



THERE WILL BE NO DEATH:
EXEGETICAL EVALUATION OF THE CONCEPTS
OF LIFE AND DEATH
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

by

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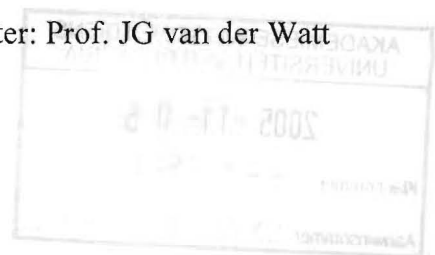
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Dedicated to:
Alta, Nardus and Wiehan

...καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι οὔτε πένθος οὔτε
κραυγὴ οὔτε πόνος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι,
[ὅτι] τὰ πρῶτα ἀτῆλθαν. (Rev 21:4b)

Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.
μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ·
ἐπι τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν. (Rev 20:5b-6ab)

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ABBREVIATIONS

1. Abbreviations with regard to books and series used:

AB	-	Anchor Bible (Commentaries)
ABD	-	Anchor Bible Dictionary
AV	-	Authorized Version of the Bible
BECNT	-	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BES	-	Biblical Encounters Series
BHS	-	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BIS	-	Biblical Interpretation Series
BNTC	-	Black's New Testament Commentaries
BRT	-	Baptist Review of Theology
CBQ	-	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ET	-	Expository Times
EWNT	-	Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament
GNB	-	Good News Bible: Today's English Version
GNS	-	Good News Studies
HTKNT	-	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HThS	-	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	-	International Critical Commentaries
JBL	-	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSNTSS	-	Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JTS	-	Journal of Theological Studies
JTSA	-	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
KJV	-	King James Version of the Bible
LLS	-	Logos Library Systems
LXX	-	Septuagint
MT	-	Masorete Text
MNTC	-	Moffatt New Testament Commentaries
NAV	-	Nuwe Afrikaanse Vertaling van die Bybel (1983)
NCB	-	New Century Bible (Commentaries)
NGTT	-	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif
NICNT	-	New International Commentary on the New Testament



NICOT	-	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	-	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIDOTTE	-	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIGTC	-	New International Greek Testament Commentary
Nov Test	-	Novum Testamentum
NTC	-	New Testament Commentaries (Baker)
NTL	-	New Testament Library
NTS	-	New Testament Studies
NTT	-	New Testament Theology Series
OBT	-	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTL	-	Old Testament Library
PNT	-	De Prediking van het Nieuwe Testament
POT	-	De Prediking van het Oude Testament
SJSJ	-	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
Sup NT	-	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
SNTS	-	Society for New Testament studies
SOED	-	Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
TDNT	-	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDOT	-	Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament
TNTC	-	The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TPI	-	Trinity Press International (New Testament commentaries)
UBS	-	United Bible Societies
UPTS	-	Universiteit van Pretoria Teologiese Studies
WBC	-	Word Biblical Commentaries
WTJ	-	Westminster Theological Journal



2. Abbreviations with regard to Books of the Bible referred to:

Old Testament (OT)

Gen	-	Genesis
Ex	-	Exodus
Lev	-	Leviticus
Num	-	Numbers
Deut	-	Deuteronomy
Josh	-	Joshua
Judg	-	Judges
1 Sam	-	1 Samuel
2 Sam	-	2 Samuel
1 Kgs	-	1 Kings
2 Kgs	-	2 Kings
1 Chr	-	1 Chronicles
2 Chr	-	2 Chronicles
Ezra	-	Ezra
Neh	-	Nehemiah
Esth	-	Esther
Job	-	Job
Psalms	-	Psalms ¹
Prov	-	Proverbs
Eccl	-	Ecclesiasts
S. of Sol.	-	Song of Solomon
Isa	-	Isaiah
Jer	-	Jeremiah
Lam	-	Lamentations
Ezek	-	Ezekiel
Dan	-	Daniel
Hos	-	Hosea

New Testament (NT)

Matt	-	Matthew
Mark	-	Mark
Luke	-	Luke
John	-	John
Acts	-	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	-	Romans
1 Cor	-	1 Corinthians
2 Cor	-	2 Corinthians
Gal	-	Galatians
Eph	-	Ephesians
Phil	-	Philippians
Col	-	Colossians
1 Thess	-	1 Thessalonians
2 Thess	-	2 Thessalonians
1 Tim	-	1 Timothy
2 Tim	-	2 Timothy
Heb	-	Hebrews
Jas	-	James
1 Pet	-	1 Peter
2 Pet	-	2 Peter
1 John	-	1 John
2 John	-	2 John
Jude	-	Jude
Rev	-	Revelation

¹ Except where specifically indicated, references to texts within the Psalter are with regard to the BHS. The LXX will be mentioned specifically when applicable.



Old Testament (OT)

New Testament (NT)

Joel	-	Joel
Am	-	Amos
Obad	-	Obadiah
Jonah	-	Jonah
Mic	-	Micah
Nah	-	Nahum
Hab	-	Habakkuk
Zeph	-	Zephaniah
Zech	-	Zechariah
Mal	-	Malachi



3. Abbreviations with regard to other sources referred to:

2 Apoc Bar	-	2 Apocalypse of Baruch
3 Apoc Bar	-	3 Apocalypse of Baruch [Greek]
1 Cl	-	1 Clement
2 Cl	-	2 Clement
1 En	-	1 Enoch
2 En	-	2 Enoch
3 En	-	3 Enoch
2 Esdr	-	2 Esdras
4 Ezra	-	4 Ezra
4 Kgdms	-	4 Kingdoms
1 Macc	-	1 Maccabees
2 Macc	-	2 Maccabees
3 Macc	-	3 Maccabees
4 Macc	-	4 Maccabees
Apoc Abr	-	Apocalypse of Abraham
Apoc Eli	-	Apocalypse of Elijah
Apoc Ezra	-	Apocalypse of Ezra
Apoc Pet	-	Apocalypse of Peter
Apoc Zeph	-	Apocalypse of Zephaniah
AscIsa	-	Ascension of Isaiah
Bar	-	The epistle of Barnabas
Did	-	Didache
Gos Pet	-	Gospel of Peter
Ign Eph	-	Ignatius: Letter to the Ephesians
Jub	-	The Book of Jubilees
Just Dial	-	Justin – Dialogue with Trypho
Mart Pol	-	Martyrdom of Polycarp
OdesSol	-	Odes of Solomon
Ps Sol	-	Psalms of Solomon
Sir	-	The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach
Test A	-	Testament of Asher



Test Jos	-	Testament of Joseph
Test Jud	-	Testament of Judah
Test Levi	-	Testament of Levi
Test Mos	-	Testament of Moses
Test Sol	-	Testament of Solomon
Tg Deut	-	Targum Deuteronomy
Tg Isa	-	Targum Isaiah
Tg Job	-	Targum Job
Tg Jer	-	Targum Jeremiah
Tg Ps	-	Targum Psalms
TIsaac	-	Testament of Isaac
Tob	-	Tobit
Wis Sol	-	Wisdom of Solomon

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"I am the One that lives, but also the One that gives Life. I have died, but do I look at all dead? No, I am alive – not just now, but forever and ever. The keys that open the doors of Death are in my hands. I am the One who decides who stays in the realm of Death, and who comes to life." Rev 1:18.¹

1. Revelation: a message of hope

Revelation has long been recognised as a book of hope and comfort (Coetzee 1990b: 265; Shogren 1997a: 656; Pohl 1969: 35). A lot has been written about this wonderful book, with nearly just as many views on the contents of its message. The seemingly mysterious apocalyptic visions and highly symbolic language have brought about much deliberation on the message of Revelation. And this message continues to fascinate readers and scholars today.

In the end one thing stands out amidst all these different viewpoints: Revelation wants to convey a message of hope and comfort. The purpose of John's message was to strengthen believers' faith and courage in the wake of possible persecution and hardship (Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035)². John wants his readers to take comfort from the knowledge that their faith and trust in the Christ-event will eventually lead to them also being resurrected into a new life with the living Christ (e.g. Rev 20:4, 6). They must just hold on to the victory of the Lamb and not let anyone rob them of their victory prize (Rev 3:11). Even if they are rejected by this world they must not lose their faith and courage. The Almighty God is still in control of His creation (Du Rand 1991a: 591-593³; Shogren 1997a: 656). His sovereignty is evident in His power as the Creator-God (cf. Rev 4).

¹ Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

² Sweet (1990: 34-35) argues that the actual crises for believers are not so much the physical persecution, but rather false doctrines and "worldly ideas" that have infiltrated into the churches. The letters to the seven churches also suggest that there is more to the message of Revelation than just encouragement in the light of physical persecution (e.g. Rev 2:14, 20-23). In fact, there are a variety of things that could influence believers' courage and faith (Bauckham 1993b: 15; Barnett 1997a: 75).

³ The title of this article is: "God controls the history: a theological-historical viewpoint according to the Revelation of John" [my translation]. The message of the article is that the sovereignty of God is the centre of the hope that John wants to convey to his readers. God is still in control and has won the

For the faithful believer, however, there is more than just God's sovereign control to hold on to: the new creation, brought about by the eschatological salvation of the Lamb [who was slaughtered, but is now alive – Rev 5:5-6] is their actual destination (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 46). Their hope should therefore not rest upon things in this world, but on the new life [i.e. the new heaven and earth, the new Jerusalem – Rev 21] that God has prepared for them in heaven. John's message of hope runs throughout the text of this Christian prophetic-apocalyptic book⁴.

Although apocalyptic images and symbols play a major role in Revelation, the use of the concepts of *life* and *death* in conveying this eschatological message is striking throughout Revelation. A thorough reading of this Book brings one to the realisation that *life* and *death* are more than just linguistic and theological terminologies used by John [cf. the tables in Annex A.1 to A.3]. They are central theological concepts in conveying this crucial message of hope, as will be argued in the rest of this thesis. It is specifically life that is important, to be more specific, eternal life, life beyond the earthly realm.

The earthly life and death of Jesus Christ is the foundation on which this eschatological message of Revelation is based (Bauckham 1993b: 144; Beasley-Murray 1981: 47). *Life* and *death* in Revelation is for most parts looked at from an eschatological point of view. Therefore physical life and death is not at the centre of Revelation's message, but eschatological life.⁵

Revelation 4-5 is the fulcrum of the book, with the message that the God of creation is also the God of redemption (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). The Lamb who lives

final battle on the cross (Rev 12:11). This historical victory is the source from which believers can find their hope, regardless of their present situation on earth (cf. also Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035).

⁴ A term also used by Du Rand (1991b: 180) for the genre of Revelation [cf. also Schüssler Fiorenza 1985 – Chapter 5 – who refuses to choose between prophecy or apocalypse as genre]. Du Rand also mentions that this rather unique genre is further wrapped in a letter framework, which makes it a complex document, one that as a result of its different faces cannot be boxed and assessed from a single point of view.

⁵ Eschatology, of course, plays a major role in the development of the overall message of Revelation. This is not unusual, as eschatology is an integral part of most apocalyptic writings (2 Macc 7:9; 1 En 51:1; Test Jud 25:1; 2 Apoc Bar 82:1-2; [Beale 1997: 332; cf. Du Rand 1991b: 170-183]). According to John Collins "The mysteries they disclose involve a view of human affairs in which major importance is attached to the influence of the supernatural world and the expectation of eschatological judgment" (Collins 1997: 29).

forever and ever (cf. Rev 1:18) has through his own death and resurrection overcome the powers of evil and death. He has got the keys to *life* in his hands [i.e. He is ultimately the One who decides on life and death – Rev 1:18].

The eschatological message of Revelation goes hand in hand with the [ethical] question that confronts the believer in the present age: Am I dead, or am I alive? In the end the answer to this question is **the** deciding factor for believers in their life of faith in this world. The readers must already answer the question in this life. In the eschatological future the result of this “present” life [or death] will come into effect, without the possibility to make any “late changes” to one’s name in the *Book of Life*.

Although on the surface the message sounds threatening, it is not the primary intention of John (Beasley-Murray 1981: 27). He only wants to shift his readers’ focus. They must not be too concerned about the outcome of things in this world, as there is “a better world” awaiting them after this one. Their goal should therefore not be to stay out of the arms of physical death, but rather to ensure that they have grasped the “real life” [i.e. everlasting life – e.g. the letters to the seven churches]. In the words of Jesus Himself: “...do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; but rather be afraid of Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” (Matt 10:28 – Amplified Bible: 1087)

2. An overview of research on the subject

The importance of the concept of life to the message of hope in the Book of Revelation becomes more and more evident when a close reading of the book is done. Even reading through commentaries and other books written on Revelation, the importance of this concept as bearer of the message of hope comes through. However, very little has been written up to now on the extent and influence of the concepts of life [and death] on the message conveyed by John to his readers. Quite a lot has been written, specifically in theological dictionaries, on the understanding of life [and death] in the Ancient Near East and in the Old Testament and New Testament in general [concluding sometimes with a mention to the application thereof in Revelation], but very little has been written on how Revelation specifically employs these themes within its message of hope and comfort to the believers in Asia Minor.

A survey of articles written on life and, specifically focussing on life [and death] in Revelation, have produced a number of sources on the subject, however focussing only on a limited number of texts within the Book of Revelation. Most of the articles surveyed also did not focus on life and death in Revelation primarily, but only used the subject implicitly or referred to it within the context of the discussion of the specific article.

The following prominent articles reviewing the subject of life and death in Revelation directly or indirectly can be cited:

i. With regard to resurrection

- a. *The first resurrection*: An article by Meredith Kline in Westminster Theological Journal (1975: 366-375). This is a survey of Revelation 20 focussing on the understanding of the first resurrection as a new life exempt from the “second death” or eternal death (Kline 1975: 373). It is compared with the “crown of life” promised to the faithful Christians in Smyrna, i.e. those who are righteous in Christ.
- b. In the same series of the Westminster Theological Journal is an article by Norman Shepherd called “*The resurrections of Revelation 20*” (1975: 34-43). This article evaluates the meaning and timing of the first and second resurrection in relation to the resurrection of Christ. Shepherd (1975: 43) interprets the difference between the first and second resurrection as “the distance between the resurrection of Jesus Christ in whom and with whom all believers are raised by baptism, and the resurrection of all things at the end of the age”⁶.
- c. *After the thousand years: Resurrection and Judgment in Revelation 20* is a book by JW Meale published in 1992. This book is another exegesis of the millennium as described in Revelation 20. The conclusion of Meale (1992: 248) is twofold: “Those who have rejected

⁶ The resurrection as described in Revelation 20:1-6 in the end seems to be a more heavily discussed issue than any of the other concepts relating to life and death. The differences in interpreting the millennium probably add to the interest in this debate. In 1976 Michaels responded in the Westminster Theological Journal (WTJ) (1976: 100-109) on the work of Meredith Kline, which was again responded upon by Kline in the same issue of the WTJ (1976: 110-119). Cf. also *Millennium as Metaphor in John's Apocalypse* by Paul Rainbow (WTJ 1996: 209-221) and *Reigning with Christ: Revelation 20:1-6 in its Salvation-Historical Setting* by Don Garlington (BRT 1994: 4-37).

God in their mortal lives, will never be reconciled with Him” in a negative sense, even though they might receive salvation. But positively this exegesis opens up Revelation 20 as the story of the grace of God that never expires but warns and reminds again and again until time finally runs out at the judgment.

- d. A number of books have been written on the subject of resurrection. Again most of them do not focus primarily on life and death in Revelation, but is more set towards understanding the concept of resurrection within the New Testament church in general (cf. Travis 1997a: 1020). Three excellent works on resurrection that will also be used in this study, are:
- *Resurrection and discipleship*, by Thorwald Lorenzen (1995). In his book Lorenzen first discusses different models being used to interpret resurrection in the Bible. He then goes on to discuss resurrection as an act of God. In Part IV of the study he looks at the nature and reality of resurrection and how it affects believers’ understanding of God, Christology, soteriology, etc.
 - *The Fate of the Dead: studies on the Jewish & Christian apocalypses*, by Richard Bauckham (1998a). The fate of the dead plays such an important role in all apocalyptic literature (Bauckham 1998a: 1). Bauckham has put together a study of apocalyptic works from Jewish and Christian origin that give information about visits to the underworld or to heaven in order to determine how the surrounding traditions of ideas and images have influenced thinking in the early Christian world with regard to the fate of the dead.
 - *Life in the face of death* (Ed. Richard Longenecker) is a corpus of studies evaluating how the different New Testament writers interpreted the resurrection of Christ, and “the significance of that message for the living of life, the facing of death, and the longing for the future after death” (Longenecker 1998: ix). Chapter 12 of this book [by Allison Trites] focuses on the resurrection message of Revelation.

- ii. With regard to life metaphors [e.g. the Tree of Life]
 - a. *The Tree of Life: Protological or Eschatological*: An article by Robert Starke in *Kerux* (1996: 15-31). In this article Starke concludes that the tree of life is actually to be linked with the cross as a life giving “tree” (1996: 30-31).
 - b. *The tree of life in Revelation 2:7*: An article by Daniel Wong in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1998: 211-226). This is an aspect that has been explored quite a lot in the past. However, Wong summarises the viewpoints, also referring to work done by other scholars on the subject (cf. Wong 1998: 213). The article interprets the tree of life as pointing towards the concept of eternal life in the eternal city (Wong 1998: 226).
- iii. The Lamb of God in Revelation
 - a. *Lion as slain Lamb: on reading Revelation recursively*: An article by Patricia McDonald in *Horizons* (1996: 29-47). This article focuses, as its title suggests, on the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and interpreting the victory of believers [even in death] within this context (McDonald 1996: 46-47).
 - b. *The Kerygma of the Revelation to John*: An article by Mathias Rissi in *Interpretation* (1968: 3-17). This article centres on the idea that victory and life in the church is only possible through the victory won by the Lamb. The final victory [i.e. at the judgment], which includes the institution of the new world and the new city, will not be destructive, but rather redemptive.
- iv. The four living creatures
 - a. *Living creatures in the midst of the throne: another look at Revelation 4:6*. An article by Robert Hall in *NTS* 36 (1990: 609-613). In this article Hall reinterprets the phrase ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου as placing the four living creatures on the throne itself, and then using the same formula to place the Lamb also on the throne in Revelation 5:6 (Hall 1990: 613).⁷

⁷ This is probably also implicitly stated in Revelation 22:3, when it is said that God **and** the Lamb are on the throne, and his followers will serve **Him**. It is, however, not the focus of the study to explore this here in detail. Cf. Excursion 5 on “the Divine Trinity in Revelation.”

v. Life in the church and the end times

- a. *The hearing formula in the Book of Revelation*: An article by Anne-Marit Enroth in NTS 36 (1990: 598-608). The message of the hearing formula is to encourage believers to live a victorious life, so that they might obtain eternal life in the end (Enroth 1990: 607-608).
- b. *A Kingdom of Priests*: This article by Jose Busto in Theology Digest (1992: 215-219) discusses the priestly life and death of Jesus and how it affects the lives of believers who in the end have to sacrifice their lives for God in martyrdom.
- c. *The Fifth Seal (Rev 6,9-11) as a Key to the Book of Revelation*: An article by John Paul Heil in Biblica (1993: 221-243). The idea of this article is to prove that Revelation 6:9-11 has a unique position in relation to the rest of Revelation, acting as a core from which the sections preceding and succeeding it can be interpreted. It centres rather on understanding the text from the viewpoint of the coming judgment (cf. Heil 1993: 242). Of course, the judgment also plays an integral part in life and death decisions in Revelation, as will be seen from the main part of the thesis.
- d. Jan du Rand wrote a number of articles [and books] on Revelation. Some of these reflecting on the church in the end times are:
 - *'Now the salvation of our God has come...'* A narrative perspective on the hymns in Revelation 12-15 in Neotestamentica (1993: 313-330). The article focuses on the important role of worship hymns in Revelation. "The readers, representing the faithful, experience a catharsis in associating with the hymns to live from the perspective that...his kingly role and salvation have arrived on earth" (Du Rand 1993: 313).
 - *Van klipkrip tot Armagedon (1999b)*. This is a popular exposition regarding the message of John to the church in Asia Minor about the end times. Another book, with a similar message, was published in 1995 with the title "666 en die eeuwenteling" (Du Rand 1995a).
 - *The New Jerusalem as pinnacle of Salvation: Text (Rev 21:1-22:5) and intertext*, in Neotestamentica (2004: 275-302). In

this article Du Rand explores how the text of Revelation 21:1-22:5 links with the surrounding context of Revelation [and other texts] to bring forth the message of the fulfilment of God's salvation in the New Jerusalem (2004: 299).

As can be seen from the above discussion, research up to now has focussed mainly on specific concepts within selected texts in the Book of Revelation, exploring mainly the meaning of those specific text(s). Sometimes implicit reference is made to the issue of life or death. None of the abovementioned sources focussed on the overall picture, i.e. the impact of the concepts of life and death on the message of Revelation as a whole. Within Revelation most of the attention has been on the theme of resurrection, specifically in Revelation 20:1-6 [as can be seen from (i) above]. On the other hand, sources that did focus primarily on the subject of life and death, only gave a brief overview of the understanding of life and death in the Book of Revelation.

3. Reason for this study

Looking at life [and death] from a theological point of view is definitely not a new discovery that originated with the author of Revelation. Theologically the concept of life [or death?] is important to the Biblical message of salvation as a whole. Of course, in the New Testament it is looked at from a new angle. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes the focus point from which everything else is evaluated, including life and death (Durand 1981: 18).

The hypothesis for this study is that the concept of life, as used in the Revelation of John, is a central theological theme in conveying the message of hope and comfort with regard to God's sovereignty, believers' faith and courage in the wake of the victory of the Lamb, and their life of witnessing and perseverance in obedience to God and the Lamb. Life is mentioned [or at least implied] in nearly every chapter of Revelation [See Annexure A.1].

For the purposes of this study life can be defined as follows:

It is the cognitive existence of a being within a specified framework of time and space with the prospect of participating in the action. Without

the possibility of participative existence no life can exist. The context within which a being operates determines the qualitative nature of life, i.e. if life exists in a physiological sense, a spiritual sense or within an eternal realm. Death, in this sense, is the antithesis for life, i.e. it constitutes what life is not. In Revelation death applies more often to those who do not possess “real life”.

As this is primarily a message of hope, the focus is strongly on life as a central theme.⁸ The climax of the Book of Revelation is ultimately life in the New Jerusalem in eternity (Du Rand 1995a: 135; cf. Du Rand 2004: 275-302). It is a look at life from an eschatological point of view, made possible by the death and resurrection of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Rev 1:18; 5:5-6). Life in a physiological sense is not of great importance. This life will eventually come to an end.

