



## CHAPTER 8

### PHYSICAL LIFE AND DEATH IN REVELATION

*"Do not give up, even if people try to terrorise and harm you... see it as a test of your faith and loyalty unto Me, even if they kill you. Listen carefully... the Christian that holds onto his or her faith until the end, might still die in the flesh, but he or she will never lose the eternal life. There is no way that even death can take that life from such a person." Rev 2:10-11.<sup>220</sup>*

In Revelation physical life and death is not deemed to be of great importance [except for the physical death and resurrection of Christ, which is the fulcrum for the rest of Revelation's message (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108)]. Having life [or being dead] does not have too much to do with physical existence. With regard to physical life very little is said in Revelation. The only [direct] mention of real importance is the call to live in faith [i.e. the ethics of life before God] found in the proclamations to the seven churches. It is only in this sense that life [physical] is important.

There are, however, many texts that talk about physical death. These texts could be divided into the following broad categories:

- Death through martyrdom
- Death in the world, mostly as part of God's wrath

The reality is that people will still die in this life. Death is a universal occurrence for every person (Heb 9:27). God alone is immortal (1 Tim 6:16; [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2 and Chapter 6]). Everybody else will suffer death (Gulley 1992: 110-II). Believers will not escape this death, even though they are protected under the blood of the Lamb. The world will not escape death [physical or eternal], as they will be struck by the wrath of God upon the opening of the seals and the trumpets.

#### 1. Physical life

In contrast to the perceptions prevalent in the Old Testament and ANE [cf. Chapter 2], the New Testament [cf. Chapter 3], and specifically the Book of Revelation, does not put too much emphasis on continued existence in this life. The life in eternity is of far

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<sup>220</sup> Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

greater importance, and to really enjoy the full impact thereof, one must first see out the struggle of this life. It is only in this sense that life in this world is of importance.

In this respect life in relationship with God is of the utmost importance. To really be alive and experience the benefits of eternal life, one must live victoriously now. The benefits of God's new world are promised to everyone that conquers in this life, i.e. stay faithful unto death ["real" life {or eternal life} will be discussed in Chapter 9 below]. The importance of the life lived in relationship with God is similar to that found in the Old Testament [Chapter 2, 3.6].

### *1.1. Life in Relationship to God*

It is only in the proclamations to the seven churches that we get any clear reference to the physical life of believers<sup>221</sup> [a lot more is mentioned about them dying, specifically as martyrs – cf. Rev 2:10, 1; 6:9-11; 20:4-6].

The expected way of living of believers are in strong contrast to the lives of the people of this world, about whom we get small snapshots throughout the middle section of Revelation 6-16. The world is constantly in conflict with God, with no positive relational contact emanating from any of their actions. They are depicted as continuing in their lives of sin (Rev 9:20-21), cursing God for their ordeals (Rev 16:11, 21), and worshipping the Dragon and the two Beasts (Rev 13:8).

In the end the contrasting characteristics in the physical lives of believers and non-believers carry through to the eternal sphere, when the physical lives they lived will determine the place they will spend eternity. The texts to be discussed below do not mention the word *life* at all. In all instances life are implied via the actions of people.

#### *1.1.1. Christ amidst his church on earth (Rev 1:12-13)*

##### i) What is the context?

The text is part of the vision of the Son of Man (Rev 1:9-20) that John observes after the prologue to the Book of Revelation. The context of Revelation 1:9-20 have

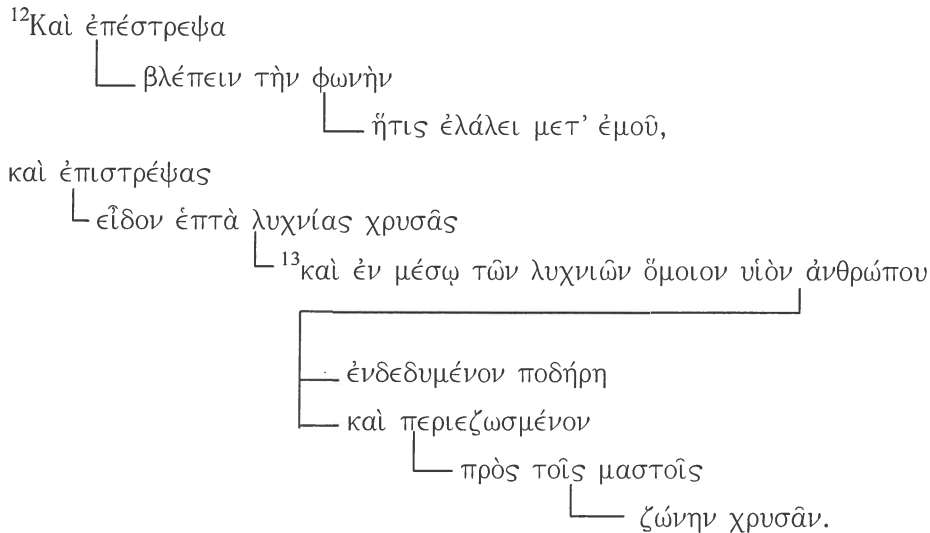
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<sup>221</sup> For purposes of this study the life lived in relationship with God will be taken to be the same as the "religious life" or "spiritual life" of a person during his or her time on earth.

already been discussed in Chapter 7 and will therefore not be repeated here [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.3 (i)].

ii) Christ is with us

a) Syntactical analysis



The two verses describe the reaction of John at seeing the exalted Christ. It is not an unfamiliar reaction to a divine revelation (cf. Isa 6:1-5). The description is expanded on further in Revelation 1:14-16. The focus is on John turning around [ἐπιστρέφω] and seeing the exalted Christ amidst his church [i.e. amidst the lampstands].

b) The glorious Son of Man with his church

The glorious description of the Son of Man in Revelation 1:9-20 is reminiscent of the Old Testament description of the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9; 10:5-6). The image is loaded with Old Testament images (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 66-67). What John sees in this vision is the exalted Christ in absolute glory [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)].

The important point for this discussion is not the life of Christ [that was discussed in Chapter 7], but the *living presence* of Christ amongst his church. The message of hope for the church is that the living One [i.e. the Son of Man] is alive and active amongst his church (Osborne 2002: 87). He is *amidst* [ἐν μέσῳ] his church, actively participating in their existence.

In the vision (Rev 1:13) He is depicted as being amidst the seven lampstands. In Revelation 1:20c the lampstands are identified by the Son of Man as depicting the seven churches (Groenewald 1986: 44). Identifying the lampstands with the church [or churches] is an image that goes back on Zechariah 4:2-14. The image links up with the identification of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3-4. The fact that John identifies seven individual lampstands [instead of the well-known symbol of the seven-branched lampstand – *menorah*] “hints at their nature as each representing the reality of the whole church” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 66). The church as a lampstand implies it has a function of bearing light (cf. Matt 5:14-16). Their light is the sign of the divine presence and life in a dark world (Mounce 1977: 77).

The comforting presence of Christ is further emphasised when, in verse 16, He is seen to be holding the seven stars in his right hand. The seven stars are later on, in Revelation 1:20b, identified to be the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν<sup>222</sup>. That Christ holds all seven stars in his hand emphasises his sovereign control over the entire church [i.e. He is not just present, but also controlling and directing his church]. Furthermore, it emphasises that the entire church is safely within his protective hand (cf. John 10:28; [Mounce 1977: 79]). The fact that Christ is *amongst* his people, is a sign of his *living presence*, i.e. He is alive (cf. Rev 1:18).

The light is the sign of spiritual life within the church. If life is not evident anymore [i.e. the torch is not giving any light] the light will be removed from its place in history [i.e. the eternal life will be lost – cf. Rev 2:5]. For the author of 4 Ezra the removal of the lampstand from the temple during the destruction thereof symbolised the end of the worship life of the temple (4 Ezra 10:22). This is a significant interpretation, as the worship of God implied life in a spiritual sense [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1. (b); {Aune 1997: 89}].

The message of hope to the church is that even in this life [i.e. physical life] with its trials and suffering amidst a darkened world [i.e. a world darkened by sin] God has

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<sup>222</sup> On the translation of the ἄγγελοι there have been much debate. Billerbeck (as referred to by Beasley-Murray 1981: 69) thinks of them as referring to the “presiding officer of a congregation”, a view shared by Groenewald (1986: 43-44) and Enroth (1990: 603-604). However, they could also refer to “Danielic...angels assigned to nations” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 69; cf. Mounce 1977: 82). Cf. also Aune (1997: 108-112) for an extensive Excursion on the possible meaning of the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν, and Hemer (1986: 32-34).

not left his people unprotected. He is always present amongst them to protect, guide and control them in his sovereignty. It is from this basis of Christ's living presence that the proclamations to the churches are made, urging them to hold on to their spiritual [and therefore eternal] being, even amidst a stressful and painful physical being.

### iii) Summary

- Although nothing is seemingly said about physical life [or any other form of life] within the churches in Revelation 1 [the image is about the living One, Christ], the image of Revelation 1:9-20 implies that there must be life within the church, because the living Christ is amongst his people, protecting and guiding them in this life.
- The burning seven lampstands imply the living church in this world, an image based on Zechariah 4:2-14. In this sense life is equated to the worship life of the people of God.

#### *1.1.2. The ethical call to the churches (Rev 2-3)*

##### a) A spiritual preparation in this life

What we have in Revelation 2-3, are prophetic proclamations with regard to physical life, proclaiming it as a life that must be lived in such a way that it becomes a sign of spiritual livelihood, which in the end is the life that will lead to eternal life (cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii) (b); [Beasley-Murray 1981: 72]). People must actively participate in the realm of God's new world to be alive. Aune (1983: 326) identifies them with the "paraenetic salvation-judgment oracle" of ancient prophetic speech, but with distinct features found in the ancient Imperial Edicts (Aune 1997: 126-128).

The existing situations within each of the congregations are measured against the ethical standard of God's new world. In this sense the proclamations become evaluations of the current status of life in each congregation. They "give a vivid impression of Christian life in Asia at a time when pressure is being brought to bear on the Christians..." (FF Bruce, as quoted by Mounce 1977: 84-85). Because Christ is present in each congregation [being amongst the lampstands], He observes the

situation in each firsthand and therefore knows who lives and who not. David Aune (1990: 203-204) sums up the purpose of the proclamations as follows:

“The implicit function of *these* proclamations, however, is to demonstrate that the risen Christ, speaking through the prophet John in the Spirit, knows precisely the situation of each and every one of the seven communities”.<sup>223</sup>

The proclamations act as “a spiritual preparation for accepting the message of revelation” (Enroth 1990: 602). On the one hand believers are exhorted to hold on to the redemption and victory that Christ has already won (Du Rand 1991b: 269). Their goal must not be success in this world, but the victory in eternity. To emphasise this the hearing formula plays an important role (Enroth 1990: 601-604). It prepares the readers, on the other hand, by inviting them to listen to the encouraging [and warning] voice of the risen Lord (Enroth 1990: 602)<sup>224</sup>. Combined with the exhortation to be victorious [i.e. stay faithful unto the end] it is “clearly a promise and an invitation” (Enroth 1990: 603). The repetition of the hearing formula in each of the proclamations wants to remind the reader of the urgency and importance of the prophecy, and of the necessity to adhere to its contents by repenting and following in the footsteps of the Lord (Trites 1998: 283).

Each of the congregations is addressed personally [through their ἀγγελος] by Christ [using one of the designations for Christ in Revelation 1:9-20], confirming his active presence in the church. However, this does not mean that the message of the revelation is limited to these seven congregations only. The number seven [the symbol of completeness throughout the Bible – Du Rand (1991b: 215)] symbolically indicates that the messages are aimed at the entire [complete] church in its struggle in this world (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 53). This was also the interpretation of the writing to exactly seven congregations in the Muratorian Canon, and of Victorinus

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<sup>223</sup> Italics by Aune.

<sup>224</sup> The so-called “hearing formula” refers to the stereotyped formula ‘Ο ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις found at the end of each of the seven proclamations. According to Enroth (1990: 602) the hearing formula “...underlines what should be heard and how it should be heard, and what follows from hearing right.”

(Aune 1997: 130). The message of the proclamations must therefore be read as a unit, incorporating the message to the entire church.

b) Redemption and ethics

The images of Revelation 2-3 are again picked up in Revelation 21-22. The vision of the heavenly city (Rev 21) is the perfect new world order awaiting believers that held on to their faith in the victory of Christ until the end, and it stands in strong contrast to the imperfections evident in this world. Richard Hays (1996: 173) understands the contrast within the context of the sinister demonic emulation of Christ by the beast:

“For those who have eyes to see, the present order of the earthly city, built upon exploitation and violence, is a foul demonic parody of the city of God.” (Hays 1996: 173)

Hemer (1986: 16) calls these contrasting images [between the old and the new] “...repeated echoes of the same images, promises developed in a larger context, particular opponents overcome and disabilities reversed.” This “new world order” is the “real life” that believers can look forward to if they continue in faith. John confirms this promised “perfect new world” when each of the seven proclamations is closed with a promise of this new life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 72).

It is thus clear from the proclamations that the preservation of life in this world is not something to be too concerned about. The aim should not be a prosperous life in this aeon, but the gift of life given to those that persevere, even amidst possible persecution and martyrdom. No compromise is possible in this life, as “the kingdom of God is incompatible with the kingdom of Caesar” (Collins 1977: 252).

Life in this world [i.e. according to John in Revelation] is only important in as far as believers are urged to live a life in close relationship to God’s will. Soteriology and ethics are thus combined. Being saved by Christ’s death and resurrection has ethical implications for one’s life (Rom 6). If the Cross of Christ spells the death of the believer *Imitatio Christi*, then the ethical call is that one’s life should change accordingly to also be *Imitatio Christi* (Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:6; [Hays 1996: 30-31]). If believers do that, they are ensured of the promise of eternal life in the new aeon.

Here the importance of life as existing only within a close relationship with God [as per the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.6] comes through. Therefore, when “life” in the churches is evaluated, it is evaluated in terms of the expectations of a relationship with God (Groenewald 1986: 46). Those who really hear the voice of the risen Lord, and live accordingly in their relationship with God, will inherit the new life in the new aeon even if they lose their life in this world (Enroth 1990: 603-604).

“The will of God is clearly revealed in the teaching and examples of Jesus, and the church is expected to obey all that he has commanded, to the end of the age” (Hays 1996: 110).

References to life in the proclamations are therefore all with regard to life in the new world [i.e. eternal life]. Believers must focus on reaching that life [which is promised by Christ] by living in relationship with God in this life. The promises of eternal life will be discussed in Chapter 9 below.

### *1.1.3. The two witnesses (Rev 11:3-14)*

The context within which Revelation 11:3-14 is to be understood has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.5 above]. Just as in the proclamations, the concept of physical life is not mentioned explicitly in Revelation 11. We are therefore again faced with an implied reference to physical life, to be read from the call on the church to prophesy (Rev 11:3-4).

By identifying the two witnesses with two lampstands (cf. Zech 4:14; 11:4; Ps 97:5), John immediately draws parallels with the witness of the church in this world, reminding one of the call by Jesus to his disciples to be a light in this world (Bauckham 1993a: 273)<sup>225</sup>. The two witnesses “...represent the church fulfilling their vocation to bear witness to Christ in the final time of tribulation” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 178). In Revelation 1:20 the seven congregations to whom John is to write are

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<sup>225</sup> The use of two witnesses probably goes back to the Old Testament requirement that any testimony is only acceptable if two witnesses can confirm it (Num 35:30; Deut 17:6; 19:15; cf. Matt 18:16; John 5:31; 8:17; 15:26-27; [Bauckham 1993a: 274]). Caird (1966: 135) adds: “In the human lawcourt their evidence will not secure an acquittal, but in the heavenly court of appeal that same evidence will secure both their own vindication and the condemnation of the city which has rejected their testimony...” Morris (1969: 148) thinks that the two witnesses refer to only a portion of the church [if put up against the seven lampstands of Rev 1:20]. However, this is probably reading too much into the text.



called seven lampstands. The church is the sole bearer of God's prophetic message to the world and must continue bearing witness, even in the face of death. Revelation 11:3-4 proclaims the task of the church in this world in bearing this message (Beasley-Murray 1981: 180-181).

What is the message? According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 182) the message they have to proclaim is "the testimony of Jesus Christ." It is the same message that Christ has come to witness to John (Rev 1:2). The testimony of Christ is the message of his sacrificial death and resurrection, which resulted in the victory over the powers of evil. For Caird (1966: 132) prophecy is equal to martyrdom. Although this is eventually the case for the two witnesses, they do not prophesy in order to die as their Lord died. They prophesy the victory of Christ and the message of hope and life that comes with accepting that victory. It is essentially the message of salvation through the blood of Christ. However, the links with martyrdom are there because:

“...the function of the church's prophetic ministry to the world is to bring into universal effect what Jesus achieved in his own prophetic witness, death and resurrection” (Bauckham 1993a: 280).

Very little is said about the prophetic content of the message. The only hint towards the content is the identification of the garments of the two witnesses, i.e. wearing sackcloth. Aune (1998a: 611) mentions four possible reasons for the wearing of sackcloth: i) mourning or national distress (cf. Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31; Lam 2:10; Esth 4:1); ii) an indication of submission in certain circumstances (cf. 1 Kgs 20:31-32; Jer 4:8; 6:26; Dan 9:3); iii) penitential practice (cf. 1 Kgs 22:27-29; 2 Kgs 19:1-2; Neh 9:1; Ps 35:13); iv) the garment appropriate for prophets (cf. Isa 50:3; Rev 6:12; 1 Cl 8:3). Of course, prophets could have worn sackcloth for a combination of the above reasons (Aune 1998a: 611). According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 183) sackcloth's primary association is with penitence and mourning [signifying repentance – cf. also Mounce (1977: 224) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 77)]. It seems that the content of the message could be that of repentance in the face of the victory of Christ. The refusal to repent during the plagues (cf. Rev 9:20; 16:9,11) and the negative reception of the message here supports this view.

Satake (as referred to by Aune 1998a: 611) thinks the message is that of judgment, reading it in the light of verse 5 and 6, where the witnesses kill anyone who tries to stop them. This seems farfetched, as judgment, even in Revelation, lies solely in the hands of God and Christ, and is seemingly effected only at the end of time (cf. Rev 14:14-20). John probably does not want to put too much emphasis on the content of the message. It is rather implied by the fact that the message is similar to the “testimony of Christ” [cf. above]. For John it is rather the reception of the message that is important here (Aune 1998a: 612).

How is the message received? It is clear that the response is not positive. In fact, it is rejected by the world (Aune 1998a: 612). That is why the witnesses are eventually killed (Rev 11:7). It is only after the witnesses have been resurrected that their message [or maybe rather the miracle of resurrection] seems to have a positive effect on the people. Those who saw their resurrection “gave glory to the God of heaven” (Rev 11:13d). The phrase “to give glory to God” can have more than one meaning, but here probably refers to the people repenting of their sin when they see the two witnesses alive (cf. Aune 1998a: 628; Sweet 1990: 106-109). Aune (1998a: 628) mentions that there is strong evidence that the phrase *διδόναι δόξαν τῷ θεῷ* is an idiom for conversion (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 187). It is thus only in the conclusion of the way in which the witnesses participate in the victory of the Lamb through death unto the new resurrection that the world would come to realise that the victory belongs to the Lamb (Bauckham 1993a: 283)<sup>226</sup>.

What does this say about physical life and death? The call to prophesy determines Christian living in the realm of God. As long as they live in this world, they must proclaim the “testimony of Christ”. However, their prophecy will not necessarily protect them from harm in this life. In the words of Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 79) “...they will have to suffer death just as their Lord had to die.” Again it is evident that the preservation of physical life is not important to the author. The ethics of

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<sup>226</sup> Cf. however Mounce (1977: 229), Kiddle (1940: 206) and Groenewald (1986: 123) who thinks that the glorification is born out of fear and anxiety rather than repentance. That is why the people only react when the witnesses are resurrected. These scholars also refer to the texts that follow with regard to the pouring out of the bowls (Rev 16), where it is clear that the people still did not repent [cf. however Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 79), who is of the opinion that the “rhetoric of judgment expresses hope for the conversion of nine-tenths of the nations in response to Christian witness and preaching”].

physical life [being in accordance with God's will – cf. Rev 2-3] is what believers must rather strive for.

#### *1.1.4. Summary on physical life in Revelation*

- Preservation of physical life is not important to the author of Revelation. Life is not about staying alive in this world. As was the case in the Old Testament, life in the end is about a relationship with God. Believers must be more concerned about their relationship with God, participating in the victory of Christ. Life is to accept the salvation that Christ has achieved and to live under the blood the Lamb (cf. Rev 12:11).
- Believers have the task to witness about this victory, calling on people to repent and become part of the victory of Christ. However, they must know that their witness will not necessarily be met with great joy. They could even get killed for proclaiming the “testimony of Christ”, just as the two witnesses.

## **2. Physical Death**

The fate of the dead plays an important role in all apocalyptic literature. It was mainly in the apocalyptic literature [Jewish and Christian] that the belief in life after death was developed, resulting in people starting to think about their fate after physical death. This influenced the outlook on life in the present as the connection to the existence after physical death. Revelation is no exception to this (Bauckham 1998a: 1).

The Old Testament understanding of death as something evil is continued in Revelation (Rev 9:1-11; 20:1-6; [Bailey 1979: 95]). This applies to physical death and eternal death. There are many references in Revelation to physical death [cf. Annexure B.1]. However, Revelation's interest with physical death is not the death as such, but that which lies beyond the doors of death. The numerous references to physical death are either messages of comfort to believers [having to face the trials and even martyrdom] or messages of judgment [to those who do not want to repent]. The eschatological life after death is the main focus. Death is qualified in the light of the resurrection of Christ (Gulley 1992: 110-II-111-II). His resurrection has moved

the boundaries of life beyond the doors of death. But death is still an important marker in the cycle of life. At death the chance to change from death to life [i.e. spiritually] comes to an end. No decision on life or death is possible after physical death. Life before death determines life after death.

There is continuity and discontinuity between life and death in Revelation. Death is more than just the terminus of life in this world. Death affects life on the way to the day of death (Gulley 1992: 110·II-111·II). Life can continue after death [i.e. eternal life – cf. Chapter 9 and 10], but physical death could also spell the final end to life [i.e. death in eternity – cf. Chapter 9]. This may sound peculiar, but must be read in the light of the eschatological outlook of Revelation, whereby even life and death get new meaning (cf. Bailey 1979: 75-76; [cf. Chapter 3 above]). The focus is very much on the *personal eschatology*, i.e. what happens to the *individual* now and after death (Bauckham 1998a: 1).

In the light of this it is important to determine the position of a person at his or her physical death. Believers that die as a result of their faith will inherit eternal life. Revelation puts a lot of emphasis on the idea of martyrdom. It is sort of expected that many of those who are faithful until the end would probably die as martyrs. However, this does not imply that all believers must or will die as martyrs, or that martyrdom is the only passage to eternal life (Luter 1997: 720)<sup>227</sup>. These deaths are afflicted upon believers by the hands of the beast and his followers (Luter 1997: 719-720). For the martyrs death is, however, not the end, as they already had eternal life.

On the other hand many people die as a result of God's judgmental actions, e.g. the opening of the seals (Rev 6), the pouring out of the seven bowls (Rev 16). These people are mostly seen as dying as sinners. They enter eternal death [for the discussion on eternal death, cf. Chapter 9].

### 2.1. *Death through martyrdom*

Martyrdom is a central concept in Revelation (Bauckham 1993b: 77). Believers are prepared by John to expect death as martyrs sometime along the way. They can,

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<sup>227</sup> Cf. Caird (1966: 16); Bauckham (1993b: 77) who are amongst those that assume that believers are basically called to be martyrs.

however, take heart from the fact that all believers are in a similar position, including John, who shares in their suffering while in exile on the island of Patmos (Rev 1:9). The reality of “real life” [eternal life] is that it would probably end up in death [physical death] for believers. But Christ’s death has set the tone for believers to stay faithful throughout all persecution and suffering unto death (cf. Rev 1:4-5).

“...in Revelation...the impulse to martyrdom, and the rejection of this world, is intensified by the example of Jesus, who achieved his victory by his crucifixion” (Collins 1987: 214).

An interesting phenomenon is the impact that martyrdom had on the perception of physical death. For the martyr death was not something to fear anymore. Physical death could actually be something to look forward to, as it relieves believers of the agony of this world, and takes them to the throne of God in heaven (cf. Phil 1:23; Mart Pol 19:2). It was also a sign of faithfulness to God above love for oneself.

#### 2.1.1. *Antipas the faithful one (Rev 2:13)*

##### i) What is the context?

The ethics and unity of the proclamations to the seven congregations have already been discussed in 1.1.2 above [Cf. also Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(b) for a discussion on the context of the proclamations]<sup>228</sup>.

Pergamum seemingly had a history as a setting where emperor-worship was developed (Hemer 1986: 86). It was the official seat of the imperial cult in Asia (Mounce 1977: 96). Here emperor-worship was not just developed, it was also strictly enforced. This strong Roman and imperial-religious influence is most-probably the background to the reference of Pergamum as the place where the throne of Satan was situated (Hemer 1986: 87). It could refer to the proconsul’s judicial bench where, later on, many Christians from the surrounding area were brought to stand trial for their faith (Aune 1997: 182-183). It is clear from this proclamation [and the one to Smyrna] that Christians certainly had to endure persecution and even martyrdom in John’s congregations<sup>229</sup>.

