

CHAPTER 9

ETERNAL LIFE AND SPIRITUAL LIFE [OR DEATH]

"He who does not become despondent and give up, will be dressed in beautiful, clean, white garments. His name will be written into the Book of Life with indelible ink. The names of everyone who have eternal life are written into that Book. And I will personally tell wonderful things to God and his angels about each one of them." Rev 3:5.³⁰⁷

As mentioned previously [cf. Chapter 8], the author of Revelation is not too concerned about physical life and the outcome thereof. He rather wants to give his readers comfort amidst the struggles they might experience in this life [and even if this life might be cut short by physical death]. The main focus of John is the spiritual life of his readers, which is linked to their relationship with God in this life [cf. Chapter 8, point 1 above], and their continuing faith in the salvation of the Lamb, even to the point of death.

It is a question of having "real life", which points towards life in eternity. Those who have "real life" now, will inherit eternal life after death. Although the phrase "eternal life" does not appear in Revelation [in contrast to the Gospel of John], the concept is quite clear throughout the Book of Revelation (Du Rand 1990: 233). In fact, Revelation's message of hope lies in the message of eternal life that awaits believers if they hold on to their faith.

According to Porter (1997a: 347) "the concept of eternal life is one linked to a phrase created by use of the adjective *aiōnios* and a noun, usually the word for life, *zōē*". In Revelation the concept of "eternal life" often appears without the use of the word "eternal". However, this life is nearly always equalled to eternal life in Revelation.

1. They who have real life

Life in eternity is only possible through the salvation by Christ. This act of salvation has already been completed by the Lamb of God, who was slaughtered but is now alive (Rev 5:5-6; cf. Rev 12:11). The blood of the Lamb cleanses believers from their

³⁰⁷ Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

sins, so that they can enter life in eternity (cf. Rev 7:9-17). As Barnett (1997b: 1074) puts it:

“In...Revelation, for the most part salvation is eschatological in its realization, is a present reality in Jesus Christ, fulfils the expectations of the OT and is made available by the word of God”.

The important thing for believers to remember is that, because Christ has already conquered, He holds the keys of Death and Hades in his hands (Rev 1:17-18). He will open the doors to a new life for believers, even if they suffer death in this life. Their entire life in faith can be lived with this comforting news in mind. This message is enhanced by the messages of comfort that continuously follow messages of suffering and persecution [e.g. after the opening of the first four seals, the fifth seal brings hope for believers who died: the souls of the martyrs {alive} are seen under the altar praying to God]³⁰⁸.

1.1. Life in the churches of Asia Minor (Rev 2-3)

The question answered in each of the proclamations to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) is: Who is really dead and who is really alive? Everyone of the congregations is “evaluated” according to their relationship with God [and Christ]. Slater (1999: 108) aptly sums up the ethical theme of the messages to the seven churches:

“...the letters address internal communal issues that must be corrected in order that the churches may withstand social pressures to conform their religious practices and also what they must do in order to be able to endure the coming apocalyptic trials.”

Mounce (1977: 84) sees the letters as “designed to impress upon the church universal the necessity of patient endurance in the period of impending persecution”. The message is that those that persevere will conquer. As Trites (1998: 274) puts it: “John’s prophetic words were designed to produce *conquerors* – people who would

³⁰⁸ Similar messages of hope follow in Revelation 7 [after the opening of the sixth seal] and Revelation 14 [after the persecution by the beasts].

prove absolutely loyal to Christ in the face of suffering and persecution”³⁰⁹. “Those who have conquered” is a familiar phrase in the proclamations to identify the believers who held on to their faith. Believers must live a life in accordance with the will of God now, in order to enter eternal life after death [cf. Chapter 8, 1.1]. The churches are constantly measured according to their ἔργα [i.e. their works]. The noun ἔργα is an important term that appears 20 times in the Book of Revelation, of which 12 occurrences is found in the proclamations of Revelation 2-3 (Aune 1997: 142).

The broad context of the proclamations to the seven churches has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(b) and Chapter 8, 1.1.2 and 2.1.1(i) above]. The discussion on life in the churches will therefore only include a short discussion on the applicable situation within each congregation [where it has not been done previously]. The overall discussion of the context will not be repeated here.

1.1.1. Life in Ephesus: a fainting torch

Ephesus, according to William Barclay (1957: 12), “was a city which had many a claim to greatness and to fame.” The town was situated strategically with regard to trade routes in the ANE. Barclay (1957: 12-18) also argues that Ephesus was outstanding in the fields of politics and religion. Aune (1997: 136) thinks the city’s greatest importance was in the field of administration³¹⁰. It was one of the greatest centres of early Christianity since the days that Paul founded the church there (Arnold 1997: 146-147; Aune 1997: 139-141). It is in a flourishing and probably pulsating city with an abundance of “worldly” attractions that the church in Ephesus had to stand tall for its Lord.

Although there are a number of textual variants for the entire textual unit (i.e. Rev 2:1-7) none of them is strong enough to suggest a change to the text (Aland & Aland 1993: 634-635). Aune (1997: 134-135) also supports the reading of Aland & Aland with regard to each of the suggested variants.

³⁰⁹ My italics.

³¹⁰ Cf. Also Beasley-Murray (1981: 72-73); Groenewald (1986: 42-43); Morris (1969: 58-59); Mounce (1977: 85-86). Mounce (1977: 85) sees the importance of Ephesus as the appropriate reason for the church there to receive the first letter. Hughes (1990: 33) thinks the priority of Ephesus is because of John’s presumed close relationship with the city of Ephesus.

a) Saved by grace

Ephesus, wrote Paul, received life by the grace of God (Eph 2:8-10). The works of this life were seemingly still evident in Ephesus. Christ knows these works, as He is the One that walks amidst the churches (Rev 2:1; [Mounce 1977: 86]). In line with the ethical evaluation of the churches [see introduction to 1.1 above] the observation of the works is not so much about the actual deeds done, but is an evaluation of “an overall manner of life” in Ephesus (Mounce 1977: 87). What Christ is actually evaluating, is if the believers in Ephesus has got “real life”. The mentioning of certain ἔργα in Revelation 2:2 suggest that there certainly were evidence of life. According to Aune (1997: 143), the first καὶ functions expegetical, i.e. to qualify the ἔργα.

On the surface then the church in Ephesus was alive and well: it still had, in the words of Barclay (1957: 21) “Christian energy” and believers did well in preserving the orthodoxy in the church by identifying those who proclaimed a false doctrine within the church, some of them from the Nicolaitans, as mentioned in Revelation 2:6 (Barclay 1957: 23)³¹¹.

b) Lost in love and losing their lamp

However, as is the case with five of the seven proclamations, there is a contradiction within the life of the church, introduced with the particle adversative ἀλλὰ in verse 4 (Aune 1997: 146). In spite of all the good things building their spiritual life, believers in Ephesus have lost one important aspect in their spiritual life: they have lost their first love. Whether this refers to the love for Christ or for their fellow believers is not stated. Mounce (1977: 88) is of the opinion that it could refer to both, but that it leans more in the direction of the brotherly love in line with 2 John 5. “First love” could also refer to the love for God that precedes real love for each other (Groenewald 1986: 49). On the other hand, love for each other identifies love for God (1 John 5).

In losing their love, they stand in danger of losing their “real life” (Groenewald 1986: 88). The light of life of the Ephesians’ torch is fainting. They are urged to repent from their unloving nature lest Christ remove their lamp from its place (Rev 2:5).

³¹¹ The proclamations often mention something about a conflict between believers and people bringing in a false doctrine, suggesting that Sweet (1990: 34-35) is probably correct when he says that the main problem in the churches were not so much persecution as internal temptations and compromise [cf. also footnote 2]. One must, however, not disregard the importance of persecution.

This is a metaphor for the removal of God's presence [and thus life] from the church (Osborne 2002: 119). In Revelation 1:12-20 Christ is depicted as moving amidst his church, identified as lampstands. John very aptly uses the names of Christ identified in Revelation 1:12-20 to address each congregation according to its strength or weaknesses (Mounce 1977: 92).

The light shining from the torches of the lampstands suggests life in the churches (cf. Barclay 1957: 26). Ephesus is currently not shining the light of love, even though their works are good. Christ has each torch in his hand, suggesting his control and protection of life in the churches. If no light [or life] is shining through it means the church is spiritually dead. If the church is removed from its place, it loses its life in the face of God.

If the church adheres to the message and believers repent, they are promised to eat from the tree of life (Rev 2:7). This of course is a symbol going back to the narrative of Paradise [as part of the Creation-narratives] in Genesis 2 (cf. Gen 2:9). The mentioning of Paradise (Rev 2:7c) confirms that the author is thinking about the Genesis-tradition (Aune 1997: 154). In early Judaism paradise was equalled to heaven (cf. 2 En 8:1). However, Revelation 22:2 suggests that paradise [including the tree of life] will be situated on the "new earth" (Aune 1997: 154). This is also the intention of the vision of Ezekiel 47, the text from which John drew the vision of Revelation 22. Starke (1996: 20) is of the opinion that both the vision of Ezekiel and that of John refer to a heavenly kingdom, and not a new earthly realm. Ezekiel in his vision addressed the future restoration of the messianic kingdom (Wong 1998: 212). This life in the new kingdom is the life in eternity, and is available to all believers. In his article Wong (1998: 221-226) gives twelve reasons why the tree is meant for all believers and not just an elected few.

The tree of life is a symbol of the eternal life man longed for after the fall into sin³¹². After the Fall God chased Adam and Eve from Paradise to prevent them from eating

³¹² Aune (1997: 152-153) mentions that there were two primary traditions regarding the tree of life in Judaism. The first was that of participation in the heavenly paradise [a restoration of the intention at Creation]. This tradition occurred quite often in apocalyptic literature with regard to the promise of new life after the judgment (1 En 24:4-25:6; Test Levi 18:11; [Mounce 1977: 90]). It is also the most common interpretation amongst scholars (Wong 1998: 218). The second tradition used the tree of life

of the tree of life and thereby obtaining eternal life or immortality. This does not necessarily imply that man *lost* eternal life through sin, but simply that they lost the opportunity to life [cf. Chapter 2, 3.1]. Man was deprived from the beauty and fullness of the original creation. This could only be restored if the relationship with God has been restored, hence the New Testament interpretation that connected sin and death. Receiving access to the tree of life is a restoration of man's place in the new creation and therefore a restoration of life to man (Wong 1998: 219-220). That which came to stand between man and God is removed through the blood of Christ, realising the dream of a new world of never-ending life in the presence of God (Hughes 1990: 38). He gave his life so that man could have life again (1 John 4:9). In the words of Mounce (1977: 90)³¹³

“The Paradise of God in Revelation symbolizes the eschatological state in which God and man are restored to that perfect fellowship which existed before the entrance of sin into the world.”

This points to the important fact already discussed in Chapter 2, namely that life in the Bible is equal to a positive relationship with God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6]. The symbol of Paradise and the tree of life in Revelation 2:7 emphasises that this relationship has been restored in the new creation. But it has not been restored by man. The restoration came through the blood of the Lamb. He won the ultimate victory over Satan (Rev 12:11). And because the relationship has been restored, man can again live in relationship with God (Rev 21-22). This will be the “new life” in the “new creation”, i.e. life eternal.

The verb *νικᾶν* again takes on the meaning of a military victory, referring to the victory of Christ [Rev 12:11; cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4. (ii)]. Those who conquer [*τῶ νικῶντι*] are not people who attained the prize of life on their own. It rather refers to those that remained faithful to Christ until the end. The victory they won is analogous to the victory won by Christ on the cross (Mounce 1977: 90).

as a symbol for the “elect community” (Aune 1997: 153). In later Judaism a tradition also developed linking the tree of life to the Torah (Aune 1997: 154). There is also a tendency amongst some scholars to identify the tree of life with the cross of Christ [through a connection of the word *ξύλον* to both the tree and the cross (Wong 1998: 214)]. Starke (1996: 29) is a strong supporter of this view.

³¹³ Cf. also Wong (1998: 212).

In summary: Life in Ephesus is currently a weak, fainting torch. They are urged to urgently repent. What is promised to the believers in Ephesus is to partake in the fruits of eternal life if they repent and thereafter continue in their lives of faith. If they live now in a relationship with God, they will certainly inherit eternal life in God's new kingdom. However, if they don't, Christ will remove their lampstand from its place [i.e. they will lose their life in Christ].

1.1.2. Life in Smyrna: to live in the face of death

Amongst the cities of Asia Minor Smyrna was known as “a paradise of municipal vanity” (Hemer 1986: 57). Smyrna [today known as Izmir in Turkey], a strategic port city, was characteristically known for its beauty (Hemer 1986: 59). However, it also boasted a famous stadium, very good and straight roads, and a number of theatres and temples (Mounce 1977: 91; Groenewald 1986: 51). According to Barclay (1957: 31) it was one of the great centres of Caesar worship. It became an important centre for Christianity in the second century (Aune 1997: 160). The city is well known for the most famous martyr of the early church, Polycarp, who died in the second century when he was Bishop for Smyrna (Mounce 1977: 91).

a) Faithful unto death

As was the case with the letter to Ephesus, there are a number of textual variants suggested, but none of them critical to the text. Aune (1997: 157-158) also accepts the text of Aland & Aland (1993: 635) in each instance. Although, in verse 10, the negative clause μηδέν φοβοῦ [singular] does not agree with the following pronoun ἃ [plural] it is, according to Aune (1997: 157-158), probably the original.

Christ addresses the church in Smyrna as “the First and the Last, who was dead but is now alive” (Rev 2:8). For the church in Smyrna the good news is that they can overcome death just as Christ did [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 (ii)(b)]. Because He is alive they will also live, even if they have to face death in this life (Mounce 1977: 92). For a church living in the face of death the message of life even beyond martyrdom and death would be the encouragement they needed to stay faithful (Groenewald 1986: 52). Even “in death there is one with us who conquered death” (Barclay 1957: 40).

Smyrna is one of only two cities to which no negative message is sent [the other being Philadelphia]. To Smyrna nothing is said about their current status with regard to life and death. However, from the message of Christ it is evident that there is a living relationship with God and Christ. Smyrna can therefore be deemed a city that has spiritual life. This life is made very difficult through many tribulations that the congregation has to endure [cf. Barclay (1957: 40-44) for a discussion on all the possible difficulties that the congregation had to face].

In fact, they are warned of even more suffering. The suffering that they will have to face, will last *for ten days*. This is not a reference to an exact period of ten days, but “is used for an undefined but relatively short period of time” (Aune 1997: 166; cf. Charles 1920a: 58)³¹⁴. By using the aorist subjunctive verb *πειρασθήτε* the emphasis is put on the meaning that this will have for them, i.e. a testing of their faithfulness (Aune 1997: 166). The limitation put on the suffering confirms God’s control over the situation (Hughes 1990: 41-42). Believers are still safely in his hands, even though they might endure quite a lot.

Believers in Smyrna are exhorted to “be faithful unto death”. The word used for death is *θάνατος*. This probably implies physical death, in this case through martyrdom [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.4 (ii) for a discussion on the interpretation of *θάνατος*]. Coupled with the preposition *ἄρχι*, the implication for believers is that “the time of interim suffering is likely to terminate in actual death, not the mere threat of it” (Hemer 1986: 71). The death of Polycarp in the second century is a classic example of the suffering believers had to endure, in specifically Smyrna, and that the end thereof was nearly always death as a martyr (Mart Pol 17-19; [Aune 1997: 167]).

b) Receiving a crown of life

Believers in Smyrna should not let this threatening news put them off. They can take heart from the knowledge that Christ was also dead but is now alive (Rev 2:8). If they stay faithful unto death, they will receive *τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς* from the “living

³¹⁴ Hemer (1986: 69) notes that there are inscriptions from Sagalassus in Pisidia with similar expressions. This expression, coupled with a reference to stay faithful unto death, would then be familiar to the believers as language of the arena [a place where they could expect to be tested in their faith unto death (Hemer 1986: 70)]. Morris (1969: 64) is of opinion that it refers to the completion of suffering for believers.

One” (Rev 2:10d). Aune (1997: 167) calls the phrase “an appositive or epexegetical genitive”. The phrase then translates “the wreath consisting of life” (Zerwick, as referred to by Aune 1997: 167). Charles (1920a: 59) is of the opinion that the genitive phrase is possessive.

The word *στέφανος* is used three times in Revelation referring to a wreath (Rev 2:10; 3:11; 6:2; [Aune 1997: 167])³¹⁵. It is an imagery drawn from the world of athletics (Mounce 1977: 94). Revelation never uses *στέφανος* for a royal crown [the word used in those instances is always *διάδημα* (cf. Rev 12:13; 13:1; 19:12)]. The word *στέφανος* is used frequently in the New Testament to allude to the victorious prize of an eternal reward [usually eternal life] for the faithful believer (1 Cor 9:25; 2 Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12; 1 Pet 5:4; [Hemer 1986: 72]). The victory wreath compliments the fact that Christ has won the victory and that believers share in that victory and therefore receives the victory crown (Rev 12:11). What believers share in, is the life of Christ, He who was dead but is now alive (Rev 2:8). The *στέφανος τῆς ζωῆς* is thus a metaphor for the “reward” of eternal life.

The crown of life was often closely connected to martyrdom (Aune 1997: 167). The interesting fact about this crown of life is that it is bestowed upon the person posthumously [implied message of the text: only if you stay faithful unto death do you qualify for the crown of life], something which was never done in athletics (Aune 1997: 167). In the Martyrdom of Polycarp it is said about Polycarp that he “was wreathed with the wreath of immortality” (Mart Pol 17:1; [Aune 1997: 167]). This, of course, referred to his position after his martyrdom.

This text shows the strong contrast in Revelation between physical life and death on the one hand or eternal life and death on the other hand. In the end it is not the life [or death] in this world that matters. What matters is to be faithful until the end [even unto physical death] so that one does not lose out on life in eternity (Morris 1969: 64).

³¹⁵ Cf. excursion by Aune (1997: 172-175) on the use of wreaths and crowns in ANE imagery (cf. also Hemer 1986: 72-75). Beasley-Murray (1981: 83) suggests the possibility of “a crown of light surrounding the head, to indicate the glory of the one on whom it rests” indicating believers will be crowned in glory in eternity.



The letter to Smyrna concludes with a comforting promise to those that persevere: they will not be affected by the second death. The use of the double negative οὐ μή “is the strongest way of negating a fut. event or condition” (Aune 1997: 158). It is thus given as a standing assurance to believers that their position with regard to God and Christ will not be hurt by any form of suffering or death in this world.

The phrase τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου appears in Revelation four times (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8)³¹⁶. In rabbinic literature the “second death” refers to the death of the wicked in the next aeon [i.e. the death in judgment]. The phrase is commonly found in the Targums (cf. Tg Isa 65:15; [Mounce 1977: 94; Aune 1997: 168]). Believers are promised that they would not share in the fate of the wicked if they persevere in faith. They will most certainly inherit the crown of life. The promise is founded in the resurrection of the One who was dead but is now alive, and who holds the keys to Death and Hades in his hands (Rev 1:18).

In summary: Believers in Smyrna are commended for their faith, even in the face of death. They seemingly have endured a lot for Christ, and will endure more in the future. They must just hold on to their faith throughout the suffering. If they persevere even unto death, they will surely receive eternal life, which is a life where death will have no power over them anymore. This promise comes from Christ who has overcome death and is now the forever living (Rev 2:8).

1.1.3. Life in Pergamum: a tale of two lives

The context and situation in the city of Pergamum has already been discussed in Chapter 8 and will not be repeated here [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.1. (i)]. There are a lot of minor textual variants [some of them well attested] for the text of Revelation 2:12-17 (Aland & Aland 1993: 635-636). However, none of them will affect the message in a material way (cf. Aune 1997: 177-179). One can therefore work with the text of Aland & Aland.

³¹⁶ The understanding of the second death will be discussed in 2.5 below.



a) Having life, but...

The church in Pergamum is addressed by “the One with the sharp two-edged sword”. Groenewald (1986: 54) sees in this phrase an allusion to Isaiah 11:4, where the messianic interpretation of the text makes the Messiah the one who will judge the world in the last days. Nothing is said, however, in Isaiah 11:4 about the image of the two-edged sword. The Word of God is sometimes compared to a two-edged sword in the New Testament (cf. Eph 6:17; Heb 4:12; [Hughes 1990: 27]). It also appears in Revelation 19:15 and 21. A close parallel is found in Wisdom of Solomon 18:15-16:

“Thy all-powerful word leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of thy authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth”. (Translation by Bruce 1990: 112)

This designation serves to comfort believers with the knowledge that it is not the proconsul who has the final say over life and death (Mounce 1977: 96). He can maybe decide to end life in this world. But the ultimate power to decide over life and death lies in the hands of the Christ, not in the hands of an earthly judge (Groenewald 1986: 54).

The initial evaluation of life in the church in Pergamum is positive. They held on to their faith, just as was said about believers in Smyrna [cf. 1.1.2 above]. Even in the most testing circumstances [living in the face of Satan (verse 13a) and experiencing martyrdom (verse 13c)³¹⁷] they continued in their lives of faith.

Comparing this with what has been said above with regard to Smyrna, the admonition should have been the same: just hold on to your faith and you will earn the crown of life [cf. 1.1.2 above]. However, not all was well in Pergamum. There seems to be a contradiction in the lives of some of the believers in the church. This is evident in that the believers allowed for the infiltration of people “who hold the teaching of Balaam”. This is not necessarily a reference to a false doctrine being taught in the church. It alludes to Balaam’s advice to Balak in the Old Testament (Num 21-24; cf.

³¹⁷ For a discussion on martyrdom in Pergamum, cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.1.

25:1; 31:16) to use the Midianite women to beguile Israel into acting treacherously against Yahweh (Mounce 1977: 97). In this sense Balaam “became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies” (Mounce 1977: 98). By leading people astray, they are taken away from the life-giving relationship with Yahweh. In Pergamum some believers seemed to have gone the route of accommodation and compromise. They are probably the ones who “hold the teaching of Balaam” (Mounce 1977: 98).

b) Eating the wrong sacrifices

The compromise with Balaam of which these people are accused is “eating meat sacrificed to idols” and “fornication” (Rev 2:14c). This could be understood in a literal sense or as a metaphor. If taken literally the meat sacrificed to idols would probably refer to meat that was sold on the market place after it was sacrificed to idols in the temple. If this is the case, the fornication would then entail actual practices occurring at pagan festivals. Mounce (1977: 98) certainly thinks this was the case (cf. also Aune 1997: 186-188). However, in a symbolic sense, both these things could refer to idolatrous practices in general becoming part of the church (Morris 1969: 67; Beasley-Murray 1981: 85-86).

Participation in cultic meals acted as a unification rite between participants. In the Old Testament it was strictly forbidden for the people of Israel to eat meat that was sacrificed to idols (Ex 34:15). In the New Testament the eating of sacrificial meat was often associated with sexual promiscuity, as this was common in pagan festivals (Acts 15:29; 21:25; [Aune 1997: 193]).

There is thus a lot more at stake for believers than just the refusal to eat sacrificed meat. It communicated the message of becoming one with those that practice pagan rituals and worship (Aune 1997: 194). It was seen as drawing believers into an acceptance of that which the gentile world worshipped [a compromise as Balaam advised Balak to tempt the Israelites into]. This would effectively mean being cut off from the life-giving relationship with God [cf. above]. The warning to believers in Pergamum is to refrain [or repent in the case of those who have already compromised] from further association with people who want to lead them astray. If they don't adhere, Christ will “come quickly” in judgment (Mounce 1977: 99).

c) Promises of hidden manna and white stones

All is not lost for the people of Pergamum. As is the case with the other proclamations, they are promised eternal life if they don't compromise their faith in Christ (Rev 2:17). To the people in Pergamum two things are promised if they conquer [i.e. stay faithful to the end]: τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κρυμμένου [hidden manna] and ψῆφον λευκὴν [a white stone].

The manna alludes to the miraculous feeding of the people of Israel during the exodus (Ex 16:4-36). It is often called "food from heaven", recognising God's hand in the supply of the food (Neh 9:15; Ps 105:40; John 6:31-33, 50-51). There was an eschatological expectation that God would again supply manna in the future when his people are in the wilderness in the end times (cf. 2 Apoc Bar 29:8; [Aune 1997: 189]). That the manna is hidden probably goes back to a tradition that the pot of manna placed in the ark was taken by Jeremiah upon the destruction of the temple and hidden away in Mount Nebo (2 Macc 2:4-7; [Mounce 1977: 99]). However, there was also an eschatological tradition that understood the hidden manna as a hidden treasure [in heaven] that would descend from heaven during the messianic reign to feed the chosen people of Yahweh (Charles 1920a: 65; Mounce 1977: 99). In the context of Revelation this was probably meant to refer to the heavenly [hidden] manna of the Old Testament that would be restored [in heaven] through eternal life (Aune 1997: 189). The manna in heaven is "hidden" because only God can provide it (Groenewald 1986: 56). In this sense the heavenly manna becomes a symbol of eternal life.

The precise meaning of the white stone is not certain³¹⁸. Two significant interpretations are mentioned by Groenewald (1986: 56): Understanding the white stone as a sort of amulet with a divine name inscribed on it, or secondly a sort of access ticket [stones were sometimes given to members of groups to confirm right of access to gatherings (cf. Aune 1997: 190)]. In the case of the church in Pergamum it is possible to use any [or both] of these interpretations (Groenewald 1986: 56). It could be a protective amulet as well as an access ticket to eternal life.

³¹⁸ For an extensive discussion on the possible meanings of the white stone, cf. Hemer (1986: 96-104) and Aune (1997: 190).

The new name inscribed on the stone probably refers to the name of Christ (cf. also Rev 3:12; [Aune 1997: 190])³¹⁹. As the only entrance for the sheep into eternal life in heaven (John 10; cf. John 14:1-6) it is appropriate that his name is inscribed on the stone. The stone itself is white “in that it symbolized the triumph of his faith” (Mounce 1977: 100). To those who have triumphed through the blood of the Lamb, the stone of access to God’s kingdom will be presented.

In summary: Life in Pergamum is certainly a case of two lives in one body. On the one hand the church is alive. They seem to have a positive relationship with their Lord and have not forsaken their faith regardless of the sufferings they had to endure. On the other hand, however, they have allowed members within the church to compromise their faith without acting against them. This situation is threatening to the “real life” in Pergamum as it could draw them away from their life-giving relationship with Christ. It is important for them not to forsake their faith so that they can inherit the prize of eternal life.

1.1.4. Life in Thyatira: trying to live next to Jezebel

The context of the church in Thyatira has already been discussed in Chapter 8 when the death and judgment of Jezebel and her disciples was discussed [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.1 (i)]. It will therefore not be repeated here. There are no critical textual variants suggested for the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 636-637)³²⁰.

a) Going forward but struggling with Jezebel

The believers in Thyatira are addressed by the “Son of God” [the only time that this title is applied to Christ in Revelation {probably in an allusion to Ps 2:7}]. The expanded description He uses is “the One who has eyes like a flame of fire and his feet are like burnished brass” (Mounce 1977: 100). This emphasises Christ’s ability to see through anything, even the plans of Jezebel, [with his flaming eyes] with unmatched strength and splendour (Mounce 1977: 102; cf. Aune 1997: 201-202).

³¹⁹ Mounce (1977: 100) is of the opinion that the name could not be that of Christ, as his name could not be “new” to believers. However, this could refer to the “new” status of believers as saved people through the grace of God who sealed them for his kingdom (cf. Rev 7). In any case, the text also mentions that believers will know this “new” name. Christ will therefore not be an unknown factor for them.

³²⁰ Cf. Aune (1997: 196-199) for a detailed discussion on all the suggested variants.

The church in Thyatira seemed to have struggled with the same situation as the believers in Pergamum. On the one hand their works proclaimed their liveliness in relationship with Christ (Rev 2:19). They even lived in love, an aspect dearly missed in Ephesus (Mounce 1977: 102). In fact, their works [including love] were growing in stature (Rev 2:19b). In this sense Thyatira were far better off than Ephesus: they progressed in their lives of faith and love, whereas Ephesus slipped backwards, away from God (Morris 1969: 70).

However, just as was the case in Pergamum, the believers in Thyatira allowed people to influence the church into compromise-theology (Rev 2:20). The person involved is called Jezebel, a reference going back to the wife of king Ahab in Israel³²¹. Just as Jezebel lured Ahab [and Israel] away from a close relationship with God, so the Jezebel of Thyatira influenced people to follow her sinful practices (Groenewald 1986: 58). And just as in Pergamum the people in Thyatira stood to lose their life-giving relationship with Yahweh. In Revelation 2:25 believers are urged to hold on to what they already have (cf. Acts 15:28), so that they would not be overcome by this theology. They would then inherit the prize as conquerors together with all other believers. Believers don't need anything new, extra or special [and certainly no accommodating practices] to enter the new life as conquerors. They must just hold on to what they have, which is the conquering blood of Christ (Groenewald 1986: 60).

b) The morning star for a king

A double promise comes to the believer who conquers [i.e. those who hold on to what they already have until the end and not give in to the misleading teachings of Jezebel]. The first is a promise of sharing in the messianic power in the *eschaton*, which is a regular feature in Jewish eschatology [taken over by Christianity (cf. Ps Sol 17:23b-24a; Matt 11:28; 1 Cor 6:3; Rev 5:10)]. The promise is a free rendering of the LXX text of Psalm 2:8-9 (Mounce 1977: 106; cf. Aune 1997: 209)³²². The phrase καὶ ποιμανεῖ αὐτοὺς ἐν ῥάβδῳ σιδηρᾷ suggests an authoritative control, even including judgment (Mounce 1977: 106; Groenewald 1986: 60-61). Although the verb ποιμανεῖ could mean “to shepherd” in a gentle manner, here it certainly has the

³²¹ On whom Jezebel might have represented, cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.1.