Contrary to physical life, eternal life [i.e. the existence in the face and realm of God] lasts forever. This new life offers believers the promise of an eternal existence in the presence of God in a new world order that He has prepared for them (Rev 21:1-22:5). In this new world order death has no part to play (Rev 21:4). Without this existence the new heaven and earth actually would not exist [as will the New Jerusalem], as a perfect relationship with God in his new world order would not be possible.

4. Approach to this study

The study consists of an exegetical review of the terminology used with regard to life [ζῶν, ζῶον, ζωή, ψυχή] and its antithesis, death [ἄδης, ἄβυσσος, θάνατος, ἀποθνήσκω, ἀποκτείνω, νεκρός] in the Book of Revelation. Other related words [and phrases] that support the concepts of life and death [e.g. ἀνάστασις – resurrection, αἷμα – blood, etc] will also be discussed in the exegesis. The study will focus on the Greek text as presented by Aland & Aland (1993).⁹ Existing exegetical methods will

⁸ Of course, life as a central theme in the New Testament is not unique to the Book of Revelation. The Gospel of John is commonly known as the “Gospel of life” (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 2; Smalley 1978: 203). Eternal life is also important in Paul’s theology (cf. 1 Cor 15). However, it is interesting to note from Van der Watt’s study that, apart from the Gospel of John, Revelation is the Book in the New Testament where the words ζωή and ζάω occur most frequently (1986a: 56). This just illustrates the importance of this concept for John’s message to the churches in Asia Minor (cf. Durand 1981:18).

⁹ The problem with regard to authorship, dating, redaction history, structure, etc will not be discussed in detail. A lot of work has already been put into these areas of study, not least of these the monumental study by David Aune on Revelation [in three volumes issued between 1997-1998] (cf.

be employed in the process to ask relevant questions to the text. The content of the questions will be determined by the text, the context, text-critical notes and evaluations, etc¹⁰.

The exegesis will also take into account the impact of the Old Testament, Jewish and Judaic literature, and other New Testament Books on the message of life and death in Revelation, where applicable. For this purpose the understanding of the concepts of life and death within these environments will be evaluated upfront. This will provide a broad ecological framework within which exegesis on the texts in Revelation could be done. However, this does not necessarily imply that the understanding of the text in Revelation is entirely dependant on an etymological development of a text. John was certainly free to use [and reinterpret] text and symbols to bring a specific message within a Christological context. The high percentage of allusions to the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2] though, makes it quite possible that John would somehow expect his readers to pick up on some of the Old Testament metaphors [as understood in their time] and to then apply them Christological.

Although all texts identified [cf. Annexure A.1-A.3, B.1] will be explored, each one will not necessarily be discussed in detail. A detailed exegesis will therefore be conducted on those texts where life and death plays the most prominent role in conveying the message of hope. Where applicable, texts will be combined within a discussion of these more prominent themes [specifically where two or more texts convey the same meaning]. This process should be sufficient to prove that life and death are central in John's thought to bring hope and comfort to his readers in Asia Minor. More importantly, it should prove that Revelation is a Book of life, bringing the comforting message of life eternal to the reader.

also studies done by Charles 1920a; Mounce 1977; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985; Du Rand 1991b; Beasley-Murray 1981; Bauckham 1993a; and many others).

¹⁰ It is not the purpose of this study to evaluate or prove [or even propose] any exegetical method to be used in studies on Revelation. For further reading on exegetical methods, refer to extensive work done by scholars such as Wilhelm Egger: *How to read the New Testament: an introduction to linguistic and historical-critical methodology* (1996); Joel Green: *Hearing the New Testament: strategies for interpretation* (1995); and Stanley Porter & David Tombs: *Approaches to New Testament study* (1995). Cf. also Stanley Porter & CA Evans: *New Testament Interpretation and methods* (1996) and Stanley Porter & Dennis Stamps: *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (2002).

CHAPTER 2

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

"A person who does not live a righteous life has lost life...The righteous person who also loves others has obtained life. People will honour and respect him for that." Prov 21:16, 21.¹¹

1. Importance of the Old Testament for Revelation

Old Testament traditions are evident throughout Revelation [e.g. the Exodus, creation, exile]. Many of the symbols and visions used in Revelation have their roots in specific historical traditions found in the Old Testament. In his study on the influence of the prophetic tradition on the message of Revelation, Jan Fekkes writes:

"(T)he sheer magnitude, variety and consistency of John's use of the OT certainly constitutes this area as a fundamental starting point for the exegete" (1994: 59).

Revelation is actually saturated with allusions to the Old Testament (Bauckham 1993b: 4)¹². Although no direct quotations from the Old Testament are cited in Revelation [as for instance is done frequently in the Gospel of Matthew – e.g. Matt 1:22-23], the allusions are woven into the text¹³ (Moyise 1995: 14; Pohl 1969: 31). Pohl (1969: 32) sees the reason for this in the fact that the message of Revelation is more than the Old Testament prophecies itself¹⁴. John uses a reinterpretation of prophecies, combining them with each other and with Christology so that in the end "Trotz der Fülle von Anklängen entstand etwas Neues" (Pohl 1969: 32). It is thus important to read the text within the reinterpreted framework that John has created.

¹¹ Free translation from "Die Boodschap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

¹² Moyise (1995: 137) identifies more than 200 allusions to the Old Testament to be found in the Book of Revelation [cf. also the research by Fekkes: 1994 and Beale: 1998 on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation].

¹³ This seems to be typical of the Johannine literature, as the Gospel of John also uses the Old Testament in similar fashion (cf. Du Rand 1990: 5).

¹⁴ As Pohl (1969: 32) puts it so strikingly in his commentary: "Erfüllung ist eben mehr als Weissagung, wie der Baum mehr ist als sein Same. In diesem Bewußtsein haben alle Apostel, die die Erfüllung in Jesus Christus geschaut, betastet und gehört haben, dem Alten Testament gegenüber gestanden. In dieser Vollmacht können sie die alten Worte in einer Freizügigkeit verwenden, die jeden überraschen muß, der von der Höhe, Tiefe, Länge und Breite der Christusoffenbarung nichts begreift".

They take on a new life in the new situations that call for a new revelation from God, i.e. the revelation of Jesus Christ (Michaels 1997: 853).

However, to understand even the reinterpreted message of the prophecies, one still needs to take into account the original Old Testament meaning thereof. It is important to realise that the authors of the New Testament books were part of a world filled with traditions and concepts that we find in the Old Testament. Also: the faith of the early Christians was still very much focussed on the God of the Old Testament (Moyise 1995: 12-13). Therefore, a study on the book of Revelation cannot be complete without taking into account the influence of the Old Testament. On the other hand one must remember that the Christians just could not interpret the Old Testament the same any more. The person of Jesus Christ has now come to stand between them and the Old Testament (Van der Watt 1989a: 62-64; Von Rad 1975b: 328).

The use of the Old Testament [by John] to such a high extent is not incidental. Old Testament concepts are purposefully used as vehicles to convey the message of Revelation. They are, however, now reinterpreted in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ [see above]. What God promised centuries ago has realised in the person of Jesus Christ. Even the historic traditions are reinterpreted Christologically and eschatologically (Sweet 1990: 39).

Reinterpretation of texts is not limited to Christian literature. It is also evident in the eschatological [and apocalyptic] interpretation of texts found in early Judaism and in Jewish apocalyptic literature, where Old Testament texts and traditions also took on new, apocalyptic [and eschatological] meanings (Bailey 1979: 75-76; Allison 1992a: 18)¹⁵. As Russell (1964: 92) puts it: “Apocalyptic is not a substitute for prophecy...It is *prophecy in a new idiom*”¹⁶.

John sometimes draws symbols and visions from these traditions. However, he also reinterprets these traditions within the context of the Christ event. Through his subtle use of the Old Testament he wants to inform his readers that the prophecies and

¹⁵ cf. also Aune 1997: lxxxv; Bauckham 1993a: 38-91; Charlesworth 1985: 64; Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 40-41.

¹⁶ My italics.

promises from the Old Testament have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, and that He is the One bringing salvation:

“John’s theological and eschatological concepts are firmly rooted in the OT, which he clearly regards as the prime locus of God’s revelation.... John is not only concerned with images, but with promises, and their fulfilment” (Fekkes: 1994: 38-39)

It is therefore important to pay attention to the way the concepts of life and death were understood in ancient Israel, through the window of the Old Testament. Reading the apocalyptic visions and images against this background opens the door to understanding Revelation’s message of hope against a more appropriate backdrop (Beale 1998: 127).

2. Life and death in the Ancient Near East (ANE)

Ancient Israel did not exist in a vacuum. They were part of the ANE, an environment with whom they shared certain values, cultural and even religious customs. There are a lot of comparisons to be made between Israelite thought and that of the other nations from the ANE, also on the issues of life and death (Vosloo 1977: 2-7). A short insight into the way life and death were perceived in the ANE is given here as a background to the Jewish thought on life and death.

However, it must be remembered that Israelite religion was also unique amongst the peoples of the ANE. Therefore, one can’t just apply everything within the ANE onto religious thought and rites prevalent in Israel, or even Christianity for that matter (De Vaux 1973: 271). Furthermore it must be noted that life in the ANE [including Israel] was not static (Collins 1997: 57). There was certain development in the way things were perceived. The view given in this section of the thesis is just an overview, which in a sense represents a very generalised view on life in the ANE.¹⁷

¹⁷ The following dictionaries have been consulted with regard to the use of the concepts of life and death in the ANE, Old Testament and New Testament: Anchor Bible Dictionary (ABD); New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology (NIDNTT); New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE); Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT); Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT); Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels; Dictionary of Paul and his letters; Dictionary of the later New Testament and its development, Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (EWNT).

In the ANE life and death was mostly seen as opposites (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death was generally perceived to be something negative, whereas life and staying alive was seen as something very positive. Life was in the hands of the gods. Man had no control over it. The “creator-god” of the people was accepted as the giver of this life. This notion was common throughout the ANE (Ringgren 1980: 325-328).

2.1. Life in the ANE

Life was in most instances limited to the physical existence of a person on this side of the grave. “...life is not something abstract,...but the concrete existence of all creatures.” (E Otto, as quoted by Ringgren 1980: 325). This does not mean that “life” was limited merely to existence within an active body of a person. Health and vigour were also positive signs that life was present (Ringgren 1980: 328; cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849-851). Ill persons were in a sense regarded as dead, and only through healing could they be returned to life (Hendriksen 1973: 390; Nielsen 1982: 168; Bolkestein 1985: 51).

Life was never meant to be eternal for the people of the land. That privilege belonged only to the “creator-god”. The people of the land must just make the best of their lives on this side of the grave, knowing that it will last for a limited period only. Death is the destiny of every person (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 431). The only hope for the people is that the god will grant them a long and healthy life here on earth. That will be their only reward for being “good citizens” in the eyes of the creator-god (Ringgren 1980: 329, 341)¹⁸.

It was of great importance for the king to have a prosperous life. Life and the king were often associated with each other. The king was perceived to be the “living image” of the gods.¹⁹ He was the visible “bestower” of life on behalf of the god

¹⁸ The Greeks tried to overcome this negative perception about death by making death part of normal life. They regarded death not as man’s fate, but instead saw it as an achievement. It was thus important to die gloriously, without fear (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 431).

¹⁹ In Mesopotamia, for instance, the king was seen as the one who transmits life and prosperity [which he received from the creator-god] to the land and the people. He was a type of mediator between the god and the people. This made the ongoing life of the king even more important in the eyes of the people (Ringgren 1980: 329). Their prosperity and existence in a sense hinged on the continuing life of the king.

(Ringgren 1980: 326-329). The kings were sometimes called “sons of god”. The people thought of the king as having been begotten by the god. It was thus quite common in the ANE that the kings ended up being honoured as deities (Weiser 1975: 113). In the light of this status it was hoped [or maybe even expected of?] that the king would have immortality similar to the gods (Ps 2:7²⁰; cf. Ringgren 1980: 330).

2.2. *Death in the ANE*

In a polytheistic environment [the situation within most of the peoples of the ANE] the issues of life and death were complicated by the fact that the “creator-god” was not the only god that existed. There were numerous other gods. These gods were mostly out to attack or kill. Death was seen as an intruder brought about by some of these other gods and, although bound to befall everyone, was something that must be fended off at all cost²¹. Especially premature death was held very negative (Bailey 1979: 8-16; Richards 1992: 108·II -109·II).

Although death was mostly perceived of very negative, it was not necessarily the end for a person. Some form of life was still possible after death, even though only in a spiritual way. The spirits of the dead brought a form of continuity between this life and life after death. They were believed to be in constant contact with the living. The spirits could also be called upon at times through spirit-mediums (e.g. 1 Sam 28). This contact with the spirits was, however, not necessarily positive. The spirits of the dead could haunt the living if they were not treated with the necessary respect (Bailey 1979: 8-16).

For the continuing [positive] existence of [and contact by] the spirit of a dead person to be possible, it was essential that the body be properly preserved after death. Burial ceremonies were very important in achieving this position. The Egyptians specifically put a lot of effort into their burial ceremonies (Hitti 1961: 64-66). For

²⁰ Except where specifically indicated, references to texts within the Psalter are with regard to the BHS. The LXX will be mentioned specifically when applicable.

²¹ The peoples of the ANE showed a significant interest in a plethora of rituals to fend of the woes of death and the underworld. Many stories and legends have been documented describing efforts to explain the reasons for the intrusion of death into the lives of people. Although it was taken that everybody’s lives were limited, there were still dreams of reaching immortality as the ultimate state for the “good person” in the eyes of the creator-god. Bailey (1979: 6) tells the story of Gilgamesh seeking immortality on behalf of his friend Enkidu (cf. also Hitti 1961: 64-66 and Richards 1992: 109·II), only to find out that death was a part of man since his creation (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 25).

them tombs were not signs of the end of life. Life and death were not to be contradicted. They were no more than two different sides or modes of existence just as day and night exist together in the universe. They were “place(s) of rejuvenated life” (Ringgren 1980: 325-327).²²

3. Life and death in the Old Testament

Israel had a uniquely developed theology and religion amongst the nations of the ANE. Although there were many similarities with the ANE thought, also in terms of religion, Israel was also very different in the way they perceived and approached life. This was influenced strongly by Israel’s theology, their thinking about God and the unique relationship between God and his people (Vosloo 1977: 4). It was a “unique covenant history made up of unrepeatable events” that determined theology in Israel (West 1971: 51). An overview is given in the rest of the chapter of the way life and death was perceived in ancient Israel.

3.1. *The sovereign God controls life*

Monotheism plays an important role in some documents of the Old Testament²³ (West 1971: 146; Von Rad 1975a: 210-211). This is specifically evident from the Book of Deuteronomy. In the strongest possible language Yahweh is depicted as *the* sovereign God and, according to the Credo, the only living God²⁴ (Deut 6:4). This is also illustrated in no uncertain terms in the creation stories recorded in the Bible [Genesis 1 and 2]. God [Yahweh] is the Creator of everything that exists. It is from this

²² These views about death and the realm of death were neither universal nor static. Through the years thinking about life, death, mortality, etc developed. This development is clearly expressed by Joachim Jeremias in his article on ἄδης in TDNT (1965: 146-149).

²³ Von Rad (1975a: 210-211) has shown that monotheism was not always prevalent in Israel. There is evidence from the Old Testament that Israel accepted, and sometimes incorporated, other gods (Gen 31:53; Judg 11:24; 1 Sam 26:19; 2 Kgs 3:27). It is only in the time of the exile [and thereafter] that we find a clear expression of monotheism. Pre-exilic syncretism was then recalled as the main cause for Israel’s downfall and the resultant exile (Dunn 1991: 19). That is why the focus is so strong on the one God. Israel must return to faith in the only living God. In the exilic and post-exilic times monotheism became “a necessary presupposition for and consequence of the narration of Israel’s history: it is the same God who is responsible for all, from beginning to end” (Newman 1997a: 413). In Isaiah 45:5-6 Yahweh proclaims through the prophet: “I am Yahweh, besides me there is no God.” Cf. also Isaiah 44:7-8; 46:1-2 and others (Von Rad 1975a: 212). In this thesis, we will, however, work with the accepted view of monotheism. To discuss its development is, according to Von Rad (1975a: 210-212), complex. It is rather the subject of a separate study.

²⁴ The gods of the other nations were almost always seen as no more than the dead idols these people worshipped. Where the existence of other gods were recognised, they were inferior to Yahweh, the God of Israel (cf. 1 Chr 16:25-26; Ps 86:8). According to Dunn (1991: 21) the problem of multiple gods were solved by either subordination or absorption (cf. Deut 32:8-9; Sir 17:17).

creation by the Creator [Yahweh] that Israel's relationship with Yahweh stems (West 1971: 51). He is not an absent God who has since disappeared, leaving his creation to function all on its own. He is still in control of creation. The dialogue between God and Job is an excellent example of God's incomparable sovereignty as Creator and Controller of his creation (cf. Job 38-42).

This sovereignty includes Yahweh's control over life and death (2 Kgs 5:7; Deut 32:39). He, as the only acknowledged God, was the Giver of all life. He was also the One who could take life away (2 Kgs 20:1-11; Job 24:18-19). The entire cycle of life was therefore in his hands (cf. Ps 30:15; 138:16 [both LXX]). Man has never possessed the power to decide on the boundaries for life and death. It is Yahweh alone who determines how it is apportioned (Ps 90:3-5; [Von Rad 1975a: 388]).

The creation story of Genesis 2 and the story of the fall of man (Gen 3) could also suggest, contrary to popular believe, that man has never possessed eternal life [cf. however, Genesis 2:16-17, which again seems to imply the contrary]. In Genesis 3:22-24 God chases man away from Eden to prevent him from eating from the tree of life, *thereby* obtaining eternal life in addition to the acquired knowledge (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844).

By accepting this sovereignty of Yahweh over life and death, and man's limitations within God's created order, Israel was able to also accept the mortality of the people, and ultimately the existence of death as something natural (Bailey 1979: 57-59). There was no arguing that every person's life would eventually end up in death. Also, there was no place for the acceptance of any other forces or gods that could influence life for God's people (cf. again Deut 6:4):

“The entirety of Israel's gratitude and attention is focussed upon Yahweh. There is simply no room, indeed no need, to acknowledge the existence of the demonic” (Bailey 1979: 28-29).

Bad things, including death, therefore didn't happen as a result of the intervention by other gods. It is the wrath of God that brings death and punishes people, not the interference by other gods (Num 21:6-9; Am 1-2). It was brought about because the

people of God have turned away from Yahweh to serve the gods of the surrounding nations, or just to serve their own interests (Am 2:6-16). For this disobedient attitude towards Yahweh they will be judged and even destroyed (cf. Mays 1969: 53; Dunn 1991: 19). Yahweh even uses Israel's enemies to punish his people [i.e. Israel] for their disobedience (2 Kgs 17:7-23).

3.2. *Life in the Old Testament*

The frequency of occurrences of the roots חיה [life] and נפש [soul, living being]²⁵ in the Old Testament suggests that thinking about life [and how to hold on to this life] was central to the people of Israel (Ringgren 1980: 331-332). Life is valued very high throughout the Old Testament. God is a God of life and of the living, not the dead (Deut 30:19; [Johnston 2002: 39]). It is often associated with the blessing of Yahweh on a person or nation who lives a righteous life. Life is a gift from Yahweh to all living beings. This is specifically evident from the Wisdom literature (cf. Ps 119:93, 144; Prov 5:21-23; 6:23; 8:35-36; 12:28; Eccl 9:4; [Brensinger 1997: 111-112; Richards 1992: 110-II; McKane 1992: 358-359²⁶]).

As a result of this premium placed on life, old age was seen as a blessing. It was a sign that somebody has lived a righteous life before the Lord, and has therefore been blessed by Him with a long and prosperous life. In contrast to this it was taken as a curse from Yahweh if a person came to die at an early age (Deut 30:19-20). It was

²⁵ The verb חָיָה and its related noun occur more than 650 times in the Old Testament (Ringgren 1980: 331-332). The Greek words ζῆν and ζωή in the LXX translate nearly all the uses of חָיָה in the Old Testament (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 33). The word נֶפֶשׁ occurs more than 775 times (Jacob 1974: 618). נֶפֶשׁ has a wide spectrum of meanings in the Old Testament of which “life” is only one possibility. For a more detailed discussion of these uses, refer to the article by Seebass in TDOT (1980: 504-517; cf. also Holladay 1988: 242-243; Jacob 1974: 617-631; Fredericks 1997: 133). נֶפֶשׁ is in most instances connected with the saving of life. Verbs of saving frequently have נֶפֶשׁ as their object (e.g. Josh 2:13; Ezek 14:14; Isa 44:20; Jer 20:13; Am 2:14-15). Von Rad (1975a: 153) sees נֶפֶשׁ as that which is essential to man in the broadest terms. The נֶפֶשׁ is sometimes so identified with the whole of man that it denotes a non-breathing corpse (Lev 21:11; [Fredericks 1997: 133]). The נֶפֶשׁ [“life”] of a being was in its “blood”. Therefore, it is wrong to eat meat with its blood still inside (Deut 12:23; cf. Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11; [Seebass 1980: 514]). Life also ceases to exist [i.e. is dead] when the נֶפֶשׁ has departed from a person (Jacob 1974: 619). חָיָה could mean more than just physical life, and is sometimes used metaphorically within different scenarios. There are a number of synonyms which could also denote “life” in the Old Testament, as is shown by Bultmann in his article in TDNT (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849). Harder (1978: 680) in his article in NIDNTT sees נֶפֶשׁ as the sensitive part of life, the seat of emotions (cf. Ps 86:4). From the above it is clear that it is not always that easy to see the difference between נֶפֶשׁ [living being] and חָיָה [life]. The Old Testament in any case didn't make that much of the seemingly complex distinction between body and soul (cf. Bailey 1979: 41-42).

²⁶ Cf. also McKane (1992) on the texts in Proverbs cited here, where the same notion is reiterated.

perceived of as the result of a life of disobedience to God. A long and fulfilled life was therefore something to be desired (Gen 15:15; Judg 8:32; [Durand 1981: 21]).

However, this was not the only way to look at life. Even in the Old Testament we find that different meanings were attached to the word “life”. This ranged from the physiological life on the one hand to life as a metaphor for being in the presence of Yahweh on the other hand (cf. Ringgren 1980: 332-342; Seebass 1980: 497-519; Holladay 1988: 101-102).

