

CHAPTER 10

THE ENDLESS LIFE WHERE DEATH EXISTS NO MORE

*"Then I heard a loud voice saying: God now lives with and amongst his people...
If there is tears on their cheeks God will wipe it away. Nobody will die from now
on. Nobody will experience sorrow or pain. These terrible things that happened
earlier will be gone forever and ever." Rev 21:3-4.⁴⁰¹*

This chapter is all about life – eternal life to be more specific. Eternal life is what Revelation is about. Life is the theological climax of the Book of Revelation⁴⁰². John's message moves through a mixture of past, present and future⁴⁰³ to this very central message of his Book: in Christ there is life; in relationship with God there is life; God's eternal presence is the source of this life. This life that believers are to inherit is a life without end. Everybody who has been sealed by God, who has washed his or her clothes in the blood of the Lamb and who has his or her name written into the Book of Life [these are all different metaphors describing the same thing – eternal life – which have been discussed in previous chapters of this thesis], will inherit this life. Eternal life is the victory prize for everyone who stays faithful to God unto the end, i.e. until death (cf. Rev 2-3).

In Revelation 21-22 the reader is given an insight into this life in the presence of God when John sees a vision of the new heaven and the new earth. That which every person has longed for, a life without end and without any problems and any sin comes about in the New Jerusalem, the city of God in the new heaven and the new earth (Du Rand 1999a: 1804). It is a vision that is central to John's intention to bring a message of hope and comfort to his readers in Asia-Minor: they need not give up because of all the suffering they must endure, for they have the prospect of the perfect new world order of God awaiting them. Even physical death cannot part them from this life. In

⁴⁰¹ Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

⁴⁰² Thompson (2000: 691) might have a point when he says that, "John is preoccupied with the death of both Christ and Christians." But he misses the important eschatological hope of life that goes even beyond the horizons of death. Life is the hopeful outlook, death the conquered enemy.

⁴⁰³ The distinction between past, present and future is not always easy to determine and is complicated by the switching around between heaven and earth in the visions. According to Sweet (1990: 115) past, present and future flows together into an indiscernible unity in heaven. Actually, time in heaven cannot be measured in earthly measurements. "There is no difference in the Lord's sight between one day and a thousand years; to him the two are the same" (2 Pet 3:8) [cf. also footnote 28].

fact, if they die now on earth, they will immediately be part of this life [cf. Chapter 9, 1.1-1.6 above].

1. The first resurrection

The first resurrection has been interpreted differently by scholars through the years. Most of the differences are influenced by the interpretation of the millennium, which is mentioned in the same passage of Scripture [cf. Excursion 10 above for a discussion on the meaning of the millennium].

It is only here in Revelation 20 that John refers to believers as being resurrected into a “new life”. The phrase ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη is found in the Bible only in Revelation 20:5b and 6a. In this “new life” they will reign with Christ for a symbolic period of a thousand years. The mention of a “first” resurrection is probably just as confusing, because it immediately leaves the reader with the impression that there is yet another resurrection to follow [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (ii)(b)].

i) Context

The context of Revelation 20:1-10 has already been discussed in Chapter 9 above [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5]. A syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:5-6 was also done [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (ii)(b)]. Working according to the subdivision by Aune (1998b: 1078-1080)⁴⁰⁴ Revelation 20:4-6 is the middle part of the text:

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

Although the section is popularly known as the text regarding the “millennial reign” the millennium plays a subordinate role throughout the text. In each of the three subsections the focus is rather on the control of God and Christ in reigning supreme (Trites 1998: 284).

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Giblin (1991: 183), who also puts the focus on the millennial reign with Christ in a enclosing structure.

According to Aune (1998b: 1079) the text was a later insertion “written expressly to be sandwiched into this particular location.” It is framed by the announcement regarding the beginning and conclusion of the millennium (Rev 20:3bc and 7). The subtext is introduced by the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 20:4, confirming that John is about to see something new. The announcement of the completion of the millennium in Revelation 20:7 “formally indicates that the unit has concluded” (Aune 1998b: 1079).

By inserting verse 4-6 into the text John clearly shifts the focus away from Satan’s imprisonment during the thousand years to the millennial reign of believers with Christ. Although it is mentioned (Rev 20:4a) that the believers have been given the authority to judge with Christ, thereby implying a judgment scene for the vision, no judgment takes place (Aune 1998b: 1079; [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (i)(a) and (ii)(b) above]).

ii) Blessed are the resurrected (Rev 20:4-6)

Although there are a number of variants suggested for Revelation 20:4-6 (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 674) the suggested changes are generally not well attested. The numerous suggestions in these three verses regarding the omission [or insertion] of the definite article τὰ before χίλια ἔτη confirms the “genuineness of the anarthrous χίλια ἔτη” when omitted (Aune 1998b: 1073), although it must be noted that when a concept is repeatedly used in Revelation it is usually only the first occurrence that is anarthrous, whilst the following occurrences use the anaphoric article (Aune 1998b: 1072-7073)⁴⁰⁵.

As mentioned above, believers “coming alive” and reigning with Christ is the central theme of Revelation 20:4-6 (Travis 1997a: 1017). The emphasis is rather on believers not being imprisoned by Death in eternity than on Satan being imprisoned by God for the thousand years. It highlights the insignificance of Satan in the eyes of God as someone believers should not be concerned about. It is not he who reigns but Christ (Travis 1997a: 1017).

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1073-1074) for a discussion of the other textual variants.

a) Coming to life in the first resurrection

In Revelation 20:4 John sees the believers [the souls of those who have been beheaded] *coming alive and reigning with Christ*. The verb ἐζήσαν could be interpreted as either a bodily resurrection of the believers or a “spiritual resurrection” of the souls [τὰς ψυχὰς] of believers in the intermediate state before the Parousia (Osborne 2002: 706-707)⁴⁰⁶. Which interpretation applies depends on the view taken regarding the position of believers after death [and the interpretation regarding the millennium]. Wright (2003: 475) is of the opinion that it is only a privileged group of some of the martyrs that partake in the first resurrection⁴⁰⁷. This, however, is contradicted by the mentioning that the ones that became alive are *those who have not worshipped the beast and have not taken the seal of the beast on their foreheads*, which refers back to the imagery of Revelation 13 (cf. Rev 13:4, 8, 12, 15).

The first resurrection is certainly not intended only for the martyrs, but should include all believers. All believers are deemed to share in the privileges of the new world, not just the martyrs. All believers are resurrected into the new life, not just some privileged ones (Beale 1999: 998-999). All believers will miss the second death, not just the privileged martyrs (Osborne 2002: 707-708). The martyrs mentioned here are, in accordance with the historic situation of John, representative of the situation in the entire church (Beasley-Murray 1981: 294-295).

As noted by Osborne (2002: 706-707), in all the other instances where the verb ἐζήσαν is used it implies a physical resurrection. This is also the case regarding the resurrection of Christ, who is said to *have come to life* (cf. Rev 1:18). The basis on which believers can have hope for their own resurrection is the resurrection of Christ (Travis 1997a: 1017). He took control of Death and Hades at his resurrection (Rev 1:18; cf. 1 Cor 15). It is interesting to note that, while John speaks of a resurrection [ἀνάστασις] of believers in Revelation 20:4-6, with regard to Christ in Revelation he only mentions that He came to life, or that He is alive [ζᾶν / ζῶν] forever (Aune 1998b: 1090).

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (ii)(a) above.

⁴⁰⁷ This is also the view of Mounce (1977: 360), Caird (1966: 252) and seemingly of Aune (1998b: 1090), whereas Giblin (1991: 187), Osborne (2002: 707-708), and Beasley-Murray (1981: 294-295) understand this to be a resurrection of all the believers, or at least representative of all believers.

Shepherd (1975: 43) deems the first resurrection to be the resurrection of “Jesus Christ in whom and with whom believers are raised by baptism.”⁴⁰⁸ This, however, is a spiritualising of the resurrection mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6. It is not the resurrection of Christ that is in view here, but the resurrection of believers *to reign with Christ*. Kline (1975: 370) recognises that the bodily resurrection is to introduce “the final order of the world to come”. However, she then uses this explanation to see the first resurrection not as a bodily resurrection by again seeking an implied second resurrection following on the first resurrection. This need not be the case. If all believers are resurrected with Christ in the first resurrection, they will in any case be alive when the rest of the people “who did not come to life until the thousand years were over” are called from death to be judged. It is important to note that these last mentioned persons are not said to be resurrected at the Parousia. They are merely returned by Death and Hades and the Sea [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 and 3.1.1 and 3.1.3].

The interpretation by Hoekema (1977: 57) is close to the idea of the text: the resurrection is “...to mean not regeneration but the transition from physical death to life in heaven with Christ during the time between death and the resurrection.” The only problem with the understanding by Hoekema is that it still prompts the search for a second resurrection for believers, something John clearly refrains from in Revelation 20:1-15 (Morris 1969: 238; Travis 1997a: 1018).

The resurrection is therefore not just a spiritual resurrection. Although John sees “souls”, it is not just souls but ψυχὰς [here in Rev 20 probably to be translated in a wider sense with *persons* or *living beings* – cf. Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 901-902)] that “came to life” [ἐζήσαν] (Ladd 1977: 37-38)⁴⁰⁹.

b) No second resurrection!

As discussed in Chapter 9 [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5] ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη must not be seen as implying a second resurrection to come [cf. Excursion 10 on the millennium]. Its function is merely to stand in stark contrast with the second death, which is

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Hughes (1990: 214-215) who has a similar view.

⁴⁰⁹ It must be noted that Ladd (1977: 17-46) reads this from the viewpoint of being a premillennialist. The interpretation of this study accept the physical interpretation of ἐζήσαν, however not in a way sought by the premillennialist view, but in line with the a-millennial view that the thousand year reign is between Christ’s first and second comings [cf. Excursion 10 for an understanding of the view from which this thesis works].

mentioned in Revelation 20:11-15 (Aune 1998b: 1090). Resurrection is a term that John reserves only for believers (Osborne 2002: 708). Therefore, whereas all believers who die are to be resurrected [ἀνάστασις] into a life without any further interference by death, those who do not have the seal of God will experience the second death. They await this second death in Hades, as they did not come to life until the thousand years were over (cf. Rev 20:6). At the end of the thousand years they are called from Death and Hades only to be judged and thrown into the second death (Rev 20:12-13; [cf. also Chapter 9, 2.5 and also sections 3 and 4]).

The “first resurrection” is probably best explained by what Paul says in Philippians 1:23 (Du Rand 1995a: 130). Paul’s urge to die to be with Christ is an expectation of a union with Christ immediately after death (Müller 1991: 63). As Müller (1991: 63) further explains Paul’s view on life after death:

“No mention here of an intermediate state of unconsciousness or sleep of the soul in which Christ’s presence would not be experienced; and also no thought that he would be with Christ only after the resurrection.”