³²² Psalm 2 is alluded to often in the New Testament. Particularly verse 7 was understood as a messianic text (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Just Dial 61:6; 88:8; 122:6; [Aune 1997:210]).

meaning of strong authority³²³. The manner of “shepherding” described in the end of the verse confirms this authoritative and judgmental power. This suggests in the first place that believers will have life in the *eschaton* [or else they won’t be able to share in his power], and secondly that in judgment they will share in the decision over life and death. Beasley-Murray (1981: 93) is of the opinion that both interpretations are possible.

The second promise is that believers will receive the morning star (Rev 2:28). The morning star refers to the planet Venus [the actual morning star in astrology]. In ancient times it was understood as the sign of the herald of a new day, as it appears before dawn (Aune 1997: 212). As Christ calls Himself the bright morning star (cf. Rev 22:16) it could mean that the believers effectively receive Christ if they conquer at the end (Aune 1997: 212). As Morris (1969: 75) puts it: “The ultimate reward for the Christian is to be with his Lord”. Groenewald (1986: 61) understands the morning star as a reference to royalty and links it to the iron rod and power of the first promise. Beasley-Murray (1981: 93-94) sees this as a double assurance that believers will share in the glory of Christ in the *eschaton*. Morris (1969: 74-75) mentions that the morning star [as the sign of the dawn of the new day] could refer to the resurrection of the believer in the new life, which is certainly a possibility if compared to the other proclamations that end with a promise of the new life to the believers who conquer.

In summary: Life in Thyatira has been affected strongly by the presence of Jezebel. She misled some of the believers in the church to allow and accept compromises in the church. By doing this she has taken believers’ attention away from Christ as the focal point of salvation and faith. But God, with his eyes flaming and his powerful feet of bronze, can see through the plans of Jezebel. Believers are urged to stay faithful to the end. If they do, they will receive the power with Christ to judge and reign over people like Jezebel. They will also be given the morning star, probably a reference to their resurrection into this new reign with Christ. He will destroy Jezebel, but He will save the conquering believer.

³²³ Groenewald (1986: 60) reminds us that a shepherd is actually a very authoritative and autocratic person in his management of the sheep.



1.1.5. Life in Sardis: the living dead

Sardis was the capital of the kingdom of Lydia and a very wealthy city at the time of the writing of Revelation. Its central location [it was situated at the centre of a knot of five major roads] made it one of the most vibrant trade cities of the world in its time (Barclay 1957: 80; cf. also 83-84). The wealth of Sardis is evident from jewellery found in the local cemeteries (Mounce 1977: 109). Even the Jewish community in Sardis were quite wealthy. Proof of this was found in the discovery of the remains of a large synagogue in Sardis (Aune 1997: 218-219).

In Sardis emperor worship was not a central thing. The biggest problem for believers seemed to have been the fact that life in Sardis was just too easy-going [i.e. for everyone, believer and non-believer alike]. There is evidence that Jews and Christians in the city sought to accommodate themselves to their pagan environment, which enabled a comfortable integration in life in the city for all of them. This is probably where the expression “soiled their garments” in Revelation 3:4 stems from (Hemer 1986: 137). People just got carried away by the luxury, decadence, and pleasurable environment that were created in Sardis.

Although there are a number of textual variants suggested for Revelation 3:1-6, none of them are critical to the understanding of the text as presented. One can therefore work with the text of Aland & Aland (1993: 637-638) as presented³²⁴.

a) Life is more than just a word

The congregation in Sardis is addressed by the One “who has the seven spirits and the seven stars” (Rev 3:1). On whom the “seven spirits” might represent, there is difference of opinion. Aune (1997: 219) is of the opinion that they represent the seven archangels (cf. Mounce 1977: 110). From this Aune (1997: 219) reads the *καὶ* epexegetically, translating it with “namely”. He thereby sees the spirits as a “heavenly reality” and the stars as an “earthly reality” referring to the same group. Morris (1969: 75) thinks of the “seven spirits” as a reference to the Holy Spirit (cf. also Groenewald 1986: 62)³²⁵. According to contemporary Judaism the two main functions of the Spirit are “the inspiration to prophecy and the quickening of the

³²⁴ Cf. Aune (1997: 215-217) for a detailed discussion on the textual variants.

³²⁵ Beasley-Murray (1981: 94) talks about “the Holy Spirit sent in his fullness to the seven churches”.

dead” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 94-95). The last mentioned task could certainly be applied to the church in Sardis.

The church in Sardis was probably sheltered from persecution more than any of the other congregations. Its seeking accommodation in the laid-back pagan environment made life even easier for them. But because of this laid-back and sheltered environment the church probably became too laid-back itself. They still looked vibrant and alive from the outside, but from within they were dead (cf. 2 Tim 3:5). This is in total contrast to Paul’s words to the Corinthians (2 Cor 6:9) that believers are “as dying, and, behold, we live” (Morris 1969: 75-76). For Paul [constantly having to face death] God’s power triumphs over death. But then, he was constantly dying and living, dying of the self and living more and more the new life of Christ in him (Martin 1986: 181-182).

The situation of the church in Sardis is probably the most direct reference in Revelation explaining the difference between life and death, as John understands it. The church had a good reputation [ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς] as a living church, i.e. from a worldly perspective the church was alive. But this life was nothing more than a showcase to the outside world. From a spiritual point of view the church was dead. Materially and physically the church might have been active, but in things that really mattered they are dead (Barclay 1957: 87). Osborne (2002: 174) sees in the switch from a verb [ζῆς] to a noun [νεκρός] an explanatory contrast: believers in Sardis “acted” alive, but had nothing but death. This underlines the clear distinction being made between physical life and death and spiritual life and death in Revelation. The conclusion is: one can be dead even whilst you are still physically alive in this world. Although the word νεκρός used in a figurative sense means a person that is inactive (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 536), this does not necessarily mean that nothing happened in Sardis. The church did look alive [i.e. there must have been something going on to create that idea]. But it was only an outside image (Hughes 1990: 53). In the works of the Spirit that portrays real life, they were found to be dead.

b) Repent and find life again

That they are not entirely dead is evident from the following verse where they are urged to strengthen that which has remained of their spiritual lives (Rev 3:2).



Although the church in general could be deemed dead, there were still some who held on in faith (Rev 3:4). For those who are currently dead [as the prodigal son was called dead whilst he was away from the father's house – Luke 15:22], there is still the hope of restoration of life. As long as there is physical life there is always the hope that spiritual life could be regained. The important step required to get back to this life is to repent (Rev 3:3a). This is also the route that the prodigal son took. And when he returned in repentance he was immediately and unconditionally “restored to life” by the father (Luke 15; [Groenewald 1973: 185-186; cf. Nielsen 1990: 66-67]).

Those who still have life are called people “who have not soiled their clothes”³²⁶. The clothes refer to a person's “moral and spiritual condition” (Aune 1997: 222). The dirt on the clothes is generally understood as a reference to sins. Having dirty clothes made a person unworthy of standing in front of God. In Revelation 3:1-6 it could refer to the compromises with the pagan world, resulting in the church's image being blemished by worldly standards. The image could be an allusion to Zechariah 3. In Zechariah 3:1-5 Joshua stands before the Lord with dirty clothes, with Satan claiming his unworthiness to be there. But then God in his grace restores Joshua's status by dressing him in clean clothes.

Looking at the symbol of clothes in this sense, it becomes a metaphor for life or death. Dirty clothing denotes death, while clean [and especially white] clothing denotes spiritual holiness (Beasley-Murray 1981: 97). That is why every believer wears white clothes in the new kingdom (Rev 7:9). Again, as with Joshua, the only reason why the clothes are white, is because God graciously cleansed it for them “in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). Life therefore comes through the willingness to let one's clothes be cleansed by the victorious blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 12:11).

c) A promise of white garments

The believers who have not soiled their garments will “walk with Christ” (Rev 3:4b). This is an indication of a very close relationship with God and Christ (Aune 1997: 222). Enoch also walked with God, indicating his very close relationship with God, in fact so close that he never died physically (Gen 5:22-24). This emphasises the strong

³²⁶ Translation as by Aune (1997: 222).

bond between life and a relationship with God. “Real life” is only possible within a living relationship with God and Christ [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6].

The promise of life by wearing white clothes is taken a step further in Revelation 3:5. Those who conquer are promised white garments. Traditionally white garments were associated with a heavenly reward for the righteous dead (cf. Aune 1997: 223). It is thus a promise of [new] eternal life that is bestowed upon the faithful believers in Revelation 3:5. If they wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb, they will have white clothes in eternity (Charles 1920a: 82).

This is further confirmed by the second promise given to believers: their names will not be deleted from the “Book of Life”. This phrase occurs six times in the Book of Revelation (Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27). The notion of a book containing the names of the elect of God [and also the erasure of someone’s name from that book] is widespread in the Old Testament and early Judaism (Aune 1997: 223). The idea stems from the ancient custom of keeping a register of all citizens of a kingdom (Beasley-Murray 1981: 98). The motif of the Book of Life is first mentioned in the book of Exodus (Ex 32:32-33; cf. Ps 69:28; 139:16; Dan 12:1; Mal 3:16; [Barclay 1957: 93; Mounce 1977: 113]). From this followed the interpretation in early Judaism and Christianity, which linked the Book of Life to “a citizen-roll of the heavenly kingdom” (Hemer 1986: 148). In the New Testament the βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς refers to eternal destiny and citizenship, not that of the world (Sweet 1990: 100).

The primary scene for the use of the Book of Life was the eschatological judgment, where God is portrayed sitting on his throne in the heavenly kingdom (Dan 7:9-10; 1 En 47:3; 90:20; [Aune 1997: 223]). The Book of Life thus becomes the determining factor for entrance into the eternal kingdom [i.e. eternal life]. Having one’s name erased from the Book of Life means that a person “has no place among those who have received eternal life” (Hughes 1990: 57). He or she is to be declared dead (Beasley-Murray 1981: 98). This might look as if having one’s name in the Book of Life is dependent on one’s own faith and ability (cf. Aune 1997: 223). However, as Hughes (1990: 57) puts it: “Such a conception could only be conducive to insecurity on the part of God’s people”. A person can never deserve to have his or her name written in the Book of Life. The Lamb of God [i.e. the Son of Man amongst the



lampstands – Rev 1:12-20] decides on whose names are written in the Book of Life. “I give them eternal life...and no one shall snatch them out of my hand” Jesus said in John 10:28 (Hughes 1990: 57). Everybody who has washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb will have their names written into the Book of Life (Groenewald 1986: 141). That God can remove one’s name from the Book of Life is a metaphor for eternal judgment (1 En 108:3; [Aune 1997: 224])³²⁷.

That Christ promises to confess the names of true believers before the Father [the third promise to those who conquer] enhances the promise of eternal life. It reminds of the words of Jesus in Matthew 10:32 that he will acknowledge everyone before the Father who is not afraid to acknowledge Him before men (Mounce 1977: 114). Those who do not forsake their faith in this life can be sure of eternal life. The challenge for believers in Sardis is to ensure that they do not falter and if they did, to wake up and repent, lest they lose the life that Christ has given them.

In summary: The proclamation to the church in Sardis is about a decision on life and death. A very clear distinction is drawn between physical existence and eternal life for believers. From this proclamation one can see most clearly that physical aliveness doesn’t necessarily mean eternal aliveness. The problem for believers in Sardis is that they only seem to be alive on the surface. Underneath the surface very little is happening, prompting Christ to call them spiritually dead. The urgent call to believers is to wake up and return to “real life” lest their names be erased from the Book of Life [i.e. before they lose their place amongst those who have received eternal life through the blood of Christ]. However, all is not lost. For the living dead in Sardis there is hope, as Barclay (1957: 93) puts it: “While life remains, there is still time for faith to be awakened, and for the dead heart to come alive”.

1.1.6. Life in Philadelphia: hanging on in faith

The town of Philadelphia was a strategic border town, lying on the border of three countries, namely Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia (Barclay 1957: 94). It was a city of commercial importance. The imperial post route from Troas to Rome ran through the

³²⁷ The basis for this could be derived from the ancient use [in Athens specifically] of deleting a person’s name [who has been condemned to death] from the register of citizens before he or she was executed for his or her crime. The verb used to describe this action is the same as is used here: ἐξαλείφω (Aune 1997: 225).

town. Philadelphia earned itself the appropriate name of the “gateway to the East” due to its strategic location (Mounce 1977: 114-115). It was also a famous centre for heathen worship. The principal god was the god of wine, Dionysius, which could be expected, taking into consideration the fertile soil of the town and its surrounding land (Barclay 1957: 98). Although little evidence exist with regard to a Jewish community, Revelation 3:9 implies that there was some sort of Judaic influence coming into the town (Hemer 1986: 160).

There are quite a number of variants suggested for the text of Revelation 3:7-13. However, none of the variants have sufficient support to warrant a change to the text of Aland & Aland (1993: 638)³²⁸.

a) Greetings from the One who has the key

Christ is introduced to believers in Philadelphia as the one who has the key of David (Rev 3:7). This firstly emphasises Christ’s complete control [absolute power] over all (Mounce 1977: 116; Aune 1997: 235). As the Davidic Messiah He has ultimate control over who enters the kingdom of heaven. The phrase “the key of David” comes from Isaiah 22:15-22 where it is said that Eliakim son of Hilkiah will have the key of David and thereby have the power to decide who might and might not enter (cf. specifically Isa 22:21-22; [Snijders 1985: 221]). This “right of admission” in Revelation becomes more clear when one reads the name Δαυίδ as an objective genitive. It should then translate “the key *to* David”, i.e. the key to the Davidic kingdom (Aune 1997: 235)³²⁹. The Davidic kingdom here refers to the New Jerusalem (Charles 1920a: 86; Morris 1969: 78).

Therefore: Christ has control of the keys to the eschatological future [cf. Hemer (1986: 161-162) who thinks differently on this], just as He has control over the key to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). This already brings comfort to believers that have probably been shut out from the local synagogue (Groenewald 1986: 65). Even if this happens they should not despair, because the most important key, the one giving

³²⁸ Cf. Aune (1997: 228-233) for a detailed discussion on all the variants for this text.

³²⁹ One can also recall the words of Jesus to Peter about the keys to the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19). Snijders (1985: 221), however, is of the opinion that Matthew 16:19 is not as much related to Isaiah 22:22 than is the case with Revelation 3:7 [cf. however Hughes (1990: 58) who prefers “the key of David”, thereby confirming Christ’s Davidic descent as acknowledgment of Him being the true Messiah].

access to heaven, is in the hands of the true and holy One, Christ the Lamb (cf. Rev 3:7a). This is essentially a promise of participation in eternal life in the presence of God in the future, even though they might be shut out from participation to synagogue worship in the present (Beasley-Murray 1981: 100). The fact that Christ has set before believers “an open door” (Rev 3:8) is a promise that they already have access to eternal life in the new eschatological kingdom³³⁰. They must just make sure that no one takes away their crown of life (Rev 3:11).

b) A pillar of strength with a threefold name

For the believers that conquer [i.e. stay faithful to the end] a twofold promise is given. Firstly they will be made pillars in the temple of God. This has a twofold message of comfort: firstly it signifies stability [the stability and strength of a pillar, which is a familiar metaphor in the New Testament – cf. Gal 2:9; 1 Tim 3:15], and secondly it is a metaphor for permanence. The last mentioned interpretation is given further emphasis with the following phrase “and he will never leave it”. It is thus a “metaphor for eschatological salvation” (Aune 1997: 241) that is given. The Book of Enoch uses the metaphor of pillars in a description of the eschatological New Jerusalem (1 En 90:28-29; [Aune 1997: 241]). To the believer who conquers is therefore promised eternal life with the emphasis on the eternity of thereof³³¹.

The second promise is that a threefold name will be written onto the conquering believer³³². The symbol of a name being written upon the believer is a metaphor for divine ownership, and that the one inscribed as such has been dedicated to God (Aune 1997: 242). The text could allude to Exodus 28:36-38 where Moses is instructed to write the inscription “Holy to the Lord” on a gold plate, which was to be mounted on the front of Aaron’s headdress, signifying Aaron’s dedication to Yahweh as the high

³³⁰ Charles (1920a: 87) reads into the phrase “open door” the opportunity for evangelisation, in line with the interpretation by Paul of the phrase (1 Cor 16:9; 2 Cor 2:12; Col 4:3). However, as Aune (1997: 236) concludes, “the fact that missionary activity is never mentioned elsewhere in Revelation and also that such an emphasis does not fit the context makes this meaning doubtful.” The interpretation should therefore be eschatological, which lies at the background of most of Revelation.

³³¹ It is not necessary to question the contrast of pillars in the heavenly temple here with the reference in Revelation 21:22 that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem. John’s use of symbolism and apocalyptic imagery allows for fluidity in the use of metaphors and language (Mounce 1977: 121).

³³² There are some scholars who are of the opinion that the name is written on the pillar rather than on the believer (cf. Charles 1920a: 91; Groenewald 1986: 67). However, taking into account the nature of the promise [i.e. life], compared to the sealing of believers in Revelation 7:3 [cf. Rev 14:1] it is almost certainly the believer that receives the name (Charles 1920a: 91-92).

priest of Yahweh (Aune 1997: 242). In Revelation 7:3 the faithful servants of God are sealed, the form of which in Revelation 14:1 is identified as “the name of the Lamb and of his Father” (Mounce 1977: 121). Belonging to God is a promise that ensures protection and, more important, future life for believers. This becomes particularly clear in Revelation 7:9 when, after John heard about the 144 000 being saved, he sees the innumerable multitude in the midst of the Lamb in heaven, confirming this liveliness and protection [and of course ownership].

The “name of the city of God” [i.e. traditionally Jerusalem, or in this case the New Jerusalem] being written onto believers signifies the authenticity of their citizenship of the Kingdom of Heaven (Hughes 1990: 62). Therefore: believers are not just promised life, but also a new home that gives meaning to this new life. It confirms the promise of life [ownership] given by the writing of the name of God on the believer. The phrase is parallel to that of Revelation 21:2 and 10. According to Aune (1997: 243) it could have been taken from there, as Revelation 21 derives from an earlier edition of the text than Revelation 3.

Finally believers in Philadelphia are promised that the name of Christ will be written upon them [“my own new name” – remembering that it is the exalted Christ that is addressing the believers]. This refers to the “seal of salvation” brought about by the blood of Christ (Hughes 1990: 63). In biblical tradition the bestowal of a new name generally implies a change of status of a city or nation (cf. Isa 1:26; 60:14; 65:15; Zech 8:3) or a change of condition or status of an individual (cf. Gen 17:5, 17; 32:27-28; 41:45; Dan 1:7). In this sense believers are promised a change of status from dead to alive, since God has washed them in the Blood of the Lamb. It is not entirely clear what this “new name” of Christ was. In early Christianity the new name [of Isaiah 62:2 and 65:15] was thought to be that of “Christian” (Aune 1997: 244). Therefore: the third name is again a promise of life bestowed upon believers.

In summary: Apart from Smyrna, the church in Philadelphia is the only other congregation to whom no negative message is sent. Believers are only urged to hold on to what they already have, so that they can receive the prize as conquerors in the end. The message of hope comes from the “One who has the key of David”, which is already comforting news to believers. Christ promises that He has control over access

to the new heaven and earth and will open a door for them when they conquer (cf. Rev 1:18). The promise is confirmed in the closing of the letter when believers are given the assurance that God has sealed them by writing his name upon them [i.e. claimed them as His own], the name of the New Jerusalem [i.e. giving them citizenship of this new world] and the name of Christ [i.e. confirming their salvation through the blood of the Lamb]. Believers in Philadelphia can be rest assured that they have eternal life, which God has given to them through the salvation of Christ [cf. Chapter 7 on the salvation won by Christ].

1.1.7. Life in Laodicea: the in-between people

Laodicea was a prosperous town that controlled trade flowing down the river valley towards the coast (Barclay 1957: 108). It was one of the greatest cities within the Lycus valley (Hemer 1986: 178). By the first century AD it was the wealthiest city in all of Phrygia (Mounce 1977: 123). So great was the wealth of Laodicea that, after an earthquake in 60AD, the town was rebuilt without any imperial financial assistance (Aune 1997: 249). It had an influential Jewish community, but they were closely assimilated to the pagan society of the valley (Hemer 1986: 208). The Christian communities in Laodicea and Colossae were closely connected, as is evident from Paul's letter to the Colossians (Col 2:1; 4:13, 15, 16 [x2]). Paul seemingly never visited any of the two cities. His message was probably taken there by Epaphras (cf. Col 1:6-7; 4:12-13; [Aune 1997: 249-250]).

A number of variant readings exist for the text of Revelation 3:14-22 (Aland & Aland 1993: 639). The strongest variant is for the omission of *καὶ* in verse 20. However, according to Aune (1997: 247) the *καὶ* "introduces the apodosis of a conditional sentence in such a way that it must be construed as a Hebraism corresponding to the *waw*-consecutive in Heb." Aune (1997: 247) therefore regards the insertion of *καὶ* as the preferred [and probably original] reading.

a) The true and faithful, the Amen

That Christ addresses the congregation as *ὁ ἀμῆν* is significant. It is used as a title elsewhere in the Bible only in Isaiah 65:16, where it is said of God. Christ is therefore put on the same level as God by John (Aune 1997: 255; [cf. Chapter 7, point 1 for a discussion on the high Christology of Rev]). The word *ἀμῆν* can be translated

with “truly” and serves as a strong affirmation of something that was said or promised. The following title used for Christ ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, which comes from Revelation 1:5, confirms the interpretation of ὁ ἀμήν. In the words of Berger (as referred by Aune 1997: 255): “This compound title serves to define the essential meaning of ‘Amen’”. The third title ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ is probably taken from the hymn in Colossians 1:15 [which is understandable taking into account the close relationship between the two cities in the New Testament – cf. above (Aune 1997: 256)]. In early Christianity the title ἡ ἀρχὴ is often used for Christ (cf. Just Dial 61.1; 62.4; [Aune 1997: 256])³³³. The use of this threefold title for Christ emphasises “his supreme authority and power to execute the word of which he is the guarantor and the faithful and true witness” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 104).

b) Lukewarm Christians

The problem for believers in Laodicea was that they were neither hot nor cold. This metaphor has probably been drawn from the water supply of the city, which was lukewarm [in contrast to the water of Hierapolis {hot} and Colossae {cold} (Aune 1997: 257)]. Generally the image is interpreted by scholars as referring to the spiritual well being of the people [i.e. hot for spiritual liveliness and cold for spiritual death]. However, as Rudwick & Green (1957: 176) mentions, this distinction was hardly used in the ancient world. The metaphor is rather referring to the fact that the church in Laodicea “was providing neither refreshment for the spiritually weary, nor healing for the spiritually sick”. The church was therefore spiritually useless (Rudwick & Green 1957: 177-178)³³⁴. Whatever the reason, the message to the church in Laodicea is that they have become spiritually apathetic [in-between people]. They thought they still had all the good things required for spiritual well being, but they actually lacked spiritual life. The symbols used in Revelation 3:17-18 all came from Laodicea’s [i.e. the town] claim to fame: the city produced a good ointment for

³³³ Silberman (1963: 213-215) has argued that all these are not necessarily divine titles comparing Christ to God, but well-known epithets of wisdom in the Old Testament that, through Jewish speculation on Proverbs 8:22 and Genesis 1:1 was then applied by the Christian community onto Christ (cf. Aune 1997: 256-257).

³³⁴ Koester (2003: 411-416) looks for an answer in the dining practices and the fellowship connected to that, mentioning that there was no evidence of Laodicean water being the worst drinkable. He also connects it to the home setting rather than the public space, and then links it to Christ’s plea that He is knocking at the door (Rev 3:20).

eyes [yet believers can't see spiritually], they were rich materially [yet believers were spiritually poor], and they had a flourishing textile industry [yet believers were spiritually naked] (Mounce 1977: 126-127). The problem for Laodicea is that believers have neglected their relationship with Christ on behalf of worldly riches. If Christ "spits them from his mouth" it would spell death for them, as it would signal the breaking off of the relationship with Christ.

c) Even Laodicea has hope!

The message to Laodicea, however, also shows that spiritual death is not the end [i.e. as long as physical life still prevails]. A lifeline is thrown to the church: they must come to Christ to get the right ointment, buy "gold" from God and purchase "white garments" [as a metaphor of cleanliness and holiness³³⁵]. All these are only obtainable from Christ, and cannot be found in one's own strength [contrary to Laodicean believers' thought]. It is a gift being bestowed in grace [a possible allusion to Isa 55:1; (Groenewald 1986: 71; Mounce 1977: 127)]. That Christ tells them He punishes those whom He loves (Rev 3:19) indicates that believers must see this as yet another opportunity to repent and return to the grace of God³³⁶. It confirms the latter interpretation that God wants life, not death [cf. Chapters 3 and 4 where this change in focus is discussed]. The comfort in this message is that there is always hope as long as there is life [i.e. physical]. However, the accompanying warning is that one must use the chances to repent before it is too late [i.e. when physical death occurs].

Jesus goes further by reminding believers that He stands at the door and He knocks. Aune (1997: 260) calls this "an epiphany motif". It could be drawn from Jesus' saying in Luke 12:35-38, where it refers to Jesus' knocking at the door of the unbeliever [i.e. calling that person to faith]. By saying this to the church, the implication could be that, in their self-righteousness, they actually excluded the risen Christ from the church (Mounce 1977: 129). They were doing all the right things but without looking for a living relationship with Christ. If they open the door Christ will enter and join them in a festive meal. The meal could either be a fellowship meal

³³⁵ It is used quite often in this sense in Revelation (cf. Rev 3:4, 5; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13-14; 19:14; [Mounce 1977: 127]; cf. also 1.1.5 above).

³³⁶ Ramsay (as referred to by Mounce 1977: 127) is of the opinion that Revelation 3:19-22 is not directed at Laodicea but at all the churches. This doesn't really matter as all the letters were in any case probably read in all seven congregations.



[common in the ANE] or the eschatological meal in heaven (cf. Rev 19:9). It is not really necessary to choose between the two. The first interpretation could be linked to the opening of the door to fellowship with Christ now, while the second interpretation could refer to the prize of eternal life given to the conqueror in Christ (cf. Aune 1997: 250-254).

The promise to conquering believers in Laodicea is that they will reign with Christ on his throne (Rev 3:21). The motif of reigning with Christ occurs frequently in Revelation (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5), and is based in part on Daniel 7:18 and 27 (Aune 1997: 261). It is essentially a promise of life, for one can only reign if you are alive. Believers who hold onto their faith until the end will have life in the new aeon, where they will be given power to reign by Christ (cf. Rev 20:4, 6). “Jesus’ ‘victory’ was the basis of his throne, and the victory of the saints as they overcome the world and its evil is the basis of their throne” (Osborne 2002: 215).

The route to conquering is described to be similar than the victory won by Christ. It is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, but is also found in the Book of Enoch (cf. 1 En 45:3; 51:3; 55:4; [Mounce 1977: 130]). Again it is significant that the words of the Psalm are now put in the mouth of Christ [putting Him on the same level as God (Aune 1997: 262-263)]. However, believers cannot obtain the victory as Christ did. They can only share in the victory Christ has already won (cf. Rev 12:11). The infinitive [καθίσαι] following after δώσω implies that they were “granted” the privilege of sharing in this (Osborne 2002: 214).

In summary: The situation in Laodicea can best be summed up as that of spiritual death. It is the one congregation of which nothing positive is noted. Although they had everything going for them [i.e. is materially] they were spiritually dead. They lacked a living relationship with their Lord. However, in spite of that all is not lost. They can still repent. But to get back to life they must return to Christ’s grace. He alone can give them what they require to have real life. That Christ stands at the door and knocks signifies that He wants to give them another chance to have fellowship with Him. And if they repent and afterwards hold on to their faith, they will receive the prize of life, reigning with Christ in heaven. That they will be able to reign is by implication an indication that they will be alive.

1.1.8. Summary on life in the churches

- Life in the proclamations to the seven churches is dependent on the relationship with God. Where the relationship is not functioning the congregation is not deemed to be alive. The ethical life of the congregations is the evidence of this relationship [or lack thereof]. The importance of ethical living as a sign of the relationship with God is already evident in the Old Testament, specifically the Torah.
- It is clear that life is more than just physical [or even religious] activities. Of importance is spiritual life [how physical life is being lived] leading to eternal life. The proclamation to Smyrna clearly shows that physical life and death is not what matters, but life in relation to God, even up to the point of death. This becomes even clearer in the proclamation to Sardis, of whom it is said that they look alive, but is actually dead.
- The hope of life is present in all seven proclamations. Every proclamation is closed with a promise of life to the conquering believer. To conquer believers don't have to fight their own war. They just need to hold on to their faith in Christ. He has already won the victory on the cross [and through the grave]. Because He lives, they will live (cf. Rev 1:18).
- Nearly all the congregations lack "real life". It is only the congregations of Smyrna and Philadelphia of which nothing negative is said. They are only urged to hold on to what they already have. On the other side of the spectrum the church of Laodicea is the only one receiving a letter with no good news. Life in this church has seemingly already disappeared. However, in spite of this, even believers in Laodicea are given a chance to return to Christ and receive life.
- Many of the problems with regard to life are the result of the infiltration of false teachers [or rather teachers luring believers to compromise their faith]. This is the case at least in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis.
- The churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia [the only two not to receive a negative message] were seemingly the only places where believers really suffered persecution.