3.2.1. *Life as being alive in the body*

Of course, “life” denotes, throughout the Old Testament [as is the case in the ANE], in the first place life in a physiological sense (Brensinger 1997: 108)²⁷. The physical life refers to the life span of that person in terms of the number of years he lived in this world, i.e. from birth to death. This interpretation is quite common throughout the Old Testament, and is often referred to, specifically in the genealogies and in the history of the kings, of whom we read in the books of Kings and in the Chronicler (cf. Gen 5; 11:11f; 2 Kgs 14:17; [cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 849]).

To be alive you first of all need to be in a “living body”. Physical life is in the hands of the Creator, which for Israel meant Yahweh. Man can only possess this physical life in as far as he receives it from Yahweh. He is the One who possesses of the times of life (Job 10:12; Ps 36:10; [Bultmann Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850]). Life is only a gift, a loan, from Yahweh to all living beings (Link 1976: 478).

The creation stories take the origin of life back to the creative activity of Yahweh as accounted for in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1 and 2) (Brensinger 1997: 108). There it is declared that man was created “in the image of God” (Gen 1:26). He breathed the breath of life so that man could become a נִפְשׁ חַיָּה – a living being (Gen 2:7). It is this *breath of life* received from Yahweh that constitutes life, not the physical body (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). The body is something that, after death,

²⁷ Bultmann (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 1-2) is of the opinion that life (חַיִּים) in the Old Testament only denoted physical life. This is, however, a very narrow interpretation and does not take into account the numerous metaphoric uses of the word, which also occur in the Old Testament (cf. in this regard the article by Ringgren on חַיִּים in TDOT [cf. also note 25 above]).

disintegrates and returns to the earth [אָרֶם] from which man was originally formed (Gen 3:19; cf. Gen 2:7).

Life comes to an end when Yahweh withdraws the breath of life from a person (Job 24:18-24). This deterministic look at the origin and end of life places God in total control thereof and makes man totally dependent upon God for his or her life. Man will only live for the time God allows Him on earth (cf. Job 1:21; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850-851]).

Even though people might be blessed with a long life because of their righteousness, Yahweh never promised anyone unending physical life (Brensinger 1997: 109), not even before The Fall (Gen 3:22-24; cf. Gen 2:9). The Old Testament actually doesn't answer the question [or even ask it!] whether man would have died or not had sin not come into this world (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). Biological immortality is not a natural phenomenon for the people of the Old Testament. It is taken for granted that everybody will die some time or another, even the wise and the righteous (Ps 49:11-12; [Collins 1997: 354-356]).

3.2.2. *God and life*

All limitations fall away when the concept of life is applied to Yahweh. God possesses life *per se*; He is אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים - the living God [or חַי־יְהוָה], the forever living (Deut 5:26; 2 Kgs 19:4; Jer 10:10; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 16]). He is Life; but He is also the Source from whom life originates; the breath of life to man.

The phrase “the living God” [חַי־יְהוָה] appears in the Old Testament 43 times (Ringgren 1980: 339). These concepts take Yahweh outside the boundaries of human thought on life and death. It also takes the concepts of life and death outside the boundaries set for man.²⁸ This everlasting life attributed to God is actually a most difficult concept to understand. It is no more than a human effort to try and explain Yahweh's

²⁸ Thinking about life in connection with God actually takes us into another realm, that of the Godly. It is a realm surrounded by the mysterious, where things and thinking are not limited in any sense, where time and distance loses its “logical” meaning [even its existence?]. Time cannot be measured anymore, but can only be appreciated from the viewpoint of faith. It requires a total mind shift on the part of man to envision just something of this realm, which even makes what is written here a humble human effort to just grasp something of God's sovereignty and eternity and try and describe some of the divine characteristics that He chose to reveal to man through his Word (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 45).

unlimited existence. It could be seen as an effort to describe his active presence amongst and salvation of his people on a continuous basis as the forever-living One (cf. Ringgren 1980: 339).

Yahweh is also living in the sense that He is not silent. In contrast to the dead idols of the surrounding nations, Yahweh is an active God, actively participating in his creation: He actively manages, intervenes on behalf of, and delivers his people throughout the Old Testament (1 Kgs 18:25-39). Man must, however, realise that Yahweh is not limited to these “boundaries” of active involvement. Beyond these “boundaries” Yahweh is still the “First and the Last”. “The First and the Last” is a name used by God in Revelation to refer to Himself (cf. Rev 1:8; 21:6), but this way of referring is also quite common in Second Isaiah (Isa 48:12; cf. also Isa 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 46:9f [Beuken 1986: 289]).

The message of Second Isaiah [i.e. Isa 40-55] is a message of hope to the people of God in exile. It is part of a promise to bring a small remnant of righteous people back to the Promised Land where God will establish a new relationship with them²⁹. Israel must find comfort and hope in this promise of restoration that comes to them, even right at the start of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:1; [Beuken 1986: 15]). A new life will begin for the “new people” of God. This new life is possible because the living God, the “utterly incomparable One” (Bauckham 1993b: 27; [cf. Isa 40:12-31]), to whom all nations are subjected, will bring it about.

It is important to note that in Second Isaiah the reference is not to physical life, but to a new beginning, a new chance to build a relationship with Yahweh when the people return to the Promised Land. This opportunity is reserved only for the small remnant that wants to come into a personal relationship with Yahweh (Isa 51:11; cf. Isa 11:11). Life thus becomes a metaphor for having a purposeful relationship with Yahweh. Only those that share in this relationship will share in new life promised by Yahweh. Outside of this relationship no life is possible, even though you might be alive in the body (Van der Watt 1986a: 298; Prinsloo 1999: 810).

²⁹ A similar metaphor is used in Ezekiel 37, the vision about the valley of the dry bones that comes to life [cf. also Rev 11, which could probably be drawn from this image of Ezekiel’s, although the Old Testament is here reinterpreted in an entire new context, i.e. the context of the resurrection of Christ and therefore the new life that came to his church amidst persecution and suffering].

The Isaiah text is also a message that Yahweh is still in control of everything that exists, even though it might not seem to be the case. Even the Persian emperor Cyrus is just an instrument in the hands of Yahweh to bring back God's people to the Promised Land (Isa 44:28-45:1; [Prinsloo 1999: 810]). This message of hope is at the same time a message of God's infinite existence, and of his sovereignty and overall presence: although Israel was "dead" in exile, God is still and will forever be. And even more: He is even with his people while they are in exile (Isa 43:1-5). The "Living One" cannot die. Instead He controls life [and death]. He is "the One that is" [i.e. without beginning and end]. That is how He has revealed Himself to Moses in the desert (Ex 3:14; cf. Dan 12:7; Rev 1:4c). The existence of the one and only *living* God is illustrated no better than through the doxologies. Worship of Yahweh was a way of recognising the uniqueness and the almighty power of Yahweh amongst the other gods. "God *must be* worshipped; no creature *may be* worshipped"³⁰ (Bauckham 1993a: 118; [cf. 3.6.5 below]).

From this can be deduced that God and life is one. Because Yahweh is life [or "the living One"], life can be defined only in relation with Him (Van der Watt 1986a: 298). Outside of such a relationship life is absent and therefore death prevails [for a further discussion on this, refer 3.6 later on in this chapter].

3.2.3. *The life of the king*

With regard to the life of the king, Israel also differed from their neighbours. The wish was still that the king would have a long and successful life³¹ (Ps 21:5). He was the visible image of God's blessing upon his people. If the king prospered and was wise and righteous, the people of the land were evaluated similarly (e.g. 1 Kgs 12:28-30; 2 Kgs 18:5-8). The king and the people should then receive "life" as a blessing from Yahweh (Ringgren 1980: 336).

In Psalm 2:7 [a text later reinterpreted and applied to Jesus as the Messiah] the king is called "my son" by Yahweh. This does not imply that the people of Israel regarded

³⁰ My italics.

³¹ Referring specifically to physical life.

the king as a deity. This was never the case³². The text of Psalm 2 clearly rejects the idea of the king being physically begotten by Yahweh, by using the ancient adoption formula “today...you are my son” (Weiser 1975: 113). The king is therefore only entitled to the title “son of God” because Yahweh is willing to adopt him “today”, i.e. as from the moment of his kingship, as his child. In the light of this the king had a certain status as the “representative” of God in this world.³³ Israel therefore never doubted the mortality of the king. He is as human as any other person. Just like everybody else, the life of the king will also one day end in death. Only God can live forever (Ringgren 1980: 335-336).

3.2.4. *Life is not just physical life*

Living within the physical body is, however, only one way of looking at the Biblical definition of “life”. Life must have a certain quality attached to it before it could be recognised as “real life”. It is not just the absence of physical death, but also the presence of things such as health, strength, and even wealth that determines the presence of life (Brensinger 1997: 109; Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850). Movement or activity also signalled the existence of life, e.g. living water, which is just another way of referring to running water, water from a fountain, stream, etc. (Lev 14:5f; 15:13; Num 19:17)³⁴. Life is thus [in terms of the definition in Chapter 1] an active participation in life. Those who cannot actively participate cannot live.

Healing from illness was seen as coming back to life, suggesting at the same time that illness is equal to being dead (Job 27:15; Isa 38:16; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 850; Hendriksen 1973: 390]). The Israelites bitten by snakes in the desert looked upon the brazen serpent and lived, i.e. they were healed from the poisoning (Num 21:8f; [Ringgren 1980: 333-334]). Of course, in juxtaposition, looking up at the serpent also prevented them from actually dying physically from the poisoning by the snakes (Jagersma 1988: 88). This text is reinterpreted in the Wisdom of Solomon, where it is mentioned that the healing did not come through looking at the brazen

³² Cf. section 2 above.

³³ Man was originally created in the image of God to be God’s representative and reign over God’s creation (Gen 1:26-27). It is only because man himself chose to have a king put between him and God that the title of representative shifted to one single man, the king (cf. 1 Sam 8).

³⁴ The rivers flowing through the Garden of Eden could also be seen as a symbol of the pulse of life. In this sense the chasing of Adam and Eve from the garden constitutes death metaphorically: they are deprived from the pulse of life, which the rivers represent, as a result of their sins (Vosloo 1999a: 15).

serpent, but through the people of Israel lifting their hearts up in faith to God in heaven (Jagersma 1988: 90).

This connection between illness and death is understandable when one looks at what the Law requires to be done to people who fell ill. Contracting certain contaminating diseases [e.g. leprosy] had the effect that those people had to be expelled from the community until they were healed (cf. Lev 13:46). They had to live an isolated life away from their families and the community for as long as they had this disease (Wenham 1979: 203). Someone who could not participate in everyday community life was deemed dead (Johnston 2002: 32). On the other hand, restoration of health meant that such a person could regain his dignity, rejoin the community life, and thus have “life” restored to him or her (Isa 38:16; [cf. Ringgren 1980: 334]).

On a metaphoric note the people of Israel were also deemed dead while in exile. In Ezekiel’s vision of *The Valley of Dry Bones*³⁵ the Lord tells Ezekiel that the people of Israel are just as dead as the bones that he sees lying in the valley. The verb נָגַר [cut off] in Ezekiel 37:11 [describing the state Israel find themselves in] is also used in Isaiah 53:8 to describe the servant of Yahweh being “cut off” from the land of the living (cf. Lam 3:54). It describes metaphorically the hopeless situation of the people in exile (Zimmerli 1983: 262).

But He, the Lord, will rise up His people again, just as those bones were brought to life in the vision. Bringing them back to Jerusalem will constitute this new life for them (Ezek 37:12-14 [cf. also 2.1.2 on *God and life* above]). That will only happen because God will graciously bestow his Spirit [רוּחַ] upon his people. Through this God will reveal Himself as the Living God, the almighty One (Zimmerli 1983: 263).

3.3. *Life, death and mortality*

The mortality of man was never questioned in Old Testament Israel. Although a long life was the sign of God’s blessing, it is not mentioned anywhere in the Bible [or even implied] that man could be granted immortality at any stage of his life (Eccl 1:4; 2:4-11, 13-14, 16-19; [Bailey 1979: 53-55]). It was a given fact that everyone would

³⁵ Ezekiel 37:1-14: Caption as used by Good News Bible (1995: 880).

come face to face with physical death, even the king (Eccl 9:5; [cf. 3.2.3 above]). No man could save himself from the claws of Death (Ps 49:9-11; 89:49). “Death sets man bounds which he is not able to overstep by his own efforts” is Weiser’s comment on Psalm 49:7-9 (1975: 388). Only God could break or stretch these boundaries [e.g. in the case of King Hezekiah – Isa 38], but it is never done indefinitely. King Hezekiah was only set a later boundary, and eventually died fifteen years after his illness (2 Kgs 20:1-6; 2 Chr 32:33).

The Bible only testifies about two people who seemingly gained immortal status, i.e. Enoch (Gen 5:24; cf. Heb 11:5-6) and Elijah (2 Kgs 2:11), both of whom are mentioned as prime examples of a near perfect relationship with God. Enoch was said to have walked with God during his whole life on earth, i.e. always seeking the face of the Lord, always striving to get even closer in his relationship with God. It is a relationship of continuous close contact with God. Elijah was seen as *the* exemplary prophet, the prophet who in every aspect looked to proclaim God’s will in his life. They are the examples that, amidst a troubled world, life in the presence of God is possible after all (Vosloo 1999a: 26). However, it is important to note that even though Enoch and Elijah never died, they did not **achieve** immortality in themselves. They **received** immortality from the hand of God (Van Selms 1989: 97)³⁶. The power to decide on life and death therefore still lay with God. He is, throughout the Old Testament, recognised as the Giver of life [cf. 3.2.2 above].

3.4. *Death in the Old Testament*

There are a number of words used in the Old Testament to describe death: מוֹת (Ps 6:6); אָבַד (Job 4:7, 9, 11, 20); הָרַג (Gen 12:12; 2 Sam 3:30); תָּמַם (Deut 2:14, 15, 16)³⁷. The Old Testament doesn’t seem too concerned about the origin of death. Yahweh was the Source of both life and death and therefore also the Decider on when to give life or take it away (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844; [cf. 2 Kgs 20:1-11]).

³⁶ The verb לָקַח [take] in Genesis 5:24 and 2 Kings 2:11 suggests that it is God’s hand and decision, and not that of Enoch or Elijah.

³⁷ The root מוֹת alone appears 200 times in the BHS, while אָבַד appears 49 times and הָרַג 38 times (cf. LLS 1997). Not all of these occurrences denote *death* as such (cf. Holladay 1988: 1, 188). The word מוֹת [generally describing death as such] actually could also denote the chthonic power behind death and anything that is associated with death, e.g. disease, drought, etc (Hos 13:14; Ps 49:15; cf. also Hab 2:5 [Lewis 1992: 104-II]). In addition the word נָשָׁב [sleep] is sometimes used as a metaphor for death (cf. Deut 31:16; Ps 13:3 [Richards 1992: 108-II]).

The problem was rather more to understand the invasion of death into life (Richards 1992: 108·II – 109·II).

3.4.1. *Death or life*

In many instances, life and death are juxtaposed in the Old Testament (Gen 42:2; 1 Kgs 3:22-23; Num 17:13). To live is not to die (Ringgren 1980: 332). Death is, however, not necessarily the end of all life.³⁸ In some or other form the dead were still alive afterwards, either in the netherworld or “lower grave” (Merrill 1997: 887; (Von Rad 1975a: 276). Seemingly as long as the body still “existed” [i.e. the bones were preserved], the soul also “existed in Sheol” (Job 26:5-6; Isa 14:9-10; [De Vaux 1973: 56]). It was a shadow of the living person, a very weak form of life (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 34; Johnston 2002: 128-130).

Sometimes the spirits or souls of these people were even called upon by those still living on this side of the grave. King Saul for example called upon the spirit of Samuel to ask for guidance in a war (1 Sam 28). While this practice was quite acceptable amongst Israel’s neighbours in the ANE, it was perceived of very negative in the eyes of Yahweh (cf. Lev 19:31; Deut 18:10-12).

According to Bailey (1979: 39) we could divide the concept of “death” into three broad groups: i) As a metaphor for everything that leads man away from life according to the will of Yahweh; ii) As a power in opposition to the creative order; iii) Physical or historical death. Merrill (1997: 887) also mentions the possibility of Death personified in the Old Testament. It is then viewed as a strong enemy of mankind (cf. S. of Sol. 8:6), with the power to kill (2 Sam 22:5-6; Job 18:13; [cf. Johnston 2002: 28-31]).

3.4.2. *Accepting death*

Death was certainly an unfortunate thing, but it was also something obvious that just had to be accepted (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 846). It was not an irrational intruder, but part of an orderly, controlled and harmonious society (Bailey

³⁸ There are texts that give the impression that death is the end (cf. Job 14:14; 2 Kgs 13:21; Isa 26:14, 19). Job seemingly longs [or hopes] for a life after death, but is hit by this reality in 14:14: “If mortals die, can they live again?” (Habel 1985: 242).

1979: 57-59). It was the normal end to earthly life, something from which no one could escape (Johnston 2002: 41). However, even amidst all this uncertainty, there seemed to be not much evidence of fear in the wake of death (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433). The inescapable position rather had the effect that anger and grief surrounded the mystery of death that faced man, something that is focussed upon specifically in the Psalter and to some extent the wisdom literature (Richards 1992: 109-II).

Because death was accepted as something normal, it was not necessarily a bad thing. In the following instances, however, it would be deemed to be a problem: i) premature death (e.g. 2 Sam 18:32-33; Isa 38:1-3, 10, 12; Job 36:13-14). In Proverbs sudden death is sometimes even interpreted as punishment from God (Prov 10:21; 11:9; etc); ii) a cruel death [e.g. drowning which was specifically looked upon negatively because the sea was also deemed to be the abode of the dead]; iii) If the deceased had no inheritors. Those who died without any children [or other family] stood to lose their property and even worse, their identity. A person's identity was carried forth through the generations. Someone who died without inheritors therefore ceased to exist in every sense (2 Sam 18:18; Sir 44:1, 7, 9 [Bailey 1979: 47-52]). Although the life of the individual was important to the continuing existence of both the family and the community, it was the survival of the community as a whole [through the next generation] that was most important (Bailey 1979: 59; Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433; [cf. Richards 1992: 110-II; Van Selms 1989: 97]). That is why separation from the community [either through illness or physical death or any other reason] effectively meant death (Johnston 2002: 32).

Later on in Post-exilic times death was seen as something inappropriate. Its origins were sought in the wages of sin (2 Esdr 3:7; Sir 25:24; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 433-434]). There also developed a more figurative [spiritual] understanding of death. Death becomes a reality whenever Israel [or any individual] breaks away from God, i.e. terminate their relationship with Yahweh (cf. Ezek 18:21-24; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 434]).

Apart from the physical understanding, death could also be used as a metaphor for any kind of distress that a person might experience, and of course, also for illness or any

other suffering that might threaten someone's life (Ringgren 1966: 181; Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 851). Death can actually mean anything that takes away just something of the full potential of man, which he was originally created by Yahweh to fulfil (Wenham 1979: 212).

It is a judgment of the quality of life that is being lived at this moment (Bailey 1979: 40). Whoever keeps him or her busy with wrong things in life, inevitably ends up in death, or is sometimes regarded as already dead, and according to Proverbs 5:23, is dead for as long as they continue in their ways. In this sense dying is understood as a negative way of living in the present. As Richards (1992: 110-II) says: "It is a mode of living over against the way (*derek*) of life." (Prov 2:19; 5:6; 6:23)

3.5. *The realm of Death in the Old Testament*

The realm of Death is, according to the Old Testament, the place where all the dead go. There is no moral distinction between good and bad in this realm (Russell 1964: 355), although there are scholars who perceive of it as a place only for the unrighteous (Lewis 1992: 104-II; Johnston 2002: 81). This is, however, a concept that only evolved later on in Jewish literature.³⁹ "Israelite faith concerned a living relationship with Yahweh in the present, not speculation about the future" (Johnston 2002: 70; cf. also p 72-73). There is a clear shift in focus in the Jewish apocalyptic literature (2 En 62:2) under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic ideas, where Sheol is seen solely as the destiny for the unrighteous (Jeremias 1965: 147). In the book of Jubilees the realm of the dead becomes the place of condemnation for the unrighteous (Jub 7:29; 22:22; 24:31; [Russell 1964: 360-361]).

3.5.1. *Sheol and death as partners*

The realm of the Dead is most commonly denoted by the word שְׁאוֹל⁴⁰ [directly translated into English as Sheol]. The word מָוֶת [generally used for "death"] is sometimes used to refer to the realm of the dead (e.g. Prov 7:27). Actually there

³⁹ The conception of Sheol has gone through quite a lot of development throughout Biblical times in the ANE (cf. Jeremias 1965: 146-149).

⁴⁰ Occurring 66 times in the Old Testament, almost always translated with ᾗδης in the LXX (Lewis 1992: 101-II; Jeremias 1965: 146). See also Lewis's discussion on the etymology of Sheol (1992: 101-II - 102-II) and Johnston (2002: 71) for a breakdown of occurrences. From this Johnston (2002: 71-72) then concludes that Sheol is very rarely used in narrative literature, and is entirely absent from legal material.

seems to be fluidity between Sheol and Death, specifically when they are personified or localised. Sheol goes hand in hand with the grave, to such an extent that some scholars identify the two with each other (Lewis 1992: 103-II; Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349). It is in this sense that we should probably also understand the importance of a proper burial ceremony in Ancient Israel. A person's burial determined his entrance into Sheol (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 50-51).

In Revelation 9 reference is also made to the Hebrew word “Abaddon” as the name for the underworld, or for the ruler of the underworld (Lewis 1992: 101-II). The Hebrew word אֲבַדּוֹן occurs in the BHS only six times (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps 88:12; Prov 15:11; 27:20). There it is used to describe either a “place of destruction” or the “realm of the dead” (Holladay 1988: 1). In the rabbinic literature אֲבַדּוֹן becomes the place of punishment and damnation, which is therefore a place where only the unrighteous and wicked ended up. Whoever ends up there has no chance of a return to “the land of the living” (Lewis 1992: 104-II; cf. Zimmerli 1983: 39).

Other words sometimes used to refer to the underworld are אֶרֶץ (cf. Ezek 26:20)⁴¹, שְׁחַת (cf. Ps 16:10) and בּוֹר (cf. Isa 5:14; 38:18). The last two specifically refers to the realm of the Dead as the “pit” (Lewis 1992 104-II).