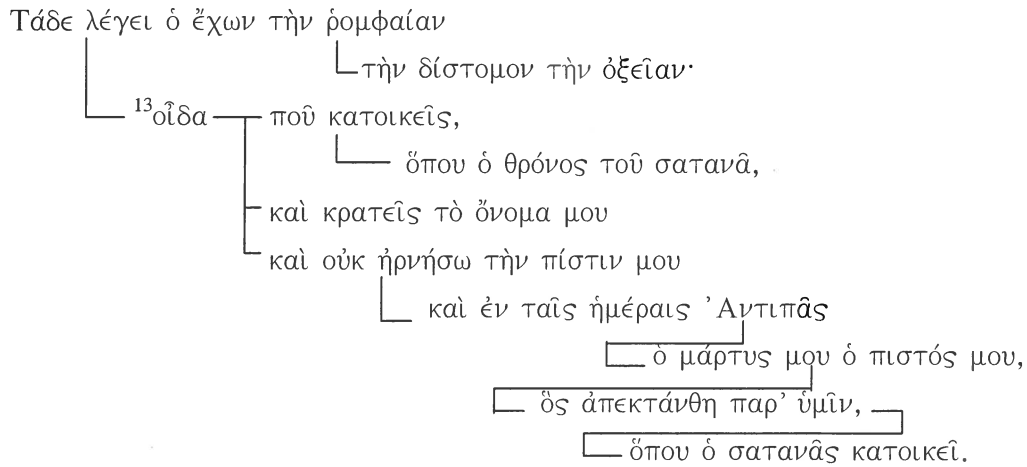
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<sup>228</sup> For a discussion on the use [and order] of these specific congregations, cf. Aune (1997: 130-132).

<sup>229</sup> Cf. Aune (1997: 180-181) for a more detail discussion of the historical background of Pergamum.

## ii) Antipas, ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου

## a) Syntactical analysis



In Revelation 2:12b-13 the standard greeting [as used in all seven proclamations] is found. The focus is on the exalted Christ that knows everything with regard to the congregation (Rev 2:13a). The phrase ὅπου ὁ σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ (Rev 2:13a) is repeated in Revelation 2:13d, confirming the suffering some believers had to endure in Pergamum. The use of ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός in conjunction with ἀπεκτάνθη confirms that it is physical death [martyrdom] that is mentioned.

## b) Killed for his faith

The text of Revelation 2:13 is without major text-critical changes [for a discussion of all text-critical changes suggested, cf. Aune (1997: 177-178)]. The cluster phrase ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου stands in apposition [nominative] to the name Antipas [genitive, although indeclinable] (Aune 1997: 184). The fact that Antipas is called ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου suggests that the author wants his readers to make a connection with the suffering and life of Christ, who is called ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός in Revelation 1:5 [Cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (iii)(a) for a discussion on the meaning of ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός]<sup>230</sup>. Just as the Lord, Antipas was faithful unto death (Hemer 1986: 86; Lorenzen 1995: 214). Of course, Antipas was not the only well-known person dying as a martyr in Asia-Minor. In the second century we read about the

<sup>230</sup> Trites (1973: 73-80) discusses a process whereby the word μάρτυς has developed from witness through “witness by death” to martyr (cf. also Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 495-496).

martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna (cf. Mart Pol; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 80-81; Aune 1997: 185]).

The verb ἀποκτείνω could refer to any manner by which a person was deprived of physical life. Most often it referred to the killing of someone (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93). In Revelation ἀποκτείνω is mostly used to describe believers who were “killed” for their faith (Trites 1998: 274)<sup>231</sup>. This is also the meaning here in Revelation 2:13. Antipas was killed because he stayed faithful to the testimony of Christ. He was killed as a martyr for his relentless faith. The fact that Antipas was killed “where Satan dwells” creates an expectation of martyrdom for faith, as Satan is the antagonist, the one imitating Christ and trying to dethrone Him.

Being killed because of one’s uncompromising faithfulness to Christ is the essence of martyrdom in Revelation: “The martyrs conquer not by their suffering and death as such, but by their faithful *witness* to the point of death” (Bauckham 1993a: 237)<sup>232</sup>. In the church under persecution the word μάρτυς came to mean “one who witnessed unto death” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 495). In this sense the ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός is an important identification [title] for “successful” martyrdom (cf. Mart Pol 2:2; 14:2; 15:2; 16:2; 17:3; 19:1-2).

By “staying faithful” was the means by which believers would share in the victory [i.e. conquer] of Christ and receive their promised eschatological reward. This is the motif behind the call to stay faithful in each of the seven proclamations (Bauckham 1993b: 76). Furthermore, through their witness they also participate in the witnessing death of Christ [Who is called ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός in Revelation 1:5 – see Chapter 7, 2.1.1. (iii)(a) above]. Dying as a martyr was not a shame [or the end], as these deaths were deemed victories in the fulfilment of God’s plan in history, just as the death of Christ was the ultimate and complete victory over the powers of evil in this world (Luter 1997: 720).

However, this does not imply that martyrdom was the sole passage into the kingdom. Ladd (1972: 104) is of the opinion that the church are called to be a martyr-people by

<sup>231</sup> Cf. also Chapter 4, 3.1 on the meaning of ἀποκτείνω in the New Testament.

<sup>232</sup> Italics by Bauckham.

Christ (Matt 16:24) and therefore must expect to suffer martyrdom. But John himself could be deemed a faithful witness that did not necessarily die as a martyr. Instead he was exiled to Patmos (Rev 1:9). Also, not all the believers referred to or addressed in Revelation died as martyrs, even those referred to in Revelation 7:1-17 (Luter 1997: 720; Aune 1998a: 444, 447; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 67). Scholars such as Bauckham (1993a: 210-237) and Caird (1966: 94-98, 178-181) are of the opinion that the 144 000 and / or the multitude refer to the Christian martyrs who died before the *eschaton* [cf. Aune 1998a: 440-447 for a detail discussion on the various interpretations of the 144 000 and the innumerable multitude through the years].

Interpreting the phrase καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου (Rev 7:14) as referring to the triumphant martyrs alone as Bauckham (1993b: 77) does is, however, probably too narrow. The phrase could refer to the redemptive blood of Christ (Luter 1997: 720). Sharing in the redemption of Christ does not necessarily include martyrdom. Becoming part of [and accepting] the redemptive blood of Christ as the true and final sacrifice draws believers into redemption regardless whether they die as martyrs [cf. Rev 6:9-11 where the reference is clearly to the Christian martyrs – cf. 2.1.1 below]. In Revelation 12:11 believers conquer, not by their own deaths, but by the atoning blood of Christ who conquers the Dragon. This strong feeling towards Christian martyrdom probably only came to the fore in the second century AD, when martyrdom increased dramatically (Ford 1975: 110).

In the Apocrypha we find traces of the importance of martyrdom. Martyrs are called “representatives of Israel” whose “death was a vicarious sacrifice for his people” (Ford 1975: 110). In 2 Maccabees 6:31 (cf. also 2 Macc 7:37) we read:

“He who has died in this manner [i.e. through martyrdom]<sup>233</sup>, has through his death left behind an example of a noble character and the remembrance of true virtue, not only to the young, but to most of the people.”<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> My bracketed insert.

<sup>234</sup> My translation.



In the early church then martyrdom was looked upon with great awe. In the Martyrdom of Polycarp 2:1-2 we read:

“Blessed then and noble are all the martyrdoms which took place according to the will of God...For who would not admire their nobility and patience and love of their Master?”<sup>235</sup>

Ignatius regarded martyrdom as the “highest expression of discipleship to Jesus Christ” (Luter 1997: 720). In his letter to the Romans while in captivity he clearly shows his eagerness to die, because “Martyrdom offered the opportunity for the highest form of spiritual attainment” (Luter 1997: 720). This notion is taken further in the letter about the Martyrdom of Polycarp (cf. Luter 1997: 721 and Mart Pol 2:1).

### iii) Summary on Antipas’ death

- It is clear from this text that martyrdom was part of Christian life in John’s time. Antipas was killed because he was a ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, i.e. someone who stayed faithful to Christ until death. The importance of martyrdom is also evident in the Apocrypha (cf. 2 Macc 6:31; 7:37)
- However, this does not mean that each and every Christian had to die as martyrs to be acceptable to God [this seemingly became a popular idea in the second century AD]. Many Christians did not die as martyrs, but were still cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, because his redemption was all encompassing.
- Redemption is by the blood of the Lamb, not the blood of the martyr.

#### 2.1.2. *The souls of the martyrs (Rev 6:9-11)*

##### i) What is the context?

According to Heil (1993: 242) this section is the only prayer of supplication in the Book of Revelation, and has a very unique relationship with the rest of the Book, referring both backwards and forwards. Ford (1975: 110) sees Revelation 6:9-11 as the key to the understanding of the rest of Revelation 6, looking back towards the “martyrdom” of Christ (Rev 5) and forward to the sealed believers in Revelation 7<sup>236</sup>.

<sup>235</sup> English translation as in *The Apostolic Fathers II* (Warmington 1970: 315).

<sup>236</sup> Cf. above, where it is asserted that the 144 000 or the multitude is not necessarily martyrs.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 64) links the opening of the fifth seal (Rev 6:9-11) to a number of texts: the outcry of the angel in Revelation 16:5-7, the confirmation of the hearing thereof in Revelation 18:20 and the positive result for the martyrs in Revelation 20:4-6 [cf. also the article by Heil (1993: 220-243)]. The message is not so much to explain the reason for the prayer or the delay in answering, but that God's predetermined plan is still in place and will be implemented. God is still in control (Bauckham 1993a: 56).

Revelation 6:9-11 forms part of the opening of the first six seals (Rev 6:1-17), which is a section of text that mentions death and suffering a lot. Revelation 6 is still part of the [larger] heavenly vision that was introduced in Revelation 4:1 [discussed in Chapter 6]. It is distinguished from the rest of Revelation 6 by the distinct subject matter of the vision (Aune 1998a: 389-390). Aune (1998a: 391) has found close parallels with visions in the apocalyptic literature, such as 1 Enoch 47:4 and 4 Ezra 4:35-37 [cf. Bauckham (1993a: 449) who adds 2 Baruch 23:4-5a to the comparison]. The comparison is, according to Bauckham (1993a: 54-55) the result of a common traditional source used by all the above authors (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 134).

Schematically Revelation 6:9-11 fits into the vision of Revelation 4:2b-7:17 as follows<sup>237</sup>:

4:2b-7:17	Sovereignty of God, investiture of the Lamb, first six seals
4:1-2a	John's heavenly ascent
4:2b-5:14	Vision of the heavenly throne-room
6:1-17	the first six seals
6:1-8	the four cavaliers
<b>6:9-11</b>	<b>the souls of the martyrs</b>
6:12-17	the Day of wrath
7:1-17	sealing of the 144 000

Revelation 6:9-11 can be read as another "interlude" that plays an important role in comforting believers amidst difficult times. Because of Christ's life-giving triumph

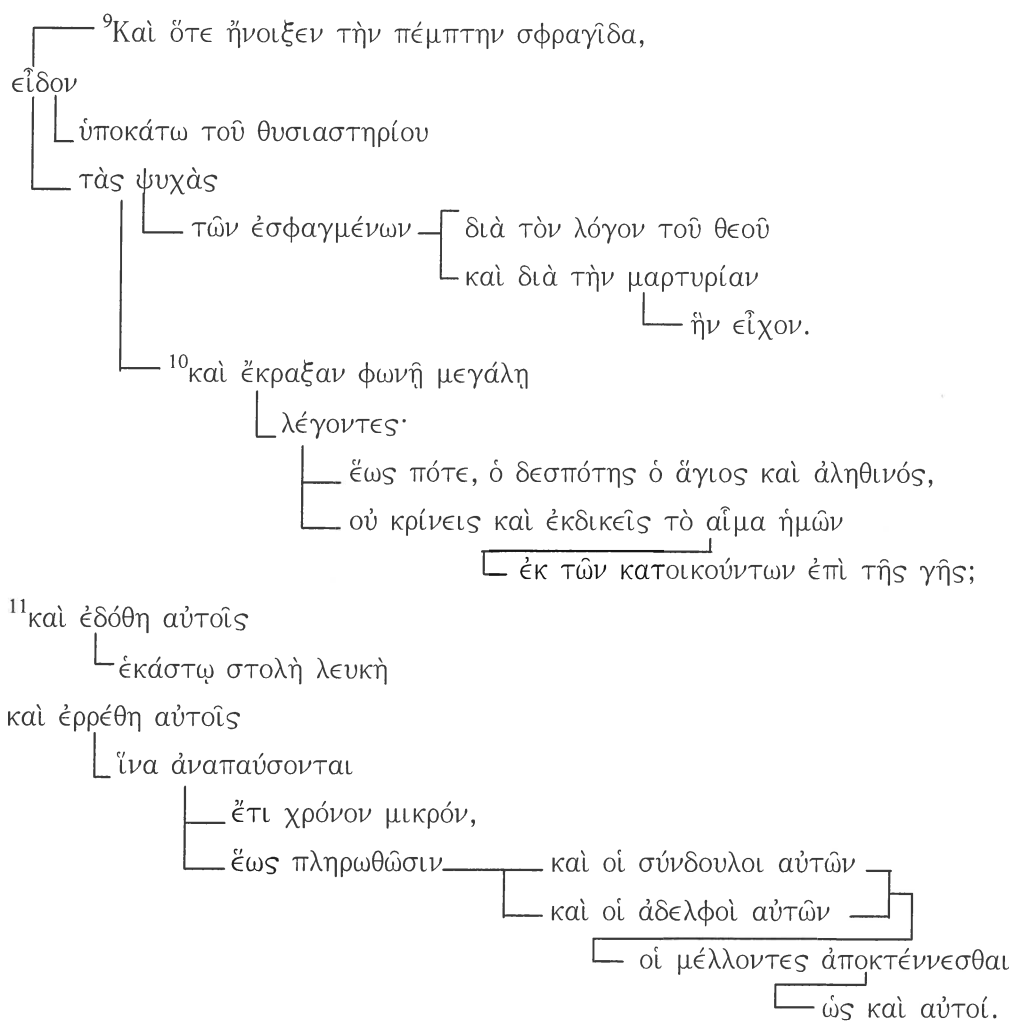
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<sup>237</sup> Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.

believers will participate in the life of the risen Christ [by receiving eternal life], even if they are to suffer death during the time of war and civil strife brought about by the breaking of the first four seals (Heil 1993: 222-223; [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2 (i) on John's use of this structural feature]). This is particularly evident in the hopeful passage of Revelation 7, when we find the sealed believers [the 144 000 (Rev 7:1-8) who turns out to be an innumerable multitude (Rev 7:9-17)] alive in the midst of the Lamb in heaven, confirming their protection, even though they might have to die a martyr's death for their faithful witnessing (cf. Trites 1998: 280).

ii) The souls of the martyrs

a) Syntactical analysis



In the first part of the vision (Rev 6:9-10) John sees the souls of the martyrs and then hears them as they cry out to God for righteous judgment. In the second part of the

vision the martyrs are given white robes and comforted with the message that they only have to wait for short while before God will act in righteousness. The key phrase τῶν ἐσφαγμένων διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ implies that it is death [i.e. physical death] in martyrdom that these people suffered.

b) Souls in heaven

The word ψυχή [soul] has a wide spectrum of meanings. In Revelation it sometimes refers to the physical being of a person [cf. Rev 12:11]. However, in most instances in Revelation ψυχή refers to the “centre of personality, the inner person in its capacity to direct one’s life and relate to God” (Travis 1997b: 985)<sup>238</sup>. It is an existence that transcends the physical existence on earth (Aune 1998a: 404). It is not bound by earthly existence. In Revelation ψυχή wants to confirm the wholeness of the being of man. Even the souls [ψυχὰς] of the martyrs are not less than whole persons. This is indicated by the use of the masculine pronoun in Revelation 20:4 (Travis 1997b: 985). The timing of this resurrection is a much-debated subject, specifically since the believers are told here to rest “a little while” until all the martyrs have come in. Revelation 6:9-11, however, does not say anything about the timing of life or death, but about the timing of God’s wrath in judgment, which is at the eschatological end of time. The importance is that the souls of the martyred believers are alive, and they are talking to God in prayer from underneath the altar. They are with God in their wholeness.

A significant fact about the souls of the martyrs in heaven is that the content of the vision overrides the Old Testament understanding that all mortal beings go to Sheol [cf. Chapter 2, 3.5]. This change in thought [with regard to the fate of the dead] was also prevalent in Jewish apocalyptic literature [cf. Chapter 3, section 3; also Chapter 4, 3.1 and 3.2]<sup>239</sup>. In the New Testament a number of passages suggest the presence of the dead in heaven (2 Cor 5:1, 8; Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 3:13; 4:14; 5:9; [Aune 1998a: 403]). According to Aune (1998a: 403-404) this change in perception is linked to a so-called new cosmology, which became prevalent in the Hellenistic era [cf. however Bauckham (1998a) and Bailey (1979: 78-79), where other reasons are mentioned].

<sup>238</sup> Cf. Schweizer (1974: 637-656) and Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 901-902) for a detail discussion of the meaning of ψυχή in the Bible [cf. also Chapter 4, section 2].

<sup>239</sup> For an excellent discussion on the fate of the dead, cf. Bauckham (1998a) *The fate of the Dead: studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*.

c) Slain witnesses

That the martyrs were slain [ἐσφαγμένων] is significant, as it is the same verb used to describe the slaughtering of the Lamb in Revelation 5:6 (Heil 1993: 225). It is a clear use of sacrificial terminology, bringing the death of the martyrs in line with the sacrifice of Christ [not to say that their sacrifice was in salvation, but rather a sacrifice in faithfulness to the salvation of Christ {cf. also Paul's view of himself as a sacrifice – 2 Tim 4:6 (Mounce 1977: 157-158)}].

This vision on the fate of believers after death was supposed to act as a vision of hope to the congregations struggling amidst persecutions by shifting their focus from the problems on earth to their position in heaven (Groenewald 1986: 90). They can be rest assured that, even if they were to die here on earth, they will be close to God: the souls being under the altar signifies their closeness to God, a motif also found in Jewish traditions (Aune 1998a: 404). This protective presence of the martyrs close to God is emphasised further by the white robes being given to the “souls under the altar”. There is a close parallel in Jewish literature that “the souls of the righteous dead are protected near the heavenly presence of God” (cf. 1 En 39:4-5; 41:2; 61:12; 70:2-4). Rabbi Akiba stated that the souls of the righteous Jews were “*under the altar in heaven*”<sup>240</sup> (Charles 1920a: 173). The white robes of course, could be a sign of salvation, victory, purity, or immortality<sup>241</sup> (Aune 1998a: 410; Beasley-Murray 1981: 136). It could also be a “token of heavenly existence” (Caird 1966: 86). The promise to believers in Sardis is that those who persevere until the end [i.e. claim the victory of Christ] will be clothed in white (Rev 3:4-5; [Heil 1993: 227-228]).

Heil (1993: 222-223) claims that the slaughtering of the martyrs is the consequence of the breaking of the second seal, where it is said that war and strife broke out after the breaking of the seal (Rev 6:3-4). This is a possible interpretation, although it is not stated nor implied in any manner by the text. The breaking of the first four seals does not hint at all on persecution or martyrdom, whereas it is clear that the souls in heaven

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<sup>240</sup> Italics inserted by Charles (1920a).

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Excursion 2 for some views on immortality of souls. In any case, if we have a resurrection in Revelation 20:4 for the same martyred believers, then immortality could hardly be a possibility here in Revelation 6:9-11. The “immediate immortality” that Caird (1966: 87) talks about could only be an immortality of the soul after the immediate resurrection into the new life.

were slaughtered as martyrs. Revelation 6:1-8 rather portrays a situation where many people [believers and non-believers] are killed in violent situations emanating from the breaking of the seals. Heil (1993: 223) goes on to identify the rider of the white horse with the one in Revelation 19:11-16 [which is the Lamb] on the basis of the white horse and the claim to victory. The point that Heil neglects is that the Lamb is the one opening the seals in Revelation 6, and that at the opening of each of the seals, judgment is announced. Even the victorious rider on the white horse [i.e. on the breaking of the first seal] goes out to destroy and to overcome through destruction and power, not to save or to judge, which is probably the interpretation of Heil (Beasley-Murray 1981: 131)<sup>242</sup>.

Believers' hope does not lie in the conquering rider of Revelation 6:3-4, but in the conquering Lamb of Revelation 5:6 (cf. Rev 19:11-16). His control over the entire situation [even amidst the strife and war and killing] is emphasised by the fact that He opens the seals [i.e. decides on what is allowed in history, and on the judgment to be bestowed upon the inhabitants of the world and the timing thereof]. If the Lamb is in control, believers can look forward in hope to the victory and therefore stay faithful until the end. In this manner they will conquer and receive the prize promised to the congregations in the seven proclamations (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 139).

### iii) Summary on the souls of the martyrs

- Revelation 6:9-11 is about Christian martyrdom (Charles 1920a: 171). In a hopeful vision John sees the souls of the martyrs in the presence of God, praying for the vindication of their deaths.
- The message of hope is that death is not the end for believers. The souls of the martyrs will be resurrected into a new life with Christ (cf. Rev 20:4). He is the One that has the keys to the doors of Death and Hades (cf. Rev 1:17-18). He opens the door to eternal life for believers at death. Believers therefore can have hope because they will be safe with God, regardless of whether they live or die in this world.

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. also comment on this by Aune (1998a: 393-394); Charles (1920a: 164); Swete (1907: 86); Mounce (1977: 153-154) all of whom distinguish clearly between the rider of Revelation 6:3-4 and the Messiah of Revelation 19:11-16.

- Revelation 6:9-11 thus has just as much to say about the existence of eternal life than it says about the cutting short of physical life through martyrdom.

### 2.1.3. *Death of the witnesses (Rev 11:7-11)*

As discussed above [cf. 1.1.3 above and Chapter 7, 2.1.5], the text of Revelation 11:3-14 is a call to Christian witness. Because the context of this text has already been discussed in the mentioned subsections above, it will not be repeated here. Although this is an allegorical [prophetic] narrative (Aune 1998a: 586), it also hints on the message by and persecution of the church in this world, and therefore warrants discussion here. The narrative about the two witnesses can be subdivided into the following three textual units (Aune 1998a: 586):

- |                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 11:3-6         | mission and authority of the two witnesses |
| <b>11:7-10</b> | <b>lynching of the two witnesses</b>       |
| 11:11-13       | victory of the two witnesses               |

#### a) Syntactical analysis

<sup>7</sup>Καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν,  
 τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου  
 ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον  
     καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς  
     καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς.

The syntax of Revelation 11:7 is quite simple. John just states that the two witnesses will be killed “after they have completed their witnessing”. The central point of the verse is that the beast would kill the believers. The images of war and the use of the verb ἀποκτενεῖ suggest that John refers to physical death.

#### b) Martyred witnesses

After the witnesses have completed their prophetic work, they are overcome by the beast from Hades (Rev 11:7). Again the verb ἀποκτείνω is used to describe their being killed by the beast [cf. 2.1.1. (ii) above for a discussion on the possible meanings of the verb ἀποκτείνω]. It is the same verb used in verse 5 to describe the

killing of anyone trying to harm the two witnesses while they are witnessing [in verse 5 it is said that the witnesses would καταθ(ει {consume – Amplified Bible} their opponents]. Although there are a couple of variant readings on the text as presented, none of the suggested variants influence the text in a material way (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 652-653; Aune 1998a: 652-655).

The text of verse 5 could be a problem to some Christians. It is modelled on the narratives found in 1 Kings 17:1 and 2 Kings 1:10-12. It reminds the modern reader of the Old Testament Law, which required “an eye for an eye” in the case of any harm being done to a person (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21; [cf. the prayer of the martyrs in Rev 6:9-11]), something Jesus clearly rejected in his “new interpretation” of the Law (Matt 5:38-42).

As an apocalyptic vision, however, the narrative should be read as a highly symbolical vision. The two witnesses are symbolic of the expected return of the eschatological prophets [presumably representing Moses and Elijah]. They are given the same powers as Moses [bringing about plagues] and Elijah [fire from their mouths, power to shut the sky] (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78). The killing of people rejecting the witnesses’ message is rather a message of God’s judgment on those that try to harm the believers or do not want to accept the salvation offered by Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 184). Furthermore the entire textual unit (i.e. Rev 11:1-14) wants to emphasise that the witnesses act under the protection [and authority] of God (Groenewald 1986: 121). Under the protection of God they are immune to the attacks of their opponents (Bauckham 1993a: 277). This interpretation of divine protection is central to the message of verse 5 and 6, and to the message with regard to life and death in Revelation<sup>243</sup>. It confirms that God will not let his message of salvation [or judgment] be interrupted in any manner by anybody. It will continue, even amidst persecution and martyrdom.

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<sup>243</sup> There is of course, the possibility to view this entire text metaphorically, and to understand “the destruction through fire” as the power of the eschatological message of the two prophets (Beasley-Murray 1981: 184-185; cf. Mounce 1977: 224; Aune 1998a: 602). A similar metaphor is found in Jeremiah 5:14 (cf. Sir 48:1).



The protection of the witnesses on earth lasts until they have completed their witness, which lasts for 1 260 days<sup>244</sup>. Only then does God permit that they be overcome by the beast, just as He permitted his only Son to be killed by the Roman authorities (Beasley-Murray 1981: 185). This vision is modelled on the vision of Daniel 7 about the little horn making war against the saints (Mounce 1977: 225). The entire vision wants to emphasise God's control over history. This control was, however, already evident in the heavenly vision of Revelation 4. The message now is that God's sovereignty and control is not influenced at all by anything that happens in history. History is rather dependent on God's control and what He permits people [even the evil beast] to do.

The deaths of the two witnesses follow the parallel route of the Christian martyrs, i.e. in the footsteps of Christ who was the ultimate ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός. Their deaths are a "participation in the blood of the Lamb" (Bauckham 1993b: 85). This is the model for the entire church under persecution, i.e. the church should be willing to die as martyrs in this life if they are faithful to their witnessing of the Gospel (Swete 1907: 137; Mounce 1977: 225-226). It is surely not the idea of John that the beast would wage a full-scale war against only two persons (cf. Rev 12:17; 13:7). Furthermore, the narrative does not imply that the entire church is to suffer persecution or has to die as martyrs (Du Rand 1999a: 1788)<sup>245</sup>. Many believers might die as martyrs at different times in history (cf. Rev 6:9-11), but not all will die as martyrs (Beasley-Murray 1981: 185; [cf. discussion on martyrdom above]).