This is also implied in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31 (cf. Luke 16:22-23). Lazarus immediately experiences the joy of eternal life while the rich man suffers torment in Hades, awaiting his judgment (Groenewald 1973: 192).

c) Who is resurrected?

Who shares in the first resurrection? One can conclude that the first resurrection is the resurrection of *all* believers from the grave directly after their own death (Du Rand 1999a: 1803; Osborne 2002: 708). The fact that believers are with Christ directly after death is implied in a number of texts in Revelation (Rev 1:18; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5). In all of these texts John sees believers that have died on earth in the presence of God and the Lamb in heaven. The implication is that the control of Christ over the keys to Death and Hades [after his own resurrection] means that He unlocks the doors of Death and Hades for believers after death in order for them to enter the heavenly kingdom (Rev 1:18).



Slater (1999: 101) takes the issue a step further. He sees a link between the mentioning of the Book of Life and Christ's stewardship thereof (Rev 13:8; 17:8; 20:14-15), and Christ's control of the keys to life and death (Rev 1:17-18). This means that everyone, whose name is in the Book of Life, will experience this first resurrection. He or she will not be affected by the second death. This certainly fits the explanation that believers are not judged according to deeds if their names are in the Book of Life [cf. Chapter 9, 1.3]. They are immediately acknowledged as having the seal of God and being part of the new life.

Is this a case of immortality for the believer? The Old Testament is very quiet regarding the subject of being raised and even more so about immortality [cf. Chapter 2, 2.3 and Excursion 2]. Belief in the return of the dead to life only appears in Israelite religion at a late stage (Martin-Achard 1960: 185). In the Wisdom of Solomon immortality seems to be widely accepted. According to Wisdom of Solomon 8:17b "...to be allied unto wisdom is immortality". On the other hand, in 2 Maccabees 7:9 it is a resurrection after death that is expected: "...the King of the world shall raise us up, who died for his laws, unto everlasting life." In the New Testament the concept is mentioned quite frequently, more often with regard to the resurrection of Christ. However, as a result of the resurrection of Christ, believers have a hope of resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15; [cf. also Chapter 4, 2.1.3] Travis 1997a: 1018). It is clear from the above that there was a strong belief in resurrection after death that the believer could look forward to (Shogren 1997b: 775).

Grammatically "resurrection" cannot be deemed "immortality". The first implies a death followed by a coming back to life, whereas the second implies no interference by death at all [cf. Excursion 2]. The believers that John sees in heaven have certainly died, most of them as martyrs during persecution (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 20:4-5). Everyone goes through the grave, even these believers. But no believer stays in Death. All of them are resurrected into the kingdom of God where they will reign with Christ (Rev 20:4-6). The most one could talk about is an immortality after death [cf. footnote 48 and Merrill (1997: 887)]. The believers in God's new world will not be affected by death anymore, as death will not exist in God's new heaven and earth (Rev 21:4). They will not even have to worry about the second death at judgment, as this can have no power over them (Rev 20:6).

d) When are they resurrected?

How does Revelation 20:1-6 relate to the Parousia of Christ? Many scholars see a second resurrection at the Parousia, i.e. of the “other” believers and the unbelievers (Rev 20:11-15; [cf. footnote 407 for a list of some scholars supporting this view]). This, however, immediately forces a distinction amongst believers [a whose-who at the first or second resurrection] being resurrected. This distinction is unnecessary [and not contemplated by John], as all believers are being resurrected in the first resurrection. There will not be a re-resurrection, or second resurrection. Those not resurrected are destined for the second death (Osborne 2002: 709).

One must keep in mind that judgment is not a once-off action at the Parousia. Judgment occurs continuously in this life. The Parousia is only the revelation of what has already been decided (Du Rand 1995a: 110-111). Life in this world is already a moment of judgment. This is clear in the fact that believers are resurrected directly after death [knowing they have conquered in this life and will thus miss the second death – cf. Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17] while non-believers are waiting in Hades [knowing what awaits them at the Parousia is the second death – cf. Rev 20:13-14].

It is essentially a message of hope. “The resurrection reveals that the life of God is stronger than the estranging power of death. The resurrection of Jesus means the ultimate death of death” (Lorenzen 1995: 257). Moreover, believers are promised a resurrection as a result of the resurrection of Christ. Death will have no power over them, as Death itself will be cast into the Lake of Fire, the eternal second death (Osborne 2002: 709-710).

iii) Summary

- The concept of a resurrection is not attested in the Old Testament. It appears in Israelite religion only at a very late stage (cf. 2 Macc 7:9b; Wis Sol 8:17; 12:1).
- In the New Testament resurrection is a prominent feature based on the all-important belief in the physical resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15).

- The first resurrection (Rev 20:4-6) refers to all believers being resurrected to reign with Christ, not just a privileged few. The designation “those who have not taken the seal of the beast or have worshipped the beast” is applied onto every believer in Revelation.
- While believers are resurrected immediately to reign with Christ, unbelievers await the Day of Judgment from the “prison” of Hades, knowing their final destination is the second death.
- Judgment is a continuous process and already happens in this life. The Parousia is only the announcement of what has already been decided.
- Because believers partake in the first resurrection, they will not be affected by the second death. Death has no power over them and will therefore not be able to hold them in.

2. There will be no death...

i) Context

The context of Revelation 21:1-8 has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (i)(c)]. Aune (1998b: 1113) identifies two subunits of text, which comprises of two speeches by different persons in the vision:

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

In Chapter 9 the focus was on the divine speech from the throne, confirming that in God’s new world there would be no place for any imperfectness, including death. The focus in this section will be the angelic speech (Rev 21:1-4), which, according to Aune (1998b: 1114-1115), could be linked directly to Revelation 22:3-5⁴¹⁰.

That a new unit of text starts in Revelation 21:1 is identified by the text marker Καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 21:1a. The subsection of Revelation 21:1-4 is framed by the phrases πρῶτος...πρώτη...ἀπῆλθαν (Rev 21:1b) and τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν (Rev 21:4b). It is an announcement by the angel [identified only as “a voice from the throne] that the old aeon has passed away and that God’s new aeon have now been completely

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1114-1115) regarding the possibility of Revelation 21:5-22:2 being a later insertion into the text.

Charles (1920b: 145) sees Revelation 21:1-4 as an important turning point:

“It is clear from this passage that we have arrived at the closing scene of the great world struggle between good and evil, and that henceforth there can be neither sin, nor crying, nor pain, nor death any more. In fact, there can be no place at all for these in the universe of God—the new heaven and the new earth, and the New Jerusalem that cometh down from God to the new earth.”⁴¹¹

One very important characteristic of this new world is the fact that there will be no death [καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι]. The noun ὁ θάνατος does, of course, have different possible meanings (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 351-352). One possible translation is that of “pestilence” (cf. Rev 2:23; [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.1]). However, Isaiah 25:8, to which this text alludes, is clearly a reference to death being swallowed up by God in the eschatological future (Snijders 1985: 250). It could even be a personalisation of Death [cf. Chapter 9, 3.1 with regard to Death and Hades as being personalised. In these cases the word used for Death is always ὁ θάνατος]. However, as personalised entities the two [i.e. Death and Hades] are always mentioned together in Revelation. It is thus more probable that John is referring here to the disappearance of physical death.

Revelation 21:4 is an allusion to Isaiah 25:8 (cf. 1 Cor 15:54). The total cessation of death is also foreseen in Targum Isaiah 65:20 [the prophecy of Isaiah, as it is given in the Bible, only refers to the cessation of untimely death⁴¹² – Aune (1998b: 1124-1125)]. The total removal of death is a common theme in apocalyptic literature (cf. 4 Ezra 8:53; 2 Apoc Bar 21:23; [Aune 1998b: 1125]). In 4 Ezra 8:53-54 it is said: “...iniquity has fled into oblivion in hell, sorrow has disappeared, and the treasure of immortality became visible in the end” [free translation from *De Apocriefe Boeken I* (J Keur & P Keur 1958: 69).

⁴¹¹ Italics as inserted by Charles (1920b: 145).

⁴¹² Cf. Chapter 2, 3.4 for a discussion on “untimely death”.

Furthermore, the promise of the new heaven and new earth is an allusion to the prophecies found in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. It is primarily an account of creation, or rather recreation, of that which sin has damaged and destroyed (Osborne 2002: 729). This recreation is essentially a re-establishment of the relationship with God, something that has gone astray as a result of the sin of man (cf. Gen 3). In the New Testament a strong link was made between death and sin: death was the consequence of sin, was Paul's conclusion (Rom 5:12; cf. Jas 1:15; [cf. Chapter 4, 3.1]). This was not necessarily the understanding of death in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.4].

It was probably this New Testament understanding that Death "was the last enemy to be destroyed" (1 Cor 15:26) that prompted the visible removal of death as an enemy of God in Revelation 20:14 (Osborne 2002: 735). The victory over death has already been won. This happened on the cross, when Christ died, and on Easter, when He was resurrected from death. It is specifically this resurrection that made Him the bearer of the keys to Death and Hades, thereby confirming their powerlessness and his control over them (Rev 1:18; [Aune 1998b: 1125]). When Death is thrown into the Lake of Fire, it is not just powerless, but it is entirely removed from the presence of God (Du Rand 1995a: 133).

In any case, it is important to note that Revelation does see death as an enemy of God, bringing with it a number of other unhappy experiences, such as sorrow, mourning, crying, pain. The end of Death and Hades [personified] then also spells the end for physical death. When death is removed (cf. Rev 20:14), all these other things will almost automatically disappear as well (Mounce 1977: 373; Osborne 2002: 735). The cessation of all negative aspects of life in the *eschaton* is a popular theme in apocalyptic literature, where the picture that is drawn of paradise is said to specifically exclude any negative emotions (cf. 1 En 25:6; [Aune 1998b: 1125]).

Also important is the phrase τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν (Rev 21:4b), which refers back to verse 1. It confirms the contrast between the old [the current situation in the world of sin and imperfectness] and the new [God's new perfect world]. Death and its mentioned consequences are all part of these "first things that have gone by" (Groenewald 1986: 209). They are linked to the "first heaven and earth". In the "new heaven and earth coming down from God in heaven" there will be no place for these

things (Osborne 2002: 736-737). The all-encompassing presence of God will push aside all else that exists [cf. section 5 below]. Even the sea [believed to be the seat of evil] is said to disappear (Beasley-Murray 1981: 307).

c) Only life

The end result of the disappearance of death is that only life remains thereafter. This is even more evident in the description of the New Jerusalem that follows. In fact, no further mention is made of death after the speech by God [cf. Annexure A.2 and A.3]. In Revelation 21:8 a brief summary is given of those destined for the Lake of Fire. This, however, serves more as a contrast to those who do inherit the new life than to mention anything about death⁴¹³. For the purpose of John's message, which is to comfort believers with the hope of a perfect existence with God, death [and everything negative or evil] will play no part in God's new aeon. It is the message of God giving a life that death cannot touch, an endless life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 312). This is the climax John wants to lead his readers to visualise and hope for [cf. section 5 below].