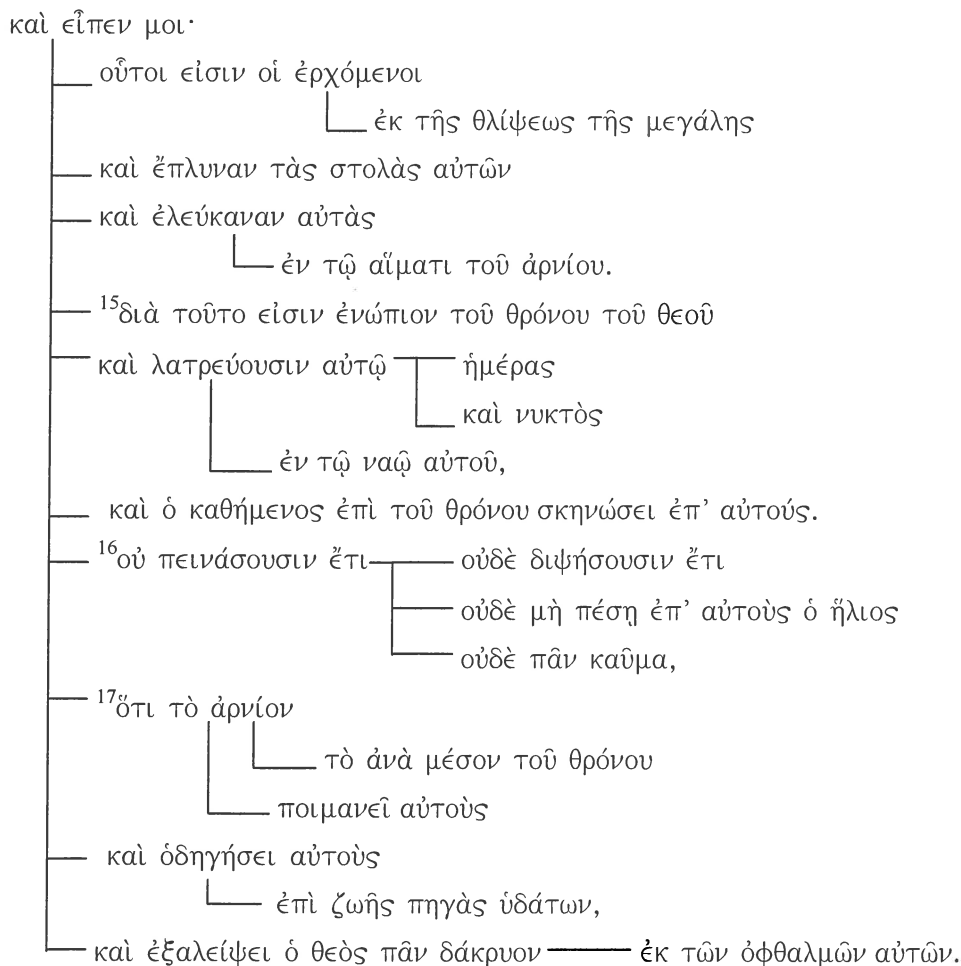
1.2. *Washing one's clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14, 17)*

The context of Revelation 7:9-17 has already been discussed in Chapter 6 [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2. (i)]. The discussion will therefore not be repeated here. It is, however, important to note the positioning of Revelation 7 as a strategically placed text to comfort believers. After the outcry of the pagan world, “Who is able to stand?” (Rev 6:17) comes the comforting answer that everyone sealed by God will be alive, even though they might die in this world (Pohl 1969: 212-213; Beasley-Murray 1981: 139).

Overall the text is well attested. The few variants that exist for verses 14 and 17 do not have strong support (Aland & Aland 1993: 646). It is thus possible to work with the text as presented [cf. Aune 1998a: 430-431 for a more detailed discussion on the suggested variants].

i) Washing clothes to stay alive

a) Syntactical analysis



In these three verses an angel describes the situation with regard to the innumerable multitude to John. Verse 14 describes their status and the origin thereof [i.e. by the blood of the Lamb], verse 15 describes their continuous participation in heavenly worship, while in verse 16-17 the consequences of life in the presence of God are explained. The nature of the text [eschatological] steers the interpretation of life in the direction of the eternal. This is the life all believers have been promised [cf. the seven proclamations].

b) A holy multitude

In his vision John sees an innumerable multitude before the throne [i.e. in heaven, as this is a continuation of the throne-room scene from Rev 4], all dressed in white robes. They had palms in their hands. The white robes [according to Morris (1969: 116) the word *στολὰς* refer to long white robes] generally signify purity [i.e. being cleansed from sin – white being representative of “supernatural brilliance beyond the earthly (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 944)] and holiness (cf. Rev 3:5; [Groenewald 1986: 98]). White was also the typical colour thought to be worn by heavenly figures, including God (Dan 7:9; 2 Macc 11:8; 1 En 14:20; Matt 17:2=Mark 9:3=Luke 9:29; Matt 28:3; John 20:12; Acts 1:10; [Aune 1998a: 468]). According to Morris (1969: 116) the white robes could signify justification [which is in any case the result of the cleansing towards purity and holiness]. Koester (2003: 424) also mentions that white garments did have the connotation of honour and holiness.

The palm fronds usually symbolise victory (1 Macc 13:51; 2 Macc 10:7). There are many examples from ancient history where palm fronds were used as a symbol of victory. Many references in early Judaism support this idea (Charles 1920a: 211). This is probably the motivation behind the crowd when they waved palm fronds during Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem (John 12:13)³³⁷. That the image of victory is in view is confirmed by the “victory outcry” of the multitude in heaven (Rev 7:10). Palm fronds could also be connected to festivities, although it was not always *palm fronds* that were used in the festival activities (cf. John 12:13; [Groenewald 1986: 98; Aune 1998a: 469]).

³³⁷ The corresponding texts of the Synoptic Gospels are significantly different, telling that the crowd cut of branches and strew on the path (Mark 11:8=Matt 21:8; [Aune 1998a: 469]).

In the light of the above the innumerable crowd could be deemed the victorious crowd of believers. The victory they have won is the victory over death and sin. As Mounce (1977: 172) puts it: “It is deliverance from everything that stands over and against the blessedness portrayed in verses 15-17...from sin and all its dire consequences”. It is clearly linked to the promise of hope and life to the victors in the proclamations of Revelation 2-3. “Coming through the tribulation to be victorious”, indicates that the multitudes that John sees are those that have been faithful to Christ even unto death.

The phrase οἱ ἐρχόμενοι ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης is articular, implying that readers are familiar with what John is talking about, i.e. he is referring to the final tribulation introducing the *eschaton*, first mentioned in Daniel 12:1 (Mounce 1977: 173; Aune 1998a: 473). The occurrence of a great tribulation signalling the start of the *eschaton* was a popular theme in Judaism and was later on taken over by Christianity (4 Ezra 13:16-19; 2 Apoc Bar 27:1-15; Mark 13:7-19; Matt 24:6-28; 1 Cor 7:26; Rev 3:21; [Aune 1998a: 473-474]). This tribulation will come over the whole world (cf. Rev 3:10).

It is not only the martyrs standing at the throne, but all believers who have conquered [cf. Excursion 3, Chapter 6 on the 144 000 (Groenewald 1986: 99); cf. Ford (1975: 127) who is of the opinion that “coming from the great tribulation signifies that they are indeed martyrs, or that they may have fought with Christ in a holy war”]. That they stand around the throne (Rev 7:9) and worship God (Rev 7:10) implies they are alive [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1. (iii)(b) on worship and life].

c) White garments and red blood

The reason for their victory is given in Revelation 3:10: “Victory belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb” [translation as by Aune (1998a: 470)]. It is not a victory of the believers [not even the blood of the martyrs (Hughes 1990: 98)] themselves but only a sharing in the victory won by Christ [cf. Chapter 7 on the victory by Christ, specifically 2.1.4 and 2.1.6]. Their clothes are white, as it has been washed in the blood of the Lamb. The cleansing effect of the blood of Christ to wash away sins is a familiar theme in the New Testament (cf. Heb 9:24; 1 John 1:7; 1 Pet 1:2; [Mounce 1977: 174]). The phrase *blood of Christ* “is metonymy for the death of Christ or more particularly the atoning death of Christ” (Aune 1998a: 475).

The second phrase “and made them white” is paradoxical. Logically it is not possible to wash garments in blood and get them white. However, this is symbolic language for the cleansing of sins. It probably alludes to Isaiah 1:18 where scarlet sins are to be made white by God (Aune 1998a: 475). The aorist tense of the verbs [ἐπλυναν and ἐλεύκεναν] indicates that these are once-off actions that already took place. The victory of Christ is final and completed and all believers [i.e. those that conquer] will share in it (Mounce 1977: 174). It is only because of this victory that believers are able to stand in front of the throne (Mounce 1977: 174; Aune 1998a: 475)

The eternal preservation and protection of believers are promised in Revelation 7:16. Whatever is lacking now will be provided for in eternity. It is a phrase drawn from Isaiah 49:10, where the same protection is promised to the people returning from exile to Jerusalem (Mounce 1977: 175). The promise is now directed at believers who are destined for the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21:6).

The reason why believers will not hunger or thirst anymore is given in Revelation 7:17: “The Lamb...will guide them to the springs of life” [translation as by Aune (1998a: 478)]. The phrase could be an allusion to Psalm 23:2, where God is the One guiding the Psalmist to the water of life and to the green pastures. The phrase ζῶης πηγᾶς ὑδάτων literally means “running water” or “flowing water” [i.e. water with life – cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.4 and footnote 34], which is in contrast to standing water (cf., LXX of Gen 26:19; Lev 14:5; Jer 2:13; Zech 14:8; [Aune 1998a: 478-479]).

The metaphors used in Revelation 7:14-17 [i.e. of “shepherd” and of “water of life”] have a lot in common with metaphors that Jesus applied onto Himself in the Gospel of John (cf. John 4:14; 6:35; 7:17-18; 10:1-30; [Groenewald 1986: 100; Aune 1998a: 478]). He is the source from whom living water flows. This living water, according to Brown (1966: 178-179), could refer to either [or both] the teaching or revelation of Jesus, or to his communication of the Spirit that is to come. According to Van der Watt (1986a: 174) it is the combination of Giver [i.e. Jesus] and gift [i.e. the Good News, the Gospel] that brings life to the Samaritan woman in John 4. However, in the New Jerusalem it is not the Gospel-message that would bring life, but the presence of

God in a life-giving relationship³³⁸. This should be seen in the light of Revelation 22:1 (cf. also Rev 22:17). There it is the throne of God [and of the Lamb] that is the source of the “river of life” (Hughes 1990: 101).

Believers who have stayed faithful to the salvation of the Lamb will therefore be led [by the Lamb] to the presence of God where they will always [i.e. in eternity] be able to have a living relationship with Him [i.e. they will have eternal life]. In the words of Mounce (1977: 176): “He directs the heavenly multitude to the fountain and source of life – that is, to the immediate presence of God”.

In the light of the troubles that might come over them as a result of the opening of the first four seals, believers are promised divine protection [by being sealed in Rev 7:3] and divine preservation in the presence of God in heaven [by being led to the springs of living water]. It is a promise of eternal life even if physical life is taken away from them (cf. Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 766). This promise contrasts [and overrides] the threat of Revelation 13:16-18 that people who do not have the 666 would be killed. Even if they are killed, they still live in the presence of God (Rev 14:1-5) because they are protected and have been sealed by God (Rev 7:3, 14-17).

ii) Summary

- Mounce (1977: 171) gives a good summary of the vision of Revelation 7:9-17: “Without doubt it is one of the most exalted portrayals of the heavenly state to be found anywhere in Scripture...that has caused the faithful of all ages to yearn for that final redemption.” And this is what Revelation 7:9-17 give: a glimpse on life in the presence of God in heaven.
- The believers in heaven are dressed in white because they have been justified [cleansed]. This justification does not come from them but is the result of the blood of Christ on the cross. They are alive because they are *standing* and they are *worshipping* God. The white robes are the reward to the faithful for not giving up their faith (Koester 2003: 424).
- Believers are led to the water of life by Christ. This refers to the message of redemption that they held onto (cf. John 4:14) and, specifically in

³³⁸ According to Mounce (1977: 176) the “inverted syntax of the expression in Greek lays emphasis on the word life”. Swete (1907: 105) even translates the phrase with “to Life’s water-springs”.

Revelation, to the “immediate presence of God” (Mounce 1977: 176). From this one can see that life exist when one is in the presence of God in a life-giving relationship with Him.

- Therefore: to believers suffering in the present the promise of hope is given that they will be protected by God and they will share in the gift of eternal life in the future.

1.3. The Book of Life: to be or not to be there (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27)

The Book of Life is mentioned six times in the Book of Revelation (Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; [cf. discussion in 1.1.5 above where the meaning and possible origination of the concept of the Book of Life is discussed in more detail]). It is yet another Old Testament motif brought in by the author (Aune 1997: 223). In the New Testament, and especially in the Book of Revelation, it is used in an eschatological sense, referring to the eternal destiny of believers (Sweet 1990: 100). Therefore, the “Book of Life” is a heavenly “register of the names of all those who belong to God” (Mounce 1977: 256), confirming their citizenship of the heavenly kingdom.

It is important to ensure that one’s name does appear in the Book of Life. Looking forward to the eschatological judgment, where the Book of Life has its primary function, it is the most important factor that will determine entrance into the kingdom. Only those people whose names appear in the Book of Life will be allowed into heaven on the Day of Judgment (Aune 1997: 223). Contrary to this, not having one’s name in the Book of Life is a metaphor for falling under eternal judgment (Aune 1997: 224).

1.3.1. Not being in the Book of Life (Rev 13:8; 17:8)

The context of Revelation 13:1-18 has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.5. (i)], as has the broad context of Revelation 17:1-19:10 [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.7. (ii)(a)]. Revelation 17:7-18 [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.7. above] as a subsection of this is an interpretation of the vision of the Woman seated on the scarlet beast (cf. Rev 17:1-2; [Aune 1998b: 916-917]). “The vision described in vv 3b-6a is designed to be allegorically interpreted in vv 7-18” (Aune 1998b: 916). With regard to the text, there are no major textual variants that could influence the understanding of the message in

a material way [for a discussion of the suggested variants, cf. Aune (1998a: 718) and Aune (1998b: 910)].

a) Syntactical analysis

Revelation 13:8

⁸καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτὸν
└─ πάντες οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
 └─ οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ
 └─ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς
 └─ τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου
 └─ ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου.

The sentence is an extended description of those that worship the beast. The phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου could be linked to either γέγραπται or to the Lamb. If compared to the parallel phrase of Revelation 17:8 preference is given to the first interpretation [cf. (c) below].

Revelation 17:8

⁸Τὸ θηρίον
└─ ὃ εἶδες
 └─ ἦν
 └─ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
 └─ καὶ μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου
 └─ καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει,
καὶ θαυμάσθησονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
└─ ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς
 └─ ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου,
 └─ βλέπόντων τὸ θηρίον
 └─ ὅτι ἦν
 └─ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
 └─ καὶ παρέσται.

Revelation 17:8 is an extended description of the beast associated with the harlot. The description is repeated in verse 11. It is a parody of the predication of God elsewhere in Revelation (cf. Rev 1:4, 8; Aune 1998b: 939). It is probably based on the Nero



redivivus legend (Aune 1998b: 940). Again it is mentioned that everybody whose name does not appear in the Book of Life, will be astonished when they see the beast.

b) Those whose names have not been written

The phrase οὐ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς appears in Revelation 13:8 and 17:8 [with nearly the same wording]. In Revelation 13:8 an extended version is given, by adding the phrase τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου. According to Charles (1920a: 353) this extension is a redactional addition by the author [cf. Aune (1998a: 747) who shares this view, specifically when he compares the phrase with the parallel phrase in Rev 17:8]. The negative formulation of the phrase was probably changed from the positive version of the saying “whose names were written in the Book of Life...” (Aune 1998a: 747).

The phrase “whose names are *not* written in the Book of Life” becomes a title in itself referring to the unbelieving world destined for eternal death in judgment. In Revelation 13:8 it serves to explain that not everybody will be carried away by the signs and wonders of the two beasts. Only those who are destined for death in eternity [with the beasts and the dragon – cf. Rev 19:20; 20:15; 21:8] will eagerly follow and worship the beasts (Hughes 1990: 149). The Book of Life is, according to Hughes (1990: 149), “the ultimate division of all mankind...the regenerate and unregenerate.”

That the Book of Life belongs to the Lamb [that was slain] confirms that salvation is only possible through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross [i.e. through the blood of the Lamb]. Through his sacrifice alone it is possible to have one’s name written into the Book of Life (Rev 5:9-10; [Mounce 1977: 256]). He is ultimately the One who decides whose names appear in the Book of Life, and it is done for everyone who “has washed his or her clothes in the blood of the Lamb” (cf. Rev 7:14). In this sense Jesus is again on the same level as God, who was generally accepted as the Owner of the Book of Life (Aune 1997: 223). It is seemingly possible that one’s name could be deleted from the Book of Life (cf. Rev 3:5). This is aimed at those people who compromised their faith in this life, which is what happened in Sardis.

c) The interpretation of ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου

Scholars differ on the interpretation of the phrase ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου. It could either be linked to “the Lamb that was slaughtered” (cf. Mounce 1977: 256; Caird 1966: 168; Sweet 1990: 212) or to γέγραπται (Groenewald 1986: 140-141; Aune 1998a: 746-747; Hughes 1990: 149). The first interpretation implies that “the death of Christ was a redemptive sacrifice decreed in the counsels of eternity” (Mounce 1977: 256). The implication is that God’s redemption plan was worked out even before creation. This interpretation has support from 1 Peter 1:18-20 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 214).

The second interpretation [linking it to γέγραπται] brings the theological doctrine of predestination to mind³³⁹. This interpretation has support from elsewhere in the New Testament in Matthew 25:34 and Ephesians 1:4. In this sense

“...it testifies to the absolute security of those whose names, well known to God, and chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Hughes 1990: 149).

Preference for the second interpretation comes from the parallel phrase in Revelation 17:8, where the phrase ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου follows directly on τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς, suggesting that it is the writing in the Book of Life that has been predestined. If the author is consistent in his interpretation of the phrase ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου [and if Rev 13:8 is a redactional change to Rev 17:8 as suggested above, one could take it as having a similar meaning] the reading of Revelation 13:8 should be done so as to link ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου to γέγραπται and not to τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου (Aune 1998a: 746-748; Hughes 1990: 149).

The identification of those “whose names are not written in the Book of Life” serves [positively] as a message of comfort for believers in Asia Minor. This message is supported by the knowledge that their [i.e. believers] places in heaven are secured [even from the creation of the world]. This is true, especially in the light of the following verse, reminding readers that as believers they are not protected necessarily

³³⁹ It is not the purpose of this thesis to discuss doctrinal issues of any kind. Therefore no in depth evaluation of the content and validity of the doctrine of predestination is done here.

from physical death [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.5.]. However, their life in eternity has been secured regardless of their physical lives. As Morris (1969: 169) puts it:

“John wants his little handful of persecuted Christians to see that the thing that matters is the sovereignty of God, not the power of evil. When a man’s name is written in the book of life he will not be forgotten. His place is secure.”

The phrase ὧν οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς has essentially the same message in Revelation 17:8 as in the parallel phrase in Revelation 13:8, i.e. all people whose names “are not written in the Book of Life” will be amazed about the wondrous recovery of the beast. The unbelieving world will not stand in awe of the all-encompassing power of God who has written peoples’ names from the beginning of creation in the Book of Life. They will instead wonder in awe “at the reappearance of the beast after his disappearance” (Morris 1969: 209).

It is important to note that the predestination implied here is not a deterministic view of the final destiny of people in eternity, i.e. some people were destined for eternal death and nothing they do will change that³⁴⁰. According to Sweet (1990: 212) predestination is always to be linked to human responsibility. From Revelation 3:5 it is clear that one’s position with regard to the Book of Life could change during one’s life on earth. In the Old Testament having one’s name blotted out from the Book of Life was sometimes a metaphor for “to die” (cf. Ex 32:32-33; Ps 69:27-28; Isa 4:3; [Aune 1997: 224]). This is exactly the interpretation thereof in Revelation.

In Revelation 17:8 John wants to emphasise the big difference between the followers of the Lamb and the followers of the beast (Mounce 1977: 313). Because this vision forms part of the judgment scene [that started with the casting of the seven bowls in Rev 16, but was already pre-empted from Rev 14] the reference to “those whose names are not written in the Book of Life” becomes a judgmental phrase, suggesting that these people are destined for eternal death just as the beast whom they worship is destined for eternal death (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:15; 21:8; cf. also 1.3.2. below).

³⁴⁰ Ringgren (1963: 52-54) mentions certain texts from Qumran suggesting that God not only knows men’s deeds, but even predestines them (cf. Ford 1975: 280).

It is clear from this that the Book of Life plays an important role in the decision between life and death, especially in the *eschaton*. Not being written in the “Book of Life” is a metaphor for being destined for eternal death. It is effectively a message [or decision] of life or death.

1.3.2. Judgment according to the Book of Life (Rev 20:12, 15; 21:27)

i) Context of Rev 20:1-15

Revelation 20:1-15 is a heavenly scene describing the eschatological judgment of God. The motifs found in Revelation 20:1-15 have seemingly been taken from Isaiah 24:21-22, a text that also describes the eschatological judgment³⁴¹ (Aune 1998b: 1078). In 1 Enoch 10:4-6 and 10:11-13 similar texts are found, probably influenced by Isaiah 24.

A new unit is introduced in Revelation 20:1 with *καὶ εἶδον* as the distinct text marker [the phrase *καὶ εἶδον* is used thrice more {in Rev 20:4; 20:11 and 20:12} to introduce smaller breaks within the text of Revelation 20:1-15]. The text of Revelation 20:1-15 is further separated from the preceding text by a change of scenery: the vision moves from the heavenly festival to the heavenly courtroom. A new unit start again in Revelation 21:8, which is introduced with *καὶ εἶδον* (Aune 1998b: 1113).

Aune (1998b: 1078-1081) divides Revelation 20:1-15 into two subsections, although in the detail analyses he distinguishes four smaller units. Within the broader context of Revelation 19:11-21:8 the subtext of Revelation 20:11-15 fits in as follows³⁴²:

19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God’s remaining foes
19:11-21	the Divine Warrior and his conquests
20:1-10	Final defeat of Satan
20:11-15	Vision of the final judgment
21:1-8	Transition to the new order

³⁴¹ Cf. Excursion 1 on the “Day of the Lord”; cf. also Chapter 2 for a discussion on the understanding of life and death in the Old Testament.

³⁴² Cf. Aune: 1998b on the detail structure of Revelation 17-22.

ii) The Book of Life in judgment

a) Syntactical analysis

¹²καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκρούς,
┌
├── τοὺς μεγάλους
├── καὶ τοὺς μικρούς,
└── ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου.

καὶ βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν,
καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοίχθη,
└── ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς,

καὶ ἐκρίθησαν οἱ νεκροὶ
┌
├── ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις
└── κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

¹³καὶ ἔδωκεν ἡ θάλασσα τοὺς νεκρούς
└── τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ

καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἔδωκαν τοὺς νεκρούς
└── τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς,

καὶ ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος
└── κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

¹⁴καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἐβλήθησαν
└── εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός.

οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος ἐστὶν,
└── ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός.

¹⁵καὶ εἴ τις οὐχ εὐρέθη ἐν τῇ βίβλῳ τῆς ζωῆς
┌
├── γεγραμμένος,
└── ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός.

Revelation 20:12-15 is a description of the final judgment. An important feature of the verses is the Book of Life. The phrase appears in nearly every verse [except for Rev 20:13]. As a judgment scene, the focus is not on physical life [or death] but on eternal life and who would enter therein.

b) The Book of Life

Revelation 20 narrates the final judgment of God, more specifically in the subtext of Revelation 20:11-15 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 298-299). God is pictured in splendour and glory and with almighty power on his throne, similar to the vision of Daniel 7

(Mounce 1977: 364). Morris (1969: 240) aptly calls it “an awe-inspiring judgment” scene. The people of the world are judged according to the inscriptions in the Book of Life. In 1 Enoch 47:3 a similar scene is portrayed with God sitting upon the throne and then the “books of the living” are opened before Him (Aune 1998b: 1102). This scene includes, according to Charles (1920b: 145) “*the final condemnation and destruction of all evil, together with the destruction of death itself*”³⁴³.

With regard to the text of Revelation 20:11-15 there are quite a few suggested variants. However, none of these variants have enough support to warrant changes to the text or influence the text in a significant manner (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 675). It is therefore possible to work with the text as presented³⁴⁴.

From Revelation 20:12 it is clear that the Book of Life has its primary use at the eschatological judgment as the register of heavenly citizenship [cf. 1.3.1. above]. However, in this eschatological judgment scene it is not just the Book of Life that is opened. John writes in verse 12b: καὶ βιβλία ἠνοίχθησαν [and books were opened]. The phrase alludes to Daniel 7:10, where it reads καὶ βίβλοι ἠνοίχθησαν (Aune 1998b: 1102).

In the Old Testament and in Jewish and early Christian literature [at least] three types of heavenly books are mentioned: i) The Book of Life, which is the heavenly register of citizenship of the righteous (1 En 108:3; Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; 1 Cl 53:4); ii) The Book of Deeds, which is the record of all the good and bad deeds of a person during his life on earth (1 En 89:61-64; 90:17; 104:7; 108:7)³⁴⁵; iii) The Book of Destiny in which the history of the world is recorded (Ps 56:8; 139:16; 1 En 81:2; 93:1-3; 106:19; 107:1). This book is sometimes referred to as the “heavenly tablets” (Aune 1997: 224).

The Book of Life and the Book of Deeds are distinguished in Revelation 20:12 (Aune 1997: 224). According to Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (1998: 114) the two books are also intertwined, “since a person’s actions are the basis of judgment” [i.e.

³⁴³ Italics as inserted by Charles (1920b: 145).

³⁴⁴ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1075-1076) for a detailed discussion of the suggested variants.

³⁴⁵ In Judaism the Book of Deeds is sometimes seen as two books: one for the deeds of the wicked and one for the deeds of the righteous (Aune 1998b: 1102).

determining the entrance of a person's name in the Book of Life]. The Book of Deeds is not mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15, but implied in the phrase *κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν*. From the Book of Deeds every person will be judged according to what he or she has done (Rev 20:12). "Everyone will be judged from the book of deeds, but those whose names appear in the book of life will enter the eternal city" (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 114). It leaves the impression that both books are used in judgment. However, this is not what the text says [cf. below]. Beasley-Murray (1981: 302) mentions that, "In judgment God's justice and grace are neither divorced from one another, nor set in conflict with each other, but are harmonious".

The Book of Life is seemingly not part of the books opened in verse 12a-b, as it is said that, "another book was opened, the Book of Life" (Morris 1969: 240; Aune 1998b: 1102). The direct mentioning of the Book of Life is, according to Aune (1998b: 1102), an interpolation inserted by the author into the judgment scene. The reason for this could be the important role of the Book of Life in the eschatological judgment scene.

The fact that people are judged "according to their deeds" implies that the deeds are the determining factor and not the Book of Life. This is a strong theme in the Old Testament (Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10), which is also picked up in the New Testament (Rom 2:6; 1 Pet 1:17). This is seemingly in contrast to the statement in Revelation 20:15 that the Book of Life is the determining factor for entrance into the heavenly kingdom (Aune 1998b: 1103). It is not man's deeds that count, but if one's clothes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14).

According to Farrer [as referred by Mounce (1977: 366)] the Book of Deeds is the last resort for those people whose names are not in the Book of Life. On the other hand, the Book of Deeds could only be the record of the deeds of the wicked [i.e. those whose names are not in the Book of Life]. This would imply that the Book of Deeds would only be used to judge the unrighteous, and not the people of God. The people of God will not be judged, as their names are in any case written into the Book of Life. With regard to the righteous Hughes (1990: 219) mentions:

“Those, indeed, whose names are written in the book of life are sinners and in themselves guilty before God. They belong, however, to the company of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14)... Forgiven and reconciled, they stand before the Judge justified, not in themselves but in Christ...”

Revelation 20:11-15 is a message of comfort to believers. Knowing that their names are in the Book of Life, they don't have to fear the judgment of God. They will be declared righteous. For those who have disregarded the message of salvation [i.e. their names are not in the Book of Life] the punishment of eternal death waits. They will be judged by the Book of Deeds. But because no one is worthy in himself of herself (cf. Rom 3:9-20, 23) they will be cast into the Lake of Fire [for a discussion on the Lake of Fire and the end of Death and Hades, cf. 2.5 and 3.2 below].

The message in Revelation 21:27 [where the Book of Life is again mentioned] is the same as in Revelation 20:11-15, i.e. eternal life in God's new world is reserved only for those whose names appear in the Book of Life. In Revelation 21:27 the Book of Life is again linked to the Lamb of God. This re-emphasises that salvation is only possible through the blood of the Lamb (Morris 1969: 255). It also serves to emphasise that the new world order [i.e. the heavenly kingdom] is a place of life where nothing linked to death in any manner will be visible [cf. Chapter 10 below for a discussion on life in God's new world. The context of Rev 21:9-22:9 will also be discussed then]. The sins listed that would exclude people from the heavenly kingdom are the same as would exclude them from temple worship (Aune 1998b: 1132)³⁴⁶. Everyone who persists in these evil practices will end up in the lake of fire. He or she will not be allowed into God's new world (Hughes 1990: 226).

iii) Summary

- The Book of Life is the determining factor at the judgment for entrance into the heavenly kingdom (cf. Rev 20:15; 21:27). Although the Book of Deeds is reviewed to judge people's works, this only applies to the judgment of non-believers (cf. Rev 20:12). The actual deciding factor is

³⁴⁶ Mounce (1977: 375) is of the opinion that the list could have been aimed at believers [as a warning signal] who have denied their faith under pressure from the surrounding pagan world.

the appearance [or non-appearance] of a person's name in the Book of Life (Rev 20:15). Eternal life is only preserved for those whose names appear in the Book of Life.