The beast that wages war against the church and conquers it is the eschatological antagonist [i.e. the Antichrist]. The use of the definite article with the noun θηρίον indicates that the reader is familiar with this antagonist (Ford 1975: 179). The phrase τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου describes the origin of the beast, identifying him with Satan, the king of the ἄβυσσος (Aune 1998a: 616). The motif of the beast from the underworld [or Satan] is picked up again in Revelation 12, 13 and 17. The image of the beast probably goes back to the fourth beast of Daniel 7:21 (Aune 1998a: 617).

<sup>244</sup> The numbers 1 260 or 42 or 3½ all have the same meaning, i.e. a divinely restricted time [most often referring to the full period of eschatological tribulation] modelled after the vision of Daniel 7:25 (cf. Dan 12:7) (Aune 1998a: 609). It is modelled on the reign of terror by Antiochus IV Epiphanes between 167BC and 164BC (Du Rand 1991b: 216; Mounce 1977: 221; Porteous 1979: 113-114).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Groenewald (1986: 121-122) who seems to think of the entire destruction of the church on earth.

The vision John sees in Revelation 12:17 about the Dragon persecuting the church is a close parallel to this vision. The fact that he conquers the church is not an image of God [or the church] losing the war against Satan. It is rather an image of the church staying faithful regardless of persecution and martyrdom in this world.

Again we see the symbolic figure of three-and-a-half, which is the symbolic number of days that the bodies of the witnesses lay in the streets of the city before being resurrected (Rev 11:8-9). The fact that the bodies are left lying in the streets epitomises the disrespect for the church in this world. In the ANE, if a dead person was not buried properly, it was seen as “an act of ignominy” (cf. Tob 2:1-7; [Mounce 1977: 226; cf. Aune 1998a: 622]).

### c) Resurrected witnesses

Completing the parallel modelling on Christ as the ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, the two witnesses are resurrected after the three-and-a-half days and are then ascended to heaven (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 79). This is an allusion to the vision of Ezekiel 37 [about the valley of the dry bones]. The content is, however, different. In Ezekiel’s vision the people were spiritually dead and buried. In Revelation the church is strong and faithful [alive in the spirit]. The only comparison is that in both visions the resurrection of the people is the result of a divine intervention [ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ]. The “breath of life” is something that only God can give (cf. Gen 1:30; 2:7; 6:17; 7:15, 22; [cf. also Chapter 2, 3.1]).

The resurrection of the two witnesses is in line with the Christian tradition of the resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15; 1 Thess 4). It confirms the ultimate victory of Christ over death (Rev 1:18-19). The fact that the witnesses “have come to their feet” confirms that they have come to life (cf. 2 Kgs 13:21; Ezek 37:10; [Aune 1998a: 624]).

When the witnesses are resurrected, it is the ultimate confirmation that the control over life and death is in the hands of the sovereign God (Mounce 1977: 228). A significant feature of the narrative is the change in tenses at this time. The witnessing and death of the witnesses are written in the future tense as if to come. However, when John recites the resurrection, he suddenly changes to the aorist tense. This

change in tense wants to highlight the certainty of this resurrection (Groenewald 1986: 123). Believers can have complete faith in the coming resurrection, knowing that they will surely participate therein if they persevere until the end as faithful witnesses. It is a promise of life amidst the threat of death.

The following ascension of the witnesses confirms their protection by God even beyond the doors of physical death, and after the resurrection into the new life. Aune (1998a: 625) calls this part of the narrative “essentially a *rapture story*”<sup>246</sup>. Beasley-Murray (1981: 187) is of the opinion that we have here a symbolic preview of the first resurrection (cf. Rev 20:4). It could of course, just be a confirmation of the hope that believers will be resurrected [into eternal life] unto heaven after death [cf. 2.1.2 above].

The killing of seven thousand people in an earthquake at the ascension of the witnesses is entirely the result of divine action. It probably has no direct significance except to confirm the sovereign power of God. It is an apocalyptic vision that gives an insight on events yet to come (Mounce 1977: 229). As is the case in Revelation 16:18, the earthquake here in verse 13 functions as a means of divine punishment on the world because of their rejection of the message of Christ (Aune 1998a: 627). Not everybody is killed, which leaves a door open for the conversion of the rest.

Revelation 11:3-13 wants to give believers the hope of life, even in the face of death [maybe even through martyrdom]. David Aune (1998a: 603) in his conclusion on the identification of the two witnesses, sums up the message of this prophetic narrative [also with regard to life and death] appropriately:

“With regard to the symbolic significance of the two witnesses, it is relatively clear that they represent the witness of the people of God in a godless world and that they, like their Lord, will ultimately triumph over suffering and death.”

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<sup>246</sup> Italics inserted by Aune.

#### d) Summary

Throughout Revelation the notion is that physical life is not really what matters. Believers must rather focus on their faithful witness in this life in order to conquer and receive eternal life. In this sense Revelation 11 is no exception. It wants to give believers hope beyond physical death so that they can continue with their task of witnessing in this life. They need not fear even death because they will be resurrected into a new life with Christ.

#### 2.1.4. *Willing to die for Christ (Rev 12:11c)*

The context of this text, which Aune (1998a: 674-676) calls a mythological narrative, has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 8 [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.6 (i) and (ii)]. The same applies with regard to the syntactical analysis. In the same subsection attention was also given to the suggested textual variants. However, the focus then was on the sacrificial death of Christ as the only passage to victory over evil [cf. summary on 2.1.6 in Chapter 8]. For this discussion the focus will be on the willingness to die of believers in Revelation 12:11c. This central section of the text (i.e. Rev 12:7-12) “reveals the deepest cause for the persecution and oppression experienced by Christians in the time of John” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 81). It reveals Satan as the oppressor and accuser of believers here on earth and how he came to be that (Caird 1966: 156). However, the hope lies in what has already happened in heaven, where Satan was dealt a devastating blow, being defeated in a cosmic war (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 81-82).

Revelation 12:11c is introduced by *καὶ*, which functions as a causal particle, further explaining the reason for the preceding statement about the salvation and victory through the blood of the Lamb (Aune 1998a: 655)<sup>247</sup>. It is important not to confuse the message with regard to salvation with the willingness to die for this salvation. This clause is not the reason for the salvation (Beasley-Murray 1981: 204). The sacrificial death of Christ is the final victory over Satan. Whatever follows in Revelation 12:11 and further on is just the consequence of that which Christ has already achieved (Beasley-Murray 1981: 203). Therefore, when believers are willing to die, it is not to obtain salvation, or even to add onto the salvation already achieved

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<sup>247</sup> Charles (1920a: cxlviii) is of the opinion that *καὶ* “introduces a statement of the condition under which the action denoted by *ἐνίκησαν* took place” (cf. also Aune 1998a: 655).

by Christ, but only because they “continued in faith and obedience towards him in whose conquest they shared through unity with him” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 204). It is a confirmation of what is meant by the preceding clause: “the word of their testimony.”

The believers “did not love their own lives so much...” refers to them willing to put Christ first. It does not imply that they did not love their own lives. Various texts in the Bible seem to accept that man loves his own life. In the Old Testament the love of life is sometimes used [as negative motivation] to motivate people into virtuous behaviour (Jer 17:21; Prov 22:5). In the New Testament it is often used [positively] to urge people to love one another, just as they love themselves (Luke 10:27; Eph 5:28; 1 Pet 3:10). With this interpretation it is taken for granted that people love themselves and therefore their own lives (Aune 1998a: 703).

Contrary to this is the saying of Jesus that “whoever is bent on saving his [temporal] life [his comfort and security here] shall lose it [eternal life]; and whoever loses his life [his comfort and security here] for My sake shall find it [life everlasting]” (Matt 16:25 Amplified Bible; [cf. John 12:25; Matt 10:39 and the Synoptic parallels on these texts]). Within the context of Christian martyrdom Ignatius also writes to the Ephesians: “Love nothing according to human life, but God alone” (Ign Eph 9:3; [Aune 1998a: 703]).

This highlights the virtues of the Christian martyr: he is the person who by faithful witnessing has conquered. The martyr stands out as the person who has not loved his own life to such an extent that he would cling to it if being pressured. He shares in the victory because he has faithfully borne his testimony until the end (Mounce 1977: 243). For believers this should not be a stumbling block, because, according to Paul, the believer has already died of himself and now only lives for Christ (Col 2:20).

Again we see the priority given to eternal life [and life in relationship to God] over physical life. Believers can take heart from the knowledge that the victory has already been won by Christ on the cross (Charles 1920a: 328). If they continue in their lives of faith, they will share in this victory, just like all the Christian martyrs did (Beasley-Murray 1981: 203-204). They don’t necessarily need to die as martyrs themselves,

but must be willing to sacrifice their own lives for Christ (Matt 16:25). The important factor for them should not be to stay alive [physically] but to receive life [in eternity] through the blood of Christ.

#### 2.1.5. *The evil attack on the faithful (Rev 13:7, 10, 15)*

Although two different words [for death] are used in Revelation 13:7 [νικῆσαι] and Revelation 13:15 [ἀποκτανθῶσιν], the message in both instances are with regard to the persecution of the faithful believers by the dragon [Satan] and his two agents [i.e. the beasts from the sea and from the earth] (Mounce 1977: 248).

##### i) Context of Revelation 13:1-18

Revelation 13:1-8 is part of a larger subtext, which starts at Revelation 12:18. It is connected to the previous subtext (Rev 11:19-12:17), within the middle part of main body of the Book (Rev 11:15-16:21), by a redactional link, which is Revelation 12:18: καὶ ἐστάθη ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον τῆς θαλάσσης (Aune 1998a: 725). In Revelation 14:1 a new section starts, introduced with a clause favoured by John: καὶ εἶδον (Aune 1998a: 794)<sup>248</sup>. The text is subdivided further by two different scenes: the beast from the sea (Rev 12:18-13:10), and the beast from the land (Rev 13:11-18). It is a narrative probably reflecting the main strands of the traditional Jewish myth of the eschatological antagonist being combined (Aune 1998a: 729; Charles 1920a: 341).

#### **Excursion 7: The trinity of evil**

The eschatological antagonist is pictured as a perverse opposition to the Divine Trinity [cf. Excursion 5] in Revelation. The trinity is represented by the Dragon [Satan], the beast from the sea [the Antichrist] and the beast from the land [the false prophet]. In Revelation 16:13 they are brought together in a single sentence, although it is already clear that they act as an evil trio in opposition to God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 207). According to Brown (1982: 335) the Revelation account of the antagonist is the most comprehensive combination of the antagonistic figure in Christian literature. “Almost every piece in the Jewish picture of future evil has been put into this mosaic” (Brown 1982: 336).

<sup>248</sup> In this sense a new section could also be identified starting at Revelation 13:1. However, the redactional clause in Revelation 12:18 becomes a link, while also changing the scenery for the narrative in Revelation 13, and therefore probably is the start of the new subsection. The link between the dragon and the beasts is also made when the dragon delegates his power and authority to the beasts in Revelation 13.

The Dragon is the one pictured trying to dethrone God in heaven. His real colours are revealed in Revelation 12:9, i.e. being Satan, the serpent from the Old Testament (Gen 3:15). It is also made clear that his effort to take charge in heaven has been defeated. Actually he was more than just defeated; he was thrown out of heaven, signifying that his powers have been severely limited by God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 201-202). In contrast to God who reigns supreme eternally and saves his people, the Dragon's powers are broken and all he has left is to mislead and kill for the time being [evident in the discourse of Rev 13]. The symbol of the dragon is modelled on the Leviathan of the Old Testament (Aune 1998a: 728-729). In Revelation the Roman Empire is the representative symbol of Satan (Watson 1997b: 51).

The beast from the sea is the perverse antagonist of Christ, the ἀντίχριστος (Ford 1975:219). The term ἀντίχριστος appears for the first time in Christian literature in the Johannine letters (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7). It is probably the combination of various background factors from Judaic literature (Brown 1982: 333). The antichrist also perceives to be a Lamb [just like Christ], and even seems to have been slaughtered just as the Lamb (Aune 1998a: 726). He even performs signs, just like Christ did. The latter is a common feature of the eschatological antagonist in both Jewish and Christian literature (2 Thess 2:9-10; Rev 13:13; 16:14; 19:20; AscIsa 4:10-11; Apoc Eli 3:5-13; [Aune 1998a: 753-754]). He even claims to have been "resurrected" as Christ was (Watson 1997b: 52). However, in all instances the antichrist comes short when measured up against the real Christ (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 207). For John the person of Nero [the 666 – cf. Excursion 6] represented the antichrist (Watson 1997b: 52).

The second beast is also described in terms reminiscent of Christ: he looks like a Lamb, but when he speaks, his dragon-like features are revealed (Rev 13:11). The second beast performs the role of the false prophet, and in his speech stands in relation to the antichrist in the same manner as the Holy Spirit stands to Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 207). The false prophet leads the people to worship the Dragon and the antichrist, as opposed to the Holy Spirit who guides people to worship Christ and God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 207-208).

In the end, however, the evil trinity comes short in every respect to the Divine Trinity. The blood of Christ has conquered over evil (Rev 12:11). The end result

will be that all three will be put into the eternal realm of death at the eschatological judgment (Rev 19:20-20:10).

Whereas the central antagonistic figure in Revelation 12 was the Dragon, the focus shifts to the two beasts in Revelation 13. They are the agents of evil trying to establish a kingdom for the Dragon on earth. In the process of doing this, they kill anybody who is not willing to worship the beasts or the Dragon. Again we see the possibility of martyrdom for believers and the call to stay faithful regardless of the circumstances. The texts under discussion here fit into the larger subunit as follows<sup>249</sup>:

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
	<b>12:18-13:10</b> <b>the beast from the sea</b>
	<b>13:11-13:18</b> <b>the beast from the land</b>
14:1-20	vision of eschatological salvation and judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

When reading Revelation 13, two things must be kept in mind. Firstly, Revelation 13 cannot be understood correctly if it is isolated from its surrounding context. Many of the answers to the conflict are resolved in Revelation 12 and 14. In Revelation 12 we see the defeat of Satan in heaven “by the blood of the Lamb” forcing him to turn his anger against God’s people on earth, trying to establish a kingdom here. In Revelation 14 we see the conquering believers safely in the presence of Christ on mount Zion, regardless of whether they have died as martyrs or not. Secondly, Revelation 13 must not be read, as so many people did in the past, as a futuristic vision that just points forward to an eschatological antagonist somewhere in the distant future [or the present]. It must firstly be read within its historical context.

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<sup>249</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.

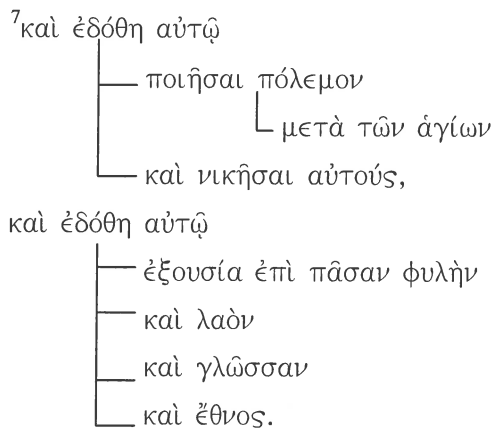


## ii) Persecution by Satan's agents

Revelation 13 takes up the narrative of the dragon waging war against and seemingly conquering the church after being thrown out of heaven (cf. Rev 12:9, 13-18; cf. also Rev 11:7). The connecting verse (Rev 12:18) gives the background for that which is following. Part of this war is the enticement of people to rather follow the dragon and the beast instead of following Christ (Groenewald 1986: 139). To achieve his goal, the Dragon uses two agents, the antichrist [the beast from the sea in opposition to Christ] and the false prophet [the beast from the land in opposition to the Spirit].

## a) Waging war against God's people

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 13:7:



The verse proclaims the power of the beast. Significant is the use of the passive verb ἐδόθη. It is not clear who gives permission, although the use of the passive could indicate divine permission [cf. below].

In the textual criticism some very significant witnesses omit the entire line about the war of the beast on the believers in Revelation 13:7a (Aland & Aland 1993: 657). Aune (1998a: 717), however, notes that this omission is probably the result of a scribal error, making the insertion of this line probably the original one. Verse 10 seems to be overflowing with suggested textual variants, most of them seemingly the result of scribal errors (cf. Aune 1998a: 718-719). In verse 15 there are a number of variants. It is, according to Aune (1998a: 721) a verse with an exceedingly complicated textual history, but with most of the suggested variants probably the

result of errors of haplography caused by the two occurrences of τοῦ θηρίου in the verse [cf. Aune 1998a: 721 for a detail discussion on these variants].

This verse has already been alluded to in Revelation 11:7, where it is said that the beast waged war against the witnesses [cf. 2.1.3 above]. It is thus nothing more than looking at the eschatological last time tribulations from different angles (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 84). The origin of this text goes back to Daniel 7:21 (Aune 1998a: 746). The vision of Daniel wants to confirm the coming suffering and persecution of believers on the one hand, but on the other hand wants to give believers hope that this time of tribulation will only last for a short period of time (Ford 1975: 223). In the end the evil beast will be destroyed, the rule of God will be universal and the believers will experience God's sovereign rule (Porteous 1979: 114-115).

In Revelation 5:5-6 the verb  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  [to conquer] is used [without an object] to describe the unlimited victory of Christ [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(a)]. In Revelation 2-3 it is used to urge believers to stay faithful in order to share in this victory. This is the more common manner to use  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  in Revelation. Here in Revelation 13:7, however, it is the beast from the sea that conquers the believers in a war. The use of  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  in war-terminology is the more common use of the verb in general (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 541). The war is the same one narrated in Revelation 11, and is the symbolic way of referring to the persecution and martyrdom, which awaits believers in the future.

By using  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  with an object here, the verb gets a temporal meaning: it is limited to the object [the believers] in this life [the physical life where Satan still claims to reign]. However, although the believers are overcome in this world, the ultimate victory still belongs to them. They are the ones depicted as coming off victorious from the beast (Rev 15:2). The true victory lies in the fact that they were willing to relinquish their physical lives rather than their faith in the eternal victory of Christ (Mounce 1977: 255). This paradoxical victory [by dying as martyrs] is parallel to the death of Christ: while it seemed that Christ had been conquered [on earth] through Him dying on the cross, it was actually the greatest victory of all, the victory over sin and the ultimate defeat of Satan (Rev 12:11; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 213]).

The beast *is given* universal power [καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ]. The use of the passive voice is theologically striking. It is highlighted even further by the fact that the phrase “it was given” is repeated. The beast clearly had no power of his own. Firstly he had to receive power from the Dragon (Rev 13:4). However, the ultimate source lies even further away. The beast is only allowed his powers for a limited period (Rev 13:5). It is clear what John wants to emphasise: God is still in control, even while the beast reigns [or thinks he reigns] on earth. Therefore, the passive voice can be deemed a passive of divinity, meaning that God is the One granting this authority (Beasley-Murray 1981: 213). In the words of Stauffer: “However much the idea of Satan has developed since the time of the Book of Job, the basic thought of Job 1:6ff remains true: Satan is an authorised minister of God” (as quoted by Beasley-Murray 1981: 213). With this Stauffer [probably] did not imply that Satan is an angel of God, but that he cannot [just like in Job] operate outside of the powers granted to him by God. John shares this view (Mounce 1977: 255). This is in line with Old Testament and New Testament thought regarding the sovereign power of the Almighty God.

b) Destined to be killed

<sup>9</sup>Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς  
    └ ακουσάτω.  
    <sup>10</sup>εἴ τις εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν,  
εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν ὑπάγει. ─┐  
    εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι  
αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι. ─┐  
<sup>ϵ</sup> Ὡδε ἐστὶν ─┐ ἡ ὑπομονή ─┐  
    └ καὶ ἡ πίστις ─┐ τῶν ἁγίων.

This short insertion acts as a commentary on the meaning of the vision (Aune 1998a: 749). The sentence is peculiar in that the protasis εἰ lacks a verb (Aune 1998a: 749). The notion of this prophetic oracle is that believers must accept their destiny, i.e. suffering for Christ. A similar text is found in Esther 4:16 (Aune 1998a: 750).

In Revelation 13:10 the destiny of believers staying faithful until the end is confirmed. Although this is an allusion to Jeremiah 15:2 [LXX], John uses his source selectively. He deliberately excludes famine and pestilence from the equation that Jeremiah used.

The notion is not [as is the case in Jeremiah] punishment for sins, but to emphasise the fate [destiny] of believers who hold on to faith in endurance even until death (Aune 1998a: 749-750)<sup>250</sup>. The answer supporting this understanding is given in Revelation 13:10c: “Here believers need endurance and faith”<sup>251</sup>. This is a call to believers to hold on to their faith in Christ, and not be put off by any trials or tribulations they might endure along the way (Groenewald 1986: 141). They must endure in the same manner as their Lord did, regardless of what may lie ahead for them (Beasley-Murray 1981: 215).

[Of course, there is the possibility that the text could be a reference to physical death in general: everybody will die if so determined. Because of this, it is important that believers hold on to their faith, so that they can enter eternal life {cf. Luke 13:1-5 where Jesus uses a similar metaphor}].

c) They who do not worship the beast

<sup>15</sup>Καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ  
└ δοῦναι πνεῦμα  
└ τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου,  
└ ἵνα καὶ λαλήσῃ ἢ εἰκὼν τοῦ θηρίου  
└ καὶ ποιήσῃ [ἵνα] ὅσοι  
└ ἐὰν μὴ προσκυνήσωσιν τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου  
└ ἀποκτανθῶσιν.

Revelation 13:15 builds up to the point where the believers who do not worship the beast are killed. This is the essence of the message John wants to bring to his readers (cf. Rev 13:10). The hope amidst this bad news lies in Revelation 14:1-5. Believers will be safe [and alive] with God, even if they are killed now.

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<sup>250</sup> Cf. However Caird (1966:169-170), who thinks of this allusion as having the same meaning than in Jeremiah, i.e. punishment or retribution. In this sense the believers are rather [negatively] warned to refrain from these things if they don't want to bring similar things over themselves. This interpretation probably goes back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 26:52, and is also translated as such in the 1933 Afrikaans version of the Bible. This, however, is a misconception regarding the meaning the text has for John.

<sup>251</sup> My translation.

In Revelation 13:15 the conflict between God's people and the evil trio continues. The beast from the sea exercises great powers on behalf of the first beast and urges [forces] people to worship the first beast. If people refrain from this worship, they are killed [ἀποκτανθῶσιν]. This takes the allusion to Jeremiah used in Revelation 13:10 further. Those who continued with their lives of faith and endurance [as requested in verse 10c] will eventually be killed by the beast [the use of the verb ἀποκτείνω indicating physical death]. As discussed above [cf. 2.1.1 (ii) above], the verb ἀποκτείνω is often used in Revelation to describe believers who were “killed” for their faith (Trites 1998: 274).

The fact that people are killed for not worshipping the image [statue] of the first beast probably refers to the enforcement of emperor worship in Roman provinces (Ford 1975: 224-225). It alludes to the text of Daniel 3:5-6, where worship was enforced onto Daniel and his friends. Believers are required to make a decision concerning life and death. Choosing for worship of the beast, means physical life but eternal death. On the contrary, choosing for Christ might bring physical harm and death, but will certainly bring eternal life to that person.

Believers must, however, not be put off by this. Physical life is not important for continued existence. They must rather stay faithful to the end so that they can share in the eternal victory of the Lamb and be with Him on mount Zion [i.e. living in his presence – Rev 14:1]. In this sense Revelation plays a strategic role theologically. For believers who are concerned about the future in times of trouble, the message of hope is that they will be alive [standing] in the presence of the living Christ [on mount Zion], even if they die in this life (Groenewald 1986: 146).

The message with regard to eschatological life and death goes much further in Revelation 13. It becomes more and more clear that compromise-theology is not acceptable. In physical life one decides either for God or for Satan. It is a question of eschatological life or death. Choosing for God [and Christ] spells life in the end times [and thereafter]. Choosing for Satan and his agents spells death in eternity (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 84).



iii) Summary on the persecution

- Amidst the very troubled [and dooming] nature of this text, a lot of hope and comfort is given here to believers.
- Revelation 13 refers in different ways to the persecution of believers by the powers of evil. The war on the witnesses of God (cf. Rev 11:7-12) is in motion. Believers are killed, deprived of privileges, and imprisoned for their faith. However, despite these trouble times, they must not give up. If they endure until the end, they will share in the victory of Christ. That is why they are called to endurance and faith (Rev 13:10c).
- Revelation 13 is in effect a call to believers to stay faithful so that they can share in the victory of Christ on Mount Zion, alive in his living presence, even if they die [or are killed] in this world.

2.1.6. *Blessed are the ones dying (Rev 14:13)*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 14:13 is a peculiar verse, not so much for the content thereof, but the context it finds itself in. The rest of the text of Revelation 14 concerns the judgment of God, except for Revelation 14:1-5, which is about the 144 000 in the presence of God on mount Zion [as a hopeful answer to the persecution of Rev 13 – cf. 2.15 above]. In the middle, squeezed between the announcement of God’s judgment (Rev 14:6-12) and the execution of the judgment (Rev 14:14-20) is verse 13, a beatitude, announcing God’s blessing upon the believers who “from now on die in the Lord”.