3.5.2. *Going down to Sheol*

Traditionally Sheol was perceived to be a place beneath the surface of the earth (Bauckham 1998a: 9). Whoever dies, goes *down* to Sheol (Num 16:30). It even has a shaft down from the earth to the entrance (Rev 9) with entry gates, just like any ancient city (Job 38:17; cf. Rev 9). These entry gates were sometimes perceived to be the graves of the people (Ps 139:18; cf. Job 3:10-16; Jer 20:17; [Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 350]). The entry gates, often depicted as being guarded, underline the inescapable imprisoning power of Sheol (Lewis 1992: 103-II). The sea and water was also at times associated with Sheol, specifically the area below the water surface (cf. Jonah 2:3-6; [Bauckham 1998a: 17])⁴².

⁴¹ The more common meaning of אֶרֶץ is “earth”. According to Zimmerli (1983: 39) אֶרֶץ in this instance refers to the entire world arranged in different layers, where the mysterious netherworld is regarded as a complete and self-contained country.

⁴² With regard to this issue, it is worth reading the extensive work by Johnston (2002) on Sheol that was published recently [specifically chapter 5 of the book].

Perceptions about Sheol have always been very negative. It is the netherworld with gloom and darkness as its key characteristics (Job 10:21-22; 11:8; 26:5-6; Lam 3:6; [Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349; Yamauchi 1998: 44]). It is also a place of disorder (Habel 1985: 201, 540). Sheol is quite often characterised by silence, contemplating the absence of life and movement (cf. Rev 18:21-24). In the Psalms praise and worship are key characteristics of life and of a relationship with Yahweh (Ps 31:17-18; 94:17; 115:17; Isa 47:5). In Sheol this is absent, as one is cut off from being in this relationship with Yahweh (Yamauchi 1998: 44). Sheol is not part of the realm of God. It is, according to Johnston (2002: 75), “at the opposite theological extreme of Yahweh.”

Whoever goes down to Sheol is forgotten by all who is still on earth (cf. Job 24:20; [Ringgren 1966: 244]). Nobody who goes down to Sheol comes up again (Job 7:9; cf. 2 Sam 12:23; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]). Only in a figurative sense does Israel make provision for a return from Sheol. The closest parallel is the story of Jonah (cf. Jonah 2:2-9; [Bauckham 1998a: 16-17]). In the Psalms the poets sometimes feel so close to death that they perceive themselves as already dead (Ps 107:18; Isa 38:10; cf. 3 Macc 5:51; Ps Sol 3:16). Only through the divine intervention of Yahweh can they be brought back to “life” again (Ps 9:3; 30:3; 86:13; Isa 38:17; cf. Sir 51:5; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]). This, according to Bauckham (1998a: 16), was a step towards the belief that God in his sovereign power will bring back the dead to the world of the living through an eschatological resurrection, an idea that developed into the belief in an eschatological life and death at Judgment Day.

In Judaic literature Sheol is a fearful place, a detention for the wicked where they await their punishment on Judgment Day in anguish (cf. 4 Ezra 7:79-87)⁴³. According to Bauckham (1990: 359) there is no torment and punishment in the present, but only “anguished fear of the judgment to come”. According to 2 Enoch 40-42 the wicked dead are not being tormented in hell. They only observe it, knowing that they will be condemned thereto at the judgment. It is only later on in the first two centuries C.E.

⁴³ Cf. Johnston (2002: 70-72) who is of opinion that even in the Hebrew Bible Sheol is a place only for the wicked.

that a gradual change became visible and the punishment of the wicked dead was seen to happen directly after death (Bauckham 1998a: 36-38).

3.6. Life and death as relational concepts in the Old Testament

It is clear from the above discussions that there is a lot more to life and death than just the birth or death of a physical person. The understanding of life [and death] in the Old Testament was to a large extent determined by relationships, and specifically the relationship with Yahweh (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 844). To obtain life [i.e. in Biblical terms], a relationship with Yahweh needs to be established (Van der Watt 2000: 211). Relationship here stands for more than platonic friendships. In relation to Yahweh, it has to do with knowledge, obedience, and love (cf. Johnston 2002: 46). This relationship is only possible because God has taken the initiative to enter into a relationship with man. The Book of Genesis records quite a few instances of God's initiative in such a relationship [e.g. the stories of Noah and Abraham respectively].

As the times of life are in the hands of God alone (Ps 31:15; 139:16), man can only possess life by being in this direct relation to Him (Durand 1981: 21). The fact that God created man "in his image" (Gen 1:27) also implies that a special life-bond between man and God was already formed there [on the initiative of God], right at the beginning of everything. It is a bond that calls man to obedience before the face of Yahweh (Van Selms 1989: 38).

The quality of this relationship determined the quality of the life that is being lived, or the lack thereof, which in the end would constitute death (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death in this sense implies the inability to have a sustained relationship of quality with Yahweh. It is a state of alienation from God (Van der Watt 2000: 211). When the relationship with Yahweh becomes vague, one is only a step away from the final end of life, i.e. entering death (Von Rad 1975a: 388).

3.6.1. The Law as a guide to life

The Book of Deuteronomy is a good example of how the possession of "real life" is constantly linked up with the relationship with Yahweh (Link 1976: 478-479). Life is to choose Yahweh and to love Him with all of one's heart and soul, i.e. to stand in a

positive relationship with Him (Deut 30:19-20; cf. Prov 19:23; 22:4 [Brensinger 1997: 109]). This love is shown through obedience to God's word and to the Law (Ps 119:9-10, 17; cf. John 15:14). God's words [and his Law] are the foundation and content of "real life" (Westermann 1980: 117-118). Whoever has these words in his or her heart, lives (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 845-846).

Life is thus strongly linked to the teaching in the Torah (cf. Deut 4:4; Ps 119:57⁴⁴). It is only through the words of the Torah that a person hears the voice of the living God speaking directly to him or her (Allen 1983: 143). The words of the Law are the life to the people (Deut 32:47). A long life is promised to those people that keep these commandments of the Law (Deut 4:1; 5:33; 8:1; 30:16,19; [Brensinger 1997: 109; Link 1976: 478]). He who disregards the teachings of the Law will surely die. Life and death thus becomes a matter of decision. Man can choose between the way of life [i.e. obedience to the Law] or the way of death [i.e. disregarding the Word of God] (Sir 15:17; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 851; Collins 1997: 354]).

3.6.2. Relational life can be regained

As life and death in this sense are relational concepts, it is possible to "recover" from this death. Whoever rebuilds his relationship with Yahweh, receives renewed life from Yahweh. The Psalms talk a lot about Yahweh's intervention to bring his people back to life from the arms of death (Ps 9:13; 30:3; [Bauckham 1998a: 16]).

This is also the message to the people of God in exile. In Isaiah 55:1-3 the Lord invites post-exilic Israel to a new relationship with Him. This new life is to be found in the living water that God Himself provides (Isa 55:1). This water is the grace of God, which He gives to everyone who is in need thereof. If they would listen to Him and turn back to Him, He would re-establish his covenant with them. This renewed relationship would restore life to Israel, however not to all, but only to a faithful remnant of the people (Beuken 1983: 280-281).

⁴⁴ The composition of Psalm 119 is in itself an acrostic lesson in obtaining life through keeping God's word and the Law. In this Psalm life is the result of God's kindness (v. 17) and mercy (v. 77) to those who keeps his commandments. The Lord gives and sustains life, and He gives life meaning. (Brensinger 1997: 111; Allen 1983: 141-145).

3.6.3. *Life as a relationship in prophetic literature*

In the prophets, and specifically in the book of Ezekiel, life is linked to the Word of God (e.g. Ezek 14:13-18; 18:1-24; 33:1-6). In Ezekiel 33 a strong line is drawn between obedience and life, when the prophet mentions explicitly that only the righteous [i.e. those who keep the commandments and those who turn back to God] will live. Also: Even if you have lived an obedient life but then later fall away, your righteous deeds of the past will not save you. You will still die as a result of your sin. Only those who seek Yahweh continuously will live. This is a frequent theme throughout the Prophets, and is not just apparent in Ezekiel (cf. Am 5:4, 14; Hos 14:7-8). Although sometimes this could refer to physical death [cf. 3.6.4 below], the absence of a relationship as a result of disobedience to Yahweh already constitutes death in itself, even while someone is still alive in the body (Ezek 37:1-14). In the Wisdom literature keeping the commandments do not only lead to a long life, but is life per se. Also, the notion is that he who has found Wisdom has found life (Ringgren 1980: 334).

3.6.4. *Life in the Wisdom literature*

Even physical life and death could be dependant upon the relationship with Yahweh. He or she, who lives in a positive relationship with Yahweh, will be blessed with a long life. This is why a long and prosperous life on earth was of so much importance to the people. It was prove of a life lived in close relationship with Yahweh (cf. Gen 15:15; [Durand 1981: 21]).

A similar notion is found in the Wisdom literature, and specifically in the older forms of wisdom, which often looked at life from a very deterministic point of view (Prov 4:4; 7:2). Living with wisdom and being obedient to the commandments of Yahweh are both relational concepts. Only in seeking Yahweh in a relationship will one find Wisdom and thus life (Collins 1997: 355). Richards (1992: 109·II) is probably right when he says about Proverbs 1-9: “A person who obtains life may possess Wisdom, but more importantly in this portion of Proverbs, long life is not the consequence of wisdom. It [*i.e. wisdom*]⁴⁵ is what constitutes life...Death is an expression of a mode of living apart from life”.

⁴⁵ My bracketed italics.

This relationship could be perceived to continue beyond the grave, but it is set on the basis of a relationship that existed in this life before the grave. However, in the netherworld one is cut off from communion with God (Johnston 2002: 46). There it is not possible to have a sustained relationship with Him (Ringgren 1966: 244). That is why death must be delayed for as long as possible.

3.6.5. Life and worship in the Old Testament

A very significant point on life and death in the Old Testament is the close connection that is made between life and the worship of God. Worship of Yahweh was the most elementary sign of life (Ps 30:8-10; Isa 38:16-20). Doxologies, with their confession that the honour and the praise belongs only to the one being addressed therein, was the way that the people of Israel worshipped Yahweh as the only living God (Bauckham 1993a: 140).

But worship is only possible within the context of an existing relationship with Yahweh. Only those who are alive can worship Yahweh. On the other hand silence was often connected with death, as was the case with silence and Sheol (Richards 1992: 109-II). Death took one outside the sphere of worship of God (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 847). In death worship became impossible because a person's participation in the cult came to an end (Von Rad 1975a: 369-370; Collins 1997: 355). In Sheol silence and darkness prevail; there is no life or movement, and thus no relationship with Yahweh (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 349).

3.7. Resurrection in the Old Testament?

The idea that God will provide a resurrection from the dead for his people [i.e. Israel] is not central to the Old Testament. It is touched on very rarely, and actually lies more on the periphery of the Old Testament (cf. Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; [Vorster 1999: 101]). Resurrection in Daniel 12:1-3 was expected seemingly as a consolation for the righteous people of Israel who suffered terribly under the rule of Antiochus Epiphanes (Vorster 1999: 101). In Isaiah 26:19 resurrection is used metaphorically [cf. below]. Resurrection-belief is a very late development within Jewish theology, one that only surfaced around the second century before Christ in early Judaism (Lohse 1976: 59-60; Yamauchi 1998: 46). In post-biblical Judaism belief in life after death and

resurrection, however, became the general belief, except amongst the Sadducees (Bauckham 1998b: 81-82; Johnston 2002: 231). The belief in a resurrection was based upon God's mercy. "If God is all-just and all-merciful then death in this world cannot be the final end" (Lapide 1984: 54-55).

The belief in resurrection was not the sudden emergence of a new theology in Judaism. Israel's hope for a resurrection is in continuity with the Old Testament portrayal of God's sovereignty. As the God of life he could give and take life, and therefore even restore life that was lost. He is the righteous Judge who will deliver the righteous believers from their oppressors (cf. Dan 12:2-3) and He is also the faithful Father of his people. Belief in resurrection was therefore nothing more than a radical conclusion of Old Testament faith in who God is (cf. 1 Sam 2:6; [Bauckham 1998b: 84-86]).

During the early stages of development it was thought that only the righteous would be resurrected into a new life with God (2 Macc 7:10-11, 23; cf. Isa 14:9-12; Ps 16:10-11; [Bailey 1979: 79]). Later developments then made provision for a general resurrection on Judgment Day. On that day everyone will appear before the throne of God to be judged according to his or her life on earth (cf. Luke 14:14). According to Revelation 20 there seems to be a resurrection of the believers [which seemingly occurs earlier – cf. Rev 20:4-6] and a general resurrection [for the non-believers – cf. Rev 20:12-14].

Excursion 1: The Day of the Lord as a metaphor for life or death?

Traditionally the concept "Day of Yahweh" had a "well-defined complex of eschatological expectations" attached to it (Von Rad 1975b: 119). It was originally understood as the day when God will judge and punish the wicked [the enemies of his people Israel] and save the elect (Isa 2:10-21; Zeph 1:14-16⁴⁶). It was generally seen as a day of joy for the people of God, when it would be demonstrated that the God of the Exodus is on the side of Israel (Webb 1997: 264; Mays 1969: 43; [cf. Am 5:18-20 where the Day of the Lord suddenly becomes a day of judgment for the

⁴⁶ In total 16 texts were identified by Von Rad that mention this day (1975b: 119). It appears only in prophetic texts in the Old Testament (Mays 1969: 103). The most important of these are Isa 13:6-9; 22:5; 34:8; Jer 46:10; Ezek 7:10; 13:5; 30:3; Am 5:18-20; Obad 15; Zech 14:1 (cf. also the book of Joel). There are of course many other passages that refer to the Day of Yahweh without specifically using this terminology (cf. Von Rad 1975b: 119-125).

people of God themselves]). On this day Yahweh will fight a [holy] war on behalf of his people in a setting of cosmic and historical gloom (Mays 1969: 103-104). This war will take place in the *eschaton*, on a day popularly known as the “Day of the Lord” or Judgment Day. The Lord will then restore everything to his chosen people and inaugurate a new age of righteousness for this world (Zimmerli 1978: 233).

In the post-exilic prophetic literature, the Jewish apocalyptic literature, and the New Testament the “Day of the Lord” was more and more interpreted in terms of being an eschatological judgmental event affecting everyone, not just the enemies of God’s people (Geddert 1992: 20-22). From this eschatological judgment only a faithful remnant would remain. Only this faithful remnant would then partake in the future aeon of Yahweh (e.g. Is 61:1-2; Zech 12-14; Mal 4:1-6). For them God will inaugurate a new age where his will can finally be realised (Zimmerli 1978: 233).

Thinking about the Day of Yahweh became particularly popular in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Questions were asked about the timing, the prevalent signs and the events surrounding this day. It was clothed more and more in mythological phenomena and became very much an eschatological event (2 Apoc Bar 24:1-2; 83:1-7; 1 En 1:3-9; 100:1-6; 2 Esdr 7:38; etc [Webb 1997: 264-265]).

In this context the phrase “Day of the Lord” leaves the impression that a final [judgmental] decision on life and death will be taken one day. The Judge, who is Yahweh, will then decide who will live in the future age and who will end up in eternal death. Very little is said in the Old Testament about the manner in which it will realise. What matters is not the detail, but the presence of Yahweh Himself amidst his chosen remnant from that day onwards (Zimmerli 1978: 185).

This interpretation of the “Day of the Lord” is carried through into the New Testament literature (Matt 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36; 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2). The understanding is of course that the “Lord” refers to the person of Jesus Christ, a notion that Paul even incorporates into a new concept, calling it the “Day of Christ” (Phil 1:10; 2:16; [Webb 1997: 265]).

In the Book of Revelation the “Day of the Lord” is the eschatological moment in history when God [or Christ as the Son of Man – cf. Rev 14:14-20] will decide who may enter life in the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev 19:5-10) and who will be cast in the pool of fire (Rev 20:11-15; 21:1-8), very much in line with apocalyptic

interpretations. The words “Day of the Lord” are not used in Revelation, but the “hour of Judgment” is used as a synonym (cf. Rev 14:7; 18:10; [Webb 1997: 266; Aune 1998a: 828]).

Judgment is not just meant for the traditional enemies of God’s people [according to the Old Testament thinking]. The deciding factor in judgment will be if one has lived according to God’s will, regardless of the group or people you belong to. Judgment and the relationship with Yahweh therefore go hand in hand, and will culminate in a vital decision on the Day of Yahweh (Aune 1998a: 828).

It is in the Book of Daniel that we first get a clear mention of an expected resurrection or an afterlife (Dan 12:2; [cf. Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 852; Segal 1998: 97]).⁴⁷ Most texts up to then suggested that death is the end for man (Ringgren 1980: 341-342). It is from the time of the Maccabees that the belief in a hereafter, in resurrection and eternal life was accepted wholeheartedly in many circles within Jewish theology (2 Macc 7:9, 14, 23, 26; [cf. Chapter 3 below]). It was, however, not [even in the time of the Christian era] accepted widespread amongst the people of Israel (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 852; Bauckham 1998b: 82-84).

It was not just the resurrection of the individual that was important in Jewish eschatological hope, but also the future of God’s whole creation (Collins 1987: 90-91). The hope on a resurrection was a hope in a new creation that God will bring about in the end times through the coming of his kingdom (cf. 1 En 72:1; 91:16; 2 Pet 3:13; cf. Isa 66:22). This “new creation” will relieve the present status of creation of its shortfalls. The concept of a “new creation” does not necessarily mean that the current creation will be replaced by another one, but that this creation would be restored [revamped] to its original destiny (Jub 1:29; 4 Ezra 7:75; cf. Rev 21:1; [Bauckham 1993b: 49]). In this sense resurrection is usually associated [temporally] with the “Day of Yahweh”.

⁴⁷ It must be noted that Daniel 12 does not envisage a general resurrection [presumably only the extremes of good and bad will be resurrected]. The main function of this resurrection account seems rather to lend support to those who had to lay down their lives for their faith (Porteous 1979: 170). Bauckham (1998a: 277) is of the opinion that Isaiah 26:19 is the only text in the Old Testament [together with Isaiah 26:21] that “makes the place of the dead (here the earth) the subject of the act of resurrection” (cf. also Bauckham 1998b: 81; Vorster 1999: 100-101).

Of course, resurrection could also be understood metaphorically in the present age. When Israel is revived from their religious death, or from exile, the metaphor of a resurrection is used to describe this occurrence. This is quite clear from the context of Isaiah 26:19, where the people of Israel are called “back to life” by the prophet. The same message applies to the vision in Ezekiel 37 about the valley of the dry bones, when the bones are brought back to life [“resurrected”] by Yahweh, symbolising God’s new start with the faithful remnant of his people (Zimmerli 1983: 262-263).

The Jewish hope for a resurrection was not based on man’s inherent capacity to overcome or conquer death. It was fundamentally a trust in God who, as Creator, has the power to give life that ends in death [which was also perceived to be the work of God], and Who therefore has the power to give back life to the dead. He can also give eschatological life that goes beyond the boundaries and threat of Death (Bauckham 1993b: 48-49).

Excursion 2: Immortality or resurrection?

Immortality, according to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (SOED), is a state of “exemption from death or annihilation; endless existence” (SOED 1970: 962). Resurrection on the other hand is defined as “the action or fact of rising again from sleep, disuse, etc.; revival; restoration to previous state or vogue” and is applied to Christ’s resurrection and the “rising again of men at the Last Day” (SOED 1970: 1720). Does eternal life in this sense imply that someone has become immortal and will never die?

The Old Testament, although rather thin on the subject, makes it clear that resurrection does not cancel out physical death (cf. Dan 10:13; 12:2-3 [Bailey 1979: 71-74; Collins 1997: 355-356]). The general notion is that death comes into play in every respect when someone dies physically. Even the faithful and righteous will eventually experience death, and will end up in Sheol (Yamauchi 1998: 43). This reality is quite clear from historical writings, and specifically the distinctive genealogy in Genesis 5, where the immortality of Enoch stands out amongst the rest of the people on the list (cf. however Wis Sol 1:15; 6:18; 15:3; [Collins 1997: 364]).

The only way that someone can escape death is through ascension, an idea that comes to the fore only later on in Second Temple Judaism [cf. however the stories of Enoch

and Elijah above]. The dominant notion is death and after that resurrection into a new life. This resurrection occurs, according to the Midrash on Ecclesiasts, immediately after death (3:21, 22a) when all the souls [i.e. righteous and ungodly] are carried to heaven for the judgment (Harder 1978: 682).

It is only the Book of Jubilees that prefers the concept of immortality (Russell 1964: 372). This idea probably stems from Hellenistic thought, where immortality of the soul was accepted (cf. 4 Macc 14:5; 17:12; [Harder 1978: 682]; cf. also 2 Esdr 7:78ff; 1 En 103:4, 7; 71:16). However, as Bauckham (1998b: 86) has shown, the idea of eternal life and resurrection is rather an extension of Old Testament faith in the sovereignty of God than a monotonous following of Hellenistic influences.

In the New Testament the idea of “immortality of the soul” seems stronger, especially when it is linked up with the concept of eternal life [a concept found quite frequently in the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation]. It seems to be an idea that flowed over from Greek Hellenistic thought, and specifically the Platonists. They taught that the soul was immortal and pre-existent, and only connected temporarily to the body, which in the end shaped the thinking of at least the Hellenistic Jews (Wis Sol 2:23; 8:19-20; [Shogren 1997b: 775]).

As will be shown later [in Chapter 4], eternal life in the New Testament is to be understood qualitatively rather than temporally, an idea already prevalent with Sirach (Sir 15:17; 17:11; [Collins 1997: 354]). The New Testament tried to find a midway, whereby eternal life and resurrection hope could be combined with the realisation that this life is but temporary (Shogren 1997b: 775). Eternal life does not imply the extinction of physical death, but only of death’s power over God’s people. The soul in itself cannot be immortal, as it is destined for hell. God in his grace granted eternity to believers, whose souls have already died from the old life and have been resurrected into this new, godly life.