- To have one's name in the Book of Life is not an achievement in works but the result of the grace of God. The Book of Life belongs to the Lamb and entrance into the heavenly kingdom is only possible through the blood of the Lamb.
- The message of hope and comfort to believers are that they have been washed in the blood of the Lamb. They have therefore been cleansed of their sins and have been sanctified. This enables them to enter the heavenly kingdom.

1.3.3. *Summary on the Book of Life*

- The primary function of the Book of Life in Revelation is that of judgment. The Book of Life is the determining factor for entrance into the heavenly kingdom (cf. Rev 20:15; 21:27).
- The phrase οὐ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς serves as a title for the unbelieving world. People whose names are not written into the Book of Life are those that worship the beast rather than the Lamb of God (Rev 13:8; 17:8). They are destined for eternal death at the judgment (Rev 20:15).
- The message with regard to the Book of Life is not supposed to threaten believers. They can live in the knowledge that they have been cleansed and sanctified by the blood of the Christ. If they conquer until the end, they will inherit the prize of eternal life.
- The message of comfort and hope is that everyone whose name is in the Book of Life, will not be judged according to the Book of Deeds, but will have life (Rev 20:15).

1.4. *First-fruits of the kingdom (Rev 14:4)*

i) Context

The wider context of Revelation 14:1-20 has been discussed in Chapter 8 above [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.6]. Revelation 14:1-5 is the only one of the four subtexts of Revelation

14 [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.6. above] that does not discuss the final judgment of God. Instead, Revelation 14:1-5 is a message of hope following on the terrifying narrative of Revelation 13 (Aune 1998a: 796). It wants to give believers hope in the light of the struggles and persecutions that might lie ahead (Mounce 1977: 266).

Revelation 14:1-5 as a textual unit is framed by the text marker καὶ εἶδον in verses 1 and 6. The context [décor] of the vision [the 144 000 with the Lamb on Mount Zion] differs from that of Revelation 13 [the narrative about the two beasts] and Revelation 14:6-20 [the final judgment scene]. It is an interlude of encouragement between the persecution by the beast and the judgment that lies ahead. Believers are given the comforting news that they will be preserved regardless of what they might endure in this life, and they also don't have to fear the judgment, as they will be safe [and alive] with God. The context of Revelation 14:1-5 fits into the overall context of Revelation 11:15-16:21 as follows³⁴⁷:

11:15-16:21	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
14:13	audition of antiphonal beatitude
14:14-20	execution of God's judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

ii) The text of Revelation 14:4

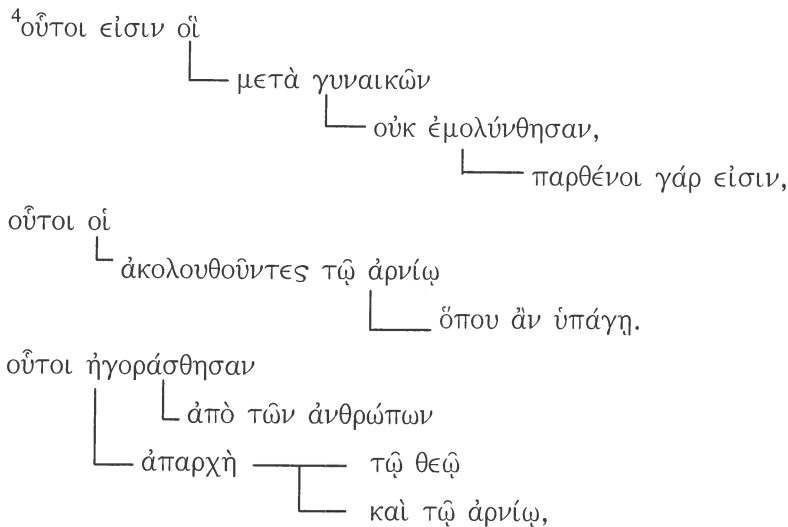
The vision of the 144 000³⁴⁸ that John sees on Mount Zion stands in obvious contrast to the preceding vision about the beast. While believers are killed in Revelation 13 (cf. Rev 13:15), in Revelation 14:1 they are seen standing [i.e. alive] on Zion. In Revelation 13:17-18 the followers of the beast are marked with the distinctive number

³⁴⁷ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

³⁴⁸ For a discussion on whom the 144 000 represent, cf. Excursion 3.

666³⁴⁹, but in Revelation 7 the believers [i.e. the followers of the Lamb] were already said to have been sealed with what is now identified as “the name of the Lamb and of his Father” (cf. Rev 14:1). The security of this seal is now evident because they are safely in the presence of the Lamb.

a) Syntactical analysis



⁵καὶ ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν οὐχ εὐρέθη ψεῦδος,
ἄμωμοι εἰσιν.

Revelation 14:4 is a description of the 144 000 on Mount Zion. Each new statement in the description begins with οὗτοι [they]. The description confirms the sanctity and worthiness of the 144 000 to be in the presence of the Lamb. The context of the verse is eschatological, implying that life in these verses refers to eternal life.

b) The 144 000 on Mount Zion

A number of textual variants are suggested for the text of Revelation 14:1-5 (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 659). Some of the more important variants will be discussed. Following the consistency of John with regard to the use of the definite article [i.e. omitting the definite article after the first use of a word], the τὸ before ἀρνίον (Rev 14:1) should be omitted. However, there is strong textual evidence supporting the insertion of τὸ (Aune 1998a: 783). In verse 3 there is strong support for the omission of ὡς [in brackets in the text] before ὠδὴν. The support for the inclusion of ὡς is,

³⁴⁹ For a discussion on the beast and the number 666, cf. Excursion 6.

however, stronger. Also, as Aune (1998a: 784) notes, “the use of ὡς in contexts in which the first term of comparison is omitted, as here, is in accord with the style of Revelation”. There is further strong support for the insertion of γάρ before εἰσιν in verse 5. The insertion of γάρ is supported by the parallel phrase in verse 4a (Aune 1998a: 785). However, none of the textual variants would have a material influence on the message of the text for the purpose of this study materially³⁵⁰.

Revelation 14:1-5 could allude to Isaiah 40:9-11 (Aune 1998a: 804). Mount Zion [this is the only time it is mentioned in Revelation] is of course where the temple stood (cf. 4 Ezra 13:33-36). In some Jewish apocalyptic texts Zion is used to designate the place where the Messiah will defeat his enemies and judge over them (2 Apoc Bar 40:1-3; [Aune 1998a: 804]). In Joel 2:32 Zion is the place of divine deliverance (Charles 1920b: 4; Wolff 1977: 68-69). Those on Mount Zion are exempted from the terrible judgment on the Day of the Lord (Mounce 1977: 267). In this sense Zion is a place of security (Allen 1976: 102). In “prophetic expectation”, as Hughes (1990: 157) puts it, Zion could refer to “the promised messianic kingdom of justice and peace”. Zion is often used interchangeable with Jerusalem as the “city of Yahweh” (Isa 60:14; [Ford 1975: 240]). Of course, all of these could be incorporated into the image of the heavenly Zion (Groenewald 1986: 146).

Mount Zion is also a place of the presence of God (Allen 1976: 102). If the temple, the “house of the Lord”, stands on the earthly Mount Zion, then everybody on [the heavenly] Mount Zion is in the presence of God. In any case, it is clearly stated in Revelation 14:1 that they are in the presence of the Lamb, who is on Mount Zion. That they are standing, implies that the 144 000 are alive, even though they have died.

c) They were purchased from the earth

The 144 000 “have been purchased from the earth” (οἱ ἠγορασμένοι ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς - Rev 14:3). The verb ἀγοράζειν appears six times in Revelation of which Revelation 5:9 and 14:3, 4 has religious meaning. Used in this sense it is a metaphor for salvation (Aune 1998a: 810). In the New Testament it is generally used to indicate believers “for whom Christ has paid the price with his blood” (cf. 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23;

³⁵⁰ For a detailed discussion of all the suggested variants, cf. Aune (1998a: 783-785).

[Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 12)]. The verb is in the passive voice, indicating that it is through divine intervention that they are delivered. Believers are purchased [set free] from their sins by the sacrifice of Christ (Marshall 1997: 1002). Their salvation comes through the blood of the Lamb. This doesn't necessarily mean that they are dead, because the blood of Christ frees all believers from the evil ways of the world (Mounce 1977: 269; Groenewald 1986: 147; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 88). Of course, seeing that this is a heavenly vision of the heavenly Zion, the implication is that they are dead [this is concurrent to the parallel text of Rev 7:9-17].

This seems to make verse 4a superfluous [where the sexual purity of the believers are stated as the reason for their being purchased from the earth]. If verse 4a is not superfluous it could create the idea of an elite group of believers, which would certainly be in conflict with the interpretation of the 144 000 in Revelation 7³⁵¹. However, it is important to note that the whole church [in line with the interpretation of the 144 000 in Rev 7] is in view here (Beasley-Murray 1981: 222).

It is possible to understand the sexual purity metaphorically. The use of the masculine form of the noun *παρθένος* certainly supports such an interpretation. It could refer to the fact that believers have resisted the influences and temptations of idolatry and the temptations of the beast (Ford: 1975: 242). The purity comes from Christ, whose "coming was to make the defiled pure and to sanctify the holy" (Hughes 1990: 159). It is thus all believers that are represented by the 144 000 and all are sanctified because they have washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14).

It is in this sense that the phrase *ἀπαρχὴ τῶ θεῶ καὶ τῶ ἀνίω* should be understood. Although first-fruits generally signify the first reaping of something much better that will follow (cf. Rom 8:23; 11:16; 16:5; 1 Cor 15:20, 23)³⁵², here in Revelation 14:4 it signifies the totality of the redeemed, clearly identified by the symbolic figure of the 144 000 (Hughes 1990: 160). Aune (1998a: 814) translates *ἀπαρχὴ* with "devoted servants", which steers away from the first fruits in the direction of the victorious believers who held onto their faith until the end. Used

³⁵¹ Charles (1920b: 9-11) sees this as a later addition by a "monkish interpolator, convinced that the highest type of the Christian life was the celibate" [cf. Aune (1998a: 812) for a discussion of all the possible interpretations of *παρθένος* in the Bible].

³⁵² Aune (1998a: 815-816) gives an extensive discussion on the meaning of *ἀπαρχὴ*.

metaphorically it emphasises “the inviolability of Israel” (cf. Tg Jer 48-49; [Aune 1998a: 816]). A parallel phrase in Revelation 5:9 omits the ἀπαρχή, suggesting that it could even be a gloss in Revelation 14:5 (Aune 1998a: 818).

iii) Summary

- Revelation 14:1-5 is a message of comfort to believers in the light of the suffering talked about in Revelation 13:16-18. Believers are promised that, regardless of what might happen on earth, they will be protected to be alive with God in heaven [on the heavenly Mount Zion].
- The 144 000 represent all believers of all ages, not just an elite group. They have been purchased from this world by the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they stand holy and pure before the Lord.
- That they are purchased as ἀπαρχή does not imply that they are the first of more to come. The ἀπαρχή are representative of the entire group of “devoted servants” purchased by Christ.

1.5. Conquerors of the beast (Rev 15:2)

i) Context

The wider context of Revelation 15:1-16:21 have been discussed in Chapter 6 [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.4]. The discussion here will thus only focus on how Revelation 15:1-4, the prologue to this subsection, fits into the rest of the text.

Revelation 15:1 introduces a new unit with the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον. The next unit starts in Revelation 15:5, introduced with καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον. Within this subunit it is possible to identify Revelation 15:1 as a separate subtext, specifically as verse 2 again starts with καὶ εἶδον. Aune (1998a: 863) calls this subtext “an introductory heavenly throne-room scene”. The text is introduced as “the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb”, probably alluding to either Exodus 15:1-18 or Deuteronomy 31:30-32:43 (Aune 1998a: 863). Du Rand (1995b: 203) sees the function of this song as a means “to strengthen the faithful by assuring them of God’s deeds in the past”. Structurally Revelation 15:1-4 fits into the subsection of Revelation 15:1-16:21 as follows³⁵³:

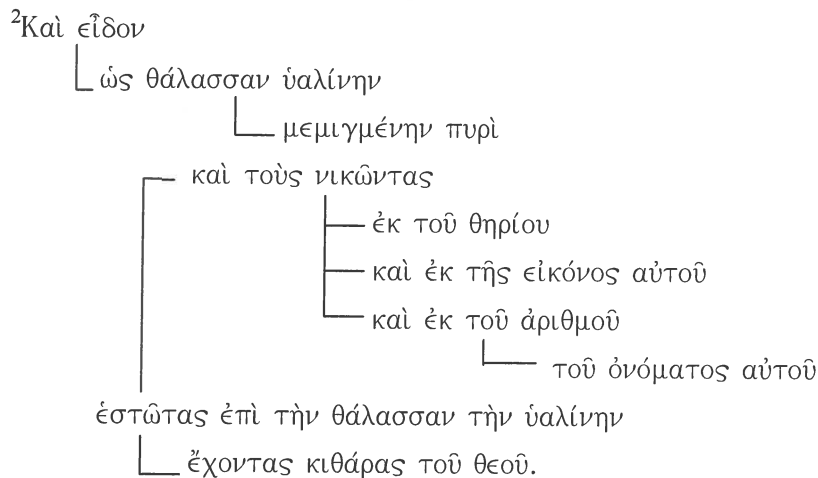
³⁵³ For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

15:1-16:21 Seven angels and the seven last plagues

15:1-4	Prologue
15:5-8	Commission of the seven angels
16:1-21	Seven last plagues

ii) Those who have conquered the beast

a) Syntactical analysis



The focus of Revelation 15:2 is on the believers that John sees, standing next to a crystal-like sea. The list given of whom these believers overcame emphasises their faithfulness regardless of what happened to them. The two words suggesting life are τοὺς νικῶντας and ἑστῶτας. The heavenly vision and the message of conquering believers imply that it is eternal life that John has in mind.

b) Conquerors by the sea

In Revelation 15:1-4 the only indication of life and death is the use of the word τοὺς νικῶντας in verse 2. The verb νικᾶν as a technical term for victory over sin is common in the New Testament [cf. discussion on the meaning of νικᾶν in Chapter 7, 2.1.4. above]. The construction νικᾶν ἐκ... is, however, strange. According to Aune (1998a: 871) this construction does not occur in any other Greek texts. One suggestion is that it could mean *being delivered from* [Aune (1998a: 871) calls it a *constructio praegnans*]³⁵⁴. This would certainly fit into the general context of the use

³⁵⁴ According to Aune (1998a: 871-872) it could also be either an Aramaism [meaning pure, clean, innocent] or a Latinism [meaning “carry or bring from victory”]. Aune prefers the latter. Of course, in some cases the day of a man’s martyrdom was called his day of victory (Morris 1969: 188).



of $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ in Revelation (cf. Rev 5:5-6; [cf. the closing statements in each of the seven proclamations in Rev 2-3]).

The theological motif applied here is that of the Exodus (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 91). “The song of Moses” [if it is the one in Ex 15] is a song of deliverance by God (Mounce 1977: 286-287). This would support the understanding of $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\dots$ as referring to their redemption by God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 235; Hughes 1990: 170-171). The redemption includes all believers who have resisted the mark of the beast and have conquered until the end (Rev 2-3; 13:16-18; [Groenewald 1986: 159]). Of course, that believers are called conquerors [cf. Rev 2-3] is parallel to the song of victory found in Revelation 12:11, where it is said that believers have conquered. However, they have conquered, not in own strength, but by the blood of the Lamb [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.6. above]. Their victory lies not in a military struggle in which they have been victorious, but in their holding on to the victory that Christ has already won. They have been purchased and did not pay the price themselves (Rev 14:1-5).

It is a question of choice that decides participation in the victory of Christ. As DeSilva (1997: 362) puts it:

“Those who participate in the exaltation of God’s enemy fall prey to dire consequences when the true Lord judges the world (Rev 14:9-11; 16:2), whereas those who revere Christ as Lord by not giving reverence to a usurper will enjoy God’s presence and favor eternally (Rev 15:2-4; 20:4-6; 22:3-5)”.

That the “Song of Moses” is also called the “Song of the Lamb” implies that it is a song to the Lamb [or about the Lamb] for his deliverance of his people (Aune 1998a: 872-873). “It celebrates his righteous and redemptive activity beginning with Moses and culminating in the Lamb.” (Mounce 1977: 286).

The believers are standing by a mirror like sea. The fact that they are standing confirms that they are alive [cf. 1.4 above]. They have not been affected by the judgment (Rev 14:6-20) or by persecution of the beast (Rev 13:16-18). They are alive, even though they might have been killed for not worshipping the beast.

Furthermore, the believers are worshipping the Lamb with their song. And worship is an important indicator of life. Those who worship are alive, and He who is worshipped is the only living God [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1. (iii)(b)].

Therefore, what Revelation 15:1-4 does, is to give hope and comfort to believers in the wake of persecution and temptations they might endure. Also, in light of the following text [casting of the seven bowls – the final judgmental plagues] believers are comforted with the knowledge that they don't have to fear the eschatological judgment. They have been redeemed from this evil world as *first fruits* of God's new world (Rev 14:4). They belong to Him and will be protected by Him.

iii) Summary

- Revelation 15:1-4 wants to comfort believers with regard to their position. Although they might suffer persecution, or even death, in this world, they need not fear. They will eventually celebrate victory [alive] in heaven.
- The victory John talks about in Revelation 15:2, is the victory of deliverance by the blood of Christ, not by their own deeds (cf. Rev 12:11). Believers must hold on to this victory of Christ until the end to be victorious. The prize of victory is eternal life in the presence of God on the heavenly Mount Zion [cf. closing statements of all of the seven proclamations].
- This eternal life is confirmed in the vision in that believers will stand and they will worship the only living God.

1.6. Summary on real life in Revelation

- Having “real life” in Revelation is much more than just living physically. “Real life” is determined by the relationship with God. This is specifically clear in the proclamations to the churches, where life is time and again measured by looking at believers' spiritual liveliness. Where the relationship with God has deteriorated, the congregation's aliveness is questioned [cf. the proclamation to Sardis in Rev 3:1-6].
- Throughout Revelation believers are given hope and comfort. Many of these messages of hope follow messages of suffering. This is seen clearly

with regard to the study of eternal life. In Revelation 7 believers are given the hope of eternal life even if they die physically during the struggles of Revelation 6. The same applies with regard to Revelation 14: believers can be assured that they will be safe with God, even if they are killed for not worshipping the beast as said in Revelation 13:16-18.

- Promises of hope and eternal life come through a number of metaphors being used by John [of which many comes from the proclamations of Revelation 2-3]:
 1. They will have the water of life [i.e. be redeemed to the immediate presence of God]
 2. Their names will be written into the Book of Life [i.e. they will not be judged, but have been justified by the blood of Christ].
 3. They will be safely in the presence of God on the heavenly Mount Zion because they have been purchased by the blood of Christ as “first fruits” [i.e. devoted servants] for his kingdom.
 4. Believers will worship God victoriously in his new kingdom. They will not be affected by death in this world, or by any of the beast’s wonders or persecutions.

2. The judgment of God over life and death

The eschatological judgment of God is a central theme throughout Revelation. However, the idea of God delivering and vindicating those suffering injustice and judging those who live unjustly, are pervasive themes already in the Old Testament (Bauckham 1998b: 88). Throughout the Old Testament God is portrayed as the righteous and just God who will stand up for those who are suffering innocently. This is seen particularly in the Servant of the Lord images in Isaiah (Isa 42:6; 45:8, 13, 19; [Onesti & Brauch 1993: 829-830]). Righteousness, according to Onesti & Brauch (1993: 829), “characterizes the character or action of God who deals rightly within a covenant relationship and who established how others are to act within that relationship.” This theme is continued throughout the New Testament (cf. Rom 1:17; 3:5, 22; 10:3; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5: 21; [Newman 1997b: 1054]).

The righteousness [and the holiness] of God is promoted throughout Revelation. According to Bauckham (1993b: 40) the “whole of Revelation could be regarded as a vision of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer.... (Matt 6:9-10).” In order that God’s name be hallowed on earth, that his kingdom come on earth, and that his will be done on earth, it is necessary that evil [i.e. all unrighteousness], which interfered with this, be eradicated from this world. God is the Ruler [Sovereign King – cf. Rev 4] that judges in righteousness over the evil of this world. As sovereign and holy King, “His judgments are true and just (Rev 16:7; 19:2)” (Bauckham 1993b: 43). It is on this basis that judgment on the Day of the Lord will be executed.

Excursion 9: God as Judge of the world

The concept of God as Judge over the world is not foreign to Biblical literature. Already in the Old Testament it was clear that God is ultimately the One that decides over life or death [cf. Chapter 2, section 3, especially 3.1. and 3.2.2]. He is the righteous God that controls the times of life. If God then is the Decider on life and death, it is logically taken that He is also Judge over life and death. The Psalmists celebrate Yahweh who, as the righteous King, punishes the wicked and intervenes on behalf of the righteous people (cf. Ps 72:1-4; [Seifrid 1997: 621]). The understanding of Yahweh as Judge of the world is the result of his holiness (Hasel 1975: 79).

As righteous Judge and King who cannot accept the existence of evil [unrighteousness] in this world, God must act in his judgment to set things right. The messages of the prophets are clear examples of God acting in judgment against his people, Israel (cf. Hos 2:1-22; Am 5:18-20). The focus of judgment is not to destroy his people but to save them by judging and erasing the evil from within their hearts (Prinsloo 1987: 222; Zimmerli 1978: 190). Judgment is thus a “confrontation with the living God” (Zimmerli 1978: 189).

Ironically, while God’s judgment of the world will cause fear in the hearts of the world (cf. Rev 6:9-11) and even the people of Israel (Am 5:18-20), creation and God’s people will rejoice in God’s setting things right through his judgment (cf. Ps 96:11-13). In the words of Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman (1998: 472): “There is a holy timeliness and proportionality to God’s judgment (Gen 18:16-33; Isa 65:1-7)”.

The New Testament writers understood the concept of God as Judge in much the same manner as the prophets of the Old Testament (Seifrid 1997: 621). Jesus warned many times of a coming judgment that would include punishment for evil but also, in contrast thereto, grace and redemption for faithful believers (cf. Matt 19:27-20:16; [Seifrid 1997: 621]). The focus of judgment has, however, shifted towards the judgment on the Day of the Lord. This Day of Judgment was already familiar in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament [cf. Excursion 1]. In the New Testament [coming from the time of early Judaism and apocalyptic literature – cf. 1 En 1:1-9; 4 Ezra 7:70-74; Dan 12:2-3] judgment was seen as an eschatological happening to occur in the *eschaton* (cf. Mark 1:15; 9:42-48; Matt 11:20-24; [Seifrid 1997: 621]).

Revelation emphasises the holiness and righteousness of God, and the importance of judgment to eradicate this unrighteousness from earth in order that the new heaven and earth be put into place, as it is already visible in heaven (Bauckham 1993b: 40). God’s condemnation of unrighteousness is visible in the three series of judgment [seals, trumpets, bowls] through which his wrath on the injustice of this world is poured out. Each of these judgments is in some way connected to the throne-room scene that started in Revelation 4, confirming that, “It is God whose awesome holiness the living creatures sing unceasingly who manifests his glory and power in the final series of judgments” (Bauckham 1993b: 41).

In the New Testament Christ is sometimes called the One who judges “the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; Bar 7:2). Early Christians brought together allusions to Daniel 7:13, Psalm 110:1, and Zechariah 12:10-14 in various combinations to portray Jesus Christ as the eschatological Judge (Bauckham 1998a: 201). In Revelation 14:6-20 He is sitting on a cloud, in a vision describing the Day of Judgment, whereas in Revelation 20:11-15 it is “the One who sits on the throne” [i.e. God] who affects the judgment. This interchanging between God and the Lamb even in judgment re-emphasises the high Christology of Revelation, affording divine status to Christ.

God’s incomparability as the sovereign and transcendent One makes Him the true and only Judge of the world (cf. Rev 15:4; [Bauckham 1993b: 43]). God’s sovereignty and incomparability is shown by using a kind of *apophaticism*

whereby God is distinguished from everyone in creation by depicting Him in negative terms: He is not what creatures are (Bauckham 1993b: 43).

The focus of the Day of Judgment in Revelation is, according to Webb (1997: 266), “the judgment of the ungodly which has as its corollary the liberation and vindication of the righteous (e.g. Rev 6:10; 11:18; 16:6-7; 19:1-2)”. While God pours out his wrath upon the people of this world [i.e. the unbelieving world], He promises hope and life and salvation to the believers who hold onto their faith until the end (cf. Porter 1997b: 1239). Judgment [or the warning about it] could, however, be used as a warning to believers falling away in their faith (Webb 1997: 266).

In Revelation 14:6-20 the Lamb is portrayed as the One carrying out the judgment of God. That God’s judgment is to be effected by the Lamb with his second coming,

“...follows common early Christian practice in quoting an Old Testament prophecy of God’s coming in judgment (Isa 40:10; 62:11) with reference to the Parousia of Christ...” (Bauckham 1993b: 64).

However, this judgment over evil does not occur only at the Parousia (Bauckham 1993b: 64). Christ’s sacrificial death is already an occurrence of Divine judgment. His death brings eternal life to God’s faithful, but at the same time means victory over evil (cf. Rev 12:11). Furthermore, “the resurrection of Christ guarantees the prospect of the future judgment of Christ” (Hansen 1998: 217). Important is also the fact that Jesus [already during his life] is pronounced as the Giver [or the One that ends] of life, already in this world. In the Gospel of John life is expressed as something to be experienced already in this aeon [i.e. realised eschatology – cf. Chapter 4, 2.2], and not only in the eschatological future (Lincoln 1998: 128).

The judgment of God [or Christ] spells the deciding moment [or kairos-moment] for people in this world. Those persons, whose names appear in the Book of Life, will have life on that day (cf. Rev 20:4-6). However, if a persons’ name is not in the Book of Life, he or she will be judged and thrown in to the Lake of Fire [cf. Rev 20:11-15 and 1.3.2 above and 2.4 below].

2.1. *The kairos-moment (Rev 11:18)*

i) Context of Revelation 11:15-18

There is difference of opinion amongst scholars on where this particular unit fits into the structure of Revelation. Many scholars see Revelation 11:15-18 as the closure on the larger part, starting at Revelation 8:1 (Mounce 1977: 177; Morris 1969: 121)³⁵⁵. It is also possible to understand Revelation 11:15-18 as an interlude before an entirely new section starts in Revelation 11:19 (Aune 1998a: 635). Barclay [as referred to by Mounce 1977: 230] calls this small unit “a summary of all that is still to come”.

Although the usual text marker *καὶ εἶδον* is not used, John hears voices in heaven (Rev 11:15) and sees the Ark of the Covenant that became visible in the heavenly temple (Rev 11:19). This signals the start of a new textual unit [for a discussion on the context of the two surrounding textual units, cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.5. and 2.1.6.]. The content of Revelation 11:15-18 also differs from that of the preceding text [Rev 11:3-14 regarding the two witnesses] and the following text [Rev 11:19-12:17 which is a cosmological vision about the war in heaven and the woman, the child and the dragon]. The scene of this short unit of text is the announcement of the Final Judgment, in which both the wicked and the righteous are seemingly judged (Aune 1998a: 636). Within the larger text unit of Revelation 11:15-16:21 this text fits in as follows³⁵⁶:

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

ii) The kairos-moment for the world

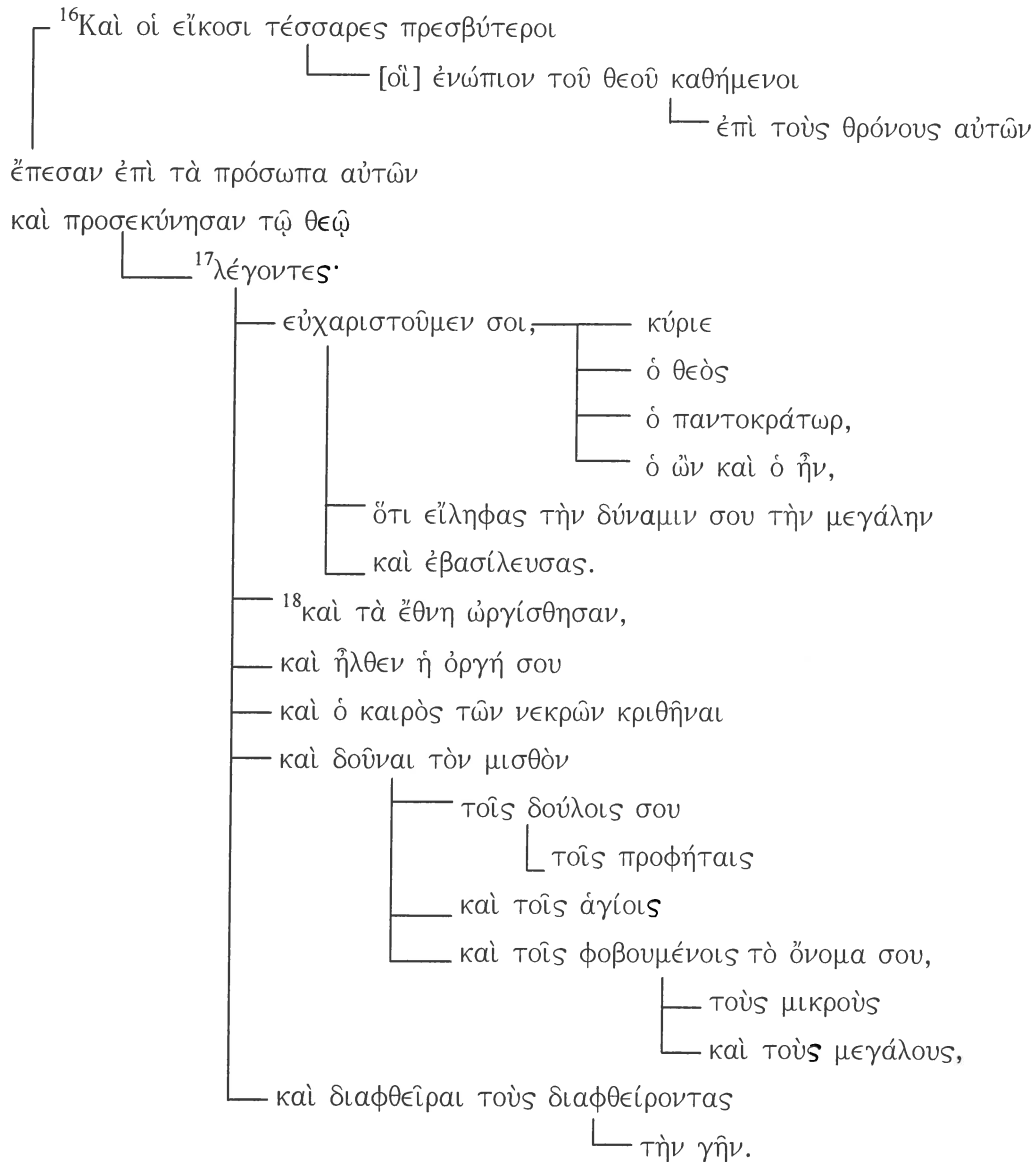
Revelation 11:15-18 narrates the sounding of the seventh trumpet. It is a short interlude announcing the judgment of the Lord upon the peoples of this world.