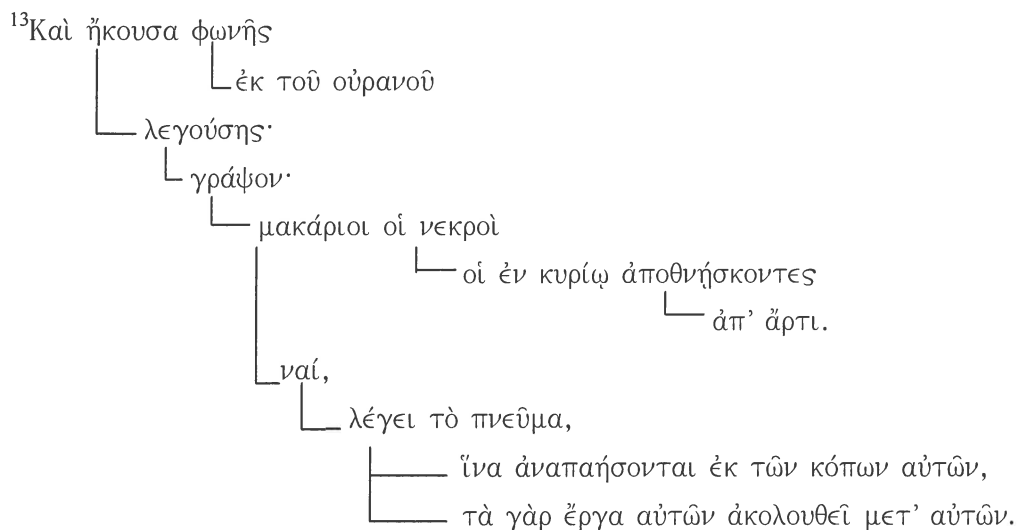
Revelation 14 forms part of the same subsection as Revelation 13 [i.e. Rev 11:15-16:21; cf. discussion on 2.1.5 above]. The subunit of text (Rev 14:1-20) is easily distinguished within the larger subtext by the frequently used text marker *καὶ εἶδον* in Revelation 14:1, which is again used in expanded format in Revelation 15:1 as *καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον*, indicating that Revelation 15 is a new subsection (Aune 1998a: 794-795). The content of Revelation 14 is also different from that of Revelation 13 and 15. However, one should not disregard the comparative links. Revelation 14:1-5 is the answer to the persecution in Revelation 13, while Revelation 15 is an indication of the plagues as part of the pouring out of God’s wrath upon the earth, which is the subject of the rest of Revelation 14 (Aune 1998a: 794-795).

Within Revelation 14 four subtexts can be distinguished (Aune 1998a: 794). Each of these is introduced with the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον. The only exception is Revelation 14:13, which begins with καὶ ἤκουσα. Although it might seem as if Revelation 14:14 is the start of a new larger subtext [introduced by καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοῦ], it is linked to the rest of Revelation 14 by the frequent use of ἄλλον ἄγγελον in both Revelation 14:6-13 and 14:14-20 (Aune 1998a: 794). Within the larger subtext of Revelation 11:16-6:21 the text under discussion fits in as follows<sup>252</sup>:

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
14:1-20	Vision of eschatological salvation and judgment
14:1-5	the Lamb and the 144 000
14:6:12	announcement of God's judgment
<b>14:13</b>	<b>audition of antiphonal beatitude</b>
14:14-20	execution of God's judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

ii) The ones dying in the Lord

a) Syntactical analysis



<sup>252</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.

The central message of the verse is the announcement that the believers will eventually rest “from their work” “if they die in the Lord”, i.e. die as a result of [or at least as] faithful believers. It consists of two parts: first John hears a voice, and then he is commanded to write (Aune 1998a: 798). It is not clear if verse 13c-d comes from the same speaker, although it could be the case. The *ναί*,... is a confirmation of the reason for them being called *μακάριοι*.

b) A beatitude for the faithful who die

This is one of seven beatitudes in Revelation<sup>253</sup>. Although this beatitude is in the plural [as is the ones in Rev 19:9 and 22:14 {cf. also Matt 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23}] there is seemingly no material difference between the use of the singular or plural in the beatitudes (Aune 1998a: 838). The beatitude comes from an unidentified voice, which in the Old Testament usually refers to God (Num 7:89; Ezek 1:28; Dan 4:31-32). In early Judaism the unidentified voice was sometimes even used as a circumlocution for God (Apoc Ezra 6:3; 7:13; Apoc Abr 9:1; 10:1, 3; [Aune 1998a: 561]). It is therefore possible that the unidentified voice in Revelation [something that is mentioned quite often in Revelation – cf. Aune (1998a: 561) for a discussion thereon] refers to God.

Although there are a number of textual variants suggested for different phrases in verse 13, most of them are not critical to the understanding of the verse within the context of this study [cf. Aune 1998a: 788 for a detail evaluation on the merits of each of these variant readings]. The only variant reading that could influence the text is in verse 13a-b. There is difference of opinion whether *ἀπ’ ἄρτι* should be read as part of verse 13a [this is how Aland & Aland (1993: 661) reads] or if it should be read with verse 13b [Aune (1998a: 788) prefers the latter reading and then changes the word to *ἀπαρτὶ* meaning “certainly” or “truly”, resulting in him also doing away with the confirming *ναί*]. Since there are no variant readings suggested for the latter option [i.e. in the text used], it would be better to work with the text as presented, taking note of the very interesting and solid explanation by Aune (1998a: 788) with regard to his choice (cf. also Charles 1920a: 370). Mounce (1977: 278) understands

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<sup>253</sup> The seven beatitudes are to be found in Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14.



the ἀπ' ἄρτι as marking “the transition into the more active persecution of those who hold unswervingly to their faith.”

Two words regarding death are mentioned here: οἱ νεκροὶ and οἱ ἀποθνήσκοντες. The noun οἱ νεκροὶ generally refers to persons who are dead [Rev 1:18 – cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(a) above], although it could sometimes refer to people who are dead to sin (Rom 6:11) or dead in sins (Eph 2:1-5; Col 2:13; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 536-537]). The verb ἀποθνήσκω is very common in the New Testament, occurring in total 104 times [cf. Chapter 4, 3.1]. It refers mostly to physical death, or to the mortality of man (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 90-91). In the case of believers dying [in Christian literature], it often refers to people dying as martyrs (Rev 14:13), although one can die “in the Lord” without being a martyr (cf. Rom 14:8; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 90-91]).

It is interesting that Charles (1920a: 369) distinguishes between the martyrs under the altar (Rev 6:9-11) whose blessedness is not yet fully consummated, and the martyrs who are “to die from now on”, who are called blessed ones (Rev 14:13). The reason for this is, according to Charles (1920a: 369), that “with them the number of the martyrs is accomplished, and therefore the hour for judgment has come.” The words “from now on” hint on a future tribulation lying ahead for believers. Whereas verse 12 urges believers to stay faithful amidst all the persecution and with the judgment of God coming on (cf. Rev 13:11-17), verse 13 wants to “convey a positive assurance of the blessedness which awaits them” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 227; Caird 1966: 188).

To an extent this beatitude [like most other beatitudes] sounds like the Jewish doctrine of being saved through one’s works. However, John’s emphasis on the “works that follow them” is rather on the redemptive power of Christ, which bears fruit in the lives of believers, than any saving works (Beasley-Murray 1981: 228). Their faithfulness will not go unnoticed. Being “rested from their labours” refers to them not having to face any more tribulation or persecution. Their struggle to stay faithful amidst suffering has come to an end (Mounce 1977: 278).

The message of hope lies therein that believers do not have to fear physical death. There are more important things than this life to be concerned about (Morris 1969: 182). They must endure the sufferings in this life to share in the victory of Christ over

death. Of course, this does not only apply to those believers that die as martyrs, but to all believers (Beasley-Murray 1981: 227). “Dying in the Lord” could be seen as a reference to uncompromising faithfulness unto Christ, even if no persecution is at hand. For some of the believers in the seven congregations [cf. Rev 2-3] the struggle was not staying faithful amidst persecution but staying faithful amidst false doctrines and worldly views drawing them away from the way of life (Rev 2:14-15, 20-23).

“Dying in the Lord” means having a living relationship with Christ<sup>254</sup>. Everybody who shares in the death in Christ will therefore also share in his resurrection (1 Cor 15:17-18; Thess 4:16; [Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 90]). Their dying off of themselves stands in sharp contrast to the death of the unbelievers, who stand to face the judgment of God (Mounce 1977: 277). The immanent judgment of God makes this decision on life and death all the more important.

Although physical death is what is being referred to here, the blessedness is all about having “real life”, i.e. eternal life. That is why it is linked [squashed in between?] to the judgment scene of Revelation 14. It becomes a choice of life or death, of adoring the beast in this world [and come before God in judgment] or of enduring in faith amidst persecution by the beast [and then being blessed by God in eternity] (Ford 1975: 249). This beatitude is a very “noteworthy piece of encouragement in a situation where the steadfastness of the saints was most important” (Morris 1969: 182-183). To die, said Paul, is actually a gain, because then believers get to be with God (cf. Phil 1:21-23; [Hughes 1990: 164]).

### iii) Summary on Revelation 14:13

- In the face of the coming judgment believers are given hope regarding their position. They don't have to fear death. If they persevere in faith [live in Christ], they will be saved from the wrath of God at judgment.
- Everyone who “dies in the Lord” will be relieved of all the hardships and persecutions. Although the verse could refer to martyrs specifically, it is

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<sup>254</sup> Paul stressed that one can [and should] die of oneself with Christ now [in this life], and then be resurrected into a new life through Christ's resurrection now (cf. Col 2:20; 3:1-2). This is a reference to spiritual life: to live spiritually one has to die from the old self and be resurrected into the new life with Christ [i.e. be reborn – cf. John 3:1-18]. In this sense eschatological life becomes a reality already in this life [cf. Chapter 4, 2.2 for a discussion of Paul's thoughts on life].

applicable to all believers who “have lived in the Lord”. This refers to having a relationship with Christ. These believers already partake in eternal life even before death.

### **Excursion 8: The seven beatitudes of Revelation**

The Greek adjective μακάριος generally means being “happy”, “blessed”, or “fortunate” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 487). In a religious sense the connotation is generally that of blessedness associated with the eschatological new day (Garland 1992b: 78). In the New Testament μακάριος occurs fifty times (Garland 1992b: 78). Stylistically the use of μακάριος in the New Testament follows the tradition found in apocalyptic literature (Becker 1980: 216).

A blessing therefore refers to the experience in a certain manner of well being by a person. This blessing is usually bestowed upon a person by God (Johnson 1997: 131). The opposite of μακάριος is οὐαί [woe – Garland (1992b: 77-78); cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 595], which is often contrasted directly with the blessing. In Revelation 14 the woe is not mentioned explicitly, but implied by the surrounding context of the blessing (Becker 1980: 216-217).

The beatitudes should not be read as an indication of piety, but in line with the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount they “proclaim the blessedness of those who look to God for redemption” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 52). There are no conditions to be met before the blessings are bestowed. On the contrary, they are seemingly received by those least worthy in terms of works. This is specifically the case in the Sermon on the Mount (Schweizer 1976: 81). Keeping to the requirements of these beatitudes is only possible through the gracious activity of God that has been bestowed upon man (Garland 1992b: 79)<sup>255</sup>.

In Revelation the seven beatitudes are connected to certain values of the early Christian community. The first (Rev 1:3) and sixth (Rev 22:7) beatitudes form an inclusion, pronouncing blessedness upon everyone who “keeps the words of this prophecy” (Johnson 1997: 131). Rossing (1999: 57) stresses the importance of “keep” [τηρέω] in the blessings, which underscores the ethical implications of the new life for believers. The reason for this urgent appeal is because

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<sup>255</sup> Hendriksen (1973: 266) sees the entire section on the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-12 as a spiritual reference, looking forward to God’s new world, but also reminding readers that this new world has already arrived in Christ, so that they can experience these blessings already now.

ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς, i.e. the blessings are to be bestowed soon in the eschaton that is near (Aune 1997: 21).

Everything that is given in this book is thus of utmost importance for spiritual wealth [and spiritual life]. Adherence to the words contained herein will bring about these blessings as a result of God's grace (Mounce 1977: 66). Again it is not a case of piety and working towards blessing, but of receiving blessings for staying faithful to an already claimed victory. This understanding is specifically clear from the other five beatitudes in Revelation.

The other beatitudes more clearly proclaim blessedness to those that stay faithful until the end. Revelation 14:13 proclaim that everyone who "dies in Christ" is blessed, i.e. they who do not forsake their faith. Revelation 16:15 calls them blessed who stay awake waiting for God's intervention. Revelation 19:9 and 20:6 refer to those that have received the eternal life from God as being blessed (cf. Johnson 1997: 131).

Urbrock (1992: 761-1) draws a connecting line between the final beatitude in Revelation 22:14 and what he calls the opposite thereof [the prohibition to access the tree of life], which he finds in Genesis 3:14. He sees this last beatitude of Revelation as a reversal of the prohibition placed on man in Genesis, which is now possible, because God has renewed everything through the death and resurrection of Christ. In the new world God has established this relationship with Him will be restored.

If the seven beatitudes are read as a unit, they all refer to the faithfulness of believers amidst persecution. These people are the ones eventually being blessed, not for their piety but for being faithful to God's salvation (Johnson 1997: 131). The fact that there are seven beatitudes probably wants to stress the unity [completeness] of these seven beatitudes as an indication of complete blessedness in the end times (Johnson 1997: 131; Aune 1997: 22-23).

#### *2.1.7. The blood of the faithful (Rev 16:6; 17:6; 18:24)*

These three texts will be discussed under the same subheading, because in all three of them John discusses the same issue, i.e. "the blood of the faithful and of the prophets that have been shed" by the evil powers of Satan and his agents. "Drinking" and

“blood” are important images in Revelation 17 and 18 (Rossing 1999: 85). However, because the texts are found in different subtexts of Revelation, the context and content of each will be discussed separately, with a single summary in the end.

i) Revelation 16:6

a) Context

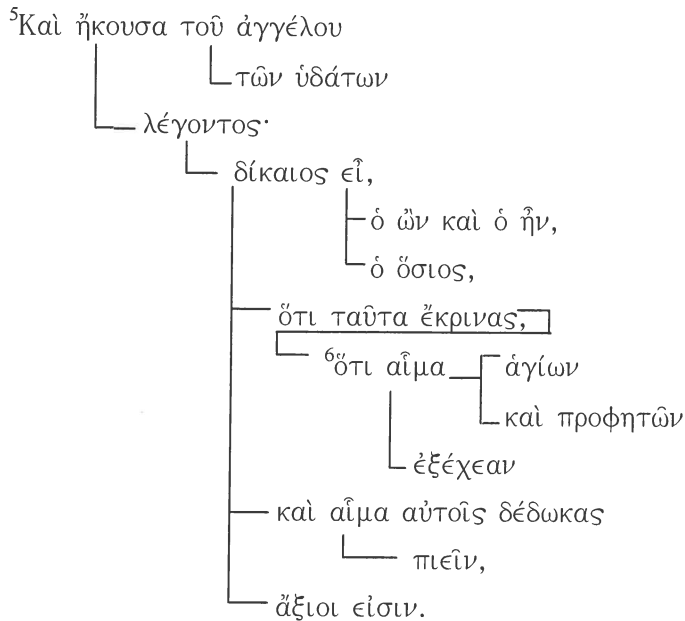
The context for this discussion is Revelation 15:1-16:21 [which is part of the larger textual unit Rev 11:15-16:21]. A new subunit of text starts in Revelation 15:1 with the familiar *καὶ εἶδον* [cf. 2.1.6 above; (Aune 1998a: 863)]. The narrative in this section differs from that of the seven seals (Rev 6:1-8:1) and that of the seven trumpets (Rev 8:2-11:18) in a number of aspects [cf. Aune 1998a: 863 for a discussion on these; cf. also Beagley (1997b: 133)]. In Revelation 17:1 a new subsection starts when one of the angels steps forward towards John [text maker – *καὶ ἦλθεν*]. Revelation 16:19b seems to be an interpolation into the text to link this text artificially with the vision of Babylon in Revelation 17 (Aune 1998a: 867).

Within this larger subtext Aune (1998a: 863-868) identifies a number of subdivisions, of which Revelation 16:1-21 is one subunit [introduced by another familiar text marker – *καὶ ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς*], a narrative regarding the pouring out of the seven bowls of God’s judgment (Aune 1998a: 863-864). This is the pouring out of the wrath of God on the peoples of this world (Aune 1998a: 883). Within the larger subtext of Revelation 15:1-16:21 the text under discussion here fits in as follows<sup>256</sup>:

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
14:1-20	vision of eschatological salvation and judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls
15:1-4	Prologue
15:5-8	commission of the seven angels
<b>16:1-21</b>	<b>seven last plagues</b>

<sup>256</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.

## b) The blood of the faithful



The centre of these two verses is the angel's proclamation of God's righteousness in judgment. The judgment seems to be in retribution to the killing of the martyrs (cf. Rev 6:9-11). The righteousness of God is a message of comfort to believers, knowing that their suffering have not gone unnoticed, neither is it without purpose.

What we have in Revelation 16:6 [and also in Rev 17:6 and 18:24] is not actual death, but a reference to previous killing of Christians [and probably other believers too], which is now being punished by God in his wrath. This wrath is symbolically poured out from seven bowls upon the followers of the beast in the eschatological judgment. In contrast to the seals and trumpets, all the followers of the beast are now hit (Beagley 1997b: 132-133). The textual variants suggested are not crucial to the text. One can therefore work with the text as presented [cf. Aune (1998a: 856-857) for a detailed discussion on the suggested variants].

The word αἷμα is translated with "blood" [of humans or animals] and can be used either in a literal sense or metaphorically as an interpretation of "life" or "death" (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 22-23). Of course, blood being shed as a sacrifice, spells life, as it brings reconciliation with God (cf. Heb 9:22; [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(b)

above for an interpretation of the sacrificial blood of Christ as a life-giving occurrence]). Because blood is understood as the seat of life, the shedding of blood is equal to killing (Gen 9:6; 37:22; Lev 17:4, 13; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 22; cf. De Cock 2004: 157-182]). This is the interpretation with regard to all three texts that form part of this discussion<sup>257</sup>. The motif of the phrase is that of martyrdom: it refers to believers who died at the hands of the dragon and the beasts as a result of their faithfulness to the testimony of Christ. In all three instances, according to Aune (1998a: 886), it is the result of a redactional addition.

The phrase αἷμα ἐκχεῖν is found only here in the book of Revelation (i.e. Rev 16:6) and could be translated literally with “to shed blood” or “to pour out blood”. This effectively means “to kill” or in stronger words “to murder” (cf. Gen 9:6; Deut 19:10; Jer 7:6; 1 En 9:1; [Aune 1998a: 887]).

The killing [rejection] of the prophets is a theme already found in the Old Testament (1 Kgs 19:10; 2 Chr 36:16; Ezra 9:11; Neh 9:26), but is repeated in the New Testament (Matt 5:11-12 = Luke 6:22-23; Acts 7:52; Rom 11:3; 1 Thess 2:15). Aune (1998a: 887) understands the prophets referred to here as “envoys of God who are also heroes of faith”. They are not necessarily representative of the Old Testament prophets (Luke 10:24; Matt 13:17; John 8:52; Heb 11:32-38; Jas 5:10).

That those who have shed the blood of the righteous “have to drink blood” is a reference to the righteousness of God’s punishment in judgment (Mounce 1977: 295). Because God alone is the Lord of life [and therefore the Controller of blood], He avenges innocent human blood being shed, particularly those of the saints, the martyrs and the prophets (Laubach 1980: 222). “Drinking blood themselves” is the righteous and worthy punishment for what they have done to the faithful believers (cf. also Rev 6:9-11; [Du Rand 1999a: 1796]). In the Wisdom of Solomon it is said: “By what things a man sinneth, by these he is punished” (Wis Sol 11:16; cf. Isa 49:26). The “blood” they drink is seemingly the water that has been turned into blood by the

<sup>257</sup> Laubach (1980: 223) in his commentary on the interpretation of “blood” [αἷμα] in NIDNTT sums up the spectrum of the meaning of blood strikingly: “In the blood lies the power for sanctification (Heb 13:12) and the conquest of all powers at enmity with God (Rev 12:11). A transforming and renewing power flows from the atoning death of Jesus into the life of those who have accepted redemption in faith. Christ’s blood makes life in God’s presence possible; it gives access to God (Heb 10:19; Eph 2:13, 18).”

second and third angels (Rev 16:3-4). This recalls the events of the Exodus (Ex 4:22-23; [Ford 1975: 271]).

The final phrase of verse 6, ἄξιόι εἶσιν could refer to the saints getting the rest they are worthy of, or to the persecutors getting the punishment they deserve. The more general interpretation seems to be the latter. The importance is, however, that both interpretations come to the same conclusion: God's righteousness will bring rest for the believers from their struggles and punishment for the persecutors according to their actions (Hughes 1990: 174).

## ii) Revelation 17:6

### a) Context

In Revelation 17:1 a new section starts. The subsection Revelation 17:1-19:10 deals with the Fall of Babylon [with regard to this there is a strong link between Rev 17 {the splendour and fall of the great whore} and Rev 18 {the fall of Babylon}<sup>258</sup>] (Charles 1920b: 54-55). According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 248) Revelation 17 should not be seen as following on the pouring out of the seventh bowl. The seventh bowl is the conclusion of God's judgment. What we see from Revelation 17 onwards is the consequences of the judgment of Babylon (Beasley-Murray 1981: 248).

It is the only vision in Revelation that also incorporates a detailed interpretation of the vision<sup>259</sup> (Aune 1998b: 915). The vision is introduced in verse 1 with the familiar text marker καὶ ἦλθεν [cf. also (i) above]. Although there are a number of familiar text markers used throughout the textual unit, the text of Revelation 17:1-19:10 is distinguished from the rest of the surrounding context by its content: the vision regarding the splendour and fall of the whore [and Babylon – essentially the same]. The familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον introduces a new larger subsection, which starts in

<sup>258</sup> Who turns out to be the same entity (Rossing 1999: 81-82). Babylon is a symbolic name for Rome in Revelation, and occurs six times in this manner (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:6; 18:2, 10, 21). The parallel goes back to the exile of Israel in 587 BC [being paralleled with the conquest of Jerusalem by Rome in 70 AD] (Aune 1998a: 829-830; Bauckham 1993a: 345). Groenewald (1986: 150) sees in the Fall of Babylon also a reference to the fall of the tower in Genesis 11:1-9. It is interesting to note that Beagley (1997c: 112) mentions the possibility that Babylon could be a reference to Jerusalem, as many believers had a torrid time under Jewish leaders there. In any case, Babylon becomes the symbol of the place where evil resides. It is a place where people live in disregard of God and Christ (Groenewald 1986: 151). Babylon is the great seducer of the world (Mounce 1977: 310).

<sup>259</sup> This is a feature quite common to Jewish apocalyptic literature (Aune 1998b: 915).



Revelation 19:11 [cf. Mounce (1977: 36-338) who breaks the text at Rev 19:5]. From here on the narrative of Revelation is fixed on the complete overthrow of the evil powers that are in opposition to God (Morris 1969: 202).

Revelation 17 is in effect only the introduction to the judgment of Babylon. In Revelation 17:1 the angel promises to show John the judgment of the great whore, but then goes on to show John the whore in her splendour. Only in Revelation 18 does the effects of the judgment become the actual focus of John (Aune 1998b: 915). Within the larger context of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the text containing Revelation 17:6 fits in as follows<sup>260</sup>:

17:1-19:10	Revelations of the judgment of Babylon
17:1-2	introduction to the visions
17:3-18	allegorical vision of Babylon as the great whore
	<b>17:3-6a</b> <b>vision of the great whore</b>
	17:6b-18 interpretation of the vision
18:1-24	destruction of Babylon
19:1-8	heavenly throne-room audition
19:9-10	concluding angelic revelation

b) The blood of the faithful being drunk

καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα  
 └ μεθύουσιν  
 └ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων  
 └ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων  
 └ Ἰησοῦ.

καὶ ἐθαύμασα  
 └ ἰδὼν αὐτήν  
 └ θαῦμα μέγα.

The verse could be divided into two separate actions. First John sees the great whore, and then he shows his astonishment at her appearance. In the context of martyrdom, which believers could face in the near future, the whore being drunk with the blood of

<sup>260</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b.

believers is a metaphor for the killing of believers, i.e. those who held on to “the witness of Jesus (verse 6a) [cf. below].

With regard to verse 6, there are only a few textual variants suggested (Aland & Aland 1993: 666). However, none of them are critical to the outcome of the discussion. Aune (1998b: 909-910) also shows preference for the text as presented in *Novum Testamentum Graece*. Aune (1998b: 913-915) divides the text after verse 6a [the focus for this discussion], reading the astonishment with the next subsection and not as part of the blood of the saints being drunk. This is probably correct, as the astonishment acts as a bridge between the two subsections [it comments on Rev 17:3-6a, and simultaneously introduces the comment on John’s astonishment by the angel who interprets the vision for John from verse 7 onwards].

The blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus refer to those people who had to suffer death because of their faithfulness to Christ [cf. (i)(b) above]. It is not sure if John refers to different groups in Revelation 17:6, or if it is just one group. Aune (1998b: 937) is of the opinion that the *καὶ* in verse 6 should be read epexegetical [as “that is”], understanding the second phrase as a further explanation of the first [cf. the discussion on Rev 16:6, where mention is made of saints and prophets]<sup>261</sup>. It is possible that John refers to both the New Testament martyrs and the Old Testament witnesses [prophets] who were killed (Beasley-Murray 1981: 253). Morris (1969: 207) is of the opinion that the combination of both is done to add solemnity to the situation<sup>262</sup>.

The drinking of blood has a specific metaphoric meaning. Being “drunk with blood” is a familiar imagery for the brutality with which a nation acted against surrounding peoples. In the book of Judith, for instance, the Assyrian commander used this metaphor to boast of his army’s ability to totally demolish Israel (Rossing 1999: 86). Furthermore, the fact that the woman is pictured drunken with the blood could be seen as a sign that she rejoiced in her deeds of killing the saints. However, it also implies that many believers died in this ongoing process of killing – that is why she is drunk

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<sup>261</sup> Cf. Mounce (1977: 311). Charles (1920b: 66) sees the mentioning of the second group as tautologous.

<sup>262</sup> Cf. Hughes (1990: 183-184) who is of the opinion that the first group refers to the affliction suffered by the living witnesses, and the second group refers to the martyrs who died for their faith.

(Morris 1969: 207; Groenewald 1986: 172). A similar metaphor is found in Revelation 11, where it is said that the world rejoiced in the killing of the two witnesses (Rev 11:10). It highlights something of the total rejection of believers by the unbelieving world.

The vision of the great whore [or Babylon] does not narrate the killing of the believers as such. It rather concentrates on the judgment of the great whore because of the killing of believers through the ages (Rev 17:1). The reality of those killed by the evil powers of this world is evident in verse 6, but stands in contrast to the perpetrators of these deeds. The latter will in the end have to drink the full cup of God's wrath (Rev 16:6), while the martyrs will experience eternal rest (Rev 14:13).

