness as judge for repaying the ungodly

The phrase ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας ("for you have judged these") is obviously a reference to the previous judgements of God.²⁵⁴ Several commentators see a surprising element in the response of the angel here. For instance, Van de Kamp (2002:358) notes that instead of being perplexed by the fact that the focus of his main task in life is affected by this judgement, the angel of the water praises God who is and was for this just punishment.²⁵⁵ To most of the scholars, however, the response is not surprising at all. As stated earlier in this section, most other commentators find the response in accordance with the plague. De Villiers (2002:60) sees it as an answer to the plea in Rev 6:9-11. To Beale (1999:817) the response of the angel of the waters is an interpretation of the effects of the third bowl plague.²⁵⁶ The angel makes a statement about the character of God by saying that He is righteous. There are two reasons for this, the first being that God has judged these things. The third bowl is therefore interpreted as being a judgement by God himself on the people. Secondly,²⁵⁷ God is called righteous by the angel of the waters in verse 6²⁵⁸ where the angel says God paid the ungodly back for what they did: they poured out (ἐκχέω) the blood of the saints and the prophets and now they get

²⁵² Cf. Blount (2009:297) states that "the dynamic had shifted. God was no longer expected; God's rule has arrived with the dramatic onset of God's judgement."

²⁵³ He refers to a few manuscripts which insert καὶ before ὅσιος which is in his view an indication that in an older tradition ὅσιος was strongly linked to the threefold formula. ὅσιος ("holy") designates the end time judgement which started to take place with these plagues. Although Koester (2014:647) does not explain his argument in depth, his conclusion is basically the same.

²⁵⁴ To Aune (1998:886) it is specifically a reference to "the wrath of God previously mentioned in 15:1, 7".

²⁵⁵ Pattemore (2004:99) notes that it is not in this instance the dragon or either of the beasts which gets the blame for the killing of the people of God, but rather their followers.

²⁵⁶ Beale (1999:817-818) discusses the three-fold formula with which God is described ("the one who is and was, the holy one" in detail and reaches the conclusion that the use of the formula indicates imminent last judgement. He also sees a strong connection to the trumpet plagues.

²⁵⁷ This is to Beale (1999:818) "not a separate ground from the first, but a further elucidation of it."

²⁵⁸ According to Aune (1998:887) most of verse 6 and 7 is an addition by the final redactor, incorporating the theme of "martyrdom" into the text.

blood to drink.²⁵⁹ The pouring out of blood was common in the sacrificial rituals of ancient Israel.²⁶⁰

The prophets are those believers who testify about God and by being persecuted they are also seen among the Old Testament prophets who were persecuted and killed for their prophetic work (Koester, 2014:648). The word “saints” or “holy ones” is in Revelation a collective term to refer to all people who acknowledge Christ as Ruler and refuse to follow the Beast.

The implications of the wording, is that the punishment is in accordance with the crime committed (Beale, 1999:818-819).²⁶¹ To Beale (1999:819) the shedding of blood and drinking of blood in verse 6 does not necessarily imply death but rather suffering. He presents as proof for his argument his view that Isa 49:26 is probably at the background of the wording of verse 6 and in that text, the drinking of blood only implies suffering. He also interprets Ps 79 (LXX) echoed in this text where the blood of God’s servants is said to have been shed by the enemies (Ps. 79:3). In verse 12 the psalmist requests a sevenfold payback for what they have done. Beale (1999:819) does not make it clear why he thinks that the shedding of blood in Ps 79 only implies suffering and not murder, especially since verse 2 notes that the enemies have given the bodies of the servants of the Lord as food for the birds.²⁶² Referring to *Midr. Rab. Exod* 9:10, Beale (1999:819) furthermore notes that the corresponding Egyptian plague also has the

²⁵⁹ Saints and prophets are also mentioned together in Rev 11:18. Later in Rev 18. Babylon is judged, causing the saints, the apostles and the prophets to rejoice (Rev. 18:20), because the blood of the prophets and the saints have been found in the city (Rev 18:24). Interestingly enough, in both places, apart from Rev 16:6, (11:18 and 18:24) where the saints and prophets are mentioned closely together, the prophets are mentioned first and the saints second, while it is the other way around in Rev 16:6.

²⁶⁰ In Exod 29:12 for example the priests are ordered to take some of the blood of the sacrificial bull and put it on the horns of the altar and the rest must be poured out at the base of the altar. The first born of every herd must be eaten before the Lord but if the animal has any form of blemish on it, it must not be eaten as sacrifice. In that case the blood must not be eaten, but rather poured out on the earth like water. Philo (QG 1.62) also discusses this ritual in the sacrifice of Israel in his discussion of the narrative of Cain and Abel. A little later (QG 1.67) he asks the question why Cain killed Abel in the field and in his answer he explains that the earth had to drink the blood of Abel which in turn led to Cain having to eat food which was polluted by blood. Blood was also poured in bowls at the altar during the sacrifice as seen in Exod 24:6 (despite the Greek word for bowl being different than in the bowl plagues) and which is also noted by Philo (*Her.* 182).

²⁶¹ Beale (1999:818) sees here another link to the trumpet plagues, specifically to Rev 6:10 where there is a call to God to vindicate the blood of the saints.

²⁶² In this Psalm the servants of the Lord is also called saints of holy ones, but the word ὁσίοις is used which is in Rev 16 used as reference to the Lord.

function of making the punishment in line with the transgression. Rome will receive the same punishment the Egyptians received. Indeed Koester (2014:648) argues that “pouring out blood is an idiom for murder”. The punishment required according to Gen 9:6 is that the one who sheds someone else’s blood will have the same done to him.²⁶³ Collins (1977:370) therefore argues that the punishment does not simply correlate with the crime. If the punishment was in line with the crime, the perpetrators’ blood would also have been shed.²⁶⁴ However, they are now given blood to drink. Still she thinks that the intention is for the two to be in line. The point is that everything people do has definite future implications. Her argument is that the utterance of the angel of the waters has a very strong eschatological undertone. Koester (2014:655), in turn, sees the fact that the punishment and the crime are not in line, rather as an indication of the mercifulness of God who still leaves the possibility open for the enemies of God to repent. This argument, if accepted, is another link to the Exodus plague of blood as the Exodus plague of blood was not just meant to punish the Egyptians, but to coerce them to repent and let the Israelites go free.

Sommer (2015:199) is probably correct when he identifies a strong allusion to Isa 49:8-50:3 (particularly Is 49:26), where it is stated that those who hurt God’s people will eat their own flesh and drink their own blood. He furthermore indicates that both Rev 16:6 and Isa 49:26 are closely related to Exod 7:14-25.

Beale (1999:820) sees in the use of the word ἄξιος a further link to the Exodus plagues. This link is mainly made through the way the plague narrative is described in Wisdom. In a few places in the book of Wisdom²⁶⁵ references to the Exodus plagues can be found and in each it is said that it is what the Egyptians deserved (ἄξιος). The implication is that John was familiar with the book of Wisdom, even though he never quotes from it.

4.4.3 Summary

The response of the angel of the waters provides some perspective on the third bowl plague itself. Two questions still need a conclusive answer. The first was on the identity of the angel of the waters. In the response itself, no significant clues can be found which would shed more light on who exactly this angel would be. Looking further, however, at the whole description of the response, it does seem like the angel of the waters is not the angel who poured out the bowl. If it was the same angel, why would John specifically note that it is the angel of the waters

²⁶³ Interestingly, according to Philo (QG. 2.61), the text of Gen 9:6 reads “He himself shall be poured out like blood who pours out blood.” This appears to mean to him that the body will degenerate in totality.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Koester (2014:648).

²⁶⁵ Wis 16:9; 18:4; 19:4.

and why did he not just say “the angel responded”. It seems like it is another angel who has some kind of connection to water and who responds here. What the background of the reference to this angel is, is still unclear. Even though that part of creation which he has authority over is affected, he acknowledges the supremacy of God in using creation against his enemies. The response of the angel stands in stark contrast to the response of the followers of the beast later in Rev 16.

Secondly, it was asked whether this response is to both the second and the third bowl plague or only to the second bowl plague. The key lies in the praise that the angel gives to God for giving the enemies of his people blood to drink. Salty water is not drinkable and has no nourishing function for human beings. In the third bowl plague the focus is clearly on the water turning to blood so that it can no longer nourish the people. Therefore, although the two plagues are closely connected and although the angel of the waters is probably not the angel who poured out the bowl, it still appears that the response of the angel of the waters is a response to only the third bowl plague.

4.5 The response from the altar

As noted, there is another response and this time it comes from the altar:

⁷καὶ ἤκουσα τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου λέγοντος·

Ναί, κύριε, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου.

⁷And I heard from the altar saying:

“Yes Lord God the almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

The voice from the altar in Rev 16:7 then reacts to what the angel of the waters said. It is uncertain whether it is the voice of God or the voice of an angel, although it would be strange for God to address Himself. Beale (1999:820) says that it can be either, although it seems likely that the voice in Rev 16:1 is the voice of God, implying that this is probably the voice of God as well. Blount (2009:299) also notes that it is odd that the altar is said to respond, but to him it can make sense when taking into account that the “executed saints” stood under the altar. Koester (2014:648) takes the argument of Blount even further by arguing that it is neither God, nor an angel, responding from the altar. He argues that “John uses metonymy, calling something by the name of something in close relation to it”, contending therefore that the voice from the altar is “probably the martyrs who are under the altar (6:9-11), just as a voice from the throne is the voice of someone on or near the throne”. The view of Koester (2014:648) appears to be correct, taking into account the words of the angel of the waters. In that response

reference is made to blood being shed. Blood is usually shed on an altar. Although the martyrs are probably not to be seen as sacrifices themselves, the mention of the shedding of blood and the altar so close to each other cannot be seen as coincidence. It would also make sense that the martyrs would respond, because they are the ones who would be most satisfied that their blood has been avenged. The content of the response from the altar is in line with Rev 6:10 where the saints under the altar asks God how long it is until their blood is avenged (Beale, 1999:818).

The reaction from the altar is in clear agreement with what the water angel says, and it emphasises it. Beale (1999:821) observes that the last word used to describe God's judgment "forms an inclusio with the same statement in v 5 (δικαιος), thus emphasising that God's judgement highlights his righteousness".

Two words are added in the response from the altar. Firstly, God is called ὁ παντοκράτωρ ("Almighty"). This word is commonly used in Revelation to refer to God. Outside of Revelation it is used only in one other place in the New Testament (2 Cor 6:18) and that is also with reference to the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it is mostly used as translation for the word אלהי-צבאות (God of hosts/armies).²⁶⁶ Secondly, God's judgements are also said to be ἀληθινά ("true"). This is a reinforcement of what the angel of the waters says. The angel said God's judgements are righteous and the altar confirms that, but he adds that they are also true. The phrase κύριε, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια is found in Rev 15:3 with only the exception that in that verse δίκαια stands before ἀληθινά. In Rev 15:3 it is the ways of the Lord which are said to be just and true.

Gallusz (2008:23-34) interprets the judgement of God as strongly connecting the bowl plagues to the Exodus plagues. He accepts that the Exodus plagues were meant to be judgements on the people of Egypt. It will, however, be argued that the bowl plagues are not only intended to be judgements, but also warnings.

4.6 Philo on the connection between Cain and blood

An interesting matter to take into consideration is Philo's discussion on Cain's shedding of the blood of Abel. The connection between Cain and the shedding of blood is something Philo discusses extensively in different parts of his treatises.

He strongly emphasises the outpouring of blood by Cain, and indeed there is a clear reference to it in the narrative in Gen 6. As noted in a footnote earlier in this chapter, in QG 1.67 Philo answers the question on why Cain killed Abel in the field by arguing that the earth

²⁶⁶ In the book of Job the word is consistently used to translate the word יְהוָה which is a title for God and is generally translated as "Almighty".

had to drink the blood of Abel, which in turn, led to Cain having to eat food which was polluted by blood. It is also in this narrative where the well-known retributive law originates, stating that the blood of the one who sheds blood will be shed, which Philo emphasises in a few places in his writings. Marcus (1953:41) reconstructs and translates the text in the following way:

In order that when once again it is sown or planted, infertility and unfruitfulness may altogether come upon its fruits, and by bringing the murder to mind, may reveal its foulness. For the ground was not to be the same after being forced to drink human blood unnaturally so as also to grow food for him who polluted it with the blood of a foul deed.

This law, as it has been discussed, also plays an important part in the third bowl plague.

With this in mind it also has to be noted that Philo places strong emphasis on the life-giving function of blood. In his view, Lev 17:11 (containing the prohibition against the eating of blood because the blood contains the life of a living thing) is an indication that the blood is the essence of the soul or life (Philo, *Det.* 80). Later in the same work he notes that the essence of our “vivifying power” is the blood (Philo, *Det.* 92). In *Her.* 54 he sees blood as sometimes used figuratively for “the life which depends on the blood”. Philo (*Mos.* 1.100) also notes that with the turning of water to blood in Exodus, the river which was known to provide life now, had a destructive power. He even compares the rivers and springs to veins in the human body. In this sense blood and water are in a sense quite alike. Both have the ability to give life, but both can also be extremely destructive.²⁶⁷ This corresponds strongly to the focus on the nourishing function of water in the third bowl plague.

Another interesting matter raised by Philo is the matter of the mark which Cain received. In his treatise on the sacrifices of Abel and Cain (Philo, *Det.* 177) he writes that:

Moses says in the next passage that the Lord God set a mark upon Cain in order to prevent anyone who found him from slaying him; but what this mark is, he has

²⁶⁷ Philo (*Mos.* 1.144) notes something which is not stated explicitly in the Exodus account of the ten plagues, namely that the water of the Hebrew people was not turned to blood, but remained fresh so they could drink it. It was therefore, according to Philo, only the Egyptians who were affected by the first plague. The question is now whether the water in Revelation turned to blood for the believers and the unbelievers or just for the enemies of God. Blount (2009:296) argues that everyone is affected by the third bowl plague which is why a strong response from the angel is necessary to confirm that God is still acting righteous. However, there is not any other evidence to support this view. In fact, the angel of the waters explicitly states that it is those who shed the blood of the righteous who got blood to drink.

not shown, although he is in the habit of explaining the nature of everything by a sign, as he does in the affairs of Egypt, where God changed his rod into a serpent, and withered the hand of Moses till it became like snow, and turned the river into blood.²⁶⁸

It is remarkable that Philo refers to someone (specifically someone who shed the blood of someone else) having a mark and the first Egyptian plague in the same paragraph. In the bowl plagues, people shedding the blood of other people are also said to have marks on them (even though these marks do not come from God) and there is a reference to the first plague of the Exodus. The second chapter indicates that some scholars interpret the boils as marks from God as punishment for having the mark of the beast.

Philo compares God marking Cain, to God turning the river into blood, as both were physical signs of something deeper. Cain, who rebelled against God, was given a mark, albeit a mark by God and the function of the mark was to protect him from being killed. Philo says that Cain, who he says was never killed, was like an evil which never dies and keeps on inflicting “incurable disease on all who are once infected by them” (Philo, *Det.* 178). All of this has some remarkable correspondences with the first three bowl plagues. The first bowl plague causes a kind of disease which might be the same disease as the boils in the first bowl plague. This disease is an evil sore which is only on those with the mark of the beast. The one remarkable difference is that Philo concludes that his deep hope for evil to be exterminated does not appear to be prevailing. In Revelation the author is very certain that evil will finally be overcome by God and ultimately disappear. Taking these strong correspondences of Philo into account, the question should once again be asked: is it possible that John made use of the same traditions as Philo?

4.7 Adela Collins on the four elements

One last point to bring into the discussion at this point is the role of the four ancient elements. It has already been stated in previous chapters that it looks like the four classical elements in Greek thought do in fact play a role in the bowl plagues. For the purposes of this chapter, only the view of Adela Yarbro Collins will be discussed, which is mainly set out in two of her works. Owing to Collins sharing her understanding on the view of the four elements when she discusses the reference to the angel of the waters in Rev 16:5, it justifies why her work is important in this case.

²⁶⁸ Translated by Colson and Whitaker (1994:319).

Collins (1977:374-381) broadly examines the use of the four ancient Hellenistic elements in Revelation and discusses the amount of influence it played in the composition of the book of Revelation in reaction to Betz's argument that "the source material used in chaps. 8, 9 and 16 places greater emphasis on the Hellenistic motif of the four elements of the world than the rest of Revelation" and "Rev 16:4-6 is a fragmentary reflection of this Hellenistic tradition". According to Collins, Betz's argument is that the angel of the waters represents the element of water in a personified manner, typical of Jewish tradition. Collins (1977:374) calls the evidence he uses for this argument into question and continues to explain why she does not think that the ancient Hellenistic elements played any significant role in the composition of the book of Revelation, especially not in the way Betz argues for it.

Firstly, she does not see the four Hellenistic elements in any way present in the trumpet plagues in Rev 8 and 9. The lists of "elements" mentioned in the trumpet plagues serve in her opinion only to mention the creation as a whole and is in line with usual Old Testament cosmology (Collins, 1977:375). She says that "the Hellenistic list emphasizes material distinctions, while that reflected by the trumpets emphasizes geographical or spatial distinctions". Her interpretation is therefore that John rather got his information directly from the Old Testament and she sees no reason why it should be argued that he used Hellenistic sources in the trumpet plagues. The same applies for the bowl plagues even though fire has been added in the bowl plagues, which leads her to believe that the "old cosmology" is behind the bowls as well, but in the case of the bowls John altered it to incorporate the Hellenistic idea of four elements (Collins, 1977:376). To her, the author of Revelation himself is not very attracted to the idea of the four elements in Hellenistic thought, but rather makes use of the Jewish cosmology with heaven, earth, water under the earth and the sea to express his ideas. She can confidently say this, based on her argument that John wrote the words of the angel and it does not come from a source, in the words of the angel there is not much stress on the four elements. She does, however, admit that what she sees as the source used by the author of Revelation, did make use of the four elements from Hellenistic thought, but that that source is "too fragmentary" to make it possible to explore it any deeper and to "allow a reconstruction of its underlying questions" (Collins, 1977:378). In her later monograph on the cosmology and eschatology in Jewish and Christian apocalypticism, Collins (1996:107-108) keeps to this argument. She adds an additional note, though, stating that John "neither suppressed nor emphasized this Hellenistic motif". Specifically, the references to the "angel of the waters" and "the angel having authority over fire" are an indication that John accepted the Hellenistic motif

of the four elements.²⁶⁹ She acknowledges the influence in Rev 16:4-7 of the “Kore Kosmou” passage proposed by Betz and indicates some similarities and differences.

It appears that Koester (2014:654) agrees partially with this point of view as he argues that the creation narrative plays an important part in this bowl plague. He writes that

it seems incongruous that the rivers and springs that God created (14:7) now turn to blood. Yet the point is that the creation joins with the Creator in the service of divine justice. As in the Exodus tradition, which informs this section, God enlists creation against Israel’s foes so that “the elements of the universe—earth, fire, air, and water—carried out the assault.

To justify his point, he refers to Philo in *Mos.* 1.96 and to *Wis* 5:20; 16:17; 24; 19:6; Josephus (*Ant.* 2.292). Indeed, when writing about the Exodus plagues, Philo states that God uses the elements of which the universe is made up against his enemies. The important matter is that Koester thinks that there might be a reference to Philo in this part of Revelation. It is another example of a reference to Philo in this bowl plague. Collins, however, does not mention the influence of the ideas of Philo who placed strong emphasis on the four classical elements. Along with this, it is not widely accepted that the response by the angel of the waters is a later addition to the text, which casts doubt on that argument of her as well.

Philo and his stance on the four ancient elements will be discussed in more detail in other chapters in this study, for the time being it is important to note that it appears that the four ancient elements might have played a larger role in the bowl plagues than Collins is prepared to accept.

The view of De Villiers (2005:201) has already been hinted at in the introduction to this chapter and also needs to be noted in this regard. His view is that the earth, sea, rivers and springs are grouped together. He writes that:

in terms of the rest of Revelation, it makes sense that the first three bowls focus as a triad on three logically coherent objects of the earth, sea and waters, whilst the heavenly region is suggested in the group of the last four (together with the “air” in the seventh trumpet, Rev.16:7). The sun and air form a logical unit, thus framing the last four bowls.

²⁶⁹ Later in her work she repeats this idea that “it may be that the traditional schema of the four elements (earth, fire, water, and air) is reflected in Rev. 16:15 and 14:18” (Collins, 1996:195). Note: the reference to Rev 16:15 appears to be a typing error and should obviously be Rev.- 16:5.

One problem with his view is that he does not explain how the throne of the beast in the fifth bowl plague relates to the sun and the air. He also does not mention the possibility of a connection to the four elements at all.²⁷⁰

4.8 Conclusions

From this discussion several conclusions can be drawn in terms of the background of the third bowl plague.

4.8.1 General observations

Another bowl is poured out on water, but this is a different kind of water. It is not the salty water of the sea which is affected by the second bowl plague, but rather the fresh waters of the rivers and springs. In the chapter it has been argued that there is more to the background of this plague than what most modern scholars indicate. Some of the matters on the background of the plague which were investigated are the following:

4.8.2 Connections to other plagues which affect water

Looking at the first Exodus plague it appears that the first of the ten Exodus plagues was in the author of Revelation's mind when he composed the text of the third bowl plague. There is a strong correspondence between the idea of the water turning to blood and the two plagues. However, it appears that the Exodus plague of blood is not the only text serving as the background of Rev 16:5, particularly due to the lack of a reference to springs in the Exodus plague. The lack of any secondary effects mentioned in the third bowl plague also distinguishes it from the Exodus plague. The water is simply said to be turned to blood.

Another plague which affects water, specifically fresh water, is the third trumpet plague. However, it was indicated that this plague also differs too much from the third bowl plague to see it as primary background, although they are definitely linked with each other. The only real correspondence is the reference to the rivers and springs of water. However, there the water is not turned to blood.

²⁷⁰ In an earlier essay, De Villiers (2004:134) writes about the significance of the parts of nature for the structure of the septets of Revelation, but once again does not mention any possible connection to the four elements. His view will be discussed in more detail further on in this study.

4.8.3 The connection between the second and third bowl plagues

The second and third bowl plagues both affect water, therefore it was necessary to look at the two together. The two plagues have been shown to be very closely connected in terms of their Old Testament backgrounds as well. Where certain texts are echoed, some parts of the text are used in the second bowl plague and other parts of the same text appear to be used in the third bowl plague. This appears to be true for the first Exodus plague as well as for Judith 2:8b.

In this regard an important matter which was highlighted, is the connection to the way Philo differentiates between salty water and fresh water. It is clear that John distinguishes between salty water and fresh water as different entities, not just in the bowl plagues, but also in the rest of the book of Revelation. The question is just whether this is simply based on the distinction made in the two creation narratives between the different types of water, or if it is an idea that he got from somewhere else. In this regard, it has been noted that Philo draws a clear distinction between salty water and fresh water. According to him only the salty water is actually the element of water, while the fresh water, which comes from under the earth, is part of the element of earth. The function of this water is to nourish the plants and it also acts as a type of glue, keeping the different particles of soil together. If it is accepted that the author of Revelation was acquainted with the works of Philo, or at least his ideas, this could explain why the second and third bowl plagues deal with salty and fresh water respectively. The second bowl would then be seen as affecting the element of water, while the third bowl plague also affects the element of earth. This distinction is in line with the distinction in Rev 14:7 where God is praised as creator of heaven, earth, sea and springs of water. It therefore appears that the classical Hellenistic elements might play a more important part than what most scholars would admit.

Furthermore, it has been indicated that Philo sees the fresh water as having two very specific functions. In the first place it is seen as the glue, holding different particles of the earth together and in the second place it has a nourishing function. It is possible that by stating that the water is turned to blood, John also refers to these functions that Philo ascribes to water. This makes even more sense when noting that the angel of the waters says the followers of the beast were given blood to drink. The blood lost its nourishing function and became impure.

4.8.4 The response of the angel of the waters

The first bowl plague is followed by a verbal response to the plague. First the angel of the waters responds and then the altar also responds. The response of angel of the waters was discussed first. From the discussion it became clear that the identity of the angel was in

question and also the amount of bowl plagues he responds to. After investigating the possible background in ancient literature, as well as the response of the angel himself, it became apparent that the angel of the waters is most probably not the angel pouring out the bowl on the waters. This is primarily because the angel is specifically called the angel of the waters, creating the impression that this is another angel. Despite the close connection between the second and third bowl plagues, one could argue that the response of the angel of the waters is to both the third bowl plague and the second. However, it was indicated that this is most probably not the case. The focus of the third bowl plague is clearly on water as nourishment, therefore the angel praises God for taking that nourishing function away so that the enemies of God might suffer. Clearly the intention is not to kill them, but to make them suffer because of the suffering they have caused. There is still opportunity to repent. As will be seen in later chapters, the effort is futile and the followers of the beast refuse to repent.

The response from the altar confirms what the angel of the waters said, namely that God is righteous in causing the followers of the beast to suffer by changing their drinking water to blood. The response from the altar echoes images from the Hebrew Scriptures of God as an almighty God who always acts fairly, even when He hands out punishment. It was stated that the words from the altar most probably come from the martyrs as it is their blood that was shed, according to the angel of the waters. Shedding of blood and an altar are closely connected concepts in the Hebrew Scriptures.

4.8.5 Philo on the story of Cain and Abel

Some strong correspondences have been made by the way Philo discusses the narrative of Cain and Abel and the first three bowl plagues. In the first instance Cain shed the blood of Abel and the earth had to drink that blood. Even though Cain did not drink the blood, Philo argues that he indirectly consumed it by eating the crops growing in that blood-stained soil. Cain also received a mark, even though this mark was given by God and was not an indication of allegiance to God's enemy. Yet the evil sores from the first bowl plague are seen by some scholars as a mark given by God. Philo's discussion on the functions of blood and water also strongly relates to the way it is portrayed in the third bowl plague. Finally, there is another correspondence to the first three bowl plagues in Philo's discussion of Cain and Abel. Philo, commenting on Cain who was never noted to die, says that he was a sign of evil, like an incurable disease, which can never be eradicated totally. The links to the bowl plagues are obvious.

4.8.6 The four classical elements

Finally, one view on the four classical elements in Hellenistic thought was discussed and it was noted that Adela Collins does not reason that the classical elements played any significant role in bowl plagues. However, she never mentions any influence of the thoughts of Philo who places strong emphasis on the classical elements. It would appear that the four elements play a more significant role in the bowl plagues than Collins would give credit for. The influence of the classical elements will be discussed in more detail in later chapters of this investigation.

Chapter 5: The fourth bowl plague (Rev 16:8-9)

5.1 Introduction

The fourth bowl plague is the first plague without any obvious parallelism to one of the ten plagues in Exodus. In none of the ten Egyptian plagues the sun is affected. The closest parallel appears to be the ninth plague which brings darkness over the whole land of Egypt. This plague has a secondary effect which targets the followers of the beast directly. It is the first plague to which the people, who are harmed by it, react verbally. In this chapter the fourth bowl plague will be explored in detail, attempting to determine possible connections to other literature from the ancient world.

One connection which will be discussed in detail is the role of the sun. In this plague it plays an important part. It is also a well-known fact that in ancient Egypt the sun was seen as vitally important, with the Egyptians worshipping the sun-god Ra and erecting a city for this god, called the Heliopolis (Ἡλίου πόλις), or On (Ὠν) as it was also known.

As with the previous plagues, the role of the four ancient elements in Greek cosmology will be discussed, especially since fire was one of these elements.

5.2 The text of the fourth bowl plague

Greek text (Rev 16:8-9)

⁸Καὶ ὁ τέταρτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἥλιον·
καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους²⁷¹ ἐν πυρί.
⁹καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα·
καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν²⁷² τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ θεοῦ
τοῦ ἔχοντος τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπὶ τὰς πληγὰς ταύτας,
καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν.

Translation

⁸And the fourth poured out his bowl on the sun
And it was given the power to burn the people with fire.
⁹And the people were burned by a big heat,

²⁷¹ Thomas (1995:257) appears to be correct when he argues that “people” only implies the followers of the beast and not those who remained faithful to God.

²⁷² Some manuscripts also add the word ἄνθρωποι here.

and they blasphemed the name of God
who has power over these plagues
and they did not repent and give Him glory.

5.3 Connections to an Egyptian plague

As noted in the introduction to this chapter there is no Egyptian plague which makes any mention of the sun burning people. This fact is highlighted by some commentators²⁷³ while others simply don't make any mention of a possible connection to the Exodus plagues.²⁷⁴ The only likely Egyptian plague which might be remotely close to this bowl plague, is the Egyptian plague of darkness. However, this does not seem likely to be a parallel at all, and also none of the scholars consulted mentions this as a possibility.²⁷⁵ Still it does not exclude a connection to Egypt as will be indicated later in the current chapter. We will now turn to a detailed discussion on the text of the bowl plagues to determine what other connections there might be.

5.4 Stichwörter and key phrases

In this section the text of the plague will be discussed, focussing on the most important words used, attempting to determine connections between the literature from the Jewish Greek world.

5.4.1 τὸν ἥλιον – “the sun”

The main word in the description of this bowl plague is the word “sun”, as this bowl is poured out on the sun.²⁷⁶ From the outset it has to be explained that for the ancient people the significance of the sun was much more than just a heavenly body, providing light and heat to the earth. Throughout the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, the sun plays an important role and is sometimes seen as a god in the astral religions. In the first century these astral religions

²⁷³ For in instance Van de Kamp (2002:359), Du Rand (2007:478)

²⁷⁴ For instance Thomas (1995:256-257), Beale (1999:821), Koester (2014:655).

²⁷⁵ Gallusz (2002:38) still thinks that the idea of intensification of the exodus judgments is not absent from it (the bowl plague), but is suggested by the expression καὶ ἐκαυματίσθησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καῦμα μέγα (“scorched with a great scorching”).

²⁷⁶ Aune (1998:889) states that this is another apparent violation of the command given in verse 1 where the angels are ordered to pour their bowls on the earth. As it has been noted in the second chapter, however, “earth” in verse 1 refers to the whole creation and not just one specific part of it.

were also very influential in the lives of people.²⁷⁷ In the following section this will be explored in detail, indicating the way the sun was seen by the writers of the Biblical books.

5.4.1.1 The Hebrew Scriptures

a) The God of Israel has power over the sun

In the Jewish canonical texts, the God of Israel, or Yahweh, is often said to have power over the sun. In Josh 10:12, 13 God made the sun stand still in the sky to lengthen the day. In the well-known passage in Ps 120:6 (LXX) it is promised that God will keep the sun from striking his people by day (ἡμέρας ὁ ἥλιος οὐ συγκαύσει σε) and the moon from harming them by night. The same promise is made in Isa 49:10. According to Amos 8:9, the Lord says that He will make the sun go down in the middle of the day. Isa. 38:8 even says that God will cause the sun to go to back ten degrees. In Isa 60:19, 20, in a sequence of promises made by the Lord, the people of God receive the assurance that the sun will not be their light by day or the moon their light by night, but the Lord will be their everlasting light. This is in line with the first creation narrative in Gen 1 where the light is created before the celestial objects. The sun and other celestial objects are called to worship the Lord as their Master in more than one occasion, underscoring the notion that God has power over the sun.²⁷⁸ The general view of ancient Jewish writers clearly believed that the sun was powerful, but God had full authority over it. As Creator, he was able to control it and limit its movement at his will. This notion is definitely present in the current text.

b) The Heliopolis

In Egypt the worship of the sun played a major role. The Egyptians even had a city, called the Heliopolis (the city of the sun), which was famous for its cult of the sun-god Ra. The Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was thought to be the son of Ra.²⁷⁹ Lesko (2005:661) also writes that the sun-god Ra (or Re as he is called in the *Encyclopedia of the archaeology of ancient Egypt*) was seen as the father of the king

²⁷⁷ Hartman (2013:252-253) states that “astral religion played a role in almost every kind of religious thinking in Hellenistic and Roman times”.

²⁷⁸ Ps 148:3; Dan 3:62 (LXX).

²⁷⁹ Cf. Brovarski (2005:42).

who is joined by the king, who is accompanied and guarded by him, and who is glorified by every pyramid, obelisk and sun temple erected by the king on earth.

According to Goelet (2005:85) there were quite a few temples dedicated to Ra with many references to it in official writings. This points to the importance of these temples in ancient Egypt. Furthermore, it appears that these temples had strong economic power as well. Goelet (2005:85) states that “this can be seen in the fact that according to the Abusir Papyri, offerings sent to the royal mortuary temples were dispensed first through the associated sun temples.”

Another important aspect regarding the cult of Ra is that the god was associated with creation and nature. David (2005:807) specifically notes that among the creation stories the cult of Ra, who took over the cult of Atum, stands central and indicates the connection to other gods of nature like the sky, earth, wind, moon and stars. He summarizes the creation story of Ra as follows:

It tells how Re-Atum, the first god of Heliopolis, emerged from a great primeval ocean, Nun, and created a mound on which to stand (his priesthood claimed that their temple was built on this “Island of Creation”). Dispelling the gloom by bringing light, he then took the form of the mythical *bennu* bird and alighted on the *benben* (the pillar associated with Re’s cult at Heliopolis). He brought into existence the god of air and the goddess of moisture, who in turn produced the earth and sky deities, who became the parents of Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys. This family was known as the Great Ennead.

Traces of this sun-cult can also be found in the Jewish scriptures. The Masoretic Text of Exod 1:11 provides the names of two of the cities built by the Israelites, namely Pithom and Remeses. In the text of the LXX one more name is added to these names: “*On*, which is Heliopolis” (Ὠν, ἧ ἔστιν Ἡλίου πόλις).

In Jer 50:13 (LXX) there is another reference to the Heliopolis which is significant. The text of the LXX reads: καὶ συντρίψει τοὺς στυλοὺς Ἡλίου πόλεως τοὺς ἐν Ὠν καὶ τὰς οἰκίας αὐτῶν κατακαύσει ἐν πυρὶ (“and He will crush the pillars of the Heliopolis, which are in On and He will burn their houses with fire”). There are two important correspondences between this verse and Rev 16:8. The first is obviously the mention of the sun in both. The second correspondence is the fact that God is said to burn the houses of his enemies with fire. Even though a different word is used to denote the concept of burning in Jer 50 (κατακαίω in Jer 50

and καυματίζω in Rev 16) the word κατακαίω is often used in the book of Revelation²⁸⁰ with more or less the same meaning as καυματίζω.²⁸¹ A third possible correspondence may be present in the obvious reference to the Exodus and Egypt in Jer 50:13. The cities mentioned were all built after the suffering of the Israelites. This corresponds to the links in the bowl plagues to the Exodus narrative.

What is of further significance, is the fact that *On* in Greek is the same word translated as “being” and the same word which is used to denote God in the doxology of the angel of the waters in Rev 16:5: ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὅσιος - “who *is* and who *was*, the holy”. Tompsett (2014) discusses the cult of the Sun and refers to Fideler (1993:248) when noting that Plato uses the sun to represent the idea of being. Tompsett (2014) further notes that the Cairo based architects, Agnieszka Dobrowolska and Jaroslaw Dobrowolski, point out how the ancient “Egyptian Gods were worshipped ‘in a Hellenized guise’ by the first century CE”. He argues that the Roman emperors saw themselves as gods just like the Pharaohs saw themselves as sons of the sun-god Ra. The Romans even took some of the obelisks of ancient Egypt, including some which came from Heliopolis, to their own cities to show their power. Additionally, the Heliopolis was, in its time, a centre of knowledge which had a significant influence on many Greek intellectuals such as Plato.²⁸²

This is where Philo’s writings become important for the current discussion. Philo (*Post.* 57) argues that symbolically Heliopolis, as one of the cities built by the Israelites, points to the mind of the person. By giving light, the sun makes invisible things visible and in the same way the mind gives us the ability to comprehend things which we would otherwise not have been aware of.²⁸³ In his description of the sun as symbol for the mind, the way Philo sees the mind is very much in line with the view of Plato. In *Somn.* 1.77 Philo writes on the three Egyptian cities built by the Israelites and notes about Heliopolis the following: “...and On, the mind, which they called Heliopolis, since the mind, like the sun, has the predominance over the whole mass of our body, and extends its powers like the beams of the sun, over everything.”²⁸⁴ To Philo the mind is the whole being, which is in turn, linked to the sun.

²⁸⁰ For instance, three times in Rev 8:7 and once in Rev 17:16.

²⁸¹ According to Arndt and Gingrich (1957:412) κατακαίω means to burn up or consume by fire and καυματίζω also means to burn up or to burn someone with fire (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957:426).

²⁸² Tompsett (2014) notes that Clement of Alexandria as well as Strabo believed that Plato went to Heliopolis and was a student under one of the priests named Sechnuphis.

²⁸³ Cf. also Philo *Her.* 263.

²⁸⁴ As translated by Colson (1988:339).

Interestingly, Philo links the Exodus plague of locusts to the scorching of the sun, even though the Biblical text makes no mention of the sun. In *Mos.* 1.120 he mentions the wind, which, according to Exod 10:13, carries the locusts into the land of Egypt:

the south wind is dry and produces headache and makes hearing difficult, and thus is fitted to cause distress and suffering, particularly in Egypt which lies well to the south, where the sun and the planets have their orbits, so that when the wind sets it in motion the scorching of the sun is pushed forward with it, and burns up everything.²⁸⁵

If the author of the book of Revelation was acquainted with the writings of Philo, it might be that the locusts, which play an important role elsewhere in the book of Revelation, are also in mind in the fourth bowl plague. What is even more significant is that the burning quality of the sun is emphasised here. Philo (*Conf.* 157), furthermore, calls the sun “a single part of the heavenly expanse of fire” (πυράς ἥλιος) in his work on the tower of Babel.