³⁵⁵ Morris (1969: 121) actually starts the larger unit at Revelation 8:6. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 35) moves Revelation 11:15-19 to follow directly on Revelation 4:1-9:21. Aune (1998a: 635) supports this view in part.

³⁵⁶ For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

According to John, on that day *all* the dead [τῶν νεκρῶν] will be judged according to their actions during their physical lives. The judgment of all, living and dead, is found frequently in the New Testament, with Jesus often depicted as the Judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Cl 1:1; Bar 7:2; [Aune 1998a: 644]). That God is still regarded to be the Judge of all (cf. Rev 20:11-15), confirms the divine status that the New Testament gives to Christ [cf. Excursion 9 above]. In Revelation 20:11-15 a different view is given on judgment, with seemingly only the unrighteous people being judged.

a) Syntactical analysis



The focus is on the elders worshipping God. In this worship song the greatness of God and his righteousness in judgment are proclaimed. The phrase ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι is generally associated with judgment, and therefore the decision on eternal life. The implication from this analysis is that there are two sides of the Judgment: reward and punishment.

b) The moment of judgment

The text of Revelation 11:15-18 has quite a number of suggested variants. The most significant change suggested by variant readings is the change of the dative phrase τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις to the accusative case. This, however, would not be in accordance with the preceding phrase, which is in the dative. If the accusative is used [in accordance with the phrase following it] it should be regarded as an accusative of apposition to τοῖς δουλοῖς σου..... The more correct version is probably the one by Aland and Aland (1993: 654), using the dative case [cf. Aune (1998a: 634), also with regard to the other, less significant, variants for this verse].

The phrase ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι has its roots in the Old Testament tradition with regard to the יום יהוה [the Day of the Lord]. It is a phrase that is prominent particularly in the literary works of the prophets (cf. Ezek 7:19; Zeph 1:18; 2:2-3; Lam 2:2). It was generally accepted to be the day that Yahweh would deliver Israel from their enemies and inaugurate the Messianic reign [cf. Excursion 1 on “the Day of the Lord as a metaphor for life or death – Wolff (1977: 255)]. However, prophets such as Amos quickly reminded Israel that the Day of the Lord will bring the wrath of God in judgment over all unrighteousness in this world, including the unrighteousness of Israel. Its earliest literary attestation in the Bible is probably in Amos (cf. Am 5:18-20; [Wolff 1977: 255]).

The word ὁ καιρὸς “has about it the air of ‘the right time’. Judgment does not take place until the time is right” (Morris 1969: 153-154). In eschatological terms ὁ καιρὸς refers to the final eschatological judgment, “*the time of crisis, the last times*” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 395-396).

The fact that the time of judgment is right [the kairos-moment has arrived] confirms that God is in control. Even though things seem to run out of control, His redemptive

plan for this world is falling into place as scheduled (Mounce 1977: 232). He has determined the exact day and hour for executing judgment (Rev 9:15; [Trites 1998: 282]). This was already made clear in Revelation 5, when John saw the Lamb holding the scroll with the seven seals and then opening it to reveal the unfolding and consummation of history as planned.

c) Judgment in righteousness

God's judgment in wrath is greeted with songs of praise by the faithful worshippers in heaven, because judgment for them does not entail punishment. While the pagan world will suffer under God's judgment, the believers will be rewarded for holding on to their faith until the end (Porter 1997b: 1239). It is the reward of eternal life for those who conquered in the struggle in this world (cf. Rev 2-3). Reward [μισθός] in Revelation generally refers to "the salvific benefits that God will bestow on the faithful in the eschaton" (Aune 1998a: 644). It is not a case of being judged by the Book of Deeds (cf. Rev 20:13; [cf. 2.4 above]). The final criteria for entrance into God's new world is if one's name appears in the Book of Life, i.e. having one's clothes washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14; 20:15; [Aune 1998a: 645]).

The Day of Judgment is thus a decisive moment with regard to life and death. On this day believers will enter eternal life [as a "reward" for their faithfulness – although the victory actually belongs to Christ [cf. Rev 12:11]). For non-believers this day will, however be the day they are condemned to eternal death (Rev 20:11-15).

The announcement of the Judgment seemingly does not result in the execution of the final judgment. Instead the cosmological vision of Revelation 12 follows (Morris 1969: 152). In Revelation 14 the Judgment is again announced [with Christ sitting on a cloud, ready for judgment], but again it is followed by a series of judgmental plagues [the seven bowls of Rev 15-16]. This confirms that the text of Revelation is not to be forced into a strict chronological time frame. The announcement of God's judgment acts as messages of hope and comfort to believers. They are urged to continue in their lives of faith, knowing that God will deliver them from the suffering.

The phrase καὶ διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν describes the result of God's judgment. According to Bauckham (1993b: 52), this phrase is an example of a

case of *jus talionis*, i.e. the punishment matches the sin. It is equivalent to the types of punishment in the Old Testament law that God taught to Israel (cf. Ex 21:24; Esth 7:10; [Aune 1998a: 646]). This principle is found quite often in eschatological narratives (cf. 1 Cor 3:17; Jude 6; Mark 8:38; 2 En 44:3a; [Bauckham 1998a: 123-124]). It serves to confirm the absolute justice of God in judgment (cf. Rev 16:6; 18:6; 22:18-19). The text is modelled on the Flood narrative of Genesis 6-8, where it is said that God destroyed the world for its moral destruction of the earth (Bauckham 1993b: 52). “The destroyers of the earth” are the Dragon and the two beasts [of course including the harlot Babylon who has, according to Revelation 19:2, corrupted and destroyed the earth (Bauckham 1993b: 52)].

Although the word διαφθείρω is not translated directly with death [in a literal sense], the implication of *destroy* includes death. It is often used to indicate moral destruction of the world, which is the breaking down of the relationship with Yahweh [i.e. spiritual death] (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 189)³⁵⁷. The entire phrase is a case of paronomasia, i.e. the literal and figurative meanings of a word are both used in the same sentence (Aune 1998a: 646).

Destruction is not the ultimate goal of God’s judgment. God is the righteous Judge who wants to save and free his people from the “oppressive and destructive powers” of the earth (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 79-80). He is the God of life and He wants to stand in a life-giving relationship with his people [cf. Chapter 2, 3.1. and 3.2.]. His ultimate goal is to restore Creation to its intended glory at creation. This new, restored, glory is shown to John in Revelation 21, with the vision of the New Jerusalem and the new heaven and earth (Hughes 1990: 134). It is a world where death [and everything in opposition to God] will not exist anymore, and life in the presence of God will prevail into eternity (Rev 21:4).

iii) Summary

- Revelation 11:15-18 is a short interlude announcing the judgment of the Lord. The phrase ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι has its roots in the Old Testament tradition with regard to the יום ידוה [the Day of the Lord]. It is

³⁵⁷ Cf. Aune (1998a: 646) and Louw & Nida (1997).

the day that God will judge the living and the dead [i.e. nobody will escape the Day of Judgment].

- God’s moment of judgment is a decisive moment on the issue of life and death. On this day the final decision will be announced on who enters eternal life and who ends up in eternal death. For believers it is not a day to fear, but a moment of joy (cf. Rev 11:15-17).
- That God will “destroy the destroyers of the earth” confirms his justice in judgment. He is the righteous Judge that punishes according to sins. However, his ultimate goal is not destruction and death, but life. He wants to restore creation to its former glory, where death and destruction will have no part to play anymore. This new, restored Creation is shown to John in Revelation 21-22.

2.2. *Judgment by the One on the cloud (Rev 14:14-20)*

i) Context

The context of Revelation 14, and how Revelation 14:14-20 fits into this context, has already been discussed in Chapter 8 above [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.6. (i)]. Revelation 14:14-20 consists of two images, which are essentially doublets (Aune 1998a: 798-799). Bauckham (1993a: 295) sees the two images as contrasting each other in depicting the outcome of history [the positive image of the harvest of the earth, and the negative image of the vintage of the earth].

Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 79-80) links Revelation 14:14-20 with Revelation 14:1-5, using the term “first-fruits” as a link with the terminology of the harvest. This is not necessary, as the harvest in itself is a metaphor for divine eschatological judgment (cf. Joel 3:13; [cf. Aune 1998a: 800]). Within the larger subtext of Revelation 11:15-16:21 the text under discussion (Rev 14:14-20) fits in as follows³⁵⁸:

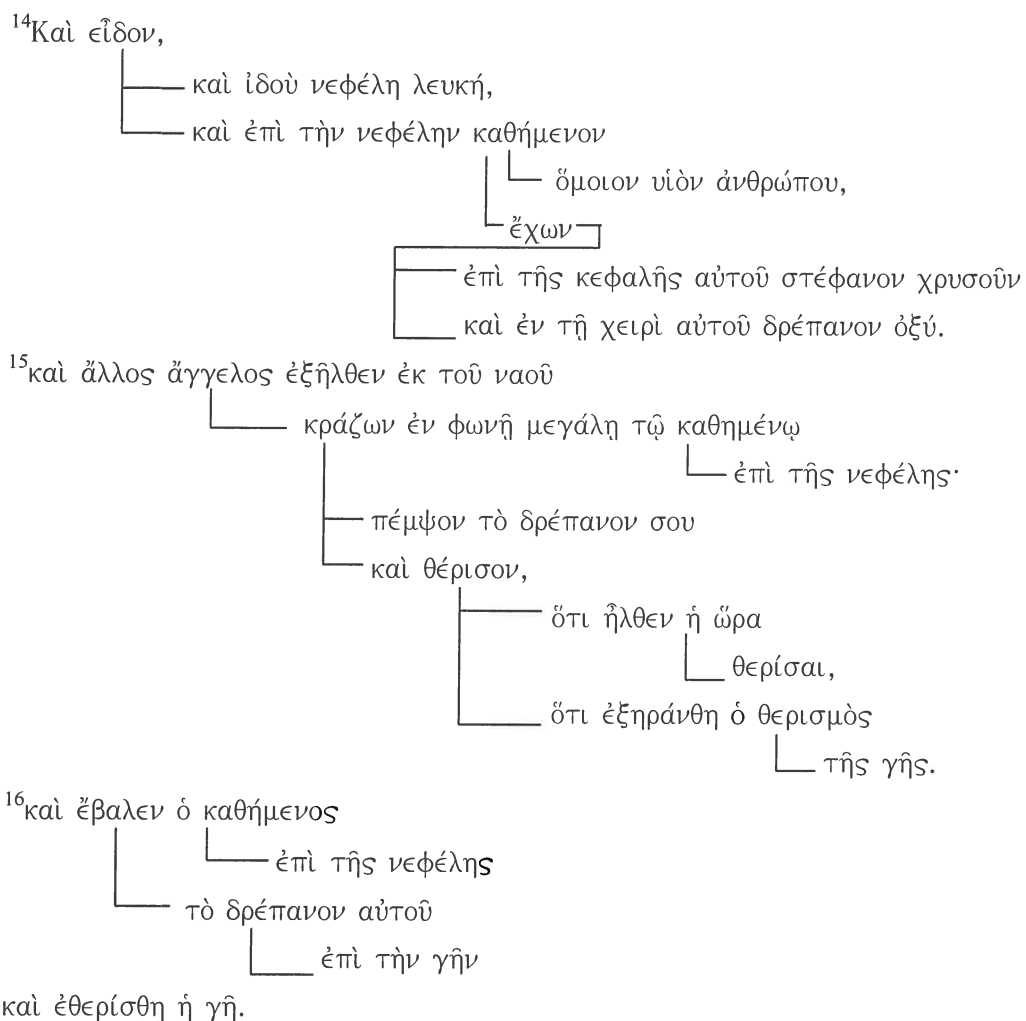
11:15-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
12:18-13:18	the two beasts

³⁵⁸ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.

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
14:13	audition of antiphonal beatitude
14:14-20	execution of God's judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

ii) Judgment by the Son of Man

a) Syntactical analysis



In Revelation 14:6-13 the judgment of God is announced as the ἡ ὥρα τῆς κρίσεως [the time of judgment]. Three angels fly past and announce God's judgment upon the harlot Babylon, the two beasts and everyone that has the mark [seal] of the beast on their foreheads and hands. The announced judgment is then effected by “someone



like the Son of Man” (cf. Rev 14:14). The metaphors of a harvest and the phrase “the time has come” (Rev 14:15) confirm the judgmental nature of the vision.

b) Harvesting the world

Although there are a number of textual variants suggested for the text, most of them are not supported strongly (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 661-662; Aune 1998a: 789-791). In verse 14 there is strong support to change $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\acute{\omicron}\nu$ to the dative $\upsilon\acute{\iota}\acute{\omega}$. This change would be in line with the general rule that the dative case follows $\acute{\omicron}\mu\omicron\iota\omicron\varsigma$. However, it is possible that the author follows a fixed tradition here, which also occurs in Revelation 1:13. Aune (1998a: 789) calls the use of the accusative here a solecism. The correct reading is therefore probably the one used by Aland & Aland (1993: 661).

In Revelation 14:16 there is also strong support to change the genitive $\tau\eta\varsigma \nu\epsilon\phi\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\eta\varsigma$ to the accusative case. According to Aune (1998a: 790) the accusative is probably the more correct reading, as this conforms to the author’s general usage, i.e. after $\acute{\omicron} \kappa\alpha\theta\acute{\eta}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ [in the nominative or accusative] follows $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\acute{\iota}$ plus accusative.

The scene for Revelation 14:14-20 is the Final Judgment. It is reminiscent of the judgment scene portrayed in Daniel 7:13-14, using precisely the same imagery about the Son of Man [cf. Chapter 7, 1.3; cf. also footnote 150]. As discussed above, the scene of the Final Judgment is a decision on life and death [cf. 2.1. above]. Bauckham (1993a: 295) does not see judgment in the first image of Revelation 14:14-20 [that of the harvest], as this narrates the receiving of the universal kingdom by the Son of Man³⁵⁹. He supports this by virtue of the fact that the second activity with regard to judgmental harvests [i.e. threshing and winnowing] is not mentioned in the text, while in the second image it is mentioned that the winepress is treaded, which clearly indicates judgment (Bauckham 1993a: 293; cf. Aune 1998a: 844-845)³⁶⁰.

³⁵⁹ The identification of the Son of Man has been discussed in Chapter 7, subsection 1.3. Aune (1998a: 800-801) is of the opinion that the Son of Man does not refer to Christ here, citing a number of reasons for his decision (cf. Morris 1969: 184). Although there is some merit in the argument, the context and the specific mentioning of his title [Son of Man] distinguishes Him from any angelic being in the text [of which at least three are mentioned just here]. It is also in line with the use of the title of Son of Man in Revelation 1:9-20, where it clearly refers to the exalted Christ. It is thus the exalted Christ that comes in judgment in Revelation 14:6-20 (Mounce 1977: 279; Bauckham 1998b: 97-98; Groenewald 1986: 153-154; Hughes 1990: 165).

³⁶⁰ The following texts are cited by Bauckham (1993a: 293-294) supporting his view: Ps 1:4; 35:5; Isa 17:13; 29:5; Jer 51:22; Dan 2:35; Hos 13:3; Mic 4:12-13; Hab 3:12; Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17).

The imagery of the harvest is an allusion to Joel 3:13 (cf. Isa 63:1-6; [Mounce 1977: 279]). In Joel 3 both the images used by John appears. Also, in the text of Joel there is no mention of the threshing out of the grain harvest, just as John applied the allusion in Revelation. Joel applies both images in reference to the judgment of God (Allen 1976: 119; Wolff 1977: 80-81).

Of course, one must remember that judgment does not exclude the believers. On the Day of Judgment everybody will appear before the Judge of the world (cf. Rev 20:11-13). The difference is that “those whose names appear in the Book of Life” will not be condemned to eternal death. Their reception of eternal life will be acknowledged in judgment. Judgment only has negative connotations for those who will experience God’s wrath on Judgment Day. In this sense the two different images proposed by Bauckham (1998a: 293-295) are quite possible (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 79-80). The context is that of the Messiah returning in judgment, which would include reward for the righteous (Mounce 1977: 279).

That it is “the hour of judgment” as determined by God that has arrived, is confirmed by the fact that the harvest and the grapes are ripe for the plucking (Mounce 1977: 280). The fact that the winepress overflows, confirms the abundance of transgressions for which punishment is meted out (Wolff 1977: 80-81). A similar metaphor is found in 1 Enoch 100:3 (Mounce 1977: 282).

Furthermore, the blood flows for “1600 furlongs”. This is not an exact figure but a symbol explaining that God’s judgment will include the whole of mankind [4 = the number of the earth; the four corners of the earth – this number is squared, getting to 16]. The completeness of the judgment is further underlined by multiplying the number 16 with the number for completeness, which is one thousand (Mounce 1977: 283; Morris 1969: 186). Blood [αἷμα], in this instance, does not refer to the salvific action of Christ in saving the world from sin, but indicates, in apocalyptic sense, heavenly disaster – i.e. judgment (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 22). In judgment it is the blood of slaughtering, not of salvation that flows (Aune 1998a: 848).

That the winepress stands outside the city is significant. Outside the city walls is traditionally the place where God would judge the enemies of his people. Everybody inside the city walls is protected from the consequences of the judgment (Groenewald 1986: 155-156). This is a message of hope to believers knowing that they were destined to be inside the walls of God's New Jerusalem (cf. Rev 21:26-27). Aune (1998a: 847) thinks that this could also be a case of *jus talionis*, in which case the judgment of the unrighteous constitutes a kind of poetic judgment [comparing it to Jesus' death, which also took place outside the city – Matt 27:33 = Mark 15:22 = Luke 23:33 = John 19:17; Heb 13:12-13].

The message of hope is further emphasised by the comforting scene of the vision preceding the judgment, depicting the 144 000 safely in the presence of Christ on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-5). Following this text (i.e. Rev 14:14-20) is another comforting vision in which John sees “those who did not accept the mark of the beast” standing in heaven by a mirror-like sea whilst singing a worship hymn to the almighty God (Rev 15:1-4)³⁶¹.

iii) Summary of the judgment scene

- Revelation 14:14-20 is another judgment scene in the Book of Revelation. It narrates the judgment by the Son of Man [i.e. Christ] on the peoples of the earth in words alluding to Joel 3.
- Two similar yet contrasting images are used: (i) the reaping of the harvest, probably referring to the righteous being brought into the new kingdom; and (ii) the treading of the grapes from the vineyard, referring to the punishment of the unrighteous unto eternal death. Both images are well known Old Testament images for God's judgment.
- Blood does not refer to salvation and cleansing in this case, but to the disaster of heavenly judgment and death. The overflowing amount of blood emphasises the magnitude of sins to be punished.

³⁶¹ Cf. also Chapter 6, 2.1.4 [on this text] and Chapter 6, 2.1.1. (ii)(b). Specifically in the last mentioned discussion the connection between worship and life is highlighted. It supports the message of hope and comfort [and life] in Revelation 14:14-20 and 15:1-4 even further.

- The comforting news to believers are that they will survive the judgment and will be seen worshipping God while they are standing next to a mirror-like sea [i.e. they will be alive].

2.3. *Prince on the white horse (Rev 19:13, 21)*

i) Context

The context of Revelation 19:11-21:8 has already been discussed above [cf. section 1.3.2.]. Within this section Revelation 19:11-21 forms a unit. It fits into the larger subsection as follows³⁶²:

19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
19:11-21	the Divine Warrior and his conquests
20:1-10	Final defeat of Satan
20:11-15	Vision of the final judgment
21:1-8	Transition to the new order

The unit of Revelation 19:11-21 is marked off by using the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 19:11 and 20:1. Both these phrases are combined with an angel that is seen, either in heaven (Rev 19:11) or coming down from heaven (Rev 20:1). Although the phrase καὶ εἶδον appears twice more within the text [Rev 19:17, the beginning of the second subunit {cf. below}, and Rev 19:19] it is not a change to another vision. Specifically with regard to the use of καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 19:19, Aune (1998b: 1064) comments: “[It] functions to focus on a new aspect of a continuing vision report”³⁶³. Within the subunit of Revelation 19:11-21 Aune (1998b: 1046) identifies two subsections:

- 19:11-16 Eschatological coming of the Divine Warrior
- 19:17-21 Capture of the beast and the false prophet³⁶⁴

³⁶² Cf. Aune: 1998b on the detail structure of Revelation 17-22. Bauckham (1993a: 339) calls Revelation 19:11-21:8 a “transition from the fall of Babylon to the arrival of the New Jerusalem.”

³⁶³ My bracketed insert.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 105), who divides the text into three subunits by using the text marker καὶ εἶδον. There is certainly a lot of merit in this argumentation. It is, of course, also possible to understand Revelation 19:17-18 and 19:19-21 as two subunits of the subtext Revelation 19:17-21.

The vision of the Parousia of the Messiah in Revelation 19:11-21 is loaded with images from the Old Testament and early Judaism. The vision of the bloodstained Messiah goes back to Isaiah 63:1-3, but also has similarities with the narrative of Exodus 15:3-4 (Aune 1998b: 1048-1050).

ii) Conquering Prince

a) Syntactical analysis

¹²οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ
 └ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός,
 καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά,
 ἔχων ὄνομα
 └ γεγραμμένον
 └ ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν
 └ εἰ μὴ αὐτός,
¹³καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον
 └ βεβαμμένον αἵματι,
 καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.

The emphasis is on a description of the exalted Christ. John uses the conjunction δὲ twice in Revelation to emphasise his description of the exalted Christ (Aune 1998b: 1054). John uses a familiar image of bloodstained clothing of a divine warrior (cf. Ex 15; Deut 33; Isa 26:16-27; [Aune 1998b: 1057]). It is an eschatological motif as part of the scene of the Final Judgment, therefore referring to eternal death.

b) The divine warrior with bloodstained clothes

The text of Revelation 19:11-21 has many suggested variants. However, many of the variants are not well attested. Furthermore, none of the variants would influence the text in a material way. It is thus possible to work with the text as presented by Aland & Aland (1993: 672-673) [cf. Aune (1998b: 1042-1045) for a detailed discussion of the merit of all the suggested variants; cf. also Ford (1975: 320-321), specifically on the suggested variants for the perfect tense verb βεβαμμένον in Rev 19:13].

Revelation 19:11-21 [and specifically Rev 19:11-16] is “a description of the return or Parousia of Jesus Christ” (Aune 1998b: 1046; Kreitzer 1997b: 870-871). According

to Bauckham (1993a: 18), from Revelation 19:11 onwards nothing is seen or heard about anything that happens in heaven³⁶⁵. Although the pericope does not contain any of the traditional early Christian conceptions with regard to the Parousia, the context is that of the Messianic Warrior going out victoriously to conquer the enemies of his Kingdom (Aune 1998b: 1046-1047). The “*symbolic description*” (Aune 1998b: 1047)³⁶⁶ of the Divine Cavalier supports the décor of the scene as that of the Final Judgment. The image of the winepress (Rev 19:14) is similar to that found in Revelation 14:14-20, where the Final Judgment is announced [cf. 2.2 above]. Also, the image of the feast on the corpses of the peoples of the world [i.e. the unbelievers] puts the emphasis on the righteous judgment of God. He will not let any evil pass unnoticed (Morris 1969: 232; Mounce 1977: 348-349). Only those “who have washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb” and “whose names are written in the Book of Life” will survive (Rev 7:14; 20:12-15). They will partake in the festival as the guests of the King.

The same applies with regard to the identification of the Cavalier as the Messiah. He is coloured in the language of judgment (Aune 1998b: 1047). John uses some features from the introductory section of Revelation in his description of the Messiah (cf. Rev 1:5, 14, 16; 3:7, 14; [Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 105; Bauckham 1993a: 20]). He is identified as “the Word of God”, a title found in the New Testament only in Johannine literature (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; cf. Heb 4:12; [Mounce 1977: 345-346]).

The Cavalier on the white horse is none other than Christ. He is going out in glory to wage war on the nations of the world [i.e. the unbelieving world, the enemies of God] and to judge in glory and righteousness (Aune 1998b: 1048). The strong militaristic language is controlled by adding judicial imagery (Bauckham 1993b: 105). That Christ is called *ὁ καθήμενος* (Rev 19:11b) could be a subtle word play on the circumlocution that is used throughout Revelation for God. It is another example of the divine status that John affords to Christ in Revelation.

³⁶⁵ Cf. however Gourgues (1985: 678-680) who is of the opinion that one must be careful to just place an entire vision either on earth or in heaven. Throughout Revelation John tends to jump around between heaven and earth.

³⁶⁶ Italic by Aune (1998b: 1047).

As in the judgment scene of Revelation 14:14-20 the blood mentioned in Revelation 19:13 is not the blood of Christ in salvation, but the blood of his enemies that have been destroyed by Christ in the Messianic war (Aune 1998b: 1057). It is thus not life-giving blood [as thought by the patristic writers (Beasley-Murray 1981: 280)], but the blood of death [i.e. life passing out of the body (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 100; cf. De Cock 2004: 158); cf. also discussion on blood in section 2.2 above and Chapter 7, 2.1.4]. The text from which this image was drawn (Isa 63:1-3) also implies that the death of God's enemies is what John has in mind. The image of blood in this instance [as in Rev 14:19] expresses the final cleaning of the earth by pouring the blood of those in opposition to God (De Cock 2004: 160). Furthermore: "It indicates his function as executor of the divine wrath" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 280). Although He is only riding out to war in the vision, the blood on his clothes symbolises his victory [beforehand] in the war that He is about to enter into (Mounce 1977: 345)³⁶⁷.

The image of a bloodstained warrior going out to destroy his enemies is found in a number of texts in the Old Testament (Ex 15; Deut 33; Hab 3; Isa 26:16-27:6; 59:15-20; 63:1-6; Zech 14:1-21; [Aune 1998b: 1057]). The clothes of the Messiah are dipped [stained – βεβαμμένον] in the blood. The use of the perfect tense indicates the permanence of this action (Morris 1969: 230). It confirms that the punishment of death in judgment [or life in judgment] will last in eternity.

iii) Killing in judgment

a) Syntactical analysis

²¹καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν
 └─ ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ
 └─ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου
 └─ τῇ ἐξελεύσει ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ,
καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν
 └─ ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.

The image is that of the eschatological judgment. The description of the Messiah is in terms of Him going out to conquer in judgment. The use of words such as τῶν σαρκῶν and ἀπεκτάνθησαν implies physical death, whereas the imagery

³⁶⁷ For the meaning of νικᾶν, cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4.



supports the idea of eternal death. Of course, physical death would spell eternal death for the unbeliever.

b) The text of Revelation 19:19-21

The “war of judgment” seemingly never occurs. The next vision that is revealed is that of the Messiah capturing the beast and his followers (Rev 19:20). It could be that no actual war will take place. A war is not necessary anymore, as the Messiah has already won the decisive victory on the cross (cf. Rev 12:11). The Final Judgment is nothing more than a confirmation of this victory and the sentencing of God’s enemies to eternal death (Morris 1969: 232). In Revelation 12:7-9 Michael and his army of angels also rides out to conquer the Dragon and his angels. However, the victory is not attributed to them [and nothing is mentioned about the war]. The victory ultimately belongs to Christ (Rev 12:11).

Furthermore, the believers [the army of warriors] accompanying the Messiah never partake in any conquering action. The victory belongs to the Messiah only [cf. Rev 12:11 where a similar notion is followed]. This is in stark contrast to Jewish apocalyptic literature where believers play a significant role in the Messianic victory (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 210-212).

That the beast and his followers *were captured* [ἐπίασθη - passive] refers to actions performed by the Messiah [i.e. divine passive] (Aune 1998b: 1065). The destruction of the beast and the false prophet is completed when they are thrown *alive* into the Lake of Fire [for a discussion on the Lake of Fire including the discussion of Rev 19:20, cf. 3.2 below].