It is a promise that will become true for "everyone who have conquered" [the motivational message given to the seven congregations in Asia-Minor (Rev 2-3)]. Believers can therefore take heart from the fact that the imperfect world they currently find themselves in [i.e. as described in the proclamations] will be "renewed" by God, so that they as believers can experience the blessings of the perfect new heaven and earth in the continuous presence of God (Mounce 1977: 374).

Although the narrative implies that death will disappear only after the Parousia, believers are already saved from the effects of death after their own physical death. People, believers included, will [until the Parousia] still experience physical death in this world. However, after death they will immediately be resurrected into the new life with Christ [cf. section 1 above]. The second death will have no power over them (Rev 20:6). Believers who have died in this world should therefore already

⁴¹³ Of course, death will still exist in the form of the second death or Lake of Fire. It will, however, not be part of the Realm of God [i.e. the new heaven and earth] and it will not necessarily be physical deadness. It will be an existence away from the presence of God and the perfect world that He has brought about.

experience the benefits of the new heaven and the new earth. No wonder Paul is longing to die so he might be with Christ (Phil 1:23)!!

iii) Summary

- Revelation 21:1-4 describes the inauguration of God's new world in terminology taken from Isaiah 25:8 and 65:16-17 (Aune 1998b: 1124-1125). It is a perfect world where nothing in opposition to God will exist.
- One important characteristic of the new world is that death will be absent from it. Death [together with Hades] is thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14) and therefore has no power over the people of God anymore. This was also expected in apocalyptic literature (cf. 4 Ezra 8:53-54).
- With Death goes physical death. It also disappears in God's new world. Only life in the presence of God remains. This life is a never-ending life.
- With physical death go sorrow, pain, mourning and crying. All these will also disappear when death disappears from the scene (cf. 4 Ezra 8:54).
- For believers this never-ending life already starts at physical death. Because Christ was raised, He will also raise believers from death into the new life with Him. Believers therefore obtain life without end at their resurrection [i.e. the first resurrection – Rev 20:4-6]. The second death will not affect them at all.

3. Providing the water of life

The water of life is a prominent feature in Revelation 21-22. It is mentioned three times in this part of the Book of Revelation (Rev 21:6; 22:1, 17). In Revelation 7:17 the giving of living water is also mentioned. There it is the Lamb [i.e. Christ] that leads his people [those who washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb and have the seal of God on their foreheads] to the fountains of living water (Aune 1998b: 1127; [cf. Chapter 9, 1.2 above]). It is meant to be an eschatological motif in the new world that God will bring about, and is therefore mainly found in the closing chapters [after the Parousia] of Revelation. The reference in Revelation 7 is part of a heavenly vision. The believers seen in this vision are already part of the world where death will have no part to play anymore [cf. section 2 above].

i) Context

a) Revelation 21:1-8

The context of Revelation 21:1-8 has already been discussed, with its two identified subsections of Revelation 21:1-4 and 21:5-8 [cf. Chapter 9, 2.5 (i)(c)]. The subtext of Revelation 21:5-8 [the speech by God] was also discussed in the same section. Furthermore, Aune (1998b: 1127-1128) discusses the strong comparisons between Revelation 21:6 and 22:17.

b) Revelation 21:9-22:9

Revelation 21:9-22:9 is the narrative regarding the New Jerusalem, the new city of God in the new world of God. The narrative “is a combination of *traditional material...as well as innovative elements*”⁴¹⁴ (Du Rand 1988: 76). The start of a new unit of text is identified with the text marker Καὶ ἦλθεν in Revelation 21:9, introducing a new angel [one of the bowl-angels] into the scene. Although most scholars end the textual unit at Revelation 22:5 [cf. Mounce 1977: 48-49; Beasley-Murray 1981: 32; Du Rand 1988: 65], Aune (1998b: 1201-1202) follows Giblin [as referred to by Aune] to cut the text after Revelation 22:9, the reason for this being the structural comparisons between Revelation 17:1-19:10 and 21:9-22:9 (cf. Du Rand 1988: 76). Revelation 22:6-9 forms a transition to the following section (Rev 22:10-20). It acts both as a conclusion on Revelation 21:9-22:5, as well as an introduction to Revelation 22:10-20 (Aune 1998b: 1144).

Aune (1998b: 1143-1144) identifies three subsections within the text:

- 21:9-10a Introduction to the vision
- **21:10b-22:5** **Description of the New Jerusalem**
- 22:6-9 Concluding angelic speech

It is a description of the New Jerusalem that awaits believers, with a lot of focus placed on the prominent features contained within the New Jerusalem (Aune 1998b: 1144). The New Jerusalem forms the central feature within the new creation

⁴¹⁴ Italics inserted by Du Rand (1988: 76).

described [announced] in Revelation 21:1-4 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 315). There is strong support to understand Revelation 21:5-22:2 as a later addition to the text (cf. Aune 1998b: 1149-1150). However, for purposes of this thesis, Revelation 21:5-22:2 will be regarded as part of the text, as it is part of the final edition to the modern reader.

c) Revelation 22:10-20

The possibility that this section actually starts at Revelation 22:6 has already been mentioned above [cf. (b) above]. Bauckham (1993a: 22) acknowledges the ambiguity by uniquely overlapping his structure for Revelation at this point. It forms the epilogue to the Book of Revelation. The epilogue in this case functions “to underscore the divine origin and authority of the book that it concludes” (Aune 1998b: 1201). Because of the seemingly disordered text many suggestions were made on how to rearrange the text to its “correct and original order”. However, as Aune (1998b: 1205) has noted, all of these suggestions “are based on the dubious assumption that an originally coherent text was somehow thrown into violent disarray” by an editor rewriting or reviewing the text.

There are strong parallels to be drawn between Revelation 22:6-21 and Rev 1:1-3 [the introduction to Rev] (Aune 1998b: 1205-1206). Just as the message was originally said to have come from God and Jesus Christ through his angel, so does God, Christ and the angel speak in the final chapter of the book (Groenewald 1986: 221). The text of Revelation 22:10-20 could be subdivided into six identifiable subunits (Aune 1998b: 1200-1201):

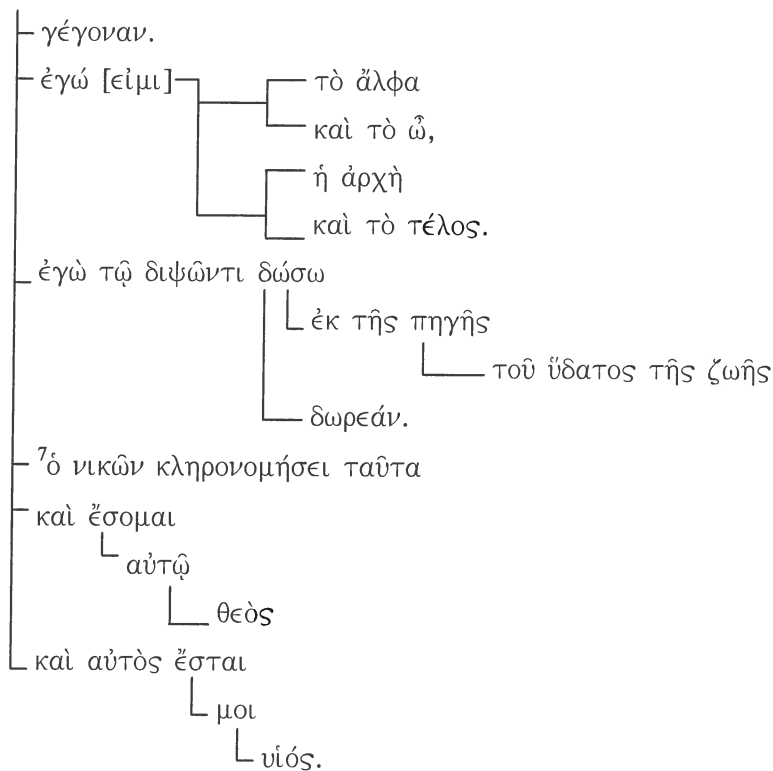
- 22:10-11 Admonitions of the angel
- 22:12-16 Sayings by Christ
- **22:17** **Invitation to take the water of life**
- 22:18-19 Additional warnings and curses to the hearer
- 22:20ab Christ’s promise to return soon
- 22:20c Responses by the author

ii) The water of life

The texts referring to the water of life (i.e. Rev 21:6; 22:1, 17) is generally well attested. The suggested variants for the texts do not have sufficient support to warrant a change to the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 676, 678, 680)⁴¹⁵.

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 21:6-7

⁶καὶ εἶπεν μοι·



The context of the text is the announcement of God's new heaven and earth. It functions as an "oath formula" that guarantees the truthfulness of what has been said and of what is to follow (Aune 1998b: 1182). Within this context the metaphor of the water of life clearly refers to eternal life being bestowed upon believers by God. The use of the emphasised phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι [repeated in the following phrase] puts the emphasis on the divine nature of the one speaking. It reminds of the divine name God mentioned to Moses (Ex 3:14-15).

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1111-1112, 1139, 1199) for a discussion on all these variants.

b) Receiving the water of life freely

God promises “living water” [ὕδωρ ζωῆς] coming from a fountain [ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς]. The phrase ὕδωρ ζωῆς is ambiguous: it can mean either “living water” in a religious sense, or it could just be a reference to flowing or running water. It was often understood in this manner in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.4]. If it is “living water”, the reference is to the water that gives eternal life [although it could stand for righteousness (cf. Prov 10:1; 1 En 48:1) or for wisdom and knowledge (cf. Prov 18:4; Jer 2:13) {Du Rand 1988:78}]. This is certainly the case in John 4:4-16 (Aune 1998b: 1128). The “living waters”-metaphors of Revelation 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]). The living water is the new gift of life that Christ brings to the world (Burge 1992b: 869). “He is the source of the promise [of life] and its fulfilment”⁴¹⁶ (Burge 1992b: 870).

This living water as used in the Gospel of John could also refer to the Gospel message (Brown 1966: 178-179; Van der Watt 1986a: 178-179). However, in the New Jerusalem it is not the Gospel-message that would bring life, but the presence of God in a life-giving relationship. This is clear from the vision of Revelation 22:1, where the living water flows “from the throne” [i.e. from the presence of God]. The way to this presence comes only through the Christ (John 14:6; [cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 179 – he sees the water of life as a reference to Jesus *and* his revelation. The basis for the origin of this life is the relationship between the Father and Christ {Van der Watt 1986a: 239-240}]).