From this discussion two important assertions can be made: 1. In the first place the sun was a significant part the religion of ancient Egypt as object of veneration. If the Exodus narrative plays any role in the bowl plague narrative - which it definitely does, to some extent – then it is highly probable that the reference to the sun in the fourth bowl plague is made with the religion of ancient Egypt in mind. The fact that the Romans also took aspects of this part of the Egyptian religion into their own cultic practices reinforces this idea. Sun veneration would have been something well-known in the world in which John lived. 2. The second important matter which has been highlighted is the connection between the ancient Egyptian city of the sun and the word ὦν. This link is also discussed by Philo, who connects the sun to the mind.

5.4.1.2 The New Testament

In general, when the sun is mentioned in the New Testament outside the book of Revelation, it is with reference to the physical sun. The rising of the sun is seen as something positive in Matt 5:45. In the parable of the weeds the burning effect of the sun is mentioned (Matt 13:6, Mark 4:6).²⁸⁶

The sun is mentioned fairly frequently in the book of Revelation. In Rev 1:16 John notes that the face of the “one like the son of man” standing between the lampstands was shining

²⁸⁵ The translation used is by Colson (1984:339).

²⁸⁶ Refer to James 1:11.

like the sun.²⁸⁷ In Rev 6:12, after the opening of the sixth seal, a great earthquake takes place causing the sun to turn “as black as sackcloth” and the moon to blood. In Rev 7:2 the sun is simply used as reference to the direction from which the angel with the seal of the living God approaches.²⁸⁸ In Rev 7:16 it is promised that those who come from the great tribulation will not hunger or thirst anymore and neither the sun nor any heat (καῦμα) will strike them. Those who are loyal to God are promised to be protected from the heat of the sun. The fourth trumpet affects a third of the sun, the moon and the stars, darkening a third of their light.²⁸⁹ Most scholars do not think that the fourth bowl plague has any real connection to the fourth trumpet plague which also has an effect on the sun.²⁹⁰ In Rev 9:2 the sun and the air were said to be darkened by the smoke from the shaft which was opened by the angel with the sixth trumpet. The end of the book of Revelation affirms that new Jerusalem will be without any need for sun or moon because the Lamb will be its light (Rev 21:23 and 22:5).

With regard to the fourth bowl plague, other references to the sun in the New Testament do not provide any deeper insight into the way the sun was seen in the first century. Consequently, it does not assist in finding deeper insight in the background of the fourth bowl plague.

5.4.2 καυματίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους (“they are burned - the people”)

5.4.2.1 The followers of the beast are burned

The sun is allowed to burn people with fire.²⁹¹ Strong emphasis is placed on the intensity of the burning because verse 9 states that the people are indeed burned, but the heat with which they are burned, is described as μέγα (fierce/big). The punishment the people receive is quite severe.

²⁸⁷ In Rev 10:1 it is an angel whose face is like the sun and in Rev 12:1 a vision of a woman clothed with the sun is seen by the seer.

²⁸⁸ In Rev 16:12 it is used in the same way.

²⁸⁹ Paulien (1988a:407-408) notes that “as a plague involving heavenly bodies, the fourth bowl is parallel to the fourth trumpet” and “it is probably not very helpful to study the fourth trumpet in the light of the corresponding bowl”.

²⁹⁰ Out of all scholars consulted Blount (2009:299) probably sees the strongest connection by noting that “the action is broadly parallel to the disturbance caused by the fourth trumpet angel, whose disruption of the moon and the stars also precipitated chaos on earth”.

²⁹¹ Beale (1999:821) notes that it can be either the sun or the angel which is given the power to burn. From the text it appears that it is the sun which burns the people and not the angel.

It is not explicitly stated, but the assumption is that “the people” here does not include the people faithful to God. It is only the followers of the beast who are burned.²⁹² This is also the view of Van de Kamp (2002:359) who notes as support for this argument that in Rev 7:16 it is implied that “Gods verlostte kinderen van zonnesteek en hitte geen last hebben”. Here in Rev 16 it is therefore said that God’s enemies are punished with unbearable heat.

5.4.2.2 Economic suffering?

By comparing the fourth bowl plague to Rev 7:16, which states that “they will not have hunger or have thirst and not the sun or any heat will strike them”, Beale (1999:822) arrives at the assumption that “this woe includes suffering involving deprivation of forms of earthly security, likely with an economic focus”. His reasoning is based on the fact this bowl is the opposite of what will happen to the saints according to Rev 7:16. And Rev 7:16 is based, in turn, on Isa 49:10, which adds that God’s people will not be hungry or thirsty. He also adds Deut 32:24 to the argument where people violating the laws of the covenant will be “consumed by burning heat” and this is linked to famine. Whilst this might be true, in the specific case of the fourth bowl plague there is no indication that the meaning of the fire scorching the people has anything to do with economic suffering.

5.4.2.3 Philo on the tower of Babel and the connection to the sun

The idea of the sun being able to burn people is also found in the works of Philo. Philo (*Conf.* 157), when writing about the tower of Babel, addresses the question on whether the construction of the tower of Babel was completed by the time God intervened. To him it would be impossible to build a tower high enough to reach the heaven, because the air around the earth is too hot. In his reasoning he notes the following:

For to all that is at a long distance from its course or lies at an angle to it, it merely gives warmth, but all that is near it or directly under it, it actually destroys with the force of its flames. If this is so, the men who ventured on the ascent could not fail to be blasted and consumed by the fire, leaving their vaunting ambition unfulfilled.

²⁹² Beale (1999:821) argues that the burning should not be seen as a literal burning but rather meant in a figurative way.

Whilst there is no clear evidence of any direct links between this discussion of Philo and the bowl plagues, the correspondences are important to note, especially since there does not seem to be any other place in ancient Jewish works where the sun is said to burn people.²⁹³ Just like the followers of the beast rebelled against God, these people who built the tower of Babel were also in opposition to God and risked being burned by the sun.

5.4.3 ἐν πυρί (“with fire”)

According to ancient writings, specifically Philo, fire can have a very negative effect on the one hand, but also a positive effect on the other. As with water, it has the ability to sustain life, and destruct life.²⁹⁴ It can consume material things, but it also has the ability to purify precious metals.²⁹⁵ Fire is one of the four classical elements in Greek thought and Philo often refers to fire in this regard.²⁹⁶

5.4.3.1 Fire in the Hebrew Scriptures

The most significant thing we learn from the Hebrew Scriptures about fire is that God has power over it.²⁹⁷ It is common for God’s enemies to be burned by fire, with the first instance of this found in Gen 19:24 where Sodom and Gomorrah is said to be destroyed by brimstone and fire.²⁹⁸ Interestingly enough the Egyptian plague of hail (Exod 9:23-28) is also connected to fire as the bolts of lightning which preceded and accompanied the hail are called fire. In Exod 24:17 the “appearance of the glory of the Lord” is said to be like fire burning on the mountains. Fire was also the way the Lord guided the people through the desert by night (Exod 40:38). In Deut 4:24 and Deut 9:3 God Himself is called a “devouring” fire. In Jud 16:17 the people who rise up against God’s people are warned that on the day of judgement “he will send fire and worms into their flesh; they shall weep in pain forever.”

²⁹³ Aune (1998:889) notes) one myth which recounts the sun burning the earth, but in this myth there is no reference to people specifically. None of the commentators consulted indicate any other ancient reference to the sun burning people.

²⁹⁴ See the discussion on water in the previous chapter.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Philo *Leg.* 67; 77.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Philo *Opif.* 146 where man is said to be formed out of all the elements of the universe including fire.

²⁹⁷ See for instance Ps 148 (LXX) where fire, hail, snow, ice and stormy wind all do what God says.

²⁹⁸ In the apocryphal book of Sirag it is noted in 7:17 that the punishment for the ungodly is fire and worms. Refer to Sir 16:6; 39:29.

God sometimes sends fire in anger against his own people. Evidence of this is found throughout the Hebrew Bible,²⁹⁹ but it is very common in the prophetic literature.³⁰⁰ In 2 Kings 1, Elijah calls on God and fire devours a contingent of 50 men from the king of Samaria. This happens twice before the captain of the third contingent begs for mercy and an angel of the Lord tells Elijah to go with the captain.

In the psalms fire and the wrath of God upon his enemies are frequently closely connected. In Ps 10:6 (LXX) fire and brimstone are both mentioned in relation to the anger of the Lord. According to Ps 17:9 (LXX) and Ps 49:3 (LXX) the angry presence of the Lord is associated with a burning fire.³⁰¹ In Ps 77:21, 63 (LXX) the fire of the Lord is directed against his own people and in Ps 105:18 (LXX) it is said that the Israelites who rebelled against Moses and Aaron were burned up when a fire was started among them.³⁰²

Ps 78 (LXX) is important here as it contains quite a few correspondences to the bowl plagues. The Psalmist complains in verse 1 to God that the nations (ἔθνη – the same word used in Rev 15:3 in the “Song of Moses”) have come into his “inheritance” and defiled his holy temple. This is a clear reference to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. In verse 2 the accusation is that they (the enemies – probably the Babylonians) have given the bodies of God’s servants to the birds to eat and their flesh to the beasts (θηρίοις) of the earth. After the sixth angel pours his bowl on the earth, the beast of Revelation is mentioned. The third verse of this psalm states that they have poured out the blood of God’s people like water around Jerusalem. This appears to correspond to the second and third bowl plagues. Verse 5 asks the question on how long God will still be angry and his jealousy burn like fire? His anger is clearly seen as directed against his own people, but in the next verse the psalmist pleads to God to rather pour out his anger on the nations who do not know Him or call on his name as punishment for what they have done to God’s people. Fire and the anger of God is therefore linked in this psalm in the same way as in the fourth bowl plague. The glory of God is directly linked to the salvation He brings about in verse 9 of the psalm. In the third bowl plague God is also glorified for the salvation he brings about, but by the angel of the waters. In verse 10 there is another plea to God to avenge the shedding of the blood of his servants. As indicated in the

²⁹⁹ In Lev 10:2 fire is said to devour the sons of Aaron for bringing a “strange” fire. See also Num 11:3 where the people complained or muttered against the Lord which caused Him to send fire among them. Num 26:10 and Deut 32:22 are also good examples of this.

³⁰⁰ In Hos 8:14 God also warns that He will send fire upon the cities of Judah as in Obad 1:18. The prophet Amos warns that God will send fire on many nations who go against the will of God. Similarly in the book of Joel the prophet complains that the army of God set everything on fire. In both the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah it is often mentioned that God will punish people with fire.

³⁰¹ Cf. also Ps 96: (LXX).

³⁰² See also Ps 88:47 (LXX).

previous chapter, this might also be echoed in the words of the angel of the waters. In summary it is clear that there are many correspondences between Ps 78 (LXX) and the whole bowl plague narrative. Among these is the theme of God punishing the enemies of his people because of the blood they have shed. These enemies are called the nations. There is mention of beasts even though it is not with the same meaning as in Rev 16. God is glorified for apparently acting righteously. There are also some differences, the most important being that in Ps 78 (LXX) the Psalmist acknowledges that the persecution the people of God suffers is because of their own sins. Therefore, he pleads for forgiveness and pleads with God not to be angry. In Revelation, however, the persecution is not deserved, and God's anger is only directed at the oppressors of God's people.

A last important psalm to explore is Ps 104 (LXX), which is a poem about the plagues of Egypt. Verse 32 reads: ἔθετο τὰς βροχὰς αὐτῶν χάλαζαν, πῦρ καταφλέγον ἐν τῇ γῆ αὐτῶν ("he made their rain hail, flaming fire in their land"). It appears that fire is according to Ps 104 (LXX) part of the plagues that hit Egypt.

Finally, in the Hebrew Bible, fire is also frequently used in relation to the ritual of the sacrifice. Abraham prepared a fire to sacrifice Isaac in Gen 22:6. Especially in the book of Leviticus fire is often used in close connection to the cultic sacrifice rituals. In Judg 6 in the story of Gideon an angel sets a sacrifice alight with fire by reaching out with his rod. The setting of the bowl plagues is clearly a heavenly cultic setting and it could possibly be that the fire of the third bowl plague is clearly a heavenly cultic setting and it could possibly be that the fire of the third bowl plague might also allude to the fire in cultic sacrifices.

It is difficult to determine whether the reference to fire in the fourth bowl plague is an allusion to any specific text from the LXX. However, the idea of the anger of God which is connected to fire is well attested in the Hebrew Scriptures. The use of fire in the bowl plagues clearly reflects more than just one specific use of the concept in the Hebrew Bible.

5.4.3.2 The New Testament

In the New Testament the word πῦρ also occurs frequently. In general, there are two ways fire is used outside of Revelation, apart from the normal use as a fire which is made by people to keep them warm.

a) Fire as punishment

In Matt 3:10,12 and Luke 3:9,17 John the Baptist says that every tree which does not bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.³⁰³ He clearly speaks figuratively, but this the first instance in the New Testament where punishment from God and fire are connected. In this same passage fire is also connected to baptism by God which is the other way in which fire is used in the New Testament. Jesus, in his discussion on reconciliation in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:22) notes that someone who calls his brother a fool is punishable by fire from hell (γέεννα). In the parable of the weeds in Matt 13:42 Jesus warns that those who do evil will be thrown into the oven of fire and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.³⁰⁴ In Matt 18:8, 9 and Mark 9:43, 48 Jesus says that one should remove the hand or foot which causes you to stumble, because it is better to have no hand or foot than to be thrown into the eternal fire. In Mark 9:48 γέεννα is said to be the place where the worm never dies and fire never stops. Mark adds in verse 49 that everyone will be salted with fire, which means the fire will restore their original state. Fire is also the fate of those who never helped one of the brothers of Jesus who were in need (Matt 25:41). In Luke 9:54 Jesus's disciples want to take the law into their own hands and ask Jesus if they should command fire from heaven to consume the Samaritans who did not want to receive Jesus. Clearly the idea of punishing people with fire from God was common in the first century. In Luke 17:29 there is a reference to the fire which consumed Sodom. In the whole gospel of John there is only one reference to fire where Jesus says that whoever does not abide in Him is like a branch which will die and be burned in fire. Heb 10:27 contains a reference to the fire that will consume the adversaries who will not stop acting against the will of God. In Heb 12:29 the people are urged to have reverence and fear for God for He is a consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον).

According to Koester (2014:648) the main idea behind fire in the Greco-Roman context is that it implies punishment by the gods. He refers to Julius Obsequens (*Prod.* 3; 52; 54) when he writes that: "whether people were scorched by lightning or saw a ball of fire appear in the heavens, they would know that an offense had been committed against a god and that steps were needed to rectify the relationship." This fits the context of the fourth bowl plague. There is, however, more to fire in the first century context.

³⁰³ These words are also put in the mouth of Jesus in Matt 7:19. Interestingly none of the other synoptic gospels makes any mention of the fact that the trees which bear no fruit will be thrown into the fire.

³⁰⁴ Also refer to Matt 13:50.

b) Baptism with fire

The first place where fire is mentioned in the context of baptism is in Matt 3:11 where John the Baptist says that Jesus will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The same scene is found in Luke 3:16. In Luke 12:49 the ideas of fire and baptism are mentioned in the same context as Jesus says that He came to bring fire to the earth and in the next verse he notes that He has a baptism in which he will be baptised and He is distressed until it is completed. The most well-known reference to baptism with fire is in Acts 2 with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. When fire is linked to baptism it is most probably the purifying aspect of fire which is in view. Obviously, baptism is not in the mind of the author of Revelation in the bowl plague narrative.

c) Other uses

The ability of fire to purify/test precious metals is also stressed in some of the New Testament letters and is used as metaphor for the way hardship purifies/tests peoples' works (1 Cor 3:13,15) and people's faith (1 Pet 1:7) as it has been indicated earlier in this section. In James 3:5,6 the ability of fire to spread quickly is used as a metaphor for the tongue. In the fourth bowl plague it appears, though, that the emphasis is much more on destruction than purification.

d) Revelation

Of all books in the New Testament the word πῦρ is found most often in the book of Revelation and with different meanings. The eyes of the "person like the Son of Man" is said to be like flames of fire in Rev 1:14 and Rev 2:18.³⁰⁵ Rev 19:11 refers back to these two texts where it is said that the eyes of the one who sat on the horse were like a flame of fire. In Rev 3:18 there is a reference to the purifying power of fire.

The trumpet plagues start in Rev 8:5 with an angel taking a censer, filling it with fire from the altar and then throwing it to the earth, causing thunder, lightning and earthquakes. When the first angel blows his trumpet hail and fire, mixed with blood, were thrown towards the earth causing a third of the earth, trees and grass to be burned up. The second trumpet also has to do with fire. This time a mountain burning with fire is thrown into the sea. After the sixth trumpet was blown, horses appeared, breathing fire, smoke and brimstone and killing a third of humankind (Rev 9:17-18). Those left over did not repent. The angel who then appeared, had

³⁰⁵ This refers to his role as judge (Beale, 1999:208).

feet like pillars of fire (Rev 10:1). Obviously the fourth bowl plague is not parallel to the sixth trumpet plague, even though both involve fire. The main difference between the sixth trumpet plague and the fourth bowl plague is that the trumpet plague kills a third of the people, but the bowl plague does not kill anyone, it only causes suffering because of the burns and that suffering affects everyone. Furthermore, the sun is also not mentioned in the sixth trumpet plague.

The two witnesses in chapter 11 burned those who wanted to do harm to them with fire coming from their mouths. In chapter 13 the second beast coming from the earth is said to have the ability to perform great signs like making fire come down from heaven to earth.

In Rev 14:10 the third angel flying in the middle of heaven says that everyone who worships the beast and his image and bear his mark on their heads and hands will experience the wrath of God. This wrath will be in the form of tormenting fire and brimstone. An angel with power over fire is mentioned in Rev 14:18. The matter of angels and fire will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

In Rev 15:2 there is mention of a sea mingled with fire. Commentators have different arguments on the meaning of this, but it is not within the scope of this study to discuss this in detail.³⁰⁶

Famine and mourning are connected to fire in Rev 18:8. A voice from heaven says that there will be famine and mourning in Babylon and she will be burned with fire. This fire is the fire of the judgement of God, leading to destruction and thus the reaction of mourning by the people who experience the destruction. In the end the beast and the false prophet is captured and thrown into the lake of fire burning with sulphur (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 15; 21:8). Finally, the enemies who surround the saints and the beloved city are burned and consumed with fire from heaven (Rev 20:9, 14).

It is evident from this discussion on fire in the book of Revelation in general is that fire is indeed, as Beale (1999:789) argues, connected mainly to judgement. The destruction brought about by fire is because of God's anger directed towards his enemies. It is not always complete destruction, but sometimes it appears to rather be a display of the power of God. Not once, except for Rev 16:8, is this fire said to come from the sun.

³⁰⁶ What can be noted is that Koester (2014:633) disagrees with Beale (1999:789) about the meaning of fire here. To Koester (2014:633) fire refers to "the trials that test faith". In Beale's (1999:789), opinion however, fire in the book of Revelation always refers to "judgement and evil and never connotes the saint's trials or baptism". The view of Bauckham (1993[2]:98-99) is in agreement with that of Beale.

5.4.4 Fire and angels

As mentioned in the previous subsection and in the previous chapter of this study, Rev 14:18 contains a reference to an angel with authority over fire. Whilst no secondary sources attempt to make any connections between the fourth bowl plague and this angel, as the angel is not directly involved with the fire, the action of the angel indirectly has the effect that people are burnt with fire. No scholar has thus far attempted to determine if the angel might be linked to a known archangel from ancient literature.

Examining the sources, however, the results are interesting to note. The angel Michael, the fourth archangel in the book of 1 Enoch, is sometimes connected to fire. According to Davidson (1971:193-194), in Jewish lore the burning bush, which Moses encountered in the desert, looked like Michael. He also notes that in one of the Dead Sea scrolls, called *War of the sons of light against the sons of Darkness*, "Michael is called the prince of light." The sun is obviously also connected to light throughout the ancient writings.

It is, however, the angel Uriel which is most fascinating to take note of. Steyn (2011:149), in his discussion on the quotation from Ps 103:4 (LXX) in Heb 1:7, notes that the quotation "states that the angels are made 'flames of fire' by God". He also refers to Bauckham (2005:35) when indicating that "it was especially Uriel, the angel who instructed Ezra (2 Esd 4:1; 5:20; 10:28) and who was 'over the world and Tartarus', who was known as the 'fire' or 'flame of God'". In his opinion the angels connected to fire in Revelation probably follow in this tradition. Among these are the angels in Rev 10:1, Rev 14:18 and also Rev 19:17 (Steyn, 2011:149). Steyn's discussion revolves around angels reflecting the glory of God. In the fourth bowl plague the main aim of the fire is to burn the people as punishment, or warning to repent, while there is time left. In the reaction of the people, however, it becomes clear that the expectation of the burning with fire is also that those who get burned will give glory to God. It is interesting to note that Uriel was the fourth archangel according to three sources, namely the Christian Gnostics, Gregory the Great and Pseudo-Dionysius (Davidson, 1971:338). As already mentioned, in the case of the fourth bowl plague the angel is not directly linked to fire. The angel pours out his bowl on the sun, which in turn, burns the people with fire. Still it cannot be ignored that a fourth angel is connected to fire bears strong resemblance to the ancient tradition that an angel which was the fourth archangel according to a few sources, was known as "fire of God".

5.4.4.4 Fire as one of the four ancient elements

The final point of fire which warrants deeper discussion, is the matter of fire as one of the four classical elements in Greek philosophy. Among most of the modern commentators this aspect

receives very little attention. Some scholars refer to the ancient elements in their discussion on this plague, but they do not discuss it in any depth.³⁰⁷

Philo, once again, is the most important source to consult in this regard. In *Opif.* 146 he argues that every person is connected to the earth in his body, seeing that the body is made up of all the elements namely earth, water, air and fire. In *Her.* 135-136 he argues that fire is opposite to air in that it is the hot part of the division, which has been made in the less dense matter, as opposed to air which is the cold. He continues to explain that fire can be divided in what is useful and what is saving. Useful fire can be very destructive and his view on this is well illustrated in his discussion on the tower of Babel, which was referred to earlier in this chapter. He states that fire can provide warmth to those who are not too close to the sun or not directly in the path of its rays. However, those who are directly in the path of its rays or come too close to the sun will be scorched (Philo, *Conf.* 157). Interestingly it appears that Philo views aether, which is in some later traditions seen as the fifth natural element, as fire and the sun as a part of that fire. He writes:

secondly, because the aether, that holy fire, is an unquenchable flame, as its very name shews, derived as it is from αἴθειν, which is a special term for "burn." This is attested by a single part of the heavenly expanse of fire, namely the Sun, which, in spite of its great distance, sends its rays to the corners of the earth, and both earth and the naturally cold extent of air, which divides it from the sphere of heaven, is warmed or consumed by it as the case may be. (*Conf.* 156-157)

He also emphasises the fact that God can use the created elements to punish people. In *Mos* 1.96, where he starts his discussion on the ten Exodus plagues, Philo says:

for the elements of the universe, earth, water, air, and fire, of which the world was made, were all by the command of God brought into a state of hostility against them, so that the country of those impious men was destroyed in order to exhibit the height of the authority which God wielded, who also fashioned those same elements at the creation of the universe, so as to secure its safety, and would

³⁰⁷ Van de Kamp (2002:360), dividing the plagues in three and four plagues, notes that this plague stands separate from the other three in this second group of four plagues in the sense that it connects to the previous three in terms of the four ancient elements. In that way he sees this plague as pivotal between the two sets of plagues.

change them all whenever he pleased, to effect the destruction of those impious men.

The importance of this for the current study is that there are some correspondences to the fourth bowl plague in Philo's understanding of the function and essence of fire. The fact that God is able to use the elements of nature to punish people, is also a constant theme in the bowl plagues which will be expanded on in coming chapters.

5.5 The reaction of the people

It was noted that this is the first bowl plague which is followed by a verbal response from those affected by it. As with the Egyptian Pharaoh, after all plagues except for the last, the reaction of the people struck by these plagues is that they only harden their hearts. This hardening of their hearts is expressed in a twofold response, one active and one passive: It is first said that they actively blaspheme the name of God who has power over these plagues. Secondly it is noted that they passively refuse to repent. πληγᾶς is in the plural here, probably implying that this reaction is not just to the fourth plague alone, but also to the preceding three plagues. Each of these reactions will now be discussed separately.

5.5.1 Blasphemy

This is the first of three places in the bowl plagues where the people who are affected by the plagues, are said to blaspheme God.³⁰⁸ The other two places are after the fifth plague (verse 11) and after the seventh plague (verse 21). The word βλασφημέω appears frequently in the New Testament. In the gospels Jesus is often accused of blasphemy. Blasphemy is generally seen as meaning to insult someone, most often a divine being. In the gospels it is usually God who is said to be blasphemed and it is Jesus who is accused of being the blasphemer. People are also often blasphemed by others who want to insult them.

³⁰⁸ This is to Beale (1999:823) an indication that they cannot accept what is happening to them is the fair punishment from a sovereign God.

In this instance the name of God is said to be blasphemed.³⁰⁹ The name of God is a reference to the character of God.³¹⁰ They blaspheme the name of God who is “the one who has power over these plagues”. Although Beale (1999:823) argues that this blasphemy implies that they will not acknowledge that God is the almighty who “has authority over the plagues”, it would rather seem that they do acknowledge God as having the authority over the plagues. They see God as responsible for the plagues which cause them to have pain and for that reason blaspheme his name. The problem is not that they do not acknowledge that it is God who is responsible for the plagues, but rather that they react in the incorrect way. The correct response to the plagues would be to glorify the name of God, which is stated at the end of the verse.³¹¹

Koester (2014:655) agrees with Beale (1999:823) when arguing that the actions of the followers of the beast become aligned to the actions of the beast, since the beast first blasphemed God according to Rev. 13:6, which implies to him that they take on the character of the figure they are following. It is worth noting that this blasphemy by the beast happened after all the earth (ὅλη ἡ γῆ) marvelled at him. This could possibly be the reason for the first bowl being poured out on the earth. It is at least partly the punishment of the earth for having respect for the beast while they should have contempt.

5.5.2 They do not repent

It is explicitly mentioned that the people who are struck by the plagues do not repent.³¹² This implies that there was opportunity to repent, which was deliberately refused. Repentance “involves a change in the mind and conduct, which involves a turning away from sins and turning to God, which produces demonstrable results” (Croteau, 2013:105). It might further be deduced that the reason for the outpouring of the bowl plagues was to get the followers of the beast to repent, but they chose not to repent. The followers of the beast subsequently do not

³⁰⁹ Aune (1998:889) argues that this implies that they broke the third of the Ten Commandments which prohibits the “wrongful use of the name of God”. He also notes that the punishment for blasphemy is death.

³¹⁰ Cf. also Beale (1999:832) who argues that by blaspheming his name the people tell lies about who God is and do not admit that God has power over the plagues.

³¹¹ Van de Kamp (2002:359) links this refusal to glorify God to the call to the glorification of God in Rev 14:7 which is here said not to be answered.

³¹² Bauckham (1993:307) argues that this response stands in contrast to Rev 15:4 where all the nations are said to come and worship the Lord. Rossing (1999:125) sees this refusal to repent “as the reason for the increasing severity of the bowl plagues”.

give the expected glory to God.³¹³ Again Philo wrote something which needs to be taken into consideration. Philo (*Virt.* 180) says that a man must repent from “honouring the creature in preference to that uncreated being who was himself the Creator of all things”. The implication of the actions of the people in verse 9, is that they did not repent from honouring the created beast to honouring the Creator. They carried on worshipping the beast. Thus far, the plagues appear not to fulfil their aim.

All of this substantiates what Collins (1977:371) wrote. She explains the fact that the blasphemy is emphasised together with the refusal to repent, implies that the plagues were meant to cause repentance and glory to God. The appropriate and ideal response to the plagues would be to start glorifying God and not to blaspheme his name. However, she proceeds to argue that in the broader context of Revelation the situation is quite different. In her opinion it appears that the reactions of the people have already been determined from the outset, as the time for repentance is long since over and now it is only the vengeance and wrath of God which remain. The main focus of her argument is that this is the way John uses his source material in the trumpets and the bowls. He would use material with the implication that it is meant to bring about repentance, but the introduction to the material implies that “the faithful will be saved if they remain faithful (2:25) and the fate of the sinners is predetermined (21:8, 27; 22:11)” (Collins, 1977:372). She therefore assumes that in both the trumpet plagues and the bowl plagues John used some sources in which the Egyptian plagues were eschatologically reinterpreted. This is justified by two points: a) in the account of the plagues in Wisdom of Solomon and Philo the idea of repentance plays a significant role; b) the plague of hail is “rather anticlimactic” in the context of the bowl plagues as opposed to its role in the plagues in Egypt. The second point she makes will be discussed in the chapter on the bowl plague of hail, but the first point requires some deeper discussion.

In the Exodus plagues repentance plays a significant role. After every plague there is the expectation that the Pharaoh will repent and set the Israelites free.³¹⁴ However, each time his heart is hardened so that he does not repent. Philo (*Mos.* 1.101) highlights the merciful nature of God who forgives the Pharaoh every time he repents and then he turns things back to the way it was. According to Philo (*Mos.* 1.134) the aim of the Egyptian plagues was not to destroy the Egyptians, but to convince them to let the Israelites go free.³¹⁵ He also emphasises the clear distinction between the Egyptians and the Israelites during the plagues where the

³¹³ Rev 9:20-21.

³¹⁴ Cf. Aune (1998:889).

³¹⁵ Philo (*Mos.* 1.110), when writing about the Egyptian plague of lice, notes that God deliberately did not use stronger animals such as bears or lions to chastise the Egyptians, because his aim was not to destroy them.

Egyptians were hit by the plagues while nothing happened to the Israelites. This was meant to teach the Israelites about piety (Philo, *Mos.* 1.145-146). Indeed, as Adela Collins indicates, there is a strong emphasis on repentance in the book of Wisdom. Wis 11:23 states: "But you are merciful to all, for you can do all things, and you overlook people's sins, so that they may repent." Also, in Wis 12:19-20 the notion of God who provides opportunity to repent is found.³¹⁶

The question is now whether this emphasis on repentance in both the works of Philo and the book of Wisdom is stronger than what is already present in the book of Exodus. In the Exodus plague tradition, it is not the Pharaoh who refuses to repent, but the Lord who hardens the heart of the Pharaoh.³¹⁷ Yet it is still the Pharaoh who is accused of not letting the Hebrew people go. The focus of the Exodus plagues therefore appears to be more on the display of the power of God, rather than on demonstrating how he provides opportunities for repentance. The notion of repentance plays an important role as it does in Rev 16:9. Blount (2009:301) also interprets it in this way, noting that "the plagues, then, even as a judgment tool, were not designed simply with destruction in mind but were engineered to elicit changes in loyalty and recognition of lordship".³¹⁸

It should be noted that Beale (1999:822) sees a strong correspondence to the sixth trumpet plague in this verse. The reaction of the people after the sixth trumpet is that they still did not repent. The view of Beale is therefore that the suffering of the fourth bowl plague is comparable to the suffering in Rev 9:17-18 (the sixth trumpet) where the people suffer because of three plagues: fire, smoke and brimstone. The reaction to the fourth bowl plague differs slightly from the sixth trumpet plague. In the reaction to the sixth trumpet, the different deeds they did not repent from are explicitly mentioned. The followers of the beast are also not accused of not giving glory to God. On the effect of the fire in the trumpet plague and the bowl plague, Beale (1999:822) states:

Both there and here the plagues of fire is a figurative woe comparable to the 'fire' that the two witnesses unleash against their unbelieving opponents during the church age according to 11:5-7, where the 'fire' is a form of spiritual judgement

³¹⁶ It reads: "Through such works you have taught your people that the righteous must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins. For if you punished with such great care and indulgence the enemies of your servants and those deserving of death, granting them time and opportunity to give up their wickedness."

³¹⁷ Philo (*Mos.* 1.167) notes that the Pharaoh repented of letting the Israelites go after the last plague.

³¹⁸ This is in agreement with the view of Boxall (2006:230). Bauckham (1993:14) adds that this failure to heed to warnings posed by the bowl plagues, rings in the time where there is no opportunity for repentance left. Lichtenberger (2014:215) agrees with this view. It might, however, be premature to say this here as there are still three more plagues to come in this last series of plagues.

against persecutors that only lays the foundation for their future final punishment. This pre-parousia punishment of the fourth bowl anticipates the final judgement of 'Babylon', which will also be 'burned by fire'.

He might be correct in his assumption that there is a link between the different fires mentioned, but the fact that the fourth bowl plague also appears to be a warning to repent should not be ignored.

Finally, considering everything discussed in this section, it appears that the focus with the bowl plagues serves more as a warning for the followers of the beast to repent and worship God. There are strong connections to the Egyptian plagues, especially the Pharaoh with his uncompromising attitude in the face of the plagues with which his country is hit. In this regard it appears that in the reaction of the people, there are strong connections to the ideas of Philo.

5.6 Preliminary conclusions

In the discussion on this bowl plague some very interesting matters on the background of the fourth bowl plague emerged.

5.6.1 The sun

It has been indicated in this chapter that the Hebrew Scriptures often portray God as having power over the sun. Clearly John also wants to convey something of this image of God to his readers in this bowl plague. However, nowhere does he use the sun to burn people as punishment or warning. It is apparent that none of the Egyptian plagues are in the background of the fourth bowl plague. This does not, however, mean that there are no links to ancient Egypt. There appears to be some connections to the sun cult of ancient Egypt with the city called the Heliopolis standing central. A few connections have been observed in this regard:

1. The sun-god, Ra, was seen as the father of the Pharaoh. The sun therefore obviously played a major role in ancient Egypt and the sun-god was seen as a benefactor to the people. It was also shown that the veneration of the sun-god played an important role in the religion of the first century Roman empire. If John saw the followers of the beast as the same type of people as the ancient Egyptians, this might have implications for the way the fourth bowl is interpreted. The fourth bowl is poured on the sun, causing the sun to burn people. By doing this, God causes the sun to harm its worshippers instead of caring for them. The implication would be that God also causes their own god to hurt them, which is a strong indication of the omnipotence of God.

2. The second connection that was indicated is the connection of the sun-god Ra to nature. Ra was strongly associated with elements of nature because he was also seen as a type of creator-god. It has been indicated that Ra was associated with the creation of the other gods of the natural elements. In the context of the bowls this is important as many of the bowls have a direct effect on the natural elements. It has been indicated in previous chapters that there appears to be a deliberate reference to the four classical elements of nature in the bowl plagues. Fire would be the third of the four classical elements which is mentioned in the bowl plagues after earth and water.

3. The third important connection between the Heliopolis (Ἡλίου πόλις) and the bowl plagues is the fact that the Heliopolis was also known as *On* (Ὠν) according to texts such as Exod 1:11 and Jer 50:13 (LXX). Three links to Jer 50:13 were highlighted, the first being the mentioning of the sun, the second being the fact that is noted that God will crush the Heliopolis and burn the houses of those who dwell in the city with fire. Finally, the reference to the Exodus narrative corresponds to the links to the Exodus narrative in the bowl plagues in general. Leading from this it can even be argued that Babylon or Rome might well have been associated with *On* in the book of Revelation.

4. Furthermore, in this respect it has been indicated that *On* is also the Greek word translated with “being” and in his reaction to the third bowl, the angel of the waters calls God ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος (“who is and who was, the holy”). Philo (*Somn.* 1.77) strongly links “being” and “mind” to the Heliopolis and the sun, due to the mind being the control centre of the whole body as the sun is in control of the whole world. The possible message that might be underlying here is that God will always be, but those who worship the sun will perish in fire. God is the ultimate Being and not the gods of the Romans. The message is clearly in line with the idea that is constantly found in the Jewish Scriptures: The God of Israel is so powerful that He also has power over the sun.

5.6.2 The sun burning people

While no precedent for the sun burning people could be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, or the New Testament, leading to new insights on the background of the fourth bowl plague, two instances have been indicated where Philo refers to the sun as burning the earth. The first is Philo’s discussion on the Egyptian plague of locusts where he notes that the wind, carrying the locusts into Egypt, also causes the sun to scorch everything in its way. Therefore, it is possible that the plague of locusts plays an indirect role in the fourth bowl plague, but then as viewed by Philo (*Mos.* 1.120).

The second place where Philo refers to the sun’s ability to burn people, is in his discussion on the tower of Babel. Philo (*Conf.* 156-157) argues that the tower could not have

reached to the heavens as the people planned. That would have meant that they would have been burned by the sun because they would come too close to it. He does not explicitly say that God would actively have caused the sun to burn the people. Still it does not rule out the possibility of a connection here, because no other place in ancient Jewish literature could be found where the sun is said to burn people. On the other hand, when looking at *Conf.* 162, it appears as though Philo sees the sun burning the people as punishment for their attempt to reach up to God. He makes out a strong case that an attempt to transgress is just as bad as the transgression itself. Philo writes: "The punishment which he decrees against those 162 who 'build' up and weld together arguments for godlessness is indeed extreme, though perhaps some foolish people will imagine it to be beneficial rather than injurious."³¹⁹

The point Beale makes of the fourth bowl plague referring to economic suffering has been dismissed as there is no indication in the text that this is what is intended. It is, however, accepted that it is only the followers of the beast that are burned and not the saints as well, despite the text only saying that "the people" are burned.