### iii) Revelation 18:24

#### a) Context

The context of Revelation 17:1-19:10 has already been discussed [cf. (ii)(a) above]. In this discussion the focus will therefore only be on how Revelation 18 fits into this structure. Revelation 18 can be called a dirge over the city [Babylon / Rome] signifying the end of the old world in which God's people was tormented by the evil of this world (Beasley-Murray 1981: 262; Aune 1998b: 979; Rossing 1999: 100-101).

Aune (1998b: 976) identifies three different types of poetic compositions interlinked within the text of Revelation 18: (i) a ritual lament (Rev 18:1-3, 9-20), which is similar to the laments over Tyre in the Old Testament (Ezek 26:15-18; 27:1-8, 26-36); (ii) a command to flee (Rev 18:4-8), and (iii) a symbolic action and interpretation (Rev 18:21-24). Within the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the text under discussion fits in as follows<sup>263</sup>:

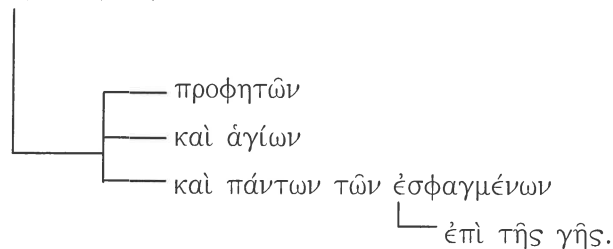
17:1-19:10	Revelations of the judgment of Babylon
17:1-2	introduction to the visions
17:3-18	allegorical vision of Babylon as the great whore

<sup>263</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b. An interesting structural division is done by Rossing (1999: 100-101), who divides Revelation 18 into five major subsections, in the end forming an inclusion, with Revelation 18:1-3 and Revelation 18:21-24 described as "Proclamation of Judgment, City Lament: ὅτι clause giving reason." According to Rossing (1999: 101) this highlights Revelation 18's "tightly composed structure" [cf. the structure by Bauckham (1993a: 339-340), which incorporates Rev 19:1-8 into the inclusion].

18:1-24	destruction of Babylon
18:1-3	an angelic taunt song
18:4-20	speech by an unidentified heavenly voice
<b>18:21-24</b>	<b>vision of the symbolic destruction of Babylon</b>
19:1-8	heavenly throne-room audition
19:9-10	concluding angelic revelation

b) Babylon guilty of shedding the blood

<sup>24</sup>καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα εὐρέθη



This short sentence concludes that Babylon is guilty of the deeds she was punished for. The evidence of her killing of believers was found with her [or in her], i.e. the blood of all the saints. The passive voice makes God the finder of the evidence [i.e. divine passive].

“Revelation 18 draws on a repertoire of biblical laments and anti-imperial strategies to portray Rome as doomed...” (Rossing 1999: 99). Its imagery is more typical of that found in the Old Testament prophetic literature than that of the apocalyptic literature (Aune 1998b: 976). Specifically Revelation 18:2-8 and 21:24 contains a number of allusions to Jeremiah 50-51 [LXX Jer 27-28], where the focus is on the judgment of [the actual] Babylon (Aune 1998b: 983). Revelation 18:23-24 “gives the grounds for the destruction of Rome” (Charles 1920b: 112).

There is only one textual variant suggested for Revelation 18:24 (Aland & Aland 1993: 671), suggesting that the singular noun αἷμα be replaced with the plural αἷματα. According to Aune (1998b: 973) the singular is probably correct as this is the way it occurs 19 times in Revelation.

Revelation 18:24 is a concluding remark on the judgment of Babylon, with a possible allusion to Jeremiah 51:49 (Aune 1998b: 1010-1011). The remark retains the “blood of the prophets and saints” found in Revelation 16:6 and 17:6, but then add “and all of those slaughtered on earth”. The latter could possibly refer to everyone put to death by Babylon [i.e. Rome] in John’s time (Aune 1998b: 1011). Babylon has been found guilty of the blood of everyone that died innocent and whose blood cries out to God [this is an Old Testament imagery taken over. In Genesis 4:10 the blood of Abel called out to God from the earth (Mounce 1977: 335)].

This underlines the totality of evil in this world, getting rid of everyone standing in its way (Groenewald 1986: 188). In this sense Babylon becomes the symbol of every power that undermines [or rather tries to undermine] God’s sovereign power and righteousness (Morris 1969: 223). In Matthew 23:35 a similar charge is brought against Jerusalem as the killer of the prophets of God (Charles 1920b: 113). The latter is a prophecy by Jesus regarding the persecution awaiting the church after his ascension (cf. Hendriksen 1973: 837). It is, however, a prophecy that also recalls the Old Testament occurrences of this (cf. Van Zyl 1999: 1170).

Although the imagery [specifically of Rev 18:21-24] implies the persecution and killing of believers [as in Rev 16:6 and 17:6 – cf. above], Bauckham (1993a: 347-378) is of the opinion that economic critique is also evident in God’s judgment on the idolatrous arrogance (Rev 18:8) and self-indulgent luxury at the expense of others (Rev 18:7; [cf. Bauckham 1993a: 349-350]). However, the important message of Revelation 18 is that Babylon [symbol of evil] will be judged, and the punishment for its transgressions will be final and permanent (Rev 18:21-24). And the most important reason for this is that Babylon is the one responsible for the death of the Christian martyrs, actually all the saints and prophets of God, and even all the other innocent people who died at her hand (Rev 18:24; [Bauckham 1993a: 350]).

iv) Summary on the blood of the faithful

- In Revelation 16, 17, and 18 the references with regard to death are not about the actual dying of people at the hand of the evil [symbolised here by Babylon], but to the judgment on the evil for its killing of God’s saints. It is interesting that physical death seemingly does not appear in the text

after Revelation 16. The references to death here is more looking back towards earlier killing of believers. All three texts discussed highlight this.

- In all three texts the focus is on the blood of the saints and the prophets that were shed by Babylon [blood being a reference for the seat of life]. The martyrs can be assured that God will in his righteousness judge and punish Babylon for this. The martyrs have a consolation that they will at last rest from their sufferings, even if they die as martyrs in this world (Hughes 1990: 174).

### 2.1.8. *God's wrath for the death of the faithful (Rev 19:2)*

#### i) Context

Revelation 19:2 is still part of the larger section (Rev 17:1-19:10) discussed above [cf. 2.1.7 (ii) and (iii)]. A new subsection starts in Revelation 19:1 with the formula *μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα*, a frequent text marker in Revelation (Charles 1920b: 114). Revelation 19:1-10 comprise of two textual units [Rev 19:1-8 and 19:9-10] that both function as transitions from Revelation 17-18 through to the section on the bride in Revelation 21:9-22:5 (Aune 1998b: 1019)<sup>264</sup>. Revelation 19:1-8 is the “longest, most complex, and final hymnic section in Revelation” (Aune 1998b: 1021). It contains five hymnic texts, praising God for the judgment of Babylon and the redemption of his people (Aune 1998b: 1021). Beasley-Murray (1981: 271) calls it “a liturgy of Hallelujahs”. It is the only place in the New Testament that the word Hallelujah is found and it is probably taken over from the Hallel Psalms, i.e. Psalms 113-118 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 271). The structure of Revelation 19:1-10 fits in at the end of the larger section of Revelation 17:1-19:10, and has the following layout<sup>265</sup>:

17:1-19:10	Revelations of the judgment of Babylon
17:1-2	introduction to the visions
17:3-18	allegorical vision of Babylon as the great whore

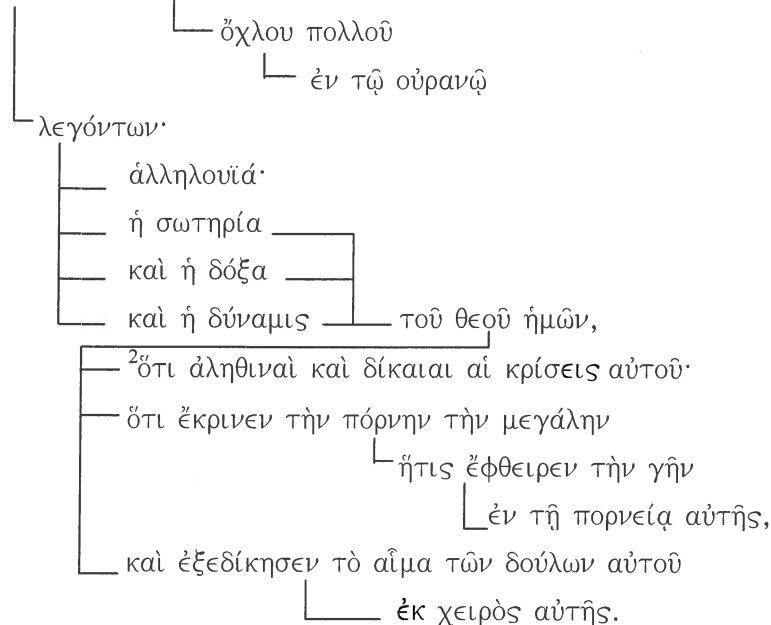
<sup>264</sup> Cf. Aune (1998b: 1020-1021) for a discussion of the parallel between Revelation 17:1-19:10 and Revelation 21:9-22:9 [cf. also Rossing 1999 who evaluates in detail the comparisons and differences between Babylon and Rome, and the fact that John deliberately contrasts the two].

<sup>265</sup> For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b [cf. also Charles 1920b: 116-118 who changes the order of the verses around to what he calls its “due chronological connection” (Charles 1920b: 116)]. Many scholars break the text at Revelation 19:5, thus making Revelation 19:6 the start of a new section (Morris 1969: 224-226; Mounce 1977: 336; Hughes 1990: 196). Beasley-Murray (1981: 270-271) and Groenewald (1986: 188) follows Aune on the structure.

18:1-24	destruction of Babylon
19:1-8	heavenly throne-room audition
<b>19:1-4</b>	<b>two-part hymn of praise and response</b>
19:5-8	call to praise and hymnic response
19:9-10	concluding angelic revelation

ii) God's righteous judgment in Rev 19:2

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλην



At the centre of Revelation 19:1-2 stands God who saves and judges, who judges and punishes the evil. The first part of the text (Rev 19:1) is a worship hymn attributing to God a number of exclamations. The second part (Rev 19:2) gives the reasons why God in his righteous judgment could be trusted. Of course, the judgment of God is eternal, but the mention of the blood of the faithful goes back to the other references [cf. above].

As was the case in the discussions of Revelation 16-18 [cf. 2.1.7 above], it is not the death of believers that is mentioned here, but the wrath of God in judgment for the previous killing of his people. This is the final eschatological judgment of God, where the decisions on life and death come into effect in eternity. The judgment of God determines who has life and who is dead. Believers rejoice in the knowledge that this judgment will be righteous and trustworthy (Rev 19:1-2).

There are only two minor variants suggested for the text of Revelation 19:2 (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 671). In both instances the variants are weakly attested. It is thus possible [and preferable] to work with the text as presented (cf. Aune 1998b: 1015).

In Revelation 19:2 two words occur that could be interpreted with the meaning of “death”: τὸ αἷμα and ἔφθειρεν. The meaning of αἷμα has already been discussed [cf. 2.1.7 above]. According to Aune (1998b: 1015) “death is the deep structural meaning of τὸ αἷμα” in Revelation 19:2. It is thus another reference to the blood of God’s people [the saints and prophets – Rev 16:6; 17:6; 18:24] that was shed by Babylon (Morris 1969: 225). The phrase ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς indicates that Babylon is the one found to be guilty of killing the saints of God. There is a strong allusion to the killing of the Old Testament prophets by Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:7; 4 Kgdms 9:7). A line could even be drawn to Jezebel of Thyatira (cf. Rev 2:20-23) who seduced the people into spiritual deadness (Aune 1998b: 1025-1026).

The other word ἔφθειρεν [translated with “corrupted” by Mounce (1977: 336)] has a number of different possible meanings. In a literal sense the translation of “destruction” or “corruption” could mean killing someone [i.e. destroying his being]. In a religious sense the interpretation is mostly to destroy [in an eternal sense as punishment – cf. 1 Cor 3:17b], to corrupt, to ruin, or to seduce someone (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 865). Of course, the other three possibilities could all apply to the text here. Babylon corrupted the world with her misleading theology and lifestyle [cf. the message to Thyatira referred to above]. She also ruined the morals and religion of many peoples and has seduced people to drink from her cup of fornication. “Her fornication is her seductive and unholy alliances with the entire civilized world” (Mounce 1977: 337).

Revelation 19 confirms that, whatever the great whore [Babylon – symbol of evil] has done to the believers in this world, God will avenge every evil deed of her in the Day of Judgment. Revelation 19 confirms that the eschatological judgment is the time when the destroyer will be destroyed (Rev 11:18) by God’s true and righteous judgment (Beasley-Murray 1981: 272). The hymns of praise are specifically aimed to highlight these aspects of the eschatological judgment (Mounce 1977: 337). Believers



can rejoice, because they know their redemption comes from the God to whom all the salvation, glory and power belongs (Rev 19:1; [Groenewald 1986: 189]). Interpolations of worship-hymns into the text often accompany the narrative visions of the end time in Revelation<sup>266</sup> (Groenewald 1986: 189). The image of the “smoke going up” confirms the finality of the judgment, and that the effects thereof will last into eternity. The killing of God’s people has finally been avenged by righteous judgment. They can now rest in eternity from their sufferings (cf. Rev 14:13).

iii) Summary on Revelation 19:2

- As in the previous section, Revelation 19:2 narrates the eternal judgment of God on the great city Babylon [i.e. the whore of Rev 17] for her persecution and killing of the people of God. This is the final punishment, the effect of which will last in eternity (Rev 19:3).
- As in the previous section, physical life and death is not really at stake here, but faithfulness to God, which will bring about eternal life for the enduring believer, in contrast to the beast, the whore and those who drank her cup, who will have to taste the bitter cup of God’s wrath.

*2.1.9. Summary on martyrdom in Revelation*

- i) Martyrdom was a central concept in the thought of John. It was part of Christian life in the early church, although it must be said that not all Christians died as martyrs. Martyrdom was valued very high, as it was a sign that someone loved Christ more than his own life (Rev 12:11).
- ii) The important message is that death is not the end for believers. Believers can have hope for eternal life even beyond death on earth. In Revelation 20:4, for instance, John says that the souls of the martyrs will be resurrected into a new life with Christ. He [i.e. Christ] opens the door to eternal life for believers at death (Rev 1:18-19). This hope of eternity is confirmed in the texts of hope that constantly follow texts of persecution or hardship [e.g. Rev 13 and Rev 14:1-5].
- iii) Physical life in Revelation is not important [cf. part 1 above]. Believers must rather focus on being part of the life in eternity, which is a life that

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<sup>266</sup> Cf. Revelation 4:11; 5:9-14; 7:9-17; 11:15-19; 12:10-12; 14:1-5; 15:3-4.

cannot be impeded by death in any manner. It is a life where death does not exist any more [Rev 21:4 – cf. Chapter 9 below].

- iv) The grounding for this is the fact that the victory has already been won by Christ on the cross (Charles 1920a: 328). Salvation comes only through the blood of Christ, not the blood of martyrs.
- v) Believers who stay faithful until the end do not have to fear the judgment of God. They are the blessed ones that will then rest from their sufferings.
- vi) Finally, believers are assured that God will in his righteousness judge and punish the evil powers of this world for shedding the blood of the faithful in this world. This judgment will be final and eternal for the enemies of God.

## 2.2. *Death in the world*

Physical death does not only come over believers through martyrdom [cf. 2.1 above]. In Revelation many people die as a result of God's wrath being poured out upon the evil of this world. There are a number of texts referring to these occurrences [cf. Annexure B.1, 4.2]. Sometimes these killings are generalised and could possibly also incorporate believers [for instance the opening of the seals, where the war and strife is not aimed at believers or non-believers specifically]<sup>267</sup>.

The one clear distinction with regard to the physical death of non-believers is that it is generally also connected to their eternal judgment. Physical death for them is equalled to eternal death [this is done because for the author of Revelation physical life or death is less important than the eschatological eternity – cf. the introduction to Physical death above and the discussion in 2.1]. The physical death of people in the unbelieving world is contrasted very strongly with the martyrdom of the believers throughout Revelation.

### 2.2.1. *Killing of Jezebel's children (Rev 2:23)*

#### i) Context

The context within which the proclamations to the seven congregations function, has already been discussed above [cf. section 1.1.2 {Cf. also Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(b) for a

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<sup>267</sup> One can even compare this with any war at any time. During war there are always many innocent people who lose their lives, believers and non-believers. The same could be said of natural disasters in general, although it would seem as if Revelation does want to give a different perspective hereof in some instances.

discussion on the context of the proclamations itself}]. The letter to Thyatira is the fourth of the seven proclamations in Revelation 2-3. It is also the longest of the proclamations [the reason for this being the extended discussion regarding a certain *Jezebel*]. Thyatira was, in comparison to the other cities mentioned a relatively unimportant city. Because of this, Thyatira was probably not a place where the imperial cult functioned strongly. Religious persecution was therefore not much of an issue for believers in Thyatira (Beasley-Murray 1981: 89).

However, Thyatira, although small, was a town full of merchants and craftsmen (Mounce 1977: 101; Beasley-Murray 1981: 89). The city of Thyatira was well known for its variety of trade guilds, featuring quite prominently throughout. One notable trade guild was the guild for dyers (Aune 1997: 201). This reminds of Lydia [Paul's first convert in Europe] who traded in purple goods in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 40). It was a trade she probably learned earlier in Thyatira (Aune 1997: 201). It could have been the trade guilds that caused the problem for believers in Thyatira, sparking a tendency to syncretism amongst believers who belonged to certain of the guilds. Members who refrained from emperor worship would have struggled to get into or sustain a peaceful membership of the guild (Ford 1975: 405).

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

<sup>22</sup>ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτήν

└ εἰς κλίνην  
└ καὶ τοὺς μοιχεύοντας μετ' αὐτῆς  
    └ εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην,  
        └ ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήσωσιν  
            └ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων αὐτῆς,

<sup>23</sup>καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ

└ ἐν θανάτῳ.

καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι

└ ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι  
    └ ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας,

καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ

└ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

In this prophecy of judgment on Jezebel judgment is proclaimed on Jezebel and her followers. The judgment is progressive: whereas Jezebel is hit by a sickbed, her followers are killed (Rev 2:22a, 23a). The judgment is done *καὶ γινώσκονται πᾶσαι...* (that everybody should know...) of God's righteousness (Aune 1997: 206). The metaphors are that of physical death combined with the eternal judgment of God.

b) The seductive Jezebel

In the proclamation to the church in Thyatira the believers are firstly praised for their good works and endurance amidst the struggles to keep job, religion, and trade guild together. After the praise, however, the believers are warned for keeping up with Jezebel and her seduction of the people in Thyatira. Who Jezebel was and exactly what the seduction and fornication was that she was promoting, is not entirely clear. It seems that a lot of the information are metaphorical. The name Jezebel is a reference to the wife of King Ahab of Israel [869-850BC] who seduced her husband [the king] into idol worshipping (cf. 1 Kgs 16-21), eventually bringing the religious practices of the people of Israel into a compromise religion with the Canaanite gods (Aune 1997: 203; Mounce 1977: 102). Jezebel of Thyatira was probably a patron of the church in Thyatira and used her influential status to motivate believers into a compromise theology (Hemer 1986: 117-118; Aune 1997: 203-204)<sup>268</sup>. The *πορνεία* [usually referring to sexual immorality] should be read metaphorically [which is more or less the general understanding thereof throughout Revelation]. The reference to *πορνεία* probably has to do with the religious compromise theology Jezebel was promoting in the congregation (Aune 1997: 205). Morris (1969: 71) sees the problem as similar to that experienced by Paul in Corinth (cf. 1 Cor 8), i.e. the question of sharing in the meals sacrificed to idols when they attended guild banquets (cf. Hemer 1986: 120)<sup>269</sup>.

<sup>268</sup> There is a textual variant in verse 20 that adds *σοῦ*, reading "your wife Jezebel". The implication is then that this is a reference to the wife of the local bishop. This is improbable (cf. Mounce 1977: 103).

<sup>269</sup> With regard to the meals, one must keep in mind the important role that meals played in the ANE. The sharing of food "was perhaps the most common way of establishing a sacred bond between individuals and between individuals and their deities" (Aune 1997: 192). Throughout the New Testament there seems to have been conflict between Jews and Gentiles with regard to communal meals (cf. Gal 2:11-14; Mark 7:1-23; Acts 10:9-16, 28; 11:3-10; [Aune 1997: 194]). Cf. the discussion by Aune (1997: 191-194) on "Eating Food sacrificed to Idols". Cf. also Morris (1969: 71-72), who is of the opinion that the reference to fornication and promiscuity should not just be taken figuratively. It could well have been that some of these guild banquets ended up in immoral festivals.

From the message it would seem that the problem in Thyatira is rather internal, with not much of an external threat to believers in the form of persecution (Charles 1920a: 69). It could even be that Jezebel and the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites (cf. Rev 2:6 and 14-15) were the same group (Hughes 1990: 48-49)<sup>270</sup>. Christ's flaming eyes in the vision suggests that He could see through anything and therefore knows what Jezebel is up to in Thyatira. His "feet like bronze" communicates his strength and power to act against Jezebel (Mounce 1977: 102).

c) A deadly sickbed

The phrase ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ [literally "I will kill with death" – future indicative] is understood by many scholars as possibly a Hebraism, which intensifies the rudeness and certainty of the statement (Mounce 1977: 105; Groenewald 1986: 59). The Hebrew version of the phrase is interpreted in this manner in many Old Testament texts (cf. Lev 20:15). However, as Aune (1997: 198) has shown, this is not the only possible interpretation of the phrase. In line with passages such as Ezekiel 33:27 [LXX] the translation could be "to kill with pestilence" (Aune 1997: 198). The use of the prepositional phrase ἐν θανάτῳ as a dative of means indicates that the understanding should be "to kill with pestilence" [cf. Rev 6:8 where it is used similarly]. This is further emphasised by the statement in Revelation 2:22 that the followers of Jezebel will be "thrown into a sickbed" [this is a Hebrew idiom for becoming ill and specifically for inflicting illness on someone (Beasley-Murray 1981: 91)]. The passive voice of the sentence is a passive of divinity, implying that God is the one inflicting the illness. It was an accepted view in the ANE that there is a positive connection between illness and sin (cf. 1 Cor 11:27-29; Ex 21:18; 1 Macc 1:5; [Aune 1997: 205; Charles 1920a: 71-72; Ford 1975: 406])<sup>271</sup>. Of course, one must not forget the Old Testament view, which even connected illness with being dead, because illness deprived one from community life [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.4]. However, it does not seem that the author of Revelation is implying this. This is more a case of death from illness [cf. Rev 6:8].

<sup>270</sup> This is the opinion specifically of Ford (1975: 406), but it is also strongly suggested by Charles (1920a: 69-70).

<sup>271</sup> Cf. however John 9:2-3 where Jesus discards the idea that all illness is the punishment for sin.

Revelation 2:21-23 is a prophetic judgment over Jezebel and “her children” for her transgressions in Thyatira (Beasley-Murray 1981: 91). The “children of Jezebel” probably refers to people converted to her cult or prophetic circle (Aune 1997: 206). Charles (1920a: 72) sees them as “those who have absolutely embraced this woman’s teaching even to its fullest issues”. This is probably the reason why their punishment is so severe, actually even worse than that of Jezebel herself or the others who have been seduced by her (Hemer 1986: 121-122).

However, the answer to the severe punishment could also lie in the phrase “and all the churches will know”, which implies that the serious nature of the penalty must act as a solemn warning to anyone to abstain from her fornication (Hemer 1986: 122). The use of the futuristic present indicative verb βάλλω with the future indicative ἀποκτενῶ reinforces the imminence and certainty of the prophetic judgment (Mounce 1977: 104). What has been promised with regard to Jezebel will follow, and it will follow soon. And anyone aligning them with her will also be punished.

The reason for this judgment being so harsh is because Jezebel “was given time to repent from her immorality, but she did not want to repent” (Rev 2:21). The refusal to repent is a frequent phrase with regard to the world. The verb μετανοεῖν is used five times in Revelation in a negative sense of that from which a person turns away [or is supposed to turn away but refuses]. In Revelation 9:21 the people did not repent [οὐ μετανόησαν] from their ungodly practices, even after they have experienced the consequences from the sounding of the sixth trumpet (Aune 1997: 205).

The repeated theme of repentance is an interesting [and important] theme in Revelation. It immediately brings the idea of eternal punishment, eternal life and eternal death to the fore. The notion with regard to Jezebel then is: if she repents [turns away from evil], she will live [i.e. receive eternal life]. However, since she has refused to repent from her ways and teaching [after numerous warnings], she will now have to suffer the consequences of God’s judgment [which is eternal death] (Aune 1997: 206). Thus, although the words used to describe death are usually used to designate physical killing, the implication here is drawn further unto death in eternity. It is in cases like these that one can see the link that is made to physical existence and eternal existence. Although physical existence is not the end goal, it determines the

eternal outcome of life and death. Those who do not “live” [i.e. spiritually] now will not “live” in eternity. And that is what lies ahead for Jezebel and “her children”.

iii) Summary of Revelation 2:23

- Revelation 2:21-23 is a prophetic judgment upon Jezebel for her seduction of the believers in Thyatira. She will be punished with illness, but “her children” [close followers] will be punished with pestilence, which would lead unto death.
- The punishment of death is more aimed at eternity than at physical existence, although the words used to describe it imply physical death. Eternal punishment is further implied by the theme of repentance [or rather the lack thereof] with regard to Jezebel and “her children”. John’s intention with this is probably to connect the physical death of these people with their eternal death. The message in this case is: those who do not “live” spiritually in this [the physical] life, will be dead in eternity.

2.2.2. *Opening of the first four seals (Rev 6:1-8)*

i) Context of the first four seals

After the vision of the Almighty God in glory and majesty and the investiture of the Lamb, the scene changes to the opening of the first four seals of the scroll that is in the hands of the Lamb. This vision flows out from the vision of Revelation 4-5 (Aune 1998a: 389). The scroll being opened is the one that the Lamb took from the hand of “Him who sits on the throne”.