The prepositional phrase ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν (Rev 21:6) is a motif that alludes to Isaiah 55:1. The emphasis on ἐγὼ upfront confirms that it is God who is the Provider of the living water (Aune 1998b: 1127). In Isaiah 55:1 it is Yahweh who invites people to be filled with the water of life. This is implied in the preceding phrase here in Revelation, depicting God as the “Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end” (Rev 21:6a), i.e. He “is the source and origin of all things” (Mounce 1977: 374). The important message for believers is that life is to be found only with God. He is Life [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2 and Chapter 6].

⁴¹⁶ My bracketed insert.

This life in its fullest sense lies in the eschatological future. It is directed primarily at the believer. As Beasley-Murray (1981: 313) has noted:

“While the saying doubtless extends to all who will come forward and take the water in the future (22:17), its primary application is to the believer who has come, who trusts in the Christ, and who faces the testing described in the earlier chapters of the book.”

A second notable feature of the water given by God is that this water is free [in Isa 55:1 the people of God are invited to “buy” the water of life “without cost, freely”]. The water of life is a gift from God (Aune 1998b: 1128). Receiving a gift implies that no equitable value was given in exchange. It is thus something received “*undeservedly, without reason*”⁴¹⁷ (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 209). The “living water” is available as part of God’s grace and for no other reason. The “price” for access to this water has already been paid, by Christ, when He died on the cross (cf. Burge 1992b: 870). Through Jesus’ death believers have access to life in eternity in the New Jerusalem [cf. section 2 above], where the living water flows for everyone, who is in the New Jerusalem, to drink (cf. Rev 22:1).

Thirdly, the water is available for everybody that thirsts. Thirst here refers to the longing to be in a relationship with God. “Scripture often employs the figure of thirst to depict the desire of the soul for God”⁴¹⁸ (Mounce 1977: 374). In the Gospel of John [as is the case in Rev] the verb διψάω is used to describe the thirst for the water of life (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 199). “Everyone that thirsts” is thus parallel to “those who conquered” (Rev 21:7a). This phrase is taken from the proclamations of Revelation 2-3. It refers to the believers who are motivated to hold on to their faith, even to the point of death (Mounce 1977: 374; Aune 1998b: 1129). Even though the participle ὁ νικῶν is singular in Revelation 21:7a, it certainly doesn’t imply that only one person will receive the blessings of the new aeon, hence the translation of “those who conquer” (Aune 1998b: 1129).

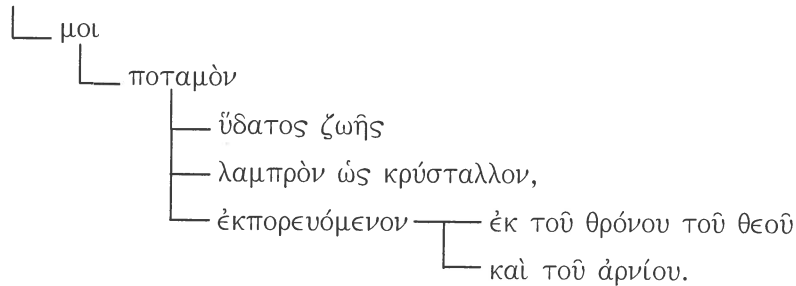
⁴¹⁷ Italics inserted by Arndt & Gingrich.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Ps 42:1; Isa 55:1. Hunger and thirst frequently refers to “unfulfilled moral and spiritual needs and are often used in the OT, early Judaism, and early Christianity for the need for spiritual satisfaction and fulfilment that can only be provided by God” (Aune 1998b: 1229).

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 22:1 and 22:17

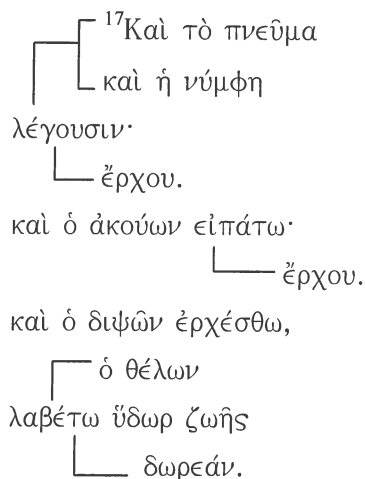
Revelation 22:1

Καὶ ἔδειξεν



The focus is on the river containing the living water. That is what the angel shows John. The rest of the sentence is a description of the water, and an identification of the source of the living water [cf. (e) below]. It is an eschatological description using paradise imagery (Aune 1998b: 1175).

Revelation 22:17



Revelation 22:17 is an open invitation to partake in the life of God. The invitational nature is emphasised by the repeated use of ἔρχεσθαι (Aune 1998b: 1227). The language alludes to Isaiah 55:1, where God invites Israel to come and receive living water [cf. (d) below]. The imperative verb כּוּן [come] occurs three times in Isaiah 55:1 (Aune 1998b: 1228-1229). Again the focus is on the water of life that is freely available to anyone in need thereof.

d) An invitation to drink

When do believers get access to the living waters? In the Gospel of John (John 4:13-15) the water is available [given] the moment Jesus reveals his identity to the woman (Van der Watt 1986a: 174). In Revelation the living water is available to all “that have conquered” (Rev 21:7a). The setting of the text [i.e. in the New Jerusalem] implies that this happens after the Parousia. However, “those who have conquered” is said to have been resurrected with Christ so that they will not be affected by the second death [cf. section 1 and 2 above]. Therefore, the implication is that this living water is available to every believer immediately after his or her physical death.

The phrase “everyone who thirsts must come and receive the water of life free” is repeated, this time clearly as an invitation, in Revelation 22:17 [cf. Aune (1998b: 1127-1128) for a discussion on the comparison between Rev 21:6 and 22:17]. The verb used for the invitation, ἔρχεσθαι, is used twice more in Revelation 22:17. The other two occurrences are urgent calls for the coming of Christ at the Parousia (Beasley-Murray 1981: 344-345; Aune 1998b: 1228)⁴¹⁹. The repeated use of the imperative form of the verb ἔρχεσθαι in Revelation 22:17

“...serves to extend the invitation until that very moment when history will pass irrevocably into eternity and any further opportunity for decision will be past” (Mounce 1977: 395).

It is not clear if this last call is an invitation to believers who still thirst to come and be filled some more, or if it is a final call to unbelievers to not delay any further in coming to the water (Groenewald 1986: 225).

e) The real source of living water

In Revelation 22:1 the source of the stream of living water is revealed. Here the word ποταμός [river] is used instead of πηγή [fountain]. The imagery used to describe the New Jerusalem is reminiscent of Paradise in Genesis, which is said to have four rivers flowing through it (Aune 1998b: 1175). The waters flowing through the Garden of Eden symbolised the pulse of life that was present in Paradise (Vosloo 1999a: 15; [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.4]).

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Caird (1966: 287) who is of opinion that the call to come is addressed “to all comers”.

The image is probably an allusion to Ezekiel 47:1-12. Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the temple [i.e. the place where God resides]. As far as the river flowed it made the soil fertile and brought life in abundance wherever it flowed (Aune 1998b: 1175-1176). In Revelation 22:1 the river does not flow from the temple [the New Jerusalem doesn't have a temple, because God is its temple – Rev 21:22!!] but “from the throne of God and of the Lamb”⁴²⁰ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 330). Revelation 22:2 continues with an elaborate description of the river and its effects on the surroundings. It is paired with the image of the tree of life, i.e. another Paradise motif [cf. section 4 below for the discussion on the tree of life in the New Jerusalem].

That the river runs through the middle of the New Jerusalem implies that the abundance of life is present overall. This is true in the sense that God's presence is said to be overall in his new world (cf. Rev 21:3). “The river of living waters even more powerfully expresses the idea of life in inexhaustible supply” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 331). Trying to figure out the complicated logistical description of the location of the river and the tree of life paired with it would only confuse the visionary message. As an apocalyptic vision it is not always the logical combination that tells the story, but the combination of images in its fullness (cf. Du Rand 1991b: 216-218). In this instance the abundance of images wants to confirm the abundance of life to be received in this New Jerusalem. In the words of Mounce (1977: 386):

“...the central affirmation of the verse is that in the eternal state the faithful will live at the source of the life-giving stream which proceeds from the very presence of God.”

iii) Summary

- The living water referred to in Revelation 21-22 is an allusion to the vision of Isaiah 55:1, but also incorporates an allusion to Ezekiel 47.

⁴²⁰ It is of interest to note that God and the Lamb are the sources of the living water, whereas in Ezekiel's vision it was only Yahweh (Beasley-Murray 1981: 330). Furthermore, John specifically mentions only one throne and two persons – God and the Lamb. Also, in Revelation 22:3, it is said that the throne of God AND the Lamb would be in the city, and HIS servants will worship HIM [prominent singular use of the pronoun] (Beasley-Murray 1981: 332). This confirms the divine unity and high Christology of Revelation, which was discussed in Chapter 8 [cf. Bauckham (1993a: 139) who refers to the monotheistic impetus of John's descriptions of God and Christ].

- The living water is to be equated with the life-giving experience of the everlasting presence of God amongst his people (cf. Rev 21:3).
- God is Life and is therefore also the source of living water. The living water flows directly from the throne of God and the Lamb [i.e. the place where God resides in the New Jerusalem].
- The river flows through the middle of the “heavenly city”, bringing its water within reach of everyone in the New Jerusalem.
- The water of life is freely [i.e. by God’s grace] available to anyone who thirsts for it [i.e. longs for God’s presence in abundance] and “who have conquered” [i.e. held onto their faith until the end].
- “Those who have conquered” implies that the water of life is available immediately after death, as that is the moment when believers are resurrected to reign with Christ (Rev 20:4-6).
- The abundance of water [as elaborately described in Rev 22] confirms the abundance of everlasting life received in the New Jerusalem. Believers will never be without life again!

4. The tree of life is back!!

The tree of life is mentioned four times in this last section of the Book, in Revelation 22:2 (x2), 14, 19. It is also mentioned in the proclamations in Revelation 2:7 (Aune 1998b: 1177). The context of the text for this section [i.e. Rev 21:9-22:9 as well as Rev 22:10-20] has already been discussed [cf. section 3(i) above] and will therefore not be repeated here [cf. also discussion on the tree of life in the message to Ephesus – Chapter 9, 1.1.1. A description regarding the tradition surrounding the tree of life is given there].

ii) The tree of life in the New Jerusalem

To the congregation in Ephesus was promised access to the fruit of the tree of life “if they conquered” (Rev 2:7). In Revelation 22 “those who have conquered” are given this access, as they are in the New Jerusalem where the tree of life is available to all “who have conquered”.

The texts of Revelation 22:14 and 19 are well attested with very little in the form of textual variants. With regard to the tree of life no suggestions are given. In Revelation 22:2 there is a suggestion to change the singular τοῦ ξύλου to the plural form τῶν ξυλῶν (Aland & Aland 1993: 678). The suggestion was, according to Aune (1998b: 1140) “a scribal correction based on understanding ξύλον ζωῆς as a collective noun phrase meaning *trees of life*”⁴²¹. A number of scholars share the view of a collective understanding (Swete 1907: 299; Charles 1920b: 176). It is clearly used collective, sometimes even referring to the faithful people in Israel, in the Old Testament (Gen 1:11-12; 3:8; Lev 26:20; Ps 92:12-13; Isa 61:3; Jer 17:2; 1 En 93:2; OdesSol 1:2; 11:1; [Aune 1998b: 1177-1178]).