Although it would seem from 1 Corinthians 15:53b-54 that Paul supports the idea of immortality of the soul, the immortal state [*ἀθανασία*] for Paul is applicable only once a person has died of the old life and has been resurrected into a new life (cf. also Col 2:20; 3:1; [Merrill 1997: 887; Harris 1998: 160-164])⁴⁸. When Paul speaks about

⁴⁸ Merrill (1997: 887) in his article in NIDOTTE on מוֹת [death] refers to immortality *after* the grave, which is correct if one thinks in terms of life after the resurrection into the new life (cf. also Bailey 1979: 89). Only then death will have no part to play (cf. Rev 21:4). Metaphorically one gains this

resurrection, he also qualifies it as being a resurrection “of the dead”. However, not all the dead are resurrected, only the believers that have died, “those who belong to Christ” (1 Cor 15:12-13, 22-23, 42-44; [Harris 1998: 149-151]). For Paul it is a case of “resurrection to immortality and immortality through resurrection”, two inseparable concepts (cf. Harris: 1998: 167).

The impression from Revelation 1:18 is that there is still, even where eternal life has been received, a passage through the doors of death that everyone has to pass through. The immortality that the soul receives only means that, even when passing through this passage of death, the soul cannot be destroyed if it has been granted eternal status by God (Matt 10:28).

The timing of the resurrection could be a problem. The question can be asked: if sin comes into this world in every new body that is born, why can’t the resurrection life come into effect with every new death and resurrection that takes place? It is something Cullmann (1958: 50) is reluctant to accept. Resurrection for him is something that happens only on Judgment Day in the *eschaton* [cf. the Jewish apocalyptic thought on life and death – Chapter 3].

Karl Barth [as discussed by Cullmann 1958: 49] is probably more correct. He understands the transformation through resurrection to take place at each individual death (cf. Luke 16:22; 23:43; Phil 1:23). This would mean no waiting period after death, but a direct and immediate transfer from Death’s quarters to the final eschatological destination. This corresponds with Jesus’ teaching in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31; cf. Luke 23:43) and John’s visions of the faithful in heaven (cf. Rev 6:9-11; 20:4-6).

Immortality of the soul therefore only comes into play after the resurrection into the new life has taken effect (cf. John 3:5). The soul could be deemed immortal as it could pass unscathed through the passages of Death or Hades [not necessarily sometime in the future, but more probably immediately after death] unto the realm of God, where life in eternity awaits a person (Phil 1:23). Again, in Harris’ words: “[it is] resurrection to immortality and immortality through resurrection” (1998:167). In this sense Merrill’s (1997: 887) view on immortality after death is more acceptable [cf. footnote 48].

immortality after salvation into the new life, which constitutes resurrection of the soul. Even though physical death would still occur, it could have no further influence on the life of the soul (cf. Rev 1:18).

Although no explicit mentioning is made thereof, it is this same notion that is put forward in Revelation 1:18, when Jesus says that He has the keys to the doors of Death in His hands (Groenewald 1986: 42-43).

3.8. *Conclusion on life and death in the Old Testament*

- i) Yahweh is the sovereign God. The Creator-God has all the power in contrast to the gods of the other nations who are seen as dead idols. He is the sole Decider on both life and death, all of which is in his hands to give and take (Eccl 6:8; [Collins 1997: 353]). Life is a blessing from Yahweh on a person. On the other hand, death could be a curse from Yahweh (Deut 30:19; Ps 119:93, 144; Prov 2:19; 5:23; 8:35-36 etc.).
- ii) Life denotes in the first instance physical life (Brensinger 1997: 108). This life was always meant to be limited for man. Although the Old Testament perception of death was very negative, it was recognised as a natural phenomenon bound to befall everyone.⁴⁹ The notion that the existence of death as such was the result of sin probably came from later religious interpretation of texts.
- iii) Life is not always physical life. Health, vigour [sickness, deprivation] could also spell life [or death]. Israel's exile was metaphorically seen as death (Ezek 37:1-14; [cf. Zimmerli 1983: 262]).
- iv) God and life are intimately related. He is the living God [חַי־יְהוָה], the Source of all life (cf. Deut 5:26; 2 Kgs 19:4).
- v) Because God is life, life can only be obtained in relation to God. Outside of such a relationship death prevails (Barrett 1994: 47). The Old Testament frequently speaks about man's existence as a way that leads to either life or death, thereby putting man before a choice (Deut 30:19; 2 Sam 15:21; Prov 14:12; 16:25; Jer 21:8 [Merrill 1997: 886]). Israel must constantly choose between obedience and disobedience to God. This becomes a choice between life and death (cf. Deut 28; 30:15ff [Ringgren 1966: 143]).

⁴⁹ Of course, the Old Testament, and especially the Law, identifies certain sins that do lead unto death or deserve death as a punishment (Lev 24:17; Deut 22:23-26), immediately suggesting that not all sins deserve this very harsh punishment (Merrill 1997: 886). This, however, is referring to physical death as punishment. The spiritual punishment on all sins is death, either spiritually or physically.

- vi) The quality of relationship with Yahweh is what determines life. Death implies that the relationship with Yahweh was terminated. Man is then cut off from the lifeline of God. However, God will resurrect him into a new life if he is willing to turn back to Him. This relational interpretation becomes more prominent in the apocalyptic literature and in the New Testament, and is a strong motive in Revelation.
- vii) Immortality is not an option in Old Testament texts. Texts that talk about man being saved from the claws of death should be read metaphorically (e.g. Ps 16). The only hope for man is to be resurrected into a new life by God (cf. Dan 12). This is an issue that rarely features with regard to the individual. It is, however, frequently applied to the people of God collectively.
- viii) Sheol was the biding place for all the dead. It is a place of gloom, where no glory, movement or praise is possible. Whoever goes down to Sheol, is forgotten and can never return. It is a place outside the sphere of God, where no relation with God, i.e. no life, is possible. The distinction between hell and Sheol does not exist in the Old Testament. In the English Translation [KJV] hell is often equated with Sheol (cf. Hab 2:5).
- ix) Resurrection is very rarely touched upon in the Old Testament with only two vague suggestions (Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). The resurrection-belief that developed later on in Judaism, is not a new theology, but just a continuation of the Israelite belief in the sovereignty of God to decide on life and death, which could even include the return of life to a person or nation (Bauckham 1998b: 86).

As said previously [cf. Chapter 1], this does not necessarily mean that John would have the same interpretation in mind when he used these words and symbols in Revelation, even though he might have borrowed them from the Old Testament. However, as Revelation is strongly rooted in Old Testament language and symbols, it is quite possible that John would require his readers to take into account the Old Testament understanding of concepts to fully appreciate the meaning of the message.

CHAPTER 3

JEWISH APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT ON LIFE AND DEATH

"When that time comes around everyone...whose name is written in God's book will be saved. Many that have died will then rise up; some of them will live eternally while others will come under the eternal punishment and rejection of God...Those who led others on the right path will forever shine like the stars in heaven." Dan 12:2-3.⁵⁰

This is only a brief overview to sensitise the reader on the shift in religious focus that took place later on in Judaism⁵¹. As certain of the perceptions and thoughts were still in line with Jewish and ANE thought from the Old Testament times, the entire discussion will not be repeated here. The discussion is, however, necessary, as the apocalyptic influences on the Christian environment, and for this area of study [i.e. the Book of Revelation], cannot be ignored.

The importance of the apocalyptic thought for the Christian centres around the most fundamental of all Christian beliefs, which is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the gift of eternal life to the believers as a result thereof (Collins 1987: 207).

It is important to note that the apocalyptic movement did not replace the Old Testament prophecies. It was just understood as "prophecy in a new idiom". The fulfilment of the prophecies was still of immense importance to the apocalyptic writers (Russell 1964: 92). In the apocalyptic literature the eschatological prophecies about the future are linked to the "salvation history" of the past, and are then applied unto the present situation of the readers (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 40-41). This new outlook can be seen in the apocalyptic literature that started to appear in early Judaism [around 200BC – AD100].

⁵⁰ Free translation from "Die Boedskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

⁵¹ It is not the intention here to discuss in detail the origin and development of apocalyptic and its literature. A lot of work has already been done on this subject in the past (e.g. by John Collins and others). Kreitzer (1997a: 55-68) gives a brief overview of the complexity of this development (cf. Aune 1997: lxxix-lxxxix). As a literary phenomenon Von Rad (1975b: 301) places it within "the group of pseudepigraphical apocalypses from Daniel to IV Ezra." For a discussion of the characteristics of apocalypses, cf. Aune (1997: lxxxii-lxxxvii); Du Rand (1991b: 169-175); Mounce (1977: 19-23); Kümmel (1975: 453-455); John Collins (1979a: 1-20) and others.

1. Background

In the post-exilic period we see an unparalleled shift in the way history was perceived. Thoughts about resurrection and life after death came to the fore that was rarely talked about in the Old Testament (Bauckham 1998b: 83). The reigning perception was now that the present world was overcome by evil and darkness (Collins 1979b: 27). Nothing good can possibly come from it. There is no hope that the situation could be overturned for the better in the future. In fact, it is expected that things would rather get worse from now on. This would especially be the case for the faithful believers who tried to stay obedient to God (Du Rand 1991b: 174). Bauckham (1998b: 83) points to the increasing number of martyr deaths during the Maccabean period that could have had an influence on the development and expansion of a belief in eternal life (cf. 2 Macc 7:9, 11, 22-23, 28-29)⁵².

In this situation the conviction grew that salvation actually lies on another level. Under the existing conditions no salvation could be possible in this world; it would only be possible if the current situation is overthrown or totally renewed, which can only be done by divine intervention; and this will only happen in the *eschaton*, i.e. on the Day of the Lord (Kümmel 1975: 454), when the salvation of the faithful remnant is expected to be announced through some or other cataclysmic event brought about through the promised divine intervention (Charlesworth 1985: 64). At the same time eternal death will be announced as the final destination for the unrighteous people.

Apocalyptic trips to and visions about heaven, Sheol, and hell was all part of divine revelations that the apocalyptic prophets received. Eschatology was in the mind of nearly every writer from this age (Russell 1964: 15, 20). It was a transcendent eschatology that asked for retribution and restoration beyond the bounds of this life (Collins 1987: 9). Transcendence is a key word in all the apocalyptic literature. The forms of expected salvation might have been diverse, but one thing was universal: salvation required a radically different existence for the people of this world, “in which all the constraints of the human condition, including death, are transcended” (Collins 1979a: 10).

⁵² John Collins (1997: 59-72) also notes the influence of the political, cultural and religious alienation that people experienced due to the foreign domination during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, which led to many of the nations of the ANE who came under this foreign rule to look for salvation on other levels.

People therefore focussed their hope on the expectation that God will grant salvation by bringing history to a final consummation in the near future (Beale 1998: 131). The present aeon will pass away and will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth, or otherwise by a *renewed* heaven and earth that would come about through the total transcendence of the current situation in the *eschaton* (1 En 93:1-10; cf. Rev 21:1-8).

2. The concept of eternal life in Jewish Apocalyptic

In the apocalyptic literature a different view is held regarding the outcome and meaning of life and death. The broad understanding as per the Old Testament is still valid [cf. Chapter 2], however, with some Hellenistic modification (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 858). Both life and death are now transcended to a new aeon, which is an aeon outside the bounds of history (Brensinger 1997: 112). Life in this world is nothing more than a time of preparation for the future world to come (Du Rand 1991b: 164). There is, however, a discontinuity between this life and the transcended aeon to come (Collins 1979b: 27). In the end a person should not be too concerned about the outcome of things in this life, as long as he or she lives in accordance with God's will in preparation for the future world (Link 1976: 479). Having said all this, Collins (1997: 97) reminds us that "for the apocalypticists present experience and the future hope were intrinsically connected and mutually interdependent". In this sense eschatology is rather the "transcendence of death by the attainment of a higher, angelic form of life" (Collins 1997: 97).

2.1. Ethical piety and life

Ethical piety becomes an important aspect within the apocalyptic literature in general. A person just needs to live a life of ethical piety here on earth while waiting on the nearing *eschaton* (Du Rand 1991b: 175). Believers are therefore called up to live a life of devoutness so that they can receive eternal life on the Day of Judgment [cf. the letters to the seven churches in Rev 2-3]. It is the quality of life lived now that will determine the continuance [or the resurrection to a new life] of life in the *eschaton*. In 4 Maccabees 7:18-19 [cf. also Wis. Sol 1:12] the notion is that true life can only be obtained when the physical life corresponds to a transcendent norm, as was the case with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 858).

This strong ethical call comes in the wake of the evil [unethical] that is evident in this world (cf. 4 Ezra 7; 12:32-33; Apoc Zeph). God will bring all this evil to an end on Judgment Day. On that day the eternal judgment will be passed by the Messiah on behalf of Yahweh according to the ethical lives they lived (Collins 1987: 50-52).

The judgment on the Day of Yahweh is central within all apocalypses (Collins 1979b: 25). Not everybody will be condemned on this day. Only the wicked will be punished for their transgressions, while the faithful will be saved. This salvation is not just a salvation from sin, but also a salvation out of this evil world (Charlesworth 1985: 123). Throughout the apocalyptic writings a clear line is drawn between the fate of the righteous and that of the wicked (cf. 4 Ezra 7:75ff; [Rowland 1985: 168]).

2.2. *Life as a relationship with God*

As was the case in the Old Testament, life [and living] is linked to the relationship with Yahweh. Ethical piety is only possible within a relationship with God and is also the sign that a relationship with Yahweh exists. It is because of his life of devoutness that Enoch escaped the claws of death (Gen 5:21-24; cf. 1 En 70). Outside of this devoted relationship one is in any case dead, even though you might seem to be alive in the eyes of the world (Rev 3:1c).

Yahweh is a God of life. He does not want death to be part of his new realm. Although His sovereign power over death is still evident in the fact that He casts the wicked into eternal death at the *eschaton*, He primarily wants life to prevail (cf. Rev 21:1-8). He wants to bring life, particularly “new life”, to the people of God, and as the sovereign God He is also able to give back life to the dead through resurrection (Wis. Sol 1:12-13; 2:23-24; [Bauckham 1998b: 83-86]). In the Wisdom of Solomon 1:12 righteousness [and maybe with it the righteous?] is called immortal. God brings the hope of life to his faithful followers about the new aeon where they will live in eternity, which comes through apocalyptic images and visions (Bailey 1979: 75-76).

The warnings about suffering or persecution to come “in the near future” are not supposed to be frightening to the readers, but function to guide the people of God through the constraints they have to endure in this world on their way to their actual destiny in glory in the presence of God (cf. 4 Ezra 7; [Rowland 1985: 126-128]). This

glory is the ζωὴ αἰώνιος that God promises to everyone that persevere in a life of devoutness. Visions about the new heaven and earth, angels, life in the new world, all become part of a comforting message to motivate believers (cf. 1 Enoch).

2.3. *Eternal life in early Judaism*

The concept of ζωὴ αἰώνιος [eternal life] was widely accepted within early Judaism and the apocalyptic literature in general (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 859; Bauckham 1998b: 81-82). It grew from a universal belief, evident within the apocalyptic genre, in the existence of a personal afterlife (Collins 1979b: 26)⁵³. There is a far greater interest during this age in the possible reality of an existence of, and therefore resurrection to, eternal life (4 Ezra 4:41-43; 2 Apoc Bar 49:2-51:12; 2 Macc 7:36; 4 Macc 17:17-18, 22; 18:23; [Osborne 1992: 674-675]). In 4 Maccabees 17:17-18 the martyrs are resurrected unto eternal life “beside the divine throne”. This eternal life is only possible because God through resurrection from death brings people back to life (4 Macc 7:19; 15:3; 16:25; Ps Sol 3:16).⁵⁴ In this new life people will be free from the constraints of the evil world, including death. This ζωὴ αἰώνιος was a life cleansed of all sin and evil (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 43-51). In eternity believers will “live a blessed life” (4 Macc 17:18).

The hope for a resurrection of the righteous therefore becomes more prominent in the apocalyptic literature, specifically in the light of the expectation of the ζωὴ αἰώνιος awaiting the righteous (Dan 12:1-3; 2 Macc 7:29; cf. Isa 26:19; [Bauckham 1998b: 80-81]). The existence of death is still accepted as part of physical life, although now the notion is that Yahweh doesn’t want it. Everybody will still die [although some prominence is now given to the idea of ascension for some righteous believers, e.g. Enoch (cf. Himmelfarb 1993), some of these ascents are only temporary – AscIsa 6-

⁵³ Explicit mention of an afterlife is absent in only two Jewish Apocalypses, where it is probably implied in any case, i.e. The Apocalypse of the Weeks and Test Levi 2-5 (Collins 1979a: 9). All the other apocalypses describe some form of afterlife. This afterlife is the only place of hope for the believers (cf. also 4 Macc 15:2-3; Ps Sol 3:16; Test A 5:2; Test Jud 25:1; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 859]).

⁵⁴ Osborne (1992: 674-675) shows, however, that there is no uniformity in this time on the possibility of a resurrection at the *eschaton*, e.g. Jesus ben Sirach denied the possibility of resurrection, saying that the dead will abide in Sheol, which is “a place of unending sleep” (Sir 30:17; 46:19), while Enoch has an expectation of a resurrection (1 En 92:3-5; 104:2-4). In 4 Maccabees, on the other hand, immortality is mentioned seemingly even without the possibility of linking it to a resurrection (cf. 4 Macc 17:12, 22), although in 4 Maccabees 16:25 it is said, “that they who die for God, live to God” [translation as per *Septuagint Greek & English Old Testament*], implying that resurrection to an eternal life will come after physical death for the righteous believer.

11 (Himmelfarb 1993: 55)]. However, Yahweh is mightier than even Death and Sheol (Ringgren 1966: 246). He can revive His people from death and give them new life (cf. Ezek 37).

3. The death-concept in the apocalyptic and early Judaism

3.1. *Death and eternal punishment*

Because, according to the apocalyptic literature, God did not want death, it became a problem to the people (Bailey 1979: 78-79). Death was more and more perceived to be the punishment for the sins of man and was therefore perceived of even more negative than before. As a result of sin physical death awaited each person, but this death was still not the *eternal* punishment for one's sins. After death came a resurrection followed by the moment of judgment, the timing of which is uncertain [although the apocalyptic writers made an effort to divide history into different time periods, including forecasts of the future and even the end times⁵⁵ (4 Ezra 4-27; 1 En 93:1-10)]. At this judgment eternal punishment would be meted out to the wicked for their life of unrighteousness (Bultmann 1965: 17).

The punishment for the wicked is that they will suffer everlasting torment in hell. According to 2 Baruch this punishment is nothing more than a fulfilment of the Deuteronomistic Law (Collins 1987: 174). There is thus nothing new in these expectations; the judgment criteria are the same as in the Old Testament. Everybody is judged according to his or her violations of the Law of Moses, which was still the barometer for evaluating a life of devoutness [cf. Rom 7:7-12 and the Sermon on the Mount as an ethical call to obey the Law].

The tours of hell, so often found in the apocalyptic literature, give an impression about the fate of man after judgment (2 En 8-10; 2 Apoc Bar 59:10; [Bauckham 1998a: 33-34]). It also changes the view on man's fate directly after death. The seer [or apocalyptic prophet] is given an insight into the afterlife that awaits every person after his or her death. Punishment of the wicked does not happen at the last judgment [i.e. on the Day of the Lord], but already at death (Bauckham 1990: 357; cf. also Bauckham 1998a: 49-80). Personal death therefore becomes the personal Day of

⁵⁵ Periods of wickedness within this time frame "culminate in the separation of the elect" (Collins 1987: 50-52). In some of these periods the elect will then be chosen and saved (cf. 1 En 93:1-10).

Judgment (cf. Rev 1:18). This view was, however, not universally accepted, not even by the first century CE (cf. Jeremias 1965: 147).

It would seem that there was thus a gradual change in the belief about the fate after death. Some apocalypses proclaimed an interim waiting period until the Day of Judgment, which lies somewhere in the future [this future day will not be too distant, as this evil world must come to pass very quickly]. According to Enoch (1 En 22:11) the wicked dead even suffer punishment in Sheol while waiting for the Day of Judgment. Initially the idea of a future judgment, and an interim waiting period until that time arrived, was still accepted. This notion however developed in time, up to the point where the belief was that punishment was meted out directly after death (Bauckham 1998a: 34). It was actually not yet fully developed [and accepted] by the time of Jesus. This can be seen in Jesus' own teachings, where He sometimes expresses different views on the subject (cf. Luke 16:23, 46 against Luke 16:9; 23:43; [Jeremias 1965: 147]).

The earliest conception of punishment directly after death comes from the Apocalypse of Elijah. In his apocalyptic vision or tour Elijah seemingly sees the wicked after death, being punished in $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\epsilon\nu\nu\alpha$. In the later Apocalypse of Zephaniah the prophet initially ends up in $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$, from where he is transferred to heaven. From heaven he observes the punishment of the wicked in $\alpha\delta\eta\varsigma$ (Bauckham 1998a: 89-91).

3.2. *Sheol in apocalyptic literature*

Sheol did not disappear in the apocalyptic literature. Its existence was still recognised for example in Ecclesiasticus (14:16; 17:27f; cf. also the Book of Revelation). Where a judgment directly after death was not accepted, Sheol played the role of the intermediary "waiting room". In his evaluation of 1 Enoch 12-36 and 4 Ezra 7:79-87 Bauckham (1998a: 33-34) comes to the conclusion that Sheol is not the place of eternal punishment in the mentioned books, but a place where the wicked wait in anguish for the coming judgment [cf. 2.4, Chapter 2 above and Bauckham (1998b: 89)]. However, both the righteous and wicked already knows what will await them at the Day of Judgment (cf. 4 Ezra 7:75-101; [Bauckham 1998b: 89]).

In 1 Enoch 12-36 we have the oldest available account of a visit to the underworld (Bauckham 1998a: 33). Enoch is shown the places in Sheol where man will await the final judgment (1 En 22:1-4, 8-13). The ethical character of one's life will determine the kind of rest that will be experienced while waiting in Sheol (Rowland 1985: 161).

In Revelation Death and Sheol are personified partners (Rev 6:8; [Aune 1998a: 401])⁵⁶. Sheol is not an eternal destiny for every dead person any more. It is a place associated only with the wicked, where they seemingly go until the Day of Judgment. In the *eschaton* both Death and Sheol will be judged and will then also land in the pool of fire (Rev 20:14). The pool of fire, or the hell, now becomes the place of eternal judgment. That is where all the unrighteous people will be sent to after judgment (Aune 1998b: 1103).