5.6.3 The essence and function of fire

Fire is one of the four ancient elements of nature and is often referred to in this regard by Philo. It has been indicated that fire plays an important role throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, and also the New Testament, in a variety of contexts. The Exodus plague of hail is, for instance, connected to fire, as it was preceded by bolts of lightning which are called fire. This might also be echoed in the fourth bowl plague. Fire is furthermore used in the context of the sacrificial rituals. As previously stated, the purifying nature of fire is well attested in both the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the New Testament.

For the purpose of this study the most significant use of fire is the fairly common use of fire in relation to the anger of God and the punishment he gives. Sometimes it is a literal fire which burns those who oppose God and at other times it is a figurative way to refer to the anger of God. Often people who rebel against God would be burned by fire. Especially in the psalms the wrath of God is associated with fire. Ps 78 (LXX) is particularly important as it contains many connections to the bowl plagues. With regard to the fourth bowl plague, the important factor is the reference to the zeal of God as a burning fire. Although it is God's own people to whom the "fire" is directed, there is a strong plea for God's wrath to be redirected to the nations (ἔθνη). The theme of God punishing the enemies of his people for the bloodshed they have caused also features strongly in the psalm, which plays a definite role in the bowl plagues. It is furthermore worth noting that the glory of the Lord is in the salvation he brings

³¹⁹ Translation by Colson and Whitaker (1985:99).

about. One difference indicated in Psalm 78 (LXX) is that the suffering of God's people is deserved. In Revelation the suffering of the saints is underserved persecution, but the suffering of the followers of the beast is indeed deserved.

In the New Testament fire is also said to be used for punishment from God. In the gospels Jesus often warns that those who do not believe in Him will be subjected to a figurative fire while Jesus' disciples literally wanted to ask for fire to burn the Samaritans. The idea that God will burn those who oppose Him was thus well established among first century Christians. God is also said to be a consuming fire which is a warning to people to fear Him (Heb 12:29). The purifying function of fire is also attested in the New Testament, but it does not appear to play any role in the fourth bowl plague. The book of Revelation, however, is the book in the New Testament where fire is mentioned most frequently. Fire is used for punishment in quite a few instances, the focus being on the fact that fire is able to do great harm to people. However, nowhere is the fire said to be originating from the sun.

To conclude, it appears that, while fire was also known as something useful, it was mainly something frightening. Clearly the ancients knew well how destructive fire can be and therefore fire is mostly used to denote power and the ability to cause great destruction. In the hands of someone powerful like a god, it predicts doom for those who oppose the will of that god. Someone with fire in hand is someone powerful, and someone with power over fire is someone worth fearing. Once again one of the four ancient elements from Hellenistic thought is used by God to harm the people who hurt those who are faithful to Him.

5.6.4 Fire and angels

Something which no scholar thus far has explored in much detail is the connection to archangels in ancient literature. There are, however, two archangels, who were known to be connected to fire. The first is the fourth archangel in 1 Enoch, namely Michael who was apparently seen in the burning bush encountered by Moses. The other archangel, Uriel, was known as the flame of God in a tradition where fire was connected to the glory of God. He was the fourth archangel in three other ancient sources. The connection to fire and the glory of God both link to the fourth bowl plague as the fire burn the people with the expectation that they will give him glory. Taking all of the above mentioned into consideration, it is possible that one of these angels, particularly Uriel, was in John's mind in the fourth bowl plague.

5.6.5 The natural elements

The final point on the description of the effects of the fourth bowl plague which has been mentioned, is the link to the discussion of Philo on the elements of which the earth is made up of according to Hellenistic thought. It was shown that Philo sees the element of fire as being opposed to the element of air in the sense that fire is hot and air cold. From the discussion it can be concluded that there appears to be some strong correspondences between the element of fire in the fourth bowl plague and the element of fire in the way Philo understands it.

5.6.6 The reaction of the people

The people who are affected by the fourth bowl then react by cursing the name of God. It appears that they react to all four bowls which have thus far been poured out. Contrary to what some scholars think, it looks like they do acknowledge God as being responsible for the plagues, but they do not react in the correct way. Instead of giving glory to God they blaspheme the character of God, just as the beast did after all the earth marvelled at him in Rev 13:6. It is clear that their reaction is noted by John in the form of an accusation, rather than simply stating the facts. They did what Philo suggested the people should not do, namely, to worship the created, rather than the Creator. This relates to Rom 1 where Paul accuses some people of trading the glory of the eternal God for the worship images of mortal humans, birds, animals and creeping animals (εἰκόνας φθαρτοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πετεινῶν καὶ τετραπόδων καὶ ἔρπετων).

In the Exodus plague narrative, the Pharaoh also does not repent. However, his heart is said to be hardened by God. One of the functions of the Exodus plagues is therefore not just to get the Pharaoh to repent and set the Israelites free, but rather to demonstrate the great power of God and to instil fear in the Egyptians. As in Exodus, the outcome is not reached in the way planned and therefore the plagues continue. This appears to be in line with the way Philo saw God as a merciful God in the Exodus plagues. He keeps on giving people another chance to repent. Therefore, it has been established that the plague is not merely meant to punish people, but also to warn them to repent. By not killing them they are given another chance, even though they harden their hearts.

5.6.7 Contribution of this chapter

In this chapter it became clear that whilst no other scholar recognizes it, it does appear that there are strong connections to motifs similar to the works of Philo of Alexandria in the fourth bowl plague. These need to be recognized and to be taken into account.

Chapter 6: The fifth bowl plague (Rev 16:10-11)

6.1 Introduction

The fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast plunging his kingdom into darkness. The tone changes, as for the first time in the bowl plagues, the bowl is not poured out on one of the natural elements. Aim is taken at the throne of the beast and his followers carry the consequences of not repenting and stubbornly following the beast.

There are different views on where this plague fits into the larger structure of the bowl plagues. Some commentators argue that it introduces a new section in the bowl plague narrative,³²⁰ while to some it is the final plague in the series of the first five plagues.³²¹ There are also those who simply see the plague as part of a larger section within the bowl plagues.³²² Others argue that it is positioned between two larger sections. Gallusz (2014:219) summarizes his view on the place of the fifth bowl plague by arguing that it fits between two segments in the bowl plague narrative. The first segment in the narrative is the attack on the whole “created world” namely the land, sea, rivers and springs of water and air, which is executed by the outpouring of the first four bowl plagues. With the outpouring of the last two bowl plagues the focus turns in his view to the Armageddon and brings themes of the Exodus and the fall of Babylon as well as the theme of divine warfare into the narrative. The fifth bowl plague then strikes in the middle of the kingdom of the beast. The important point is that while this plague carries some of the themes of the previous bowl plagues forward, with the outpouring of the fifth bowl plague some new themes are also introduced.

In this chapter the background of the fifth bowl plague will be discussed in detail, taking into account as many texts, traditions and contexts which might play a role on the text as possible. In the first place the text of the bowl plague will be presented syntactically, after which the relationship to the Egyptian plague of darkness will be discussed, looking at the correspondences and differences. The plague itself will then be looked at in detail, exploring the meaning of the different words and phrases being used. Specific attention will be focused on the way in which these words are used in the LXX, the New Testament and other literature which was available in the first century. It will be indicated that there are texts which warrant attention when looking at the background of this plague and which have not been recognised

³²⁰ Cf. Giesen (1997:353).

³²¹ To Beale (1999:814) the first five bowl plagues are connected in as they all cause the followers of the beast to be deprived of “earthly security because of their persecution and idolatry”.

³²² To Blount (2009:299) this plague is part of the larger section comprising of the fourth to the sixth bowl plague.

by scholars yet. The first century Roman context will also be examined for clues. Possible links to the trumpet plagues have been identified and these will be discussed to see if any new insights can be gained. Finally, there will be a discussion on the influence of the ancient cosmology with regard to the four natural elements from ancient Greek thought and the idea of heaven and earth as well as the angelology.

6.2 The text of the fifth bowl plague

Greek text (Rev 16:10-11)³²³

¹⁰Καὶ ὁ πέμπτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον τοῦ θηρίου·

καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἐσκοτωμένη,

καὶ ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν

ἐκ τοῦ πόνου,

¹¹καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ

ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν

καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐλκῶν αὐτῶν,

καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν.

Translation

¹⁰And the fifth poured his bowl on the throne of the beast

and his kingdom became dark.

And they gnawed their tongues

because of the pain.

¹¹And they blasphemed the God of heaven

because of their pain

and because of their sores

and they did not repent from their deeds.

The text of the plague will be discussed in more depth later on in a section of this chapter. Firstly a comparison between the fifth bowl plague and the ninth Exodus plague will be done.

³²³ There are no significant text-critical considerations to take note of in these verses.

6.3 The Egyptian plague of darkness

This plague immediately reminds us of the Exodus plague of darkness since it is a plague about a kingdom being enveloped in darkness.³²⁴ The connections between the fifth bowl plague and the ninth of the ten plagues which hit Egypt, therefore need to be discussed to determine if these connections to the fifth bowl plague are strong enough to conclude that this bowl is mainly based on the ninth Egyptian plague as Beale (1999:823) argues.

6.3.1 The text of the Egyptian plague

The text of the Egyptian plague of darkness is found in Exod 10:21-23 (LXX).

²¹Εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν ᾿Εκτεινον τὴν χεῖρά σου εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ γενηθήτω σκότος ἐπὶ γῆν Αἰγύπτου, ψηλαφητὸν σκότος. ²²ἔξετεινεν δὲ Μωυσεῖς τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ ἐγένετο σκότος γνόφος θύελλα ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν Αἰγύπτου τρεῖς ἡμέρας, ²³καὶ οὐκ εἶδεν οὐδεὶς τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ τρεῖς ἡμέρας, καὶ οὐκ ἐξανέστη οὐδεὶς ἐκ τῆς κοίτης αὐτοῦ τρεῖς ἡμέρας· πᾶσι δὲ τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ ἦν φῶς ἐν πᾶσιν, οἷς κατεγίνοντο.

²¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt." ²²So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. ²³People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived.

6.3.2 Comparing the two plagues

6.3.2.1 Differences

The first difference, other than the different number in the sequence of plagues, is in the action that sets the plague into motion. In Exod 10, Moses stretches out his hand, assumingly to the heavens, and then darkness comes over the land. In Rev 16 an angel pours out a bowl, specifically on the throne of the beast which causes the kingdom of the beast to become dark.

³²⁴ Almost all commentators refer to the Egyptian plague of darkness as being partly at the background to the fifth bowl plague. Some, such as Ford (1975:272), even sees this plague as being based exclusively on the ninth Egyptian plague.

Another point of difference is the duration of the plagues. While the Exodus plague lasts for three days the darkness of there is no specifies duration mentioned of the fifth bowl plague. Clearly the focus in the bowl plague is very specifically on the intensity of the darkness and not on the duration.

The fifth bowl plague also differs from the ninth Exodus plague in the effect that it has on the people as it is more severe and the effect is not what one would expect. The effect on the Egyptians is the effect that one would expect darkness to have on people: they could not see so they could not move, causing distress. In Wis 17:1-18:4 the darkness is said to cause fear and terror among the Egyptians exactly for this reason. The fear and terror might have been connected to not being able to see any possible threat approaching them. Philo (*Mos.* 1.123) describes this darkness as a very thick darkness which even extinguished the light of fires and caused people to only move around with great effort when they needed to relieve themselves. The text of Exodus does not provide this much detail, but it does comment on the intensity of the darkness and describes it as ψηλαφητὸν σκότος (“a darkness that can be felt”). On the other hand, the fifth bowl plague is said to cause the people to gnash their tongues because of the pain. The phrase καὶ ἐμασῶντο τὰς γλώσσας αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ πόνου will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter in order to attempt why the darkness would cause pain, but for now it is sufficient to note that the darkness of the fifth bowl plague clearly has a different and more unexpected effect than the darkness of the ninth Egyptian plague.³²⁵

The final difference worth mentioning is also related to the reaction of the people. After the Exodus plague of darkness came over the kingdom of Egypt, the Pharaoh as ruler of the kingdom reacted on behalf of his people. After the throne of the beast was enveloped in darkness the people living in the kingdom reacted, but no reaction of the beast himself is noted. It is as if the beast simply observes his followers languishing in pain and does nothing to change the situation.

6.3.2.2 Correspondences

Having noted the differences between the two plagues, there are indeed some similarities worth mentioning. The first is that the two plagues are similar in scope. In the description of both plagues it is evident that they affect only the area they are aimed at and nothing more.

³²⁵ To Beale (1999:824) the darkness has a symbolic significance in that it caused people to experience great fear. This is both the case for the plague of darkness in Exodus and Revelation. The fear was mainly caused by the fact that they realized they were separated from God because of their own wickedness. However, in neither of the two plagues any specific mention is made about fear and this is therefore an assumption Beale makes without substantial evidence for it.

The darkness in Egypt came “over all the land of Egypt” and in Revelation only the kingdom of the beast is said to become dark. Unlike some other plagues, in the case of the Egyptian plague of darkness the people of God are not affected by this darkness. In the Egyptian plague this is made quite explicit by stating that the Israelites had light where they lived, but with the bowl plague it is only implied by the fact that it is specifically said that the kingdom of the beast became dark.

Secondly, in both instances the word γίνομαι is used in conjunction with σκότος. Ortlund and Beale (2013:227) notes that Exod 10:21-22 “is the only place in all of the Greek OT where the verb γίνομαι occurs with σκότος and is then followed by a reference to ‘over all the land’ (ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν).” Therefore, this correspondence is important.

Another possible correspondence is on a broader level. Beale (1999:823) notes that

the Egyptian plague was partly a polemic against the sun God Ra, of whom the Pharaoh was believed to be an incarnation. The plague came against the Pharaoh because of his disobedience to God’s command, his oppression of Israel and his allegiance to Egypt’s idolatrous system.

This is also the reason for the same plague which hit Rome. The Roman Emperor was linked to the god of light. In the previous chapter the cult of the Egyptian sun-god Ra has been discussed and strong possible links have been identified. Therefore, this is indeed a matter to take note of and which will be discussed in more depth later on in this chapter.

Sommer (2015:202) interprets the correspondence of the Exodus plague of darkness as a strong link to the “day of the Lord”-tradition, because darkness is often said to be one of the things that will take place on the day of the Lord.

6.3.3.3 De-creation

Ortlund and Beale (2013:228) make it clear that the Exodus plagues are a “de-creation” of what God created in the beginning and that the plague of darkness is then a “de-creation” of the light God created. Even though their goal is to draw lines between the three hours of darkness in Mark 15 and the Egyptian plague of darkness, the comments they make about the Egyptian plague of darkness are also of significance for the current study.

The matter of creation is, of course, a very important theme in the book of Revelation and specifically in the bowl plagues. When considering the theme of creation, the first passage that comes to mind is the description of the new heaven and the new earth, found towards the end of the book. The theme of creation is, however, already found in the opening chapters of

the book. In Rev 4:10 God is praised by the twenty-four elders as the creator of all things.³²⁶ Bauckham (1993 [2]:48) argues that the primary reason the people are expected to worship God and not the beast is because God is the one who created everything in the universe.

The focus is usually on preserving creation. A good example is Rev 11:18 where the twenty-four elders praise God for “destroying those who destroy the earth.” To Bauckham (1993 [2]:52), it is God’s care for creation that caused Him to take the strong action of destroying the people who were destroying the earth. He sees an allusion to the narrative of Noah and the flood in Rev 11:18. In the flood narrative God “determines to destroy, along with the earth itself, those who are corrupting the earth with their evil ways” (Bauckham, 1993 [2]:52). The waters which flooded the world are the “primeval waters of chaos or the waters of the abyss”. In Revelation, Bauckham (1993 [2]:53) finally argues that the waters of the sea are also a symbol for evil in the world from which the beast emerges before ultimately being killed. God does not allow another flood to destroy the earth, but rather removes the threat of evil by removing the sea from the appearance of the new heaven and earth. This is why there is no sea present when the new heaven and new earth appear (Bauckham, 1993 [2]:53).

As observed by Bauckham (1993 [2]:52), different parts of creation are employed by God in this action against the destroyers. God causes creation to hit back at those attempting to harm it. The bowl plagues are a prime example of this. It appears ironic that creation itself suffers in the process just like the creation itself suffered in the flood narrative in Genesis. However, creation is never totally destroyed along with the evil. After the destruction of the destroyers, creation is renewed.

6.3.3.4 Summary

From the short discussion above, it is clear that, while there are some correspondences between the Egyptian plague of darkness and the bowl plague which causes darkness, the differences are so strong that no direct similarities can be drawn between the two plagues other than the fact that both are plagues which cause darkness on the kingdom or land of an adversary of God. At best it might be that some of the wording of the Egyptian plague influenced the words used by the author of Revelation. The text of the fifth bowl plague will now be discussed in more depth to determine whether there are other clues to the background of this specific plague.

³²⁶ To Bauckham (1993 [2], 47-48) this is a very important characteristic of God in the book of Revelation.

6.4 Discussion of the fifth bowl plague

6.4.1 General

The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast³²⁷ and there came darkness over his whole kingdom. For the first time in the bowl plagues, it is not only those worshipping the beast who are affected. Now the beast himself is directly targeted.³²⁸ Van de Kamp (2002:360) argues that because the darkness is something the ruler of the kingdom has no control over, it means that the end of his kingdom is near. This punishment goes right into the heart of the kingdom of the enemy while the first four plagues have a more general effect.

The people who react to the punishment by biting their tongues, are the people living in the kingdom of the beast. Once again, they blaspheme God. While the reason the people blaspheme God after the fourth bowl is obvious and therefore not stated in the text, this time the reasons are explicitly noted, perhaps indicating that it is not that obvious. The reasons they blaspheme God is because of their pain and sores.³²⁹

They do not repent from their bad deeds/works.³³⁰ Decock (2007:44) sees the word ἔργον as a key word in the book of Revelation and argues that these works stand in contrast with the good works of the seven churches, which they are encouraged to continue with. To Beale (1999:825), this lack of repentance is final and cannot be undone. The followers of the

³²⁷ Aune (1998:889) notes that “many commentators think that ‘the throne of the beast’ refers to Rome.

³²⁸ Van de Kamp (2002:360) remarks that the last three bowl visions are aimed at the rulers of the guilty people. In his view the kingdom of the beast stretches across the whole world because his kingdom is everywhere he is worshipped. He furthermore argues that there are certain places where you can find a high concentration of people who are enemies of God and such a place can well be described as the throne of the beast. Pergamum is an example of a place called the throne of the Satan in Rev 2:13. To Beale (1999:824) this is exactly the idea behind the phrase “throne of the beast”. Beale (1999:823) further argues that “the bowl affects the beast’s ability to rule”. Koester (2014:649) agrees with this by noting that “this passage uses metonymy”.

³²⁹ Van de Kamp (2002:360) mentions a few arguments which have been put forward in previous research stating the potential reasons for the suffering these people endure. One possibility is the argument of some commentators that the darkness over Egypt was caused by a sandstorm which caused pain and sores. The other reason put forward is that the fifth trumpet mentions darkness because of smoke and scorpion stings Beale (1999:824). To van de Kamp, however, the reason for the suffering must be taken from the immediate context which is the previous bowl plagues causing suffering and sores.

³³⁰ To Van de Kamp the word “deeds” (ἔργα) is the keyword here. It points to the works of darkness.

beast have hardened their hearts and cannot repent anymore, just as the Pharaoh in Egypt hardened his heart without ever repenting.

6.4.2 The plague of darkness as a covenantal judgement

Before looking at the specific phrases and words used in the description of the fifth bowl plague, one broader matter has to be looked at briefly, which is raised by one commentator. In his discussion on the fourth trumpet, where a form of darkness is implied by the darkening of a third of the celestial bodies, Beale (1999:483) discusses what he calls a covenantal judgement. In Jer 31:35-36 and Jer 33:20-21, 25-26 it is said that only when the celestial bodies stop functioning, or do not function at their expected times, will the Lord end the covenant with his people. Even though this functions as a reassurance in Jeremiah, Beale (1999:483) still argues that the darkening of the celestial bodies in the Old Testament is mostly related to the covenant people forsaking their covenant responsibilities. He bases this view largely on Jewish interpretation of the Old Testament. If God's people do not obey the covenant laws, the consequence will be destruction of creation and darkening of the heavenly lights. The world, he argues, was made for Israel and therefore the destruction of the world will have a big impact on them.

Beale (1999:483) then proceeds to indicate how the same goes for the nations. The world was created for everyone who is in the world and therefore the nations will be punished in the same way. He notes a few passages from the Old Testament and other Jewish literature which provides confirmation of his view on this. In his words "these passages also assert that God alters the fixed patterns of sun, moon and stars to indicate judgement on those who have wrongly altered his moral patterns, especially through idolatry". All these passages indicate why God would change the natural order of creation. In the view of Beale, the consequence would therefore be that the plagues related to darkness in Revelation are also covenantal judgments. While this is an interesting proposal, it did not attract much interest from other scholars, probably because of the fact that the covenant is in the Old Testament an exclusive covenant which the Lord had with his people. Other nations get punished not because they breach the covenant, but rather because they threaten and harm the people with whom YHWH has a covenant and destroy what He has created. This whole matter strongly connects to the earlier discussion in this chapter on de-creation where it was noted that creation itself is employed in the retaliation against its destructors. Creation is finally renewed after all evil has been abolished. This, however, does not imply a form of a "covenantal judgement" on the followers of the beast.

The most significant words and phrases in the description of the fifth bowl plague will now be discussed.

6.4.3 *Stichwörter* and key phrases

6.4.3.1 ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον³³¹ τοῦ θηρίου³³² – “on the throne of the beast”

a. Introduction

The throne of the beast might be his headquarters, or it might refer to the whole area of his rule.³³³ Beale (1999:823) argues that the throne “represents the beast’s sovereignty over his realm”. To him the direct effect is that the beast’s ability to rule is hampered. Koester (2014:655) sees the throne of the beast as the centre of his kingdom. In the view of Gallusz (2014:221) the throne is a symbol of the power of the beast, as the fifth bowl plague is “the first judgment in Revelation which attacks directly the power of the beast.” Wong (2003:337-338) argues that the beast from the sea is both a man and an empire. The beast is a man in that he is a person who is worshiped, and an empire in that he represents the whole empire over which he reigns. He compares the beast from the sea to the Lamb and sees some parallels between the two.

b. The use of the word θρόνος in the Jewish literature³³⁴

In the Hebrew Scriptures the throne can refer to the literal seat of the king, but it is generally used symbolically and is usually seen as the centre of the rule of a kingdom.³³⁵ The greatness of a certain king’s throne is sometimes used symbolically for the amount of power he has.³³⁶ When a throne is said to last forever, it can also refer to the reign of his descendants. In Ps

³³¹ On the specific meaning of the word Gallusz (2013:77) notes that the word θρόνος is linguistically connected to the word θρῆνυς meaning “footstool” and θρᾶνος meaning “bench”.

³³² Wong (2003:339) notes that the word θηρίον is always used “with reference to the Antichrist”.

³³³ To Blount (2009:301) this throne is most definitely a reference to the city of Rome.

³³⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on the concept of the throne in the Old Testament, see Gallusz (2014:21-51). He concludes that the throne basically has five theological connotations in the Old Testament. For this study it is not necessary to go in detail into this as the main focus is on the throne of the adversary of God and the focus of Gallusz is specifically on the throne of God.

³³⁵ Gen 41:40, 1 Kings 1:46.

³³⁶ For example in 1 Kings 1:37, 47 Benaiah wishes for king Saul to have a bigger kingdom than king David had. Ps 88:30 (LXX) is a prayer that the descendants of David will rule forever and his throne endures as long as the heavens.

102:19 (LXX) the throne of the Lord is said to be in heaven and his kingdom reigns everywhere. The throne appears to be the centre of His reign.³³⁷

Whilst the throne of David refers to his earthly reign in Jerusalem, the throne of the Lord is said to be in his holy temple and in heaven according to Ps 10:4 (LXX). In Isa 66:1 the Lord says through the prophet that his throne is in heaven and the earth is his footstool.³³⁸ The throne of God is also forever. In Jer 3:17 it is prophesied that there comes a time when God's people will return and that Jerusalem will be called *θρόνος κυρίου* (the throne of the Lord). The effect will be that all nations will gather in Jerusalem. This reminds us of the vision of the new Jerusalem at the end of the book of Revelation. In Ps 93:20 (LXX) the psalmist calls the source of his persecution the *θρόνος ἀνομίας* (throne of lawlessness). He clearly sees those who are against him as rulers who have no regard for the law.

A very fascinating description of a throne is found in the long vision in Ezek 1 which centres around four living creatures who have a firmament above their heads with a throne above that firmament and someone looking like a human sitting on the throne.³³⁹ In other places in the book of Revelation there might be strong allusions to this text, but most probably not in the description of the fifth bowl plague as the throne here is obviously a throne on the earth.

It is clear that in the Jewish scriptures the throne is generally not so much the literal seat of the king, but rather a symbolic way to refer to the centre of the reign of a particular power or king. Most often it refers to the centre of the rule of YHWH or the kings of Israel. In apocalyptic literature that throne is set in heaven.³⁴⁰ There are not many references to the thrones of the adversaries of the people of God in the Jewish Scriptures.

Philo (*Congr.* 118) refers to a throne of an adversary of God's people when he writes about the ten plagues with which God punished Egypt. He notes specifically the throne along with the sceptre and diadem as symbols of the reign of a king. According to the text, the

³³⁷ It has to be noted that in the psalms there are quite a few references to the throne of David. This makes sense as the reign of David was very important for the ancient Israelites.

³³⁸ Gallusz (2014:29) calls the throne in heaven "the ultimate extension of Yahweh's throne in the Old Testament." He argues that the meaning of this expression is probably to show how wide the reign of Yahweh is. It is so big, that the earth is but his footstool.

³³⁹ To Gallusz (2014:31) this is a very important throne vision as it is the longest and has the biggest influence. The other matter which makes it peculiar for Gallusz is the fact that it is the only place where the throne is said to be moving.

³⁴⁰ An interesting throne vision which is discussed by Collins (1999:53-54) is the throne vision in the Book of the Watchers where a high throne is seen with rivers of burning fire flowing under it. This is of course the throne of God and this throne is in heaven.

Egyptians allocated these symbols to the mind, instead of acknowledging God as King. To Philo this is clearly an arrogant attempt to set the mind in opposition to God, which is confirmed by the fact that the mind, taking the place as king to the Egyptian people, is called ἀντίθεον. It is very interesting that the beast in the book of Revelation is referred to as the antichrist.

c. The use of θρόνος in Graeco-Roman literature

There is no space for a detailed examination of the word θρόνος in ancient Graeco-Roman literature.³⁴¹ For the purposes of this study it will suffice to note the four meanings Gallusz (2014:77-94) sees as being attached to θρόνος in Graeco-Roman literature. Firstly, he sees it as an emblem of power. Secondly, he notes that it has significant dignity. In the third instance a place of revelation, petitions, worship and commissioning. Lastly, the throne was seen as a figurative for the rule of a king. All these facets appear to be behind the throne of the beast of Revelation.³⁴²

d. The use of θρόνος in the New Testament

The throne written about most often in the New Testament, is the throne of God which is directly linked to the reign of Jesus in the gospels. The word θρόνος does not appear in either the gospel of Mark or John. In Matthew and Luke, the throne is almost exclusively used to refer to the reign of God or Jesus with the exception of one place, which is in the Magnificat where Mary praises God for overthrowing the thrones of rulers. This is obviously a reference to the rulers of the earth and their power.

The notion that God's throne is in heaven is taken up by the gospel of Matthew where Jesus tells those listening to Him not to swear by the heaven as it is the throne of God (Matt 5:34).³⁴³ In Matt. 25:31 it states that when the Son of Man comes in his glory with the angels, He will go and sit on his throne. There the throne is the place from where He will deliver his final judgement on the people. Stephen, in Acts 7:49, also refers to Isa 66:1 in his speech where the throne of God is said to be in heaven and the earth his footstool, thereby indicating his conviction that Jesus is the ruler in heaven.

³⁴¹ For a detailed discussion refer to Gallusz (2014:77-94).

³⁴² Cf. Koester (2014:649) remarks that the throne "signifies the beast's power to rule".

³⁴³ The earth is said to be his footstool. This verse is an allusion to Isa 66:1. Almost the same idea is found in Matt 23:21-22 where Jesus says that that he who swears at the temple also swears by Him who lives in it and "he who swears by the heaven swears by the throne of God and Him who sits on it."

The earthly reign of Jesus is depicted in Luke where He is said to take up the throne of David. For instance, in Luke 1:32 the angel says to Mary that the son she will give birth to will inherit the throne of David. This reign is to be shared with the disciples. Jesus says in Luke 22:30 to his disciples that He will give them a kingdom as the Father gave Him a kingdom. Similarly, in his speech in Acts 2 Peter refers to the throne of David which was promised to one of his descendants. Col 1:16 says that all things, including all thrones or rulers or powers, are created by God and for the invisible God. Hebrews, with its high Christology, refers a few times to the throne of Jesus and depicts Him as the great King.³⁴⁴

One important thing to consider from the discussion thus far is that in the New Testament, aside from Revelation, the concept of a throne is almost exclusively linked to Christ's dominion. No thrones of people or powers other than that of God/Jesus is mentioned, especially not thrones of those opposing God.

Finally when considering the book of Revelation it should first of all be emphasised that it is the book in the Bible where the word *θρόνος* appears most often. The throne referred to is usually the throne of God and Christ. The throne of God is the place of ultimate authority and the only throne which stays standing. However, as identified earlier in this chapter, other thrones are also mentioned. Among these are the throne of Satan,³⁴⁵ the thrones of the twenty-four elders,³⁴⁶ the beast,³⁴⁷ and those who were given authority to judge.³⁴⁸ There are only two direct references to the throne of the beast. The first is in Rev 13:2 where it is said that the dragon gave the beast its power, throne and great authority and the second is in Rev 16:10 which is discussed here. Therefore, the throne of the beast is mentioned firstly when it is established, and secondly when it comes under direct attack. It is important to consider that thrones linked to God are always in heaven while the thrones of God's adversaries are on earth.³⁴⁹ According to Rev 13 the beast came out of the sea, implicitly onto the land, and then his throne was given to him. This will be discussed in further detail later in the chapter, but it is an important point to take note of. What is also interesting is that even though the bowl is

³⁴⁴ Heb 1:8; 4:16; 8:1; 12:2. In Heb 4:16 the throne is called "the throne of grace".

³⁴⁵ The throne of Satan is said to be in Pergamum in Rev 2:13.

³⁴⁶ Rev 11:16.

³⁴⁷ Rev 13:2; 16:10.

³⁴⁸ Rev 20:4.

³⁴⁹ Beale (1999:824) identifies strong links between the throne of the beast and the throne of Satan in Rev 2:13. He notes that Pergamum was the centre of Roman government and the imperial cult and this is the reason it is called the throne of Satan. Koester (2014:649) agrees by stating that "John's readers would have seen the beast's throne in Roman imperial authority". Gallusz (2014:205) confirms this point and his conclusion from his own research into the significance of Pergamum indicates "Pergamon enjoyed a status of eminence as a significant centre, both in civic and religious realms."

poured out on the throne of the beast, nothing is said about the consequences for the beast himself. His kingdom might be plunged in darkness (which will be discussed in the following sections), but that only leads to his followers reacting to their pain. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this is contrary to the Exodus plague of darkness where the Pharaoh reacted to the darkness and called Moses and pleaded with him to make the darkness go away. The beast appears to be a passive spectator of these events. While his followers experience pain, the beast himself appears to be unaffected by the darkness on his kingdom.

e. Summary

It is clear that throughout the Scriptures, thrones are linked to authority and power, especially the throne of God and also to the those ruling over the people of God (most often the kings of Israel). The throne is the place from where the authority of a ruler is exercised. A throne is often specifically linked to judgement, and people appearing before a throne are usually there to be judged for their deeds. The pouring out of the bowl on the throne is therefore an action against the ruling and judging authority of the beast.³⁵⁰ The debilitating effect of the judgement on his throne might be the reason for his passiveness as he is being judged.

6.4.3.2 καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ ἔσκοτωμένη – and his kingdom became dark

The direct consequence of the pouring out of the fifth bowl is that the kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness. When noting the kingdom, John clearly refers to the wider area around the throne, being the wider area of the influence of the beast. The fact that the bowl is poured out only on the throne, but causes all of the kingdom to be plunged into darkness, is an indication that everything affecting the beast also affects all of his subjects.

As already indicated, the mention of a plague causing darkness immediately brings the Egyptian plague of darkness to mind. However, it has been indicated that there are many inconsistencies between the Egyptian plague of darkness and the bowl plague of darkness. The idea of darkness will therefore have to be explored in more depth as it is used in ancient literature to see what other influences might be at play here. Indeed, the concept of darkness and light as its opposite, are found widely in the Hebrew Scriptures and it is clear that both

³⁵⁰ To Blount (2009:301) it is most definitely Rome, the centre of the Roman empire, which is in view here. Beale (1999:823) also implies this.

light itself and the sources of light were created and controlled by God.³⁵¹ In the creation narrative their function is partly to convey the natural order established by God.

In the New Testament an important instance where darkness came over the land was with Jesus's crucifixion. In Mark 15:33 it is said that there was three hours of darkness as Jesus hung on the cross. The darkness is clearly a divine reaction to what is happening with Jesus on the cross. To determine the background of this text is difficult as there are many different possibilities.³⁵² One important context is strongly argued for by Ortlund and Beale (2013:224), namely the context of the Old Testament background.³⁵³ In this context the trajectory of thought about light and darkness starts at Gen 1. Significantly for the current study, Ortlund and Beale (2013:224) add a facet to their interpretation of this text which no other scholars mention in their interpretation, namely the eschatological facet according to which the darkness also indicates renewal at the end of time. They see this text as part of the Old Testament trajectory which started in Gen 1, but they also argue that the three-hour period of darkness with Jesus' crucifixion as "inaugurating the latter-day new creation".³⁵⁴ In their exposition of the passage in Mark, Ortlund and Beale (2013) provide a good outline of the theme of darkness in the Old Testament. Their exposition will be used as a guideline to discuss the theme of darkness in the Jewish Scriptures. In the first instance they indicate how light was never just natural light in Jewish literature, but it was rather the light of YHWH on his people which was something very personal (Ortlund and Beale, 2013:225). In Genesis the light was created before the celestial bodies, which also implies that the celestial bodies were not seen as giving any light of their own, they simply reflected the light which was created earlier, a type of cosmic light radiating from God himself. This light was a symbolic light, which as Philo (*Opif.* 33) notes, was a light which could be perceived by the intellect and it was in opposition to the

³⁵¹ Achtemeier (1963:439-440) notes that while the celestial bodies, which were seen as giving light, were worshipped by some ancient people in the Hebrew Scriptures they were "intended solely as instruments of God".

³⁵² Ortlund and Beale (2013:223) point to the argument that the Greco-Roman context might play a role here in that darkness was associated with the death of an important ruler. Van Bruggen (2007:379) agrees and adds that the darkness might also have indicated that creation mourns the death of the Son of God or judgement on those who killed Jesus. Stein (2008:715) also mentions the first century context and argues that the very real darkness experienced by the people on that day points to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD.

³⁵³ They see this text as taking up what they call "a biblical theological trajectory of darkness and light throughout the OT".

³⁵⁴ The notion that the darkness points to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem is in their opinion still too narrow in its eschatological outlook.

darkness. To Philo this is the reason why God created a strong division between the light and the darkness.

This fact that light is given to the people of God can also be seen in the Exodus events where the Israelites have light while the whole of Egypt is engulfed in a thick darkness, which even darkened the fires of the Egyptians. Philo (*Mos.* 1.123) appears to interpret this darkness as a very literal darkness which impaired the ability of the Egyptians to see.³⁵⁵ It is also light from God, guiding Israel through the wilderness in Exod 13:12. The Egyptian cult of the sun-god Ra has been discussed in the previous chapter where the sun is mentioned explicitly. As noted, there are indications that the Roman emperor was also linked to this sun-god. He was therefore probably known as someone who provided symbolic light to all of the Empire just as the Pharaoh as son of Ra gave light to Egypt. In Exodus the plague of darkness is therefore probably also an indication that the light actually comes from the God of Israel and not the Pharaoh. This opens up the possibility that the bowl plague of darkness also implies that the Roman emperor was incapacitated and inhibited in his ability to provide light to his kingdom. God is therefore the sole provider of light and the only one who controls it. People who obey Him and worship Him are said to be in the light in many instances in ancient literature. One example is found in the Odes of Solomon 11:18-19: "And I said, Blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in Your land, and who have a place in Your Paradise and who grow in the growth of Your trees, and have passed from darkness into light." Another example is Isa 42:6-7 where God sends his light to the nations, thereby indicating the conversion of the nations.³⁵⁶ Philo (*Virt.* 179) calls the people who did not previously worship God, but later on had a change of heart to be "people who were blind, but came out from the darkness to the light".³⁵⁷

Ortlund and Beale (2013:225) furthermore point out that in many prophetic texts light and darkness are connected to moral categories. For instance, in Isa 51:4 YHWH says that his justice is light to his people.³⁵⁸ Linking to this, the Torah is said to be the light.³⁵⁹ People who

³⁵⁵ It appears as though he sees the darkness as caused by a storm with dark clouds.