In Ezekiel 47:1-12 [where Rev 22:2 alludes to – cf. Wong 1998: 211] the prophet certainly sees numerous trees alongside the river as he walks back towards the temple. Contrary to this the creation-account in Genesis 2:9 [another passage alluded to here in Rev] talks only about one tree of life standing in the middle of the garden of Eden [it is not mentioned if it is close to a river]. It could be that John tried to incorporate both the Old Testament texts into his vision here. However, what is important is the message regarding the tree of life rather than to have the quantity clarified.

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 22:2

²ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς
 καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ
 ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν
 ξύλον ζωῆς ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα,
 κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδιδούν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ,
 καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου
 εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν.

This very complicated sentence serves to describe the overall presence and availability of the tree of life. It is located centrally so as to be available to everyone in the New Jerusalem (Groenewald 1986: 218). The illogical description in Revelation 22:2a should not be determined logistically, but should only be seen in the

⁴²¹ My italics.

light of the overall image of the tree of life in God's new world with its abundance of eternal life (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 331-332).

b) The tree of life in the New Jerusalem

The tree of life is a regular feature of Paradise in Jewish literature, where it is associated with the restoration of the perfect world in Paradise before man's fall into sin (2 Esdr 8:52; 2 En 8:3-4; [Mounce 1977: 387]). In Revelation 22:2 the tree of life [or trees of life] is paired with the river of life flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [cf. section 3 above] in a vision alluding to Ezekiel 47:1-12. Wherever the stream flowed, was Ezekiel's observation, everything lived (Ezek 47:9c). But also, the leaves of the trees will bring healing to the nations. In Genesis 3:22 God sends Adam from Paradise so that he would not eat from the tree of life and obtain immortality⁴²². The fruits of the tree of life are thus associated with eternal life already in the creation-stories (Mounce 1977: 387).

The abundance of fruit [twelve kinds of fruit twelve times a year!⁴²³], the healing effects of the leaves, and the combination with the abundant river of life emphasises the abundance in which God will bestow life upon believers in the New Jerusalem (Du Rand 1988: 78). In God's new world there will be no unfulfilled spiritual or physical needs (Mounce 1977: 387). The idea of healing seemingly doesn't fit into the New Jerusalem [it is supposed to be a perfect world]. However, as Mounce (1977: 387) notes: "The glory of the age to come is necessarily portrayed by means of imagery belonging to the present age." According to Wong (1998: 220-221) the healing has a double meaning: it refers to the historical healing of Christ's redemption, and to the future "spiritual care" by God in the new aeon.

Furthermore, the tree of life stands ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ (Rev 22:2a). Being in the centre of the city [and "in the centre of the river and on each side of the river"? – cf. GNB] implies that the tree of life is within reach of everyone that is in the city (Groenewald 1986: 218). No one who has access to the city will be cut off from the tree of life.

⁴²² Nothing is mentioned in Genesis about death as a consequence of sin. It was seen as the logical consequence of man's mortality. Cf. Chapter 2, 3.3 and Excursion 2.

⁴²³ Sweet (1990: 311) translates this with "making twelve fruitings or harvests".

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 22:14

¹⁴Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν,
└ ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν
└ ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς
καὶ τοῖς πυλῶσιν εἰσέλθωσιν
└ εἰς τὴν πόλιν.

In this beatitude [the last one of seven in Rev] the precondition for having access to the tree of life is stated: it is meant for everyone who has washed his [or her] clothes. The ἵνα - clause is not a condition to the blessedness, but a consequence of the washing of clothes in the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 7:14).

d) The tree of life is only for the saints

In Revelation 22:14 it is confirmed who have access to the tree of life: οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς (Rev 22:14a). Osborne (2002: 789) sees this, the last of the seven beatitudes of Revelation, as the unifying beatitude. It concludes who really are the blessed: those who have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb and who have remained faithful through all tribulation are the ones to participate in the resurrection of Christ and thereby enter eternal life.

The image of washing of clothes is found in Revelation 7:14, where the innumerable multitude before the throne [i.e. in the presence of God in heaven] is said to be alive and in heaven only because “they have washed their clothes and made it white in the blood of the Lamb” [cf. Chapter 9, 1.2 for a discussion of Rev 7:14]. For the believers it “signifies participation in the redemption of Christ” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 339). “That they may have the right to...” is juridical language, implying an acquittal of the accused at judgment (Beasley-Murray 1981: 339).

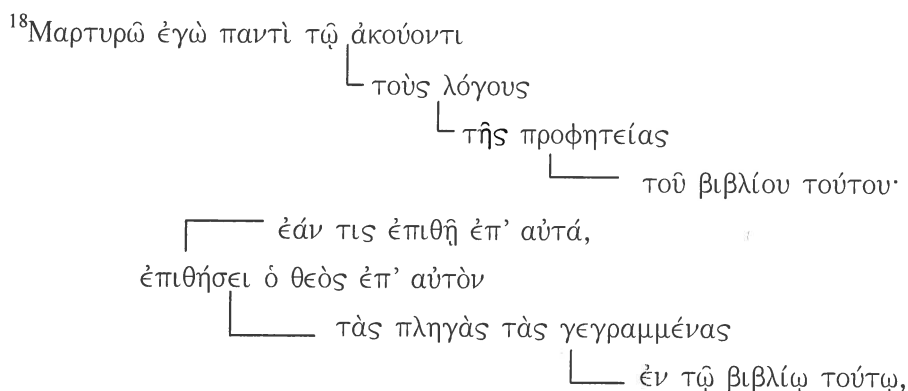
The promise of Revelation 2:7 is again picked up in Revelation 22. There it is said that those “who conquer” [ὁ νικῶν] will have access to the tree of life. The two symbols have the same meaning: it includes all faithful believers (Aune 1998b: 1219). By giving the fruits of the tree of life to everyone “who have conquered” John

confirms that the prophecy of Revelation 2:7 has been fulfilled in the new aeon, the New Jerusalem (Osborne 2002: 771).

Those “who have washed their clothes” will have ἡ ἐξουσία [literally *authority*] over the tree of life. A more appropriate translation in Revelation would be a “freedom of choice or the right to decide” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 277)⁴²⁴. A similar understanding of ἡ ἐξουσία regarding the tree of life is found in the Book of Enoch (1 En 25:24-25). In this instance the text is rather an allusion to Genesis 3:22-24 instead of Ezekiel’s vision (Aune 1998b: 1221). In Genesis the right to the tree of life was withdrawn when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise [from Genesis 2:17 it seems that they were never forbidden to eat from the tree of life, only from the tree that gives knowledge of what is good and what is bad – cf. also Gen 3:3-4]. Eternal life via access to the tree of life is a popular theme in apocalyptic literature (cf. 1 En 24-25; Ps Sol 14:3; [Aune 1998b: 1221-1222]).

Revelation 22:14c concludes with “...so that they might enter into the city by the gates”. Entrance to the city through the gates is a metaphor for eschatological salvation, i.e. entrance into the Kingdom of God, and is used frequently in the Gospels (cf. Matt 5:20; 7:21; [Aune 1998b: 1222]). It stands in stark contrast to those that are “outside” and can’t enter into the city, i.e. those in the Lake of Fire deprived of this life (Rev 22:15).

e) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 22:18-19



⁴²⁴ Cf. Osborne (2002: 790), who distinguishes between the “authority” that believers have over the tree of life and the “access” that Adam and Eve had to the tree of life in Genesis.

¹⁹καὶ ἐάν τις ἀφέλη
ἀπὸ τῶν λόγων τοῦ βιβλίου τῆς προφητείας ταύτης,
ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ
ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς
καὶ ἐκ τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας
τῶν γεγραμμένων
ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ.

Aune (1998b: 1229) calls these two verses an “integrity formula”. The emphasis is on the integrity and truthfulness of the words of the prophecy. The conditional clause ἐάν gives the condition under which the prophetic proclamation given here will come into effect. The importance of the prophetic words is highlighted even more when John says that God will punish the reader for any transgressions to this regard.

f) Losing your share of the tree of life?

In Revelation 22:18-19 the tree of life is mentioned in a warning to believers regarding the content of the message of the book. The warning is not against the scribes or translators of the text as such, but against anyone trying to distort the message contained therein (Mounce 1977: 395). The Nicolaitans of John’s time is a good example (Osborne 2002: 795). The prophetic warning is, according to Revelation 22:18, addressed to “everyone that hears”, which would probably be directed at the congregations in Asia-Minor. It is an oath formula, which in apocalyptic literature, is generally used as “verification of the truth of the vision report that follows” (Aune 1998b: 1229). This type of warning was common with regard to the validity and truth of the Law (Deut 4:2; 12:32; [Groenewald 1986: 226]). John probably based his admonition on Deuteronomy 4:2 (Osborne 2002: 795).

The admonition to the hearer is that those who distort the message will have their share of the tree of life taken away from them (Rev 22:19b)⁴²⁵. It is an admonition to steer away from anything that could influence eternal life for believers. It is also an admonition through the angel and the messenger [i.e. John] to stay faithful to the message of Christ (Aune 1998b: 1232).

⁴²⁵ Revelation 22:19a is the “protasis of a conditional sentence in which the condition is assumed to be possible” (Aune 1998b: 1232).

Although this admonition might sound like a threatening message regarding death [while it was previously mentioned that death disappears after the descent of the new heaven and earth, and simultaneously from the Book of Revelation after Rev 21:1-8 {cf. section 2(ii)}] it is not a message of death. It is an admonition to people who have life [those hearing the message (Rev 22:18) implies they are in the church, more specifically the seven congregations of Rev 2-3 – cf. Caird (1966: 287) and Osborne (2002: 796)] to make sure they don't lose this life. They must take the message of the prophet seriously and continue in the right ways and in the right words so that they will continue to partake in the benefits of the tree of life. “To him who conquers, I will give the gift of life” was the message at the end of each of the proclamations.

iii) Summary

- The tree of life in Revelation 22 [cf. Rev 2:7] alludes to the tree of life in Genesis 2:9, but is at the same time an allusion to Ezekiel 47:1-12.
- The tree of life is a metaphor for eternal life. Everyone eating of the tree of life will have eternal life (Gen 2:9, 3:22-24). In Revelation it is thus a message of the restoration of the life that Adam and Eve had in Paradise.
- In the New Jerusalem the tree of life is portrayed as providing life in abundance. It is also ἐν μέσῳ... so that everybody in the New Jerusalem could eat from its fruit.
- The fruit of the tree of life is only accessible to “those who have washed their clothes”, a reference to Revelation 7:14. This restricts access to the tree of life and its fruit only to the faithful.
- Access to the tree of life is the same as having access to the New Jerusalem through the gates, which in turn is the same as having access to eternal life. It is available to all who have conquered.