4. Conclusion

- i) In the apocalyptic literature life and death are transcended. As this world is evil and will stay evil until the end, believers should rather look beyond that and focus on the life awaiting them in the new aeon. This will be a ζωή αἰώνιος where death and Sheol will play no part, except in the case of the unrighteous that will be judged and condemned to eternal death.
- ii) Specifically in 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees a reevaluation of life is made, expecting that believers will participate in an eternal life at the throne of God if they do not forsake their faith (2 Macc 7:36; 4 Macc 17:17-18, 22; 18:23).
- iii) God's sovereignty still stands out in the apocalyptic literature. He is able to even overcome death and bring back the dead to life through resurrection (4 Macc 17:17-18; 2 Macc 7:29). According to Bauckham (1998b: 83-86) the transcendent theology in the apocalyptic literature is more the result of this belief in God's sovereignty than the origination of a new belief taken over from Hellenistic influences.
- iv) Death has become a greater problem. It is perceived more and more to be the punishment for sins and not the normal end to life (Bailey 1979: 78-79).

⁵⁶ Death is sometimes personified alone (cf. Isa 25:8; Jer 9:21; Job 18:13; Prov 13:14). When Sheol is personified, however, it is always in relation to Death and never alone (cf. Isa 28:15; Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; Ps Sol 16:2; 4 Ezra 8:53). In Revelation Death and Hades are personified four times in association with each other (Aune 1998a: 401).

- v) Sheol is not the final destination for all the dead. Only the wicked dead end up in Sheol. There, according to apocalyptic literature (cf. 1 En 12-36), they both await and visualise their punishment (4 Ezra 7:75-101), or they are punished already for their lives of unrighteousness (TIsaac 5) (Bauckham 1998a: 33-34). According to 1 Enoch 22:11 the wicked dead even suffer punishment in Sheol while awaiting the final judgment.

CHAPTER 4

LIFE AND DEATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

"The person that listens to my words and because of that believes in Him that have send me, already has unending life. He will not have to fear the judgment of God one day. The decision on his life has already been taken. He has already gone from the claws of his spiritual death unto the wonderful life that God gives... he will rise up to live with God in eternity. On the other hand: those people that kept on doing wrong, will rise up only to hear that they are condemned forever and ever."
John 5:24, 29.⁵⁷

1. Background

In the New Testament a couple of factors influence the way life and death were perceived in contrast to that of the Old Testament. The first and most important factor is the person of Jesus Christ. He was the person through whom God chose to reveal Himself anew to this world (Heb 1:1-2). His death and resurrection brought about a major shift in the perception of life and death (Hagner 1998: 99). In the new aeon that He constituted the earthly existence of a person is not that important any more (2 Cor 5:1-4). Eschatology plays a more important role. Life is equalled to eschatological salvation rather than physical existence (Schottroff 1981: 262). Eternity and eternal life are the more prominent themes throughout the New Testament.

The influence of Judaic and Apocalyptic thought is evident in the New Testament, specifically with regard to the afterlife. Teachings on the imminent coming of the Messiah, the woes of the last days, the judgment of the world, the resurrection of the dead, all of these common terms in the apocalyptic literature, would have had a familiar ring in the Christian era (Russell 1964: 34).

2. Life in the New Testament

The word most commonly used in the New Testament to denote life, is ζωή and its derivatives ζῶον and ζῶν.⁵⁸ ζωή appears 135 times in the New Testament and ζῶν 140

⁵⁷ Free translation from "Die Boodskap" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

⁵⁸ The same words are generally used in the LXX to translate "life" from the BHS (Schottroff 1981: 262). Other words used in the New Testament to describe or translate "life" are ψυχή, ἄγιος and βίος. The last two does not appear in Revelation (Johnson 1992: 470-471).

times. The word ζῶον is found 23 times in the New Testament. Twenty of these instances appear in the Book of Revelation, where it is used exclusively to designate the four living creatures. Elsewhere in the New Testament the word occurs only in Hebrews 13:11, where it refers to sacrifices, and in 2 Peter 2:12 and Jude 10, where it refers to wild animals (Petzke 1981: 272).

Another important word in the New Testament denoting life is ψυχή. It occurs 101 times in the New Testament, of which seven occurrences are found in Revelation. It is generally translated into English with the word “soul” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 901-902; Harder 1978: 682), but actually has a number of different possible interpretations (Schweizer 1974: 637-656). Two important meanings are that of physical life (Acts 27:10; Mark 10:45; Matt 6:25) and implying the whole of man, i.e. the combination of body and soul (Acts 2:43; [Schweizer 1974: 637-640]). Soul and body together imply a living body (Barrett 1994: 67).

ζωή in the New Testament has a variety of meanings. The general meaning is of course physical life (Luke 16:25; Acts 8:33; Rom 8:38; Jas 4:14) as opposed to physical death [θάνατος]. This life is limited and corrupted by sin (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862). The life of God or Christ [not just his earthly life] is also proclaimed hereby (John 5:26a), which is actually a move away from the physical [and the sinful nature] to the eschatological, and even further into the eternal divine sphere (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 340-341).

The ζωὴ αἰώνιος is an important concept in the New Testament (cf. Mark 10:17, 30, the Gospel of John). Sometimes ζωή alone is used in the same context as ζωὴ αἰώνιος. ζωή is found 16 times in the Synoptic Gospels, and almost always refers to the future life, which will be entered into at the end of the current aeon (Matt 19:16-17, 29ff; [Johnson 1992: 469]).

ζωὴ αἰώνιος is equal to βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Jesus brought the βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15) and thus the ζωὴ αἰώνιος (John 3:16, 36; 6:47). The ζωὴ αἰώνιος belongs to God. He is the God of life and death (Luke 12:20; 2 Cor 1:9; Jas 4:15; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862-863]).

This new eschatological life can be obtained already in this world. Whoever believes the Good News of the Gospel has life (Matt 4:17; John 6:47; [Smalley 1978: 235]). He has died from his old ways and has been resurrected into a new life (Cullmann 1958: 35). But the fullness of this life will only be experienced in the future [at the *eschaton* (cf. Matt 19:29)]. There is thus an eschatological hope and expectation on the future aeon to come (Coetzee 1990a: 51).⁵⁹

2.1. *The life of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels and life*

The existence of Christianity is based on the belief in a real occurrence, in real events, which took place in real time (Cullmann 1958: 16-17). These events are the actual life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the early church these were events that radically changed this world, or at least their world. Jesus Christ was for them the One who has brought ζωή (2 Tim 1:10). He is the Life, the only One that possesses ἀθανασία [immortality] in Himself (1 Tim 6:16; [Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 862]).

Jesus announced the arrival of the new aeon right at the beginning of his ministry on earth (Matt 4:17). It is not an aeon still to come, but one that has arrived (ἤγγικεν in Mark 1:15)⁶⁰. The perfect tense of the verb suggests that the inauguration is a present realisation (Ridderbos 1978: 47-48; Hurst 1992: 211). With this “new world” came a radical reinterpretation of salvation, of the way life should be lived, and of the outcome of this life (John 13:34). The new aeon implied new, eternal life. And the cross becomes “the means by which God has provided for salvation and as the instrument and measure of new life in Christ” (Green 1993: 201, 203). The Law is still important, but with a new impetus. It has been fulfilled [reinterpreted] by Jesus. His example becomes the ethical standard to be adhered to.

⁵⁹ There is a tension [or relationship?] between the fulfilled and unfulfilled [still in progress] eschatology in the New Testament. The new aeon has already been inaugurated by Jesus. The life of Jesus in present is eschatological time for the people. It is possible to share in this eschatological life in eternity now. But it is still also “eschatology in the process of realization” (Jeremias, as quoted by Allison 1992b: 207; cf. Ridderbos 1978: 36-56). This should not be seen as contradictory. A lot of the prophecies have been fulfilled in the coming of Jesus (Luke 17:18-23), but others, like the prophecies regarding the Son of Man’s role in the final judgment still lies in the future (cf. Matt 13:41; 16:28; 25:31). The eschatological expectation was also that the complete fulfilment would be in the near future (Allison 1992b: 207-208). This same tension is also evident in Paul’s eschatology (cf. Barrett 1994: 51).

⁶⁰ However, sometimes Mark himself refers to the new aeon as something still to come (cf. Mark 9:47; 14:25; [Hurst 1992: 211]).

2.1.1. *The miracles of life Jesus performed*

The one central message of all the miracles Jesus performed is to demonstrate the inauguration of the kingdom through the coming of the long awaited Messiah to this world (Matt 11:2-6; [Du Rand 2001: 102; Blomberg 1992: 301]). When Jesus performs “healing miracles” [either through healing or resurrection], He gives life back to people. Someone who has been healed was able to rejoin his family and go back to work, and therefore participate in community life again [cf. Chapter 2 on life and death in the Old Testament. The same interpretation to life and the community applies here]. His dignity [life] has been restored (Mark 5:23; John 4:50, 51, 52; [cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 336]).

Of course, sometimes Jesus did perform miracles of resurrection that actually brought people back to physical life (Matt 9:25; [cf. Mark 5:40-42; Luke 8:54-55]; Luke 11:14-15). The message of this is still the same, i.e. the coming of the new aeon, which is the aeon of eternal life. It also serves to confirm Jesus’ own power over life and death, thereby providing proof of his divine identity (Van der Watt 2003: 133-134). It is important to note that these resurrections did not represent eternal life or immortality. The persons resurrected by Jesus would still die physically again. But they are signs of the eschatological resurrection, of the new aeon that Jesus brought to this world (Hagner 1998: 101). Healing, resurrection, or other miracles are therefore symbolic of the new spiritual life that comes with the new aeon of Jesus (Luz 1995: 66-68)⁶¹. It is a way of opening the door to the sphere of God’s new aeon to the people (Matt 11:20-24; 12:28; [Kingsbury 1988: 68]).

2.1.2. *The teachings on life by Jesus*

The teachings of Jesus have a twofold purpose: theologically they proclaim God as well as the Good News of salvation coming from God through his Son, Jesus Christ, and ethically they proclaim the expected human conduct that should flow from the correct understanding and acceptance of this Good News (Hurst 1992: 210).

⁶¹ In the miracle of the calming of the storm for example the disciples’ boat symbolises the “ship of life” for the believer in the community to whom Matthew addresses this book. They could project their lives of faith, but also their being alive, onto these miracles (Luz 1995: 67-68).

The primary focus of Jesus' teaching is the new life, which is possible only if one is "in Christ" [a theme that is used extensively in 1 John]. The focus is specifically on the life after the *parousia*. Jesus' parables and teaching proclaim very little about His Person and his life on earth [neither does He elaborate in the parables and his teaching discourses on his crucifixion or his resurrection], but He has lots to say about the kingdom of God and the eternal life that is linked to it (Gerhardson 2000: 57-62).

Of course, the Gospels utilise the teachings differently so as to suit the theological message each want to convey. But all the teachings have a central message incorporated in them: explaining that the kingdom of God has come near in the person of Jesus Christ (Matt 4:17), which in itself is a revelation of God to the world, proclaiming the new life that goes hand in hand with this new kingdom. This new life will be fulfilled in the death of Christ, which is the eschatological turning point. Then the enemy, Satan, will be defeated and death, as the enemy of darkness, will be overcome (Luke 10:18; 11:22; [Allison 1992b: 205]).

This new aeon has implications for living in the present. Obtaining this new life goes hand in hand with a reframing of life in the present aeon in order to fit in with the ways of the new life brought by Christ with the inauguration of the new aeon. In this sense the Law has a part to play as God's pathway to life (cf. Matt 5:17-20). The ways of life lies in the fulfilment of the commandments of the Law, according to the will of God and the example of Jesus (Matt 7:14; [Ridderbos 1978: 275]; cf. chapter 2, 2.6). Living the Law in obedience and in relationship with God is what constitutes life in the new aeon (cf. Hurst 1992: 221). Only those who follow in the footprints of Jesus accordingly, have eternal life (Matt 16:24-28; cf. John 15:9-17). Obeying the commandments and following in Jesus' footsteps are not works that "buy" the passage to the new life, but are "signs" of a life in faith in acceptance of the new aeon that God has already bestowed upon this world through Jesus Christ (Johnson 1992: 471).

2.1.3. The resurrection of Jesus as a life-giving occurrence

The resurrection of Jesus is foundational to Christian faith. Without the resurrection the Christian faith would have no foundation for their existence (Lorenzen 1995: 115). It is the resurrection of Jesus that has brought the new life to this world, says Paul (1

Cor 15). The resurrection is so important that it is mentioned explicitly in 17 of the books in the New Testament (Kreitzer 1993: 805-806). In the evangelistic sermons it is consistently given the place of primary importance (Acts 2:24-32; 3:15, 22-26; 10:40-41; 13:30-37; 17:31; [Dunn 1991: 183]). Although Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (cf. Hagner 1998: 103-106), it was something the disciples still did not expect (Lorenzen 1995: 119-122). They would only come to understand Jesus' words when they saw Him alive after the actual resurrection (John 3:21-22; [Osborne 1992: 676]).⁶²

For those that believed in Jesus personal resurrection became a reality. "*The first Christians actually believed that Jesus' resurrection was (literally) the beginning of the general resurrection*" (Dunn 1991: 185)⁶³. To them it became a present reality through the salvation obtained in Christ (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 130). Christ was just the "first-fruits" of the general resurrection that would now follow for all believers (Rom 8:23; [Dunn 1991: 185-186]). Resurrection is, however, an act of God. As the

⁶² There is currently an intense debate developing around the historical reality of the death and [more specifically] the resurrection of Jesus. Quite a few scholars, specifically from the Jesus Seminar (e.g. JD Crossan 2003: 29-57) doubt the scientific possibility of such an occurrence. Rudolf Bultmann (as referred by Dunn 1991: 184) only talks of "the rise of Easter faith". In this sense the resurrection becomes nothing more than an event of faith. Without becoming part of this long debate, which is not the intention of this thesis at all, it is necessary to state the foundation on which this thesis will be built. The Christian faith centres on the belief that Jesus died [physically] on the cross and was actually resurrected from death. Without that, Paul says, the Christian faith would actually be without any substance (1 Cor 15). The faith in the actual resurrection was enhanced by the eyewitness descriptions in the Bible (Matt 28:9-10, 11-15; Mark 16:9; Luke 24:13-35; John 20-21). Paul also emphasises knowledge of these eyewitness descriptions when he lists a number of people who have seen Jesus after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-8). Paul doesn't try to reason or prove the resurrection of Jesus, but takes it as an accepted fact on the grounds of the eyewitness testimonies, and only tries to draw attention to the implications it has for faith (Kreitzer 1993: 806). This is actually the earliest discussion with regard to resurrection attested in the New Testament, as the Gospels were only written later (Collins 1987: 207-209). Although no descriptive account is given about the act of the resurrection itself [the closest we get is the account of the angel and the guards found in Matt 27:62-28:10; cf. Gos. Pet 9:35-45], there was a common acceptance that it was brought about through a supernatural intervention by God in his sovereignty (Hagner 1998: 111; Osborne 1992: 679). However, the first disciples' belief in the miracle of an actual resurrection was so strong that they made all efforts to ensure that everybody grasped this reality that they experienced (Dunn 1991: 183-185). Extensive descriptions of the empty tomb (Matt 28:6, Luke 24:3), the earthquake that led to the opening of the grave that Sunday morning (Matt 28:1-4), the linen wrappings in which Jesus was buried lying aside inside the grave (John 20:5); the fact that Jesus ate with his disciples next to the sea of Galilee (John 21:12-14), etc. all wanted to emphasise to believers that Jesus was physically alive [Lorenzen 1995: 128; cf. also Davis {1993: 57} on the crucial points that prove the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a fact to be accepted in history – cf. Lapidé (1984) who proves the resurrection of Jesus from a Jewish belief in resurrection!!!]. Of course one must accept that this is an occurrence that is something out of the ordinary, and that it overrides all logical and scientific possibilities. It is something inexplicable to the human mind. But then, Paul himself stressed that there is no logic in the message of the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-25). It only works through faith, and it is only through faith that our eyes are opened to the possibility of a supernatural intervention by God, including the resurrection of Christ (Davis 1998: 146-147; Du Rand 2001: 38).

⁶³ Italics as inserted by Dunn (1991: 185).

sovereign God in control of life and death He is the only One that could bring the dead back to life (Lorenzen 1995: 115)⁶⁴.

Jesus taught a twofold resurrection that is in stall for the people of this world, whereby everybody will come to life in the *parousia*: the righteous will be rewarded for their faith on that day, while the unrighteous will be punished to eternal death. He then continues to exhort his disciples that they should resist the ways of the old life, lest they be cast into hell “where the fire never goes out” (Mark 9:43; cf. Matt 18:8; [Osborne 1992: 675]). In the end His resurrection from death signalled a new eschatological reality for this world: “that God, who created all that exists, will transform all that exists into a new creation where death will no longer be experienced” (Hagner 1998: 119).

The descent of Christ into ᾗδης was the result of a general notion in His days that everyone who dies, goes down to Sheol [cf. Chapter 2 on Sheol in the Old Testament]. Jesus did not go down to Sheol [as is proposed in the apocalyptic literature] to be punished for sins [i.e. the sins of the people], but to proclaim His victory to the inhabitants thereof (1 Pet 3:19-20). The actual significance thereof, according to Bauckham (1998a: 39), is that “the divine prerogative of releasing from the realm of death (cf. Wis Sol 16:13) now belongs to Christ”. With Jesus’ resurrection, the gates of ᾗδης were for the first time opened for someone to leave (Rev 1:18; [Bauckham 1998a: 39]).

Aside from this a lot more attention is given to Christ’s death and resurrection in the New Testament than to his descent to Sheol (cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20).⁶⁵ The descent to Sheol [i.e. of Jesus] was seemingly of very little significance to the authors of the New Testament.

⁶⁴ In a very interesting move Kaiser and Lohse (1981: 117) sees Jesus’ resurrection not as a coming back from dead, but as Jesus pressing “his way through death to life.” It is a movement in faith, not to be caught up in historical facts (cf. Küng 1984: 108).

⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that in the early church a belief evolved that gave a lot more attention and significance to the descent of Christ to ᾗδης. This was expressed in three main motifs for His descent: i) Christ preached the salvation to the saints in ᾗδης [cf. 1 Pet 3:19-20 where He actually preaches to the unrighteous]; ii) He led the saints out of ᾗδης with Him; iii) He defeated the powers of death and ᾗδης while in there (cf. OdesSol 42:11). Those that left ᾗδης with Him, then also ascended to heaven with Him (AscIsa 9:17) (Bauckham 1998a: 40-41).

2.2. *The Johannine concept of ζωή αἰώνιος*

2.2.1. *What the ζωή αἰώνιος meant for John*

The concept of ζωή αἰώνιος is very prominent in the Johannine literature (Smalley 1978: 203).⁶⁶ John himself sees this as the main purpose of the Gospel message Jesus proclaimed to his disciples (John 20:31). The word ζωή occurs 36 times in the Gospel of John (Johnson 1992: 470-471). ζωή αἰώνιος is found 17 times in this Gospel (Brown 1966: 506; cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 55). John also uses numerous related metaphors in his Gospel to describe eternal life: Living water (John 4:10); bread of life (John 6:35, 48); the Light of life (John 8:12); Jesus Himself **IS** life (John 11:25; 14:6), i.e. He is the Mediator or Giver thereof (Schottroff 1981: 267-269; Smalley 1978: 203, 219). He is the sustaining power of life, without which no life is possible (John 15:5; [Brown 1970: 678; Johnson 1992: 470]). Van der Watt (1986a: 239-240) has also shown the relationship between Father and Son in the Gospel of John to be the basis for the origin of eternal life (cf. Van der Watt 2003: 135). But there is more to this: this new life and this relationship place Jesus on the same level as the Father. As Giver of life Jesus should therefore be worshipped⁶⁷ on the same level as the Father (cf. John 5:21; [Van der Watt 1986a: 232-242]; cf. also John 1:1, 14).

Whenever John uses the word ζωή and ζωή αἰώνιος in his gospel he refers exclusively to the eternal life or eschatological life (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 879-889; Johnson 1992: 469). When he wants to refer to physical life he uses the word ψυχή (cf. John 13:37; 15:13). This life [i.e. ψυχή] is the life that ends in natural death, something that is not questioned at all by any of the New Testament writers.

Eternal life on the other hand reaches beyond the boundaries of time and space. It is equated to the life of God. God lives eternally, and is Himself the Life [ζωή αἰώνιος⁶⁸ (1 John 5:20), the God who is ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ᾄων... (Rev 1:4)], as does

⁶⁶ A comprehensive exegetical study of the understanding of life in the Johannine literature, specifically in the Gospel of John, has already been done by Van der Watt (1986a) and many others, and will therefore not be repeated here in detail. The ζωή αἰώνιος plays such an important role in John's Gospel that Van der Watt calls it "the basic soteriological concept" in the Gospel (1989b: 217).

⁶⁷ On the subject and meaning of the worship of Jesus, cf. Bauckham (1993a: 118-149) and Chapters 6 and 7 below.

⁶⁸ John does not use the concept ζωή αἰώνιος when reference is made to God in the Gospel, but only ζωή. Because of God's eternal status, eternity in terms of Him is just accepted as a fact by John (Van der Watt 1986a: 880). "This dimension of life is in any case true of God" (Van der Watt 1989b: 218-219).

Jesus [ἡ ζωὴ (John 14:6)]. He existed before time, and will exist even after time has expired (John 1:1). To have eternal life is to live κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι (1 Pet 4:6).

Jesus' coming to this world has the purpose of bringing this eternal life to man (John 5:26; 6:57; 20:31; 1 John 1:1-2). It is a life that has even conquered the power of death (John 11:25). Jesus makes this life "real" through his own life, his teachings, and his miracles: He is the "real" water of life (John 4:10-14); the "real" bread of life (John 6:27); etc. (Brown 1966: cxv). This "real" life also implies that the kingdom is more real than anticipated.

John's eschatology in general is the most realised of all the Gospels (cf. Cullmann 1967: 269). Salvation or condemnation already takes place in the present, according to the decision made for or against Christ (cf. John 3:18; 5:24; [Brown 1966: cxvii; Van der Watt 1986a: 241]). There is, however, also the judgment "at the last day". This strong judgmental theme is stressed quite clear in Jesus' warnings in the Gospel of John, where He stresses that He as the eschatological Judge will condemn the unrighteous "at the last day" (John 12:48; cf. John 14:2-3; [Osborne 1992: 677])⁶⁹.