³⁵⁶ Gaventa (1987:85) sees a possible connection between this text and the conversion of Paul. She argues that people who hear the gospel turn from darkness to light.

³⁵⁷ Gaventa (1987:87) calls all of this "stereotypical conversion language".

³⁵⁸ The same connection is made in texts such as Hos 6:5 and Mic 7:9.

³⁵⁹ Refer for instance to the well-known Ps 119 and Ps 130. Philo (*Leg.* 3.171) also says that the divine word is the brightest thing in the world. He also equates having knowledge to being in light and that being without knowledge is being in total dense darkness (Philo, *Ebr.* 157).

are living in the justice of God and accepting the law of God, are therefore in the light.³⁶⁰ On the opposite side Philo (*Leg.* 3.7) says that the wicked are in darkness without the light of God in him.³⁶¹ In this regard Berger (2017:1153) sees a link to Isa 8:21 and notes that “die Finsternis über dem Königreich ist nicht nur physisch, sondern sicher auch metaphorisch zu verstehen”.

Job 12:24-25 is a good example of the view that darkness is linked to confusion of the mind which causes wicked people to stumble around, not knowing where to go. The text of the LXX is translated as saying:

Changing the hearts of earthly rulers, he made them wander by a way that they did not know: ‘May they grope in the dark without light, and may they wander about like a drunkard.’³⁶²

This text might be echoed in the fifth bowl plague. It is an important text to take into consideration in this discussion as it speaks about the confusion of the hearts of the ἀρχόντων γῆς (the rulers of the earth). The light from God is taken away from the rulers of the earth causing them to “feel around in the dark”. The Greek word for “feel” is derived from the same word used in Exod 10:21 where the darkness is described as a darkness which can be felt.³⁶³ What is important is the connection to the rulers *of the earth*, because the rule of the beast is strongly linked to the earth in the book of Revelation.³⁶⁴ Contrary to this, God promises to provide light for the people who acknowledge Him as Ruler and by implication he will therefore make sure that they do not stumble.³⁶⁵

Another aspect of darkness, which is more a literal aspect of darkness, is that darkness is known as the time when thieves conduct their evil deeds as they are then concealed by darkness.³⁶⁶ Obviously this is not the same thick darkness of the Egyptian plague where no-

³⁶⁰ Philo (*Spec.* 1.54) notes that “they (the gentiles) have abandoned their most vital duty, their service in the ranks of piety and religion, have chosen darkness in preference to the brightest light and blindfolded the mind which had the power of keen vision.”

³⁶¹ He says that “in the bad man the true opinion concerning God is hidden in obscurity, for he is full of darkness with no divine radiance in him.”

³⁶² New English Translation of the Septuagint.

³⁶³ This same use of words is also found in Deut 28:29, but there it is used in within the summary of the Egyptian plagues, unlike with Job 12:24-25 there is no direct mention of the rulers of the earth.

³⁶⁴ The strong links between the beast and the earth will be highlighted later in this chapter.

³⁶⁵ The concept of light and the clearing of the way for the people are often linked in the Hebrew Scriptures. See for instance Isa 42:16.

³⁶⁶ Cf. for instance Philo (*Spec.* 4.7).

one was able to move, but the normal darkness of night. In John 3:19-20, this literal sense of darkness being the place where thieves are at work, is applied in a symbolic way to the people who do evil deeds.³⁶⁷ These people are said to remain in the dark in order to hide their evil deeds. However, in the description of the fifth bowl plague the beast and his followers do not enter the dark voluntarily. The darkness is not a comfortable place for them, but rather causes pain and anguish.

Ortlund and Beale (2013:226) summarize the general idea of darkness in the Hebrew Scriptures with an important observation:

This motif of light, moreover, is not abstract brightness but deeply Personal—its true source is the radiant luminosity of the face of God himself (Num. 6:25-26; Ps. 4:6; 34:5; 80:3, 7, 19; 89:15; cf. Ps. 27:1; ML 7:8), reflected on the face of his servants (Exod. 34:29-35; Dan. 10:8; cf. Prov. 4:18; Isa. 60:5; Jer. 31:12; cf. 4 Esd. 7:97) and ultimately of his Son (Mark. 9:3; 2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3; Rev 1:16), the light of the world (John 8:12; cf. T. Levi 18:4).

Darkness was also connected to the “day of YHWH” as Koester (2014:650) correctly points out. For instance, in Joel 2 where the large army of the Lord is said to come over the land and destroy it, it is said that the sun and moon grow dark and the stars fade. Similarly, in Zeph 1:15 the day of YHWH is described as a day of darkness. In this same line of thought Koester (2014:650) mentions that in Greco-Roman sources “the unusual onset of darkness, commonly by an eclipse of the sun or the moon, was a sign or divine wrath, warning people of disaster and calling for reconciliation with the Gods.” In Isa 8:19-22 darkness and gloom is promised as punishment to those who seek counsel of other gods.³⁶⁸ The difference with the darkness in Rev. 16 is that this darkness on people is not caused by their own deity. Still the idea of a warning to reconcile, might be at play in this text, especially when taking into account the phrase “all nations will come and worship before you” in the song in Rev 15:4 and the emphasis in the bowl plagues that those who were hit by it did not repent.

Taking all of the above into account, it is clear that darkness in this context is not a literal darkness, but rather a figurative darkness where the light of God is cut off from the people causing all sorts of negative effects. Koester (2014:656) concludes that the darkness shows

³⁶⁷ Gaventa (1987:137) understands by this that John is using the dualism of light and darkness to draw a “sharp distinction between those who have new life and those who do not also have an ethical component.”

³⁶⁸ Blount (2009:301) places special emphasis on this text in his discussion on the fifth bowl plague. To him the darkness marks the end of the beast’s reign.

God's power over the beast and he describes the darkness as a type of prison, because it limits the movements of the beast.

6.4.3.3 καὶ ἔμασῶντο τὰς γλῶσσας– and they gnawed their tongues

According to the dictionary of Liddell and Scott (1940:1082), the word μασάομαι means “chew”. This is also the way most translations translate the word. The phrase ἔμασῶντο τὰς γλῶσσας, however, appears to be a fixed idiom and is a unique phrase that only occurs in this place in both the LXX and the New Testament. In fact, Rev 16:10 is the only place in the New Testament where the word μασάομαι is found. It also appears that the word is used only once in the LXX, namely in Job 30:4 (LXX) where it is used to denote the gnawing of roots by people who were very hungry.³⁶⁹ The closest parallel to this phrase in both the LXX and the New Testament is probably the well-known gnashing of teeth which will take place in the eternal fire where the lost will go after the final judgement.³⁷⁰ This is mentioned more than once in the gospel of Matthew and once in Luke, but nowhere else in the gospels or the rest of the New Testament. However, in all these instances the word βρυγμός is used and not μασάομαι. Where it does correspond, is that the thrashing of teeth is also linked to extreme pain which is caused by the judgement people receives.³⁷¹

With no other direct parallels, it can only be deduced from the context that in the first century it was commonly known that extreme pain, like the pain produced by burning in fire, caused people to gnaw on their tongues like they also gnashed their teeth.³⁷²

6.4.4.4 αὐτῶν ἕκ τοῦ πόνου - because of the pain

The reason these people gnaw their tongues is because of the pain, as clearly noted in the text. As stated earlier in the chapter, it is unusual that darkness causes pain.³⁷³ Admittedly

³⁶⁹ Cf. Mounce (1998:297).

³⁷⁰ See Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28.

³⁷¹ Koester (2014:649) argues that this gnawing of tongues is analogous to the thrashing of teeth in Matthew exactly because of this.

³⁷² Ford (1975:272), who accepts that this plague is based on the plague of darkness in Egypt, suggests that this is an indication that the anguish caused by the fifth bowl plague was much worse than the pain caused by the ninth Egyptian plague.

³⁷³ Aune (1998:890) most clearly expresses this point by noting that “there is an inconsistency in the text in that there is no evident connection between darkness and the experience of pain and sores.” Many different ideas have been proposed to understand why the darkness would cause pain, some

πρόνος might simply refer to suffering or discomfort in general which can easily be attributed to darkness, and not necessarily intense physical or emotional torment for which another reason needs to be found. However, the fact that this πρόνος causes the people to gnaw their tongues, indicates that the pain is of great intensity. For this reason, most commentators agree that this pain is probably not just caused by the darkness, but by the first four plagues with which the people have thus far been struck before this one.³⁷⁴ Especially the sores of the first bowl plague and the burns of the fourth bowl plague obviously caused pain. The second plague might also cause pain of thirst. The additional mention of pain in verse 11 probably provides a clue that there is some truth in this because the people are said to curse God because of “the pain and the sores”. The pain is therefore linked to the sores. This view is strongly argued for by Giesen (1997:355) who claims that the pain caused by the sores becomes unbearable in the dark.³⁷⁵

Beale (1999:824) provides a few possibilities on what the source of the pain might be. Firstly, noting Wis 17:21, he argues that the Egyptians suffered spiritual pain because the darkness made them reflect on their own “wretchedness”. In his view this same pain is also felt by the followers of the beast because of the darkness which came over them. The darkness reminds them strongly that they are separated from God.³⁷⁶ Some traditions taken up by New Testament authors, like John did, link God with light, therefore, the absence of light meant the absence of God. These traditions might indeed be at play to some extent here. Beale (1999:824) also suggests the possibility that the pain might be caused by the scorpions from the fifth trumpet plague as “the darkening of the fifth trumpet woe also led to spiritual and psychological torment”.³⁷⁷ Furthermore, he notes that the darkness “may also be linked to the removal of some forms of earthly security, which causes the wicked to focus on their lack of

more convincing and others less so. One of the less convincing proposals is that of Charles as discussed by Mounce (1998:297) who argues that some lines of the text have been lost in the process of copying. These lines supposedly contained more detail as to what exactly caused this pain. Even though this proposal is unsubstantiated, Wikenhauser (1966:148) notes that according to some scholars the text of this plague is damaged. To Blount (2009:301), however, darkness causing pain and distress has some Old Testament precedent and he notes specifically Isa 8:19-22 where darkness is connected to anguish and gloom.

³⁷⁴ To Koester (2014:649) it is very obvious, while Aune (1998:890) mentions it as a possibility.

³⁷⁵ The view is supported by Bette, van den Brink and Zwiép (2000:329) as well as van de Kamp (2002:360). See also Beckwith (1967:681).

³⁷⁶ This view is based on the arguments put forward by Ford (1975:272) and also by Sweet (1990:246).

³⁷⁷ While it is an argument supported by Beckwith (1967:681), Giesen (1997:355) does not agree and states that this reason is highly improbable.

spiritual security.”³⁷⁸ All of these arguments appear to have merit, but none received any wide acceptance among later scholars.

It is clear that there is no final agreement on the source of the pain among scholars, but taking everything into account, it appears that the most likely reason for the pain is the effect of the first four plagues collectively, which is intensified by the darkness. Creation is once again used by God to inflict pain on the people who inflict pain on those faithful to God.

6.4.4.5 καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν - and they blasphemed

The reaction of the people suffering the consequences of this bowl is the same as the reaction to the previous bowl: they curse God instead of repenting. The followers of the beast continue to follow the example of their master by blaspheming God. In Rev 13:5 the beast is given a mouth to utter blasphemous things and in Rev 13:6 it is said that he utters blasphemies against the name of God and his dwelling which is the people living in heaven.

The difference with the blasphemy uttered after the previous bowl plague, is that they are said to curse “the God of heaven” while after the fourth plague they curse “the God who had authority over these plagues”. Parallel with the reaction to the fourth plague, the implication is that they acknowledge that the God of heaven is the God responsible for these plagues. It is ironic that their reason for cursing God is exactly the reason why they should actually give Him glory. The pain is a warning to give glory to God and stop following the beast. However, these people are stubborn and rather curse God.

6.4.4.6 τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ - the God of the heaven

The mention of the God of heaven (τὸν θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) is significant here. The word οὐρανός is a word loaded with meaning. Mentioned together with angels it has even more significance. It might merely refer to the majesty of God as Morris (1989:190) argues, but there is probably more behind it. Mounce (1998:297) mentions the possibility that it alludes to Dan 2:44 (LXX), which reads as follows: “And in the times of these kings the God of heaven will set up another kingdom that will be forever and will not be corrupted. And this kingdom will never permit another nation, but it will crush and abolish those kingdoms, and it will stand forever”.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ It has been noted that Philo (*Mos.* 1.123) sees the darkness as causing the people of Egypt not to be able to move. He specifically notes that they were not able to eat anything. However, it looks like the removal of earthly securities noted by Beale implies a longer lasting problem and not just three days of hunger.

³⁷⁹ Translation: NETS.

Whether the author of Revelation intentionally alluded to this specific text when mentioning the “God of heaven” is impossible to determine with accuracy. However, it is probable that the text in Daniel reflects the ancient cosmology on the different levels of heaven and God living in heaven, specifically the seventh heaven.

While God is the God of heaven, and therefore ruler of heaven, the beast was ruler over the earth and was hence seen as the god of the earth. The idea is specifically substantiated by the fact that the second beast forced the earth and those living in it to worship the first beast (καὶ ποιεῖ τὴν γῆν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ κατοικοῦντας ἵνα προσκυνήσουσιν τὸ θηρίον τὸ πρῶτον - Rev 13:12). It is even more significant that in the same verse the mortal wound of the first beast is said to have been healed (οὗ ἔθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ) and this wound is called a “plague”. Furthermore, the second beast even deceived the people into making an image for the first beast (Rev 13:14). The links between Rev 16:10 and Rev 13:12 are therefore quite strong, clearly emphasising that the reign of the beast is on the earth while the reign of God is in the heaven. The significance of the fact that the beast’s reign is on earth will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.4.4.7 ἐκ τῶν πόνων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑλκῶν αὐτῶν - because of their pain and the sores

This is a confirmation that the pain is primarily caused by the sores from the first plague.³⁸⁰ It further indicates that these plagues follow on each other and are not seemingly isolated like the Egyptian plagues. Although it seems like the Egyptian plagues took place in quick succession, it appears that memories are the only thing left by the time the Egyptians are hit by another plague. No reference is made to the damage of one plague building on another, and the damage caused by each plague appears to be recovered by the time the next plague strikes the land. However, with the bowl plagues it is a different situation. The pain inflicted by the harm of the first plague is evidently still present by the time the fifth plague strikes. Therefore, these plagues progressively cause more harm and systematically break down the resistance of the beast and his followers.

³⁸⁰ Sommer (2015:190) indicates what he calls a “dreiteiligen Schemas” where three parallel phrases occur in Rev 16:9 and Rev 16:10c-11. To him this strongly connects the sores with the blasphemy.

6.4.4.8 καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῶν – and they did not repent of their deeds

After the fourth bowl plague, the accusation is also that the followers of the beast did not repent, but in that instance it is said that they did not repent *and give God the glory He is due*. In this instance it is simply said that they did not repent from their deeds.³⁸¹ It is not explicitly stated what these deeds were, but it is probably the acts they did out of obedience to the beast. These acts would include the shedding of the blood of the saints, mentioned by the angel of the waters after the outpouring of the third bowl plague. The pain they suffer is the just punishment for their deeds, and their persistence in cursing God and refusal to repent, confirms this. It could possibly include those deeds mentioned in Rev 9:20, which basically consists of idolatry.³⁸²

The evil and harmful deeds of the wicked may also be in opposition to the deeds of God which are said to be great and wonderful (Rev 15:3). In his discussion on the universalistic statement in Rev 15:4, Blount (2009:288) states that to fear God is a choice one has to make and anyone who chooses to fear God “is rewarded with an eschatological relationship with God; anyone who fights God is judged by God’s wrath”. The people struck by these bowl plagues chose not to fear God and therefore had to carry the consequences of their choice. They are blinded by the beast to such an extent that they could not see how wonderful the deeds of God are and therefore they are the answer to the rhetorical question posed in Rev 15:4: “Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?” They answer: “We will not.” Even though all nations will come and worship before God, these people will not.³⁸³

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Beale (1999:825) is of the opinion that the followers of the beast now have no opportunities for repentance left. Koester (2014:692) does not agree with this and states that “the beast’s allies do not repent, but Revelation does not preclude repentance as a possibility”. The question, once again, comes down to whether the bowl plagues are warnings or judgements? There is a valid argument to be made that the plagues are warnings. By noting that the followers of the beast did not repent, the author implies that the bowl plague were meant to cause repentance, just as the plagues in Egypt were meant to cause the Pharaoh to give in to the command of God to let the Israelites go.

³⁸¹ Beale (1999:825) mentions that with this they lost their final chance to turn to God. This refusal to repent is final and “irremediable”. This is particularly based on his strong view that the plagues of Egypt are behind the bowl plagues. Because the Pharaoh and Egyptians are made out to be hard in the hearts without any repentance, the followers of the beast are on the same path.

³⁸² Cf. Giesen (1997:355) and Beale (1999:826).

³⁸³ Van de Kamp (2002:360).

6.5 Relationship to the trumpet plagues

Many commentators indicate that there is some relationship between the fifth bowl plague and the fourth and fifth trumpet plagues. The description of the fourth trumpet plague is found in Rev 8:12 where the effect is that a third of all the celestial bodies (the sun, moon and stars) is struck so that a third of their light is darkened. It is even noted that a third of the day stopped shining. Both of these trumpet plagues have darkness as primary or secondary effect. The correspondence appears to be clear as the fourth trumpet also causes darkness and is, according to many scholars, based on the ninth Egyptian plague.³⁸⁴ The mention of darkness in both plagues does make it seem as if there is a strong link between the plagues. However, that is just about the only correspondence. The fifth bowl does not strike any celestial body, but rather something on earth. Furthermore, there is no mention of any celestial body in the fifth bowl plague. Finally, while the fourth trumpet plague darkens the celestial bodies (and by implication all parts of the earth they shine on), the fifth bowl plague only causes the kingdom of the beast to become dark. Obviously it can be argued that with most other plagues, the effect of the trumpet is less complete than that of the bowl, but there are many differences to be accounted for. There might be links between the two plagues, but the fifth bowl plague is largely independent and cannot simply be seen as an expansion of the fourth trumpet plague.

Some commentators also identify possible links to the fifth trumpet plague (Rev 9:1-6) where locusts like scorpions emerge from smoke. Indeed, the smoke causes the air and the sun to be darkened.³⁸⁵ As stated earlier in this chapter, it has been argued that the scorpions emerging from the smoke have been responsible for the pain caused by the darkness of the fifth bowl. There are, however, no direct parallels between the fifth bowl plague and the fifth trumpet plague, other than the mention of darkness, and no conclusive evidence to support the theory that these locusts are the cause of the pain in the fifth bowl plague.

Paulien (1987:408) sees both the fifth trumpet and the fifth bowl plague closely connected to the fourth trumpet plague. In his opinion the partial darkness caused by the fourth trumpet becomes total darkness in the fifth trumpet plague. In the description of the fifth trumpet plague it also becomes evident that the darkness is caused by “demonic control”. The fifth bowl plague turns this “demonic” control around. In this way he sees all three these plagues as being linked. The argument still remains that there is slightly more than just darkness linking the fourth and the fifth trumpet plagues to the fifth bowl plague.

³⁸⁴ Cf. among others Boxall (2006:225), Beale (1999:823), Aune (1998:890).

³⁸⁵ Ford (1975:273), Boxall (2006:230) and Blount (2009:301).

6.6 The elements

Earlier in this chapter reference has been made to the fact that the throne of the beast is given to him by the dragon after he rises up from the sea (Rev 13:1). He came out of the sea, by implication onto the land where he established his rule. If the sea is also connected to the great unknown, or the place of evil, as argued in the chapter on the sea turning to blood, this could possibly be a symbolic way to explain that the evil from the sea now also takes hold of the land. A few verses later (Rev 13:11) another beast appears, but this one rises from the earth and his role is to make sure everyone obeys the authority of the first beast. “Everyone” is specified as being τὴν γῆν καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ κατοικοῦντας (“the earth and its inhabitants”). In the rest of Rev 13 the focus is on how the beast exercised his power on earth. The dragon himself was thrown out of heaven onto the earth in Rev 12. After making war with the woman and her children, he takes a stance on the shore of the sea. Then in Rev 14 the scene turns to God and focuses once more on what is going on in heaven before the beast is mentioned again, only when his throne comes under attack in Rev 16:10. There is thus a clear distinction between the realm of the beast on earth and the realm of God in heaven with the scene constantly shifting between the one and the other.³⁸⁶ In Rev 16 these barriers are crossed from the side of heaven when the earthly kingdom of the beast is directly attacked.

When looking at the situations in this light, it appears that the throne of the beast is also part of the earth. By pouring out his bowl on the throne of the beast, the fifth angel pours out his bowl on the earth. Additionally, if the kingdom of the beast (which consists of the earth and its inhabitants) gets plunged into darkness, it is the earth that becomes dark. Although this plague does not mention one of the elements directly, the bowls are still being emptied on different elements of creation, but now it is only the inhabitants of that part of creation, in this case the earth.

Another possible way to interpret this focus on the earth is that it might be the earth in general, similar to the reference of the earth in the introduction to the bowl plagues. In that sense, this bowl would then affect the four elements together, before the last two plagues will once again affect specific elements of nature.

6.7 Angels and darkness

Finally, a few remarks will be made on the specific angel involved in the fifth bowl. Beale (1999:825) notes that in 1QS 3.20-21 and 4.11 “the ‘angel of darkness’ causes unbelievers to

³⁸⁶ Van de Kamp (2002:360) notes that “vijandschap tegen Gods kinderen is over de hele aarde te vinden. Het rijk van dit beest is zo breed als de wereld.”

‘walk in the ways of darkness’ and to have ‘a blaspheming tongue’”. This does pose the question whether a specific angel might be in mind here. Interestingly the archangel Zerachiel is the fifth of the watcher angels in “The book of the Watchers” in 1 Enoch³⁸⁷ and, according to Davidson (1971:328), the angel presiding over the sun. The list in the book of the Watchers is also the oldest reference to the seven archangels (Davidson, *Ibid.*). The angel presiding over the sun would obviously have the power to darken the light of the sun. It could possibly be that this is the angel in the mind of the author of Revelation who pours out the fifth bowl plague, however this cannot be proven for certain,

6.8 Preliminary conclusions

6.8.1 Links to the ninth Exodus plague

The first important point that became apparent in this chapter is that the connections to the Egyptian plague of darkness are not as strong as some commentators would make it out to be. While there are correspondences, there are some strong differences between the fifth bowl plague and the ninth Exodus plague as well. One of the most important differences is the fact that the secondary effect of the Egyptian plague, which causes darkness on the land is the usual effect which darkness has, in that it impairs the ability of those affected by it to see things around them. On the other hand, the secondary effect of the bowl plague is highly unusual, causing the people to gnash their tongues because of the pain. Another important difference between the two plagues which was observed, is that after the Exodus plague it is the ruler of the kingdom who reacts to his kingdom being plunged into darkness, while the people living in the kingdom react to the darkness caused by the fifth bowl plague. The beast himself does not appear to be affected by the darkness.

As stated, there are some correspondences between the two plagues. The first which was highlighted is the scope of the two plagues. Both affect only the area they are aimed at, that is the area where enemies of God’s people reside. Secondly, in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, the only two places where γίνομαι occurs with σκότος are in the descriptions of these two plagues. Finally, the indirect reference to the sun and possibly the worship of the sun-god Ra in both plagues is also a noteworthy correspondence on a broader level. It can therefore finally be deduced that this plague cannot be said to be based exclusively on the ninth Exodus plague, although the ninth Exodus plague does appear to be part of the background of the fifth bowl plague. The only real correspondence between the two plagues is that both cause darkness on the kingdom or land of an adversary of God.

³⁸⁷ This is also known as the *Ethiopian Enoch*.

6.8.2 De-creation

The matter of de-creation was discussed, as Ortlund and Beale (2013:228) see this theme behind the Exodus plagues. They argue that what was created by God is de-created in order to punish the Egyptians. It was noted that, while the focus in the book of Revelation appears to be on the preservation of creation, in the bowl plagues creation is subject to a level of destruction while being employed against the enemies of God's people. However, while evil is in the end totally destroyed, the destruction of creation is not a total destruction. Everything is finally restored to the extent that the earth and heaven is made new.

6.8.3 Connections to the trumpet plagues

This plague does not have strong connections to any of the trumpet plagues. Although proposals have been put forward to link the fifth bowl plague to the fourth or fifth trumpet plagues, it appears that there is not much more than the mention of darkness linking these plagues.

6.8.4 The background of the throne and darkness

Looking in more depth at the possible background to the fifth bowl plague, it appears that there are indeed connections to other texts and traditions as well.

Looking at the deeper meaning of the concept of the throne, it was indicated that a throne in the Hebrew Scriptures is most often the throne of God or the thrones of the kings of Israel. One reference to a throne of an adversary of God is seen in a reference Philo made to the throne of the Pharaoh, which, along with the sceptre and diadem are symbols of the reign of a king. He explains that these symbols were used by the Egyptians in relation to the mind, instead of God, implying that they worshipped the mind and not God. Scrutinizing the idea of a throne in the New Testament outside of the book of Revelation it was highlighted that the idea of a throne is almost exclusively linked to Christ's dominion. In the book of Revelation different beings sit on a throne, including Satan, the twenty-four elders, the beast and people given authority to judge. Importantly it was pointed out that thrones linked to God are always in heaven while the thrones of God's adversaries are on earth. The beast receives his throne as he leaves the ocean and walks onto the land, which could be symbolical for the evil to come from the sea onto the earth. When his throne is struck by the contents of a bowl, he himself is

not affected, while his whole kingdom is plunged into darkness. It appears as though he is totally disabled by the strike on his throne.

The concepts of light and darkness are widely used in a symbolic way in ancient Hebrew and Greek literature. In the Hebrew Scriptures as well as the New Testament it is especially linked to the being of God and his revelation to people. Light is generally seen as something positive and darkness as something negative. The people of God live in the light whilst those who do not worship and acknowledge Him as God are in the dark. Especially in the prophetic literature there are people who acknowledge the Lord as the only God said to come to the light. The same idea is mentioned in one of the writings of Philo where he calls says that people who do not worship God are blind. Similarly, the law of the Lord is seen by the Hebrew Scriptures and Philo as a light which indicates to people how they should live and those who do not obey the law are said to be in darkness.

Darkness is often associated with evil and wrongdoing, and light with good fortune and high morals. In the case of the fifth bowl plague, the darkness was not the place where the beast and his followers chose to be, so that their evil deeds would go unnoticed. In this instance the darkness is uncomfortable and causes pain and anguish. The darkness can also be an indication that the God of heaven cut off his life-giving light from the followers of the beast who dwell in the realm of the earth causing severe distress among those left in the dark.

An important allusion which has been identified and which has not been recognized in any of the consulted literature, is the allusion to Job 12:24-25 where it is said that God removes the understanding of the rulers of the earth (ἀρχόντων γῆς) and makes them grope in the dark without light. The significant aspect of this allusion is the fact that rulers of the earth are said to be in darkness, while the beast is strongly linked to the earth in the book of Revelation.

Finally, darkness was also connected to the day of the Lord. For those who do not worship the Lord that day will be a day of darkness. It is a warning to those who turned away from God to reconcile with him.

Beale's argument that the fifth bowl plague links to the notion of the covenantal judgement was dismissed primarily on the grounds that the covenant in the Old Testament was between God and his people. The fifth bowl plague is a judgement against people with whom God had no covenant.

6.8.5 The gnawing of tongues because of the pain

There was no precedent in ancient literature for the gnawing or chewing of tongues. The closest parallel is in the gospels where Jesus says that in the eternal damnation there will be a gnashing of teeth. The gnawing of tongues is probably synonymous to the gnashing of teeth which is obviously done out of anguish and frustration.

The fact that the darkness causes pain was said to be unusual. After exploring all possible explanations, no final conclusion was reached. The best proposal is that the pain is caused by the other plagues, especially the sores (as confirmed by the reaction to the plague) and the burning by the sun, which is intensified by the darkness. In this regard it was shown that the bowl plagues stand in contrast to the plagues of Egypt. In Exodus there is no mention of any lasting effect of the plagues. The damage appears to be healed completely before the next plague strikes. The bowl plagues, on the other hand, cause progressively more harm and systematically break down the resistance of the beast and his followers.

6.8.6 The background of the reaction to the plague

The second part of the reaction of the followers of the beast to the darkness is in line with the reaction to the fourth bowl plague. The people now gnaw their tongues because of the agony they experience.

An important matter on the background of the reaction to the plague was highlighted in the discussion. Once again, instead of giving glory to God, they curse him. In this instance, however, it is noted that they curse “the God of heaven” who is, according to their own implied admittance in their reaction to the fourth bowl, the God responsible for these plagues. It was argued that by referring to God as the God of heaven, it is stressed that God’s reign is in heaven as opposed to the reign of the beast, which is on the earth. Rev 16:10 appears to stand in contrast to Rev 13:12 where the second beast forces the earth and those living in it to worship the first beast. By eliminating the beast and his kingdom, God gains control over the earth as well. This is another clear example on how the beast is strongly connected to the earth.

It was further argued that the fact that they do not repent from their deeds implies that they choose not to act according to the wonderful deeds of God for which He is praised in Rev 15. It is important to realise that there still seems to be opportunity for repentance. The reaction to the plagues implies that they could have chosen another way of acting. In this regard there is a parallel to the plagues in Egypt. Since they do not repent, the set of plagues proceed and another plague is poured out.

6.8.7 The classical elements

Most commentators argue that the elements of the earth are not in play from the fifth bowl plague onwards. However, this has proven to not be the case. The second beast emerged from the earth, assisting the first beast. Additionally, in Rev 13:12 the earth and its inhabitants are said to be coerced by the second beast into worshipping the second beast and even

making an image of him. It has been argued, furthermore, that the kingdom of the beast includes all those who worship him. Therefore, if the kingdom of the beast is plunged into darkness and the beast himself is on the earth and his kingdom consists of the earth and all its inhabitants, it means that the fifth bowl strikes the earth as the realm below the heavens and it is the earth which is plunged into darkness. Another factor, adding additional strongly supporting this argument, is the possible echo of Job 12:24-25 where God is said to strip the rulers of the earth from their ability to understand and make them wander around in the dark. In the fifth bowl plague, these words come true and the kingdom (consisting of the earth) of one of the rulers of the earth is darkened. What is important, is that none of the commentators consulted appear to notice this link. It appears, therefore, that contrary to what most commentators argue, the onslaught on the elements of the earth does not stop with the fourth bowl plague but is continued in the fifth, albeit not as directly. In the fifth bowl plague those living on the earth are targeted.

6.8.8 Angelology

The final matter which was explored is the angelic motif, which is also important to note and which no commentator refers to. The angel plays the important role of emptying the bowl. It has been indicated that it might be a specific angel. The angel facilitating this destruction might be the angel of darkness or the angel Zerachiel, which is the fifth archangel and the angel presiding over the sun in 1 Enoch 1.

Chapter 7: The sixth bowl plague (Rev 16:12-16)

7.1 Introduction

In this bowl plague the tension increases dramatically with the war on the enemies of God starting to become a reality. The sixth angel pours his bowl on the great river Euphrates causing the water to dry up so that the kings “from the rising sun” may pass through. As with some of the other bowl plagues the text from the Jewish Scriptures, which immediately comes to mind when reading this, is the narrative about the Israelites passing through the Red Sea in Exodus. The main factor to be investigated in this chapter will be how strong this connection is and whether there might be other texts playing a role as well.

The drying up of the river opens the way for all nations to come and attack the kingdom of the beast. There are no barriers which keep the enemies away anymore. Now the kings from the east can come into the country and start to fight with Babylon just as Cyrus fought Babylon in Old Testament times. It appears that this military operation is allowed by God as punishment to the followers of the beast. The actual outcome of the sixth bowl plague is therefore the military operation which starts against Babylon and preludes the destruction of Babylon.³⁸⁸

This section of the bowl plague narrative contains most likely one of the most well-known references to a specific place in the whole book of Revelation, namely the place called Armageddon.³⁸⁹ Some very strong symbolic images are used in the description of the effect of the sixth bowl plague. An important image is the Euphrates River, which dries up, opening a way for the kings coming from the east, or the rising sun. Unclean spirits, demons and frogs are also mentioned in connection to the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. All these images will be explored in more detail in this chapter in an attempt to trace the possible connections with other ancient literature.

7.2 The text of the sixth bowl plague³⁹⁰

³⁸⁸ Van de Kamp (2002:361) says that God “geeft de gelegenheid tot massale groepering en positiekeus”.

³⁸⁹ Cf. Kealy (1987:196).

³⁹⁰ Van de Kamp (2002:361) notes that these last three plagues differ from the first four in that the last three plagues are concerned with those in power of those who are in rebellion against God. In the fifth plague it is the kingdom of the beast, in the sixth plague it is the dragon, the beast and the false

Greek text (Rev 16:12-16)

¹²Καὶ ὁ ἕκτος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην·

καὶ ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ,

ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου.

¹³καὶ εἶδον

ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ δράκοντος³⁹¹ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα ὡς βάτραχοι·

¹⁴εἰσὶν γὰρ πνεύματα δαιμονίων

ποιῶντα σημεῖα,

ἃ ἐκπορεύεται ἐπὶ τοὺς βασιλεῖς τῆς οἰκουμένης ὅλης,

συναγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον τῆς ἡμέρας τῆς μεγάλης τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ

παντοκράτορος—

¹⁵Ἴδου ἔρχομαι ὡς κλέπτῃς.

μακάριος ὁ γρηγορῶν καὶ τηρῶν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ,

ἵνα μὴ γυμνὸς περιπατῇ

καὶ βλέπωσιν τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην αὐτοῦ—

¹⁶καὶ συνήγαγεν αὐτοὺς

εἰς τὸν τόπον τὸν καλούμενον Ἑβραΐστὶ Ἀρμαγεδῶν.

Translation

¹²And the sixth poured out his bowl on the river the great Euphrates.

And its water dried up

so that it prepared a way for the kings from the rising sun.

¹³And I saw

coming from the mouth of the dragon and the mouth of the beast and the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits like frogs.

¹⁴For these are spirits of demons

performing signs,

who go out to the kings of the whole world,

prophet and in the seventh plague it is the great city. In the view of Blount (2009:302) verse 13-16 forms an interlude in the text between the sixth and seventh bowl plague.

³⁹¹ Some manuscripts leave this first phrase (“the mouth of the dragon”) out. The reason Beale (1999:833) provides makes sense: the scribe’s eye probably skipped from the first ἐκ to the second and he then omitted those words.

gathering them for the battle of the great day of God the Almighty.

¹⁵Look, I am coming like a thief

blessed is the one who stays awake and keep his clothes on
so that he does not go naked and his shame is seen.

¹⁶And they gathered

on the place called in Hebrew Armageddon.

7.2.1 Structure

From the above layout of the text, it is evident that this plague can be divided into three separate units.³⁹² The first is verse 12 which describes the outpouring of the bowl and the direct effect it has: the drying up the Euphrates River for the kings to pass through to gather for war. The second unit (verse 13-14 and 16) centres around the three spirits coming from the mouths of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet who gather the kings of the world. The third unit (verse 15) is an interruption in the description of the army which is marching forward. It serves as a warning to the people.³⁹³

7.3 *Stichwörter* and key phrases in the description of the plague

7.3.1 τὸν ποταμὸν τὸν μέγαν τὸν Εὐφράτην - the great river Euphrates

Once again water is affected by a bowl plague, but this time it is a very specific body of water, namely the Euphrates River. This is one of only two references to the Euphrates River in the whole New Testament. The other is in Rev 9:14 in the description of the effects of the sixth trumpet.³⁹⁴ There is a definite correlation to the sixth trumpet plague here, especially since there are references to a great army in both plagues. In Rev 9:14, however, it is said that the four angels, who were bound up at the great Euphrates River, should be released by the angel who had the trumpet in hand. After the angels are released, they go out and kill a third of all humans. In the bowl plague there is no mention of people being killed. While there are some correspondences to the trumpet plague in terms of the reference to the Euphrates River, the

³⁹² Beale (1999:831) only divides the text in two units namely verse 12 which summarizes the bowl and then verse 13-16 which provides a more detailed description on the effects of the bowl.

³⁹³ Witetschek (2008:558) calls this unit a “warning macarism that recalls chap. 2-3, especially 3:18”. Cf. also Aune (1998:890).

³⁹⁴ Cf. Van de Kamp (2002:361).

differences are strong enough to warrant a specific investigation into the meaning of the Euphrates in Rev 16.