5. A case of God's continued presence

Throughout this thesis life was constantly connected to a relationship with God. It is not physical existence that determined life but the spiritual relationship with God. The importance of having a relationship with God [and of life as a relational concept] is emphasised throughout the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6].

a) Life in God's new world

In Revelation 21-22 John gives believers an insight into the new world to come and what lies ahead in the new, eternal life, that God has promised (Osborne 2002: 728, 745). It is clear from this that there is more to life eternal than just "being alive forever". Reading the narrative regarding the new aeon of God (i.e. Rev 21-22) the overall picture is that of the all-encompassing presence of God in this new aeon and of man's participation therein. What everybody has longed for on earth [i.e. a new creation where God's people will live in the glory of God's recreation – cf. Rom 8:18-22] finally comes about in the new aeon.

In the new heaven and earth, man and creation are both renewed in a perfect new relationship with God (Du Rand 1999a: 1804). Here God has made it possible again for man to participate in the existence in God's new world. This is a restoration of the relationship that existed between God and man before The Fall (Gen 1:31; cf. Gen 2:8-9; 3:8a). Many of the images of the creation narratives of Genesis 1-2 recur in Revelation 21-22 [cf. sections 1-4 above].

Furthermore, Revelation 21-22 narrates the return of God's presence amongst his people in a renewed relationship that last existed in Paradise. "Paradise...is the dwelling place of God" (Zimmerli 1983: 510). It is a place of harmony between God and man. In Paradise man participated in God's created order (Gen 1:28). But this harmony was distorted by sin (Gen 3). Man was deprived of further participation by being cast out of Paradise. Throughout the Old Testament sacrifices became the medium by which man tried to rebuild this harmonious relationship.

However, it was only when Christ came as the final and perfect sacrifice that the relationship was rebuilt (cf. Heb 9). Jesus' earthly life was the inauguration of the renewed relationship between God and man. He announced the arrival of God's kingdom, His new world (Matt 4:17).

b) God is in the New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9-22:9 describes the New Jerusalem with the emphasis on God's overall presence amongst his chosen and saved people. The New Jerusalem would be

a place of overall divine presence. In fact, so overwhelming will be God's presence that believers [i.e. those in the New Jerusalem] will even be able to see Him face to face (Rev 22:4a; [Mounce 1977: 387])!! Adam and Eve tried to hide away from the presence of God after they sinned (Gen 3:8b). Moses was not allowed to see the face of God because He is too holy to be perceived (Ex 33:20-23). The reason: sin made it impossible for unholy people to stand face to face with the Holy One (Groenewald 1986: 219).

However, in the New Jerusalem everyone who has been resurrected by God [i.e. through the first resurrection – Rev 20:4-6] is “holy and blessed” (Rev 20:6). They have been sanctified by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14; 22:14). Being sanctified by God enables them to stand in the presence of God without fear (Groenewald 1986: 219; Aune 1998b: 1124). They can now “see” the face of God without the fear of being struck with death. The eschatological promise is not just a symbol anymore, but an actual reality (Aune 1998b: 1124).

In Revelation 21:5 God promises that He will make all things new. This is further explained in Revelation 21 by the disappearance of all imperfectness from God's perfect new world. Du Rand (1995a: 135) calls this divine declaration in Revelation 21:5 “the climax of climaxes” with regard to the message of Revelation. God's “renewal” of creation is the climax on which every believer must focus his or her attention. This is the hope for believers in a world that is without any hope.

But there is more to this “renewal” than just a physical newness. The promise of God's newness is a promise of new life and a new relationship with God. As Du Rand (1995a: 133) notes:

“The newness of the new is not found in a place but rather in a climax of perfect togetherness with God... Only one word can describe it and that is the word perfect”⁴²⁶.

⁴²⁶ My translation.

c) God's perfect presence in a perfect relationship

If life is having a relationship with God then God's continued presence must surely imply an unending continuance of the life that comes with it. The message of God's continued presence comforts believers that the relationship with God will never be interrupted again, and therefore life will never be interrupted again for them. In the Old Testament the promise of God's dwelling amongst his people was often used as a message of comfort in times of struggle and suffering (Ex 29:45; Jer 31:33; Ezek 37:27; 43:7-9; Zech 2:11; 8:8; [Aune 1998b: 1122-1123; Osborne 2002: 734]). It was an assurance of God's protection (Ex 13:21; cf. Ex 14:19).

The phrase ἡ σκηνὴ τοῦ θεοῦ as a divine promise is a “virtual translation of *Shekinah*, typified in the cloud and pillar of fire at the exodus”⁴²⁷ (Osborne 2002: 734). In the Sinai desert it was the tabernacle that became the dwelling place of Yahweh (Groenewald 1986: 208; Osborne 2002: 734). Later on in the Old Testament [during the era of the kings] God “moved into the temple” built by Solomon (1 Kgs 8:10-11). The appearance of the cloud in the temple [the symbol for God's presence in glory] is the confirmation that Yahweh has accepted his dwelling place on earth amongst his people (Brongers 1979: 92).

In the New Testament this “dwelling of God amongst his people” is realised in two ways: first by the life of Christ, who was identified as Immanuel, God with us (Matt 1:23; 28:20). John said it even better in his Gospel: the Word become flesh and dwelled [σκηνώω] amongst men (John 1:14). Christ's life [his words, teaching and healing] in doing what only God can do [heal, make alive, take away sin] is proof of the presence of God on earth (Beasley-Murray 1981: 311).

Secondly the promise is that God's presence will in future be absolute amongst his people, i.e. physical, spiritual, in fact all encompassing (Rev 21:3-4). In the fulfilment of the promise in eternity God's people [his new λαός - not Israel only] will begin to live with Him [in a close and intimate relationship] in the New Jerusalem in an everlasting life of his divine presence (Osborne 2002: 734-735). This opens up the

⁴²⁷ My italics

possibility of an unlimited and unending participation in that which God has put in place in his new world order [i.e. the New Jerusalem].

d) No temple where God lives?

In Revelation 21:9-22:20 [the vision of the New Jerusalem] John expands on what this presence of God holds in stall for the believer. Many of the images are drawn from Ezekiel's vision regarding the new temple (Ezek 40-48). The vision, however, gets an entirely new application in Revelation. In the vision of Ezekiel the temple is at the centre of the vision. Its recovery presupposes the recovery of God's dwelling amongst Israel. But in the New Jerusalem there is no temple (Rev 21:22; [Osborne 2002: 745]).

The non-existence of a temple in the New Jerusalem would have been a surprising revelation to the first reader of Revelation. This is in total contrast to Jewish apocalyptic expectations regarding a new, eschatological temple in the New Jerusalem (cf. Ezek 40-48; Zech 1:16; 6:12-15⁴²⁸; [Aune 1998b: 1167]). A Jerusalem without a temple was nearly inconceivable in Judaic religion (Beasley-Murray 1981: 326-327). It implied that God had no dwelling amongst his people. John's wording highlights this expected surprise his readers would experience: the phrase οὐκ εἶδον actually implies "I expected to see, but didn't see..." (Aune 1998b: 1166). But according to John the surprise doesn't mean a crisis, because a temple is not required in the New Jerusalem. "...its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev 21:22 – GNB).

Again the issue of the all-encompassing presence of God is at the centre of the message. Because God is always and everywhere amidst his people a temple is not necessary to ensure his presence. In fact, where God is present in his fullest, nothing else is necessary (Osborne 2002: 759-760). In the Old Testament the glory of God filled the temple. But in the New Jerusalem the glory of God will be everywhere. It will fill everything and everybody in whose midst God is. Therefore the conclusion by John: God is not *in* the temple, but God *becomes* the temple (Osborne 2002: 760).

⁴²⁸ The Book of Jeremiah (Jer 3:14-18) is an unusual exception to the general expectations, where the prophet expected the New Jerusalem in its entirety to be the throne of Yahweh (Aune 1998b: 1167). It could be that the Jeremiah-text was at the back of John's mind in narrating the vision of Revelation 21-22, specifically regarding the New Jerusalem where God will be ever-present (Osborne 2002: 760).

That the Lamb is also the temple [just as God is] emphasises John's high Christology and the divine unity that exists between God and Christ (Osborne 2002: 761).

e) God's everlasting light

That God's presence supposes everlasting life, is even further explained in Revelation 21:23-27, which is an allusion to Isaiah 60:3-5, 11 (Aune 1998b: 1170). God [via the Lamb] will provide the light [therefore no sun, moon or lamp is required – Rev 21:23]. Light makes life possible. It makes possible participation in the activities of the realm.

The nations will walk in the light provided by God [i.e. they will be alive – cf. NAV on Rev 21:24]; the gates of the city will never be closed by day, whilst night disappears (Rev 21:25, repeated in Rev 22:5) therefore there will be non-stop vibrant living in the New Jerusalem]. That the "light of the Lord God" will shine upon them continuously means they will continuously [non-stop] be filled with the glory of the everlasting presence and holiness of God (Osborne 2002: 775).

Furthermore, John mentions twice (Rev 21:25b; 22:5a) that there will be no night or darkness anymore. It is an allusion to Zechariah 14:7 (Aune 1998b: 1172). The implication is that in the eschatological new world there will only be "an everlasting day" (Van der Woude 1984: 259). Darkness has many associations (cf. Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 191-193). One that stands out within the context of the New Jerusalem is that of death or the grave (Job 10:21-22; Ps 88:12;). This is coupled with the cessation that darkness brings to human activities (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 192). Therefore, when John says that there will be no night in the New Jerusalem, he echoes the words of Revelation 21:4: "There will be no death anymore."

Charles (1920b: 173) changes $\nu\upsilon\chi\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \omicron\upsilon\kappa\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota\ \tau\omicron\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \nu\upsilon\kappa\tau\acute{o}\varsigma$, reading it, "The gates will not be closed day and night". This change, however, disregards the important role that the light from God and the Lamb plays in making this a city with everlasting light with no additional lighting required (Rev 21:23). The everlasting and all encompassing presence of God and Christ will provide the light and the life for this

everlasting day. It also misses the important interpretative link that exists between Revelation 21:25b, 22:5b and Revelation 21:4.

In summary: The overall impression of the final two chapters of Revelation is the all-encompassing presence of the Lord God amongst his people. Life in the New Jerusalem is essentially a life of perfection in the presence of the Holy One. But also: it is a life in the presence of God in a perfectly renewed relationship with Him. This relationship is possible because God will dwell amongst his people forever, and they will be able to see Him forever. He will provide in every need of theirs so that there will be nothing required that is not available from God. The everlasting life is echoed in the fact that there will be no night [i.e. no death, no cessation of life-activities] in the New Jerusalem. The climax of Revelation's message is: in a perfect relationship with God in the New Jerusalem is life. It is this life believers must relentlessly strive to become part of (Du Rand 1995a: 133-135).