Within the larger section of Revelation 4:2b-7:17 the opening of the first four seals (Rev 6:1-8) forms a “coherent literary unit” (Aune 1998a: 389). It is distinguished from the previous section (Rev 5:1-14) by the familiar text marker *καὶ εἶδον* in Revelation 6:1. Although the text marker is only repeated in Revelation 6:12 [the opening of the sixth seal], the content [and décor] of the fifth seal is clearly to be distinguished from that of the previous four seals.

The text is bound together by the stereotypical structure of the narrative: the verb *ἤκουσα* appears five times in the text; the phrase *καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ* occurs three

times; the passive of divine activity “he was given” [ἐδόθη] is used three times (Aune 1998a: 389). Another characteristic of the first four seals is that they deal with things on earth, whereas the next two seals are concerned with things in heaven (Morris 1969: 102-103). The events occurring when the seals are opened allude to the prophecy of Zechariah 1:7:11 and 6:1-8 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 130-131; Aune 1998a: 390). Within the larger context Revelation 6:1-8 fits in as follows<sup>272</sup>:

4:2b-7:17	Sovereignty of God, investiture of the Lamb, first six seals
4:1-2a	John’s heavenly ascent
4:2b-5:14	Vision of the heavenly throne-room
6:1-17	the first six seals
<b>6:1-8</b>	<b>the four cavaliers</b>
6:9-11	the souls of the martyrs
6:12-17	the Day of wrath
7:1-17	sealing of the 144 000

ii) Death when the seals are opened

Although the seals form a literary unit, different words [ways] are used to describe the killing of people. According to Morris (1969: 102) the first four seals “show us the self-defeating character of sin.” It is more probably judgmental plagues as a consequence of the sins of the people (Aune 1998a: 424). It is not explicitly stated who is killed by these plagues, i.e. only the Christians or only the Gentile world. Considering the general effects of war and famine on the entire world in general [i.e. many innocent people are affected and die], it is more probable that both believers and non-believers are affected by the occurrences at the opening of the seals, even though it is the consequence of sin. The vision about the souls of the martyrs under the altar could be seen as a supportive image to comfort believers who might have to suffer.

Only the second and fourth seals will be discussed in detail. However, a short discussion will be given beforehand on the interpretation of the “victorious” mounted horse that goes out to “conquer” even further when the first seal is broken.

<sup>272</sup> Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.



a) First seal: a conqueror conquering more

As discussed previously [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(a)]  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  has different possible meanings. Here, as in Revelation 13:7, it takes on the meaning of a military victory in war (cf. 2.1.5 (ii) above). The entire metaphor of the opening of the first seal spells that of war [and its consequences – the killing of people]. A conquering cavalier on a white horse brings up the image of a king or a military general going out ahead of his troops to conquer (Pohl 1969: 193-194). The crown that he is given before he rides out could be a symbol of the promise that he will be victorious in his conquest (Aune 1998a: 395). The *white* colour of the horse also symbolises victory (Morris 1969: 104). The bow, just like the sword given to the cavalier in the second seal, is an instrument of death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 131-132). It symbolises war and killing in a very offensive manner (cf. Isa 21:17; Jer 50:29; 51:3; [Aune 1998a: 394]). The fact that he goes out as a conqueror to conquer even more is interpreted by Hughes (1990: 85) as an expression of “his lust for power and world domination.”

There is a further interesting link to the Old Testament, as the bow is often used there as an instrument of “divine chastisement” bringing on plagues from the Lord (Deut 32:23-25, 42; Isa 34:6; Hab 3:9; Lam 3:12-13; Ps 7:13-14; [Aune 1998a: 394]). It is possible that John brought this into the text to remind his readers that the consequences of the opening of the seals are not out of God’s hands. He [i.e. the Lamb] is after all the One opening the seals, and is therefore in control of the consequences thereof. The use of the “divine passive”  $\acute{\epsilon}\delta\acute{o}\theta\eta$  [for the first time here in Revelation – in total 22 times] confirms that the powers of the cavaliers that go out come from God. They only act to the extent granted them by God (Aune 1998a: 394-395; Groenewald 1986: 88).

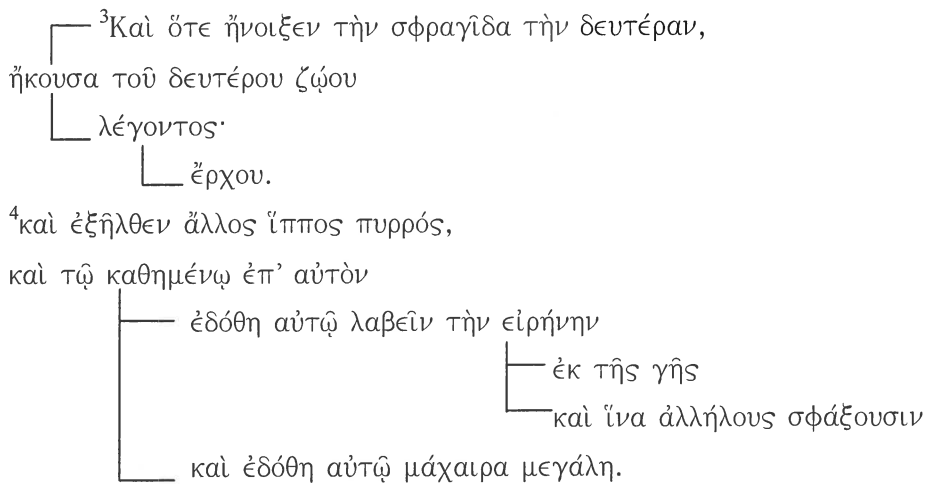
On the identification of the first cavalier there have been some speculation. Charles (1920a: 163-164) is of the opinion that it represents the Parthian empire. Many commentators have identified the rider on the white horse with Christ, citing the identification with the conquering Messiah in Revelation 19:12 (Aune 1998a: 393; [cf. Ford {1975: 105-106} who thinks of the rider on the white horse as an angel of God]). This, however, is not possible. Firstly, the Messiah is the one opening the seals. Secondly, the cavalier going out is clearly on a mission of destruction and war, something not to be associated with the Messiah (Pohl 1969: 194). Thirdly, the

cavalier going out wears a στέφανος of victory and carries a bow for war, while the Messiah goes out wearing many διαδήματα, symbols of his unchallenged sovereignty (Swete 1907: 86). The cavaliers on the four [or at least first three] horses need not be identified with some person or group. Their mission in any case determines their identity as instruments of destruction in the hands of God<sup>273</sup>.

In the end the first cavalier represents primarily the existence of war. The next three cavaliers “represents one of the stereotypical evils of war: sword, famine, and plague” (Aune 1998a: 395). What follows is thus the result of him who was given the power to go out and conquer upfront when the first seal was broken.

#### b) Second seal: war and killing

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 6:3-4:



The text consists of three principal actions: the living creature calling a cavalier as soon as the Lamb breaks the seal, the identification of the horse, and the identification of the cavalier, which includes his task in going out. Taking away the peace from the earth implies war, and the consequences thereof are physical death.

As mentioned above, the next three seals are grouped together, separately from the first seal [but intensifying its consequences]. This distinction is indicated by the use

<sup>273</sup> Cf. Pohl (1969: 195-197) who is of the opinion that the cavalier on the white horse fulfils the roll of the Antichrist considering his destructive activities.

of the adjective ἄλλος in Revelation 6:3, when the second seal is broken (Aune 1998a: 395). Text-critically there are a number of smaller suggested variants that do not affect the text in a material way (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 643). The only variant worth mentioning is in Revelation 6:4b where a variant reading of σφάξωσιν is suggested in place of the text reading of σφάξουσιν. The text reading, a future indicative used in a construction with the preposition ἵνα, is probably correct, as Revelation's author seems to have a preference for this odd construction, which John uses seven times to express result or purpose. He also uses this construction frequently as a substitute for the infinitive (Aune 1998a: 381).

The verb σφάζειν, when used in connection with people, usually indicates violence and savagery (Aune 1998a: 395). It is the same verb that was used in Revelation 5:6 to describe the slaughtering of the Lamb [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(a)]. Of course, violent killings and warfare belong together. Many commentators understand the phrase ἀλλήλους σφάξουσιν as indicating internal strife [civil war?], as opposed to the situation with the opening of the first seal, which rather seemed to have introduced external warfare (Ford 1975: 106; Mounce 1977: 154; Beasley-Murray 1981: 132)<sup>274</sup>. However, the fact that “peace has been removed” suggests conflict overall, not just internal (Charles 1920a: 164). This is an intensification of the situation from the first seal. Now *all* peace seems to have been removed (Beasley-Murray 1981: 132). The red colour of the horse could be an indication of bloodshed (Mounce 1977: 154-155; Groenewald 1986: 88).

The cavalier was given a sword to do his destructive work. The sword on the one hand is the sign of further killing and destruction [cf. (a) above]. It was the typical weapon used in cavalry warfare. On the other hand it is the symbol of authority. In Jewish literature it is sometimes given to the enemies of God so that they might destroy each other, as in 1 Enoch 88:2 [cf. Charles (1920a: 164-165), who discusses a development process with regard to the symbolism of the sword]. The cavalier was given the power and authority to remove peace, and the sword indicates the authority

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<sup>274</sup> Beasley-Murray (1981: 132) also compares the opening of the first and second seals with the pattern of the eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 13:7-8=Matt 24:7=Luke 21:10). Similar accounts exist in Jewish literature (4 Ezra 5:9, 6:24, 13:31; 1 En 56:7; [Charles 1920a: 164]).



with which he goes out. In Romans 13:4 it is a metaphor for the authority that the governing authorities possess to decide over life and death (Aune 1998a: 395-396).

Again the divine authority in the situation comes through: “He was given” [ἐδόθη]. The cavalier on the red horse might seem to be the one with powers of destruction, but he can only act in his peace-destructing work to the extent that God allows him thereto (Hughes 1990: 85; Aune 1998a: 396). It is not God who kills when the seal is opened (Morris 1969: 105). The people of this world proceed with killing each other. But above all John sees God still in control, still the one deciding what could happen when. The control of man and history is in God’s hands (Hughes 1990: 85). He has got the sealed scroll in his hands.

This is the message of hope running throughout the destruction and strife when the seals are opened. It is intensified when the fifth seal is open [the vision of the martyred souls] and in the interlude of Revelation 7 when the innumerable multitude is seen in the presence of the Lamb.

c) Fourth seal: Death bringing death

<sup>7</sup>Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην,  
 ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου  
 λέγοντος·  
 ἔρχου.  
<sup>8</sup>καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός,  
 καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ  
 ὄνομα αὐτῷ [ὁ] θάνατος,  
 καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ’ αὐτοῦ  
 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία  
 ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς  
 ἀποκτεῖναι — ἐν ρομφαίᾳ  
 — καὶ ἐν λιμῷ  
 — καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ  
 — καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων  
 τῆς γῆς.

The text of Revelation 6:7-8 follows a similar pattern to that of Revelation 6:3-4 (cf. (b) above). However, with regard to the identification of the cavalier the description is extended. There is also intensification with regard to the consequences of the opening of the seal. The opening of the fourth seal seems to be a summary of the consequences of the other seals. It seems as if everything moves towards this point.

The opening of the fourth seal introduces the combination of Death and Hades into the vision. Although there are quite a number of text-critical notes with regard to Revelation 6:7-8 (Aland & Aland 1993: 643), most of these are the result of an effort by the editors to align the wording of the four seals. None of these variants are critical to the understanding of the text, and most of them are not well attested. It is thus possible to work with the text of Aland & Aland as presented [cf. Aune 1998a: 381-382 for a discussion on the textual variants suggested].

The colour of the horse in the fourth seal, *χλωρός*, is the colour “typical of corpses and therefore is associated with death” (Aune 1998a: 382)<sup>275</sup>. The rider of the fourth horse is identified as Death, with Hades following him [on foot?]. In Revelation Death and Hades are always personified together [cf. Chapter 9, 3.1 below where the texts with regard to Death and Hades will be discussed in detail, including the occurrence in Rev 6:8]. Beasley-Murray (1981: 133-134) is of the opinion that the use of *θάνατος* is ambiguous here, as it could also refer to pestilence. This, however, does not align with the other texts where Death and Hades are personified together (Rev 1:18; 20:13, 14). The noun *ὄνομα* is in apposition to *ὁ καθήμενος* and should be read as a parenthetical nominative, while *αὐτῷ* is a dative of possession. The phrase *ὄνομα αὐτῷ* is then to be translated “his name” (Aune 1998a: 382).

The word *ἀποκτείνειν* indicates the physical killing of people in general (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93). This is followed by a list of “instruments” by which the killings are to take place. Again we see the metaphor of the sword as the instrument to kill with, this time using the word *ρόμφαία* for sword<sup>276</sup>. The phrase *ἐν ρομφαία* can be

<sup>275</sup> The adjective *χλωρός* generally refers to the colour of vegetation, but is often associated with the faces of the sick and the colour of corpses (Aune 1998a: 400).

<sup>276</sup> *μάχαιρα* usually refers to a short sword [dagger-type] while *ρόμφαία* indicates a large-blade sword (Mounce 1977: 156).

understood as a metaphor for war (Aune 1998a: 382). This was already the implication at the opening of the first two seals.

Also, the word ἐν θανάτῳ could mean “with pestilence”, as in Revelation 2:23 [cf. 2.2.1 above]<sup>277</sup>. The use of ῥομφαία, λιμός, and θάνατος together indicate the traditional formulaic character of this text, which is probably an allusion to Ezekiel 14:21 (cf. also Jer 14:12; 15:3; 43:1; [Aune 1998a: 402]). These things are generally regarded as acts of divine judgment (Mounce 1977: 156; Aune 1998a: 402). Killing by wild animals is added to the text here. It is a sign of divine judgment in Judaic literature (Ps Sol 13:2-3). That only a quarter of the people are killed, could be a warning to the world to repent as long as there is still time.

The opening of the fourth seal could be seen as a conclusion on the destruction of the first three seals. Death harvests the “food” of destruction left behind by the actions of the first three riders (Groenewald 1986: 89). The plural pronoun αὐτοῖς could refer to this as a conclusion on all four seals, although it could also refer to Death and Hades in a destructive partnership (Aune 1998a: 402). Mounce (1977: 156) sees the fourfold plague as an intensification of the opening of the first three seals.

Amidst all this the believer has the comfort that all is in God’s hands, as the Lamb sends out the four horsemen [i.e. He opens the seals to reveal history]. The other comforting news follows when the fifth seal is opened and John sees the souls of the martyrs under the altar [i.e. they are very close to God – cf. 2.1.2 above]. The church of Christ thus still stands under God’s protection, even though believers might lose their lives on earth. They will live, even if they die.

### iii) Summary on the text of Revelation 6:1-8

- Death and destruction is a common theme throughout with the opening of the first four seals. Although the opening of these seals is judgmental [i.e. inflicting God’s judgment in wrath upon the world], the consequences are far-reaching but not uncommon.

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<sup>277</sup> In the LXX the Hebrew דבר [plague or pestilence] is translated 31 times with θάνατος (Aune 1998a: 382).

- The judgmental nature of the killings is emphasised by the instruments of death used by Death and Hades: sword, pestilence, famine, and wild animals (Rev 6:8). All these are instruments of divine judgment in Jewish literature (Aune 1998a: 402).
- Whereas the first seal introduces war [i.e. the rider going out to conquer], the other seals reflect the consequences of war [violence and destruction, famine {shortage}, and ultimately death].
- Amidst all the killings believers are still given hope: they will be safe in the presence of God. The souls of the believers under the altar are the promise to believers that they will live, even though they might die. Furthermore: believers can have faith in the knowledge that God is still in control, as the Lamb is the one opening the seals and giving the restricted powers to the four cavaliers.

### 2.2.3. *Killing when the trumpets blow (Rev 8:9-11)*

#### i) Context

The opening of the seals (Rev 6:1-8:1) is followed by the second series of plagues, which is announced by the sounding of seven trumpets in the heavenly throne-room (Rev 8:6-9:21 and 11:14-18). The seventh seal leads into the sounding of the trumpets (Morris 1969: 155)<sup>278</sup>. The structure of the trumpet-plagues is very similar to that of the opening of the seals (Aune 1998a: 494-496; Morris 1969: 121-122): the first four trumpets are narrated in short (Rev 8:7-12; cf. Rev 6:1-8), followed by two [more detailed] descriptions when the fifth and sixth trumpets are blown (Rev 9; cf. Rev 6:9-17). The sixth trumpet plague is followed by an interlude before the seventh trumpet is blown [cf. the opening of the seals (Rev 6:1-8:1) with the interlude (Rev 7)]. However, where the opening of the first four seals brought war [and its consequences of famine, strife, and death] to man, the sounding of the first four trumpets inflicts cosmic destruction upon creation (Groenewald 1986: 103).

The trumpet-plagues constitute a clearly defined unit focussing on the unleashing of a series of tribulations after each of the trumpets are sound (Aune 1998a: 497).

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<sup>278</sup> Cf. however Pohl (1971: 19-20) who doesn't accept this and goes on to break the text after Revelation 8:1 [i.e. after the opening of the seventh seal], even though he recognises that the text seemingly flows seamless from the seventh seal into the seven trumpets [cf. Mounce (1977: 177-179) who also follows this route].

However, the interlude in Revelation 10:1-11:14 creates a break within this unit of plagues. This interlude is clearly defined by the use of the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 10:1. Charles (1920a: 218-223) thinks that the vision of the first four trumpets is a later addition to the text, and that it is based on the pouring out of the first four bowls in Revelation 16 (Charles 1920a: 220).

The sounding of the trumpets doesn't have a clear parallel in apocalyptic or Jewish texts except for the Apocalypse of Zephaniah (Apoc Zeph 9-12). However, the sounding of trumpets was well known in ancient warfare as a means of instructing the deployment of troops for attack on the enemy. Trumpets were also sounded when a state of emergency was called (cf. Neh 4:18). In prophetic literature the sounding of a trumpet was associated with a warning of divine judgment that was approaching (Beasley-Murray 1981: 152)<sup>279</sup>. It is therefore not strange to find the use of trumpets to announce the divine judgment of God (Aune 1998a: 497).

The narrative of the sounding of the trumpets [similar to that of the casting out of the seven bowls (Rev 15:1-16:21)] is “an *eschatological* application of the ten plagues inflicted on Egypt by God”, which is narrated in Exodus 7-12 (Aune 1998a: 499)<sup>280</sup>. The tradition of the Exodus-plagues is used quite often in Jewish literature, mostly in a seven-plague schema (Ps 78:43-51; 105:27-36; Am 4:6-11; Wis Sol 11:1-19:9; [Aune 1998a: 506]). On the one hand the plagues serve as punishment for the enemies of God [similar to the judgment over Egypt], but on the other hand they serve as a reminder of God's deliverance of the faithful into the kingdom of God (Mounce 1977: 184; Beasley-Murray 1981: 155).

Within the larger context the sounding of the first four trumpets fits in as follows<sup>281</sup>:

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. Beasley-Murray (1981: 152-154), who discusses more features associated with the sounding of trumpets in Jewish religion.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. Aune (1998a: 500-502), who does a schematic comparison between the seven trumpet plagues, the seven bowl plagues and the ten plagues of the exodus. The fact that only seven plagues are narrated in Revelation, seemingly stems from a tendency to reduce the Exodus-plagues to seven, which was seen as the number appropriate for a climactic series of punishments (Aune 1998a: 506). A feature of the plagues that is unique to Revelation is that only one-third of creation is struck. According to Aune (1998a: 500) it is “the author's way of accommodating a doubling of the final punishments” [i.e. in the pouring out of the seven bowls]. The significance of the number *seven* throughout Revelation [as the number of completeness (Du Rand 1991b: 215)] could also have influenced the use of only seven plagues instead of ten.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.





8:1-11:14	Seventh seal and first six trumpets
8:1	Seventh seal: silence in heaven for one-half hour
8:2-9:21	Vision of the first six trumpets
8:2-6	Prologue: the third throne-room scene
8:7-12	<b>first four trumpets</b>
8:13-9:21	last three trumpets (or the three woes)
10:1-11	Vision of the mighty angel and the little scroll
11:1-14	the temple and the two witnesses

ii) The trumpets sound for creation

a) Syntactical analysis

<sup>8</sup>Καὶ ὁ δεύτερος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν·

καὶ ὡς ὄρος μέγα

└┬┘ πυρὶ καιόμενον  
└┬┘ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν,

καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῆς θαλάσσης αἷμα

<sup>9</sup>καὶ ἀπέθανεν τὸ τρίτον τῶν κτισμάτων

└┬┘ τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ  
└┬┘ τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχὰς

καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν πλοίων διεφθάρησαν.

<sup>10</sup>Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν·

καὶ ἔπεσεν

└┬┘ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ  
└┬┘ ἀστὴρ μέγας  
└┬┘ καιόμενος ὡς λαμπὰς

καὶ ἔπεσεν └┬┘ ἐπὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν ποταμῶν  
└┬┘ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς πηγὰς τῶν ὑδάτων,

<sup>11</sup>καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀστέρος λέγεται ὅτι Ἄψινθος,

καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς ἄψινθον

καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον

└┬┘ ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων  
└┬┘ ὅτι ἐπικράνησαν.

The sounding of the trumpets introduces a second series of judgmental actions by God of which the first four are of a cosmic nature. They form a unity just as the first four seals form a unity (Du Rand 1999a: 1784). Whereas the first four seals were judgments that were the inevitable consequence of man's own sins, the first four trumpet-plagues "reveal the active involvement of God in bringing punishment upon a wicked world" (Mounce 1977: 184). The mentioning of fire in each of the first three trumpet-plagues probably refers back to the angel in Revelation 8:5 who filled his censer with fire from the altar at the heavenly throne (Mounce 1977: 186). The fact that the actions are judgmental of nature implies eternal punishment [death], but the words used are more commonly associated with physical death. Most probably the interpretation is a combination of both: physical death and eternal punishment [cf. discussion in Chapter 9 below].

b) When the trumpets sound

These first four judgments affect primarily "the inanimate parts of creation, though inevitably with consequences for living creatures" (Hughes 1990: 104). Each of the trumpet-plagues affect a certain part of the cosmos: earth, sea, rivers, heavenly luminaries (cf. Morris 1969: 123-124). Nobody is killed directly by any of the plagues, but the outcome of the plagues do affect people and creation in such a manner that many people [or living creatures in creation] die from its consequences. This seemingly only occurs at the sounding of the second [living creatures dying] and third trumpets [people dying from contaminated water].

Although the first trumpet-plague sees a mixture of blood and fire and hail pouring onto the earth, the image of blood in this case has nothing to do with death. It only serves to enhance the imagery. The image of the first trumpet-plague is based upon the seventh plague in Egypt (Ex 9:13-35). However, nothing is mentioned of blood-coloured rain in the seventh Exodus-plague (Beasley-Murray 1981: 156-157). The image of blood is only found in the narrative of the first plague (cf. Ex 7:20-21). The reference to blood could go back to the prophecy of Joel about the last days, which is taken up by Peter in his speech on Pentecost (Joel 2:31; [Mounce 1977: 185])<sup>282</sup>.

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<sup>282</sup> In the Greco-Roman world rain of blood indicated the anger of the gods (Aune 1998a: 546).

It is clear that this is not the final judgment of God. Only a third of everything in creation is affected by the divine plagues, serving as a warning to the rest of creation to repent before it is too late (Morris 1969: 122; Mounce 1977: 184).

The text of Revelation 8:9-11 is in general well attested. There are a couple of variant readings in different places, but none of them materially influencing the reading of the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 647-648)<sup>283</sup>.

c) Death when the trumpet sound

The word used to describe the inflicting of death through the plagues, is ἀποθνήσκω (Rev 8:9, 11; [cf. 2.1.6 (ii) above for a discussion of the meaning of ἀποθνήσκω]). The use of ἀποθνήσκω indicates that physical death is to be inflicted upon creation when the trumpets are sound (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 90). These deaths are not the judgment, but only the consequences of the eschatological judgments that affect the entire cosmos [cf. (i) and (ii)(a) above]. The cosmic nature of the plagues leading to the deaths are not to be explained in terms of natural phenomena. They represent an image of eschatological judgment (Mounce 1977: 186-187). The image of water turning into blood and killing the created order in the sea goes back to the first plague in Egypt. Moses turned the water into blood [on instruction of God], which resulted in all the fish in Egyptian waters perishing (cf. Ex 7:20-21; [Hughes 1990: 105-106]). That only a third of creation in the sea is killed is a sign that the judgment is not final. There is still time to repent.

The reference to τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχὰς (Rev 8:9) must be translated with “everything that lives”. When the trumpet is sounded, life in creation will be affected negatively. A third of all living creatures will die. Just as this served as a warning to Pharaoh and Egypt at the Exodus, it now serves as a warning to the world to repent before the final judgment comes when there will be no more time allowed for repentance.

d) Death when a star falls

The third trumpet-plague affects the fresh water [i.e. rivers]. At first glance the sounding of the third trumpet brings forth a similar judgment to that of the second

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<sup>283</sup> For a detailed discussion of the variant readings, cf. Aune (1998a: 484).

(Aune 1998a: 520). According to Artemidorus a falling star means the death of a person. That the star falls from heaven is a way of indicating that God is the active agent in the judgment (Mounce 1977: 187). This is also what occurs when the star falls, although death is not directly the result of the falling star (Aune 1998a: 520-521). Death [verb used - ἀποθνήσκω {indicating physical death – cf. above}] only comes as a result of people drinking the contaminated water. The name of the star only serves to identify the effect that the star has on creation (Aune 1998a: 521). The inclusion of the name is, according to Charles (1920a: 235), a later addition [explanatory gloss] to the text.

The contamination of the water is probably based on the text of Jeremiah 9:15, which is repeated verbatim in Jeremiah 23:15 (Aune 1998a: 522). There are, however, other texts in the Old Testament that also refer to the bitter taste brought about by *wormwood* as a symbol for bitterness and sorrow (Prov 5:3-4; Lam 3:19; [Mounce 1977: 187]).