The immediate connection in the Hebrew Scriptures appears to be to the Garden of Eden of which one of the borders was the Euphrates River.³⁹⁵ The notion of the Euphrates River, being an important border, is also found in other places in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Exod 23:31, for instance, the Lord says that He will set the borders of Israel from the Red Sea, to the sea of the Philistines and from the desert to the great Euphrates River. In Deut 1:7 Moses conveys the message from God to the Israelites, saying that they must go out as far as the great Euphrates River. In Deut 11:24 and Josh 1:4 the Euphrates River is mentioned as being a far border of Israel's territory. The same is true for the books describing the kings of Israel.³⁹⁶ Koester (2014:657) summarizes it by saying: "The Euphrates, or 'great river', was the idealized boundary of the promised land." For this reason, the Euphrates River was a common place of war.³⁹⁷ When enemy forces wanted to attack the kingdom of Israel, they had to cross the Euphrates River, so they had to be stopped before they were able to get through the river. Some of those wars were won by the Babylonians who lived next to the river (Koester, 2014:657). Van de Kamp (2002:361) summarizes the deeper nuance of the Euphrates River in the Old Testament as an "onheilshaard", an indication of impending danger.³⁹⁸ It appears indeed that in the book of Revelation this is the symbolic meaning that the author intended to convey by the reference to the Euphrates. The Euphrates as symbolic border to the land which keeps the enemies out is now gone and the gates are open for everyone who wants to fight the beast to enter unhindered.

However, there is one more factor which needs to be mentioned here and which is not noted by any other scholar consulted. Philo (*Leg.* 72), in his allegorical interpretation of the Torah, notes that the Euphrates means fertility and that it is connected to the virtue of justice. Since the final serving of justice is strongly in support of the sixth bowl in Revelation this is an important connection. The river is dried up exactly with the purpose of delivering justice. The way Philo simply notes that the Euphrates River is connected to justice, creates the impression that it was common knowledge in the first century world – at least in Egypt. It is, however, difficult to establish whether this was such common knowledge that the author of Revelation and his readers knew this in the surroundings of Asia Minor. There are no other texts in which this connection can be seen. The correspondence is clear, whether intentionally or not. The

³⁹⁵ According to Gen 2:14 the Euphrates River is the fourth river bordering the Garden of Eden.

³⁹⁶ Refer to 2 Sam 8:3; 2 Kings 23:29; 2 Kings 24:7; 1 Chron 5:9 and 1 Chron 18:3,

³⁹⁷ 2 Kings 23:29; 1 Chron 18:3; Jer 26:2, 46:2, 42:6, 42:10; Esdras 1:23, 25;

³⁹⁸ This is in line with what Resseguie (1998:105) notes about the meaning of the Euphrates River. To him the Euphrates is in the book of Revelation "associated with death and destruction".

fact that this bowl affects water, should also not be ignored. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

7.3.2 και ἐξηράνθη τὸ ὕδωρ αὐτοῦ - and its water dried up

The effect of the bowl being poured out on the Euphrates River is that its water dried up. With the Exodus already noted as being part of the background of the bowl plagues, the first immediate connection that comes to mind is the drying up of the Red Sea after the Israelites left Egypt.³⁹⁹ This was one of the most momentous redemptive acts of God in the history of Israel.⁴⁰⁰ The only connection to the Exodus, however, is the drying up of water, while there are at least two important dissimilarities. In the sixth bowl plague, the Euphrates River is dried up and not the Red Sea. Furthermore, the river is not dried up to provide a safe escape route for the people of God as it is in the Exodus narrative, but it is dried up to open a way for other kings to enter and defeat the kingdom of the enemies of God.⁴⁰¹

Beale's (1999:827) main discussion on the Old Testament background of this plague is focused on rivers in general which are said to be dried up. There are indeed a number of instances in the Jewish Scriptures where rivers are said to dry up.⁴⁰² His argument that the drying up of rivers is connected to the judgement of Babylon and the restoration of Israel appears to be valid, but then he states that "this judgement would include the drying up of the Euphrates River". He proceeds to quote a few texts, but by examining these texts it is apparent that, while indeed mentioning rivers drying up (also rivers in Babylon), nowhere is the river Euphrates mentioned explicitly or implicitly. In fact, in all of the Hebrew Scriptures the river Euphrates is never said to dry up.⁴⁰³ Referring to Isaiah's prophesy Beale further argues that the victory of Cyrus over Babylon was probably in John's mind when he wrote this text. He notes that "God executed judgement against Babylon by 'raising up' Cyrus and his 'princes'

³⁹⁹ Cf. Johns (2003:132).

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. van de Kamp (2002:361).

⁴⁰¹ Beale (1999:827) notes that it is always God who dries up water, albeit for the purpose of saving his people or judging his enemies.

⁴⁰² Another renowned instance where Israel was helped by the drying up of water is when the Jordan when the Israelites enters the promised land, but this is clearly not in view here.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Aune (1998:890-891) who remarks that while other Rivers in the Ancient Near East frequently dried up, the Euphrates River was not known to ever dry up. The view of Blount (2009:302) is not supported by any other scholar and does seem to read more into the text than there actually is. In his view one of the big consequences of the drying up of the river is that a major source of water for both Romans and Parthians is taken away.

who were to come ‘from the east’” (Beale, 1999:827). In the view of Beale (1999:827) the aim of John is to indicate that the worldly system is like ancient Babylon and that God now sends other nations to fulfil his judgment on them. He strongly argues for a symbolic view of both Babylon and the Euphrates River.

The view of Van de Kamp (2002:361) is in line with that of Beale as he sees the drying up of the river as an indication that God simply allows the longing for war among these nations to consume them by removing the main barrier that kept them apart from each other. The wide river of water was the thing that stopped all enemies from attacking at the same time.⁴⁰⁴ Koester (2014:657) notes that Caesar also once blocked a river to capture a city, making people think it was a divine act. He does not elaborate any more on when it happened and what city was captured.

It appears that the main background of this plague is therefore the idea of the Euphrates River as a great boundary of a certain territory, in this case the territory of the beast. It is important to note that this is a boundary on earth. In the previous chapter it was noted that in Rev 13 the second beast forces all the earth and its inhabitants to worship the first beast. The whole earth appears therefore to be within the scope of the kingdom of the beast. Interpreting it in this way, might be that God is now turning the beast’s subjects against him. The Euphrates River might then be seen as the boundary for the beast’s headquarters, which is now dried up, leaving the beast vulnerable for a revolt.

7.3.3 ἵνα ἐτοιμασθῇ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν βασιλέων τῶν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου – so that a path was prepared for the kings from the rising sun

Reading this phrase as a whole, it is immediately evident that John does not refer directly to the Exodus narrative in the sixth bowl plague. In the Exodus narrative the enemies of God are indeed judged, but not by means of another nation, coming through the sea to attack them. The drying up of the sea is a method of escape for God’s people. Moreover, when the Jordan River dried up, it dries up to make a way for the people of God to enter the Promised Land. In the sixth bowl plague the river is dried up to make a way for the kings from the rising sun to enter the kingdom of the beast and make war.

⁴⁰⁴ Beale (1999:827) notes that “the means by which God delivers the godly –drying up water- are sometimes used as means by which he punishes the ungodly.” Van de Kamp (2002:361) agrees with this and states that the drying up of the water can either be used to save the people like with the second exodus out of Babylon, or it can be used to judge the people like the judgement over Babylon in Jer. 50:38 and 51:36. Still, he argues, it remains clear that the water is always a barrier to a nation passing into a country at once.

The “rising sun” ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου is correctly interpreted everywhere as meaning “east”, as it is the place where the sun rises. In the book of Revelation this phrase is also used in Rev 7:2. After the vision of the four angels holding the four winds of the earth, John sees another angel ascending from the “rising sun” and this angel has the seal of God in his hand. The word ἀνατολή alone occurs more frequently in the New Testament and it is also understood to mean “east”.⁴⁰⁵ This is also the case with most occurrences of the word in the Jewish Scriptures. Especially the accusative plural (ἀνατολάς) and genitive plural (ἀνατολῶν) forms of the word are used very often on its own with the meaning of “east”. There are some instances in which ἀνατολή probably refer to the break of dawn such as 2 Macc 10:28. The word occurs along with the word ἡλῖος in a few places, and always in the accusative and genitive forms (Deut 4:41; Josh 13:5, Judg 11:18, 3 Macc 4:15). The use of the word in texts such as Deut 4:49, Josh. 1:15, 12:1, 13:8, 19:34 and 2 Kings 10:33 is interesting, since it includes a reference to the Jordan (for instance: “you will return to your own land and take possession of it, the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave to you beyond the Jordan to the *rising sun*”). Looking at all the occurrences of the word ἀνατολή on its own, it appears to generally refer to “east”. Sometimes it is used in conjunction with the word ἡλῖος with the same meaning. There does not appear to be a specific pattern in the use of the two different ways of referring to the east, but it might be that initially both words were always used together as a fixed expression that refer to the east and in time it was shortened. The same seems to be true for the New Testament. What is worth noting, however, is how often, when reference is made to something east of the Jordan River, ἡλῖος is used along with ἀνατολή to refer to the east. It does appear that when the Jordan River is mentioned, in most instances both words are used together. This is important, because in Rev 16:12 there is also a reference to a river linked to the “east” where ἀνατολή is used together with ἡλῖος.

Looking at modern commentators, it can be noted that in their discussion on this part of the text, commentators mainly attempt to explain who the kings from the east might be. Beale (1999:829) argues against looking for a literal enemy of Rome as he is convinced that it is meant in a symbolic way. Yet many commentators still agree that “the kings from the east” are forces which would be a threat to the Roman Empire.⁴⁰⁶ Koester (2014:657) notes that some commentators think it is the Parthians who lived to the East of the Roman Empire and who

⁴⁰⁵ See Matt 2:1, 2, 9; 8:11; 24:27; Luke 1:78, 13:29 and Rev 21:13.

⁴⁰⁶ Reddish (2001:310) notes that “the kings from the east appear to be a threat to the Roman Empire and are poised to attack and destroy Rome”. Aune (1998:891) argues that the use of the plural (kings) implies “that the east is not unified, but is ruled by a coalition of kings, perhaps even more specifically by vassal kings subject to Rome”.

were at one stage at war with the Romans.⁴⁰⁷ To him this vision of an invasion has much more to do with the myths about the Roman Emperor, specifically Nero. He specifically refers to one such tradition which had it that Nero never really died, but was busy making plans to return and take the empire over again, leading to a big war. Nero will also get some allies in the process. Koester (2014:657-658) thinks this tradition appears to correspond best to Rev 16:12. The view of Boxall (2006:231) is that the Kings from the East refers to the Parthians, led by the returning Nero who comes to take over the kingdom once again. If what was noted in the previous section is taken seriously, these kings might be people leading a revolt against the beast. The second beast forced the earth and all its inhabitants to worship the first beast, and now God allows them to attack him. There is a possibility that some of the subjects of the beast are realizing it is because of his actions that they are suffering.

One point that no commentator pays further attention to, is the reference to the sun, which is, in the context of the bowl plagues, most probably no pure coincidence. Before this bowl, the effects of the last two plagues both had directly and indirectly to do with the sun. In the fourth plague the sun burned the followers of the beast and in the fifth plague darkness came over the land, implying the sun was darkened. Now the kings are said to be coming from the rising sun. It has been indicated that the phrase ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου is often simply used to refer to the east, but John could also have left out the reference to the sun in the fixed formula. It therefore does seem plausible that John deliberately uses the longer phrase to indicate the east with the intention of placing further emphasis on the sun and the worship of the sun that goes along with it.

7.4 The dragon, the beast and the false prophet and the unclean spirits

7.4.1 The Satanic Triad

Rev 12-13 mentions three evil powers: the dragon, the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. So far in the bowl plagues only the beast from the sea has been identified (Rev 16:2). Now the three rulers of the evil powers come together. In the first place the dragon is mentioned. The dragon is identified as Devil (Διάβολος) and the Satan (ὁ Σατανᾶς) in Rev 12:9. He is also referred to as the deceiver of the whole world (τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην). In Rev

⁴⁰⁷ Cf. among others Caird (1966:204), Van de Kamp (2002:361), Blount (2009:302). In the view of Blount (2009:302) there is a twist in the plot here that by drying up the Red Sea God made a way for people to escape in the Exodus narrative, but in this case God dries up water and makes a way for the enemies (the Parthians) to enter the land and attack the people.

12 the dragon is thrown down from heaven onto the earth where he establishes a reign to make war against the descendants of the woman. He is the one who gives authority to the beast rising from the sea (Rev 13).

The beast from the sea is the second of the Satanic Triad⁴⁰⁸ and he appears to be the beast referred to in Rev 16:2.⁴⁰⁹ He has seven heads with blasphemous names on his heads. The whole world is in awe after the deadly wound on his one head is healed, resulting in everyone following and worshipping him. He spoke haughty and blasphemous things.

In the third place the false prophet is mentioned.⁴¹⁰ It is the first reference to the false prophet in the book of Revelation.⁴¹¹ In Rev 11 the two witnesses of God are said to prophesy. This false prophet probably stands in contrast to the two witnesses.⁴¹² The false prophet is in the view of Blount (2009:303) the beast from the land and he bases his argument on the fact that they have the same function in the book of Revelation, namely that they deceive the people into worshipping the beast from the sea.⁴¹³ These three evil characters are “acting in concert in an attempt to unleash a destructive force that is the match of God’s own acts of judgement” (Blount, 2009:303). More than that, it is clear that all three members of this evil trio somehow deceive the people. Their success lies in the fact they are able to deceive the world into worshipping the beast.⁴¹⁴

⁴⁰⁸ Witetschek (2008:557) argues that it is best to refer to these three together as the Satanic Triad even though some, such as Resseguie (1998:127), refer to them as the satanic trinity. He suggests that the latter term might present the incorrect idea of a “fully developed Trinitarian theology in the book of Revelation”. Magina (2010:188) calls it a “kind of demonic anti-Trinity”. Therefore the former will be used in this chapter to refer to the dragon, the beast and the false prophet together.

⁴⁰⁹ As stated in a previous chapter Wong (2003:337) argues that the beast of the sea represents both a man and an empire. He is a person in that he is worshiped and an empire in that the beast represents the empire he rules over.

⁴¹⁰ Schüssler Fiorenza (1989:103-104) thinks that there is a link to “the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13:22 (and parallels).

⁴¹¹ Beale (1999:831) points out that “the word summarized the deceptive role of the second beast of ch. 13, whose purpose is to deceive people so that they will worship the first beast.”

⁴¹² Resseguie (1998:128) sees a total of six parallels between the land beast and the two witnesses.

⁴¹³ This is exactly in line with the view of Beale (1999:831). Beale (1999:831) also notes that by calling the beast from the land the false prophet, John implies that the deceptive agents of the beast are also operating within the congregations. Cf. also Resseguie (1998:127) and Blount (2009:303). Koester (2014:658) points out how false prophets “lured people into false worship”.

⁴¹⁴ Koester (2014:658-659) argues that “these three evil figures” are based upon some Christian and Jewish traditions about the end times. The first is the tradition which thought that in end times there will be more evil present in the world, the second that one strong leader will stand up against God at the

7.4.2 Mouths

The reference to the mouths of these three warrants further discussion here. Malina (1995:198) argues that the reference to the mouths of the Evil Triad means that they also oppose God with their words, just as the followers of the beast blasphemed the name of God in the rest of Rev 16. However, there is no direct indication about what the Evil Triad said. The symbolism connected to mouths therefore needs to be explored in more detail.

Mouths play an important role in Rev 12-13. In Rev 12:15-16 the snake lets a river of water out from its mouth in an attempt to stop the woman from fleeing. In Rev 13:5-6 it is said that the beast from the sea received a mouth with which he could say slanderous things. On the other hand, the mouth of God or Christ is also prominent. From the mouth of the one like the Son of Man comes a sword (Rev 1:16) and in Rev 2:16 a warning is found that if the people of Ephesus do not repent, Jesus will fight them with the sword coming from his mouth. In Rev 19:15, 12 there are two more references to this sword. Fire comes from the mouths of the two witnesses in Rev 11:5 and consumes everyone who threatens them. Finally, in the sixth trumpet there is also reference to mouths, but it is the mouths of the horses (Rev 9:17-19) from which smoke and sulphur is emitted. To Blount (2009:303-304) this fighting with the mouths means that God and the dragon is caught up in a “war of words”, each fighting to gain the loyalty of the people by trying to convince them with words why they deserve their loyalty. He also notes that when people respond, they do so by using the words coming from their mouths. It is in this light that the unclean spirits like frogs which proceed from the mouths of the Satanic Triad must be explored.

Interestingly Philo (*Opif.* 118) writes that on the outside the body is divided into seven different parts: the head, the chest, the belly, two arms, two legs. In the same way the intestines are divided into seven parts: the stomach, the heart, the lungs, the spleen, the liver and two kidneys. The head is also divided in seven parts: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and finally the mouth to which he gives special attention to as it completes the seven parts of the head (Philo, *Opif.* 119). He writes that according to Plato, the mouth is the part of the body where “mortal things have their entrance, immortal their exit; for foods and drinks enter it, perishable nourishment of a perishable body, but words issue from it, undying laws of an undying soul, by means of which the life of reason is guided”.⁴¹⁵

end of time and thirdly some expect false prophets to also appear. Koester (2014:659) thinks that “Revelation combines all three traditions in a distinctive synthesis”.

⁴¹⁵ Colson and Loeb (1981:95).

Two interesting connections to Revelation must be noted: Firstly, the number seven which is a very important number in the book of Revelation, especially in the plagues which are seven in number. Secondly, the special emphasis on the mouth is significant. That which exits the mouth is in his view immortal because it is produced by the immortal soul. Elsewhere in his works Philo also refers to the mouths of people. In *Leg.* 3.103 he says “with Moses, the man who is faithful in all His house, He (God) will speak mouth to mouth in manifest form and not through dark speeches”.⁴¹⁶ When the Lord thus speaks to his faithful servant it is direct and not through visions.

In *Leg.* 3.176 Philo discusses the text in Deut 8:3 which states that man shall not live from bread alone, but from every word that comes out of the mouth of God. This same text is also quoted by Matthew (Matt 4:4) and put in the mouth of Jesus. Philo notes that the mouth in this text is symbolical for language. This symbolism is used by Philo in many other places in his works. The word of God is therefore seen to give life.

In the New Testament there are a number of references to mouths. Matthew writes in Matt 13:35 that Jesus only spoke in parables and quotes Ps 77:2 (LXX), which reads: “I will open my mouth in parables”. In Matt 15:11 Jesus says that it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth. In the sixth bowl plague it is unclean spirits which come from the mouths of the Satanic Triad. The difference is that the same word for “unclean” is not used. In Acts 3:21 it is said that God spoke a long time ago through the mouths of his prophets about the restoration of all things that will take place. The New Testament writers are also strongly opposed to bad/evil language coming from the mouth of believers (Eph 4:29; Coll 3:8; Jam 3:10).

Taking all of this into account it becomes clear that in the time of Revelation the mouth was seen as something very powerful and what came out of the mouth of someone, potentially had a great effect on the world around him. By referring to something coming from the mouths of the Satanic Triad, John clearly wanted to indicate that these three evil beings were attempting to fight back against the onslaught of God. It is not necessarily that it means they also blasphemed God as Malina (1995:198) argues, but by opening their mouths they clearly intended to oppose God. And the way they did it was by means of the three unclean spirits which came from their mouths.

⁴¹⁶ Colson and Loeb (1981:371).

7.4.3 Frogs

What comes forth from the mouths of this evil triad, are three unclean spirits “like frogs”.⁴¹⁷ The frogs will be discussed first. How exactly the word *ὄψ* should be interpreted is unclear. Do they look like frogs,⁴¹⁸ do they sound like frogs,⁴¹⁹ or do they have the same traits as frogs? Or is it all of these things together which causes the unclean spirits to be “like frogs”? What exactly the significance of these frogs is, scholars have various ideas.⁴²⁰

The immediate connection one would look for when reading about frogs in the context of plagues is the connection to the Egyptian plague of frogs (Exod 8:1-15).⁴²¹ Indeed there are some connections which should be taken into account. Frogs are only mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures in connection with the Exodus plague of frogs.⁴²² The description of the plague of frogs is found in Exod 7 and 8. It is noteworthy that in the description of the Exodus plague the frogs are also said to come from the water. In Exodus the water is water in general and not any specific body of water. Aaron must stretch out his hand over all bodies of water, rivers, canals and pools (Exod 8:5). Another aspect of the Exodus plague which is emphasised by some scholars, is that this is one of only two plagues which the Egyptian magicians were also able to perform.⁴²³

⁴¹⁷ Boxall (2006:231) notes that spiritual powers directing the actions of earthly powers are well documented in the New Testament.

⁴¹⁸ Blount (2009:303) says “they have the appearance of frogs”.

⁴¹⁹ As it will be seen, many scholars focus on the sound of the frogs.

⁴²⁰ One argument which did not gain any wide acceptance among scholars, but which is noted here for the sake of completeness, is the argument of Malina (1995:197). He looks at the book of Revelation from the perspective of the astronomical world. He notes that “in the astronomical traditions of Arab Bedouin, there are two well-known stars called the Frogs. ‘The First Frog’ (*al-dafda al-awwal*) is in the mouth of the southern Fish (*Piscis Austrini*) and still bears an Arabic name, ‘Fomalhaut’ (meaning ‘mouth of the fish’). ‘The Second Frog’ (*al dafda al-thani*), likewise still with the Arabic name, ‘Diphda’ (meaning ‘frog’) is located on the tail of ‘the hated sea-monster,’ Cetus.” To him the frogs are connected to these stars.

⁴²¹ Cf. Blount (2009:303)

⁴²² Kealy (1987:197) points out that the Egyptians saw the frog as a “symbol of Hegt, the goddess of fertility and resurrection. But such symbolism was a form of idolatry for the Jewish people and an indication of demonic influence.”

⁴²³ To Beale (1999:832) this might be the reason that these frogs signify the deception of the three spirits. They are connected to the magicians of Egypt who could perform deceptive signs. Witetschek (2008:562) notes that ironically the acts of the magicians make matters only worse for the Egyptians as they only produce more frogs.

Outside of Exodus frogs are mentioned in just three places in the Jewish Scriptures. The first is Ps 77 where the redemptive acts of God are called in remembrance. The Exodus is one of these events, with reference to the frogs found in verse 45. In that verse frogs are said to have destroyed the Egyptians. The second reference to frogs outside of Exodus is in Ps 104:30 (LXX) where the whole poem praises YHWH for delivering his people from Egypt. In this psalm the frogs are simply mentioned, and it is said that they swarmed the land and even entered the chambers of the kings. A last reference to frogs which should be noted is in Wis 19:10 where it is said that the Israelites remembered how the Lord punished the Egyptians by causing the earth to produce gnats instead of animals and the water frogs instead of fish. Witetschek (2008:562) discusses this occurrence of the word briefly and reaches the conclusion that because the frogs are said to be thrown out of the river and also compared to gnats, they are made out to be “ugly and silly”. In his view the book of Wisdom sees the frogs in a more negative light than Exodus does. While frogs are indeed seen in a negative light in Wisdom, as everywhere they are mentioned in the Jewish Scriptures, there is not much evidence to support the view of Witetschek. It rather appears that he reads things into the text to support his own theory, which will be discussed later in this section.

The view of Philo on the Exodus plagues has to be explored as well, as Philo also writes about the sounds frogs make and the effect of those sounds. In *Sacr.* 69 Philo hints at the meaninglessness of the sounds the frogs make which blinded the eyes of the soul of Pharaoh. In *Migr.* 83 he refers to the magicians of Egypt who deceived the people but who ended up only deceiving themselves by producing more frogs.⁴²⁴ He also says that senseless speech produces “bloodless and lifeless frogs, which utter only a novel and harsh sound, a noise painful to the ear” (*Somn.* 2.259). Frogs are therefore again used as example of foolishness because of the meaningless sounds they make. Philo (*Mos.* 1.103; 1.144) relates the story of the Exodus with his own interpretation. He does not say anything specific about the frogs other than that they crawled into every space and caused great distress for the Egyptians. In *Mos.* 1.105 he notes that the stench of decaying frogs was exceptionally overwhelming, because “even when alive, (frogs are) highly displeasing to the senses”. The discussion of Philo therefore points to the fact that frogs were seen as both deceptive on a metaphorical level and on a literal level they were a source of great disgust to those who came into contact with them.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Beale (1999:832) who sees this as support for his suggestion that the frogs signify deception in Rev. 16:13 because of this link to the deceptive magicians of Egypt.

Looking at the discussion thus far, it is clear that the connections between the frogs in Rev 16 and the frogs from the Exodus plague are not very strong.⁴²⁵ A few clear differences are the following: 1. The frogs are not the direct consequence of the sixth bowl plague and they do not cause any direct harm to the followers of the beast as the other bowl plagues do. 2. Nowhere in the description of the Exodus plague of frogs itself, or its reception in other texts in Jewish Scriptures, are the frogs connected to unclean spirits. 3. The frogs in Rev 16 are not a multitude which covers the whole land; there are only three of them. 4. In the sixth bowl plague they do not destroy anything themselves as Ps 77 says the frogs from the Exodus plague do.⁴²⁶ Therefore other possibilities should be explored when attempting to determine the background of the bowl plague of frogs.

This is the aim of the essay of Witetschek (2008). While he does concede that the mention of the frogs is an allusion to the frogs in the second Exodus plague, he argues that “a look at the connotations which John’s (Jewish and non-Jewish) contemporaries used to connect with frogs is even more revealing” (Witetschek, 2008:572). He therefore does exactly that by providing a very brief outline on how frogs were seen by some of John’s contemporaries.⁴²⁷ His conclusion from this outline is that “they (the frogs) were mostly thought of as disgusting and exemplarily silly.” The ultimately conclusion he reaches after his examination is that the mention of the frogs is meant to ridicule the Evil Triad by making them out to be mere frogs which can do nothing but make meaningless sounds. In the context of Revelation these three verses (Rev 16:13-14) serve as “one instance of comic relief that strips the ‘villains’ of the apocalyptic narrative of their terrifying power” (Witetschek, 2008:571).⁴²⁸

Koester (2014:658) also explores some of these possibilities with a focus on the first century Greco-Roman context. He notes that frogs “could be associated with the underworld”.

⁴²⁵ This is contrary to what Beale (1999:832) argues for. To him “the historical plague of frogs is now applied symbolically to deceptive spirits. The allusion is one of the clearest examples in the book of a literal exodus plague reapplied to a new situation and spiritualized.”

⁴²⁶ For these reasons Witetschek (2008:565) argues that the frogs cannot truly be seen as one of the plagues.

⁴²⁷ Some of the first century authors whose works he explores are earlier writings of Aesop, Phaedrus and Aristophanes, later works such as Artemidoro’s Dream Book, Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom. He also discusses some of the medical writers of the first century such as Dioskorides from Anazarbos and Claudius Galenos. Finally he looks at works from early Judaism such as the book of Exodus and its reception in later literature such as Wisdom and the works of Philo of Alexandria and Josephus.

⁴²⁸ Gallusz (2002:40) appears to agree with this view and adds that frogs were also known for their painful bites in the second temple period.

In line with the view of Witetschek, but contrary to what most other scholars argue for, he does not think that the main importance of frogs are their impurity,⁴²⁹ but rather the meaningless sounds they make, indicating according to ancient writers “empty speech and flattery” (Koester, 2014:658). To him the significance of the frogs in Rev. 16 is therefore to emphasise that everything the beast, the dragon and the false prophet says is void of true meaning and meant to deceive.

From this discussion, it is clear that there are two diverging arguments on the meaning of the frogs. Both arguments centre on the meaningless sounds that frogs were known for. According to one line of reasoning these sounds are seen as being deceptive and untrue and the frogs will therefore be an indication that what everything is coming from the mouth of the Evil Triad are lies. Another argument is that the sounds are not deceptive, but just meaningless. In that sense the frogs are an indication that the Evil Triad cannot even produce proper speech. The Evil Triad is therefore made fun of. Added to that is the fact that frogs are also slimy and disliked creatures.⁴³⁰

The frogs, however, cannot be fully understood without taking into account the three unclean spirits.

7.4.4 The unclean spirits

The uncleanness of these spirits might be another way in which they are like the frogs. Just as the words coming from someone’s mouth, spirits could be good or bad and they were beings that took action and did things (Malina, 1995:197). We find seven spirits before the throne of God in Rev 1:4 but in Rev 16:12 the spirits are said to be unclean.⁴³¹ The question is just what the significance of their impurity is. Almost all scholars focus their attention on the connection to the frogs and the presumed impurity of the frogs, which explains the impurity of the spirits. Beale (1999:832) correctly notes that frogs are among the animals regarded as unclean by Lev 11:9-12 as they fall under the category of water animals without scales or fins. The fact that it is forbidden to eat these animals is again emphasised in Lev 11:41-43.⁴³² However, it is

⁴²⁹ This is in line with the view of Witetschek (2008:565) who notes that it would not make any sense to see the primary function of the frogs in their impurity.

⁴³⁰ Cf. also Kealy (1987:1977).

⁴³¹ Malina (1995:65) calls them “sky winds”. He notes that unclean spirits were seen as evil when they did bad things. Angels and demons he calls “sky servants”.

⁴³² To Beale (1999:831) the significance of this verse is that it indicates who is part of the execution of this plague, while verses 14-16 explain the reason for the plague. Frogs were also known as unclean animals.

only explicitly stated that these animals may not be touched when dead. According to Houston (1993:51) they are “clean only in the ritual sense”. Therefore, it is not necessarily the connection to the frogs which cause the spirits to be unclean. Furthermore, there is no clear indication from the text itself that it is the connection to the frogs that causes the spirits to be impure. The impure spirits are simply said to be like frogs.

Beale (1999:831) proposes another argument for the uncleanness of the spirits which is linked to the frogs. His argument is that the main reason why these spirits are unclean is because of their deceptiveness. They have the function of misleading the people into worshipping the beast, making them unclean.⁴³³ The uncleanness of the three spirits is in his view connected to the fact that Babylon was a nation who deceived people with their own immorality (Beale, 1999:831).⁴³⁴ However, his argument is not backed by very strong evidence. There is even a question on the link between the frogs and deception.⁴³⁵ As indicated in the previous subsection, frogs were indeed known for their meaningless sounds, but that does not necessarily mean that the meaningless sounds were connected to deception.

There is another possible connection which is not yet explored by any scholars consulted, namely the connection to the Book of the Watchers.⁴³⁶ Before that argument is debated, it is first necessary to look at the way the spirits are characterised in Rev 16:14a where it is stated that these spirits are spirits of demons.

7.4.5 εἰσὶν γὰρ⁴³⁷ πνεύματα δαιμονίων ποιῶντα σημεῖα – because these are spirits of demons performing signs

The word δαιμόνιον is found very frequently in the New Testament, especially in the gospels and most often in the gospel of John. Looking at the demons in the gospel of John, Jesus is often accused of having a demon when they think He is misleading them. In John 10:20, for

⁴³³ In his view 1 Thess 2:3 is proof of the link between uncleanness and deception.

⁴³⁴ He even goes as far as calling these spirits “Babylonian spirits” (Beale, 1999:831).

⁴³⁵ Resseguie (1998:118), for instance, discusses the deceptive nature of the “demonic animals” in Revelation, but he never mentions the frogs. This might well have been an oversight by him, but surely if it was really so common for frogs to be connected to deception in the ancient world, Resseguie would surely have included frogs in his analysis of the deceptive nature of the demonic animals.

⁴³⁶ Dingman (2002:320) strongly argues that the Book of the Watchers had a definite influence on second temple Judaism. Lumpkin (2010:11) goes further by stating that “the Book of Enoch influenced the New Testament.”

⁴³⁷Beale (1999:833) notes that the words εἰσὶν γὰρ points to the fact that an “explicit interpretation” of the unclean spirits and frogs will now follow.

instance, some of the Jews do not want to listen to Jesus because they say He has a demon. In the next verse people question whether He has a demon because of his words.⁴³⁸ In Acts 17:18 the word is used in the plural with the apparent meaning of “god”.⁴³⁹ Paul remarks in 1 Cor 10:20 that the pagans sacrifice to demons and not to God, and that he does not want his readers to have community with demons.⁴⁴⁰ In the next verse demons are put even more strongly in opposition to God. Deceitful spirits (πνεύμασι πλάνοις) are mentioned alongside demons in 1 Tim 4:1. Putting demons and spirits parallel to each other appears to be something which was not uncommon in ancient literature. In Tobit 6:8, for instance, instructions are given on what to do when a woman is afflicted by “a demon or evil spirit”. References to sacrifices to demons or unclean spirits, are also found in the Jewish Scriptures. In Ps 105:37 (LXX) it is said that the people of God sacrificed their daughters to demons. In Bar 4:7 the people are also accused of sacrificing to demons and not to God.

What is even more interesting is that demons and angels were actually seen as the same kind of being with different character traits. Philo (*Gig.* 6), in his discussion about the giants, notes that angels had relationships with humans and that these angels were known as demons among other philosophers.⁴⁴¹ Two sections later (*Gig.* 8) he says that these angels live in the air:

And so the other element, the air, must needs be (*sic*) filled with living beings, though indeed they are invisible to us, since even the air itself is not visible to our senses.⁴⁴²

This confirms that demons were seen as a type of angel, or that fallen angels were also referred to as demons. He draws a distinction between souls, demons and angels, but appears to argue that the differences are not all that strong. Just as there are good and bad people, there are good and bad spiritual beings (Philo, *Gig.* 16).⁴⁴³

⁴³⁸ See also John 7:20; 8:49; 8:52.

⁴³⁹ Cf. Parsons (2008:243).

⁴⁴⁰ The same is said in Deut. 32:17 even though in Deut 32:17 it is the people of God who is accused of sacrificing to demons.

⁴⁴¹ In Hebrew the term used is “sons of the gods”.

⁴⁴² The translation used is the translation by Colson and Whitaker (1994:449). It is acknowledged that the English syntax does not appear to make total sense, but the essence of the Greek text is conveyed correctly.

⁴⁴³ Malina (1995:7) emphasizes that “Philo’s perception of the air as fully populated was common in the Hellenistic period.”

Outside of the book of Revelation demons appear therefore to be spiritual agents which are in opposition to the Lord to which sacrifices are occasionally directed. Demons were also known as deceiving agents which were able to influence the way a person acts and talks.⁴⁴⁴ These same ideas are reflected in an apocalyptic book such as 1 Enoch. 1 En. 19:1 is particularly important.⁴⁴⁵

And Uriel said to me, "There stand the angels who mingled with the women. And their spirits, having assumed many forms, bring destruction on men and lead them astray to sacrifice to demons as to gods until the day of the great judgment, in which they will be judged with finality.

In this instance it is other agents, the fallen watcher angels, who deceived the people into sacrificing to demons as if they were gods. There are clearly some correspondences to the book of Revelation.

When demons are mentioned in Revelation, they are part of the worldly powers. Other than in Rev 16:14, there are two more references to demons in the book. The first is in Rev 9:20 where it is said that the people who were not killed by the trumpet plagues, continued to worship (προσκυνέω) demons.⁴⁴⁶ In Rev 18:2 Babylon is accused of having become a home for demons, and a prison for unclean spirits and unclean birds.⁴⁴⁷

It is clear from this discussion that demons and angels were indeed seen as the same kind of being. Spirits were a different kind of spiritual being, but strongly connected to angels/demons as it is seen in Rev 16:14. Demons had some kind of authority, which caused people to worship them, perhaps the ability to perform signs. The question about the impurity of the spirits remains unanswered, but there is one more perspective which might provide some answers.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Philo (*Her.* 69).

⁴⁴⁵ The translation by Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012:39) is used again.

⁴⁴⁶ It is interesting to note that this is the only instance in both the Jewish Scriptures and the New Testament where demons are said to be worshiped. Usually it is said that people sacrifice to demons. Although both actions take place within the cultic practice, worship does imply a deeper reverence than just bringing a sacrifice.

⁴⁴⁷ This link between Babylon and unclean spirits is what causes Beale (1999:833) to remark that "demons are associated with the essence of the world's idolatrous system."

7.5 The Book of the Watchers and Rev 16

7.5.1 The unclean spirits

In the New Testament there are many references to unclean spirits. Unclean spirits appear to have the ability to take possession of a person and cause him to act in strange ways, often causing the person to be cast out from society. What is more peculiar about these unclean spirits is the fact that the readers of the texts which refer to the unclean spirits, are almost never told what exactly made them unclean. They just cause the person they take possession of to be unclean. This is a matter investigated by Elder (2016:434). He discusses the specific reference to the unclean spirit in the narrative of the possessed man from Gerasa in Mark 5:1-20, noting from the outset that in Mark the spirits are called unclean without any explanation as to why the spirit would be unclean. He furthermore points out that it is simply accepted that the readers would know the reason. In an attempt to see why the spirit in Mark might be called unclean, he refers to the apocryphal literature for an explanation. He proposes a connection between the unclean spirits in Mark 5 and the spirits in the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1-36). These spirits became unclean because of their unlawful intercourse with human women. In 1 En. 7:1 it is specifically said that they defiled (μαίνω) themselves with these women.⁴⁴⁸ The watcher angels therefore became unclean because of their own impure actions. They also had children, which were a type of human-angel hybrid, described as giants (1 En. 7:2). A few chapters later in 1 En. 10:11, there is another reference to the uncleanness of the watchers: “And the Lord said to Michael: ‘Go, bind Semjaza and his team who have associated with women and have defiled themselves in all their uncleanness” (έν άκαθαρσία αυτών).⁴⁴⁹ Once again the comment of Elder (2016:435) is important:

The phrase “to be defiled in their uncleanness” is redundant—it is tacked on to an already elongated dative indirect object. It serves to make absolutely clear that the watchers’ illicit sexual behaviour has caused them to become defiled, and this defilement is specifically connected with uncleanness— a mark that now indelibly characterizes the watchers.