6. Summary

- i) Life in eternity is the theological climax of the Book of Revelation. This life is essentially a life in relationship with God in his all-encompassing presence. It is an active participation in the activities of the eternal Godly realm. This message of life is central to John's intention to bring hope and comfort into people's lives.
- ii) Believers experience this life in its fullness after physical death when they are resurrected into the new life with Christ [i.e. the first resurrection]. The resurrection into a new life is a concept not found in the Old Testament. All believers will experience this first resurrection, not just a certain group.
- iii) In God's new world there is no death or sin. It is a perfect world with no place for any imperfectness. Believers will not be affected by any of these in the New Jerusalem. They will also not be affected by the second death, as they live forever with God.
- iv) The non-existence of death in the New Jerusalem is echoed in Revelation 21:25b and 22:5b when John mentions that there will be no night in the new aeon anymore.

- v) In Revelation 21-22 John uses a number of metaphors from Genesis 1-2 and Ezekiel 47 to describe this new world. The water of life and the tree of life occur in both these narratives from the Old Testament.
- vi) The water of life flows directly from the throne of God and of the Lamb. God is thus the Provider of life [as was Christ in John 4]. Everyone who has conquered has got access to this water of life. The abundance of water confirms the abundance of life flowing from God.
- vii) The tree of life similarly is a promise of life to those who have conquered. They will have unrestricted access to its fruit in the New Jerusalem.
- viii) Looking at Revelation 21-22 from an overall perspective, the one thing that stands out is the all-encompassing presence of God. Life in the New Jerusalem is a life in which God is present everywhere and in everyone and everything.



CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION

"How blessed are those people that have washed their clothes in order that they might be prepared for God's big festival. They will enter into the new city by the gates. And the tree that gives life to people will be available to them"

Rev 22:14.⁴²⁹

Revelation could probably be understood as a book of either life or death, depending from whose context it is read. This thesis proposes that Revelation be read as a book of life. Life is the theological climax of the Book of Revelation (cf. Du Rand 1995a: 135). Throughout Revelation life is the focus point for the believer. But that life is not the life that we know from a biological point of view, i.e. physical life. Life in Revelation is in line with the characteristic Johannine concept of eternal life [cf. The Gospel of John]. Thompson (2000: 691) is of the opinion that, "John is preoccupied with the death of both Christ and Christians" in Revelation. This could be true, but one must not forget that life is the opposite of death. Also, John is certainly not preoccupied with teaching his readers how to stay out of the arms of death. His calls in the proclamations of Revelation 2 and 3 are calls to life. His aim is to proclaim life, even in the face of death⁴³⁰.

1. God is life

1.1. God is the eternal living God

The Book of Revelation is highly theocentric (Bauckham 1993b: 23). The eternal living God stands at the centre of the Book of Revelation. He is the Almighty [δ παντοκράτωρ - cf. Rev 1:8; 4:8; 1:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22]. He is therefore not to be compared to any other god, or any creature for that matter (Du Rand 1991a: 589). His eternity and uniqueness is further emphasised when He is called by the title δ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, i.e. the God who exists beyond the boundaries of time.

⁴²⁹ Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

⁴³⁰ This is the angle from which Richard Longenecker [as editor] looks at the resurrection message in the New Testament (1998: 1). It is a life based on the crucial historical occurrence of Christ's resurrection from death. Christ is alive and can therefore promise believers the gift of life (Trites 1998: 281).

The concept of God as eternal would not have been foreign to the reader of Revelation. Throughout the Old Testament nothing is mentioned with regard to God and death. God is life – always. Life is defined in terms of God, in the relationship with God. This is evident already in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6]. He is the *living God* who created everything that lives on earth (cf. Rev 4:11). He existed before time (John 1:1). In fact, time, as we know it, is only the result of God’s creative activity (cf. Gen 1:4-5, 14-15).

The throne-room scene of Revelation 4 portrays an image of God Almighty reigning supreme and in control of everything. From this throne-room scene (Rev 4-5) everything else in history [and in Rev] unfolds (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). This is confirmed when God is seen holding the scroll [which determines the history of man through the ages – Rev 5:1-2 (Joubert 1999b: 103)] in his hand. The unfolding of history in the following chapters also emphasises His control over life and death. Life and death only occurs when God permits it or brings it about (cf. Rev 6:1-8; 9:1-21).

It is clear throughout Revelation [and specifically in Rev 4] that the God of Revelation is still the God of the Old Testament, i.e. He is the transcendent, sovereign, Creator-God, the *only* living God (Bauckham 1993b: 32). The divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος is a fitting way to portray the God who is always the same and have always been in control of history. The title, alluding to Exodus 3:14, is probably

“...referring not to God’s self-existence purely in himself so much as to his commitment to be who he will be in his history with his people”
(Bauckham 1993b: 30).

1.2. God is the Giver of life

Although God is strongly portrayed as the divine Judge in Revelation, i.e. being the Decider on life and death in eternity, He is also actively involved in the salvation of his people through the blood of the Lamb [cf. section 2 below] (Trites 1998: 272).

“...Revelation also makes clear once and for all that the one God of the Scriptures intervenes within the flow of history to direct its course to a final destiny” (Newman 1997a: 427).

As the living God who created life and sustains life, He gives eternal life to those who conquer [terminology used by John to refer to those believers who stay faithful to God until death] (cf. Martin 1997: 1224). Life in this sense means the possibility of existence and participation in the existence within the Godly realm. This understanding of life is evident in the proclamations to the congregations in Asia-Minor, where the prize for conquering is access [participative existence] to life in God’s new world [cf. Chapter 8, 1.1.2 and Chapter 9, 1].

Worshipping the living God plays an important role in Revelation. The worship is entirely theocentric (Bauckham 1993b: 33). A number of worship hymns confirm the transcendence, almighty power, right of judgment, and creative power, of God Almighty (Wu & Pearson 1997: 524). The importance of worship stems from the Old Testament. It is an acknowledgment of God as the only living God [i.e. a monotheistic belief] (Bauckham 1993b: 32). In this sense worship is a sign of life: it is the reaction of a living creation [the dead cannot worship] to the only living God (cf. Newman 1997a: 428).

For believers in Asia-Minor the good news is that they can rely on the message of life that John brings from God [through Christ – Rev 1:1-2]. God has not changed. He is just as faithful as He was in Old Testament times. He is the living God, still in control of history [and therefore of life and death], and still the sovereign God. Therefore: when He promises life to those who conquer (cf. Rev 2-3) they can know that this promise will come true for them: they will participate in this recreated new world order of God.

2. Christ and life

The portrayal of Christ in Revelation could be read against the background of two texts:

Revelation 1:18 – “I am the living one! I was dead, but now I am alive forever and ever. I have authority over death and the world of the dead”.
– GNB.

Revelation 5:5-6 – “Don’t cry. Look! The Lion of Judah, the Descendant from David, has won the victory, and he can open the scroll with the seven seals. Then I saw, standing in front of the throne, surrounded by the four living creatures (between the throne and the elders), a Lamb, the One who had been slaughtered” – free translation from NAV.

The first of the texts (Rev 1:18) confirms Christ’s status as the eternal living One after his resurrection from the dead and his authority over the powers of death. The second text confirms his status as the conquering Messiah who holds the history of the world in his hands.

2.1. Victory by the Messiah!

Although the person of Jesus is only found in the New Testament, John alludes to the Old Testament in his descriptions of Jesus. The salvific action of Christ is portrayed in language drawn from the Messianic texts of the Old Testament. The metaphors of the Lion and the Lamb in Revelation 5:5-6 was commonly known texts referring to the power of the conquering Messiah (Beasley-Murray 1981: 123-124; Aune 1997: 350-351). The military language in the mythological vision of Revelation 12 also confirms that the Messianic victory has been won (cf. specifically Rev 12:7-12).

John interprets these Old Testament texts “...in the light of Jesus and his church, but he also interprets Jesus and his church by means of Old Testament prophecy” (Bauckham 1993b: 144-145). According to John Jesus is the expected Messiah from the Old Testament (cf. Rev 5:5); but He is not the Messiah as expected in the Old Testament. He does not conquer by war, but by sacrifice. Although the victory language in Revelation 5:5-6 might sound militaristic and implies a victory by military actions (cf. Rev 12:7-9), the victory was won by the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 12:11; [Bauckham 1993a: 213-214]).

2.2. Christ's death [and life] brings life

The physical life of Jesus Christ [and specifically the reality of his death and resurrection] is the foundation on which John's message of hope and comfort is built (Beasley-Murray 1981: 47). Firstly, the Lamb of God, who is seen [standing – i.e. He is alive] in Revelation 5:6, is worthy because He has been slaughtered and has thereby purchased believers from the claws of death with his blood (Rev 5:9). He is the sacrifice [i.e. the Passover Lamb that was sacrificed to bring the salvation (Keener 1997: 641)] that paid the price on behalf of man (cf. 1 Pet 1:19; Is 53:7; [cf. Rudolph 2000]). Furthermore: the victory over Satan is won, not by the hands of the archangel Michael [who was sent to do the job – Rev 12:7], but by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11; [Trites 1998: 280]).

Secondly, the resurrection of Christ is of utmost importance to the message of life and hope that John wants to convey. The message of hope is that, although Christ died, He is not dead, but alive! Christ also identifies Himself to John [in the image of the Son of Man] as the One who was dead but is alive and therefore has the authority over Death and Hades, having taken control of the keys thereto (Rev 1:18; [Trites 1998: 282]). Because Christ has been resurrected, believers are comforted in the knowledge that they will live just as He lives now (Trites 1998: 281-282). He has, as the ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (Rev 1:5), paved the way for believers to follow Him through the doors of death unto the new world God has prepared for them in heaven (Rev 1:18b; cf. Col 1:18; 1 Cor 15:20; Rev 7:14; 20:4-6; [Travis 1997a: 1017]). Believers can therefore trust Him and follow Him “through thick and thin, for he has *the keys of Death and of Hades*”⁴³¹ (Trites 1998: 273). The promise of this new world is expanded upon in Revelation 21-22, where John portrays what are awaiting believers in the New Jerusalem. The challenge to believers [directly from the risen Christ] is to be conquerors in the earthly life so that they might inherit this life in God's new aeon (Rev 2-3; [Trites 1998: 282-283]).

Death is only applied onto the person of Christ with regard to his earthly existence. The exalted Christ cannot die. He has conquered death in his resurrection. He lives forever and ever (Rev 1:18b). He is the living One [ὁ ζῶν - Rev 1:18a]. With this

⁴³¹ My italics.

title Christ is put on the same level as God, who is called the *living God* in the Bible [θεὸς ζῶντος - cf. Rev 7:2 (Motyer 1997: 261)]. Christ [as the living One] is the One through whom life becomes a reality for believers. In the new world life is therefore just as much defined in terms of Christ as in terms of God.