While with the sounding of the second trumpet a third of the living creatures in the ocean were killed, nothing is said this time about the death of the inhabitants of the rivers and streams. Instead John mentions that *many people* died as a result of the contaminated water. This is an interesting deviation from the one-third of creation that was struck. The author probably omitted the one-third here because it is mentioned at the sounding of the sixth trumpet that one-third of the people were killed by the plagues there. In a sense this supports Charles' view [cf. (i) above] that the first four trumpet-plagues were later additions to the text (Aune 1998a: 522). But again we hear the hopeful message that not all people is killed, although many are killed (Pohl 1971: 30). There is still time for repentance for those that survive these plagues. Only when the bowls are poured out (Rev 16:1-21) does the destruction affect the entire creation (Giblin 1991: 98).

The one outstanding aspect about the trumpet-plagues is if believers are also struck by the killings. There is nothing in the text that suggests that the plagues only kill the enemies of God. The more common answer would be that the plagues affect everybody. That is what we see in life today: both believers and non-believers fall victim to crime, to the consequences of natural disasters, etc. But then, in the words

of Mounce (1977: 184) “the church is not in view in the judgments which follow”. Morris (1969: 122) is of the opinion that the trumpet-plagues don’t concern the church at all. It is only a revelation of God’s judgment on the world. It could be seen as the answer of God to the prayers of the saints: God will move against sin. He will act on behalf of his own people (Morris 1969: 122).

In Revelation 9:4 the faithful are specifically excluded from the consequences of the plagues (cf. also Rev 9:20-21; [Mounce 1977: 184]). Similarly the people of Israel are not affected by the plagues that struck Egypt. They were able to go out of Egypt unscathed. This could be the same promise to believers in Asia Minor: they will end up unscathed in the presence of God (cf. Rev 14:1-15). Furthermore, the turbulent period for the church is narrated in Revelation 11-13, not as part of the judgments (Mounce 1977: 184). It could therefore be that the trumpet-plagues are eschatological judgments aimed only at the unbelieving world, in which case the deaths referred to is only the death of people in the unbelieving world (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 71). The physical death of unbelievers is a judgmental image rather than an actual occurrence.

### iii) Summary of the text

- The purpose of the trumpet-plagues is “not so much retribution as to lead men to repentance” (Mounce 1977: 184). That is why only a third of everything in creation is destroyed [and many, but not all, people die].
- The first four trumpet-plagues are seemingly directed only at the cosmos. They affect life only indirectly. It is only when one gets to the fifth and sixth trumpet-plagues that people are affected directly, specifically the sixth plague (Rev 9:13-19).
- The word used for death [ἀποθνήσκω] indicates that physical death will be inflicted upon creation as a consequence of the plagues.
- Although it is not stated, the trumpet-plagues are seemingly directed only at the non-believing world [in Rev 9:4, 20 the plagues are more clearly directed only at non-believers]. “They are God’s judgments on the world” (Morris 1969: 122). Therefore, just as the Israelites were spared during the plagues on Egypt, so the believers are spared these cosmic plagues (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 71).

2.2.4. *People want to die but can't* (Rev 9:5, 6)

i) Context?

Revelation 9 [narrating the fifth and sixth trumpet-plagues] forms part of the same sub-section as Revelation 8:7-12 [the first four trumpet-plagues] of which the unity have been discussed above [cf. 2.2.3 (i) above]. The discussion of the broad context will thus not be repeated here. Within the larger sub-text of Revelation 8:1-11:14 the narrative of the sixth trumpet fits in as follows<sup>284</sup>:

8:1-11:14	Seventh seal and the first six trumpets	
8:1	Seventh seal: silence in heaven for one-half hour	
8:2-9:21	Vision of the first six trumpets	
8:2-6	Prologue: the third throne-room scene	
8:7-12	first four trumpets	
8:13-9:21	last three trumpets (or the three woes)	
	8:13	Introduction
	<b>9:1-12</b>	<b>Fifth trumpet (or first woe)</b>
	9:13-21	Sixth trumpet (or second woe)
10:1-11	Vision of the mighty angel and the little scroll	
11:1-14	the temple and the two witnesses	

The first four trumpet-plagues form a homogeneous unit of cosmic destruction, while the last three trumpet-plagues are seemingly the outcome of the three woes [οὐαὶ] announced in Revelation 8:13 (Aune 1998a: 496). According to Charles (1920a: 218) only the three woes [i.e. the fifth to seventh trumpet-plagues] are original, with the first four plagues added later as an expansion of the woes (cf. Aune 1998a: 496).

Within the subtext of Revelation 9:1-12, verses 7-11 seems to have been added later on in an effort to emphasise the evil nature of the locust-like demons. It is possible to omit this entire section without interrupting the flow of the message. These verses consist of an unusually elaborate description of the demons in the form of locusts. The text is an *ekphrasis* [i.e. a description of a work of art] where the author

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.



In Revelation 8:13 the last three trumpet-plagues are announced as three woes. The announcement of the woes suggests that the plagues following from here onwards will be directed not at the cosmos anymore but at “the people of the world”. The phrase τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς has a negative connotation throughout Revelation, pointing towards the enemies of God in this world<sup>285</sup>. With regard to the fifth trumpet it is clearly commanded in Revelation 9:4 that the demons should direct their attention to the people and not to the cosmos.

There are some textual variants suggested for the text of Revelation 9:5-6 (Aland & Aland 1993: 648-649). However, the only two that are of significance is with regard to the words εὐρήσουσιν and φεύγει, both in Revelation 9:6. According to Aune (1998a: 486) the correct reading of εὐρήσουσιν should be εὐρήσωσιν [which is the characteristic use thereof in Revelation]. This reading was probably altered under the influence of the two future-tense verbs ζητήσουσιν and ἐπιθυμήσουσιν on either side of εὐρήσουσιν (Aune 1998a: 486). The verb φεύγει is a “futuristic present” (Aune 1998a: 487). The variant reading of the future tense [φεύξεται] is probably the result of the three preceding future-tense verbs in Revelation 9:6 (Aune 1998a: 487). Alford (as referred to by Mounce 1977: 195) is of the opinion that the present tense φεύγει indicates the “*habitual* avoidance of death in those days”<sup>286</sup>.

#### b) God’s tormenting judgment

In Revelation 9:5 the verb ἀποκτείνω is used again for “death”, indicating that it is the physical killing of people that is being referred to here. The emphasis of ἀποκτείνω is usually towards that of violent killings (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93)<sup>287</sup>. The plague flowing from the sounding of the fifth trumpet is aimed specifically at the non-believing world [cf. above]. It is a judgmental action against those who do not

<sup>285</sup> The phrase τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς is used nine times in Revelation, always in a negative sense, referring to the unbelieving world (cf. Rev 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10 [x2]; 13:8, 14 [x2]; 17:8). It is used quite regularly in similar context in Jewish apocalyptic literature (cf. 1 Enoch; 4 Ezra and others; [Aune 1997: 240]).

<sup>286</sup> Italics as inserted by Mounce (1977: 195).

<sup>287</sup> Cf. Chapter 4, 3.1 and Chapter 8, 2.1.1 above for a detailed discussion on the use of ἀποκτείνω in Revelation. The more common use of ἀποκτείνω is in reference to believers that have been killed for their faith (Trites 1998: 274).



have the seal of God (Rev 9:4). The phrase ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις reflects the words of Jesus in the eschatological discourse about the end times (Matt 24-25).

Although this is a judgmental action by God, the demons are instructed *not* to kill the people. They must only be tormented for a period of time. In Revelation the verb βασανίζω has the meaning of punishment (cf. Rev 11:10; 14:10; 20:10; [Mounce 1977: 195]). This emphasises God's continued control in the situation (Morris 1969: 126). He remains the soul decider over life and death [cf. Chapter 2 – 3.2, 3.3, 3.4]. In the Book of Job Satan *was also given* the power to torment Job, but he was not given permission to kill him (Job 2:6).

The acts of punishment are not of a godly nature. These are cruel actions by the evil spirits coming up from the abyss and “intent on destroying mankind with their poison of falsehood and infidelity” (Hughes 1990: 109). Although the torment is the work of the evil coming up from Hades (cf. Rev 9:1-2), the demons can only act in as far as they are allowed to by God [just as Satan acted cruelly against Job, but only to the extent that he was allowed to by God]. They even have to wait for an angel from God to unlock the shaft to the abyss before they are allowed to come out on their path of destruction (Rev 9:1-2). The divine passive of the command (Rev 9:4) confirms God's total control in the entire vision (Mounce 1977: 194). In the words of Hughes (1990: 110): “the ultimate power of destruction rests in God's hands”.

That the torment must last for five months is probably a symbolic figure indicating “a few” (Aune 1998a: 530). The meaning of the image could be derived from the five fingers on one hand<sup>288</sup>. The interpretation thereof could be that of a long period or a full [one full hand] period of torment (Pohl 1971: 36). It is possible to interpret it as a period in which time will still be allowed for repentance. That is why people are not killed but only tormented: God wants to bring them back while there is still time

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<sup>288</sup> Charles (1920a: 243) is of the opinion that the five months refer to the life cycle of the locust. Morris (1969: 129) mentions the possible interpretation of the five months as indicating the incompleteness of the judgment [i.e. there is still more to come]. Beasley-Murray (1981: 161) on the other hand mentions that the image wants to emphasise that the plague will be abnormally long and intense, based on the general lifespan and actions of locusts. This interpretation is, however, not necessary, as the text is not referring to actual locusts but to demons looking like locusts. The allegory should rather only be seen as “an exaggerated, repulsive depiction of unnatural, demonic power” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 71)

(Giblin 1991: 102). In any case, the core of the message is that the torment will last for a limited period.

Most scholars refer in this instance to the [true and important] fact that scorpions' poison is painful but not lethal, and that is the reason why people are not killed by their stings (cf. Aune 1998a: 531-532). Although this is true [biological], there is most probably a theological interpretation built into the non-killing of people in this vision. The fact that people are not killed is probably an indication from the author that this is not the final judgment that is being viewed. A final series of judgments will still follow [i.e. the pouring out of the seven bowls of God's wrath].

### c) Longing for death

The two words used to describe death in Revelation 9:6 are θάνατος and ἀποθνήσκω [for a discussion on the meaning of ἀποθνήσκω, cf. 2.2.3 above]. The word θάνατος has a variety of meanings, ranging from physical death to spiritual death to eternal death (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 351-352). If compared to the words ἀποκτείνω [kill] and βασανίζω [torment] used in Revelation 9:5, the most probable interpretation is physical death (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 351). People want to die in order to escape the evil torment they are suffering on earth (Giblin 1991: 101).

According to Aune (1998a: 531) this preference of death over life is characteristic of descriptions of the end times in the apocalyptic literature. People are filled with anxiety and want to die in an effort to flee from the hands of the living God (cf. Rev 6: 15-17; [Pohl 1971: 36]). They will, however, learn that there is no escaping the judgment of God, even if they die in this life<sup>289</sup> (Hughes 1990: 110). The unsuccessful struggle to die enhances the intensity of the torment. Giblin (1991: 101-102) sees verse 6 as the central part of the fifth trumpet-plague. It stands in the middle of a fivefold enclosure starting and closing with a reference to the abyss (Rev 9:1 and 11). It describes the “plight of human beings” (Giblin 1991: 101) seeking to escape torment through death, but finding that death keeps eluding them<sup>290</sup>.

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<sup>289</sup> This will be discussed in Chapters 9.

<sup>290</sup> Giblin (1991: 101) finds a very “carefully wrought literary structure” in the text of which verse 6 is at the centre, highlighting the plight the world finds itself in.

Paul also desired to die, but that was not because of any torment and punishment that he suffered. Also, he did not try to flee from the wrath of the living God. His desire was to be in the presence of Christ and enjoy the unity in glory with Christ (Phil 1:23; [Müller 1991: 62-63]). He [i.e. Paul] actually looks forward to life in eternity in the presence of God. Physical death for him is not the end of everything. It is just a thoroughfare to get to Christ in heaven [i.e. to experience the fullness of eternal life].

This is in total contrast to the non-believers who have nothing else than physical death [the end of everything] to look forward to. To them there would be no life after physical death, but only death in eternity. However, they still deem that to be better than falling in the hands of the living God (cf. Heb 10:31). The words of Mounce (1977: 195) aptly sums up the difference in meaning that death has for believers [such as Paul] and non-believers [such as the non-believing world] in the *eschaton*: “For one, death leads to eternal blessing; for the other, it is an “escape” from torment on earth to torture in the lake of fire”.

d) Is there another chance?

Although the trumpet-plagues imply that there is still time available for repentance, it is never clearly stated if such a change occurred in the lives of the people (Giblin 1991: 102). Revelation 9:20-21 rather suggests something to the contrary. When the bowls are poured out later on, there would be no more such chances (cf. Rev 16:10-11). Aune (1998a: 495-496) is of the opinion that the plagues were not really intended to evoke repentance. This was never the intention of eschatological plagues in Jewish apocalypses. Also, the plagues over Egypt [to which this text alludes] never intended to bring Pharaoh to repent. It is explicitly stated that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that he won’t repent (Ex 7:3-4a; [Aune 1998a: 495-496]).

Jesus picks up on this motif in his eschatological discourse, referring to the narrative of Noah (Matt 24:37-38). According to Jesus, the same would happen in the end times. However, it would seem that Jesus was implying that the end times was a time for repentance. Just as people saw Noah, but did not repent, they would see all these things in the end times, but will not repent. It is probably in this direction that John thinks in his vision: people will be given time to repent, but they will not adhere.

iii) Who is Abaddon or Apollyon?

In Revelation 9:1 the star that falls from heaven unlocks the door that leads to the ἄβυσσος. The word ἄβυσσος occurs seven times in Revelation (Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3). In the three-level cosmology prevalent in Revelation [i.e. heaven, earth and underworld], the ἄβυσσος refers to the world beneath the surface of the earth [including the depths of the sea]. In the LXX [translating the Hebrew תַּהוֹמֹת] it is used more often for translating the depths of the sea and in Greco-Jewish literature the depths of the sea and the depths of the earth (Gen 1:2; 7:11; Job 28:14; 36:16; Ps 71:20; Deut 8:7). Sometimes the ἄβυσσος is equated with Hades (Ps 71:20; Rom 10:7; [(Aune 1998a: 525-526)]).

According to Enoch the abyss is the “final prison of the fallen angels” (1 En 21:7; [Mounce 1977: 193; cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 160]). In Revelation the ἄβυσσος is generally the abode of Satan and the demonic powers, but ends up being the prison for the evil (Rev 20:1-3; [Shogren 1997c: 459-460]). The beast also ascends from the ἄβυσσος in Revelation 11:7 and 17:8 (Aune 1998a: 526). It should be distinguished [in Revelation] from Hades, the place where the dead go (Groenewald 1986: 106).

In Revelation 9:11 the king of the ἄβυσσος is identified as Abaddon. The Hebrew word תַּהוֹמֹת literally means destruction (Beasley-Murray 1981: 162). It is used in this sense in Job 26:6 and 28:22. In the LXX it is often translated with ἀπώλεια [destruction – cf. Prov 15:11]. However, in the Hebrew it is used quite often as a poetic parallel to Sheol (Prov 15:11; 27:20; [Aune 1998a: 534]). In Rabbinic literature the word תַּהוֹמֹת is often used to indicate the place of punishment for non-believers [cf. chapter 2, 3.5].

The Greek equivalent Ἀπολλύων is a formation of the word ἀπολλύναι [i.e. to destroy]. This is probably the intended interpretation of the name Abaddon. The name Ἀπολλύων on the other hand could be a play of words on the Greek god Apollo, identifying the Greek religious practice as demonic (Pohl 1971: 39). Caesar Nero could be in the author’s mind, as he claimed to have had a special relationship with the god Apollo (Aune 1998a: 535)<sup>291</sup>. The followers of Abaddon are “the

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<sup>291</sup> Caesar Domitian also claimed the name of Apollo (Mounce 1977: 198; Groenewald 1986: 108).

destroyers of the earth” (Hughes 1990: 111). But their destruction in this case will only affect the non-believing world, and in the end they are themselves destroyed by God (Rev 11:18).

In some Qumran-documents (cf. Aune 1998a: 534) the angel of the abyss [i.e. Abaddon] is identified as Belial, i.e. Satan. Although Satan is identified by name [and aliases] elsewhere in Revelation (Rev 12:9; 20:2), the fact that ἄγγελον is articular here suggests that he is known to John’s readers [i.e. the angel of the abyss is none other than Satan (Aune 1998a: 534)]. In the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 9:24; 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15), and in the apocalyptic literature (AscIsa 2:4), Satan is often called the king [ἄρχων] of the demons and of Hades [as a place]. He is also called “the king of this world” (AscIsa 4:2) (Aune 1998a: 535). In the New Testament [specifically the Gospel of John] Satan is often described as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and in 2 Corinthians 4:4 “the god of this world” (Hughes 1990: 111). Satan himself also implies this when he tries to lure Jesus to bow before him (cf. Matt 4:8-9).

Although the ἄβυσσος has its own king in Abaddon, the key controlling entrance or exit from it lies in the hands of God. He sends an angel to open the shaft to the ἄβυσσος. In 1 Enoch 20:1 the archangel Uriel was deemed to be in charge of the abyss (Shogren 1997c: 460). This motif of God’s control even over the abode of Satan and his demons, is reassuring to believers. They can find their comfort in the knowledge that God still has the course of history in his hands, which will lead to them being taken to heaven in the new life (cf. Rev 4-5; 20:1-4). Even Satan cannot act without God’s consent [cf. (ii) above].

#### iv) Summary on death in the fifth trumpet plague

- When the fifth trumpet-plague is announced the attention is focussed directly on the “inhabitants of this world” [a technical term John uses for the non-believers].
- In a shift from the previous judgmental plagues in Revelation the demons sent out are not allowed to kill the people, but only to torment them. However, this torment will be so severe that people would desire to die in

order to escape the wrath of God through these plagues (cf. Rev 6:15-17). But death will elude them.

- Although eschatological plagues in general did not have the intention to bring people to repentance, the indication that the judgments are not final implies that there is still time available for repentance. However, in line with the eschatological discourses narrated in the Synoptic Gospels, the people will ignore the signs and continue in their evil ways (cf. Matt 24:38-39). In the final judgment time for repentance will have been expended and only judgment will prevail (cf. Rev 16).
- The overall message confirms God's control. Even the king of the abyss, Abaddon, does not have the key to his own domain. God decides who leaves abyss. He also decides the powers that those ascending from abyss might exercise in the world. And Satan who, together with his destructive army of demons, destroys the earth, will eventually be destroyed himself (cf. Rev 11:18).

#### 2.2.5. *Killer plagues at the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:15, 18, 20, 21)*

##### i) Context

The sixth trumpet-plague forms part of the unified text of the trumpet-plagues that was already discussed above [cf. 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 above]. The discussion on the broad context of which the trumpet-plagues form part will therefore not be repeated here. Within the larger sub-text of Revelation 8:1-11:14 the narrative of the sixth trumpet fits in as follows<sup>292</sup>:

8:1-11:14	Seventh seal and the first six trumpets
8:1	Seventh seal: silence in heaven for one-half hour
8:2-9:21	Vision of the first six trumpets
8:2-6	Prologue: the third throne-room scene
8:7-12	first four trumpets
8:13-9:21	last three trumpets (or the three woes)
	8:13 Introduction
	9:1-12 Fifth trumpet (or first woe)

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.

**9:13-21 Sixth trumpet (or second woe)**

10:1-11	Vision of the mighty angel and the little scroll
11:1-14	the temple and the two witnesses

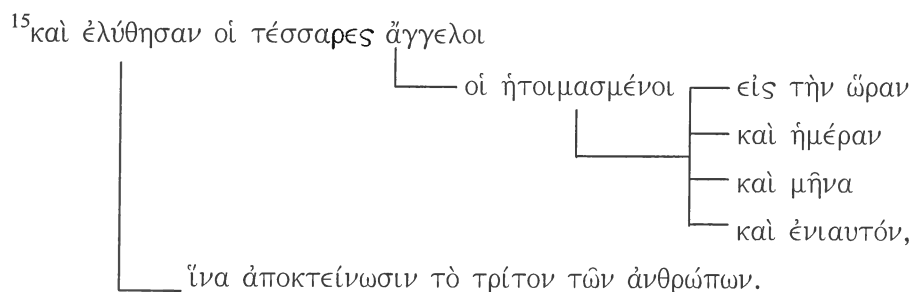
The sixth trumpet constitutes the execution of the second woe announced in Revelation 8:13. However, the conclusion of the second woe is only announced in Revelation 11:14 [after the interlude of Rev 10:1-11:13], the end of this main section of text that started at Revelation 8:1 [the completion of the third woe is never announced]. It is probably implied in the narratives that follow on the seventh trumpet [most probably the seven bowls of Rev 15:1-16:21 – Aune (1998a: 495)].

The discussion on the sixth trumpet-plague is quite extensive and concludes (Rev 9:20-21) with a short description of the reaction of the people who survived the plagues' punishment (Aune 1998a: 495). The sixth plague is clearly aimed directly at the people of this world [i.e. the non-believing world]. Aune (1998a: 497-498) lists a number of similarities between the fifth and sixth trumpet-plagues, suggesting that the two passages are doublets. The sixth trumpet-plague is, however, much more intense and severe than the plagues that emerged when the fifth trumpet was sounded. This time around people are killed, whereas previously they were only tormented (Morris 1969: 132).

ii) Killing with fire and smoke and sulphur

a) Then the angels were released

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 9:15:



The sounding of the sixth trumpet introduces four angels who are loosened to destroy [with the assistance of an innumerable army of cavaliers] a third of the people on

earth. In a sense the sounding of the sixth trumpet brings the judgmental plagues to a climax, in that the judgments now result directly in the killing of many people (Groenewald 1986: 109).

In verse 15 the focus is on the timing of the releasing of the angels. The angels were οἱ ἠτοιμασμένοι [kept ready] specifically for this moment. This confirms God's control in the situation. The word used for death is ἀποκτείνω, usually referring to physical death. This is probably also the case here, even though the death is in judgment [which could also indicate eternal death].

There are a number of less significant variants suggested for the text, a lot of them the result of scribal errors (Aland & Aland 1993: 649-650). However, none of these variants are critical to the understanding of the message of the text [cf. Aune (1998a: 489-490) for a detailed discussion on the significance and validity of all the textual variants for Rev 9:13-21]. Revelation 9:17b-18b is an *inclusio* that has a chiasmic arrangement. The killing of a third of humanity stands at the centre of the chiasm and is flanked by a description of the fire and sulphur and smoke coming from the mouths of the horses (Aune 1998a: 540; Giblin 1991: 108). It serves to pinpoint the judgment of God upon the world (Giblin 1991: 108).

In Revelation 9:15 [as well as 18 and 20] the verb ἀποκτείνω is used to describe the death [killing] of people as a result of the sixth trumpet-plague. The meaning of the word ἀποκτείνω has already been discussed previously [cf. 2.1.1 (ii) above]. The meaning is that of physical death through killing. The word ἀποκτείνω was often used to describe the death of unbelievers. In Jewish religion this killing was seen as a service to God<sup>293</sup>. The word ἀποκτείνω could also refer to the causing of death through plagues, something which is clearly evident in Revelation 9:13-21 (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93).

In Revelation 9:15 it is mentioned: “the four angels who were prepared for the hour and the day and the month of the year were released” [translation by Aune 1998a: 537]. The mentioning of an exact moment in time when this is supposed to happen

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<sup>293</sup> Cf. however, 2.1.1 above and Trites (1998: 274) who is of the opinion that the word is used quite often in Revelation to describe the violent death that martyrs suffered.



emphasises the fact that God is in total control of the situation [cf. above on syntactical analysis]. These “demonic” angels have a predetermined role in history, worked out for them by God, set to go into motion at an exact time and date predetermined by God (Aune 1998a: 537). A number of texts in the New Testament reflect this idea of the time of judgment [or salvation] that has been predetermined and worked out by God (Acts 1:7; Gal 4:4; Eph 1:9-10; [Hughes 1990: 113]). This sovereign control of God is evident throughout Revelation (cf. Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:7; 19:15; [Mounce 1977: 201]).

On whom the four angels might represent there have been much speculation [cf. Aune (1998a: 536-537) for a discussion on this]. However, no clear answer can be given on their identity. Pohl (1971: 46) is of the opinion that they can't be “good angels of God” taking into account the task they are to perform. According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 165-166) only creatures from hell could bring forth the fire from hell of which we read in Revelation 9:13-21. Aune (1998a: 538) mentions that they could possibly represent four nations in line with the vision of Daniel 10:13, 20-21. They are most probably angels of judgment of punishment. Angels of punishment who act as agents of divine judgment, are well known in Jewish apocalyptic literature and rabbinic literature, specifically in the book of Enoch (1 En 53:3; 56:1; 62:11; 63:1; 66:1; [Aune 1998a: 538]). “They were released” [passive] in any case suggests that God released them for this task.

#### b) Deadly plagues

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 9:18:

$\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{18 ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων} \\ \text{ἀπεκτάνθησαν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων,} \\ \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς} \\ \text{καὶ τοῦ καπνοῦ} \\ \text{καὶ τοῦ θείου τοῦ ἐκπορευομένου} \\ \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{ἐκ τῶν στομάτων αὐτῶν.} \end{array} \right. \end{array} \right. \end{array} \right.$

In Revelation 9:18 the emphasis is put on the instruments of killing. The main clause of the sentence confirms that actual killings have taken place [the verb

ἀπεκτάνθησαν]. This main clause is surrounded by the consequences of the plague [one third of mankind dies] and the instruments of killing.

In Revelation 9:15 actual killings do not take place. The role of the angels is only spelled out through the purpose clause, which is introduced by the particle ἵνα [“in order that”] (Aune 1998a: 537). The killings only takes place in Revelation 9:18. In between a description is given of the army of cavaliers following the angels [the angels seemingly disappear from the scene!]. It is this army [or rather the horses in the army] that become the killers of the people (Groenewald 1986: 110-111).