⁴⁴⁸ He notes that “the most likely explanation is that Mark is recalling the watchers tradition, wherein the watchers become unclean because of their illicit relations with human women” (Elder, 2016:434).

⁴⁴⁹ This English translation comes from Lumpkin (2010:35). It completely corresponds with the translation of Black (1985:30).

According to 1 En. 10:11-22 this behaviour will lead to the ultimate destruction of the watcher angels who will burn in the “fiery abyss...where they will be confined forever”.⁴⁵⁰ This passage has victorious overtones and there is a clear sense of celebration because those who caused the destruction are finally made to pay for what they did.⁴⁵¹ Note that the good angels are tasked to execute the judgement on the bad angels. In this regard the comment of Van de Kamp (2000:360) on the three unclean spirits in Rev 16:13 is important: “Twee soorten geesten werken in deze wereld: drie onreine demonische geesten en zeven heilige Geesten van God zijn elkaars tegenhangers.” It is also important to pay attention once again to Philo who also saw demons and angels as the same type of being. The three unclean spirits therefore stand in opposition to the seven (good/clean) angels (spirits) executing the judgement on the beast and his kingdom. Furthermore, it has to be stated that when the word ἀκάθαρτος is found again in the book of Revelation (Rev 17:4), it is in relation with fornication.⁴⁵² Uncleanliness is therefore also in Revelation connected to immoral sexual behaviour, as in the Book of the Watchers. Admittedly the essay of Elder (2016) focuses specifically on the unclean spirits in the gospel of Mark 5, but it is clear that his study on the significance of the unclean spirits in 1 En. 1-36 has relevance for the interpretation of the unclean spirits in Revelation as well, perhaps even for the understanding of unclean spirits throughout the New Testament.

Hence there is strong evidence to support the argument that the unclean spirits of Rev 16:13 can be explained by looking at the unclean spirits in the Book of the Watchers. In the context of the sixth bowl plague this would imply that the spirits coming from the mouths of the Satanic Triad were unclean because of their immoral behaviour, which in turn, implies that the Satanic Triad themselves were immoral.

Finally, there is one more apparent connection to the Book of the Watchers in the description of the sixth bowl plague which has to do with the angel Gabriel in 1 En. 1-36. This connection will be explored in the following section.

7.5.2 The archangel Gabriel

In 1 Enoch Gabriel is the sixth archangel and is a very important angel in Jewish literature.⁴⁵³ Excluding the apocryphal literature, Gabriel is one of the only angels mentioned by name in the Old Testament as commonly used by Christians today (Davidson, 1971:117). Gabriel is also named in the gospel of Luke as the angel who appears to the Virgin Mary. In this regard

⁴⁵⁰ Translation by Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012:29).

⁴⁵¹ Cf. Nickelsburg (2001:224).

⁴⁵² A woman is seen holding “a cup full abominations and the impurities of her fornication.”

⁴⁵³ His name means “God is my strength” (Nickelsburg, 2001:223).

Nickelsburg (2001:223) notes that while Gabriel is usually one of the four or seven archangels, he does sometimes work alone as messenger as in 1 En. 10:9. Davidson (1971:117) also notes that Gabriel is the ruler over Paradise and that “in Jewish legend it was Gabriel who dealt death and destruction to the sinful cities of the plain (Sodom and Gomorrah among them).”

For this specific study and the understanding of the sixth bowl plague, an important event is when the good angels execute the judgement of the Lord on the watcher angels who took part in immortal deeds. As explained in the previous section, some of the watcher angels had improper sexual relations with humans, causing them to become unclean. Then the Lord starts to punish them for what they did. It is in this context that Gabriel receives the command to send (πέμψον) the sons of the watchers for a battle against each other which would bring about their destruction (1 En. 10:9). Nickelsburg and VanderKam (2012:29) translate the verse as follows:

Go, Gabriel, to the bastards, to the half-breeds, to the sons of miscegenation; and destroy the sons of the watchers from among the sons of men; send them against one another in a war of destruction. Length of days they will not have.

The verse clearly indicates a great battle which is initiated by the angel Gabriel who sends these unclean angels up against each other. This brings the nations’ gathering for battle in Rev 16:14 to mind. Two verses later the direct reference to the unclean spirits is found. Looking at matters in this light, it appears that there might well be a strong connection between Gabriel and the angel of the sixth bowl plague.

7.6 The military operation

After the reference to the demonic spirits who are said to perform signs, the military operation is described in more detail. This puts another perspective on the signs the spirits perform. These are clearly signs that seem to attract people to them. Those in rebellion against God gather their forces and prepare for battle.⁴⁵⁴ The sixth event in all three sets of six in Revelation is concerned with what Van de Kamp (2002:362) calls *een voorvertoning van een aspect van de oordeelsdag*. The people from all over the world gather at the place called Armageddon in Hebrew, according to Van de Kamp (2002:364), simply referring to the Old Testament city of

⁴⁵⁴ Van de Kamp (2002:362) notes that in Zechariah and in Joël the preparation for the final battle is mentioned.

Megiddo which was in the time of the New Testament in ruins.⁴⁵⁵ To Van de Kamp (2002:364) Zion, Babylon and Megiddo are in a triangle with Zion, the place where God meets his people, Babylon where the rebellion against God starts and Megiddo the place where the two opposing forces meet.⁴⁵⁶ This whole event is caused by God bringing a final end to his opposition. Van de Kamp (2002:365) argues that Joel 3 is at the background of this event. What is interesting to note is that it is only said that the nations gathered at the place called Armageddon. The battle itself does not yet take place.

7.7 The classical elements

Thus far in the previous five bowl plagues, three of the four classical elements have been mentioned, namely earth, water and fire. The first bowl plague is said to be poured out on the earth, causing painful sores on the followers of the beast. Water is affected when the second bowl is poured out on the rivers and springs and on the sea, and everything living in it dies. The third bowl also affects water when it is poured out onto the rivers and springs, turning it to blood. Fire plays a role in the fourth bowl when it is poured out on the sun and the sun burns people.⁴⁵⁷ In the fifth bowl there is a strong focus on the earth, probably the earth in general. In the sixth bowl plague all three these elements come together. A river is affected directly by the outpouring of the bowl. In the secondary effect, the rising sun is mentioned as the place from where the kings are coming to make war and these kings come from all over the world, therefore the whole kingdom of the beast on the earth.

7.8 Preliminary conclusions

7.8.1 The drying up of the Euphrates River

In this chapter the many images referred to have been explored in detail. It was shown that the Euphrates River functions primarily in the Hebrew Scriptures as the border of a certain territory. In the sixth bowl plague it therefore serves on a symbolical level as the border of the kingdom

⁴⁵⁵ A great deal of work has been done on this specific part of Revelation with many people attempting different theories of where exactly Ἀρμαγεδών is or to what exactly it refers. In the 40's Hendriksen (1940:163) appeared to be fairly sure that the background can be found in Judges 4, 5. Van de Kamp (2002:363-364) offers a good overview of the different possibilities. This is, however, not pertinent to the current study and will therefore not be explored in further detail.

⁴⁵⁶ Incidentally all three names ends in the same way, with the letters -ών.

⁴⁵⁷ The sun is connected to fire. Malina (1995:7) notes that "celestial beings, whether stars or demons, angels or archangels, were said to be made of fire (hence visible at night)".

of the beast, keeping the enemies at bay. Furthermore, it has been indicated that according to Philo the Euphrates River is connected to the virtue of justice and that this might be another reason why the River Euphrates is mentioned specifically. The drying up of the Euphrates River in the sixth bowl plague is the symbolical start of the final serving of justice on the kingdom of the beast. Therefore, it appears that there is a connection between the idea that the Euphrates River is connected to justice in the works of Philo specifically and the sixth bowl plague. What has also been highlighted, is the fact that the Euphrates River is a boundary on earth and in Rev 13 all the earth and its inhabitants are forced to worship the beast. His kingdom therefore encompasses all the earth. As boundary, the Euphrates River might then just be a boundary protecting the beast's headquarters/throne and now God opens this boundary, leaving the beast vulnerable for a revolt against him. In the context of the Roman Empire this will make a lot of sense.

7.8.2 The kings from the rising sun

It cannot be said with certainty who the kings from the east were. Many different proposals have been put forward, none of which were absolutely convincing. A proposal that was added by this study is the possibility that the kings of the east might be the people leading the revolt against the beast. The second beast forced the people to worship the first beast, and now God allows them to attack him. It might be that they finally realized it is the beast who is responsible for their suffering.

Furthermore, the reference to the sun in this plague appears to be more than mere coincidence and was probably a deliberate use in line with the previous plagues which affected the sun. It might well be that it also says something about the kings themselves in that they are not the people of God, but rather people who worship other gods like the sun-god.

7.8.3 The Satanic Triad and the unclean spirits

In this bowl plague the Satanic Triad is also mentioned together with the land beast being called the false prophet. These three open their mouths to let three evil spirits out. It has been indicated how important the mouth was to ancient writers. The mouth had great potential for both good and bad actions. The fact that the spirits coming from the mouths of the Satanic Triad was called unclean, emphasises that nothing good came from the mouths of the evil triad. They obviously open their mouths to oppose God.

The unclean spirits are said to be like frogs (ὡς βάρπαχοι). It was argued that frogs were known for the meaningless sounds they make and their impurity when dead. Philo sees frogs as both deceptive on a metaphorical level and on a literal level they were a source of great

disgust to those who came into contact with them. Even though frogs are only mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures in connection to the Exodus plague of frogs, the connection of the frogs to the Exodus tradition is not very strong for several reasons. Firstly these are only three frogs, and not a huge infestation of frogs. Secondly, these frogs are not literal frogs, but are only mentioned as a metaphor for the unclean spirits. And finally, they are not in any way part of the bowl plague itself, but rather part of the reaction to the bowl plague. Scholars have proposed some other possible arguments on the background and meaning of the frogs. One such argument is that frogs, with the meaningless sounds they make, indicate the deceiving character of the unclean spirits. Another contrasting argument which was highlighted is that John wanted to ridicule the Satanic Triad by implying that what comes from their mouths are evil spirits which are disgusting and could only make meaningless noises. The opinion of Beale that the connection between the frogs and the spirits indicate the deceptive nature of the three spirits and therefore link them to the deceptive Babylon, has been called into question on a lack of evidence. Still, the view of Philo might well be the best parallel to the meaning of the frogs in that something of both these interpretations appears to be present in the Rev. 16:13.

7.8.4 Links to the Book of the Watchers

An important perspective on the background of the unclean spirits which has not been identified by any modern scholars is the link to the unclean angels in the Book of the Watchers. The spirits are called unclean, linking them to other unclean spirits in the New Testament. A strong argument is made by one scholar specifically, that the unclean spirits, particularly in Mark 5, has their background in the unclean watcher angels in the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1-36). It also appears that these links apply to the unclean spirits in Rev 16:13. The watcher angels became unclean because of their immoral relationships with human beings. The good angels then have to execute judgement on the unclean watcher angels. In Rev 17:4 impurity is also connected to sexual immorality. The impurity of the demons therefore appears to point to the immoral character of the spirits and also the Satanic Triad. The spirits in Rev 16:13 are also associated with demons. Associating evil spirits with demons is fairly common in Jewish literature and demons were also worshiped on a regular basis. Demons were sometimes worshiped as gods, implying that they had some kind of authority, perhaps because of the signs they were able to perform. It was stated in his discussion on the giants, Philo describes angels and demons as the same kind of being, only with different character traits. Both were seen as invisible and living in the air. In essence Philo, therefore, sees bad angels as demons. The unclean spirits are therefore seen as demons, which, in turn, are bad angels, like the angels in the Book of the Watchers. In the bowl plague narrative these bad angels are also judged by the good angels. The links are clear, especially in the light of the fact that there

seems to be more links to the Book of the Watchers in the bowl plague narrative, indicating that John most probably knew this book.

The other connection in this plague to the Book of the Watchers is the archangel Gabriel. In this bowl plague the fight between the good angels and the bad angels (also known as demons) is reaching a climax. In the Book of the Watchers it is Gabriel who is commanded to send the giants to make war with each other which will lead to their destruction. In the same way the bowl of the sixth angel opens the way for the bad people to fight each other which will ultimately lead to their demise.

7.8.5 Links to the classical elements

Finally, in this chapter it has been indicated that the classical elements still play an important role. A river is affected directly by the outpouring of the bowl. In the secondary effect, the rising sun is mentioned as the place from where the kings are coming to make war and these kings come from all over the world, therefore the whole kingdom of the beast on the earth.

Chapter 8: The seventh bowl plague (Rev 16:17-21)⁴⁵⁸

8.1 Introduction

All the nations are assembled and ready for battle but before the battle can start to take place the final bowl is poured out. The bowl is poured out on the air and appears to be the bowl with the broadest impact of all bowls thus far.⁴⁵⁹ It is the final plague of all the plagues in the book of Revelation and this is emphasised by the exclamation “It is done!” directly after the bowl has been poured out. This last bowl is poured out on the air, wreaking havoc. Some of the effects are lightning, thunder and an earthquake. The climax of the bowl plagues occurs in the form of large hailstones dropping down from heaven. The seventh bowl plague immediately succeeds the sixth, unlike in the seals and the trumpets where there is a time delay between the sixth and seventh plague.⁴⁶⁰ In this chapter the Egyptian plague of hail will first be discussed to see if it can be established as the main background of the seventh bowl plague. Following this, the effects of the bowl plague will be analysed in detail to determine the background of the plague and the specific focus of John. The different reactions to the plague will also be discussed to come to a better understanding with regard to the background of the whole description of the seventh bowl plague.

Ford (1987:327) agrees with Collins (1977) that this plague “is anticlimactic in its present context and this tension may be due to the adaptation of a source”. As with all the other bowl plagues, however, the text will be treated as a single unit.

8.2 The text of the seventh bowl plague

Syntactically the text of the seventh bowl plague can be set out in the following way:

⁴⁵⁸ Thomas (1994) notes that many scholars accept that the seventh bowl carries on beyond Rev. 16:21. He agrees with this and advances his own theory in his essay that “the text all the way from 16:17 through 22:5 constitutes a description of the seventh bowl judgement.” Even though he might make some valid points, in this chapter the discussion will only look at the immediate events following the outpouring of the seventh bowl.

⁴⁵⁹ Thomas (1995:272) argues that the impact is the most severe because air is the life breath of people. Because of this Kealy (1987:199) mentions the possibility that the outpouring of this bowl on the air refers to “universal destruction”.

⁴⁶⁰ Cf. Boxall (2006:235) and Walvoord (2011).

Greek text (Rev 16:17-21)

- ¹⁷Καὶ ὁ ἕβδομος ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα,
καὶ ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ⁴⁶¹ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου λέγουσα·
Γέγονεν.
- ¹⁸καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί, καὶ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας,
οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ' οὗ ἄνθρωποι ἐγένοντο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
τηλικοῦτος σεισμὸς οὕτω μέγας,
- ¹⁹καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη εἰς τρία μέρη,
καὶ αἱ πόλεις τῶν ἐθνῶν ἔπεσαν·
καὶ Βαβυλῶν ἡ μεγάλη ἐμνήσθη ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ
δοῦναι αὐτῇ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ οἴνου τοῦ θυμοῦ τῆς ὀργῆς αὐτοῦ·
- ²⁰καὶ πᾶσα νῆσος ἔφυγεν,
καὶ ὄρη οὐχ εὐρέθησαν.
- ²¹καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη
ὡς ταλαντιαία καταβαίνει ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους·
καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης,
ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα.

Translation

- ¹⁷And the seventh angel poured his bowl on the air,
and a big voice came from the temple from the throne saying:
“It is done!”
- ¹⁸And there came lightning and noise and thunder and a great earthquake,
since there were no people on the earth
so violent was the great earthquake.
- ¹⁹And the great city became three parts
and the cities of the nations fell.
And Babylon, the great nation, was remembered before God
to give her the cup of wine of anger and wrath.
- ²⁰And every island fled
and mountains could not be found.
- ²¹And great hail
like with the weight of a talent

⁴⁶¹ Some manuscripts change this to ουρανοῦ. The scribe clearly thought it would make more sense that the throne would be in heaven rather than the temple.

came down from the heave on the people
and the people cursed God of the plague of hail
because it was an extremely big plague.

8.3 The Egyptian plague of hail

Before the text of the seventh bowl plague will be discussed, it is necessary to first look at the Exodus plague, which appears at first glance to mostly correspond with this plague. When discussing the final bowl plague in his essay on the earthquakes in Revelation, Bauckham (1977:228) notes that the “series of seven plagues in Rev. xvi are fairly closely modelled on the ten plagues in Egypt.” Beale (2011:946) sees in Rev 16:18 - where the four natural phenomena occur in reaction to the outpouring of the bowl plague – as alluding to the Exodus.

While there are indeed some correspondences between the bowl plagues and the Exodus plagues, the distinct differences between the bowl plagues and the Exodus plagues noted in previous chapters make this statement somewhat of an exaggeration. Ford (1987:328) argues that the third bowl is the last bowl to be based on the Exodus plagues while the rest of the bowls are connected to events in the rest of Exodus.⁴⁶² However, it is still necessary, as with the other bowl plagues, to compare this bowl plague to the Exodus plague to which it, at first glance, appears to correspond.

Scrutinizing this plague specifically, there are indeed some clear correspondences between Rev 16:21 and the seventh exodus plague. These correspondences are what lead Beale (1999:845) to argue that the seventh bowl plague is directly related to the plague of hail as described in the book of Exodus⁴⁶³ However, there are also a few strong differences between the two texts which cannot be ignored. In this section the text of the seventh exodus plague and the seventh bowl plague will be compared, looking at these correspondences and dissimilarities.

8.3.1 The text of the Egyptian plague

The broader narrative of the Egyptian plague of hail is described in Exod 9:19-35. The account of the plague itself is found in verse 23-24.

⁴⁶² The interlude by the angel of the water is seen as the division between what happens directly before the actual exodus out of Egypt and what happens thereafter.

⁴⁶³ He says that “the exodus plague of hail is replicated”.

LXX text

ἐξέτεινεν δὲ Μωυσῆς τὴν χεῖρα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ κύριος ἔδωκεν φωνὰς καὶ χάλαζαν, καὶ διέτρεχεν τὸ πῦρ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ ἔβρεξεν κύριος χάλαζαν ἐπὶ πᾶσαν γῆν Αἰγύπτου. ἦν δὲ ἡ χάλαζα καὶ τὸ πῦρ φλογίζον ἐν τῇ χαλάζῃ· ἡ δὲ χάλαζα πολλὴ σφόδρα σφόδρα, ἥτις τοιαύτη οὐ γέγονεν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ ἀφ' οὗ γεγένηται ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἔθνος.

English translation⁴⁶⁴

Then Moses stretched out the hand towards heaven, and the Lord gave sounds and hail, and fire ran about on the land, and the Lord rained hail on the whole land of Egypt. Now there was hail and fire flashing in the hail. Now the hail was very, very abundant, such as had not occurred in Egypt from the time when a people had come into being upon it.

8.3.2 Correspondences

8.3.2.1 Hail

The main correspondence is of course the mention of the natural phenomenon of hail.⁴⁶⁵ In both plagues hail falls from the air and does great harm to the enemies of God. Interestingly, both the bowl plague of hail and the Exodus plague of hail are number seven in their respective series of plagues, although the Exodus plague is not the last plague in its series of plagues as it is the case with the bowl plague.⁴⁶⁶ In the Exodus plague the hail goes along with thunder and fire (probably lightning⁴⁶⁷).⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁴ Translation: NETS.

⁴⁶⁵ Sommer (2015:124) argues that John “hat in Offb 16,18 und in Offb 16,21 auf Ex 9 zurückgegriffen.

⁴⁶⁶ Possible reasons for this will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Meyers (2005:85).

⁴⁶⁸ Philo (*Mos.* 1.118) elaborates on the wonderful appearance of these natural phenomena. In this section he describes the lightning and thunderbolts as fire by stating how strange it is that the thunderbolts did not melt the hail and the hail did not extinguish the fire of the thunderbolts. The hail and thunderbolts he calls ἀντιπαταγούντων “antagonists”.

8.3.2.2 The reference to heaven

A reference to heaven is found in both plagues. In both plagues the hail comes from heaven, although this is stated more directly in the bowl plague than in the Exodus plague. In the Exodus plague the hail comes down after Moses stretched out his hand to heaven and in the bowl plague it is said explicitly that the hail came down from heaven. In Revelation the focus is clearly more on the place where the hail originates, than it is in the Exodus plague.

8.3.2.3 The exaggeration

In both plagues a strong exaggeration about the nature of what happens is found using the same wording. The exaggeration is meant to indicate how severe the event is. In both plagues it is said that what happened was so severe that there never occurred (οὐ γέγονεν – Exod 9:24; οὐκ ἐγένετο – Rev 16:18) something remotely like it in human history. The main difference is that this exaggeration is not used in relation to the hail in the seventh bowl plague, but in relation to the earthquake. In the Exodus plague the exaggeration is used specifically with reference to the hail. Strack and Billerbeck (1926:821) note that in the Jewish Midrash the thought was that, while it is said in the Exodus plague there was no such disaster in the past, it does mean that there will not be something even bigger in the future. This bigger disaster will happen on the day of God which will go along with war. The seventh bowl plague might play in on this tradition.⁴⁶⁹

8.3.3 Differences between the plagues

8.3.3.1 Noise, hail and fire

The hail in the Exodus plague goes along with two other natural events. The first is the noise (φωνάς) which is mentioned before the hail. Secondly, fire (πῦρ) is said to run across the earth and it is “in” the hail (φλογίζον ἐν τῇ χαλάζῃ).⁴⁷⁰ In the bowl plague, in the verse where the hail is mentioned, no other natural phenomena are mentioned. However, a few verses earlier the first consequence of the seventh bowl plague is that there was lightning (ἀστραπαί), noises (φωνάς), thunder (βρονταί) and an earthquake (σεισμός). In this regard the seventh bowl plague differs from the seventh Exodus plague in three instances: Firstly, there is no mention of fire, which is striking, since hail and fire are also connected in some of the psalms, which

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. Sommer (2015:124-125).

⁴⁷⁰ As noted earlier the fire is obviously a reference to the lightning.

also reflect on the Exodus. Clearly this connection was taken up in the Exodus tradition. If the final bowl plague is really modelled on the Exodus plague of hail, it could therefore be that the direct reference to fire was deliberately avoided, possibly to keep the focus in this plague on the element of air. It is, however, impossible to prove, but it remains an interesting possibility. Secondly, there are two different kinds of noises in the bowl plague, namely noise in general and noise of thunder specifically. Thirdly, the hail is not mentioned in direct relation to the other natural phenomena that occur along with the plague.

8.3.3.2 The victims of the plague

The scope of the destruction of the two plagues also differs. In the Exodus plague of hail, it is said that all people, animals, plants and trees were hit by the hail. This destruction is, however, limited to the land of Egypt. In the seventh bowl plague, only the people are hit by the hail falling from heaven. Although it is not stated explicitly, the implications are that these people are the followers of the beast.⁴⁷¹

8.3.3.3 The reaction to the plague

The initial reaction of the Pharaoh is admittance of guilt (Exod 9:27-28). He acknowledges that he sinned and that he and the people of Egypt are wicked people.⁴⁷² Moses says in Exod. 9:30 that he knows that the Pharaoh and his servants will not fear the Lord, which is exactly what happens. He eventually does harden his heart,⁴⁷³ but this only happens later. The immediate reaction is to submit. Contrary to this, in Rev 16 the immediate reaction of the people to the plague of hail is that they blaspheme the Lord as they did after the fourth and fifth plague as well. They do not acknowledge their own wrongdoing or their own contribution to what is happening to them. While they are struck by the plagues because of their own evil deeds and their allegiance to the beast, they do not recognize this and rather blame God for it.

Koester (2014:669) highlights another matter in connection to the reaction to the plagues where the bowl plague is different from the Exodus plague. Directly after describing the Exodus plague of hail, more detail is given about the damage the hail does to the land of Egypt (Exod 9:25). In the bowl plague no attention is given to what exactly the hail does to the people and

⁴⁷¹ Beale (1999:844) says that this plague “strikes not one nation but all throughout the world who are in opposition to God.”

⁴⁷² Refer to Koester (2014:669) who refers to the Exodus plague of hail when noting that “the proper response to hail is that the ungodly should repent.”

⁴⁷³ Cf. Sweet (1990:251).

the territory of the beast. The author of Revelation only highlights how the people react to the plague.

8.3.3.4 The order of the plagues

It has been observed that the exodus plague of hail is seventh out of ten plagues, while the bowl plague of hail is the final climatic plague in the seven bowl plagues. Assuming that the seventh bowl plague is based on the seventh exodus plague, the question has to be asked why this would be the case. This is one of the main questions for Beale (1999:844-845). In his discussion of this matter he agrees with the view of Bauckham (1977:228-229) who argues that in the last bowl plague, John alludes to both the exodus plague of hail and the “Sinai theophany”, as it is said in Exod 19:16 that there were noises and lightning (φωναὶ καὶ ἀστραπαὶ). The author of Revelation therefore sees the exodus plague of hail as linked to the Sinai theophany which “is a more climatic event in Exodus” (Beale, 1999:845). The reason Beale (1999:845) thinks the Sinai theophany is in the view of John linked to the exodus plague of hail, is due to the fact that he is also influenced by Josh 10:11 where the Amorites are struck down by “hailstones from heaven”. Beale (1999:845) concludes his argument by the following statement: “So Joshua 10 and Exodus 19 have influenced the placement of the hail here in the narrative of the bowls, which has also been influenced by Ezek. 38:19-22, where hail and earthquake mark the final stage of judgement on the end-time enemy.” There are a few problems with this argument. In the first instance it is unclear how Josh 10:11 and the Sinai theophany are linked, as Beale (1999:845) would argue. The link appears to be more to the exodus plague of hail. Just because Josh 10 “comes after the plagues” does not insinuate that it is linked to the Sinai theophany. Secondly, this argument on the link between the exodus plague of hail and the Sinai theophany does not adequately explain why the plague of hail should be last in the series of bowl plagues, while it is not last in the series of exodus plagues.

Noegel (1995:537-538) presents some valid arguments on why the seventh Egyptian plague is of special importance. He mentions a few important factors, such as the fact that the seventh Egyptian plague is expanded much more than any other plague. Furthermore, Noegel (1995:538) argues that hail and fire were seen as signs of the presence of the divine and he also contends that “the importance of the seventh plague, therefore, is in keeping with the symbolic use of the number seven within the narrative”. All of these are valid reasons for John to put the plague of hail last in his list of seven plagues.

However, one final point to consider, which no scholar mentions, is that the plague of hail might be last because hail and air are closely linked. In this chapter it will be indicated that the air is of special importance among all the elements affected by the bowl plagues. The bowl poured out on the air, causing the air to react in several different ways, is a fitting climax to the

bowl plagues. It is, after all, only the air among the four elements of nature, which has not been targeted by a bowl plague thus far in the bowl plague narrative.

8.3.4 Summary

The correspondences discussed here, make it clear that John had the Exodus plague in mind when writing about the seventh bowl plague. However, the differences between the descriptions of the two plagues also makes it clear that he did not intend to replicate the Exodus plague of hail. John had more in mind.

8.4 The bowl is poured out on the air (ἐπὶ τὸν ἀέρα)

8.4.1 General

The last bowl plague is poured out on the air. The air is the only classical element which has thus far in the bowl plagues not been affected.⁴⁷⁴ All three of the other elements which creation was seen as consisting of,⁴⁷⁵ namely earth, water and fire (sun), have had a bowl poured out on it. Only the air was left, but now it is also targeted.⁴⁷⁶ After this plague all created matter has been struck by the outpouring of a bowl.

Looking at the most basic association of air in ancient writings, air is what fills the gap between the heavens above and the earth below.⁴⁷⁷ In Revelation the air is said to be darkened after the fifth trumpet was blown (Rev 9:2). This is the only other place in Revelation where air is mentioned. In the rest of the New Testament the word is not used very often and usually only without any deeper meaning.⁴⁷⁸ There are, however, a few instances where deeper meaning is indeed attached to the concept of air. Two such occurrences will briefly be discussed before the occurrence of the word in the Hebrew Scriptures and the works of Philo will be examined.

⁴⁷⁴ Cf. Aune (1998:899), Blount (2009:307).

⁴⁷⁵ Cf. Philo (*Opif.* 146) and Philo (*Plant.* 120).

⁴⁷⁶ Koester (2014:668) argues that “by pouring out bowls on each element, the angels show God’s power over the whole created order. The goal is not destruction, but the overthrowing of those who would ruin it (11:8).”

⁴⁷⁷ Cf. Koester (2014:661).

⁴⁷⁸ For instance in Acts 22:23 people are said to throw dust in the air out of frustration. The same is true for 1 Cor 9:26.

8.4.2 Ephesians 2:1-2

The occurrence of the word in Eph 2:1-2 is important. In that text ἀήρ is connected to the spiritual powers. It reads:

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler⁴⁷⁹ of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.⁴⁸⁰

This text sees the air not just as the empty space above the earth, but as a place filled with invisible powers and evil spirits.⁴⁸¹ To Sweet (1990:250) this means that “Satan was ‘the prince of the power of the air’ and that ‘the sub-lunar belt was thought to be his ‘sphere of influence’”. In verse 6 it is said that the believers are raised up to sit with Jesus in the heavenly realm (ἐν τοῖς ἔπουρανίοις).⁴⁸² Later in the epistle to the Ephesians another reference to evil spiritual powers is found when the war between good and evil is explicitly noted (Eph 6:10-17). In that instance, however, the evil powers are said to be in the heavenly realm. To O’Brien (1999:160) the “kingdom of the air” is only different from the heavenly realm in that it is the lower parts of it. It appears therefore as though he sees the air as the part of heaven which is closest to the earth.⁴⁸³ A more detailed discussion of the significance of the air in ancient Greek thought can be found in an essay written by Randall E. Otto on 1 Thess 4:14-17.

⁴⁷⁹ O’Brien (1999:159) notes that it can also be translated as “prince”. The reference is in his view clearly to a personal power.

⁴⁸⁰ New Revised Standard Version.

⁴⁸¹ For an in-depth discussion on the whole of Eph 2 and the war motifs present, see Gombis (2004) who argues for the whole of Ephesians 2 is a narrative of divine warfare. He sees the different combat motifs from the Ancient Near East, identified by Collins (1975) in the book of Revelation, as also being present in the Eph 2.

⁴⁸² Cf. O’Brien (1999:160) who notes that “‘the kingdom of the air’, then, is another way of indicating the ‘heavenly realm’ which, according to Eph 6:12, is the abode of those principalities and powers, the ‘world-rulers’ of this darkness’ and ‘spiritual forces of wickedness’, against which the people of Christ wage war.”

⁴⁸³ This is in accordance to the view of Lincoln (1990:96).

8.4.3 First Thessalonians 4:16-17

¹⁶For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the arch angel's call (ἐν φωνῇ) and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air (εἰς ἄερα); and so we will be with the Lord forever.⁴⁸⁴

In this text it is said that the believers who are still alive by the time of the return of Christ, will be taken up into the clouds to meet⁴⁸⁵ the Lord “in the air” after the Lord has descended from heaven and those who were dead in Christ rose.

There is clearly more behind this than a mere reference to the open space between heaven and earth. Otto (1997:195) examines the background of this passage in detail to understand the meaning behind this reference to air. He discusses the “cult of Cabirus” which invoked *daimones* to make an epiphany to ward off danger.

This cult, perhaps the most influential in Thessalonica, looked to the powers of the air to preserve its initiates in this life and to deliver them safely to the isles of the blessed in the life to come. Those isles, though often considered as a place beneath the earth, were also viewed as existing in the airy ether above the earth to which the warm breath of the *psuche* would return at death (Otto, 1997:195-196).

He argues that these ideas, along with the fact that all trials facing the believers, were seen as the work of demonic forces who lived in the air, caused the Thessalonians to be concerned about the souls of their loved ones who died and also their own souls after they themselves die. Therefore, Paul attempts to put them at ease by the reassurance that Jesus will come from heaven and conquer all these forces in the air and the believers will meet Him in the air. Importantly Otto (1997:204) remarks that ἀήρ is not the same place as heaven, the place where the Lord dwells, “since this noun is never used as a synonym in the NT for *ouranos*”. This is also clear in the final bowl plague where the voice comes from heaven, but the bowl is poured on the air. However, in Revelation heaven is also the part of the sky that can be seen

⁴⁸⁴ New Revised Standard Version.

⁴⁸⁵ Otto (1997:203) notes that the Greek expression used here was often used in Hellenistic Greek when a city received a visit from important people.

and from where celestial phenomena come from (McDonough, 2008:180).⁴⁸⁶ To Otto (1997:204) the main significance of the air is that the ancient Greeks saw it as the place where spiritual war took place. This war was constantly waged between good and bad angels. As noted, the air as the dwelling place of evil spirits and powers is well attested in ancient Greek literature as seen in the previous section as well.⁴⁸⁷ To Otto (1997:205) it is specifically the lower regions of the air, that part which contacts the earth, where these spirits live. Two important observations made by Otto (1997:205) need to be noted here:

The air is the place of final conflict between the conquering Christ and the powers of darkness which are perceived by the Thessalonians to threaten the destiny of the departed and the fate of those who remain

and

the 'air' then, is the climatic place of final eschatological conflict where the risen Christ claims victory and the eternal possession of his people.

If this is true, it might explain why the bowl poured out on the air is the final plague in the book of Revelation.

The references to the sounding of the trumpet and the sound/voice (φωνή) of the archangel preceding the descent of the Lord from heaven, are also significant for the current study. These are imagery found in the book of Revelation too, specifically in relation to the plague septets. This is not to say that the book of Revelation is textually dependent on 1 Thess, but both John and Paul obviously drew from a common background of apocalyptic traditions. Otto (1997:200) calls the imagery used in 1 Thess 4:16-17 "standard apocalyptic military motifs". On the significance of the trumpet and the loud noise he concludes that "the association of the trumpet and the shout has an almost proverbial character as regards swiftness and power in battle" (Otto, 1997:201).

Otto's discussion of the air imagery in 1 Thess 4 is very helpful for the current study as it provides a deeper look into the way the people around the first century CE thought about the forces at work in the air. It highlights the notion that the word ἀήρ is not simply the matter we

⁴⁸⁶ McDonough (2008:180) further notes that the heaven "may also be seen as a kind of veil separating the earth from the throne room of God".

⁴⁸⁷ Gombis (2004:407) notes that "the mythological pattern of divine warfare was current and 'in the air' in the first century."

breathe or what occupies the physical space between heaven and earth. The word *ἀήρ* has much deeper connotations which need to be considered when examining the final bowl plague.

8.4.4 *ἀήρ* in the LXX

In the LXX the word *ἀήρ* only appears in the book of Wisdom and then always when referring to the physical air or wind. Air denotes the space directly above the earth where birds fly (Wis 5:11). Air is also what is breathed in (Wis 7:3), but is distinguished from wind (*πνεῦμα*) in Wis 13:2. It is important to note that there are no references to angels or other supernatural beings living in the air in the LXX. It would appear then that writers of the Hebrew Scriptures did not see any direct connotations between the air and unseen, living beings. There are, however, many references to heaven in the LXX as the place where the gods live, but there is a clear difference between the notions of heaven and air.

8.4.5 Air in the writings of Philo of Alexandria

Philo from Alexandria also provides some more insight on the way air was seen in the first century CE. In his treatise on the creation he stresses that air is one of the basic elements of nature along with earth, fire and water and he notes specifically that it fills the empty space above the void (Philo, *Opif.* 84; 146).⁴⁸⁸ Air, just like water, is an element which has very strong destructive power as it is able to destroy crops (Philo, *Opif.* 80).⁴⁸⁹

He emphasises that air was also one of the two elements (along with fire, seen by Philo as the most important elements for life) that were affected by the plagues which Moses alone carried out (Philo, *Mos.* 1.97). In his view, the Exodus plague of hail is closely connected to the air. A sudden change in the air preceded the hail which caused a violent storm to break out. (Philo, *Mos.* 1.118). In *Mos.* 1.119 he further expounds on the lightning and thunder accompanying the plague of hail, which are all phenomena happening in the air. The plague of locusts is seen as a plague of the air, because it is said in Exodus that a wind carried the locusts into the land causing the locusts to fill the air.⁴⁹⁰ Another Exodus plague which is connected to the air, is the plague of boils which was initiated by ashes being thrown into the air, coming down in a fine dust.⁴⁹¹ However, this plague was probably more connected to the

⁴⁸⁸ Philo (*Opif.* 32).

⁴⁸⁹ He sees fire and air as closely connected because these two elements are the light elements, while water and earth are the heavy elements (Philo, *Her.* 146).

⁴⁹⁰ See Philo (*Mos.* 1.120-121) where he writes about the Exodus plague of locusts.

⁴⁹¹ Cf. Philo (*Mos.* 127).

earth, because of the strong function dust plays in the plague. Thus far it appears that Philo saw the air as simply the matter which fills the space directly above the earth. Yet there is more to his view on the air.