“The rest” of the people were killed [ἀπεκτάνθησαν - divine passive] by the “sword projecting from the mouth of the one mounted on the steed” (Aune 1998b: 1067). “The rest” refers to the kings and their armies that were mentioned for the first time in Revelation 19:19a (Aune 1998b: 1067). Kill [ἀποκτείνω] is not to be interpreted in a literal sense here. It is an eschatological metaphor referring to the final judgment. In the words of Mounce (1977: 350): “...the sword is the proclamation of divine retribution that slays all who have...arrayed themselves against God and the forces of righteousness.” This eschatological destruction of the enemies of God is in

accordance with apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch 38:5 (Aune 1998b: 1067). “The sword” that is used is a metaphor for the Word of God, with parallels in Isaiah 11:4 and Hebrews 4:12 (Morris 1969: 233)³⁶⁸. It finds expression particularly in the language of judgment, which is the context for the rest of Revelation 19, as well as that of Revelation 20 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 284). Death in this case thus refers to eternal death following on the judgment of God.

The metaphorical language of Revelation 19:19-21 seems to result in different judgments for different groups of people, with the beast and the false prophet ending up in the Lake of Fire and the rest being killed by the sword from the mouth of Christ. The entire décor of the scene is, however, that of the Final Judgment. It wants to emphasise the completeness and finality of God’s judgment on the beast and his followers, a fact that is further enhanced by the statement that the birds of prey “gorged themselves on the flesh of the wicked” (Mounce 1977: 350; cf. Du Rand 1999a: 1802)³⁶⁹.

In Revelation 20:11-15 another window of this judgment scene is opened. There it is said that upon judgment everyone whose name was not written into the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire. This “double judgment scene” has prompted Charles (1920b: 140) to interpret Revelation 19:11-20:15 as a reference to two different occasions: the death of the wicked (Rev 19:20-21) and the judgment of all (Rev 20:11-15). In the interim then the souls of the dead would wait in Hades upon their moment of judgment (Charles 1920b: 140). This interpretation, however, tries to force Revelation into a chronological narrative, which it is not [cf. Du Rand (1999b: 109) for a discussion on this interpretation by supporters of premillennialism]³⁷⁰.

³⁶⁸ Aune (1998b: 1067) notes that the phrase τῆ ἐξελεύσεως ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ could be regarded as a gloss “intended to emphasize the metaphorical interpretation of the sword.” Hughes (1990: 203) connects the sword-metaphor with the warning by Christ that the words He has spoken will in the end be the judge of those who don’t adhere to his words (cf. John 12:47-48).

³⁶⁹ Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 106) who is of the opinion that the distinction made between the punishment of the beast [and the false prophet] and the “rest of the people” is important: being thrown alive in the Lake of Fire means eternal torment, while being killed instantly saves one from the torment. This distinction, however, misses out on the goal of the Judgment scene, i.e. to destroy the enemies of God, regardless if they were leaders or followers. Also: according to Revelation 20:11-15 nobody will avert the Day of Judgment.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Ford (1975: 359) who distinguishes two possible judgment scenes, one for the living (Rev 19:19-21) and one for the dead (Rev 20:11-15). A similar line is followed by Knight (1999: 129). Hoekema (1977: 56), on the other hand, takes Revelation 20:1-3 back to the beginning of the New

According to Du Rand (1999b: 118) the judgment of God in Revelation 20 is not a new judgment [following on Rev 14 and 19] but only a pronouncement of the judgment of God that has already been effected. Revelation 19-20 is a continuous vision that starts with the Parousia in Revelation 19:11, followed by the resurrection and then the Final Judgment. Judgment in Revelation 19 is thus not a separate vision from that in Revelation 20, but a different view upon the Final Judgment of God (cf. Du Rand 1999b: 116-117).

iv) Summary

- Revelation 19:11-21 is another “judgment scene” in the Book of Revelation. It is “a description of the return or Parousia of Jesus Christ” (Aune 1998b: 1046) and as such a description of the Final Judgment, which is incorporated with [or follows directly on] the Parousia.
- The Cavalier on the white horse is the Messiah [i.e. Christ] returning as King and Judge of the world.
- The blood mentioned in Revelation 19:13 is not that of the Messiah but of the enemies of God struck by his judgment.
- The capturing of the beast and the false prophet alive and the killing of the “rest of the people” are eschatological metaphors for the utter destruction of the enemies of God in the Final Judgment.
- The judgment scene is not a different one from that in Revelation 20:11-15, but probably only a different window being opened on the scene of the Final Judgment, which would result in eternal death for all God’s enemies. It starts with the Parousia of Christ (Rev 19:19-21), which is followed by the resurrection and the judgment (Rev 20:1-15). It could be that Revelation 20:1-3 refers not to this period, but goes back to the first coming of Christ (Hoekema 1977: 56). That is when the victory was won (Rev 12:11).

Testament. This is possible, if the a-millennial view is followed, where the millennium is seen as referring to the period of Christ’s reign between his first coming and the Parousia.

2.4. *Death giving back the dead (Rev 20:13)*

i) Revelation 20:13

The context of Revelation 20:1-15 has already been discussed above [cf. 1.3.2. above]³⁷¹. A syntactical analysis of the text was also done then. It is the scene of the eschatological judgment at the Parousia. The entire vision [i.e. of God on his throne, the Books being opened, etc.] supports the idea that John portrays the Final Judgment.

In Revelation 20:13 John mentions that Death will give back the dead [actually he lists Death, Hades, and the sea – all places where the dead were traditionally thought to have gone after physical death]. The idea that Death [or Hades – always used together in Rev] will “give back the dead” at judgment is a “fundamental image of resurrection” (Bauckham 1993a: 62), which is found in many texts from the first and second centuries AD (cf. 1 En 51:1; 4 Ezra 7:32; 2 Apoc Bar 21:23; 42:8; 50:2; Apoc Pet 4:3-4, 10-12; [Bauckham 1993a: 56-61]). The “resurrection”-idea could be questioned, however, as both Revelation and 1 Enoch only talks about a “giving back” of the dead and not resurrecting them [cf. also below]. It could be an allusion to the text of Isaiah 26:19 (Bauckham 1998a: 277). The Isaiah text could, of course, be understood metaphorically as a spiritual revival [cf. Chapter 2, 3.7].

That Death [or Hades or the Sea] will return the dead implies that they didn’t have an absolute right over the dead. They were just entrusted with the safekeeping of the dead by God. God still has ultimate control over the dead and could reclaim them at any time. This is a huge step away from the old Israelite conception that the dead falls beyond the sovereignty of God when they entered Death or Hades [cf. Chapter 2, 3.4 and 3.5; (Bauckham 1993a: 62)]. For the purposes of John’s message of hope and comfort it serves to remind the reader of God’s Almighty power, even over the realm generally thought to be out of his reach.

As Death and Hades are personified throughout Revelation together, it is probably not strange to find both here, even though only Hades was traditionally seen as the abode of the dead. It could also be that John used Death here in the place of Abaddon, the name he used for the “king” of Hades in Revelation 9:11 (Bauckham 1993a: 67).

³⁷¹ Cf. also 1.3.2 (ii) for a discussion on the textual variants for Revelation 20:11-15.

The peculiar mentioning, however, is that of the sea. If John really wanted to make a distinction between those that died at sea [i.e. without a proper burial who were thought to have been in the subterranean ocean] and those who died [and were buried] on earth, he would most probably have mentioned earth here too (Bauckham 1993a: 67-68). However, according to Aune (1998b: 1103) the distinction is appropriate, as Death and Hades were often associated only with death on the earth. Being “buried” in the sea was deemed inappropriate as it deprived someone of a proper burial (Aune 1998b: 1102). According to Bauckham (1993a: 68), the sea should not be seen as anything more than another metaphor for Sheol or Hades (2 Sam 22:5-6; Job 26:5; Ps 69:15)³⁷². The idea with this is probably just to show that nobody will escape judgment (Mounce 1977: 366; Beasley-Murray 1981: 302). Furthermore, by referring to the sea here, John prepares the way for the reference to its disappearance in Revelation 21:1 (Bauckham 1998a: 289).

John’s concern in this verse is not so much the how of this “resurrection” [he mentions more about resurrection in Rev 20:4-6] but rather the fact the “resurrection” took place [the context for the narrative under discussion] (Bauckham 1993a: 69).

The question of who is included in this “resurrection” could be a problem. In Revelation 20:4-6 it seems that the righteous have already been resurrected into a new life of glory with Christ. And in Revelation 6:9-11, 7:9-17, and 14:1-5 John saw the righteous in the presence of God in heaven, alive. Is it therefore only the unrighteous that is resurrected here to face the Final Judgment? Although Hades could sometimes stand for all the dead [as in the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.5], it was later on [i.e. in the New Testament and apocalyptic literature] interpreted as the biding place for only the wicked dead (Luke 16:23; cf. however Acts 2:27, 31; [cf. Chapter 4, section 3] (Ford 1975: 359; Mounce 1977: 366). As mentioned above, it rather seems as if John wanted to emphasise the universality of the resurrection and the judgment. Nobody will be excluded from either of the two. That is the only purpose of this

³⁷² Charles (1920b: 195-196) is of the opinion that the author substituted τὰ ταμεία [i.e. the place where the souls of the righteous were seemingly kept] with ἡ θάλασσα [the sea] to emphasise the physical resurrection of all the dead.

verse. The when of the resurrection can only be detected from the other texts mentioned [this will be discussed in more detail in 2.5 below].

It must be noted that John doesn't call the "gathering of the dead" from Death, Hades and the sea [i.e. the giving back of the dead] a resurrection [as is done in Rev 20:4-6 with the first resurrection]. The reason could be the fact that John is not so much concerned with the "how" of the gathering. However, it could be that John deliberately refrains from calling it a resurrection, as he prefers to reserve this term for the raising of Christ from the dead and of the believers into eternal life with God (Travis 1997a: 1018). Therefore, although this is the expected resurrection before the Final Judgment, it is not called as such, as the believers specifically are not specified here as being raised [they were seemingly raised already?].

ii) Summary

- Revelation 20:11-15 narrates the "resurrection" of the dead unto the Final Judgment. The purpose of the description of the "giving back of the dead" by Death, Hades and the sea is to emphasise that nobody will escape the judgment of God.
- John is not so much concerned about the how and the when of the Final Judgment [or the "resurrection"] as with the fact that it will take place.
- The fact that he specifically refrains from calling this occurrence a resurrection [while he specifically mentions the resurrection of the believers in Rev 20:4-6] probably confirms that he is thinking about the raising of the wicked dead unto judgment. Many other texts (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5) give the impression that the believers are in any case already in the presence of God, immediately after death.

2.5. *A second death for the dead (Rev 2:11; 20: 6, 14; 21:8)?*

i) Context

The second death is mentioned only four times in the New Testament, all of the occurrences appearing in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). All the texts under discussion [except for Rev 2:11] fall within the subsection of Revelation 19:11-21:8, which narrates the Parousia of Christ and the Final Judgment [cf. 2.4

above]. The context of the proclamations [i.e. Rev 2-3] has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3, where the context of this particular proclamation is discussed]. Within the larger section of Revelation 19:11-21:8 the other texts referring to the second death fits in as follows³⁷³:

19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
19:11-21	the Divine Warrior and his conquests
20:1-10	Final defeat of Satan
20:11-15	Vision of the final judgment
21:1-8	Transition to the new order

a) Revelation 20:1-10

Revelation 20:1-10 [and specifically Rev 20:4-6 regarding the millennial reign of Christ] has been one of the most discussed [and probably most controversial³⁷⁴] verses in the Book of Revelation. However, as Mounce (1977: 351) noted, the controversy should not distract one's attention from more important issues within the text, such as the resurrection, the Parousia, the Judgment and the removal of all wickedness. Aune (1998b: 1078-1080) divides this subsection into three smaller parts:

- 20:1-3 Imprisonment of Satan for thousand years
- 20:4-6 Millennial reign of Christ [The Judgment Scene]
- 20:7-10 The eschatological war

The first two subsections are identified by the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον that appears in Revelation 20:1 and 4. The third subsection is introduced with the phrase Καὶ ὅταν τελεσθῆ..., thus inserting a time lapse between Revelation 20:6 and 20:7. It is specifically Revelation 20:4-6 that is of concern for this discussion regarding the second death. The text is actually framed by phrases regarding the completion of the thousand years (Rev 20:3bc and 7a). Although the scene appears to portray that of a Judgment vision (cf. Rev 20:4a), it is never said that the believers [or martyrs] act as judges. They end up reigning with Christ for the period of a thousand years (Rev

³⁷³ Cf. Aune: 1998b on the detail structure of Revelation 17-22

³⁷⁴ According to Kreitzer (1997a: 871) the section about the millennium has become "the playground of the eccentrics".

20:4d), a promise of life given to the believers in Thyatira (Rev 2:27) and Laodicea (Rev 3:21) if they conquer (cf. Aune 1998b: 1079). Aune (1998b: 1079) emphasises that the scene lacks many of the typical features generally associated with such a Judgment scene. Revelation 20:4-6 is dominated by two very prominent phrases: the first resurrection and the second death.

b) Revelation 20:11-15

The context of this subsection [which narrates the Final Judgment] has already been discussed [cf. 1.3.2 above]. A syntactical analysis was also done then.

c) Revelation 21:1-8

Revelation 21:1-8 is the last of the subsections of Revelation 19:11-21:8. It is framed by the text marker καὶ εἶδον (Rev 21:1) and the appearance of one of the bowl angels in Revelation 21:9 (Aune 1998b: 1113). It can be subdivided into two subunits:

- 21:1-4 An angelic speech from the throne
- 21:5-8 A speech by “The One sitting on the throne”

The first saying by God (Rev 21:5a) acts as a conclusion to the angelic speech (Rev 21:1-4) as well as an introduction to the divine announcements of the following verses (Rev 21:5-8). According to Aune (1998b: 1114-1115) it is quite possible that Revelation 21:5-22:2 was a later insertion and that Revelation 21:4 was originally directly linked to Revelation 22:3-5 as a continuous vision of the new world of God after the judgment.

Revelation 21:1-8 announces the inauguration of the New World by God, going hand in hand with the termination of all wickedness [i.e. everything standing between God and man as a result of sin] in the Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15. Revelation 21 announces that from here on nothing will come to stand between God and his people anymore, not even death.

ii) The second death

Revelation 19:11-21:8 narrates the Parousia of Christ and, going hand in hand with it, the so-called “general resurrection” [i.e. the calling or gathering of the dead from

Hades] and the Final Judgment. The text of Revelation 20:1-21:8 [which applies to this discussion] is well attested with regard to the applicable verses. There are some changes suggested for all the verses in the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 674-676). However, none of the suggested variants are critical to the understanding of the text for purposes of this discussion. The discussion will therefore focus on the text as presented³⁷⁵.

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:5-6

οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν
└─ ἀχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.
Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.
ὁ μακάριος └─ ὁ ἔχων μέρος
καὶ ἅγιος └─ ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ.
ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν,
ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς └─ τοῦ θεοῦ
└─ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν
└─ μετ' αὐτοῦ
└─ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

The text contrasts the first resurrection and the second death. There is no chronological flow in the sense that a first death or a second resurrection is mentioned. The intention is probably only to show the difference with regard to eternal destiny between believers and non-believers. It is clearly eschatological language, suggesting that life and death discussed in this section refers to eternal life or death.

b) A first resurrection and a second death?

Two phrases stand out in Revelation 20:4-6 amidst the controversial mentioning of the millennium: ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a) and ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος (Rev 20:6b). These phrases, coupled with the mentioning of the millennium, have led to many a scholar trying to find a chronological explanation for the Parousia and the

³⁷⁵ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1073-1074; 1111-1112) for a discussion on the merit of all the suggested variants.

Final Judgment [commonly known as millennialism]. This has resulted in the development of, amongst others, the theories of pre-millennialism and post-millennialism (Dodd 1997: 740-741)³⁷⁶.

Excursion 10: Views on the millennium³⁷⁷

The term *millennium* refers to the period of a thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. In Jewish as well as Christian eschatology this period refers to the intermediate period just before the full establishment of God's kingdom (Dodd 1997: 738-739). The concept of the millennium is, according to Charles (1920b: 142), a very late development in apocalyptic Judaism. The only clear reference to the millennium in the New Testament is found in the abovementioned text of Revelation 20. The basis thereof seems to be Psalm 90:4 (Sanders 2004: 444). But, "scholarly opinion on the origin of the millennium is...by no means unanimous" (Sanders 2004: 448). The controversy surrounding the millennium comes from the different interpretations that evolved regarding the Parousia of Christ. Using the millennium as basis many scholars try to interpret the timing of the Parousia, something the text of Revelation 20:1-6 does not explicitly answer (Dodd 1997: 739).

The more common pre-millennial interpretation expects the return of Christ before the start of the millennium, after which He will reign literally with the church for a thousand years (cf. Meale 1992). The thousand years will be preceded by a seven-year period of persecution (cf. Dan 9:24-27). Believers will, however, not experience this persecution. They will be taken away to heaven during the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess 4:17; [Du Rand 1999b 80-81]). The thousand years only starts after the seven-year period of persecution (Vosloo 1999b: 1847).

The pre-millennial view works with a schema of two resurrections as well as a second Parousia (Du Rand 1995a: 128-129). The problem with this view is that the Bible neither teaches the concept of the Rapture before the Parousia [not in 1 Thess 4, nor in Matt 24], and more important, that believers will be spared the sufferings of persecution (Kreitzer 1997b: 872). In fact, in Matthew 24 and in Revelation believers are constantly reminded that they must prepare for the very real possibility of persecution and suffering (Du Rand 1999b: 80-86).

³⁷⁶ A standpoint of a-millennialism is also identified, discarding the existence of an actual millennium.

³⁷⁷ This is just a short excursion on a subject that many books have been written about. For further reading one can refer to, amongst others, Meale (1992) and Clouse (1977).

Furthermore, the text of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [used as basis for the theory of the Rapture] does not foresee the Rapture but the Parousia of Christ (Bolkestein 1980: 112-129). It is given to believers as a message of comfort to explain that fellow believers who have already died are not lost [or privileged in a specific way]. All of them will eventually stand [i.e. alive] in front of Christ (Du Rand 1999b: 84).

The post-millennial view foresees the thousand years as the period of the church's reign on earth. Christ reigns [or will reign] with believers in the Spirit until the end of the thousand years. During this period nothing will stop the spreading of the Gospel-message. The thousand years will start sometime in the future. By the end of the thousand years the conversion of all nations will have occurred (Aune 1998b: 1089). When Satan is released after the thousand years a short period [seven years?] of persecution will follow before the Parousia of Christ (Vosloo 1999b: 1851-1852). According to this view, the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection. Only at the Parousia [and the Judgment] will the bodies of the dead be resurrected (Du Rand 1999b: 110-111).

The a-millennial view doesn't foresee a thousand year reign on earth but interprets the millennium as the "state of holiness" of the believers in heaven awaiting the Parousia (Du Rand 1995a: 127). "It is a symbol for the whole period of time between Jesus' first and second comings" (Dodd 1997: 741; Hughes 1990: 211; cf. Mounce 1977: 358). Augustine of Hippo is regarded as the champion of this view. In this view the first resurrection is the birth into the life of grace (cf. Col 3:1-2; Phil 3:20; [Ford 1975: 351]). A-millennialism proposes this period of the millennium to be "the golden era" of the church in the world (Vosloo 1999b: 1855). According to Dodd (1997:74), the only problem with this view is that it disregards the existence of evil in this world.

It could, however, be possible to understand the millennial reign as the reign of Christ in heaven [and the believers who have died reigning with Him] for the full period determined by God [symbolised by the complete number of a thousand (Groenewald 1986: 203)], which is simultaneously the complete time of persecution suffered by the church on earth [i.e. three and a half years]. In this sense every believer who have died already participates in the triumphant new world order of God [which has been inaugurated with the resurrection and

ascension of Christ], while believers in this life still suffer the pains of persecution and evil (Joubert 1999a: 66-68).

This view, in a way, compensates for the so-called deficiency of a-millennialism [i.e. that the reign of Christ cannot be seen in the evil of this world]. Nothing in Revelation 20:1-10 specifically indicates that the setting is fixed either on earth or in heaven. The alternation between heaven and earth occurs frequently throughout Revelation. It could be that Revelation 20:1-3 is set on earth, whilst Revelation 20:4-6 is set in heaven (Gourgues 1985: 679-681). In this sense the last-mentioned view is quite possible. In the light of this interpretation, Gourgues (1985: 681) rightly feels that there is no need to look for a terrestrial reign of Christ before the end of time. This is the same as the view held by Joubert (1999a) above. It is also the view from which this thesis looks upon resurrection and judgment.

By implication the mentioning of a first resurrection presupposes an expectation of a second resurrection, which many scholars thought to be the resurrection referred to in Revelation 20:11-15 (cf. Groenewald 1986: 200)]. However, as Morris (1969: 238) notes, John never mentions a second resurrection. He deliberately refrains from calling the raising of the dead [Rev 20:11-15] a second resurrection [cf. 2.4 above].

Ford (1975: 350) thinks of the first resurrection as referring to “the first group to enjoy resurrection”, with reference to 1 Corinthians 15:23. This is never implied or stated by John. To the contrary, John calls those who share in the first resurrection blessed (Rev 20:6a), for they will not be influenced by the second death (Rev 20:6b; [Aune 1998b: 1091]). With the second death being eternal (cf. Rev 20:14) the first resurrection cannot be reserved only for the death of certain believers, e.g. the martyrs [cf. Chapter 10 below for a discussion of the first resurrection]. All believers are blessed, and therefore none of them will be affected by the second death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 295; Osborne 2002: 708; [cf. Charles 1920b: 185, who thinks differently]). The fact that they are also called “holy” [ἅγιος] in Revelation 20:6a probably has to do with the literary setting of the beatitude (Aune 1998b: 1091)³⁷⁸.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Mounce (1977: 359-360) who is of the opinion that the first resurrection is reserved for the Christian martyrs only. Meale (1992: 103-107) thinks of them as the 24 elders, mentioned for the first time in Revelation 4:9-10.

The second death is clearly reserved only for the unbelieving people of this world. In Revelation the second death is linked with the Lake of Fire [ἄβυσσος] (Rev 20:14; 21:8). It is the result of the judgment by God on the deeds of man (Osborne 2002: 707-708). The second death is the destiny of every person whose name is not written into the book of life (Rev 20:15). Hughes (1990: 215) calls it "...total death, the utter destruction of final judgment executed against the obdurate enemies of God." Although Jesus does not refer to it as such in His warning in Matthew 10:28, it could be seen as referring to the second death in the sense meant by John in Revelation: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Watson 1992: 111-II).

The Lake of Fire is a place of punishment, away from the face of the Lord. It is the final destiny [at the Day of Judgment] of all the unrighteous (Rev 20:15; 21:8), as well as the false prophet and the beasts (Rev 19:20), the devil (Rev 20:10) and even of Death and ἄδης (Rev 20:14) [cf. subsection 3 below].

According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 83) the concept of a second death was familiar within Jewish thought:

"...it implied a contrast between the death which all must suffer and the fate of those who are doomed never to escape its power, whether because they do not qualify for resurrection, or because they suffer judgment in the world to come."

Believers in Smyrna [cf. the proclamation to Smyrna in Rev 2:8-11] therefore do not have to fear the second death if they conquer, because they will not experience the effects thereof at all (Rev 2:11). They will only experience the joy of life in eternity with God. Eternal life is the promise to each of the seven congregations in Revelation 2-3. Whoever has eternal life, will not suffer the second death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 83). They must, however, stay faithful unto death, knowing that Death does not have any power over them (Rev 2:10). For believers in Smyrna it is a message of comfort: they need not fear death, for they will not suffer eternally judgment and punishment.



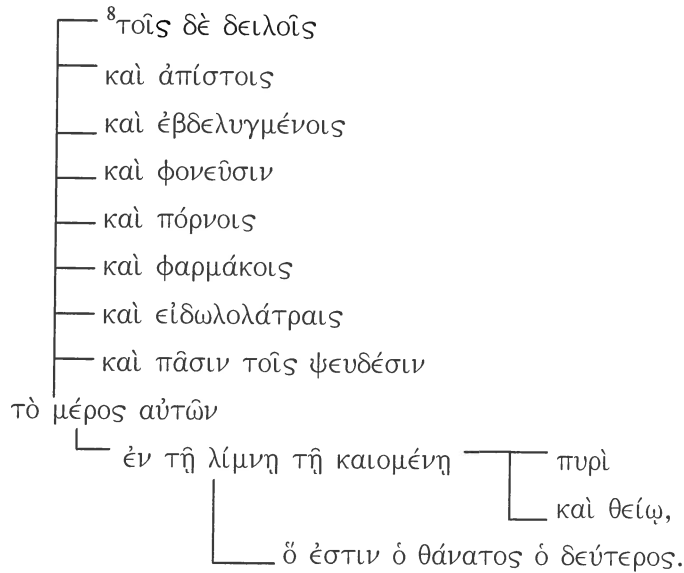
This promise [as is the case with all the other promises of eternal life in the proclamations] is then carried forward into the final chapters of Revelation (Rev 20-22), where believers are given a view on the “future result” of their lives in faith [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 and Chapter 9, 1.1.2 above for a more detailed discussion regarding the situation of the church in Smyrna].

In Revelation 20:6 ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος seems to have been used in direct contrast to ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a). Aune (1998b: 1090) notes that it is quite possible that the *first* resurrection was modelled, as a kind of counterpoint, to the concept of the *second* death. The last mentioned was a familiar way of referring to eternal death in rabbinic literature [cf. above]. The contrasting message of the first resurrection and the second death was supposed to comfort believers with the knowledge that, because their names appear in the Book of Life, they will be resurrected to reign with Christ in the first resurrection.

If, by implication, the second death were to be preceded by a first death, this first death would then be the death of the body [i.e. physical death]. It is “...a consequence of the death and mortality by which humanity as a whole is pervaded” (Hughes 1990: 215). Therefore, none will escape the “first death” [i.e. those that were to die before the Day of the Lord]. But believers need not fear, as Christ has overcome death and has the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). He will let believers rise into the *first* resurrection so that the *second* death will not get hold of them (Rev 20:5-6).

It is specifically in Revelation 20:14 where it is made clear that the second death is to be equated with eternal punishment of non-believers. This is the first instance in Revelation where the Lake of Fire is equated with the second death. In the previous instances only the second death was mentioned. Revelation 20:14 could be deemed “an explanatory gloss” linking these two concepts together (Aune 1998b: 1103). This explanation is given amidst the scene of the Final Judgment (Rev 20:11-15), confirming the second death and the Lake of Fire as the final destiny for those judged by God to enter eternal death.

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 21:8



Revelation 21:8 is a vice list, similar to that found in Revelation 9:20-21 and 22:15 (Aune 1998b: 1130). The categories of sinners listed in these lists are parallel to the Ten Commandments and traditional applications thereof [cf. Aune (1998b: 1131) for a comprehensive list of texts under each category]. The sins listed are all those sins that exclude a worshipper from the temple. In the list in Revelation 21:8 they are now excluded from the heavenly city, the place of God’s perfect life (Aune 1998a: 1132).

d) Eternal destiny of the world

The contrast between the destiny of the believer and unbeliever is further enhanced when John sees the vision of the new heaven and earth (i.e. Rev 21:1-8), immediately following on the vision of the judgment (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 304). In fact, the vision of the new heaven and earth concludes with the same statement as the vision of the judgment, i.e. that the Lake of Fire [or the second death] will be the destiny for all the unrighteous people (Rev 21:8). Revelation 21:8 is given here as the direct opposite of what lies ahead for the believers (Rev 21:6c-7; [Morris 1969: 246])³⁷⁹.

According to Aune (1998b: 1133) the words of God in Revelation 21:5-8 “succinctly summarizes the central message of Revelation”. It reveals the options open to

³⁷⁹ Aune (1998b: 1132) notes the importance to recognise the influence of Isaiah 65:17-20 on Revelation 21:1-5, and that the portrayal of the second death here in Revelation 21:8 is also found in Targum Isaiah 65:6 and 15.



believers: stay faithful unto death and receive the crown of life [as they were constantly urged to do in the proclamations], or give up on your faith and follow in the ways of the world, the end result of which is eternal punishment (Beasley-Murray 1981: 313-314; Aune 1998b: 1133). Again the message is not meant as a threat to believers. Rather it comes with a promise, directly from the mouth of God, that those who stay faithful will receive the gift of life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 314). They are promised a special relationship with God in his new world (Morris 1969: 246).

e) Eternal death or eternal torment?

The one question that comes up is whether the second death is a final destruction where such a person ceases to exist [i.e. motionless as in physical death], or whether it is only an eternal suffering of punishment [i.e. an experience of pain and suffering without being dead]³⁸⁰. There seems to be different points of view, even within Judaic literature.

Philo seemed to understand the second death as a suffering of dying “which is deathless and unending” [i.e. unending torment in hell]³⁸¹. In the Jewish Targums we find different views on the second death. The second death could either mean exclusion from resurrection (Tg. Jer 15:39, 57), or on the other hand, according to the Targum Isaiah where the second death is seen in the light of an eternal torment after judgment (Tg Isa 65:5-6). The last mentioned passage actually comes close to the description of Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 and to that of Philo (Watson 1992: 112-II).

If this is the case, the second death is not necessarily a death where there will be no existence [as in physical death], but rather a state of being alienated from God (Osborne 2002: 723-724). This would be in line with the Old Testament, which interpreted the Realm of Death in this light. God was not present in the Realm of Death, and therefore life could not exist there, as there is no possibility of a relationship with God and no possibility of participation in life in the realm of God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.5].

³⁸⁰ It could also be termed in the question “How dead is the dead in the second death?”

³⁸¹ Aune (1998b: 1092) describes Philo’s thinking as “death itself and existence in a continued state of dying”. Aune (1998b: 1092-1093) also notes the existence of the term of a second death in nearly contemporary Greek literature.