The instruments of killing this time are not swords or any other war-related weapons, but fire and smoke and sulphur coming from their mouths (cf. Rev 9:17-18). The breastplates of the cavaliers are in correspondence with the fire and sulphur and smoke coming from their mouths (Charles 1920a: 253). In Revelation 9:18 the smoke and fire and sulphur are seen as three separate plagues. The notion of divine judgment by fire and sulphur is common in the Old Testament (Deut 29:23; Ps 11:6; Isa 30:33; 34:9; Ezek 38:22), but is also found in the New Testament literature (Luke 17:29; 1 Cl 11:1). This method of judgment has its roots in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24, which were destroyed by fire and sulphur. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah became the symbol of judgment in Jewish tradition (Hughes 1990: 113). It occurs frequently in similar [i.e. judgment] scenes in Revelation (Rev 9:17-18; 14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8; [Aune 1998a: 540-541]). This is probably why it is also the source of energy for the lake of fire where those judged by God will burn in eternity (cf. Rev 20:10; 21:8; [Pohl 1971: 48]).

The phrase τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων has the same meaning as τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in Revelation 8:13, referring to the unbelieving world (Charles 1920a: 252). Believers have no part in these judgments. They are clearly aimed at those who reject God (Charles 1920a: 252). This is confirmed by the reference in Revelation 9:20 that those who have not been killed by the plagues did not repent.

### c) Still no repentance

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 9:20-21:



only one-third of humanity underlines the motif of a door that has been left open for people to repent [cf. 2.2.4 above]. That is probably why Beasley-Murray (1981: 166) sees a clear motif of repentance throughout the trumpet-plagues.

Unfortunately this repentance did not realise, as people did not adhere to the call in any manner. The motif of the plagues could therefore be understood as the ignorance of the non-believing world to the divine call from God to repent before it is too late. This links onto the motif of the Exodus-plagues, which is used throughout the trumpet-plagues of Revelation 8-9 (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 72).

Morris (1969: 132) makes an interesting observation with regard to the effect of the plagues on people and the message for believers from the non-repentance of the world:

“Believers must live in this world... John is making plain to a little group of persecuted believers that they must not expect to live in a world that understood them and welcomed their witness. No matter how severe the judgments of God on it, the world continues with its idolatries and its manifold sins. This world that John depicts, with sinful men resisting God to the limit no matter how much they hurt themselves in the process, is the world believers must live in.”

Believers’ final hope do not lie in the ultimate repentance of everybody in this world, or the disappearance of trials and tribulations from the world, but in the life in eternity God promises to them after this life, and in the promise that God will eventually judge the ungodly people who continue to resist his will in this world (cf. Rev 6:9-11).

The reference to φόνος [murder] in Revelation 9:21 probably doesn’t refer to any specific action [for instance killing of Christians], but wants to emphasise that these people just continued in their sinful ways despite the judgment that has come over a third of them<sup>295</sup>. They did not turn away one bit from their evil ways. Seemingly, in

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<sup>295</sup> The acts of murder probably include both believers and non-believers, something that is evident throughout the world even today. It is not the physical death that matters [although bringing about death against the will of God does matter after all – that is why it is prohibited in the Law], but the spiritual life that will decide whether a person inherits eternal death or eternal life after physical death.

the words of Mounce (1977: 204): “Once the heart is set in its hostility toward God not even the scourge of death will lead men to repentance”. This does not mean nobody would ever repent, but that they are set on a path away from God from which they would not be *willing* to turn back (cf. Heb 6:4-8). The end-result of all this is that these people will inherit eternal death in the judgment. Eternal death is, according to Revelation 22:15 (cf. Rev 21:8), the final home for murderers, fornicators, idolaters and liars (Mounce 1977: 204). For these people physical death will mean eternal death.

It is interesting to observe the reference to the idols of gold and silver and wood and bronze and stone (Rev 9:20). The reference to hand-made idols [worshipped by the people of this world] stands in contrast to the living God [the One who could give life but whose life-giving actions in Christ have been ignored by this world]. In Jewish and Christian documents the mentioning of a list of the materials used to make idols are often done to emphasise their lifelessness in contrast to the one and only living God<sup>296</sup> (Aune 1998a: 542). Eternal life only comes through a living relationship with the living God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6]. However, these people discarded this in favour of dead idols, which they made themselves and with which they can’t even have a living relationship. That is the route to eternal death (cf. Hughes 1990: 114-115).

### iii) Summary on the sixth trumpet-plague

- The judgments emanating from the sixth trumpet sounding are aimed at the non-believing people in the world [just as with all the other trumpet-plagues {cf. 2.2.4 above}]. However, this time around people are not only tormented, but killed. A third of the people of the world [i.e. only those that are not believers] are killed by the plagues.
- The plagues of fire and smoke and sulphur are commonly known as judgmental plagues in the Old Testament. Fire and sulphur are reminiscent of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24. It is also the energy that burns in the lake of fire, the place of eternal judgment. In this instance the physical death coming through the sounding

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<sup>296</sup> Cf. Hab 2:18-19; Dan 5:23; Ps 115:4-6; 3 Macc 4:16; Wis Sol 15:8-9; Acts 17:29

of the sixth trumpet becomes a moment of [eternal] judgment on the non-believing people in this world.

- The motif of repentance recurs in Revelation 9:13-21, with a third of humanity killed [i.e. giving the remaining two-thirds an opportunity to still repent]. However, it is made clear that people did not repent from their evil ways. Even the most terrifying plagues of judgment did not change their minds [In Revelation 16 {the pouring out of the seven bowls} the reaction is even worse, when it is said that the people of this world cursed God for the punishing plagues that came over them].
- The reference to the idols that people continue to make and worship, stands in contrast to the living God with whom they should stand in a relationship. Their refusal to enter into this relationship with God will eventually bring them to death in eternity.

#### 2.2.6. *Killing of those that torment the witnesses (Rev 11:5, 13)*

The context of Revelation 11:3-14 has already been discussed in Chapter 7 [2.1.5] and been referred to again in section 1.1.3 above. It will therefore not be repeated here. There are a number of smaller textual variants suggested for the text of Revelation 11:5 (Aland & Aland 1993: 652). Most of them are not critical to the understanding of the text. One variant that could affect the message is the suggestion that ἀδικῆσαι be replaced with ἀποκτείνειν in Revelation 11:5b. This would then imply that the witnesses kill anyone who wants to kill them, instead of anyone who wants to do them harm. The supporting evidence for this suggestion is, however, not strong enough to warrant the change (Aune 1998a: 580). It is also the reading of the similar phrase in Revelation 11:5a.

The two verbs suggesting physical death in this verse are ἀποκτανθῆναι [which has already been discussed extensively previously] and κατεσθίει. The verb κατεσθίει literally means, “to eat up, consume, devour, swallow” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 423). In a figurative sense [which is probably the use here] it means, “to destroy” (cf. Num 26:10; Job 20:26; Rev 20:9; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 423]). Of course, as discussed above [2.2.5], the motif of destruction by fire is found in the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24). However, the motif of fire coming

from the mouths of the witnesses could be a metaphor for speaking the word of God. In this sense it is usually used with regard to rebuke or condemnation (cf. Jer 5:14b; [Aune 1998a: 613]). Sirach (Sir 48:1) also speaks about Elijah as “a prophet like fire, whose word was like a burning furnace” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 184). God is said to breathe fire in 2 Samuel 22:9 (Aune 1998a: 614). In this sense the prophecy of the word of God [i.e. the testimony of Jesus Christ] becomes the factor that will destroy the enemies of God, and not the physical intervention by the witnesses (Groenewald 1986: 121). Therefore, it is stated implicitly that behind the fire breathing witnesses is the sovereign God who saves but also judges (Hughes 1990: 124).

The second part of the verse repeats, but also intensifies, the unusual and frightening death awaiting the enemies of God. The εἴ plus subjunctive as *protasis* is an unusual clause [usually one finds εἰ plus subjunctive]. However, Aune (1998a: 614) mentions that εἴ was used to an increasing extent in papyri from the second century AD in the place of εἰ. The εἴ plus subjunctive Aune (1998a: 614) calls a “third-class condition”, meaning that there is a strong possibility of this condition being realised in future. The use of δεῖ [must] confirms that this protection of God’s witnesses [and the destruction of His enemies] is guaranteed (Morris 1969: 149; Groenewald 1986: 121)<sup>297</sup>. The period of their protection and witnessing coincides with the period of persecution, which in Revelation’s symbolic language is the figure of 1260 or three and a half (Du Rand 1991b: 216; Giblin 1991: 114)<sup>298</sup>.

The killing [ἀποκτανθῆναι] of God’s enemies is not in retaliation or judgment [for judgment lies only in the hands of God and Christ – cf. 1.1.3 above], but in protection of the witnesses. They are given these powers of the word by God to protect them for as long as the message of the gospel must be proclaimed. If the content of the

<sup>297</sup> In the words of Pohl (1971: 72): “Kein Haar soll ihr ohne den Willen Gottes gekrümmt werden. Kein Mensch wird ihren Dienst verkürzen.”

<sup>298</sup> This period of tribulation comes from the persecution of the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes, narrated in the book of Daniel (Dan 7:25; 12:7; [Morris 1969: 147]). It became symbolic of the full time of tribulation. It is also a “symbolic apocalyptic number for a divinely restricted period of time” (Aune 1998a: 609). The number is used regularly in Revelation as a symbol of the time of persecution and suffering of the church in this world (cf. Rev 11:2, 3, 9, 11; 12:6, 14; 13:5; [Aune 1998a: 609-611]). According to Joubert (1999b: 103) the figure of three and a half could be equalled to the 1 000 years of peace. In this sense the figure three and a half represents the full period of tribulation on earth, while simultaneously the figure 1 000 represents the full period of triumph in heaven. Essentially the two figures [from different perspectives] represent the full time between Christ’s ascension and his return in glory and judgment at the *eschaton* (Joubert 1999b: 103-104).

message is repentance [as discussed above in 1.1.3; cf. also 2.2.4 and 2.2.5 above], then the rejection of the call to repent eventually brings death upon those that continue to live in this ignorance.

Again the life and death of a person is linked to his [or her] relationship with God. Those who want to harm the cause of God and not adhere to the call to repent will not just die physically [ἀποκτανθῆναι] but will be destroyed entirely [κατεσθίω] in eternity. That is what is implied to an extent in Revelation 11:13. The same word [ἀπεκτάνθησαν] is used in Revelation 11:13 to describe the death of people, this time through an earthquake. Earthquakes are often expected in the biblical tradition to occur in the end time. It is seen as one of the effects of the presence or the coming of God (cf. Joel 2:10; 3:16; Isa 24:18-23; 29:6; [Aune 1998a: 413]).

In Revelation earthquakes are generally associated with a theophany. However, the earthquake in this vision is probably an indication of God who acts in judgment on those who disregard Him (Aune 1998a: 627). It is not said if believers are affected by the earthquake. However, the apocalyptic nature of the vision probably wants it that only non-believers [τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς - cf. Rev 8:13] are struck. The figure of seven thousand people that have been killed in the earthquake doesn't necessarily have a symbolic meaning<sup>299</sup>. The figure could be congruent with ten percent of the size of an average city in those days (cf. Rev 11:13; [Mounce 1977: 229]). The one-tenth is traditionally a symbol for survivors of judgment (Isa 6:13; Am 5:3). If symbolic, the usage is then a reversal of the tradition (Aune 1998a: 627).

Revelation 11:13 is a divine [eschatological] judgment upon the people who ignored [or actually laughed at] the message of the witnesses (cf. Rev 16:18). The phrase ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ὥρᾳ emphasises the immediacy of this divine judgment in conjunction with the ascension of the two witnesses (Aune 1998a: 627)<sup>300</sup>. God will not delay his judgment. The ascension and killing of God's enemies reaffirm what has been said above: the protection of the witnesses [through a miraculous divine rescue (Aune

<sup>299</sup> Generally the figure seven has the meaning of completeness and 1 000 has the meaning of a round figure [10] squared three times [with three the symbolic figure of God] (Du Rand 1991b: 215). The figure 1 000 could, however, also be just another symbol for completeness (Joubert 1999a: 19).

<sup>300</sup> For the reaction of the people as a sign of conversion [or not], cf. 1.1.3 above. Groenewald (1986: 123) calls it "a recognition borne out of anxiety, but no repentance" [my translation].





The verse is a straightforward judgmental action described in three statements. The use of αἶμα with “death” suggests that physical death is what is meant. The ψυχὴ ζῶης that died [ἀπέθανεν] refers to “living creatures” in the sea [e.g. fish].

b) Death in the sea

The pouring out of the seven bowls represents the pouring out of God’s wrath in judgment. The images are similar to that found at the sounding of the trumpets, and also draws from the imagery of the Exodus-plagues. These bowl-judgments are aimed directly at the people who rejected Christ and followed the Dragon and the beasts (Beasley-Murray 1981: 239). Man is affected directly from the outset by the bowl-plagues (Mounce 1977: 291).

Aland & Aland (1993: 663) recognises four suggested variants to the text. Although none of these are critical to the outcome of the text, one of the variants does have strong support. In Revelation 16:3b a number of important documents support the reading of ζῶσα [nominative singular feminine present participle – cf. Aune 1998a: 855]. The more correct reading is probably the textual reading, which is ζῶης. Even though it is supported by fewer manuscripts, they are some of the most important ones found in textual criticism (Aune 1998a: 855).

The pouring out of the second bowl has similar effects than that of the second trumpet, with the inhabitants of the sea being killed (Aune 1998a: 866). In Revelation 8:8-9, however, only a third of everything in the sea was destroyed. Now, when the second bowl-plague is poured into the sea, all life in the sea ceases to exist. Everything is killed by the water turned blood. This reminds the reader of the consequences of the first Exodus-plague, where all the fish were killed when the water of the Nile turned into blood (cf. Ex 7:20-21).

In many instances blood is used in the Bible in reference to purification [for instance the sprinkling of blood of sacrifices onto the altar and sometimes even the people]. It is also in the sense of purification that the blood of Christ is understood throughout the New Testament (cf. Rev 7:14). But in this case [as in the Exodus-plagues] blood contaminates and kills when it comes into the drinking water (cf. Isa 15:9; 2 Macc 12:16; [cf. De Cock {2004: 157-182} for an in-depth discussion on the interpretation

of blood in Revelation]). This is probably what is implied when John says that the water turned into blood, “like the blood of a dead man”<sup>301</sup>. This is not the blood that flows in purification of sins. It is rotten [coagulated and with a smell of death] and can obviously not support or sustain life anymore (Mounce 1977: 294). This, of course, negatively affects human life. Water was [as is today] of critical importance in ancient civilisations, specifically the “more arid regions” (Mounce 1977: 294). Man needs pure water [and the fish within as food] to stay alive<sup>302</sup>.

It is interesting to note that none of the seven bowl-plagues, although directed at those that rejected God and Christ, actually directly kills any person. People experience pain and discomfort, they cry out in anguish, but seemingly no one is killed. One phrase that does stand out throughout the seven bowl-plagues is that the people didn’t repent, but rather cursed God for the suffering they had to endure (cf. Rev 16:9, 11, 21). Like Pharaoh in Egypt they refuse to bow in repentance before God (Mounce 1977: 297). It is the same motif that John used in Revelation 9, where it is also said that the people refused to repent when the trumpet-plagues came over them (Rev 9:20-21; [Aune 1998a: 889]).

Groenewald (1986: 163-164) sees this as a last chance to repent being spilled by the followers of the beast. Whether this is still a reference to a chance to repent, is not clear. The vision of the bowls seems to be on the brink of the final judgment: it could therefore be either a final call to repent or just a manner of saying that the end has come and no repentance is possible anymore [cf. discussion on repentance at the trumpet plagues in 2.2.4 (ii) above]. However, the message throughout is clear: the world will not repent, even if given a final chance.

### iii) Summary on the second bowl

- With the pouring out of the seven bowls the judgment of God is directed at the non-believing world. They are being punished, similar to the situation before the Exodus: only Egyptians were struck by the plagues then.

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<sup>301</sup> The noun νεκροῦ here means “dead person” or “dead being” [Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 536); cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(a)].

<sup>302</sup> This is also the case with the pouring out of the third bowl, which contaminates the fresh water supplies with blood in the same manner. It is, however, only the lives of the non-believing world that is affected by these plagues. It is a judgment on them for their killing of God’s faithful. Because they spilled the blood of the faithful, they will only have blood to drink (cf. Rev 16:6).

- The killing in Revelation 16:3 is not that of people, but of the “inhabitants” of the sea. They die from the contamination of the water, which turned into blood.
- The seven bowl-plagues seemingly don’t kill any person. They are tormented and left in anguish, but still alive. But the message is clear throughout: man would not even see this as a chance to repent. They would just continue in their rejection of God.

#### 2.2.8. *Summary on physical death in the world*

- i) There are different causes of physical death in the world. People could die from the effects of war [e.g. the opening of the seals], or because of their continuance in sin [e.g. the trumpet-plagues], or as a result of the judgment of God [e.g. the bowl-plagues].
- ii) A variety of words are used to describe physical death in the world. However, in all the instances it refers to people being killed [either by other people or through divine judgment]. Sometimes the words used for death do not refer to people, but to creation itself being destroyed by death.
- iii) In some instances [e.g. the first four seals] it seems that believers and non-believers alike are killed by the effects of war. However, wherever believers are affected, it is always followed by the comfort that God is still in control and will, through all suffering, protect and save them.
- iv) Throughout Revelation the sovereignty and control of God is evident. The seals revealing the destruction in history are opened by the Lamb, the trumpet-plagues resulting from demons coming from the Abyss is only possible because God has sent an angel to open the door to the Abyss for these demons to come out.
- v) Most of the killings of non-believers in Revelation are the result of the judgment of God upon the world. The instruments of killing are in most instances commonly found in judgmental texts of the Old Testament and Rabbinic literature.
- vi) There is a clear motif of repentance in the plagues. In many instances not everybody is killed [e.g. the trumpet-plagues], giving an opportunity to people

to still repent before the final judgment comes. Unfortunately nobody seemingly adheres to this call. The world just continues in its ways of sin.

vii) However, whereas believers still have the comfort of an eternal life to look forward to even though they might die, for non-believers everything ends at death. Their physical death becomes a personal day of judgment.

### 3. Other occurrences of life and death in Revelation

The texts being discussed in this section use words generally referring to life and death elsewhere in Revelation. However, in the two texts being discussed below, the words seemingly have a different meaning, and probably only indirectly refers to life and death [physical or spiritual]. A short discussion of their meaning in the specific situations will be done here for completeness.

#### 3.1. *Falling down as if dead (Rev 1:17)*

The context of Revelation 1:9-20 has already been discussed in detail in Chapter 7 [2.1.3 (i)], as was the syntax of Revelation 1:17-18. It is the all-important vision about the Son of Man, which John sees while in exile on the island of Patmos. The vision that John sees is an image of the resurrected Christ, ὁ ζῶν (Rev 1:18a), in glory. John is so overwhelmed [or rather frightened] by this powerful vision that he falls down in front of the glorified Christ *as if dead* (Rev 1:17a).

The text of Revelation 1:17a is generally well attested, with only one small variant suggested, replacing πρὸς with εἰς (Aland & Aland 1993: 634). This variant does not have strong support. It also does not affect the message of the text materially. One can therefore work with the text as attested.

The reaction of John on seeing the image of the Son of Man is to fall down ὡς νεκρὸς. John did not die physically [νεκρὸς generally refers to physical death], but only looked as if dead. This could be by way of fainting or just experiencing a visionary trance, although the vision started off with John “being taken up in the spirit”, suggesting that he had already gone into a trance. It is a typical stereotypical response in visions when someone sees a supernatural person revealing himself. The

prostration could be either in fear (Rev 1:17a; cf. Isa 6:5; Ezek 1:28)<sup>303</sup> or in awe of the divine revelation (Josh 5:14; Rev 19:10; 22:8). The reaction usually involves fear and prostration on the side of the observer of the vision (Bauckham 1981: 323-324). Israel was afraid of dying if God would even talk to them directly (Ex 20:19; cf. Deut 5:22-27). In Matthew 28:4 the guards standing at Jesus' tomb became ὡς νεκροί when the angel came to roll away the tombstone (Aune 1997: 100).

The answer of Christ in Revelation 1:17b-c forms the climax to the vision (Beasley-Murray 1981: 67). It is the reassurance to John that this is indeed the exalted Christ [the Living One that died but is now alive for ever more] that he sees (Aune 1997: 116)<sup>304</sup>. He confirms his living presence with a description of his exalted status in Revelation 1:8-19. The right hand of the Son of Man being laid on John is a “commissioning hand which restores John’s confidence and prepares him to hear the words of consolation and command” (Mounce 1977: 80).

In summary then: What we have in Revelation 1:17 is therefore not physical death, but just a reaction by John upon experiencing the presence of the exalted Christ. It is a typical reaction in fear on experiencing a divine revelation. John is comforted by the exalted Christ not to fear but to observe and write down the entire revelation to be shown to him.

### 3.2. *The selling of living beings (Rev 18:13)*

In Revelation 18:13 an interesting phrase appears: ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων [literally translated as “the souls of people”]<sup>305</sup>. The phrase ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων is, according to Aune (1998b: 1002) only a further clarification of what was meant with the preceding noun, i.e. σωμαμάτων. It clarifies that the bodies of the people sold in Babylon were

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<sup>303</sup> That John is falling down in fear [not in awe] is confirmed by the answer of Christ in verse 18: μὴ φοβοῦ. The simile of death as found here in Revelation is, according to Aune (1997: 99), less common in instances of fear. Also note the response of Mounce (1977: 80) that one must be careful to just call the reaction of John stereotypical, as this “would incorrectly imply that John was playing out a role rather than experiencing a supernatural phenomenon of such magnitude that to stand as an equal would be tantamount to blasphemy.”

<sup>304</sup> The phrase μὴ φοβοῦ is a typical form of an “oracle of reassurance” (Aune 1997: 100).

<sup>305</sup> Another interesting word just precedes it, i.e. σωμαμάτων [literally translated as “bodies” – cf. Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 806-807).] Actually the word σῶμα could have a variety of meanings, referring to either dead or living bodies [physical]. However, the word was often used to refer to slaves (cf. Gen 36:6; 2 Macc 8:11; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 807]). In the light of bodies being traded in Revelation 18:13, the last mentioned interpretation is probably correct.

living slaves. The word ψυχή, generally translated with “soul” or “life” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 901-902), is here [by metonymy] to be translated with “living creature”, as somebody with a soul is deemed to be a living creature (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 902). The phrase ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων is a commonly used Hebrew idiom for referring to “human beings” (Aune 1998b: 1002).

Nothing is therefore said about life in Revelation 18:13. It is nothing more than a common idiom used to describe the practice of slave trade. According to Aune (1998b: 1002) one should not even try to read into the phrases used the degradation of people by calling slaves “bodies”. Swete (1907: 235) calls them “human livestock” in ancient times. This was common language and in any case, slaves were not regarded very different from livestock in ancient times (Mounce 1977: 330)<sup>306</sup>.

### 3.3. *The desires of Babylon’s soul (Rev 18:14)*

In Revelation 18:14 mention is made about the ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ψυχῆς of Babylon. However, the noun ψυχή has nothing to do with life or the common translation “soul”. It is only part of a commonly known Semitic idiom found often in the Old Testament [תַּשׁוּבָה תַּשׁוּבָה] (cf. Deut 12:15, 21, 21; 14:26). It is translated in the LXX with “the desire of your soul” (Deut 12:20, 21; 14:26; Ps 9:24 {LXX}; Ps 20:3 {LXX}; Jer 2:24; [Aune 1998b: 1003]). The ἡ ὀπώρα [literally “ripe fruit”] is a metaphor for the “good things” in life (Aune 1998b: 1003). Mounce (1977: 331) is of the opinion that ἡ ὀπώρα refers to the list of things mentioned in the preceding verses. The list is bracketed in an inclusion by the statements in verse 11 [the businessmen will not be able to buy from her anymore] and verse 14 [the desirable things will not be available anymore].

Nothing is said here about life or death directly. The entire text of Revelation 18 wants to emphasise the desolation of Babylon after judgment has fallen on her. It is the signs of her being dead eternally, that is without any signs of life within.

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<sup>306</sup> Cf. also Mounce (1977: 331) for an interesting distinction between σωματίων and ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων as done by Bengel.

#### 4. Summary on physical life and death in Revelation

- i) Physical life does not play a significant role in Revelation. People should not be concerned with being alive in the body. What is important about physical life is the way it is lived. That would determine the eternal outcome of a person at physical death.
- ii) In Revelation one can distinguish [with regard to life and death] between the life and death of believers and that of non-believers.
- iii) One clear comparison with regard to physical life and death in Revelation is that both believers and non-believers are affected thereby. There is no distinction between them with regard to the reality of being physically alive, or even physically dying. It is quite clear that everybody is struck by that in this world, regardless of his or her position with regard to God.
- iv) Martyrdom is important in Revelation. Believers can expect to suffer persecution, and even death, as a consequence of their faith in Jesus Christ. The purpose of Revelation is in fact to comfort believers in the wake of possible persecution.
- v) There are a variety of means by which death comes over people in this world, i.e. war, famine, plagues. Most of the time the deaths of non-believers [i.e. people in this world] are as a result of the judgment of God upon this world. The instruments of killing are commonly found in judgmental texts of the Old Testament and Rabbinic literature, confirming God's righteousness through the ages.
- vi) Repentance seems to play an important role in many of the judgmental plagues, specifically the trumpet-plagues. There seems to be a clear motif of repentance in the plagues, although the outcome thereof is always in the negative [i.e. no repentance seems to occur]. By using the Exodus-motif the plagues want to confirm God's active involvement and his righteousness as per the Old Testament.
- vii) There is one clear distinction with regard to the effect of death: throughout Revelation the physical death of believers is followed by a comforting passage confirming their protection by God even through death. These comforting passages are never given after texts where non-believing people die. For those who did not live a life in relationship with God in this life, there will be no hope of life after death.



- viii) For believers physical death is not the end. Because Christ overcame death and now has the keys to death in his hand (Rev 1:17-18), physical death for believers becomes nothing more than a thoroughfare to eternal life in the presence of God. This is a deviation from the Old Testament thought, where death was generally perceived to be the end of sustainable life [cf. Chapter 2, 3.4].