In Philo's treatise on the giants,⁴⁹² he writes that Moses usually calls the beings referred to by other writers as demons or spirits, angels. This has also been referred to in the previous chapter. These angels are invisible beings who live in the air (Philo, *Gig.* 6, 8). In *Plant.* 14 Philo also remarks:

Of twofold kind were the beings which the great Maker made as well in the earth as in the air. In the air He made the winged creatures perceived by our senses, and other mighty beings besides which are wholly beyond apprehension by sense. This is the host of the bodiless souls.⁴⁹³

He elaborates more on the way the air brings forth unseen living beings in this treatise on the giants, but the important matter is that Philo appears to be quite confident that the air was not void of invisible living beings. This is emphasised even more in another work where he notes that these invisible beings are called angels, which denote "a most sacred company of incorporeal souls" (Philo, *Conf.* 174). Obviously, Philo saw the air as filled with different kinds of invisible beings.

One other important observation made by Philo needs to be mentioned here: according to Philo (*Mos.* 1.96) God brought the four "elements of the universe of which the world was made" in hostility to the Egyptians. This is a clear indication that, according to Philo, God controls the natural elements to warn people to repent or punish them for what they did. The idea of God using the elements against his enemies is therefore nothing new. Philo, furthermore, sees the presence and power of God throughout all creation, noting specifically earth and water, air and heaven, which he groups accordingly.

Philo's view on the air is enlightening for this study as it provides more evidence that people of the first century saw the air as filled with invisible, supernatural beings. These beings lived in the natural element of air which is the only one of the four elements one cannot see, but only feel.

⁴⁹² Known in Latin as *De Gigantibus*.

⁴⁹³ The translation used is by Colson and Whitaker (1988:219).

8.4.6 War among supernatural beings

The Book of the Watchers,⁴⁹⁴ which has been referred to in other chapters of this study, contains a narrative of conflict in the air between good and evil spirits/angels.⁴⁹⁵ In this narrative some angels descend from heaven to earth and have intercourse with human women, leading to the birth of the giants who do a great deal of harm to people on earth. These fallen angels and the giants are strongly judged by God and Enoch is asked to intercede for them. The book details the journeys of Enoch through the heavens. In the book a combat between the good and the bad angels is described. Alomia (1987:443) notes that in the Hebrew Scriptures angels are only referred to as “watchers” in the book of Daniel and is portrayed as “a kind of celestial warriors”.⁴⁹⁶ As it has already been indicated in this study, namely that John might have been familiar with the contents of the Book of the Watchers, this battle in the air might be in John’s mind, even though there are no clear allusions to it in the seventh bowl plague.

8.4.7 Air in the final bowl plague

As mentioned in the previous subsection, Otto (1997:205) refers to the air as the place of final conflict. It has been indicated that the air was commonly seen as inhabited by supernatural beings among first century writers. The question is, what is in the mind of John when referring to air here? Is it only meant as one of the natural elements from which the world was created as some would argue,⁴⁹⁷ or is it intended as the place of the final spiritual combat between the invisible creatures living in the air, or a combination of both?

Considering the air as place of conflict, it is significant that the description of the sixth bowl ends by noting the gathering of the people on the place called Armageddon. This is after they were rounded up by the three evil spirits and assembled on the mountain. According to Rev 16:14 the reason they are gathered is for war.⁴⁹⁸ Koester (2014:666) remarks that “when the demonic spirits use signs to lure the kings into battle, they promote rebellion against God and

⁴⁹⁴ See Collins (1998:49 ff.) for a summary on the Book of the Watchers as apocalyptic literature. He calls the fallen angels “supernatural agents” (Collins,1998:52).

⁴⁹⁵ Hengel (1989:47) notes that “the notion that the souls of the giants who came into being as a result of the marriages of the fallen angels with human women became evil spirits, which emerges in Enoch and in Jubilees, also coincides completely with Greek demonology.”

⁴⁹⁶ Alomia (1987:445).

⁴⁹⁷ Koester (2014:661) argues that “the air is not so much the realm of demonic beings (Eph 2:2) as it is part of God’s creation like the sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies mentioned earlier.”

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. Koester (2014:666).

Christ, the true ruler of earth's kings (Rev 1:5; 17:14; 19:16)". Indeed, the evil spirits play an important role in the battle which is set to take place between the forces of the beast and the forces of God, even though it was argued in the previous chapter that the rebellion is probably against the beast. Beale (2015:347) sees a direct link between the bowl poured on the air and the air which was darkened in the fifth trumpet plague. In his view, this "seems to associate the 'air' here with demonic activity".

After the people are gathered for battle, an angel pours his bowl onto the air. This action is clearly meant to set this battle in motion. Immediately a voice from the throne⁴⁹⁹ in the temple is heard saying: γέγονεν ("It is done!").⁵⁰⁰ This is then followed by some natural phenomena, which will be discussed in more detail in the rest of this chapter. For now it can be noted that these natural phenomena, which happens in reaction to the outpouring of the bowl on the air, is in the view of Collins (1975:220-221) an indication of the presence of the "Divine Warrior".⁵⁰¹ Boxall (2006:235) holds that the air is indeed used as reference to the spirits which were seen as living in the air. He writes that:

the focus on air here may be a reflection of the cosmic effects of this ultimate plague. More likely, however, John is invoking the association of the air with the activity of malevolent spiritual forces (cf. Eph. 2:2 which speaks of 'the ruler of the power of the air'): the only other instance of ἀήρ in the Apocalypse is in reference to the demonic locusts from the Abyss (9:2). The cosmic powers are about to see their stronghold broken.

Thomas (1995:272), on the other hand, disagrees with this view and argues that the air should not be seen "as the region of the power of evil, based on Eph 2:2", as in his view "this context contains no hint of that significance". Indeed, there is no direct reference to spiritual combat in

⁴⁹⁹ For a comprehensive study on the function of the throne motif in the book of Revelation, see the work of Gallusz (2014). In this work he mainly argues that the throne motif "constitutes the major, though not the only, interpretative key to the complex structure and theology of the book" (Gallusz, 2014:330). McDonough (2008:181) indicates that the throne was on top of the world and once one goes through the door in the heaven one enters the throne room of God. The throne of God also plays an important role in other apocalyptic texts such as Dan 7 and 1 Enoch, as Du Rand (1997:69) points out.

⁵⁰⁰ Bauckham (1993 [2]:42-43) argues that John deliberately shies away from comparing God to a human as he does not want to create the image that God is a ruthless "human despot wielding arbitrary power.

⁵⁰¹ She sees a similar combat pattern throughout the different series of seven in the book of Revelation. The word γέγονεν represents the "victory shout" in this pattern she sees.

Rev. 16, but the reference to three evil spirits in the previous verse, the reference to an angel, the voice from the throne (which is in heaven) and the reference to the beast and his kingdom, all point to some kind of combat on a supernatural level. The three evil spirits living in the air gather the people for battle, but their domain is soon targeted by another supernatural being, an angel of God. All of this is in line with what Fee (2006:12) calls Revelation's "most dominant motif" which is the holy war.

Although there are clear references to a battle on a spiritual level in the air, the natural world is also affected. As already mentioned, the pouring out of the bowl sets in motion a few astonishing and very destructive natural phenomena, all which are directly linked to the air. These are all aimed at the kingdom of the beast.⁵⁰² The war between the two kingdoms is reaching a climax. As expected, God wins by completing his onslaught on the worldly kingdom of the beast, attacking the last element of which it is made. Now there is no hiding place for the beast and his followers anymore.

8.4.8 Summary

The word *ἀήρ* appears to be a very heavily laden term when used in the context of the final bowl plague. It cannot be denied that the spiritual world and supernatural beings which were living in the air, are considered here. The reference to the air increases the anticipation of a big battle taking place. On the other hand, the word also appears to refer to the air as one of the natural elements of which the created world is made up. In the rest of the chapter it will be indicated how all the natural phenomena taking place affirms this strong reference to the natural element of air, which is used by God to defeat his enemies.

8.5 The immediate reaction to the plague

After the bowl is poured out, there is no immediate effect on the air as in the case of the previous six plagues. There is a sense of anticipation as everyone waits for the final catastrophe that about to strike the kingdom of the beast. A big/loud voice from the temple and the throne is heard: *καὶ ἐξῆλθεν φωνὴ μεγάλη ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου λέγουσα• Γέγονεν.* – "And a big voice came from the temple from the throne saying: It is done". The bowl plagues started with an announcement by a big voice commanding the angels to pour out their bowls

⁵⁰² Cf. Beale (1999:841) who argues that by pouring out the bowl on the air, judgement is implied. This judgement is on the kingdom of the beast, just as in the previous plagues. Thomas (1995:273) agrees and calls the natural phenomena "signs of God's punishment".

on the earth and these plagues are also concluded with an announcement by a big voice.⁵⁰³ The voice is probably the voice of the angels, or that of God, or even that of Christ.⁵⁰⁴

Only one word is spoken by the big voice: Γέγονεν (“it is done”).⁵⁰⁵ Scholars are divided about the true thrust of the word here. To Van de Kamp (2002:365) the use of the verb links the final bowl plague to the beginning of the vision of the heavenly throne room in Rev 4:1 where a voice tells John: Ἀνάβα ὧδε, καὶ δείξω σοι ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα. (“Come up here, and I will show you what must be done after this”). After the seventh bowl is poured out, that which had to be done is done. Aune (1998:899) argues that it refers to the “climatic end of the series of plagues that God has inflicted on the world.” Kraft (1974:21) sees the word as introducing the beginning of the final end.⁵⁰⁶ Fowler (2013:242) agrees with other scholars such as Beale and Smalley by arguing that this word implies the full completion of what Jesus did on Golgotha. Koester (2014:662) does not agree and sees no evidence to support this argument. Another possibility which was not noted by any modern scholar is the fact that the original command was to pour out the bowls on the earth. However, while not all bowls were poured on the earth directly, the voice is still satisfied that the work has been done. This is probably another indication that the aim of the bowls was to target the kingdom of the beast which consists of all the different parts of the earth, which are the four elements earth, water, fire and air.

Most scholars do, however, agree that the word strongly links to Rev 15:1 where it is stated that in these seven bowls the wrath of God is ended (Aune, 1998:899).⁵⁰⁷ This voice

⁵⁰³ This links to Rev 5:12 which ends the hymn with a glorification of the Lamb. Schimanowski (2004:78) describes the function of the voice of the angels as follows: “The liturgy, therefore, with its crescendo at the end, resembles a hymnic finale. It presents all of the angels ‘with full voice’ (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) in response, praises ‘blared over.’”

⁵⁰⁴ Blount (2009:307) argues that the voice in Rev. 15:8, which prohibits anyone to enter the temple until judgement is complete, makes it obvious that it has to be the voice of God. He also notes that the throne is used to refer to God throughout the book of Revelation. This argument appears to be based on that of van der Waal (1981:287). Koester (2014:661) agrees and also thinks it is the voice of God. Beale (1999:842) argues that it is either the voice of God or the voice of Christ. See also Thomas (1995:272).

⁵⁰⁵ Thomas (1994:75) thinks the word should be translated as “It has been done and remains done”.

⁵⁰⁶ Koester (2014:668) agrees but emphasizes the fact that this is only the end of the plagues. The true end of the anger of God only comes when his adversaries are totally destroyed in Rev 19:15.

⁵⁰⁷ See Giesen (1997:364).

confirms that with the last bowl plague, the pouring out of the wrath of God is indeed complete.⁵⁰⁸ It is clear that the function of this voice is to conclude the bowl plagues.

8.6 The effect of the plague

After the loud voice is heard, nature reacts dramatically (Rev 16:18):

καὶ ἐγένοντο ἀστραπαὶ καὶ φωναὶ καὶ βρονταί, καὶ σεισμὸς ἐγένετο μέγας οἷος οὐκ ἐγένετο ἀφ' οὗ ἄνθρωποι ἐγένοντο ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τηλικούτος σεισμὸς οὕτω μέγας, -

And there came lightning and noise and thunder and a great earthquake since there were people on the earth, so violent was the great earthquake

Even though the bowl was poured out on the air, it is not only the air in which a reaction is seen. Both the air and the earth react violently, another indication that the end is near.⁵⁰⁹ Four natural phenomena are said to take place: lightning, noise, thunder and a great earthquake. The first three are all related to the air, while the last is more closely related to the earth. Gallusz (2014:125-126) makes a strong case that all these natural phenomena are based on the Sinai theophany.⁵¹⁰ In the discussion of the great earthquake this link will be discussed in more detail. Each of the natural phenomena will briefly be discussed separately.

8.6.1 Lightning

Lightning is mentioned first. In the Jewish Scriptures ἀστραπή (lightning) is strongly connected to the presence of God. It is something which only God caused (Ps 17:15; 76:19; 96:4; 134:7 [LXX]; Sir 43:13; Jer 10:13; 28:16). In the Jewish Scriptures lightning is never cited along with all three of the other phenomena mentioned in Rev 16:18. Ἀστραπή is mentioned along with φωνή in the Sinai Theophany (Exod 19:16). Two verses later, in verse 18, the mountain is said

⁵⁰⁸ Giblin (1998:510) writes that “his event no doubt includes the anger of God declared proximately at the outset of this final septenary (16:1)”.

⁵⁰⁹ For a philosophical discussion on the way God in the Old Testament is linked to natural phenomena, see Gericke (2016) where he investigates the possible ways to see the relationship between God and nature.

⁵¹⁰ See also Gallusz (2014:141) where he equates the allusions to the theophany to the involvement of God in the world. See also Ford (1987:329) who agrees that this last bowl is specifically based on the “Sinai traditions”.

to shake, which some see as referring to an earthquake and synonymous to σεισμός.⁵¹¹ This is the closest that any text from the Jewish Scriptures comes to the phrase in Rev 16:18, which is why so many scholars see a close connection between the seventh bowl plague and the Sinai Theophany.⁵¹² In later literature lightning flashes (ἀστραπαί) are commonly associated with the end times, also in the New Testament (Beale, 1999:842). In Matt 24:27, for instance, it is said that Jesus associates his own return with flashes of lightning in the east.⁵¹³

8.6.2 Noise and thunder

A noise (φωνή) is mentioned secondly.⁵¹⁴ The Exodus plague of hail (Exod 9:23-24) was accompanied by loud noise and flaming fire (τὸ πῦρ φλογίζον).⁵¹⁵ In the book of Revelation φωνή is mostly associated with the throne of God. As mentioned in the previous section, the bowl plagues are initiated and concluded with a “big voice” from the throne. Noise and thunder are strongly connected to the air as sound travels through the air.

8.6.3 An earthquake

The earthquake, which is the last of the natural phenomena mentioned in this verse, is described as a “big earthquake”. Two of the four phenomena caused by the outpouring of the bowl are elaborated on in more detail: the earthquake and the hail.⁵¹⁶ The earthquake is immediately expanded on, while the hail is left for the last, climatic verse.

When earthquakes are mentioned in other places in Revelation, it is usually in response to God himself. Already in 1977, Bauckham wrote an influential essay on the earthquake in the book of Revelation in which he sets out to determine what role it plays in the book. He provides some valuable insights which need to be taken into consideration. In his opinion the major role of the earthquakes mentioned, is that it “heralds the coming of God in judgement”. He notices that John refers progressively more to the Exodus plague of hail as the book of Revelation

⁵¹¹ Cf. Beale (1999:842) whose view will be discussed later in this section.

⁵¹² The views of some modern scholars on the connection to the Sinai Theophany will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁵¹³ See also Luke 17:24.

⁵¹⁴ The word can mean either voice or noise, but in the context of Rev 16 it clearly refers to a loud noise.

⁵¹⁵ The flaming fire is clearly a reference to lightning. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

⁵¹⁶ Bauckham (1977:227) notes that “the earthquake and the hail are described at some length”.

continues.⁵¹⁷ In Rev 6:12, after the sixth seal was opened, a big earthquake occurred, while the sun became black and the moon like blood. In Rev 11:12 followed by a big voice from heaven which calls the two witnesses up to heave, an earthquake occurs. However, this earthquake, which occurs after the outpouring of the sixth bowl, is said to be exceptionally big, in fact it is said that it is the biggest in history. This clearly places more emphasis on the fact that the judgement of God reached its apex with the outpouring of this bowl.⁵¹⁸

Earthquakes were well known events in ancient times. Koester (2014:662) focuses all his attention on the earthquake when discussing this verse. He remarks that “in the OT the earth shakes when God confronts his enemies (Judg 5:4–5; Mic 1:4; Nah 1:5), rules the nations (Ps 99:1), and judges the wicked (Isa 13:13; Jer 51:29)”.⁵¹⁹ He also points out that earthquakes were considered to be a sign of the anger of the gods in the Greco-Roman world and attempts to indicate how σεισμός refers to contemporary events in the lives of the first readers of the book of Revelation.⁵²⁰ The first readers of the book of Revelation obviously had the knowledge of the destruction caused by earthquakes and this makes the image of a powerful earthquake, splitting the city into three parts, a very daunting thought. Calling this the greatest earthquake ever intensifies the situation even more.

Exaggerating on the severity of an earthquake is nothing new in ancient writings. In the Jewish Scriptures other supernatural events are also said to be the greatest ever experienced. Joel 2:2, for instance, writes that the plague of locusts is so big that nothing like it has ever been experienced and nothing like it will ever be experienced. Two Exodus plagues are also described in that way: the plague of hail in Exod 9:18 and the plague of locusts in Exod 10:6.⁵²¹ Bauckham (1977:231) argues that this was also a common way to describe an exceptional event. He summarizes his view on this by stating that “Rev. xvi 18 both alludes to whatever

⁵¹⁷ See also Bauckham (2004:4) where he notes that this progression indicates “progressive intensification of the judgments in the three series”.

⁵¹⁸ Some scholars such as Lichtenberger (2014:218), Beale (1999:842), Aune (1998:900) highlights the fact that they see an allusion to Dan 12:1 in this phrase. To Beale (1999:842) this is a clear indication “that Rev. 16:18 is a description of the last judgment and the end of the present cosmos”.

⁵¹⁹ This is in accordance with the view of Sweet (1990:250) who notes that “earthquake in the Bible often signifies the shattering and removal of a corrupt political power.”

⁵²⁰ Bauckham (1977:229) notes that “the Greco-Roman pagan world took earthquakes seriously as signs of divine displeasure.” He also provides more information on some of the cities in the Roman Empire which were struck by devastating earthquakes to indicate that the readers of Revelation were definitely familiar with earthquakes.

⁵²¹ Cf. Thomas (1995:274).

John's readers were accustomed to recall as the greatest earthquake ever, and projects that experience into the apocalyptic future which will surpass any known disaster".

An important reference to an earthquake which one needs to consider here is in Rev 11:13. The reference is found in the account of the two witnesses who die, but are resurrected and then ascend to heaven. It is after their ascension that the earthquake takes place, causing a tenth of the city to fall.⁵²² Seven thousand people are killed and the rest are said to be fearful of God and give glory to the God of heaven.⁵²³ This is in contrast to the final bowl plague in which the whole city is destroyed and the people blaspheme God because of the plague. In the case of the final bowl plague, however, it appears that they rather blaspheme God for the hail than for the earthquake. Still the parallel is striking with the references to the heaven, the destruction of a city and people reacting. To Bauckham (1977:231), the importance lies in the different reactions. Sometimes an earthquake can be used as a way to get people to repent, but there are also people who view the earthquake only as a wrath, such as the people in Rev 16:21 and therefore they do not repent.⁵²⁴

Another passage that Bauckham (1977:231-232) refers to, is Rev 6:12-17 where the sixth seal is opened. The description of the effects of the sixth seal being opened also contains a reference to an earthquake. Along with the earthquake the sun also became black and the moon like blood. The heavens gave way and the mountains and islands moved from their places. The only connection appears to be the earthquake, which Bauckham (1977:232) thinks is "the same final earthquake to which vii5, xi 13, 19, xvi 18 also refer".

One last important fact of the earthquake that merits more attention is that it appears to affect the earth, even though it is one of the consequences of a bowl being poured out on the air. It has been stated in the previous section that the earthquake is the only one of the four celestial phenomena in Rev 16:18 not directly affecting the air. Bauckham (1993:224), however, makes an important remark when he notes that references to an earthquake is often found in the Old Testament and other texts from the intertestamental period. He writes that "very frequently this earthquake is part of a cosmic quake: the whole universe, firmament, heavenly bodies, earth, sea and the foundations of the world tremble at the coming of God".

⁵²² In the view of Bauckham (1977:231) it is unsure whether the earthquake taking place when Jesus is resurrected was something the first readers of Revelation knew of.

⁵²³ Fowler (2013:200) questions whether these people repent or if they just do what is necessary to save themselves. For the current study this is not the important question. The fact is that these people are said to repent in contrast to the people affected by the seventh bowl plague who keep on refusing to repent.

⁵²⁴ To Sweet (1990:251) the differences mean that the differences point to "different but overlapping realities".

Bauckham concludes on the meaning of the earthquake in the book of Revelation that the author of the book “shares the expectation that the God whose voice once shook Sinai will once again shake heaven and earth, and to the unrepentant his coming can only be fearful”. The earthquake can therefore be the result of the air shaking as well.

8.6.4 The celestial phenomena in other texts

These celestial phenomena are often found together in groups of three or more, especially with reference to the “end times”.⁵²⁵ When Mary Magdalene and the other Mary arrive at Jesus’ tomb, an angel of the Lord appears on the stone and they experienced a great earthquake and it is said that the angel’s appearance was as lightning (Matt 28:1-3). Earthquakes without lightning are also associated with the final judgement. In Matt 24:7, Mark 13:8 and Luke 21:11, earthquakes are mentioned along with war, famines and pests as signs of the end times.

In the book of Revelation there are four instances where at least three of these natural phenomena are seen together. The first is in Rev 4:5, where all but the earthquake is said to proceed from the throne in heaven. In Rev 8:5 these four phenomena occur after an angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth. This happens just before the first angel sounds his trumpet. Aune (1998:517) argues that the function here is to anticipate “the divine judgments that follow the sounding of the seven trumpets”. What is interesting to note, is that in the trumpet plagues, these phenomena happen after fire from the altar is thrown *on the earth*. The third occurrence of the three phenomena (again including the earthquake) in the book of Revelation is after the temple in heaven is opened and the ark of covenant became visible (Rev 11:19). Clearly, in this instance these phenomena happen as a response to the power of God (Aune, 1998:517). Finally, in Rev 16:17 after the last bowl was emptied *on the air* the three celestial phenomena occur together one last time. In this case, Aune (1999:517) lumps these phenomena together with the hail, which occurs later in the description of this bowl plague and notes that these portents “constitute the destructive punishment of the seventh bowl”. Considering all of the above mentioned, it is interesting to note the pattern: The trumpet plagues start and end with these phenomena, while the bowl plagues only end with it. However, as it has been discussed, in the description of the bowl plague, the earthquake is said to be exceptionally big.

⁵²⁵ Cf. Reed (2004:56).

Beale (1999:842) emphasises the connection to the Exodus tradition, noting that “the phrase is based in large part on Exod 19:16-18, which describes the Sinai theophany”.⁵²⁶ His argument is based on the view first put forward by Bauckham (1977:227), who maintains that the last bowl plague is modelled on the description of the appearance of God at Sinai.⁵²⁷ In another work, Bauckham (1993 [2]: 41-42) states that

in 4:5a John has developed a feature of Ezekiel’s vision of the divine throne (Ezek. 1:13) into an allusion to the phenomena of the thunderstorm that accompanied God’s self-manifestation on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19:16; 20:18). This feature of John’s vision therefore represents the One who sits on the throne as the holy God of the Sinai covenant, who demands obedience to his righteous will. But the formula used in 4:5a is then echoed at the opening of the seventh seal (8:5), the sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:19) and the pouring out of the seventh bowl (16:18-21).

With each echo, the formula is expanded and the last three specifically include references to the earth, which is to him an indication that the holiness of God in heaven referred to in Rev 4:5 is now shown in his “judgement on evil” (Bauckham, 1993 [2]:41).

Aune (1999:518), however, disagrees with this point of view. He proposes that it would be a mistake to automatically assume a “direct allusion” between these phenomena and the Sinai Theophany, because in the Jewish Scriptures it became the norm to link earthquakes, thunder and lightning to the presence of God. It is therefore quite possible that the thunder, lightning and earthquakes are simply an indication of the reaction of the cosmos to the “big voice”. This argument is underscored by the fact that the big voice and these phenomena all have in common that they are strongly linked to the air. Sommer (2015:118) notes that the link of these phenomena to the Sinai theophany creates “eine Motivlinie, die vom himmlische Thronsaal ausgeht, durchzieht den apokalyptischen Hauptteil und verbindet diesen mit der *Tag des Herrn-Szene*.” He sees the “day of the Lord” as being of special importance here.

Taking everything into account, it then appears that the big and frightening natural phenomena are all linked to the presence of God, in the Hebrew Scriptures as well as in the New Testament. In the book of Revelation, it is connected to God using violence to get the

⁵²⁶ Although the MT writes that the mountain shook, in the LXX of Exod 19:18 it is said that the people trembled and not the mountain. Bauckham (1977:227) argues that this does not matter since it is not assured that John only used the LXX as source for his Old Testament references. Still it is most probable that he did.

⁵²⁷ Van der Waal (1981:288) also hints at this.

followers of the beast to repent. However, in the final bowl plague, the focus is clearly on the element of air and the effect God's presence has on the air.

8.7 The secondary effect of the plague

8.7.1 The great city splits

Verse 19 can basically be divided into three parts: the division of the great city, the fall of the cities of the nations, and the divine remembrance of Babylon.⁵²⁸ It appears that the effect of all these celestial phenomena together is that the great city (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη) splits into three separate parts and the cities of the nations fell.

It is interesting that there is no specific mention of a war. After the outpouring of the sixth bowl plague the nations were said to gather for war, but it was not said that they actually made war. Now, after the seventh bowl, all the cities are destroyed. It might be an indication that it was not people who won the war, but God Himself. The effect of the destruction on "the great city" (splitting the city in three parts) appears to be more the consequences of the earthquake, which was mentioned in verse 18, than a war.⁵²⁹ This lends more support to the argument in the previous chapter that the kings from the east are leaders of a rebellion against the beast. While they all rise up against their leader, it is God who finally conquers them all before they even get a chance to take up arms and start to fight.

A detailed discussion on the identification of the great city is not within the scope of this study. However, for the sake of thoroughness, it will briefly be discussed. Aune (1998:900) clearly highlights the strongly opposing views on the matter. He concludes that it must be Babylon/Rome.⁵³⁰ Beale (1999:843) agrees with Aune and argues strongly that the "great city" is Babylon. Van de Kamp (2000:366), however, argues that the "great city" and Babylon are two different places. He argues this on the basis of him seeing the result of the natural disasters as being threefold: Firstly, it splits the "great city" into three parts, secondly it destroys the cities of the nations, and thirdly, it affects Babylon. Looking at the verse itself it appears that the splitting of the great city and the fall of the cities of the nations are the same event and that the next part of the verse about Babylon drinking the cup of the wrath of God, is rather an expansion or deeper interpretation on what happened to the great city. Koester (2014:668)

⁵²⁸Cf. Aune (1998:901). Koester (2014:669) would join the first two parts together.

⁵²⁹ To Beale (1999:843) this is in line with "biblical expectation" of what will happen when God appears at "the final judgement".

⁵³⁰ Yarbrow-Collins (1981:7) also sees a reference to Rome in Rev 16:19 and remarks that Rome is "the instrument of God's wrath".

represents a unique third view by arguing that “the ‘great city’ is a comprehensive image for the world in opposition to God”. He, therefore, combines the view of Beale and Van de Kamp and holds that it includes Babylon, but does not refer to Babylon exclusively. Mounce (1998:303) is convinced that it cannot be any city other than Rome. Regardless of how it is interpreted, the consensus among recent scholars appears to be that it does not refer to Jerusalem, but to places hostile to God.⁵³¹ In the last part of the verse Babylon is indeed mentioned explicitly and called “Babylon the great”, which confirms the arguments of the scholars who see “the great city” as Babylon or including Babylon. One of the most recent commentaries on Revelation, Berger (2017:1168), confirms this. The great city is obviously the place where the throne of the beast is situated. This is only the second place in the whole book of Revelation where the name Babylon appears. The city is said to be given the cup of the wrath of God to drink.

8.7.2 Every island fled away and mountains were not found

Now the earth reacts with islands and mountains fleeing.⁵³² This is probably noted to indicate just how great the earthquake was. It even had the ability to move the earth.⁵³³ The power of God is displayed on a grand scale. Everything responds to the power shown by the Almighty.⁵³⁴ The focus on the earth is probably not coincidence, even though the earth is not explicitly mentioned. In Rev 6:14 almost the same wording is found after the opening of the sixth seal, where the mountains and islands are moved away from their places. The natural elements are continually affected by the bowl plagues.⁵³⁵

8.7.3 And great hail like with the weight of a talent came down from the heaven on the people

⁵³¹ Kealy (1987:199) and Ford (1987:329) are of the few who do think the city is Jerusalem and the splitting of the city refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Thomas (1994:75) also notes that it is “probably Jerusalem”.

⁵³² Philo (*Her.* 136) says that the land was divided into continents and islands. The same idea is seen in *Somn.* 1.17.

⁵³³ Beale (1999:844) calls this “the further breakup of the cosmos”.

⁵³⁴ Koester (2014:669) argues that it is another indication that God uses what is created to combat his enemies.

⁵³⁵ The view of Sweet (1990:251) that the fleeing of the mountains and islands is an indication that the people have nowhere to hide has no foundation in the text.

In Rev 16:21 the seventh bowl plague reaches a climax with enormous hail stones falling from heaven. In all of the New Testament, the word χάλαζα only appears in the book of Revelation and only in four instances. Two of these four instances are here in Rev 16:21 and the other two are in Rev 8:7 and Rev 11:19, i.e. in the context of the trumpet plagues. In Rev 8:7 the hail is a consequence of the blowing of the first trumpet. The hail came with fire and was mixed with blood. It was thrown on the earth, burning a third of the trees and all the green grass. In Rev 11:19, after the seventh trumpet plague, the hail goes along with flashes of lightning, noises, thunder and an earthquake. These hailstones are described as being big in size (καὶ χάλαζα μεγάλη). The hailstones of the seventh bowl plague are also described as very big in size.⁵³⁶ Apocalyptic hail stones should, of course, be exceptionally big as it goes along with big events.

In the Hebrew Scriptures many references to hail can be found,⁵³⁷ most of which is in the Exodus narrative.⁵³⁸ The plague of hail is the seventh Exodus plague. A detailed comparison between the seventh bowl plague and the sixth Exodus plague will be done in the next section. For the time being, it should again be mentioned that hail and fire are strongly connected in the Exodus plague.

In the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures, references to hail are not found frequently. In Ps 17:13 (LXX) hail and coals of fire are closely related, linking to the Exodus plague of hail. Ps 148:8 connects hail and fire, but adds snow and frost. All these natural phenomena are called upon to praise YHWH. Psalm 77 (LXX) reflects on the Exodus plagues and in verse 48 hail and fire are mentioned together. The same is true for Ps 104:32 (LXX). In the prophetic books, hail is only referred to three times by Isaiah (28:2; 30:30; 32:19) and once by Haggai in chapter 2:17. Hail is always connected to the anger of YHWH.

Focusing on the text of Rev 16:21, specifically within the context of the book of Revelation, a few important matters warrant deeper discussion. In the first place it is said that the hail falls *from heaven* (ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). Clearly the place where the hail comes from is emphasised: the hail comes from God, the place where all the bowls come from. It also links to a previous reaction to the bowl plagues where the “God of heaven” is cursed for the suffering. In the second place, the hail is said to be thrown *on the people* (ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους). As noted earlier in this section, in Rev 8:7 hail is said to be thrown *on the earth*

⁵³⁶ Comparing each hailstone to a talent obviously serves to emphasise how big they are. The weight of a talent was around 100 pounds (Aune, 1998:901). Koester (2014:669) notes that according to Josephus (*War.* 5.270) this was also the “size of the stones hurled from a catapult.”

⁵³⁷ The LXX consistently translates the Hebrew word דָּרָד with χάλαζα.

⁵³⁸ Kealy (1987:199) thinks that the hail might also resemble the large stone hurled from Roman catapults. However, there is nothing in the context to support that theory.

(εἰς τὴν γῆν). At the end of the seventh bowl the target is narrowed down from the whole earth to only the people.⁵³⁹ The reason why only the people are targeted, might be that the earth is already destroyed. “The people” are clearly all the followers of the beast and the members of his kingdom.⁵⁴⁰

8.8 The reaction of the people struck by the plague

The people are now said to react to the plague:

καὶ ἐβλασφήμησαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θεὸν ἐκ τῆς πληγῆς τῆς χαλάζης, ὅτι μεγάλη ἐστὶν ἡ πληγὴ αὐτῆς σφόδρα

and the people cursed God of the plague of hail because it was an extremely big plague.

The people proceed to blaspheme God for the hail because it was an enormous plague.⁵⁴¹ This is the third time people are said to blaspheme against God in the bowl plague narrative.⁵⁴² However, it is the first time that it is deliberately stated that they blaspheme God because of one specific plague. The severity of the hail is emphasised once again. The fact that there are people left to blaspheme God, is a clear indication that the destruction of the beast’s kingdom was not final, even though this was the final plague of the final series of plagues in which the wrath of God was said to come to an end.⁵⁴³ Beale (1999:845) argues that with this refusal to repent, the people gave up their last opportunity for salvation. As previously mentioned, a few times in this study Beale sees the bowl plagues not as final warnings to repent, but rather as judgements for not repenting and allying themselves with the beast. Koester (2014:669)

⁵³⁹ In the trumpet plagues the specific place from where the hail comes is not emphasized.

⁵⁴⁰ Beale (1999:844) argues that this implies that the plague “strikes not one nation but all throughout the world who are in opposition to God.”

⁵⁴¹ Bauckham (2004:3) notes that the “‘measure for measure’ judgment (16:4-7) should have brought the truth home even to them [the followers of the beast], but in fact they curse God and refuse to repent (16:9-11, 21).

⁵⁴² Cf. Koester (2014:669).

⁵⁴³ Van de Kamp (2002:365) mentions that in all the series of seven events in Revelation the seventh indicates a transition to the next series. The seventh seal causes half an hour of silence (Rev 8:1) and the seventh trumpet causes loud voices in heaven (Rev 11:15). After the last bowl there is a voice from heaven saying that everything has been done which needed to be done.

disagrees and argues that hail always had the intent of getting people to repent. By not repenting, these people show their firm allegiance to the beast. Not even something as severe as the hail and the earthquake can get them to repent. The main difference between the views of Beale and Koester is once again clearly evident here. While Beale sees the bowl plagues as judgements on the people for following the beast, Koester sees the bowl plagues as warnings with the aim of convincing people to repent. The argument in this study is more in line with the view of Koester that the plagues are warning the people to get them to repent before time runs out. Unfortunately, the people, who were affected by the change that the bowl plagues brought about in the elements of nature, did not repent and persisted in their following of the beast.⁵⁴⁴ Therefore they will now perish with the beast, just like the Egyptians perished at the Red Sea after never truly repenting.

8.9 The angels

In 1 Enoch the seventh archangel was Remiel, otherwise known as Jeremiel⁵⁴⁵ or Jerahmeel (Davidson, 1971:338). Davidson (1971:245) notes that “he is the same angel who, in *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, destroys the army of Sennacherib.” There is not much more information available on who Jerahmeel was, but if he was known to be the angel destroying a great army, it will fit well into the context of the last bowl plague.

8.10 The air as last element affected

It is significant that the air was left undisturbed until the final bowl was poured out. Focusing on everything which has been stated thus far in this chapter, it makes sense. All the references to supernatural beings in the book of Revelation makes it inconceivable that the author of Revelation did not think of the air as place of spiritual conflict when referring to it here. His readers would almost definitely also have made this connection. When conquering the air, the abode of the evil spirits was conquered. It is a clear indication who it really is that is in control of this area of creation where forces hostile to God were known to live. The air would therefore have been the most important element to be targeted, which is why it was left for the final climax.

⁵⁴⁴ Beale (2015:350) argues that the fact that people are said to curse God does not deter from the totality of the destruction and that there are still people left after the plague who are in opposition to God. They curse God while the hail is falling.

⁵⁴⁵ According to Lumpkin (2006:123) the name means “mercy of God”.

8.11 Conclusions

8.11.1 The Exodus plague of hail as background

The chapter was started with a discussion on the links between the final bowl plague and the Exodus plague of hail, which appears at first glance, to be the primary background to this plague. After focusing on the correspondences and differences, it was stated that there are three apparent similarities between the two plagues, namely the hail itself, the reference to heaven and the exaggeration. On the other hand, four differences between the two plagues were noted: the phenomena going along with the plagues, the victims of the plagues, the reaction to the plagues, and the order of the plague.

On the topic of the order of the plagues, the different arguments were discussed on why John would place the plague of hail last, whilst it is seventh out of ten in the Egyptian plagues. It was shown that there is no other case in Jewish literature where a plague of hail was seventh or last in a list of plagues. A perspective that was added to the different proposals of modern scholars is that the plague of hail might well be last because of the link between air and hail. Air, as it was seen, is the last element to be affected by the bowl plagues and of special importance. This could possibly be why the plague connected to hail is last.

Taking everything into account, it was established that while the correspondences are strong enough to concede that John most probably did have the Exodus plague of hail in mind, there are too many differences to argue that it was the only background to the plague. The main words and phrases in the plague were therefore explored in detail to see if some new perspectives on the background of the final bowl plague could be found.