In Revelation the second death always stands in contrast to eternal life in the Kingdom of God in heaven. The second death could therefore be interpreted eschatologically as the state of being deprived of a relationship with the living God after the occurrence of physical death and the effecting of the Final Judgment. Although someone could be deemed dead while still alive [i.e. if they don't have a living relationship with God through the blood of the Lamb], they only experience the second death after death and judgment. This eschatological interpretation is clearly the understanding in each of the four texts where the second death is mentioned.

iii) Summary

- In Revelation 20:4-6 two phrases stand out, acting as contrasting images of the eternal existence of believers after physical death and after the Day of Judgment. These phrases are: ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a) and ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος (Rev 20:6b). According to Aune (1998b: 1090), the concept of the *first* resurrection was probably modelled, as a kind of counterpoint, to the *second* death.
- The first resurrection seemingly implies a second resurrection later on. However, John never mentions such a resurrection. He deliberately refrains from calling the gathering of the dead for judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 a resurrection. Also, the resurrection of Christ is seen on another level. John just mentions that Christ is alive [or came to life].
- The second death is clearly a death in eternity. In Revelation 20:15 and 21:8 it is equated with the Lake of Fire, which is the place where the unrighteous dead go after death and judgment.
- By implication the first death [not mentioned directly] probably refers to physical death in this world.
- The second death stands directly in opposition to eternal life. In this sense it is a message of comfort and motivation to believers. If they hold onto their faith until the end they have the promise from God that they will not suffer the second death, but will live and reign with God in eternity [cf. Chapter 10 below].

2.6. Summary on the judgment over life and death

- The eschatological judgment of God is a central theme throughout Revelation. In the Final Judgment the decision on life and death in eternity comes into effect. Those that hold onto their faith, receive life in eternity, while those that forsake their faith or live ungodly, are doomed to eternal punishment.
- Judgment is not only reserved for the Parousia of Christ. His sacrificial death is already an occurrence of judgment (Du Rand 1995a: 110-111).
- The phrase ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι refers to the judgment of God [the hour of judgment or the Day of Judgment], which is the day that the final decision on life and death in eternity is announced.
- The righteousness of God comes through in each of the judgment scenes in Revelation. God will punish and erase the wickedness from this world, and He will reward the faithful accordingly, not because of their good lives, but because their clothes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 7:9-17; 11:15-17).
- In Revelation 14:14-20 John uses images from Joel 3 to describe the judgment. However, the judgment is not effected by Yahweh [as in Joel], but by the Son of Man [i.e. Christ].
- References to blood in the judgment scenes of Revelation 14:14-20 and 19:11-21 do not point to the salvific blood of Christ. It is the blood of the unrighteous being destroyed in judgment.
- In Revelation 19:11-21 John describes the Parousia of Christ and coupled with it, the Final Judgment. Again the judgment is effected by Christ, described as a Divine Warrior going out in a war of judgment.
- The metaphors used in Revelation 19:11-21 convey the message of the utter destruction of all God's enemies [i.e. eternal death].
- The resurrection described in Revelation 20:11-15 is sometimes termed a "general resurrection". However, John doesn't call it a resurrection. Furthermore, it is probably only the unrighteous people being called to stand before the throne in judgment. The believers have already been resurrected in the first resurrection (Rev 4:4-6).



- The first resurrection does not necessarily entail a second resurrection. It is a term coined by John, probably to stand in direct contrast to the second death.
- The second death is death in eternity [By implication the first death would then be physical death]. In Revelation 20:15 it is related directly to the Lake of Fire, the place of eternal punishment for the unrighteous.
- The message of comfort to believers is that they have the promise of eternal life, which John contrasts directly with the second death in Revelation 20-21. Therefore, believers need not fear eternal death.
- The judgment scene in Revelation 20:11-15 is not a new judgment. According to Du Rand (1999b: 118) it is only the revelation of God's continuing judgment. The separation of believers [in heaven] and unbelievers [in Hades] at death is already the judgment.

3. Hell and the realm of death in Revelation

In Revelation a distinction is drawn between the Realm of Death [where the unrighteous dead go in waiting until the Day of Judgment] and the Lake of Fire [the place of eternal punishment] (cf. Shogren 1997c: 459-460). In Revelation 9 John uses the word φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου [shaft to the underworld], a concept that is related, and probably refers, to Hades [i.e. the Realm of Death]. In Revelation 17 the word ἡ ἀπώλεια is used as the final destiny for the beast from the earth [said to come up from the underworld – Rev 17:8, 11].

3.1. Death and Hades in Revelation

The word ᾄδης is used four times in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14), and is always linked up with θάνατος [read as a personification of death] (Böcher 1980: 73; Bauckham 1998a: 280). Although there might be difference of opinion, ᾄδης is also personified in each instance (cf. Aune 1998a: 401). The specific contexts of these four texts have already been discussed previously [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3; Chapter 8, 2.2.2; Chapter 9, 1.3.2].

Hades [as a place] seems to be a separate kingdom [although the place is not called ᾄδης in Revelation, but by the term ὁ ἀβύσσος - cf. Rev 9:1]. It even has its own

king named ὁ Ἄββαδών (Rev 9:11). It is important that Hades be distinguished from hell [the place of torment – the Lake of Fire]. According to Aune (1998a: 401) it could be that Death is seen as the ruler over Hades [the kingdom], as Death is always mentioned first in each of the four occurrences found in Revelation. Hades is not the place of eternal torment after death, but only the place where the wicked dead await their punishment, which would be meted out at the Parousia (cf. Rev 20:11-15; [Mounce 1977: 81; Lunde 1992: 310]; cf. also Chapter 3, section 3 and Chapter 4, 3.2 for a discussion on the clear shift in interpretation of Hades in apocalyptic literature and the New Testament).

The position of Hades [and by implication its ruler] is portrayed to be inferior to that of God and Christ. The Lamb has the keys to both ἄδης and θάνατος (Rev 1:18). This is the result of Christ's **physical** resurrection [cf. Chapter 4, 2.1.3 and Chapter 7, 2.1.3]. As the Lord of both life and death He ultimately decides who stays alive and who not. Death's powers [and coupled to that the powers of Hades] have been severely limited. It only has biological influence on the lives of people (Bailey 1979: 89). As a result of this the followers of Christ can have a new outlook on life and death (cf. Rom 6:4). Death is still regarded as evil, but its evil does not affect the people of God (Bailey 1979: 93). The belief in the **physical** resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resulting resurrection for believers in the new world is a major shift from belief in the Old Testament regarding Death and Hades (cf. Wright 2003: 85-128; cf. also Chapter 2, 3.5 above).

3.1.1. Who really controls Death and Hades (Rev 1:18c)?

The vision of the exalted Son of Man (Rev 1:9-20) serves to confirm the almighty power and glory of the One who is to act as Judge and rule as supreme King over his people [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 for a more in-depth discussion on the Son of Man in Rev 1:9-20, also for a syntactical analysis of the text]. According to Osborne (2002: 100) this section “introduces the reader to the purpose and content of his book as a whole”. With this elaborate description of the exalted Christ [which is not meant to be understood literally] John wants to “...call forth from his readers the same response of overwhelming and annihilating wonder which he experienced in his prophetic trance” (Caird 1966: 25-26). It is an image that wants to leave readers standing in awe picturing the almighty power of Christ, as much as it did to John.

According to Aune (1997: 103) the genitives [τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου] could be read either as objective genitives [i.e. understood spatially – cf. Rev 20:13] or as possessive genitives [in which case they would be personifications, as is the case in Rev 6:8]. Aune (1997: 103) prefers the objective use of the genitives, as “Death is never described in ancient texts as possessing keys”³⁸². Osborne (2002: 96) thinks that there could be a double reference here [i.e. incorporating both of the mentioned uses of the genitive], or as he calls it, “another case of both-and”, because it seems as if Death and Hades are personified in each of the four occurrences in Revelation. But then Death and Hades is also by implication the *biding place* of the dead [in any case some of them – cf. section 3 below] in this text (cf. Beale 1999: 214-215)³⁸³.

The mentioning of the keys follows Jewish and Hellenistic thought with regard to the realm of the dead (Osborne 2002: 96). The keys provide access to the gates or doors of death (cf. Job 17:16; Ps 9:13; Isa 38:10; [Osborne 2002: 96]). They symbolise the authority over access to these places (Morris 1969: 55). But they also emphasise the trustworthiness of the bearer of the key, in this case the Son of Man (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476). In early Jewish mythology nothing is mentioned about doors or gates for death [in which case it would make a key superfluous]. In Odes of Solomon 42:17, however, the existence of doors for hell is presupposed in the cry by the dead to Christ to open the door for them to come out (Aune 1997: 104).

According to some texts from rabbinic literature the keys to Death and Hades belongs to God alone (cf. Tg Deut 28:12; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 68; Aune 1997: 103]). From this point of view it is quite possible to say that Christ didn’t wrestle the keys away from the hands of death’s authorities, but received it from God upon his resurrection [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.3]. If this is the case, the “authorities” in charge of Death and Hades *never* had possession of the keys to their own domain.

³⁸² The difference is that the translation could be either “the keys **to** Death and Hades” or “the keys **of** Death and Hades” (Osborne 2002: 96). Cf. however, Aune (1998a: 401), where he also sees Death and Hades as both being personified and therefore able to hold keys.

³⁸³ Cf. Morris (1969: 55) who connects Hades with hell, distinguishing it from *Gehenna*, which is according to him the place of eternal torment [i.e. the Lake of Fire in Revelation].

This interpretation should not have been too unfamiliar to the readers of Revelation. From the Old Testament it is already clear that God in any case possesses all the power over life and death [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2-3.4]. This authority is “transferred” to Christ on his resurrection (cf. Rev 5:5-6). The fact that the keys of [to] Death and Hades are handed to Christ emphasises the high Christology of Revelation: He is effectively put onto the same level as God, i.e. being the ultimate controller over life and death and the ultimate Judge of the living and the dead (Mounce 1977: 81)³⁸⁴.

To the contrary keys also enable one to escape, or get out of, a place. In Revelation 9:1-2, the key to the abyss is given to an angel and is not held by God or given to Christ [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.4]. The angel opens the door for the evil locusts to come out. The image of Revelation 9 must, however, be read in the light of the specific vision regarding the trumpets and not confused with the control of God over the realm of the dead [i.e. the abyss]. Furthermore, it is still God who sends the angel, confirming his control over the abyss.

The “turning point” for Death and the Realm of Death [i.e. Hades] is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is hinted upon in Revelation 1:17-18b [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.3 for a discussion on this]. He is identified as the living One [ὁ ζῶν] over whom death can exercise no further power. Because of his own victory over death Christ has the “proprietary rights” over Death and Hades (Wright 2003: 470). Through his resurrection He has shown that Death and Hades are not immune to his power and authority, even though its domain is alien to that of Christ, whose domain is the kingdom of life (Hughes 1990: 29).

As a result of this, death can have no greater effect on believers than it had on Christ. Those whose clothes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb will not remain entombed eternally. They will be resurrected from death as their Lord has overcome death (Rev 1:18a-b; [Giblin 1991: 19]). Even if death [i.e. physical death] does come over them, they can be rest assured that they are still safely in the hands of the One who has control over the keys to Death and Hades. He will open the door to the new

³⁸⁴ Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman (1998: 476) distinguish the keys that Christ has with the keys being handed to Peter (Matt 16:13-20). The church has been entrusted with the authority to open [or close] the kingdom of heaven by setting people free with the message of the Gospel. However, the authority of judgment resides with Christ, and nobody else.

life [i.e. the life in eternity] for them. They can joyfully look forward to a future life with God in his kingdom, not in the realm of Death (Trites 1998: 282; [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 above for a discussion on the life and resurrection of Christ, and the impact thereof on the powers of Death and Hades]).

The position of Death and Hades [as personified partners] in Revelation 1:18c is thus that control over access to their domain is not in their own hands [it seemingly never was!] but in the hands of the living Christ. Therefore, the important message for believers in Revelation 1:17-18 is that

“Death and the grave...hold no terrors for Christ’s people, nor need they fear those who have the power to inflict death and send them to the grave” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68).

3.1.2. *Death and Hades on the warpath (Rev 6:8)*

In Revelation 6:8 it is quite clear that both Death and Hades are personified (Aune 1998a: 401). Death is identified as the cavalier on the “pale-coloured” horse, while Hades is said to be following Death [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.2 (ii)(c) for a more in-depth discussion on the physical death and destruction caused by Death and Hades and the possible ambiguity with regard to the translation of θάνατος. A syntactical analysis of the text is also done there]. Death and Hades in partnership do what is expected of them as destroyers of life: they go out as warriors of destruction to destroy and kill.

The vision is part of the opening of the seals [specifically the fourth seal] of the scroll that the Lamb took possession of in Revelation 5:7 [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4]. The proclamation of Christ’s authority to open the scroll confirms his power as the only One able to judge and control history (Osborne 2002: 258). It also reaffirms his divine authority over life and death, and in this case even over the domain of Death and Hades. Although at first sight the content of the text could be frightening to the reader the restricted powers of those acting in destruction brings the comforting news that God is still in control (Morris 1969: 107).

Groenewald (1986: 89) mentions that the opening of the fourth seal functions as a summary of the consequences flowing from the opening of the first three seals (cf.

Beasley-Murray 1981: 134; Aune 1998a: 402). The fourth seal actually forms a fitting conclusion to the opening of the first three seals. It could be interpreted as if Death and Hades goes out to collect the “harvest” [i.e. the dead] left behind by the destruction of the cavaliers in the first three seals.

Osborne (2002: 282) is of the opinion that the fact that Hades is said to follow Death makes Hades the harvester of the destruction caused by Death [the destroyer]. Hades clearly acts here as a personified partner, not as a kingdom [it is important to note that Hades is never personified alone, but always in conjunction with Death, even in the Old Testament – cf. Isa 28:15, 18; Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; [Aune 1998a: 401)].

Believers will not necessarily be spared the suffering and pain prevalent in this world [contrary to the believe by some millennialists – cf. Excursion 10 above]. It is important to note that, throughout Revelation, there is no comfort given to believers regarding the preservation of their earthly lives (Osborne 2002: 283). This is in line with Jesus’ warning to his disciples in Matthew 24:3-28 that they must prepare themselves for hardship and persecution in the last days before the Parousia (Beale 1999: 372-373)³⁸⁵.

The message of comfort for believers lies therein that even Death and Hades can’t act without being sent out by the Lamb [through the opening of the seals]. Christ still has ultimate control over everything. Death and Hades are not as powerful as it might seem when the first four seals are opened (Hughes 1990: 87). However: even if believers die in this world they will still be safely in the presence of God, which is symbolised by the vision of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11. Believers can find comfort in the knowledge that they will have life, even in the face of death.

On the other hand, for Death and Hades there is the knowledge that they can only harvest whatever they are allowed by Christ, and in Revelation 6:8 they are given authority [divine passive] over only a quarter of the world to “harvest” (Hughes 1990:

³⁸⁵ Cf. Osborne (2002: 283), who is of the opinion that only the wicked are struck by this judgment. This would make the interpretation of Revelation 6:9-11 more difficult. Revelation 6:9-11 is a message of comfort to those who suffer that they will be safe with God (Heil 1993: 222-223). The interpretation by Osborne is probably aligned with his exegesis on the comparative text that this passage alludes to, i.e. Ezekiel 14:12-23. In the vision of Ezekiel the “righteous remnant” are promised that they will be spared the effects of the judgment [and therefore of death].

87; cf. Mounce 1977: 156). They are actually immensely restricted in their powers, because the Son of Man is the bearer of the keys to their domain (Rev 1:18c). He alone decides who stays in the realm of death and who is resurrected into the new life. So even if Death and Hades reap the quarter they were given Christ still decides who ultimately stays in Hades. For Death and Hades there is thus nothing positive to look forward to. Even worse: In judgment they will have to return their harvest (Rev 20:13). Ultimately they are destined for the Lake of Fire [i.e. eternal death – cf. 3.1.3 below] on the Day of Judgment (Rev 20:13-14).

3.1.3. *The end for Death and Hades (Rev 20:13-14)*³⁸⁶

In Revelation 20:13-14 the peculiar occurrence is mentioned of Death and Hades being thrown into the Lake of Fire, the place of eternal death or punishment [cf. 3.2.2 below]. At first sight it sounds illogical that death could be sentenced to death. It is, however, possible here since Death and Hades are again personified. Aune (1998b: 1103) rightly mentions that John is probably not referring to two separate entities but to the Realm of the Dead of which Death [and Hades personified] is the provider and ruler. However, if Death is said to be no more [i.e. in God's new world (Rev 21:4)] the peculiar occurrence could be true that death [i.e. physical death] itself disappears in Revelation 20:13-15.

In Revelation 20:13 Death and Hades are portrayed as the keepers of the bodies [and souls] of the dead [John doesn't really distinguish between body and soul here]. This vision emphatically highlights the supreme power of God [and Christ] over the Realm of the Dead. Initially they were given the "right" to "store" the [wicked] dead for a specified period. However, on the command of Christ [the King of kings and the Lord of lords – Rev 19:16], Death and Hades had no other choice than to return the dead that have been entrusted to them for safekeeping [cf. 2.4 above for a discussion on the giving back of the dead in Rev 20:11-15]. They don't have the keys to control their own domain (Rev 1:18; [Hughes 1990: 219]).

The question is whether Death and Hades are keepers of only the wicked dead or of all the dead. Indeed, in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.5] the idea was that all the

³⁸⁶ Cf. section 1.3.2 above for a syntactical analysis of the text.

dead go to Sheol, not just the unrighteous [cf. Morris (1969: 241) who still holds this view even with regard to Rev]. In the New Testament and apocalyptic literature the focus shifted towards a view where only the wicked dead go to Hades, while the righteous who die go directly to God in heaven [cf. Chapter 3, section 3 and Chapter 4, 3.2]. A number of texts in Revelation support the view of the righteous dead being with Christ directly after death, thus not awaiting judgment in Hades (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5). Revelation 20:4-6 also implies that believers are not in Hades. They are reigning with Christ until the dawning of the Parousia.

If this is the case, the “giving back of the dead” in Revelation 20:12-14 is not a resurrection of *all* the dead to face judgment. It is only the wicked dead that would be called out from Death and Hades unto judgment [cf. 2.5 above on the second death vs. the first resurrection. As was mentioned there, it is interesting to note that John refrains from calling this “giving back” of the dead a resurrection]. According to Morris (1969: 241) the mention of Death and Hades and the Sea wants to emphasise that all the dead are included in this instructive calling [for the sea as a biding place of the dead, cf. 2.5 above. Osborne (2002: 722) calls all three of them “personifications of evil”, i.e. as a single entity]. This is surely the case regarding the wicked dead: none of them will escape. All will be called to judgment.

The righteous people who died have already risen according to the texts mentioned above (cf. Rev 20:4-6). They are seemingly not entrusted to Hades at all. In an interesting [but very convincing] conclusion Osborne (2002: 721) equates the “dead...standing before the throne” with the righteous dead who were resurrected in Revelation 20:4, while those called to judgment in Revelation 20:13 is the dead “who did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (Rev 20:5a), which would then be the wicked dead [cf. Chapter 10 below for a more in-depth discussion of the resurrection of the believers].

After judgment has been completed the unfamiliar occurrence is then described where Death and Hades are sentenced unto the second death (Rev 20:14). The second death is described in Revelation 20:14 as the Lake of Fire [cf. 2.5 above for a discussion on the second death]. Death and Hades end up at the same place where the one they kept [i.e. Satan] were sentenced to: the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev 20:15). The difference

between Death [and Hades] on the one hand and people on the other hand in the second death is that the first-mentioned have not experienced the first death. In fact, they were the holders of the consequences of the first death.

The symbolic death of Death and Hades is important within the context of Revelation's eschatology. They represent part of the evil forces in opposition to God. They are just as evil as the other enemies that were thrown into the Lake of Fire earlier (cf. Rev 19:20; [Morris 1969: 242; Beasley-Murray 1981: 303]). In order for the new heaven and earth of God to be established the eradication of all evil must be completed. This is done when even Death is sentenced to eternal death.

When Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire [i.e. the second death] the message to believers is: all evil, everything coming between God and man has now been removed [Giblin (1991: 193) notes that Death and Hades are the adversaries of both God and man]. Even though this will only happen at the Parousia, believers need not fear death now, as they will immediately be resurrected to reign with Christ. The second death will have no power over them (Rev 20:6). Neither will the first death [or physical death] as Christ has overcome this in his resurrection [cf. 1.3.1 above].

The death of Death and Hades is also in accordance with the teaching by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (Osborne 2002: 723)³⁸⁷. From this point onwards there will be only life (cf. Rev 21:4; [cf. Chapter 10, which expands on this very important conclusion]).

3.1.4. Summary on Death and Hades in Revelation

- In Revelation the pairing of Death and Hades happens throughout. In at least three of the four instances they are personified partners of evil and death (Rev 6:8; 20:13, 14). However, it is also possible to read a personification into the text of Revelation 1:18c, although the interpretation there is rather spatial.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1103) who is of the opinion that the death of Death and Hades rather refers to the unrighteous dead who have been thrown into the Lake of Fire. Although this is a possibility the very next verse (Rev 20:15) mentions that the wicked people were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This would then be a double reference, which of course would not be entirely uncommon in Revelation [cf. Osborne (2002: 723) for a discussion on the different possible interpretations of Death and Hades in Revelation 20:14].

- The important message to believers with regard to Death and Hades is that their powers have been restricted: they can only act when Christ allows and in the manner that He allows (Rev 6:8), they don't have the keys controlling entrance [or exit] to their own kingdom (Rev 1:18c), and they are destined for eternal death (Rev 20:14).
- It is not the place of eternal torment, but only the biding place of the wicked dead awaiting judgment. Although Death and Hades are entrusted with the safekeeping of the wicked dead [the righteous are resurrected with Christ – Rev 20:4-6], they must return them on the order of Christ at the Parousia. This is contrary to the belief in the Old Testament that all the dead, not just the wicked, end up in Hades and seemingly don't return from there.
- Death and Hades also suffer the second death, which is eternal death. This is symbolic of the removal of all the evil forces [including death] before the establishment of the new heaven and earth of God. The death of Death as the last enemy is also what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15:26.

3.2. The Lake of Fire in Revelation

The Lake of Fire becomes the place of eternal punishment according to Revelation (Du Rand 1995: 76). All the wicked, everybody in opposition to God, end up in the Lake of Fire (Shogren 1997c: 460). It is also called the second death (Rev 20:15; 21:8; [cf. 2.5 above]).

The Lake of Fire as a place is mentioned in the New Testament only in Revelation 19-21 (Osborne 2002: 690). The name has no close parallels in either the Old Testament or Jewish literature as such. It is only in Egyptian literature that the phrase is used in a similar understanding than in Revelation (Aune 1998b: 1065-1066).

3.2.1. The dragon-devil in the abyss (Rev 20:1, 3)

The context of the text of Revelation 20:1-10 has already been discussed [cf. 2.5 (i)(a) above]. The following three sub-sections have also been identified:

- 20:1-3 Imprisonment of Satan for thousand years
- 20:4-6 Millennial reign of Christ [The Judgment Scene]
- 20:7-10 The eschatological war

The discussion for this specific subsection of the thesis will focus upon the first three verses (i.e. Rev 20:1-3). In Revelation 20:1-3 the strange occurrence of Satan being thrown into the abyss “for a thousand years” is narrated.

a) Syntactical analysis

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον
├── καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
└── ἔχοντα ─── τὴν κλεῖν
 ├── τῆς ἀβύσσου
 └── καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην
 └── ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

²καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα,
├── ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος,
├── ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος
└── καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,

καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν
└── χίλια ἔτη

³καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν
└── εἰς τὴν ἀβυσσον

καὶ ἔκλεισεν

καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ,
└── ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη
 └── ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν
└── μικρὸν χρόνον.

The text consists of three sentences of which the middle sentence is a long description of the defeat, capturing and binding of Satan. Satan is identified with titles going back as far as The Fall in Genesis 3 [i.e. the snake]. The limited power of Satan is emphasised by listing a number of actions being performed with him: he is grabbed, bound, thrown into the abyss, and the door of the abyss is locked and sealed. The

surrounding context of Revelation 20:1-10 is that of the *Eschaton*, describing the defeat of Satan in eschatological, even mythological language.

The text of Revelation 20:1-3 has a parallel in Revelation 12:7-9 [the mythological narrative regarding the defeat of Satan and his throwing out of heaven], where the same titles for Satan are used as is the case here. A similar motif is found in the Old Testament only in Isaiah 24:21-22, but there are comparative texts also in the apocalyptic literature, specifically in 1 Enoch 10:4-6 and 10:11-13 (Aune 1998b: 1078). According to Aune (1998b: 1083) the motifs of binding and sealing combined together are also found in Aramaic Jewish incantation texts.

b) Satan under house arrest?

The ἄβυσσος, the place where Satan is locked up, is mentioned seven times in Revelation (Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; [Aune 1998a: 525-526]). The abyss [as being looked upon in Rev] is a chamber [seemingly under the surface of the earth], which has a shaft leading down to it with a door at the end [enabling it to be closed and locked – Rev 9:1-3]. It serves as a prison for the dead wicked [this interpretation, however, is not used in Rev] and the demons in opposition to God (Rev 9:2-3; 20:7; cf. Luke 8:31; 1 Pet 3:19; [Shogren 1997c: 459-460]). As is the case in Revelation 9:1-2, the key to the abyss is entrusted to an angel of God. However, this time around he is not unlocking the abyss for a plague of locusts to be set forth. He is locking it, imprisoning Satan for “a thousand years” (Osborne 2002: 699).

The ἄβυσσος is often equated with Hades [this is done more often in the Old Testament]. In New Testament [and apocalyptic] Hades is interpreted to be the “waiting-room” of the dead awaiting their judgment (Aune 1998a: 525-526; [cf. also Chapter 4, 3.2 and Chapter 8, 2.2.4(iii)]). Groenewald (1986: 106) is of the opinion that the abyss should be distinguished from Hades. The abyss is only the biding place of the demons and of Satan, whereas Hades is the “waiting-room” for the souls of the dead (Groenewald 1986: 106; Du Rand 1995: 76-77)³⁸⁸. It would seem as if John understood the term ἄβυσσος in the abovementioned sense [i.e. as the biding place for

³⁸⁸ Cf. Du Rand (1999b: 121) where he clearly distinguishes between Hades, ἄβυσσος and hell in Revelation.

{or kingdom of} demons and Satan]. Hades and ἄβυσσος are thus clearly to be distinguished in Revelation.

Osborne (2002: 363) calls the abyss “a closed prison”, the place where the fallen angels were imprisoned (cf. 1 En 10:4-6; 18:9-16; Jub 5:3-11; [Osborne 2002: 363]). It is possible that these angels are imprisoned temporarily, awaiting their eternal destiny after their “trial” [i.e. at the Day of Judgment], just as the wicked dead are temporarily “imprisoned” in Hades, awaiting their punishment, until the Day of Judgment (Osborne 2002: 699). When Satan is then thrown into the abyss it effectively means that he is locked up in his own kingdom [similar to house arrest].

That Satan is chained and thrown into the abyss [which is then sealed AND locked] emphasises his powerlessness in the face of God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 285; Osborne 2002: 700-702)³⁸⁹. The message is not the discontinuance of Satan’s efforts to deceive the world, but a severe limitation of his powers. When God “seals” Satan in the abyss, it shows God is in control of the situation, not Satan (Osborne 2002: 702). He is restricted to an extent that he is nothing more than a dog on a chain barking his deceiving message from a distance to the world³⁹⁰.

c) Where Satan was really defeated

The binding of Satan is in agreement with the words and healings performed by Jesus (cf. Mark 3:22; Luke 10:17-19; John 1:31-32). That He was able to cast out demons “was an evidence, not only that the house of ‘the strong man’...was being plundered, but also that the ‘strong man’ Satan had been bound” (Hughes 1990: 210). That the message of hope and salvation is now open and available to every nation [through the witness of the church] is further proof that Satan is limited in his powers. He cannot wilfully deceive the nations any more (Hughes 1990: 209-211).

The important message to believers in this mythological narrative is that Satan and the demonic powers in opposition to God are doomed by the Word of God (Beasley-

³⁸⁹ S. Thompson (as referred to by Osborne 2002: 701-702) identifies three stages in the demise and fall of Satan narrated in Revelation: (i) his fall from heaven to earth (Rev 12:7-9); (ii) his fall from earth to the abyss (Rev 20:1-3); (iii) his final fall into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10).

³⁹⁰ Cf. Ostella (1975: 236-238) who is of the opinion that Satan is deprived of deception during the millennium [which is still to come after the Parousia], and will continue his deception after the millennium (Rev 20:7-9) until Judgment Day.

Murray 1981: 287). Their destiny is eternal death, and it is not in their own hands to decide their destiny. God is the One in control. Throughout Revelation this is made clear. John constantly reminds his readers that Satan “was given” [i.e. divine passive] powers, stressing God’s *permission* for Satan’s actions (Morris 1969: 235-236). In fact, Satan’s unimportance in the eyes of God is highlighted [as was the case in Rev 12:7-9] by the fact that neither God, nor Christ, performs the act of binding Satan. The job is done by an unnamed angel [in Rev 12:7-9 the angel Michael was named] (Morris 1969: 235).

Going back to Revelation 12:10-12 [the mythological narrative regarding the defeat of Satan in heaven], the victory over Satan was won at the salvific moment of the cross and the resurrection of Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 285). If the view is taken that the millennium started with this victory of Christ [cf. Excursion 10 above], then the binding of Satan into the abyss [seemingly] happens simultaneously. This might sound illogical if understood temporarily. However, reading the narrative as a myth [cf. Rev 12:7-9], and taking into account the high symbolic [and apocalyptic] nature of Revelation [something which Mounce (1977) stresses frequently in his commentary], it is quite possible to connect these occurrences to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Hughes (1990: 211)

“...the thousand years during which Satan is bound and confined had their beginning with the incarnation of the eternal Son, namely, the conquest of Satan and his realm on the cross of Calvary...a conquest confirmed and assured by Christ’s resurrection from the dead and his ascension and enthronement in glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3; 12:2)”.