2.2.2. *Jesus' miracles of life*

The miracles [signs = σημεῖα] that Jesus performs express the basic idea that there is new life to be found in Him, and that this new life is already present (Smalley 1978: 87-88). John puts a lot of emphasis on the fact that this life is a gift that God has sent [through Jesus] to the world (John 5:26; 6:35, 48, 51; [Johnson 1992: 469; cf. Brown 1966: cxv]). Smalley (1978: 90-92) shows how Jesus' "I am"-sayings in the Gospel of John metaphorically emphasise the fact the He alone is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6)⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ This does not imply that John has no future eschatology. Physical death could still intervene. But in that case the physical death and resurrection of Jesus will result in Him going to the Father to prepare a place in heaven for the believers who die here, so that they can enter into a life where death will have no part to play any more (Brown 1966: cxviii). It is in the *Parousia* that the ζωὴ αἰώνιος becomes a final reality for the people of God. Eternal life culminates in a resurrection of the body into eternity in the presence of God.

⁷⁰ Cf. Van der Watt (1986a: 781-782). Of course, there is also a strong connection to be made between Jesus' "I am"-sayings and God's "I am Who I am" in Exodus 3:14.



The miracles are signs of Jesus' power to also "give eternal life on this earth (realized eschatology) and as a promise that on the last day he will raise the dead (final eschatology)" (Brown 1966: 437). This is evident in Jesus' discourses with the people after the healing of the man in Bethesda (John 5) and before and after the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11), two passages that, according to Brown (1966: 437), are parallel to each other.

2.2.3. *ζωὴ αἰώνιος and the relationship with God*

The ζωὴ αἰώνιος that is received is more than just a change in temporal existence. Although the use of αἰώνιος on its own could be interpreted as having a temporal meaning, in combination with ζωή it rather refers to a certain quality of life (Van der Watt 1986a: 892). It is a quality of life that comes from above and corresponds qualitatively to the life God possesses (Van der Watt 2000: 202-203). Life according to the Gospel of John, and all Johannine literature for that matter, generally goes hand in hand with a relationship with God (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 288). To be part of this new quality of life a person needs to be reborn in Christ, i.e. born in the spirit, which implies that a person must first die off the old life spiritually before he or she can be reborn (John 3:3-5; [Van der Watt 1986a: 110; Coetzee 1990a: 51]). Quantity of life is determined by the divine quality thereof (Van der Watt 1986a: 894).

As a relationship, life goes hand in hand with knowing God (John 17:3). This is the only way man can participate in the realisation of God's kingdom. And the [only] way to know God is through his Son who has come to reveal Him to the world (John 1:18). He is the "Word of God" (John 1:1) who proclaims the Father, the only way to know the Father (John 14:9). Therefore his words reveal the essence of life to the people (Johnson 1992: 470). A person who "knows God" obeys His commandments (1 John 2:3, 29). "Knowing God" is more than theoretical knowledge. It is a life-receiving experience, being reborn in the new life of God. To be away from God, is to be dead (Link 1976: 480).

Whoever has this life cannot be destroyed any more (John 11:26; [Brown 1966: 507]). In the Gospel of John believers have already passed from death to life (John 5:24; 6:50; cf. 1 John 3:14; [Bultmann 1965: 18-19]). Because death breaks down any possibility of relating to the living God, death is not a possibility any more in the

realm of this new life (Van der Watt 2000: 203). This does not imply that physical death disappears from the scene. It is the soul that has died of the self and has been resurrected into eternal life that is now able to live even through the day of death unto the new resurrection in heaven.

In the eternal realm then “existence and relations within the divine sphere become a reality” (Van der Watt 2000: 203), thereby making physical death, although it still applies to everybody, irrelevant: “I am the resurrection and the life...Those who believe in me will live, even though they die” Jesus said to Martha at the grave of Lazarus (John 11:25). This sums up the Christological focus of John’s message of life and resurrection. Jesus’ own resurrection [for John] is not the centre, as He **IS** in any case the Resurrection [and the life]. And just as He, the Resurrection, has overcome death in a personal resurrection from death, so will the believers (Lincoln 1998: 143).

2.3. Pauline thought on life

Paul’s theology centres very much on the crucifixion of Christ as THE way to the new life in Christ (1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:2; 15:3-8; [Barrett 1994: 204]). However, Paul also stresses that this new life can only be obtained if we “die with Christ” and is resurrected with Christ (Col 2:20). Paul is the first of the New Testament writers to give the radical expression that the new life is available already in the present, as the replacement of the old aeon by the new has already taken place in an event in history (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 866). This is only possible because Christ has already overcome death [and the old aeon] through his own death and resurrection, thereby bringing the “new creation” to man (1 Cor 15; 2 Tim 1:10; [Ridderbos 1977: 45-46]). Resurrection is thus a state that one can already experience rather than a single event (Harris 1998: 169).

Life [ζωή] for Paul goes hand in hand with a unique quality of life in faith and forgiveness (Scott 1993: 554). Because sin is the cause of death, the presupposition of ζωή is forgiveness of sin (Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 436; Ridderbos 1977: 99). “Life is only possible in relation to the divine act of salvation accomplished in Christ” (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1964: 868). It is therefore not man that lives any more [the old is dead]. It is Christ that lives in and through him or her (Rom 6:11; 8:10; 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 2:19).

However, Paul still makes room for the unrealised eschatology. There is an expected resurrection of the body after death (1 Cor 15:12-58). Furthermore, Paul expects “to be with Christ” after death. He even longs for that day to arrive (Phil 1:23). He is aware that the present age is not the completed new aeon. That still lies in the “end times” (1 Cor 10:11) or “the last times” (1 Tim 4:1). In view of this ambivalence Ridderbos (1977: 52-53) talks about a “mingling of the two ages” whereby Paul understands the advent of Christ as the “breaking through of the future aeon in the present” without making the slightest effort to balance things out for his readers.

Life and death are not just limited to physical existence. Just as Christ brings life now, sin brings death already into this life (cf. Rom 7:25; [Ridderbos 1977: 113]). Both life and death are entities that could be experienced already in the present, although the result of it all will only be consummated in the future aeon (cf. Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 136-137).

3. Death and the realm of Death in the New Testament

3.1. *Death in the New Testament*

The words most commonly used in the New Testament for death [or dying or being dead] are θάνατος (119), ἀποθνήσκω (104), and ἀποκτείνω (74) (Bieder 1981: 320; Frankemölle 1980: 322). ἀποκτείνω more often denotes the physical end to a person’s life, especially depriving a person of such life or of any form of life (cf. Matt 14:5; 16:21; [Frankemölle 1980: 322; cf. also Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 92]). It is often used in prophetic judgments (Am 4:10; 9:1; Ezek 23:10; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 429]). In the New Testament it almost always refers to the violent killing of God’s messengers (Matt 14:5; Mark 12:5ff). It is strikingly significant in the passion predictions of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:34; [Coenen & Schmithals 1980: 429]). ἀποκτείνω is synonymous to θάνατος and θανατάω, which refers more often to death at the judgment. This comes specifically to the fore in the Book of Revelation, where death is often related to the punishment of God at the final judgment, i.e. eternal death (Bieder 1981: 324).

In the New Testament death is just as universally accepted as in the Old Testament (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 94). The mortality of man is still a nonnegotiable fact, and

God is still viewed as the only One possessing immortality (John 6:49; 1 Cor 15:53; 1 Tim 6:16; Heb 7:8; 9:27). Man will therefore still experience death in this world (Bultmann 1965: 14). It is only the final generation on earth [i.e. those living at the time of the *parousia*] that will not experience physical death. They will only experience the final judgment (Matt 16:28; [Gulley 1992: 111-II]).

The shift in thinking in the New Testament is specifically visible in two areas: the view on the origin of death, and secondly the view on life after death (Gulley 1992: 110-II). Although death will still befall everyone, it is not a normal thing. Death is not part of God's original plan for man, but is the result of sin that came into this world. The origin thereof is usually associated with The Fall (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21; cf. Gen 3:22 and footnote 34). Death is the judgment of God upon the sins of man (Kaiser & Lohse 1981: 97). In a rather comprehensive discourse Paul focuses on the effects of sin, which brings death unto man (Rom 5:12-8:39), and which could only be undone through the gracious gift of life by God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Scott 1993: 555). Death is seen as God's punishment and judgment on this world for its sinful nature (Rom 1:32; 6:16, 21, 23; [Bultmann 1965: 15]). Paul also sometimes personifies Death as the King that reigns over this world, receiving his reigning power from *ἀμαρτία* (Rom 5:12-14, 17; [Schottroff 1981: 264]).

Secondly there is an entirely new outlook on death, viewed from the perspective of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through his death Christ has overcome the powers of sin. Sin was nailed onto the cross together with Christ (Col 2:14). Then through his resurrection He overcame the reigning powers of Death and the realm of Death [θάδης]. Death has no power over the people of God (1 Cor 15:54-55; Heb 2:14; 2 Tim 1:10).⁷¹ He is the "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14:9). The presumption is that the earthly death is not the end of everything. Whoever believes in Christ has a life in eternity to look forward to, a life where death will have no part to play, even if he or she experiences physical death. A believer is seemingly clothed in this life immediately after death (2 Cor 5:2-3). For them that do not believe, death is the deciding moment, but not the end. The eschatological judgment

⁷¹ In 75 places in the New Testament νεκρός is the object to either ἐγείρω or ἀνάστασις, showing that through Christ death is not the end any more, but is only a thoroughfare from one life [the earthly] to another [the heavenly life or eternal life] (Gulley 1992: 110-111-II).

still lies ahead, to which they will be resurrected for a short moment (Heb 9:27; cf. Rev 6:12-23; [Bultmann 1965: 17]).

Death could be experienced while still alive in the body (Rom 7:24). Eternal life [or eternal death] is intimately connected to a person's relationship with Christ (cf. John 3:3-8, 36). Just as one "receives" eternal life at salvation [John 3:36 – "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" GNB], one "has got" eternal death whilst you are not saved (Bultmann 1965: 17). Only those who stay in a close relationship with Christ can receive eternal life. It comes to them that "accept the true identity of Jesus" (Van der Watt 2002: 6), resulting in that person's life being totally transformed in accordance to Jesus' example (Rom 12:1-2). Death as the opposite of life means to be alienated from God. Sin alienates man from that what God has in store for him. It disturbs the relationship with God, and specifically with Christ, who is the Mediator of life (Van der Watt 2000: 211).

The difference between eternal death and physical death lies in the fact that a person who is spiritually dead can still hear. He or she can therefore be held accountable for the choices they make in life, or for the lack of choices they made for Jesus (Van der Watt 2000: 214).

In his discourse on resurrection (i.e. 1 Cor 15) Paul theologised on the position of the believer with regard to life and death. Death personified is the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor 15:26) and this will happen at the last consummation when death will be swallowed up in the final victory of Christ (1 Cor 15:55-57; [Scott 1993: 554]). The believers will then be resurrected in the body into a new life with Christ. It is interesting to note that Paul seemingly contradicts himself on the timing of this resurrection. Whilst in 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 he talks about resurrection "when the trumpet sounds" [i.e. on the Day of the Lord], in Philippians 1:23 he is looking forward to his own death [i.e. physical death] so that he could be with Christ (cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18; 2 Cor 5:1-10).

3.2. The realm of the dead

In the New Testament ᾅδης is generally used to denote the netherworld, the intermediate abode of the dead. The word ᾅδης is mentioned ten times in the New

Testament. Only four of these appear in the Synoptic Gospels (Lunde 1992: 310). It is used to translate the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל in the LXX, with the same frame of reference (Jeremias 1965: 146). It is a place to which one goes down and stands in contrast to the highest heavens (Matt 11:23; Luke 10:15), and is therefore sometimes also referred to as the “bottomless pit” (ἄβυσσος - cf. Luke 8:31; Rom 10:7). In 1 Peter 3:19-20 it is even associated with a jail [ἐν φυλακῇ]. Sheol is also a place of darkness (cf. 1 En 103:7; [Lunde 1992: 310]). In the New Testament ᾗδης is only an interim place that takes up all the souls after death and then delivers them again at the Day of Judgment (cf. Rev 20:13-14; [Jeremias 1965: 148]). There is not finality to being in ᾗδης, in contrast to the Old Testament perceptions thereof [cf. Chapter 2].

In the New Testament ᾗδης is distinguished from the lake of fire, which constitutes the hell or the place one goes to after the final judgment (cf. Rev 20:15), and which is sometimes referred to as γέεννα in the Greek, a term that occurs eleven times in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt 5:22; 10:28; 23:15; [Lunde 1992: 310]). γέεννα replaces ᾗδης after the resurrection or judgment (cf. Rev 20:10; 19:20; Jeremias 1965: 148). This distinction is not explicit in the teachings of Jesus. He seemingly breaks with the traditional [Judaic and apocalyptic – cf. Chapter 3] view by only distinguishing between heaven as the destination for the righteous and hell as the place of punishment for the unrighteous [cf. again the parable of Lazarus]. There is, according to Jesus, no interim place where people await their trial and punishment or reward (Lunde 1992: 311)⁷².

The realm of the dead cannot get hold of the righteous people (Merrill 1997: 888). Although the righteous will still die, they won't end up in ᾗδης at all (Lewis 1992: 104-II - 105-II; Jeremias 1965: 148-149). The intrinsic implication of the parable of Lazarus and the dialogue with the thief on the cross is that the righteous will be united with Christ immediately after death in a new resurrection (Luke 16:19-31; 23:43 [Lunde 1992: 308]; cf. Phil 1:23; 2 Cor 5:8)⁷³.

⁷² Cf. “the resurrection of Jesus as a life-giving occurrence” [2.1.3 above] on Jesus' visit to the realm of the dead.

⁷³ In the Persian and Hellenistic world there was a movement towards the identification of two realms for the dead: a realm where the unrighteous will suffer punishment and torment, and a realm for the righteous people, which would be a place of happiness and bliss (Lewis 1992: 104-II; Jeremias 1965: 148). It is not clear if these realms are permanent destinations or just interim “waiting rooms” [cf.

4. Conclusion: life vs. death in the New Testament

- i) Life [and death] in the New Testament still indicates physical life and death. Physical life could either be denoted with the term ζωή (cf. Luke 16:25) or with ψυχή (cf. Acts 27:10).
- ii) The ζωή αἰώνιος becomes an important concept in the New Testament [in contrast to its total absence from the Old Testament]. Life in this sense is interpreted eschatological. The New Testament writers conceived this life to be available already in the present. Who believes in Christ, already partakes in the new aeon. This is evident from the Gospels and from Paul.
- iii) But there is still an unrealised eschatology prevalent, as the fullness of this life will only be experienced in the future. There is thus an eschatological tension between the eternal life [or death] received in the present and the final consummation thereof at the *Parousia*. This future eschatology comes through in some of Paul's letters (cf. 1 Cor. 15; 1 Thess 4:16-18; [Gulley 1992: 111-II]).
- iv) This new life [the new aeon] was brought to this world by Jesus Christ. The life, death and resurrection of Christ now become the deciding factors for participation in the eschatological life (Hagner 1998: 99). Jesus' own life, his miracles and his teaching, are all signs of the arrival of this new aeon.
- v) Obtaining this new life [the ζωή αἰώνιος] has ethical implications. The believer's life must be reframed in the present to come into line with the example set by Jesus (cf. Matt 16:24-28).
- vi) The belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus is central to Christian faith. It is his resurrection that has inaugurated the new life, the new aeon of God (1 Cor 15; [Lorenzen 1995: 115]). John's emphasis on the resurrection is based on the fact that Jesus is the Life and the Resurrection (John 11:25).
- vii) Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ, death's powers over man have been broken. Jesus is now the "Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom 14:9). Whoever believes in Christ, has this life (John 3:36). Death has no power over them (cf. 1 Cor 15:54-55). This does not eliminate

physical death, but ensures that physical death is not the end anymore (Gulley 1992: 110-111·II).

- viii) ᾗδης is not mentioned often in the New Testament. In the New Testament it is distinguished from hell [γέεννα]. It is only an interim place where people go to after death, awaiting the Day of Judgment (Jeremias 1965: 148; Lunde 1992: 310). Jesus doesn't always make that distinction. He sometimes talks about ᾗδης as the place where the unrighteous go immediately after death, in a sense equating ᾗδης and γέεννα (cf. Luke 16:19-31), which shows a development from the view of the Old Testament.

It is important to note the developments and differences in view between the Old Testament and the New Testament, as John also viewed things from a Christological point of view. This change in interpretation is important for our understanding of Revelation as a book of the New Testament. However, we must emphasise again that this is still only part of the broad ecological framework being set up. Even though John was a New Testament writer, he was free to interpret things differently from other New Testament writers. The use of the concept of ζωή in the Gospel of John [as opposed to that of the Synoptic Gospel writers] is a good example of the freedom to reinterpret texts. This is even more evident in a unique book such as Revelation.

CHAPTER 5

LIFE AND DEATH IN REVELATION: A SURVEY

"Grace and peace to you from the One who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first from the dead and the Ruler of the kings of the earth. Unto Him who loves us and, having freed us from our sins by his blood, made us a kingdom, priests for God his Father, unto Him belongs the glory and the power for ever and ever." Rev 1:4-6.⁷⁴

It is important to briefly discuss the framework within which John wrote his book, in order to understand the meaning, importance and interpretation John puts on the concepts of life and death in Revelation. This is, however, not a detail study of the environment for, and context of, Revelation⁷⁵.

1. Background

The Book of Revelation has fascinated scholars and readers for many years. Much has been written about its content, context, message, etc. The high frequency of imagery and the strong influence thereof on the message of Revelation has, however, led to many misinterpretations by scholars through the years (Bauckham 1993b: 22). Adding to this "confusion" has been the lack of attention given to the influence of the Old Testament on the message of Revelation (Beasley-Murray 1997: 1025).

Revelation opens up with the words Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. This suggests that the Book is a revelation [making known] of previously hidden secrets, which is a common feature of apocalyptic documents in general (Du Rand 1991b: 173). For many readers through the ages its message has, however, remained a mystery, a "revelation" hidden behind a plethora of illogical [i.e. to the modern reader] symbols and visions (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985: 35). Jerome already said ages ago that Revelation has just as many secrets as words [as quoted by Caird 1966: 1-2]⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ Free translation from the Greek Text (Aland & Aland 1993).

⁷⁵ For a detail study of this, refer to the list of authors in footnote 9.

⁷⁶ The difficulty in understanding the message of Revelation has led to different interpretation models through the years. It is not the purpose of this thesis to go into these models in depth. For extensive discussions on the different interpretation models, cf. Ladd (1993: 671-675); Du Rand (1991b: 230-250); Mounce (1977:39-45); Pohl (1969: 48-53); Zahn (1986: 1-40), and others.

2. Genre: Apocalypse or prophecy?

The intent is not to re-evaluate the genre of Revelation in detail here. This has already been researched extensively (cf. Aune 1997: lxx-xc; Du Rand 1991b: 177-182; Bauckham 1993b: 1-17; Beasley-Murray 1997: 1025-1027 and many others). This paragraph intends to state the genre within which Revelation should be read, especially with regard to the interpretation of life and death by taking into account the diversity and complexity of the Book.

Although it is generally recognised today that Revelation has a complex genre (cf. Du Rand 1991b: 180), one cannot deny the distinctive apocalyptic features evident throughout this Book. It is the only book in the New Testament that could be deemed to be of an apocalyptic nature [The heading also suggests that the book should be placed within the genre “apocalyptic”; {cf. Aune 1997: lxxxii-lxxxviii for a discussion of apocalyptic features evident in Revelation; cf. also Bauckham 1993b: 9-12 for a discussion of differences with other apocalypses}]. This does not necessarily imply that John borrowed a lot from existing apocalyptic works of his time. It seems that he rather regarded other apocalyptic documents and traditions as just another form of prophecy available to him. Wherever he falls back on these documents, he uses them as vehicles of prophecy (Bauckham 1993b: 5).⁷⁷

However, one must not forget that John’s first acclamation is that he is busy with an eschatological prophecy (Rev 1:3), leading to many scholars arguing for the sole prophetic character of Revelation (Aune 1997: lxxv). Against the background of a prophetic *Heilsgeschichte* John brings a message of hope and comfort to his readers in the face of possible persecution awaiting them in the near future (Mounce 1977: 24). Bauckham (1993b: 5) sees Revelation as the climax of the prophetic tradition, with all the eschatological prophecies of the Old Testament about to be fulfilled, to be seen in

⁷⁷ With regard to the relationship between Revelation and other apocalypses, Bauckham (1993a: xi-xii) says the following: “In the case of the non-canonical apocalypses...the relationship is such that we cannot be sure that John knew any particular apocalypse or expected his readers to do so. The traditions he shares with many of them cannot be pinned down to specific texts to which he makes allusion. Yet the tradition of apocalyptic literature is the living literary tradition to whose form and content he is most indebted”. It is more a case of traditions that were well known, independent of different literary works, and were used by Christian and Jewish apocalyptic writers alike (Bauckham 1993a: 39). In the case of Revelation it is probably correct to also accept that John applied traditions specifically known to his readers in the churches in Asia Minor (Bauckham 1993a: 84).

the light of the already fulfilled eschatological prophecy of the victory of the Lamb, who is the Messiah [cf. also Bauckham 1993a with its notable title “The Climax of Prophecy”].

Without expanding further on the genre of Revelation, it must be noted that Revelation is set in a traditional letter framework, probably acting as a circular letter to the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 1:11 (Aune 1997: lxxii-lxxv; Beasley-Murray 1981: 12-14)⁷⁸. This is important, as it places Revelation within the context of its immediate environment, addressing the situation of the first readers at the end of the first century CE⁷⁹ (Bauckham 1993b: 12-13; Beasley-Murray 1997: 1027-1028). This is in contrast to other apocalypses, which usually state that the revelation received is NOT meant for this generation, but for a future generation [cf. the opening paragraph of 1 Enoch; {Beasley-Murray 1997: 1027}].

In the end, the author of Revelation have synthesised the literary forms generally associated with apocalypses and prophecies through juxtaposition. To this he added a formal greeting and blessing to present it as a letter to the churches in Asia Minor. It is therefore appropriate to call Revelation a Prophetic Apocalypse set within a letter framework (Aune 1997: lxxxix; Bauckham 1993b: 2; Du Rand 1991b: 180).⁸⁰

3. The message of Revelation in short

Beasley-Murray sums up the purpose of Revelation as follows:

“John therefore wrote at the behest of the risen Lord to strengthen the faith and courage of believers, to nerve them for battle with antichristian forces in the world and to help them to bear witness to the one true Lord and Saviour.” (1997: 1035)

⁷⁸ Zahn (1986: 40) sees the whole of Revelation as a letter to the churches in Asia Minor.

⁷⁹ Accepting the dating of Revelation to be around the year 95 (cf. Mounce 1977: 36).