8.11.2 Air in general

The final bowl is poured out on the air. It was argued in this chapter that the air is important on two levels. In the first instance it was indicated that air is connected to the spiritual powers. This is in accordance with the view of Philo that the demons or the fallen angels live in the air. It has been indicated that in the minds of first century writers the air was known to be the dwelling place of supernatural beings, some of which were evil spirits. Both Paul and Philo refer to these beings. Philo's view that the air is filled with spiritual beings, such as angels, was clearly highlighted. The air is the only one of the natural elements which cannot be seen, and which has unseen beings living in it. Otto's argument that the air will be the place of final eschatological conflict was noted. This argument mainly confirmed that in the first century CE air was not simply what fills the space between the earth and heaven, and which is breathed.

In contrast to this, it was proven that the only place in the LXX where air is referred to (Wis 5:11) it is simply used to refer to what is breathed, denoting the place where the birds fly.

Secondly, however, there is also a distinct focus on air as one of the natural elements. Throughout the bowl plagues, the different classical Hellenistic elements of nature were affected by the plagues. Until the seventh bowl, only the air had not been targeted, but this state of events changed with the final bowl being poured out. In this regard air is literally the matter which fills the space between heaven and earth. The four natural phenomena which occurs after the big voice is heard, have all been discussed in detail in this chapter and it was established that everything which happens, happens as a result of the disturbance of the element of air caused by the bowl being poured out on the air. Even the great earthquake was shown to be caused by the air which was stirred up. Although some scholars identify strong links to the Sinai Theophany, it was mentioned that it is probably not the main background of the natural phenomena. In the discussion of each of the phenomena it was indicated that in the Hebrew Scriptures it was common to connect the presence of God to very impressive natural phenomena. This is probably the main reason for these phenomena at the end of the bowl plagues as well. It is a final show of the power of God, so that no one should have any doubt that it is the God from the Hebrew Scriptures who caused all the plagues. In this plague the war between the earthly kingdom of the beast and the heavenly kingdom of God is reaching a climax. As expected, God wins by completing his onslaught on the worldly kingdom of the beast, attacking the last element of which it is made. Now there is no place for the beast and his followers to hide anymore.

8.11.3 Connections to other plagues

Whilst there are indeed strong connections to the seventh Exodus plague, as it was indicated, John did not simply base his whole description of the plague on the Exodus plague or even the larger Exodus tradition. It appears that his focus was more strongly on the specific natural element on which the bowl is poured out, in this case the air. Philo notes a few Exodus plagues which are connected to air: the obvious plague of hail is one, the plague of locusts is another, and finally the plague of boils is also connected to air as it is initiated by ashes thrown into the air. The bowl plague affects the air which in turn affects the kingdom of the beast. None of these are to be seen as the main background of the seventh bowl plague, although the plague of hail has more in common to this plague than the other two.

The connection to the trumpet plague was further explored in this chapter. An important matter which was noted, is that just before the first trumpet sounds, the four phenomena, which are described just after the outpouring of the seventh bowl plague, also takes place. The implication of this might be that the two sets of plagues, which have a lot in common, might be

seen together as a series of plagues from God, starting and ending with the four natural phenomena. The fact that the earthquake after the seventh bowl is just said to be exceptionally big, might confirm this. Another possible connection to the trumpet plagues, is the hail which is described after both the second and the seventh trumpet plague. None of the occurrences correspond totally to the hail of the final bowl plague. The situation in which the hail falls in the two trumpet plagues, differ dramatically from that of the seventh bowl plague.

Therefore, it can be deduced that the air was the most important of the natural elements. It is for this reason that the air is targeted in this last, climatic plague. Now every element has been used against the kingdom of the beast and all the places where the beast and his forces might be at work came under attack. The combat also takes place in the air. After this final bowl plague, where the last natural element is targeted and used against the enemies of God, there can no longer be any doubt about this power of God.

8.11.4 The immediate reaction to the plague

The single-worded reaction directly after the bowl plague was also discussed. While scholars are divided on the origin of the voice and the full meaning of what is said, it is clear that it links to Rev 15:1 where it was stated that in these bowls the wrath of God is completed. It also links to the voice in the introduction to the bowl plagues which gives the command to pour out the bowls on the earth, which was argued to be the voice of God. On defining the voice, one possibility was added to the different proposals by scholars, namely that while not all bowls were poured on the earth directly, the voice is still satisfied that the work has been done. The whole kingdom of the beast, consisting of all the different elements which make up the earth, has been hit.

8.11.5 The splitting of the great city and the fall of the nations

An important fact that was noted on the splitting of the city and the fall of the nations is that there was no mention of the actual battle taking place. This is another indication that the argument of the previous chapter where the kings from the east are kings leading a revolt against the beast, is true. However, instead of allowing them to kill each other, God conquers them all before they even have a chance to start the battle. The city was noted to be a city hostile to God, and in the context of the bowl plagues it was obviously the city where the throne of the beast was situated. It is therefore argued that the city of the beast is the main city, probably Rome, and the cities of the nations the different cities under the rule of the great city, therefore the capitals of all the Roman provinces.

Everything is concluded by great hailstones dropping on the people. It now drops on the people and not on the earth as in Rev 8:7. Only the people are targeted, perhaps due to the fact that the earth was already destroyed. As it was highlighted in the chapter, hail often goes along with great apocalyptic events. The fact that the hail is specifically noted to drop from heaven emphasises that it comes from the same place as the bowl plagues, namely from God. It links to the reaction after an earlier plague where the God of heaven is cursed for the suffering the people had to endure.

The people who are hit react once more by cursing God. This is a clear indication that they were not all killed, even after all the plagues in the book of Revelation took place and the wrath of God was satisfied. Even after they have been hit by all these plagues, the followers of the beast still do not repent and stay aligned with the beast. They had many chances but they kept on refusing and now they will perish with the beast, like the Egyptians perished in the Red Sea.

8.11.6 The focus on the natural elements

In the discussion on the differences between the seventh bowl plague and the Exodus plague of hail, it was highlighted that fire is not mentioned in the final bowl plague, even though fire is strongly connected to hail in Exodus tradition, even in later literature. The possibility was noted that this might be due to the fact that John wanted to keep the focus on the element of air in this bowl plague.

It was also argued that the fact that the air is targeted last among the seven bowl plagues, might as well serve to emphasise the importance of the element of air. It was also stated that the air is the only element not targeted by a bowl plague before this plague.

This again links to the view of Philo, which is clearly expressed in his discussion on the essence of air, where he affirms his view that God brought the elements in hostility against the Egyptians. According to the view of Philo God is also present among all the elements of creation.

Chapter 9: Final conclusions

9.1 Introduction

The main aim of this dissertation was to explore the textual background of the bowl plagues in detail in order to gain some new insights on this imagery. A chapter was dedicated to each of the seven bowl plagues, in which the background of the different words, concepts and phrases used in the description of the specific bowl plague, was discussed and analysed at length. The views of modern scholars were also taken into consideration and gaps in the research have been identified. It became clear during this analysis that there are many aspects of the background of the bowl plagues which have not been identified by scholars, or which actually appear to be more important than what most scholars tend to think. In this final chapter, these findings will now be summarized, by pointing out what the contribution of this study is to scholarship on the bowl plagues in Revelation. It has to be acknowledged that this study is by no means an exhaustive study on the bowl plagues, but merely attempts to provide some new insights on the background to the bowl plagues – insights on which scholars might also disagree.

The findings of this study will now be discussed briefly, based on the conclusions of each chapter.

9.2 The introduction to the bowl plagues and the first bowl plague

The second chapter of the study dealt with the direct introduction to the bowl plagues, which is found in Rev. 16:1. In the same chapter the description of first bowl plague was also discussed. In the direct introduction to the bowl plagues the seven angels are ordered to empty their bowls on the earth. The first angel then proceeds to empty his bowl on the earth. It has been shown that the earth in the introduction to the bowl plagues is different from the earth in the first bowl plague. In the introduction to the bowl plagues the earth refers to all created things, which fall within the kingdom of the beast, whereas the earth in the first bowl plague refers to the earth specifically as one of the four classical elements in ancient Greek thought.

The first bowl plague is poured out on the earth and the effect is that a boil breaks out on the skin of the people who have the mark of the beast on their foreheads. This was an external sign of the internal corruption within the people who had the external mark of the beast. The severity of the plague lies in the fact that it causes impurity and it leads to the hatred of others. Those who thought they were very important and high in ranking had their status in society change to impure outcasts who were avoided by everyone. At first glance it looks like

the background of the first bowl plague lies in the sixth Exodus plague. There are indeed a number of links between the first bowl plague and the sixth Exodus plague. This does not imply that the first bowl plague was based on the Exodus plague of boils, but it was clearly influenced by it.

“Earth” in the first bowl plague is a more specific place than “earth” in the introduction to the bowl plagues. It obviously refers to the earth as one of the four elements of which the world was thought to be made up in classical Greek thought. Philo places a lot of emphasis on the presence and function of the four classical Greek elements in the Exodus plagues. Focusing on the works of Philo, specifically his first work on the life of Moses (*Mos.* 1.129), it appears that he connects the dust, coming from the ashes which was thrown in the air and causing the Egyptian plague of boils in Exod. 9, to the element of earth. Two main reasons have been noted: In the first place, dust, settling on all living creatures in Egypt, is what brings about the boils. Although this dust comes from ashes thrown in the air by Moses and Aaron, Philo sees the dust as being from the element of earth. In the second place, Philo highlights the fact that Aaron is involved in the execution of this plague, and in the execution of the ten plagues, Aaron was specifically tasked with the plagues which had to do with the element of earth.

The connection Philo makes between dust and the boils in Exodus explains why John connects the earth to the boils which came on the followers of the beast in the first bowl plague. It was argued that there appears to be a link between the first bowl plague and the ideas of Philo.

Finally, with regards to the connections to a specific angel, it was argued that the identity of the first angel might be linked to the angel Raphael. In one source he is noted as the first of the archangels and he is linked to the healing of wounds and disease. The possibility was noted that John knew his readers would think of Raphael, but while he heals the wounds of the people of God, he causes wounds on the enemies of the people of God.

9.3 The second bowl plague

The third chapter started off by discussing the different words and concepts used in the description of the plague. There are two prominent matters which have been discussed. The first is the part of creation affected; the sea, and the second is what the effect of this plague is. In the case of the second bowl plague there is a primary and a secondary effect. Primarily the water, is turned to blood, leading to the death of all living beings in the sea.

Water turning to blood immediately brings the Exodus plague of blood to mind which many scholars see as the main background to the second bowl plague. However, some important differences were identified, which clearly indicate that the background of the second bowl plague extends much wider than just the Exodus plague of blood. While the second

trumpet plague also corresponds to a certain extent to the second bowl plague, there are also some strong dissimilarities.

Focusing on the first prominent matter in more detail then, it has been indicated that the sea in ancient literature is far more than just the waters of the ocean. θάλασσαν can, of course, only refer to the ocean, but it can also refer to other bodies of water. These bodies of water were often seen as borders of areas of land inhabited by specific people. In the second bowl plague, however, it appears that the focus is on the water as such, as it turns to blood. In poetic literature the sea is also the great unknown where evil forces were thought to reside. The beast in the book of Revelation comes from the sea. This opens up the possibility that the reference to the sea could also imply the residence or place of origin of cosmic evil. However, there is one factor that points to the fact that the sea here, is actually more a reference to the element of water, which is one of the four ancient elements. The first bowl plague targeted the element of earth and now the element of water is targeted. Two of the bowl plagues have an effect of water, but it is different kinds of water. The salty water and the fresh water are targeted in separate plagues. A similar distinction is found in the trumpet plagues. However, outside of Revelation it appears that there is only one place where such a distinction is made, namely by Philo. When Philo writes about the elements, he indicates a division between salty water and fresh water. The water of the sea is in his opinion is actually the element of water, while the fresh water is rather part of the element of earth. What this points to, is that the author of Revelation might well have been acquainted with either the writings of Philo (which might not be impossible, but probably unlikely), or he used the same traditions that Philo had to his disposal.

The second important aspect of this bowl plague which was discussed, is the primary and secondary effect of bowl plague. Water turning to blood as primary effect has already been discussed. The secondary effect of the water turning to blood is rather obvious in that the living beings in the sea die. This is in line with the Exodus plague where the fish are said to die. In the bowl plague specific reference was made to ψυχή ζωής, broadening the scope of the destruction. The possibility that this might also refer to cosmic forces has been dismissed on the grounds that the cosmic forces are only defeated later in the book of Revelation. Paulien indicated that the theme of de-creation is seen in the fact that the fish are called ψυχή. This is an important theme in the bowl plagues, which is also mentioned later in the bowl plagues. There is also an allusion to Job 36:13-14, which was not pointed out by any of the scholars consulted.

The most important contribution of this chapter to modern research is the link between the bowl plagues and the emphasis that Philo placed on the natural elements of creation.

9.4 The third bowl plague

The third bowl is poured out on the rivers and springs of water, turning it to blood. This time the fresh water is targeted as opposed to the salty water of the sea, targeted by the second bowl plague. The third bowl plague is also the first of the bowl plagues, which is followed by a response from a third party. In this case there are two responses from different sources.

The first one which was investigated was other instances where plagues were linked to water. Two such occurrences were identified, namely the first Exodus plague and the third trumpet plague. The view of most scholars, that the Exodus plague of blood does play an important role in the background of the third bowl plague, has been accepted. However, enough important differences were also identified which is a clear indication that there is more to the background of this plague than just the first Exodus plague. Some scholars also identify a strong link to the third trumpet plague, which also affects fresh water. However, that is basically the only correspondence between the two plagues. In the third trumpet plague the water is not turned to blood.

One new perspective on the background of the third bowl plague which emerged, is the influence of the ideas present in Philo. There are some striking links in some of Philo's discussions to the third bowl plague, on an even broader level to the first three bowl plagues. In the first instance it was noted that Philo places a lot of emphasis on the different kinds of water, namely the salty water of the sea and the fresh water of the rivers and springs. The same differentiation is found in the book of Revelation in a few instances, specifically in the trumpet plagues and the bowl plagues where each kind of water is affected by subsequent plagues. Philo writes that the fresh water has a binding function, binding the different parts of the earth together, and also a nourishing function, providing all living beings with life. While it is confirmed that the same distinction is found in the two creation narratives in Genesis, it has been indicated that Philo places special emphasis on the fact that the fresh water is a different element than the sea as it is more connected to the earth. There appears to be links between the way John differentiates between the two kinds of water and the way Philo sees it.

Another part of the writings of Philo, which appears to play a part in the first three bowl plagues, is his discussion on the conflict between Cain and Abel. Cain shed the blood of Abel just like the followers of the beast shed the blood of the saints and as punishment had to drink blood. According to Philo, Cain also had to consume blood, although it is in an indirect way compared to the people targeted by the third bowl plague. Philo argues that the blood contaminated the soil, which, in turn, contaminated the crops which Cain planted. Water has a nourishing function, but so does blood. Both are able to do great harm in certain circumstances. In the third bowl plague these ideas also feature. The lifeblood of the saints was shed, then those who did the harm were punished by having to drink blood. Another aspect of Philo's

discussion on the narrative of Cain and Abel, which was shown to link to the bowl plagues, is the mark that Cain received. Commenting on Cain who was never noted to die, he says that Cain was a sign of evil, like an incurable disease, which can never be eradicated completely. This appears to link with the followers of the beast who received evil sores which, as many scholars argued, are like a mark on them.

The response of the angel of the waters is also an important part of the description of the third bowl plague. Although some have argued that it was not part of the original text of Revelation and added by a later hand, it is treated as part of the text in this study. Two questions were asked on the angel of the waters: Is the angel of the waters the same angel as the one pouring out the bowl plague, or is it another angel? Is his response a response to both bowl plagues affecting water, or a response to only the bowl plague affecting the fresh water?

After thorough investigation into the matter, it was established that the angel of the waters is most probably another angel with some kind of connection to water. This is primarily due to the angel is specifically called the angel of the waters, creating the impression that this is another angel. It remains unclear what exactly the background of this angel is. His response appears to be a response to only the third bowl plague as the response hints at the nourishing function of water (he praises God for taking the nourishing function of the water, the followers of the beast had to drink, away). It was indicated that the angel's response highlights the fact that the intention of the bowl plague was not to kill the followers of the beast, but to punish them for what they did. As the punishment is not as severe as the transgression, they are still given an opportunity to repent. Later in the bowl plague narrative, however, it becomes clear that they choose not to turn from their allegiance to the beast. Contrary to the response of the angel of the waters who praises God for what He did, these people keep on cursing God.

A second response comes from the altar, confirming what the angel of the waters said. The main perspective which was provided in this regard, is that the view of Koester (2014:648) is accepted in that the response comes from the martyrs whose blood has been shed.

9.5 The fourth bowl plague

In the fourth bowl plague the sun plays an important role as the bowl is poured out on the sun, causing it to burn the people who have been identified to be the followers of the beast.

It was argued that there is no precedent in ancient literature of a plague which caused the sun to burn people. The fourth bowl plague is the first which is not even closely based on any of the Exodus plagues. No trumpet plague is closely connected to this bowl plague. The background to this plague is to be found in other literature from the ancient world. Since the sun plays an important part, the significance of the sun in ancient times, as reflected in the literature from the time, was discussed in greater depth.

The link to the sun-god Ra in ancient Egypt was also highlighted. Ra was seen as the father of the Pharaoh. The sun definitely played a major role in ancient Egypt and the sun-god was seen as a benefactor to the people. It was further indicated that the role which the sun-god played was important in the religion of the first century Roman empire. This would mean that a major part of the implications of the fourth bowl plague is that God causes the sun to harm its worshippers instead of caring for them, again emphasising the omnipotence of God. With this link to Ra the matter of creation is once again brought into consideration, as Ra was seen as a type of creator god who was associated with the creation of the other gods of the natural elements. It once again brings the natural elements into play.

The fact that the Egyptians had a major city built, which was specifically dedicated to the worship of Ra, was also indicated as an important link to the background of the fourth bowl plague. This city was called the Heliopolis (Ἡλίου πόλις), or the “sun city”. The Heliopolis was also known as *On* (Ων) according to texts such as Exod 1:11 and Jer 50:13 (LXX). Three links to Jer 50:13 were highlighted: the first being the mentioning of the sun and the second being the fact that it is noted that God will crush the Heliopolis and burn the houses of those who dwell in the city with fire. Finally, the reference to the Exodus narrative corresponds to the links to the Exodus narrative in the bowl plagues in general. Deriving from this, it can even be argued that Babylon or Rome might as well have been associated with *On* in the book of Revelation.

It was also noted that *On* is the Greek word translated with “being” and in his reaction to the third bowl, the angel of the waters calls God ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, ὁ ὄσιος (“who is and who was, the holy”). Philo (*Somn.* 1.77) strongly links “being” and “mind” to the Heliopolis and the sun, because the mind is the control centre of the whole body, as the sun is in control of the whole world. The possible underlying message here, is that God will always be, but those who worship the sun will perish in fire. God is the ultimate Being and not the gods of the Romans. The message is clearly in line with the idea that it is constantly found in the Jewish Scriptures: The God of Israel is so powerful that He also has power over the sun.

An important matter which was highlighted in the discussion on the fourth bowl plague, is the idea of the sun actually burning people, or even the world, is nowhere to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures of the New Testament. Indeed, fire is used to burn people, but this fire is never directly connected to the sun. Philo, however, records two instances where the sun did, or could potentially burn people. In his discussion on the Egyptian plague of locusts, Philo mentions that the wind, carrying the locusts into Egypt, also causes the sun to scorch everything in its path. Therefore, it could be that the plague of locusts plays an indirect role in the fourth bowl plague, but then as viewed by Philo (*Mos.* 1.120). The other instance is in his discussion on the tower of Babel (Philo, *Conf.* 156-157), where he sees the main reason for the people not being able to build the tower to the heavens, being that the sun would burn them as they would get too close to it. This might not be an instance of God directly burning

people with fire from the sun, but it is still significant to note this as a possible parallel as people who are in opposition against God is said to be burned by the sun.

On the function and essence of fire itself, a few important perspectives were observed. On the one hand, fire was known as something useful and important to sustain life. On the other hand, it was seen as something very frightening. The lightning accompanying the Exodus plague of hail was called fire. This is merely one example of how God uses fire to punish people who oppose Him. In this regard Ps 78 (LXX) has been singled out, as it contains many connections to the bowl plagues. With regard to the fourth bowl plague, the important factor is the reference to the zeal of God as a burning fire. Although it is God's own people at whom the "fire" is directed, there is a strong plea for God's wrath to be redirected to the nations (ἔθνη). The theme of God punishing the enemies of his people for the bloodshed they have caused, also features strongly in the psalm, which plays a definite role in the bowl plagues. It is furthermore worth mentioning that the glory of the Lord is in the salvation he brings about. One difference that has clearly been indicated, is that in Ps 78 (LXX) the suffering of God's people is deserved. In Revelation the suffering of the saints is underserved persecution, but the suffering of the followers of the beast is indeed deserved. The focus on the fire in the context of the bowl plagues appears to be that, once more, one of the four ancient elements from Hellenistic thought is used by God to harm the people who hurt those who are faithful to Him. The way fire is portrayed in the fourth bowl plague, also appears to be in line with the way Philo describes it.

No scholar attempted to look into the identity of the angel who poured out this bowl plague. It was therefore interesting to realise that there were two archangels in Jewish tradition who are connected to fire. The first was Michael, but the second, Uriel, was the most significant. He was known as the flame of God in a tradition where fire was connected to the glory of God. He was the fourth archangel in three other ancient sources. The connection to fire and the glory of God, both link to the fourth bowl plague as the fire burn the people with the expectation that they will give him glory. Taking all of the above mentioned into consideration, it is likely that one of these angels, especially Uriel, was in John's mind in the second bowl plague.

The role of the function of the bowl plagues also strongly comes in focus with the discussion of the reaction of the followers of the beast to the plagues. Their reaction was shown to be much the same as the Pharaoh's reaction to the plagues in Exodus, in that they do not stop what they are doing and start to honour God. Furthermore, the views of Philo are important in two aspects: Philo emphasised that the aim of the Egyptian plagues was to get people to worship the creator and not the created. This also appears to be the aim of the bowl plagues, as the people are accused of not giving the glory to God. Philo also saw God as a merciful God in the Exodus plagues in that He keeps on giving people another chance to repent. In the

same way it appears that the aim of the bowl plagues is to get the people to repent and they are given many chances/warnings to do so. By not killing the people, God gives them another chance, which they are accused of not making use of.

9.6 The fifth bowl plague

As with the other bowl plagues, which at first glance appears to have an Exodus plague as main background, the background of this plague proved to be much more complicated. There is only one significant correspondence between the two plagues and that is the fact that both cause darkness on the kingdom or land of an adversary of God. The fifth bowl plague is also only linked to two of the trumpet plagues, the fourth and fifth, in that it causes darkness. All of this necessitated a deeper investigation into the background of this bowl plague.

One of the main arguments of this chapter was that that, while the fifth bowl plague is the first bowl plague not explicitly mentioned to be poured out on any one of the natural elements, the natural elements are not out of view from the fifth bowl plague onwards. Indeed, it is said to be poured out on the throne of the beast, which was argued to represent his whole rule over his kingdom. By targeting his throne, God impairs the ability of the beast to rule over his kingdom. It was clearly indicated, furthermore, that the rule of the beast is strongly linked to the earth throughout the book of Revelation. In the book of Revelation, the thrones of those who are linked to God are always in heaven while the thrones of the adversaries of God are on earth. Furthermore, in the reaction to the plague the followers of the beast are said to curse the God of heaven. God in heaven therefore stands in contrast to the beast on earth. The first beast in Rev 13 appears from the sea and receives his throne as he leaves the ocean and walks onto the land, possibly implying that the evil from the ocean now starts to take hold of the earth as well. This is followed by a second beast emerging from the earth, which forces the earth and the people living in it, to worship the first beast. In line with this train of thought is the allusion to Job 12:24-25, where it is said that God removes the understanding of the rulers of the earth (ἀρχόντων γῆς) and makes them grope in the dark without light. Hence there is plenty of evidence that this bowl does affect the earth. Another possible way to interpret this focus on the earth, is that it might be the earth in general, like the reference to the earth in the introduction to the bowl plagues. In that sense this bowl would then affect the four elements together, before the last two plagues will again affect specific elements of nature.

With regard to the way God uses creation, it was argued that, while the focus in the book of Revelation appears to be on the preservation of creation, in the bowl plagues creation is subject to a level of destruction while being employed against the enemies of God's people. However, while evil is in the end totally destroyed, the destruction of creation is not a total

destruction. Everything is finally restored to the extent that the earth and heaven is made new. This is applicable to other aspects of creation affected by the bowl plagues as well.

Some of the conclusions on the background of the reaction to the fifth bowl plague has been discussed here, but there are two aspects that still need to be highlighted. Firstly, the effect that the darkness has on the people is highly unusual. Darkness does not normally cause pain. After looking at the different possibilities, it was concluded that the best proposal is that the pain is caused by the other plagues, especially the sores (as confirmed by the reaction to the plague) and the burning by the sun, which is intensified by the darkness. The bowl plague does not correspond to the Egyptian plagues in this regard. In Exodus there is no mention of any lasting effect of the plagues. The damage appears to be healed completely before the next plague strikes. The bowl plagues on the other hand, cause progressively more harm and systematically breaks down the resistance of the beast and his followers. The pain causes the people to gnash their teeth, which was shown to be parallel to the biting of tongues caused by the pain of the fire of damnation noted in the synoptic gospels. It is an indication of the extreme intensity of the pain.

Secondly, the people are said not to repent from their deeds. This is in line with the refusal to repent after the fourth bowl plague. It was once again emphasised that there appears to be an opportunity for repentance and that the plagues probably do not only serve as punishments of judgements, but merely as warnings. As in the Exodus plagues, the people are given an opportunity to repent after each plague, but when they choose not to make use of it another plague follows.

The final matter which needs to be noted, is the identity of the angel pouring out this bowl. It could be that the angel facilitating this destruction is the angel of darkness, or the angel Zerachiel, who is the fifth archangel and the angel presiding over the sun in 1 Enoch 1.

9.7 The sixth bowl plague

In the seventh chapter the background of the sixth bowl plague was discussed with some important new perspectives being discovered. In the first place, the emphasis by scholars on seeing the Euphrates River as an important border was positively noted and confirmed. The view of Philo was highlighted, where he sees the Euphrates River as connected to the virtue of justice. This is significant for the sixth bowl plague, as the drying up of the Euphrates River in the sixth bowl plague is the symbolical start of the final serving of justice on the kingdom of the beast. While it became apparent that there are no real links to the passing of the Israelites through either the Red Sea or the Jordan River, the Euphrates River is still symbolical as an important border of the territory for a certain group of people. The connection to the beast's rule on all the earth was again emphasised, as it was discussed in the previous chapter (i.e.

chapter six of this study). If the Euphrates River is a border on earth, it was therefore a border within the kingdom of the beast, protecting his throne from a revolt among his subjects. By drying up the river, God makes the throne of the beast vulnerable to a civil uprising.

Focusing on the text from this point of view, it becomes possible that the kings from the rising sun were the leaders of the revolt. It was argued that the reference to the sun could be deliberate, linking it to the bowl plague which affected the sun. These people could possibly be seen as people worshipping the sun. This would justify the argument that these kings are part of the kingdom of the beast who are now turned against the beast by God. The second beast forced them to worship the first beast, and now God allows them to attack him. They have every reason to be angry at the beast because they might see him as being responsible for their suffering.

The second part of the description of the plague revolves around the so-called Satanic Triad namely the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. From their mouths came three unclean spirits like frogs who are like demons, performing signs. The impurity that came from the mouths of these is an indication of their own impurity which they now let out to oppose God. It was manifested that the frogs in the sixth bowl plague were probably only connected to the Exodus plague of frogs, in that frogs were a source of great disgust. Some proposed that the frogs are significant for the senseless sounds they make. Philo's point of view on the frogs was accepted as the best parallel since he sees the frogs significant for both the meaningless sounds they make and the disgust they cause. To compare the evil spirits to frogs therefore means that these spirits are both disgusting and meaningless.

In terms of the impurity and demonic nature of the evil spirits some strong links to the Book of the Watchers (1 En. 1-36) were identified. The watcher angels, who became unclean because of their immoral sexual relationships with human women stand central in the narrative. Good angels, with the angel Gabriel as leader, were sent to punish them for their deeds. The view of Philo on the nature of angels and demons is important here. He sees bad angels and demons as the same being. Therefore, the unclean spirits like demons in Rev 16:14, could be seen as fallen angels, in line with the fallen watcher angels in the Book of the Watchers. The argument is strengthened even further when realising that impurity is connected to sexual immorality in Rev 17:4. The angel pouring out the bowl could therefore also be the angel Gabriel, as he is also the sixth archangel in the Book of the Watchers.

Chapter seven was concluded with a note on the classical elements of nature, where it was indicated that the classical elements still play an important part in the sixth bowl plague. A river is affected directly by the outpouring of the bowl. In the secondary effect, the rising sun is mentioned as the place from where the kings are coming to make war and these kings come from all over the world, therefore the whole kingdom of the beast is on the earth.

9.8 The seventh bowl plague

In the eighth chapter, the seventh bowl plague was discussed in detail, starting with a discussion with reference to the Egyptian plague of hail, which is the seventh Egyptian plague. The three correspondences which were highlighted, indicated that scholars are correct when arguing that the Exodus plague of hail is an important part of the background to the seventh bowl plague. However, it was argued that the four dissimilarities made it clear that there is also more to the background of the seventh bowl plague.

On the order of the plagues and the question on why John would specifically put the plague of hail last in his list of seven plagues, a new perspective was identified. It was argued that the plague of hail could possibly be last, because of the link between air and hail. Air, as it was seen, is the last element to be affected by the bowl plagues and of special importance in the bowl plague narrative among the four natural elements. This could explain why the plague of hail is last in the list of bowl plagues, whilst it is seventh out of ten among the Exodus plagues.

It was further argued that air is important in the bowl plague narrative on two levels. Air was seen among many ancient writers as the place where invisible powers operate. These invisible powers could be either good or bad. There are two important texts from the New Testament which were noted in this regard. Philo also maintains that air is the place where good spiritual beings (angels) and bad spiritual beings (demons) reside. Air was indeed more than just the place where birds were flying, and which is breathed. The reference to evil spirits, demons and angels in the rest of the bowl plagues confirm this. However, it was additionally argued that air was also one of the natural elements of which the world consists of, according to the Greek philosophers. In this regard, air was just the matter between heaven and earth to which many impressive natural phenomena were linked. When the air is stirred up, usually by the almighty God who is present, frightening things happen. It was argued that even the earthquake in the seventh bowl plague could be linked to the change in the air. In this regard, air was the most important element. God's power and presence is clearly visible in this plague and by striking the final of the four natural elements, the war between the earthly kingdom of the beast and the heavenly kingdom of God is reaching a climax. As expected, God wins by completing his onslaught on the worldly kingdom of the beast, attacking the last element of which it is made. Now there is no place for the beast and his followers to hide any longer.

This plague was shown to be linked to the trumpet plagues mainly in terms of the natural phenomena. All five natural phenomena described in the trumpet plagues occur in two instances after the outpouring of the seventh bowl plague. Noises, thunder, lightning and an earthquake occur right before the start and directly after the end of the trumpet plagues. As it

was already noted, these phenomena usually go along with the presence of God in the Hebrew Scriptures, especially where his power is shown. This would explain why these natural phenomena play such an important role in the plagues. Furthermore, the hail occurs after the sounding of the second and seventh trumpets. However, the situation in which the hail falls from heaven is much different in the description of the seventh bowl plague, with the focus being strongly on the stirring up of the element of air.

In the discussion on the voice coming from heaven, which reacts to the outpouring of the plague, one possible interpretation of what was said by the voice, was added to the different proposals tabled by modern scholars. It was argued that this voice is the same as the voice commanding the bowls to be poured out, specifically on the earth. While not all bowls were poured on the earth directly, the voice is still satisfied that the work has been done. The earth as the whole kingdom of the beast, consisting of all the different elements which make up the earth, was struck by the contents of a bowl.

After considering the effect on the great city, it was argued that the great city is probably the capital city of the beast and the cities of the nations are probably the capitals of the provinces of his kingdom. They are destroyed before they even have the chance to make war with the beast in their rebellion against him. God is shown to have the final say on matters. Hail from heaven then drops onto the people, causing them to curse God once more, a clear indication that while their cities were destroyed, the people still survived. They had one more opportunity to repent, which they did not use and now they will perish with the beast, like the Egyptians perished in the Red Sea.

The final conclusions drawn from this chapter was that the focus in the final bowl plague is clearly on the air as the last element affected by a bowl plague. Now all the elements of nature were targeted by a bowl plague by God doing to the beast and his allies as Philo said God did to the Egyptians: He brought the elements of nature in hostility against them.

9.9 Final conclusions

The hypothesis of this study was that, despite the amount of research on the background of the book of Revelation, there is still a gap in the research on the bowl plague narrative in Revelation 16. Therefore, the research was aimed at looking for new perspectives on the background to each of the seven bowl plagues. The aim was neither to provide a thorough analysis of the deeper meaning of the bowl plagues themselves nor the application for the lives of people, but merely to examine the possible backgrounds of the symbolism used in the bowl plague narrative in the light of ancient texts, especially from the Hebrew Scriptures. The results of this investigation might be summarized in the following four findings:

- 1) One of the most important matters highlighted in this study, was **the connections to the ideas similar to those of Philo of Alexandria**, which have thus far received little more than passing attention among scholars. It was not established whether John had access to the writings of Philo (a matter which would be difficult to prove), but it is clear that he was acquainted with similar ideas as those present in the Philonic literature. Although it is impossible to prove that John had access to the writings of Philo, Decock (2018:178) indicates a few parallels between Philo and John. The genres of writing might be quite different, and Revelation might be commonly considered as being more Palestinian Jewish whilst Philo is seen as more Hellenistic Jewish, yet the two writers do have a few things in common. The most important commonality is what they ultimately want to accomplish. In the view of Decock (2018:178) “both Philo and John are prophetic figures whose spiritual experiences and resulting knowledge are meant to guide the communities towards fuller communion with God”. Both of these authors interpret Scripture, although they use Scripture in different ways. While Decock (2018:183) indicates the diverging ways Philo and John go about to accomplish their goals and also notes that Philo makes more use of “Hellenistic vocabulary” and John “preserves Biblical terminology”, the question has to be asked in light of the findings of this study if John was possibly influenced by the Hellenistic background as well.
- 2) On the connections to the Exodus plagues, it was clearly established that John refers to these plagues and he makes use of many of the images, but he **did not base the bowl plague narrative on the Exodus plague tradition**. Not one bowl plague is exclusively linked to any of the Exodus plagues. The same is true for the connections to the trumpet plagues. While the two sets of plagues have a lot in common, the bowl plagues narrative is also a separate set of plagues with a unique background.
- 3) Another important discovery, is that John **seems to have specific angels in mind** when he refers to angels pouring out bowls. Although he does not identify them in the text, it is clear that at least some of the angels are archangels known from ancient literature.
- 4) Finally, it was argued that there is **a distinct focus on the four natural elements in Hellenistic philosophical tradition** in the bowl plague narrative. Philo is a representative of such a Jewish author who often refers to the elements, and it became clear from this investigation that the focus on the elements could be due to the connection to similar cosmological ideas as those represented in writings of Philo. Indeed, John recreates these traditions available to him and does not merely transmit it. He does this because of the need to actualize it for the new circumstances of his intended readers.

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Summary

It is widely recognized that the author of the book of Revelation draws on a wide variety of sources, particularly the Jewish Scriptures, to compose his monograph. While there are no direct citations from these texts, many references to these texts have been identified among scholars over the years. An important part of the structure of the book of Revelation is the three different septets of plagues in Revelation. These septets are no exception when it comes to references to external traditions. Extensive research has been done on this. However, the background of the last of these septets, the bowl plagues, was found to be in need of some deeper investigation. This is what this study set out to do.

The study was aimed at exploring the links to texts which have not thus far been explored and some important findings were made. It was clearly indicated that the bowl plagues are not in any way directly based on the Exodus plagues. This is despite the fact that Moses, plagues and a sea are mentioned in the chapter preceding the description of the bowl plagues. It was therefore recognized that the search for the background needs to be extended. When exploring the background of the bowl plagues, most modern scholars argue for strong links to the Jewish tradition. However, it was found that there appear to be correspondences to the Hellenistic traditions as well. Particularly, some apparent correspondences between the bowl plagues and the works of Philo of Alexandria was indicated. This led to questions on whether it might be possible that the author of Revelation had access to the same traditions as Philo and that he was in some way familiar with these sources. It was furthermore indicated that the four ancient elements, namely earth, water, fire and air, most probably had a stronger influence on the composition of the bowl plagues than what scholars thus far thought. It appears as though he made use of the same cosmological traditions as Philo, while adapting these traditions to convey his own unique message.

A final matter which was investigated in this study related to the background was whether the author of Revelation had specific angels in mind. Connections to some angels which were known from ancient literature was indicated.

This study does not claim to be an exhaustive study of into the background of the bowl plagues, but it does put some important new perspectives on the table which need to be taken note of by future scholars of the book of Revelation.

Key terms

Bowl plagues

Book of Revelation

Four classical elements of nature

Philo

Hellenistic writings

Old Testament background

Angels

The book of the watchers

Kingdom of the beast

Creation