The comparison between God and Christ is continued in the worship hymns of Revelation 5-6. Except for the fact that Jesus is worshipped [something in Jewish monotheism reserved only for God], He is worshipped by using the same Old Testament words as was used to worship God (Newman 1997a: 428). John works with a high Christology throughout, constantly identifying God and Christ (Bauckham 1993a: 134-135). Even the vision of the exalted Christ in Revelation 1:9-20 is reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies (Hurtado 1997: 177). The implication is that Christ's eternal being is the same as God's eternal being. If this is the case, believers can have comfort in the knowledge that what applies to God [cf. section 1 above] also applies to Christ.

2.3. *Christ as the Decider on life*

Christ is not just the living One [equal to God]. He is also the Decider on life and death in the *eschaton* [equal to the God of the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.2]. He is the divine Judge who will, at the Day of Judgment, sit on the throne [or on the cloud – cf. Rev 14:14, both images related with judgment], from where he will be judging the world (cf. Rev 20:11-15). “The eternal destiny of each person shall be determined in this judgment” (cf. Rev 20:13-15; [Seifrid 1997: 621]). It is not physical life or death, but life or death in eternity that Christ will be the Decider of [although physical life and death is not out of God's power {cf. section 1 above}].

The title of Son of Man [an allusion to the vision of Dan 7:13] is generally associated with God's sovereignty and his coming in exaltation as the Judge (cf. Aune 1997: 90-91). This is specifically the understanding of the title as applied onto Christ in Revelation 14:14 (cf. Rev 1:9-20). But believers need not fear this judgment for the Book of Life belongs to the Lamb (cf. Rev 21:27), and everyone whose name appears in the Book of Life, will not be judged [according to the Book of Deeds, that is – Rev 20:13-14]. They will receive eternal life from Christ (cf. Rev 2-3; 20:14-15).

3. The never-ending life in Revelation

3.1. *Physical life [or death] in Revelation*

Very little is said with regard to physical existence [except for the ethical expectations required to conquer]. A lot is, however, mentioned with regard to physical death. It is clear from John's prophecy that nothing has changed with regard to the Old Testament view that man is a mortal being.

Every person's life [physical] comes to an end at some or other stage. Also: physical life and death affects both believers and non-believers. Physical death could occur, either as a result of persecution in the world (Rev 2:10, 13), or from the wrath of God in judgment (Rev 6:1-8).

Martyrdom plays an important role in Revelation, although the concept is mentioned directly only five times (Luter 1997: 719). Martyrdom is a sign of conquering unto death (Rev 2:10). On the other hand, deaths of non-believers are portrayed as part of God's wrath in judgment. When the seals are broken, the trumpets are sound, or the bowls are cast out, people die as a result of these divinely inspired actions. These killings in judgment confirm God's righteousness, which is still the same as in the Old Testament. He will not let evil continue unnoticed in this world. From this it is clear that judgment is a continuous occurrence, not just a once-off thing at the Day of Judgment (Du Rand 1995a: 110-111). The same applies then with regard to life and death. It is not something determined only at the Day of Judgment, but a continuous occurrence.

Physical death brings an **end** to the earthly life [and the chance to repent], but it is not the end. After physical death comes eternal judgment. Eternal judgment is sometimes mistakenly understood as the moment the decision **is made** on a person's destiny. However, it is rather an **announcement** of the consequences of a judgment that already occurred as a result of a person's earthly life (Du Rand 1995a: 111).

3.2. *Eschatological life [or death]*

Life [or death] in Revelation exceeds the earthly existence of a person. The main focus in Revelation is on eschatological life and death, and more specifically eschatological life. The final destiny of man overrides the current existence on earth,



although the current existence could influence the final destiny. However, believers should not be afraid even to die as a result of their faith, for they know that they will be safe [and alive!!] in the presence of God after death (cf. Rev 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 20:4-6) (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 150-151). The deciding factor for a person's eternal destiny is whether he or she has washed his or her clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14; 22:14). "Washing one's clothes in the blood of the Lamb" implies that the physical death and resurrection of Christ is the basis for the eschatological life of believers [not the ethical quality of their lives, although this is also important].

For believers eternal life in God's new world starts immediately after death (cf. Rev 1:18; 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5; 20:4-6). The Old Testament idea that all the dead goes to Hades makes way for a revised [apocalyptic] interpretation where only the wicked end up in Hades, awaiting their judgment, while believers immediately receive the new life in the New Jerusalem (Bauckham 1998a: 33-34). For believers the Day of Judgment is not something to fear, for their names are written into the Book of Life (cf. Rev 20:14). They are resurrected into the new life with Christ in what John calls the *first resurrection* (Rev 20:4-6), a term which is used as direct opposition to the *second death* [the destiny for the unbelievers] (Aune 1998b: 1090).

Non-believers will be called from the grave and Hades [John specifically refrains from using the term resurrection] to judgment in the *eschaton*. They will be judged according to the Book of Deeds and because everybody falls short in this, they will end up in eternal death [in Rev identified as the *second death* or the *Lake of Fire*]. Eternal death is not necessarily a state of motionlessness, but a state of eternal torment and punishment (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:10). It is a place where no relationship with God will be possible, i.e. an alienation from the presence of God (Osborne 2002: 723-724). It is a non-participation in the existence of God in his new world, which is therefore death.

What really determines life is the relationship with God during one's earthly existence. Life is essentially a relational concept, not just in Revelation, but also throughout the Bible. But life is not just an important relational concept in Revelation. Life is the central relational concept. Relations determine life [or the absence thereof, which is death]. All of this is caught up in the most important

relationship: The relationship with “the One who is, who was, and who is to come” and the relationship with the Lamb. Whoever stands within that relationship, has life (Du Rand 1999a: 1804). Whoever finds himself outside of that relationship, is already dead.

The clearest evidence in Revelation with regard to life as a relationship with God is found in the proclamations to the seven congregations of Asia-Minor. The ethical call to believers to live as conquerors is actually a call to stay faithful, i.e. to stay in a close relationship with God. Only if they hold onto this relationship until the end, will they receive life, i.e. eternal life (Rev 2-3; cf. Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5). It is a message of hope and comfort: they can conquer because their Lord has already conquered (Du Rand 1995a: 38-42).

The message of hope through life is often strategically placed in Revelation [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2]. Whenever believers are warned of possible hardship or persecution [or martyrdom], these passages are immediately followed by passages of hope and comfort, giving believers the assurance that, even if they might die for their faith in this world, they will be safe with God in his presence (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17). Life for believers is guaranteed through the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. Rev 1:18; 7:14; 12:11; 22:14). Because they stayed faithful to Christ, actively involved in a relationship with Him, He will bring them into his all-encompassing presence.

3.3. Life in God's all-encompassing presence

In the end life in the New Jerusalem is characterised by the all-encompassing presence of God and the Lamb leading unto an all-encompassing relationship with Him (Rev 21:22-23; 22:3-4). The entire narrative of the New Jerusalem overflows with this message of God's presence. And where God is present nothing else is required (Osborne 2002: 759-760). That is why the New Jerusalem doesn't even need a temple (Rev 21:22). Life will be bestowed upon the people in the New Jerusalem in abundance (cf. Rev 22:1-5). This is the life believers can look forward to in the New Jerusalem (Du Rand 1995a: 41-42). Anything in opposition to God [i.e. Satan, the beasts, Death and Hades, all unbelievers] will have been removed from the presence of God to allow for an uninterrupted, perfect relationship with God (cf. Rev 22:3).

4. Life: a central concept in Revelation

A lot can be taken from the words of Søren Kierkegaard (1980: 7-8), on the crisis of physical death for man, with regard to the understanding of the importance of life as a central theological concept in Revelation:

“Humanly speaking, death is the last of all, and, humanly speaking, there is hope only as long as there is life. Christianly understood, however, death is by no means the last of all; in fact it is only a minor event within that which is all, an eternal life, and, Christianly understood, there is infinitely much more hope in death than there is in life.”

Although it might seem on the surface that the judgment of God is the overriding concept in Revelation, it is essentially a book of life, hope and comfort. That life and death are central concepts in Revelation is not just evident from the frequency of occurrences [nearly every Chapter of the Book has some or other reference to life or death – cf. Annexure A.1-A.3], but also from the message of life John wants to convey and the climax [in Rev 21-22] towards which the message moves.

It is a message that gives hope and comfort, because it gives the promise of life to believers in the face of death. Believers are not exhorted to stay alive [i.e. in the body], but to make sure that they have life [i.e. eternal life]. It is clear from the exegesis that believers are constantly reminded that their lives are about a choice between life and death. It becomes a choice between existing in the presence of God or not existing at all.

The message is not given so as to strike believers with fear for eternal death but to comfort them with the hope of the future life. The theological climax they can look forward to is life in the presence of God in the New Jerusalem (Du Rand 1995a: 41-42). Furthermore: if life is building a relationship with God in the present [a typical Old Testament concept], the New Jerusalem will be a place of a never-ending perfect relationship with God (Du Rand 1995a: 133). Nothing unclean or imperfect will exist there. But important: Without life [existence] in the presence of God in a participative relationship with Him, there cannot be a new heaven and earth [or a New Jerusalem].



Life is a climax of perfect togetherness with God (Du Rand 1995a: 133). God will be present everywhere, in everyone and everything in a continuous harmony. God's control of everything, including life and death, will be visible to everybody. This all-encompassing presence of God is evident in a number of things mentioned in Revelation 21-22:

- Revelation 21:3 – “Now God's home is with human beings! He will live with them, and He will be their God.”
- Revelation 21:4 – “There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared.
- Revelation 21:10b-11a – “He showed me Jerusalem, the Holy City, coming down out of heaven from God and shining with the glory of God.”
- Revelation 21:22-23 – “I did not see a temple in the city, because its temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb. The city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine on it, because the glory of God shines on it, and the Lamb is its lamp.”
- Revelation 22:3-4 – “Nothing that is under God's curse will be found in the city. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship Him. They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads.”⁴³²

It is the language of God's overflowing presence. However: it is important to realise that life is possible only in the presence of God. The New Jerusalem, with its message of God's all-encompassing presence [as shown above], becomes a reality only for those who participate in the existence of God on his all-encompassing presence. Without God there is no life [cf. section 1 above], and without life there is no hope. Revelation's message of hope can therefore only be read as such by those that have life.

Combined with the statement that death will be no more (Rev 21:4) and the fact that death is not mentioned at all in the New Jerusalem, Revelation ends with the message of never ending life.

⁴³² All quotations taken from the GNB.

Revelation 21:4: “There will be no more death... The old things have disappeared” (GNB). This is the biggest comfort any believer can get: the knowledge of having life now and the hope of a future life regardless of what happens in this life.