“The point is that the advent of Christ brought about a change in relationship between Satan and the nations” (Hughes 1990: 209).

d) Parole after a thousand years

Satan’s release from prison was anticipated in Revelation 20:3 (Mounce 1977: 361). The fact that Satan is loosened after the thousand years “for a little while” (Rev 20:7) to deceive the nations into war against the elect people of God emphasises that this



period of his imprisonment is limited (Hughes 1990: 209)³⁹¹. But it also emphasises that Satan will never change. Even a thousand years in jail wouldn't alter him from his deceitful nature (Mounce 1977: 361). However, on his conquest to deceive again the nations he will not succeed, as he is caught and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10). Satan is overwhelmed by the total power of God again (Morris 1969: 239). Hughes (1990: 217-218) mentions similarities with the vision of Ezekiel 38:1-9 where the armies of Gog are defeated by God in his wrath (cf. Mounce 1977: 361).

The phrase “until the thousand years are over” is found in Revelation 20:3 and 5. It acts as a frame around Revelation 20:4, which narrates the victorious reign of the righteous with Christ during the thousand years [cf. Chapter 10 below where this life will be discussed in more detail] (Aune 1998b: 1083). The emphasis therefore is on the victory of God's people, not on the inadequacy of Satan to deceive. It is a message of comfort to believers to hold onto their faith, because Satan's power is insignificant when measured up against the almighty power of God's reign. They should not be distracted by Satan's limited powers, but rather look upon Christ's overwhelming strength.

e) Is the abyss the Lake of Fire?

Is the abyss referred to in Revelation 20:1 and 3 the same as the eternal Lake of Fire? No. In Revelation 20:7 it is said that the devil is released from the abyss where he was held “for a thousand years” [cf. Du Rand (1995a: 75-77) on the differences between Hades, hell and the abyss; cf. also Du Rand 1999b: 121]. Similarly, in Revelation 9:1-2 demons [in the form of grasshoppers] were released from the abyss to torment the people of the world. Hades, as mentioned, is the “waiting-room for the wicked dead and the Lake of Fire the place of eternal torment. Satan is freed from the one only to be thrown into the other. He stands powerless in the face of God.

In summary: The mythological image of Satan being caught, bound up and thrown into the abyss emphasises his insignificance when measured against the Almighty God. Although he might seem mighty from an earthly perspective, he is actually limited in his powers [something John stresses throughout in Revelation] and cannot

³⁹¹ It is this “short while” of release of Satan that prompted some views on the millennium to fit the rapture of the believers into this period or just before it starts [cf. Excursion 10 above].

harm the believers. They will reign eternally with God, regardless of what happens in their earthly lives. Satan cannot overcome those sealed with the name of God and the name of the Lamb. The abyss [actually Satan's kingdom] is not his eternal destiny. That awaits him in the Lake of Fire after he is freed from the abyss (cf. Rev 20:6-10).

3.2.2. *The Lake of Fire* (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8)

The Lake of Fire [ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός] is mentioned [with variations] six times in the Book of Revelation. All of the occurrences are found within the subsection of Revelation 19:11-21:8, the last main section of the Book of Revelation, narrating the Judgment of God and the inauguration of God's new world (Rev 19:20c; 20:10, 14-15 [3 times]; 21:8; [Aune 1998b: 1065]). This already suggests the role of the Lake of Fire in Revelation, namely, as a place of eternal punishment after the final judgment. No discussion of the context will be done here, as the context of all these texts has already been discussed [cf. 2.3; 2.4; 2.5 above for a discussion on the different contexts]. A syntactical analysis for Revelation 19:20 will be done³⁹². There are no critical variants influencing the text³⁹³.

There is an increase in importance of those cast into the Lake of Fire: first the beast and false prophet are mentioned (Rev 19:20), followed by Satan (Rev 20:10), and then the "last enemy" [Death and Hades]. After God's direct enemies have been wiped out, everybody "whose names does not appear in the Book of Life" are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14-15). Revelation 21:8 is a summarised confirmation that nothing in opposition to God will exist in his new aeon [cf. Chapter 10 below].

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 19:20

²⁰καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον

└ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης

└ ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ,

└ ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν

└ τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου

└ καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ.

³⁹² Cf. 1.3.2 (ii)(a) and 2.5 (ii)(c) for a syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8 respectively.

³⁹³ For a discussion of the suggested variants for these texts, cf. Aland & Aland (1993: 673, 675-676) and Aune (1998b: 1045, 1074, 1075-1076, 1112).

ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο
 _____ εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ.

The sentence describes the capturing of the beast after the eschatological battle. Of course, the consequences [i.e. with regard to life or death] of an eschatological battle could be interpreted within either the physical or the eternal realm. The beast being captured alive and thrown into the Lake of Fire alive suggests that it is physical life that John talks about. It emphasises the torment that awaits unbelievers in hell, being burnt alive (Osborne 2002: 690). The image is an allusion to Numbers 16:33, where Korah, Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by the earth “alive” (Aune 1998b: 1065; [cf. subsection (f) below]).

b) A lake filled with fire?

The Lake of Fire is a peculiar image with no parallels in the Old Testament or early Jewish literature [not even in the Greco-Roman literature]. It is especially the image of a “lake” [ἡ λίμνη - cf. Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 476)] as a place of eternal punishment that is unfamiliar. Similar images are found in Jewish apocalyptic writings, specifically in 1 Enoch 54 and 2 Enoch 10 (Mounce 1977: 350). It is interesting to note, however, that in Egyptian literature this association does not only exist, but the Lake of Fire is there also connected with the second death (cf. Rev 20:6 and 21:8; [Aune 1998b: 1065-1066])³⁹⁴.

According to Bertrand (as referred to by Osborne 2002: 690) the idea of a “lake” in hell stems from the “Hellenistic mythical portrayals of hell” (Osborne 2002: 690). Osborne (2002: 690-691) is of the opinion that John uses the image of a lake to distinguish it from the sea, which is traditionally the symbol of evil. The evil forces don’t go to the place of evil [the sea], but to the place of eternal torment [the Lake of Fire]. Daniel 7:10 is the closest parallel in the Old Testament, and implies the existence of a river of fire flowing in hell (cf. 2 En 10:2; [Aune 1998b: 1066; Osborne 2002: 690]).

³⁹⁴ Cf. also 2.5 above.



The image of fire as a means of divine punishment, of course, has many parallels, specifically in the second temple period. Already in Genesis 19:24 God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone (cf. Ezek 38:22). In Isaiah 66:24 it is first mentioned as a means of eternal punishment in the underworld (cf. 1 En 10:6, 13; Matt 5:22; 13:42, 50; 18:9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48; [Aune 1998b: 1066]). In Jude 7 the threat of an “eternal fire” is mentioned as awaiting the unfaithful. It is not clear if those in the fire will feel the burning pain (Shogren 1997c: 461).

According to Justin Martyr (Shogren 1997c: 461) the “eternal fire” was “certainly intended to intimate everlasting suffering” (cf. Groenewald 1986: 198). This would imply that the inhabitants are actually feeling the pain caused by the fire. This is also the interpretation of the word γέεννα [the term generally used to describe hell in the Gospels, but which is absent from Revelation]³⁹⁵ (cf. Matt 23:33; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 152]).

The image of fire in God’s eternal judgment over evil probably goes back to the vision in Daniel 7:9-11 (cf. Osborne 2002: 690-691). There are many parallels between the two texts. In Daniel 7:9 the throne of God is seen (cf. Rev 20:11), whereas in Daniel 7:10 the author sees a “river of fire” [i.e. fire flowing from the throne]. After that the “books are opened”, which implies the scene of divine judgment (cf. Rev 20:12). Then in Daniel 7:11 the beast is judged and thrown into the river of fire as eternal punishment (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:14-15). It is interesting to note that in Daniel’s vision the beast is slain before he is thrown into the fire (cf. Dan 7:11; [Porteous 1979: 109]).

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:10

Revelation 20:10 describes the casting of Satan into the Lake of Fire. A syntactical analysis of this verse looks as follows:

³⁹⁵ The word γέεννα has its origins with the valley of Hinnom. As the site of cultic offerings of human beings [specifically children] it built up a reputation as a place of ungodliness (Mounce 1977: 350; Beasley-Murray 1981: 303; Osborne 2002: 690). Because of the prophetic denunciation of the place by Jeremiah (cf. Jer 7:32; 19:6), the valley was often associated with God’s judgment, and was later on equated with hell, believing that an eternal fire would torture the ungodly there (Du Rand 1995a: 76).

¹⁰καὶ ὁ διάβολος
└─ ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς
└─ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου
└─ ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον
└─ καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης,
καὶ βασανισθήσονται ———— ἡμέρας
└─ καὶ νυκτὸς
└─ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

The sentence can be divided into two separate statements. Firstly it identifies the place where Satan goes as there where the beast and the false prophet also ended up. Secondly, John describes the duration of the torment as lasting day and night, into eternity. It serves to distinguish the final destiny of evil in opposition to the destiny of believers, which is the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21-22).

d) Progressive casting into the Lake of Fire?

Is there a progression in the casting of the different groups into the Lake of Fire, with an actual time lapse between the occurrences? The answer to this depends on which view is taken on the millennium. Premillennialism, for example, would see the vesting of the beast and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire as taking place before the start of the millennium. Satan is then cast into the Lake of Fire after the millennium, at the Parousia (cf. Osborne 2002: 716-717). Osborne (2002: 715) further mentions that this punishment will occur “in stages” (cf. Osborne 2002: 715, specifically footnote 21).

However, from the point of view from which the author goes out [cf. Excursion 10] the texts mentioned are only different viewing points on the Day of Judgment. “[T]he end of Babylon and the other adversaries will take place simultaneously, in an instant” (Giblin 1991: 183; cf. Beale 1999: 1029-1030)³⁹⁶. There is thus not necessarily a time laps between the occurrences narrated in Revelation 19:1-21:8 [inserting time lapses into Revelation is in any case a dangerous exercise as John moves around in his visions between earth {time-bound} and heaven {where time is

³⁹⁶ Giblin (1991: 183) explains the reasoning behind the different viewpoints of the judgment as follows: “Apocalyptic, however, requires sequences of particular visions and sequences of appropriately grouped visions in order adequately to present its theology.”



eternity and therefore cannot be expressed in human language}, and even within history between past, present and future].

The “overarching theme” of the entire section is that of judgment (Giblin 1991: 178). The purpose of the image is to confirm that everyone [and everything] in opposition to God will be removed to make way for God’s new world order. In God’s New Jerusalem there will be no place for any of these things. That is why even the sea disappears in the new world (Rev 21:1), because it personified evil for the people living in the Biblical era (Beagley 1997a: 129; Osborne 2002: 722-723). Judgment, of course, is also a confirmation of God’s righteousness. Righteousness will in the end prevail when all unrighteousness have been removed at the Final Judgment.

The beast and the false prophet are the first to be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20). The imagery symbolises the “purging of their defiling hostility and antichristianity from creation” (Hughes 1990: 208). They were part of the “Trinity of Evil” in opposition to God (Beagley 1997a: 127; [cf. Excursion 7]). Probably as the “subordinate” partners their punishment is mentioned first [although there need not be a specific reason for the order of mentioning]³⁹⁷.

The beast and the false prophet were the ones that deceived the people of the world with their wonders and signs, gathering a multitude of followers on behalf of the Dragon (cf. Rev 13). However, after the judgment of God there will be no space for any deception of people on the path away from God. The problem of deception for God’s people is thereby removed: they need not fear, as Christ has already overcome the deceivers and will eventually remove them from His presence and his people [this occurrence is described in the vision of Rev 19:20].

When Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10) the main opponent of God is removed. Wellhausen (as referred to by Aune 1998b: 1100) deems this to be an interpolation into the text by John. Satan, who initially tried to dethrone God (cf. Rev

³⁹⁷ Cf. Giblin (1991: 178) who discusses an enclosing schema for the destruction [in inverse order from the partners first appearances in Revelation]. In line with this schema Satan is the first to appear on the scene (Rev 12) and the last to disappear from the scene (Rev 20:10). Around this one could even mention that Death and Hades appears first (Rev 1:18) and is thrown into the Lake of Fire after Satan (Rev 20:13-15; [Giblin 1991: 178]).

12:1-9), but was defeated at the cross (Rev 12:11) and bound up in the abyss during the thousand years of Christ's reign with the saints (Rev 20:1-3), is now finally removed so that he cannot harm God's people any more. Satan cannot stand up against the sovereignty of God (Giblin 1991: 190). The message of hope to believers with this visionary image is that

“...the Devil is not God, nor is he in any real sense a rival to God. He cannot stray beyond the permission of God for his action, and at the appointed time it will cease” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 298).

e) Removal of all evil completed

Their punishment [i.e. Satan and the false prophet and the beast] is said to last ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (Rev 20:10b). The idea is a never-ending, eternal punishment. Aune (1998b: 1100) calls the phrase ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς a hendiadys, implying a twenty-four-hour day [i.e. torment without interruption]. The eternal lasting of this punishment comforts believers with the knowledge that “their [i.e. Satan and his followers] elimination from God's creation, renewed in Jesus Christ, will be *for ever and ever*”³⁹⁸ (Hughes 1990: 217). Their doom, their eternal punishment, is certain and it is irreversible (Hughes 1990: 217). Believers therefore need not fear Satan [the Dragon or the Snake or the Deceiver]. Although he is like a roaring lion (cf. 1 Pet 5:8) he has already been defeated on the cross.

The image of Death and Hades being cast in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:13) has already been discussed [cf. 3.2.1 above] and will thus not be repeated here. It is sufficient to note that when Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire [i.e. the second death] the message to believers is: all evil, all the adversaries of God and his people have now been removed (Giblin 1991: 193). According to Osborne (2002: 723) one possibility is that this could symbolise that physical death is “now swallowed up and superceded by the “second death”, eternal torment”.

The casting of the unbelievers [those “whose names were not written into the Book of Life”] completes the removal of all evil and ungodliness so that God's new world

³⁹⁸ Highlighted italics inserted by Hughes. Bracketed insert by author.

could become visible to all. God's new world is a place of perfection. Nothing unclean will be allowed there (Rev 21:27). The people that are thrown into the Lake of Fire are the dead that were waiting in Hades for the Day of Judgment and were now "released" by Death and Hades for this moment (cf. Rev 20:11-12). Furthermore: the casting of "those whose names are not in the Book of Life" into the Lake of Fire has a contra statement – those whose names do appear in the Book of Life [i.e. the faithful believers]. The believers can be sure that they will not be cast into the Lake of Fire.

According to Aune (1998b: 1133) the divine speech in Revelation 21:5-8 "succinctly summarizes the central message of Revelation". It also serves as a conclusion stating the consequences of the judgment of God, which was narrated in Revelation 19:11-20:15. The message of hope, directly from the mouth of God, is that those who stay faithful will receive the gift of life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 314). They are promised a special relationship with God in his new world (Morris 1969: 246). Those in opposition to God will be deprived of the privilege of a relationship with God. Being deprived of a relationship with God effectively means death for a person [cf. 2.5 above; cf. also Chapter 2, 3.6].

f) Are the eternal dead really dead?

Are those cast into the Lake of Fire dead or alive? On the one hand nothing is said about anyone being killed before he or she is thrown into the Lake of Fire. The implication, however, is that they are thrown into the lake alive. The punishment is thus something they will be conscious of. A similar notion is found in Numbers 16:30-33, where it is said that the earth swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abihu *alive*. The purpose of the image of a living death is to emphasise the intensity and horror of the punishment (Osborne 2002: 690). Also, in Revelation 20:10 it is said that Satan and his partners will suffer eternal torment in the Lake of Fire, suggesting that they will be conscious of this torment.

On the other hand the casting into the Lake of Fire is specified as "the second death". The implication is therefore death. Morris (1969: 233) is of the opinion that the second death in the Lake of Fire symbolises "utter destruction", which is what is generally understood with the term death. Eternal death, however, must be distinguished from physical death. Eternal death is not necessarily a case of physical

annihilation. It surely implies death in the sense that they who end up in the Lake of Fire are cut off from having a relationship with God. Death could be defined “not as extinction but as existence in the inferno (Rev 20:14)” (Shogren 1997c: 461; cf. Osborne 2002: 723-724).

In summary: The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal punishment. It is to be distinguished from Hades, the waiting room for the wicked dead. The equivalent of the Lake of Fire in the Gospels is γέεννα. Everybody in opposition to God is cast into the Lake of Fire on the Day of Judgment. In this manner they are removed from the presence of God to the place of eternal punishment. It is not a place of eternal deadness, but of eternal absence from God in the lake burning with fire and brimstone. It was not intended as a message of fear, but to emphasise that everything in opposition to God will in the *eschaton* be removed so that it could never interfere with God’s new world again. Believers should be comforted by the news that in God’s new world they will not have to worry about any of them any more.

3.2.3. *What is the ἀπώλεια in Revelation 17:8, 11?*

In Revelation 17:8 and 11 it is said that the beast, coming from the abyss, is destined to go to perdition [ἡ ἀπώλεια] (Amplified Bible – 1496). Is the ἀπώλεια to be equated with the hell [or γέεννα or Lake of Fire] or is it a metaphor for the Realm of the dead? It is clearly distinguished from the abyss [cf. 3.2.1 above].

i) Context of Revelation 17

The broad context of Revelation 17:1-19:10 has already been discussed and will not be repeated here [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.7(ii)]. Within the larger context of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the texts of Revelation 17:8, 11 fits in as follows³⁹⁹:

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
17:3-6a	vision of the great whore
17:6b-18	interpretation of the vision

³⁹⁹ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b.



18:1-24	destruction of Babylon
19:1-8	heavenly throne-room audition
19:9-10	concluding angelic revelation

Revelation 17:6b-18 follows on Revelation 17:1-6a as an interpretation thereof (Aune 1998b: 925). It is distinguished from the first six verses by the perplexed reaction of John (Rev 17:6b) on the vision he saw in the first six verses (Rev 17:1-6a). John's reaction functions rhetorically to introduce the interpretation that follows (Aune 1998b: 938). The interpretation by the angel actually only starts in Revelation 17:7. It then continues until Revelation 17:18. Revelation 18:1 introduces a new section, distinguished by the text marker μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον. Osborne (2002: 606) takes Revelation 17:15-18 to be a separate subsection describing the destruction of the great whore Babylon. This however, could still be seen as part of the interpretation.

ii) The beast destined for the ἀπώλεια

a) Syntactical analysis

A syntactical analysis for Revelation 17:8 was done in subsection 1.3.1 (a) above. The following is therefore a syntactical analysis for Revelation 17:9b-11 only:

Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν,
 └ ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν.

καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν·

¹⁰οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν,

ὁ εἷς ἔστιν,

ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν,

└ καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ
 └ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι.

¹¹καὶ τὸ θηρίον └ ὃ ἦν
 └ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
 └ καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοος ἐστιν
 └ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν,
 └ καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει.



Revelation 17:9b-11 is a detailed description [in symbolic language] of the beast. The idea with the description is to enable readers to identify the beast. John uses “an eschatological dogma with roots reaching into past millennia” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 257) in his description. The description ends with the words *καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει*, confirming the beast’s eternal destiny in hell. This is also in line with the earlier words of the angel that John should not be overawed by the glamour of the harlot or of the beast. They will both perish.

b) Destined to be destroyed

In the vision of the great whore Babylon John is warned [or maybe comforted?] by the angel not to be overawed by the greatness of Babylon. She is destined for the *ἀπώλεια*. And with her the seven-headed beast is destined for the *ἀπώλεια*. It is only those whose names are not written in the Book of Life that would in the end be astonished by her works (Rev 17:8b).

The text of Revelation 17 is well attested, although a number of smaller suggested variants are given (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 665-667). In Revelation 17:8 there is a suggestion that *ὑπάγει* [present indicative] be changed to *ὑπάγειν* [infinitive]. Aune (1998b: 910) chooses the text version as used by Aland & Aland (1993: 666) [*ὑπάγει*], reasoning that, “Assimilation to the inf. in the preceding periphrasis (*μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν*) is more probable than a change from the inf. to a present ind.”. In Revelation 7:11 there is a stronger suggestion that the textual reading [*αὐτός*] be changed to *οὗτος*. However, as Aune (1998b: 911) mentions, *αὐτός* should be retained as “an emphatic use of the nom.”.

The noun *ἀπώλεια* is generally translated with “destruction”, “annihilation” or “ruin” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 103). This is the interpretation used mostly throughout the New Testament (Acts 25:16; 1 Tim 6:9; 2 Pet 3:16; cf. 2 Cl 1:7). In many cases it is equated with eternal destruction as the punishment of the wicked (Matt 7:13; Heb 10:39) (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 103). Jesus uses the same verb in his prayer, describing what would happen to Judas in contrast to the other disciples (John 17:12). Brown (1970: 760) describes *ἀπώλεια* as referring to a person “who belongs to the realm of damnation and is destined for final destruction.” In Revelation 9:11 the king

of the abyss is appropriately identified as Ἐκτὸς Ἀπολλύων, from the word ἀπολλύναι [i.e. to destroy]. It is thus the destroyer himself that is destined for destruction.

It is clear from the text that ἀπώλεια is to be distinguished from ἄβυσσος [for a discussion regarding the ἄβυσσος, cf. 3.2.1 above]. In verse 8 it is said that the beast is coming from the ἄβυσσος and is destined for ἀπώλεια, implying that they are two different “identities”. The ἀπώλεια seems to refer to eternal destruction, which would mean that ἀπώλεια has the same meaning as the ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρὸς [cf. 3.2.2 above]. The only difference is that the Lake of Fire is seemingly not a place of destruction or annihilation, but a place of eternal pain and torment away from the presence of God (Rev 20:10b). However, this should not be regarded as a problem. The message of the apocalyptic text is still the same: the beast’s existence will be terminated, whether by destruction or by torment in the place where God is not.

The “prophecy” of Revelation 17:8 and 11 is “fulfilled” in Revelation 19:20, when the beast is cast into the Lake of Fire (Groenewald 1986: 175). Osborne (2002: 616) calls the ὑπάγει [cf. above on the discussion of the textual variants] a prophetic present, implying: as soon as the beast ascends from the abyss [an occurrence expected sometimes in the near future], he will be sent to the place of destruction [ἀπώλεια]. John’s interest “...is not in what the beast does, nor in his power. It is in his destruction: he *goeth into perdition*. So ultimately perishes all evil.”⁴⁰⁰ (Morris 1969: 211). Hughes (1990: 186) understands this to happen at the final judgment (Rev 20:7-10). This makes sense, specifically in light of the fact that the beast is captured and punished in Revelation 19:20 [a text which was earlier identified with the judgment scene at the Parousia – cf. 2.3 above].

c) The beast unmasked?

On the identification of the beast’s seven heads as explained in Revelation 17:8-11 there has been much speculation. Most interpreters think of it as a reference to Roman emperors (Osborne 2002: 617). One of the most difficult decisions is where to start counting. Through the years different scholars have come up with different answers as to whom the seventh and eighth kings are that John refers to [cf. Aune

⁴⁰⁰ Italics inserted by Morris.

(1998b: 945-949) and Osborne (2002: 617-621) for an extensive discussion on the possible identification of the different kings]. If the sixth king, who is said to be the one “that is”, is equated with Domitian [i.e. taking into account that Rev was probably written about 95AD during the reign of Domitian – Beasley-Murray 1997: 1028], the next in line [i.e. the seventh king] would probably be Nerva (Aune 1998b: 950).

The image of the beast that was, is, and is yet to come is an imitation [parody] of Christ, but his end is different – he is destined for perdition whereas Christ lives forever (Osborne 2002: 620-621). The image is probably modelled on the *Nero redivivus*-legend, i.e. the expectation that Nero would return in the near future to continue his reign of terror (Osborne 2002: 618).

Of course, it is also possible, as Osborne (2002: 619-621) discusses, that the kings could symbolically represent different empires [of which Rome is then the sixth, with the seventh and eighth still to come], or they could be nothing more than apocalyptic symbols [with the number seven referring to the completeness of the kings’ reign], similar to Daniel’s vision of the four empires (Giblin 1991: 164-165). The symbols are based on the apocalyptic symbol of the *Nero redivivus*-legend, combining it with the ancient representation of the chaos-dragon (Beasley-Murray 1981: 255).

This apocalyptic interpretation is supported by the “stereotypical apocalyptic motif” (Aune 1998b: 949) that the king who is yet to come will only reign for a short period of time. With this motif John wants to emphasise that the end is expected to be near (Aune 1998b: 949). This is, in the end, also the main purpose of the motif: if the readers knew that they are now with number six [whom they would certainly have been able to identify] in the list of evil kings they would also know that it is but a short while before the seventh and eighth kings have come and gone, and then all evil would have been removed (Bauckham 1993a: 406).

iii) Summary

- The noun ἀπώλεια in Revelation 17:8, 11 should be equated with the Lake of Fire in Revelation, i.e. referring to the eternal destruction of the beast in the judgment as narrated in Revelation 19:20.

- Although in Revelation 19:20 the beast is captured alive, the fact that he is said to be destroyed should not be regarded as a problematic contrast. The message is the same: the life of the beast will be terminated so that he will not be able to harm the people of God anymore.
- John pictures the beast as a parody of Christ, an image based on the *Nero redivivus*-legend. He is also called the one who was, who is and who is to come. But his end is different. He enters eternal death at the judgment, whereas Christ is the forever-living One effecting the judgment.

3.3. Summary on the realm of death in Revelation

- With regard to the realm of death in Revelation one should distinguish between the pairing of Death and Hades [personified throughout Revelation], the ἄβυσσος [the underworld – the bidding place of Satan and the demons], and the ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός [the Lake of Fire or hell - γέεννα in the Gospels].
- The Realm of Death in Revelation is the place where persons go after physical death while awaiting judgment. Whereas in the Old Testament Hades was the bidding place for all the dead, it is now only the place where the wicked dead go. In Revelation the faithful who die is throughout said to be alive and with God in heaven [cf. Chapter 10 below].
- Although the Realm of death is a place where God is said not to be, he still controls access thereto. As ultimate Controller of life and death He decides who stays in Death and Hades. He has the keys to the kingdom of Death and Hades, keys that has been entrusted to the Son of Man on his resurrection (Rev 1:18).
- John emphatically shows the limitation of the powers of Death and Hades. They can only harvest whatever God allows them. And even if believers are killed in the process, they don't remain in Hades. Death has no power over the people sealed by God.
- The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal destruction, or commonly known in modern language as the hell. References to the Lake of Fire are only found in the final section of Revelation [regarding the Final Judgment].

- The imagery of the Lake of Fire wants to emphasise that at judgment God will remove everything in opposition to His will in order to establish his new world. In this new world nothing unclean will be allowed (Rev 21:27).
- Although different images are given regarding the casting of the different opponents into the Lake of Fire, the best is to understand all of these as different viewpoints of the Final Judgment. Revelation 19-21 is therefore not visions of different judgment scenes but different visions of the one judgment at the Parousia.
- The Lake of Fire is equated with “the second death”. It is, however, not death as in destruction, but a death of eternal torment away from the presence of God.
- The message of comfort to believers regarding the Realm of Death and the Lake of Fire is twofold: Firstly they are assured that these evil powers cannot extinguish their life, and secondly they are assured that these evil powers will be destroyed, or rather removed from the presence of God. At the Parousia they will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

4. Summary on eternal life and death in Revelation

- i) The idea of “eternal life” as a concept is foreign to the Old Testament. Belief in the return of the dead to life only appears in Israelite religion at a late stage (2 Macc 7:9, 23, 29; cf. Wis Sol 3:4; 6:18-19; 8:13, 17; [Martin-Achard 1960: 185]). In Biblical literature it is only in the New Testament that we read of eternal life.
- ii) Although the phrase “eternal life” does not appear in Revelation, the idea is visible throughout. “Real life” [life in relationship with Christ] is nearly always interpreted as eternal life or leading unto it (Du Rand 1990: 233).
- iii) Eternal life is linked to a relationship with God. The ethical call to the congregations is to hold onto this relationship in order to have life. Persons, who do not have “life”, are already deemed dead even if they are still alive.
- iv) To believers the message of life is a message of hope and comfort. They can look forward to a life in God’s new world if they hold on to life in the world.

It doesn't matter what happens to them in this life [even if they are killed] they are assured of having eternal life.

- v) The eschatological judgment is the moment where the decision on life and death will be revealed. Judgment is not an occurrence only at the Parousia. The death and resurrection of Christ is already an occurrence of judgment.
- vi) Judgment is an act of righteousness. This is in line with the Old Testament concept of God's righteousness and his judgment over unrighteousness. According to John believers are righteous if they wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:17).
- vii) Believers who washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb will have their names written into the Book of Life. They will not be judged, but will receive life. However, those whose names are not in the Book of Life will be judged in righteousness according to their deeds (Rev 20:11-15).
- viii) Revelation 19-21 does not describe multiple judgment scenes. It is only different viewpoints on the one eschatological judgment.
- ix) The conclusion to judgment is that everybody in opposition to God is thrown into the Lake of Fire.
- x) The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal punishment. It must be distinguished from Hades [the place where the wicked dead await their judgment] and the abyss [the biding place of the demons].
- xi) When Satan, the beasts, and even Death and Hades, are thrown into the Lake of Fire, it confirms that in God's new world everything in opposition to God will be removed from his presence. Only perfection will prevail.
- xii) The capture and destruction of Satan and his partners confirms that their powers are restricted, and they have been [and will be] overcome by God. They will not be able to interfere with God's plan for his people.
- xiii) Overall the message of Revelation confirms the Old Testament view that God is in control: of life, of death, of the Realm of Death, of Satan and his partners. Believers can trust him to give them life.