⁸⁰ Newman (1997a: 426) sums the genre of Revelation up as “a literary hybrid [that] communicates on several levels simultaneously. As a letter, Revelation addresses the situation and needs of specific congregations; as a prophetic work, Revelation dialogues with major historical events, albeit obliquely; and as a narrative, characters within Revelation’s narrative...communicate with each other and the author. Revelation is something of a literary symphony.”

It is essentially a message of hope in the midst of a crisis-situation, which is brought to the readers through a magnitude of symbols and visions⁸¹. Symbols and visions are common to apocalyptic literature, but are often not consistently prominent and vary considerably (Du Rand 1991b: 172; Bauckham 1993a: 175). It is important to remember that these symbols were not secret codes unknown to the communities. Most of these symbols were drawn from the familiar environment of the Old Testament and Judaism, with books like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and Amos playing a major role (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 175). These symbols are then reinterpreted and applied to the readers' situation within their specific environment. They are therefore not timeless images, but intend to relate to the world in which the readers live. They "must be read for their theological meaning and their power to evoke response" (Bauckham 1993b: 20). It is therefore important to read and interpret each symbol within the surrounding context of the text as a whole (De Villiers 1988: 130). The meaning of symbols are also determined to a greater or lesser extent by the surrounding symbols into which it has been embedded or which it determines in a hierarchical structure (De Villiers 1988: 131).

It is important to note that the message of Revelation is not given through a description of continuous events in a set chronology. Rather, in the words of Schüssler Fiorenza (1985: 47) it "consists of pieces of mosaic stones arranged in a certain design, which climaxes in a description of the final eschatological event". The message of hope in Revelation can be divided into the following broad categories:

a. Hope for the church amidst crisis

According to Du Rand (1991b: 180-182), Revelation should be read as an ideological document giving direction in the midst of a crisis situation, written in the form of a dramatic narrative, and set within a traditional letter framework (cf. Aune 1997: lxxxix). Written in a crisis situation, Revelation wants to console and strengthen believers amidst troubled times.

For the Christians of John's generation [i.e. around the end of the first century CE] life was made difficult by Roman authorities and non-believers [including Jewish

⁸¹ The difference between Revelation and other apocalypses is, according to Bauckham (1993a: 175), "the sheer quantity of the visionary matter" found in Revelation.

religious people]. There are differences in opinion amongst scholars whether physical persecution of Christians already occurred in an organised manner during John's lifetime (cf. Du Rand 1991a: 584; Aune 1997: lxiv-lxix; Trites 1998: 271). Traces of physical persecution can be seen in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2:13; 3:10; [Mounce 1977: 33]). Other texts also hint on the possible after-effects of persecution (cf. Rev 6:9-11).

The fact is that the believers in Asia Minor perceived themselves to be caught up in a crisis situation in this world, feeling that they are being pressurised into compromising their faith in Christ, either as a result of the threat of persecution or through false doctrines being spread about Christ and faith (Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035; Sweet 1990: 34-35; Du Rand 1991a: 585).

In this crisis John makes extensive use of imagery to draw his readers into a symbolic world whereby their perception of the present is transformed (Bauckham 1993b: 17). There is, however, a tension between the present and the future, which is the result of the contrast between the vision of the future being upheld and the actual experiences by believers in the present world (Collins 1987: 213). This tension is actually created and heightened by the author to make his readers aware of the situation, before it is overcome "in the act of literary imagination" (Collins 1984: 141). The message of Revelation wanted to bolster believers' loyalty and faith in the face of the testing and suffering that might come upon them (Trites 1998: 273).

b. Hope for church into the future

A message of consolation to the believers in present is just one feature of the message of Revelation. John actually addresses a variety of situations that does not necessarily deem to console the readers or give them comfort [cf. the opening of the first four seals in Rev 6:1-8]. However, in these situations Revelation wants to be a document of security and a document of decision. Believers must make decisions that would influence the outcome of their lives in the future (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 15).

A lot of emphasis is placed on believers being "faithful" unto the end or turning back to Christ, especially in the letters to the seven churches (Trites 1998: 273). The followers of Christ cannot expect to avoid sharing in the suffering of the Lamb, but

they must not be distracted by the suffering. In this world there is a constant struggle between death and life, between evil and good, between destruction and creation. For those that persevere the symbols and plot of Revelation promise victory in the end, and new life. However, this life is obtained only on the other side of suffering and death (Collins 1984: 152).

On a story-telling level the message of Revelation could be described as the unfolding of the effect of the sacrifice of the Lamb in the present and the future. This sacrifice guarantees salvation to those persevering in the witness by the Lamb [i.e. Jesus Christ]. At the same time Revelation spells judgment [doom] to those rejecting this sacrifice (Du Rand 1991a: 584). It is a matter of deciding for or against the Lamb (Bauckham 1993b: 15). Although judgmental to a great extent, Revelation “was not written in order to hold threats of damnation before sinners, but to encourage saints to press on, despite all opposition, and to win the inheritance” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 27). It is a book of hope and comfort, not a book of fear (Pohl 1969: 35). Believers are promised a future hope because of a historic victory by Christ. They can therefore live in faith now in the wake of this promised realisation awaiting them in the future.

c. Hope because God reigns victorious forever and ever

In the midst of trials and persecutions the question comes to the reader: Why doesn't God in his almighty power bring an end to the reign of evil in this world? The answer given by John in symbolic language is that this is exactly what is happening. God is still in control and He is currently changing history decisively by a process of salvation and judgment. This process is founded on the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, and it will culminate in the final judgment when the crop will be harvested by the Son of Man (Du Rand 1991a: 590).

The fulcrum of Revelation is not the *parousia* or the New Jerusalem that will descent in the future in the *eschaton* (cf. Rev 21), but the vision of God and the Lamb, which is found in Revelation 4-5 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 25)⁸². It is a vision of God's sovereignty on the one side, but also of God's salvation [through the Lamb that has

⁸² According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 27) the vision of the New Jerusalem as inheritance for believers “is the true climax of the book – its goal”. But this climax is only possible as a result of the sovereign reign and victory proclaimed in Revelation 4 and 5.

been slaughtered but who is now alive – Rev 5:5-6] and glory on the other side (Beasley-Murray 1997: 1035). Sovereignty, soteriology, Christology and eschatology cannot be parted in Revelation. They are all part of the doctrine of God and Christ that Revelation proclaims (Beasley-Murray 1981: 26).

The theology of Revelation is highly theocentric, promoting very strongly the incomparability of the sovereign God (Bauckham 1993b: 23). According to Bauckham (1993b: 40), “(t)he whole of Revelation could be regarded as a vision of the fulfilment of the first three petitions of the Lord’s Prayer”. It is a doxology to the living, divine One who reigns forever, and who has already gained the decisive victory through the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 1:17-18; 5:5-6; 12:11). Added to this is the remarkable extent to which John identifies Christ [the Lamb] with God by interchanging his use of titles for God and Christ, thereby putting Christ effectively on the same level as God (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 54-55; cf. Beale 1997: 337)⁸³.

In Revelation life is the promise that gives hope. This life comes from the living God (Rev 4:9, 10), who gives life to them that have washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14), who [i.e. the Lamb] has won the victory over evil through his blood on the cross (Rev 12:11), but who is now alive (Rev 5:6), and can appropriately be called the Living One (Rev 1:18), who is worthy to open the scroll in the hands of the “One who sits on the throne” (Rev 5:5-6).

4. Eschatology in Revelation: was, is, or to be?

As an apocalyptic prophecy, the eschatology of Revelation is to an extent aimed at the future, and specifically the *eschaton*. The current world, overcome by evil, is transcended to the eschatological future. Through the use of Christian prophetic counter-images the believers are brought to a heavenly vision of the present and of the future (Bauckham 1993b: 17). The focus of believers should rather be on the continuation of life after death in this exalted kingdom than on survival this side of the grave. The grave is not the end. Death only culminates in the new life in the New

⁸³ Cf. Rudolph (2000: 100-101) for a detailed list of Christological titles. It must be remembered that in the whole of the New Testament [i.e. including Revelation] Christian faith presupposes a belief in Jewish monotheism (cf. Deut 6:4). Identifying God and Christ in the New Testament therefore does not imply worshipping a second God, but seeing Jesus Christ as part of the one true God of Israel (Bauckham 1993b: 32). Hurtado (1988: 114) talks about a “binitarian” belief whereby Christ is being given a prominent place in Christian confessions and devotions alongside God.

Jerusalem that God has already prepared for the faithful, and which is revealed to John in Revelation 21 (Du Rand 1991b: 170; Collins 1984: 152).

This does not mean that Revelation is only focussed on the future. The message of Revelation develops between two focal points: Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming. Between these two focal points physical life still continues for believers. Even though the world seems to be overcome by evil, they must live a victorious life, knowing that the result of what will culminate in Christ's second coming is already known [it has already been revealed], as the victory bringing this result about has already been won in the first coming (Rev 5:5-6; 12:11; [Du Rand 1999a: 1770; Beasley-Murray 1981: 25]).

The new creation [new aeon] promised in Revelation 21 has already begun with the death and [specifically] the resurrection of Christ (cf. Rev 3:14; 12:11). Many of the Old Testament prophecies are [implicitly] deemed to have been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the Lamb (cf. Dan 7:13-14 with Rev 1:13; Rev 3:4 with Isa 43:4; [Beale 1997: 337]).

Beale (1997: 337-341) shows that the whole of Revelation is actually a movement between past, present and future eschatology. Although believers must focus upon the eschatological future, they must already live, in this day, a victorious life. Only those that persevere in witnessing [martyrdom?] until the end will win this victory on earth (Beale 1997: 339).

It is a fight of life and death now and in the near future, a time of tribulation, which will come over the whole world (Rev 3:10), in which believers must continue to live their lives of faith and obedience (Pohl 1969: 21). It is in this sense that the concepts of life and death play an important role throughout the Book of Revelation, conveying the message of hope and comfort [but also an exhortation to obedience] so that believers would have the courage to persevere until the end.

5. Life and death in Revelation

This paragraph is not a detail analysis of the concepts of life and death in Revelation. It is only a preliminary analysis of the different views on life and death that John

gives in Revelation, in order to set up a framework for the rest of this study. The detail analysis and exegesis of the texts will be done within this broad framework [cf. also Annexure B.1].

If, in the words of Pohl (1969: 21), the immediate future for the readers of Revelation is “einen Kampf auf Leben und Tod”, then it stands that the concepts of life and death are central to the understanding of the overall message of Revelation. This is further supported by the frequency of occurrences of the terminology for life and death in Revelation (cf. Annexure A.1-A.3). Just as in all the other literature discussed earlier in the thesis, life and death is more than just the presence [or absence] of a “living body”. The concepts of life and death are used differently within different contexts, throughout the Book of Revelation: it could be used to describe physical life or death, spiritual life [or death], or life [or death] in eternity.

The different meanings that life [and death] takes on in Revelation can be arranged under the following headings. This is then also the division for the discussion of life and death in detail in the following chapters:

5.1. God and life

This is a central starting point for any discussion on life and death in probably any Book of the Bible. God is life, the living God [אלהים חיים - living God {or חייהוה}]; Deut 5:26; 2 Kgs 19:4; Jer 10:10; (Bultmann, Von Rad & Bertram 1965: 16); τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων - Rev 4:9, 10]. He is the First and the Last, i.e. the God of eternity, depicted in very strong terminology in Revelation (Rev 1:4; 1:8; 4:8; 4:9; 5:1; 21:6; etc.; cf. Isa 41:4; 43:10; 48:12, etc.). He is also the only living God (Isa 45:5-6), to whom all glory and worship belongs (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 140). Specifically in Revelation God is portrayed as the absolute holy, righteous and sovereign God (cf. Rev 4; [Bauckham 1993b: 40]). Only from His hand can the people receive the living water (Rev 21:6; [Du Rand 1999a: 1770]).

5.2. The living Lamb

Attached to the sovereign power and glory of God, is the salvation He has brought to the world. Christ [the Lamb] established God’s kingdom on earth through the victory that was won on the cross and through his resurrection, but it will only be finalised at

the *parousia* in the future (Rev 11:15; [Bauckham 1993b: 67]). It is only through this victory that eternal life becomes a possibility for the believer (Rev 12:11). One very distinctive feature of Revelation is the way in which John identifies Christ with God, the One who is the eternal living (cf. 1:17; 22:13; [Bauckham 1993b: 26]).

5.3. *Physical life and death*

Despite the strong focus on symbolic language and spiritual liveliness, physical life and death does not disappear from Revelation. The reality of death as an intruder in God's plan for creation now becomes part of a new struggle: a struggle for life and death between God's chosen people [those marked with the seal of God] and the evil powers under control of the beast [cf. specifically Rev 11-13 for a portrayal of the reign of the beast]. As a result of this struggle many believers lost [and will still lose] their lives in martyrdom (cf. Rev 2:13).

But it is not only the people of God that dies. Many people die when God's wrath spread across the world in the opening of the seals, the blowing of the trumpets and the casting of the bowls (cf. Rev 6:1-8; 8:6-9:21; 16:1-21). The message to believers is that they must hold onto their faith until the end so that, despite the possibility of physical death, they could partake in eternal life [cf. the letters to the churches in Rev 2-3]. Physical death for believers is not the end, because they have a promise of another life, a life in eternity, awaiting them in the presence of God in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21-22). They will be safe with Christ on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1-5), even though they might lose their lives at the hand of the beast and his evil powers (Rev 13:15).

5.4. *Eternal life [and death] and spiritual life [and death]*

It is not physical existence that is important. What is important is if life is of such a nature that it could withstand the powers of evil and death. That is why the ethical call is so strong in Revelation [cf. the call to the churches to persevere in the letters of Rev 2-3]. Those who persevere will not be destroyed, even by physical death [cf. Rev 13:15 with Rev 14:1-4]. Through the resurrection of Christ, the Living One, physical death becomes nothing more than a thoroughfare to life in eternity in God's kingdom (Rev 1:18).

Eternal life [and spiritual life] is the life that is, in the end, determined by the relationship with God and Christ. Because God is life [see 5.1 above], life as an existence before God can only really exist in relation to God. Life in relationship with God enables the believer to participate in the new aeon of God, thereby sharing in the life received from God. Outside of this participation death prevails, even though life seems to be present in every aspect (cf. Rev 3:1). It is this life that Revelation constantly proclaims, which believers must be part of, so that they can be sure of receiving eternal life, even if death comes their way (Rev 7:9-17).

5.5. *The death of Death*

Revelation comes to a powerful conclusion in chapters 20 and 21 with the announcement that Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire on the Day of Judgment (Rev 20:14), and will not exist any more to harass the people of God (Rev 21:4). They will suffer, together with the unbelievers, the second death, a death in eternity (Rev 20:14). This underlines that death is important in Revelation only as the antithesis to life, something that needs to be removed so that life in its fullness could be received and enjoyed.

The final conclusion of Revelation is then a metaphor of eternal life in the presence of God, without any fear of death or tribulation, where no mention is even made of the existence of death any more (Rev 22). This is where the eschatological hope of the believers should be focussed upon. Everyone who participates in the realm of God will share in the everlasting life of the New Jerusalem.

6. Summary

- i) The understanding of life and death in Revelation must be read against the background of the genre of the Book. Revelation has a complex genre, but in broad terms could be classified under the genre of apocalyptic literature (Du Rand 1991b: 181). John, however, proclaims to be communicating a prophecy (Rev 1:3), which he sets within a letter framework.
- ii) The message of Revelation is essentially a message of hope amidst persecution and troubled times in general. Believers are motivated to stay strong and faithful in spite of the crisis-situation. Only those that persevere

unto the end will partake in the victory that Christ has already won on the cross and through his resurrection (Rev 2-3; 5:5-6).

- iii) The whole of Revelation is a movement between past, present and future eschatology (Beale 1997: 337-341). Although believers must focus upon the eschatological future, they must already live, in this day, a victorious life (Beale 1997: 339).
- iv) Life and death are central concepts in proclaiming Revelation's message of hope and comfort, but are interpreted differently throughout Revelation. For purposes of this thesis life and death can broadly be divided in the following sub-sections:
 - a. God and Life, proclaiming God as the One Living God who reigns forever and ever.
 - b. Christ the living Lamb, the One through whose death and resurrection God has worked his salvation to bring hope.
 - c. Physical life and death, which is still part of this world.
 - d. Eternal life and spiritual life, focussing on the *real life*, i.e. what life really is: a life in relationship with God leading into eternity in the presence of God.
 - e. The death of Death at the *parousia*. After this there will be only eternal life for the people of God in the all-encompassing presence of God.

Within this broad context set up in Chapters 2 to 6 a detail exegesis can now be done on the texts identified in Annexure B.1 as relevant for a study of life and death in Revelation. The usage of, and differences to Old Testament and New Testament texts, will be discussed as the study progresses, when applicable for a specific text.



CHAPTER 6

THE ONE WHO IS: GOD AND LIFE IN REVELATION

"Lord God Almighty, how great and wonderful are your deeds. King of the nations, how right and true are your ways. Who will not stand in awe of you, Lord? Who will refuse to declare your glory? You alone are holy." Rev 15:3-4.⁸⁴

God is the central figure in Revelation. He is the main character of the Book (Rotz & Du Rand 1999: 94). The focus is not on "something" but on "someone", the eternal living One (Coetzee 1990b: 267). God is the One who is behind everything that happens in Revelation. Although the opening verse states that this is the revelation of Jesus Christ [which is given to John through the mouth of an angel – cf. Rev 1:1], it is essentially a revelation that **God gave Him** to give to John (Rev 1:1). Therefore: God is the ultimate source of the ἀποκάλυψις (Newman 1997a: 427). With this "highly theocentric theology" (Bauckham 1993b: 23) in mind the best place to start a study on life and death in Revelation is with God Himself.

However: one must keep in mind that John puts Jesus constantly on the same level as God [cf. Chapter 5, section 3(c); Bauckham (1993b: 54-55)]. Christ therefore becomes just as much the divine source of the revelation.

1. Revelation's portrayal of God

The purpose is not to develop a Johannine doctrine of God here, as this could be the subject of yet another study. But taking cognisance of John's portrayal of God will tell us a lot about the role of God in relation to life and death in Revelation.

Revelation uses the most varied terminology for God to be found in the entire New Testament (Newman 1997a: 426). The most important of these titles are ὁ θεὸς [96 times], ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος [5 times], τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ [twice], ὁ παντοκράτωρ [9 times], κύριος [21 times], and ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου [occurs seven times in this form, but various occurrences is found in different combinations (Bauckham 1993b: 31; cf. Newman 1997a: 426; Witherington 1997:

⁸⁴ Taken from the *Good News Bible*.

672)]. All of these titles express God's glory, holiness, transcendence, in fact his all-embracing power and sovereignty over everything.

1.1. The incomparable God

Throughout the Book of Revelation God is portrayed as the Almighty, incomparable, sovereign, eternal God (Du Rand 1997: 68). The powerful title $\acute{\omicron}$ παντοκράτωρ is used nine times to refer to God⁸⁵, designating Him as the One ultimately in control of everything. He is the ultimate Victor in the struggle with the evil in this world. He is the omnipotent God, who cannot be matched by anyone in creation (Newman 1997a: 427; Du Rand 1991a: 589)⁸⁶. His unchallenged power and sovereignty is in stark contrast to the unsuccessful attempts by the beast to dethrone Him (cf. Rev 12-13).

Already in the Old Testament God was called the "Lord, the God of hosts" (יהוה צבאות) [e.g. 2 Sam 5:10; Jer 5:14; Hos 12:5; Am 3:13; 4:13; Isa 6:3)]⁸⁷, indicating Yahweh's unrivalled power over all things, his majesty in contrast to the rulers of this world (Aune 1997: 57-59). John therefore links up with the Old Testament portrayal of God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.1 and 3.2.2], also stating God's unrivalled position in relation to the evil opponents of his reign (Newman 1997a: 426; Aune 1997: 57-59). It indicates Yahweh's supremacy over the course of history and historical events. It is not a theoretical supremacy, but one that is founded in God's actions in history (Du Rand 1999b: 40-41).

In this way John brings continuity with the prophetic faith in the God of the Old Testament as the Lord of all nations (Bauckham 1993b: 30; Beasley-Murray 1981: 60).⁸⁸ It is a message of hope: the God who controls history and who has, through history, showed his sovereign control, is the God that will safeguard them, and in whom believers can trust, amidst looming persecution (Mounce 1977: 73).

⁸⁵ Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22.

⁸⁶ Bauckham (1993b: 30), however, does not see it as a designation of God's abstract "omnipotence", rather of His "actual control over all things" (cf. also Mounce 1977: 73).

⁸⁷ In the LXX the term occurs nearly 170 times of which most is a translation of the Hebrew words יהוה צבאות and שדי. The only occurrence of the title in the New Testament [outside of Revelation] is found in 2 Cor 6:18 (a quotation from Am 3:13) (Aune 1997: 58).

⁸⁸ It must be remembered that in Revelation, in fact in the whole of the New Testament, Christian faith in God presupposes Jewish monotheism (Bauckham 1993b: 32; cf. Dunn 1991: 19-20).



1.2. *The God beyond time*

Two important titles used for God in Revelation are ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος⁸⁹ and τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ [cf. above]. These two titles probably have the same meaning (Bauckham 1993b: 26). They intend to confirm God's transcendence beyond time and space. He precedes everything, as He is the Creator of everything that exists, also of time. It is only by His will that the world exists (Rev 4:11; [Newman 1997a: 427]). And the last word, the new creation in the *eschaton*, will also belong to Him (Bauckham 1993b: 27; Beasley-Murray 1981: 60-63). He is clothed in divine eternity (cf. Deut 32:29; [Aune 1997: 32-33; Bauckham 1993b: 28-29]).

But the message is simultaneously that the One who is beyond time and has created time actually still controls time in the present (Newman 1997a: 427; Pohl 1969: 83). The use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet [or the Hebrew alphabet] was a common way to refer to the entirety of something (Charles 1920a: 20). As a personal title τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ suggests more than just a connection with the first and the last things, but presumes that everything in between is also included herein [cf. also a common referral to the keeping of the *aleph* and *tau* of the Law; (Mounce 1977: 73; Charles 1920a: 20; cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 59)].

The title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος reminds us of the Old Testament self-designation by God in Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am", which was understood in later Jewish interpretations to refer to the divine name for God, an interpretation for the name Yahweh (Bauckham 1993b: 28; Charles 1920a: 10). In this sense it is quite interesting to note that the only time God speaks in Revelation is when He reveals Himself in the eternal self-designation τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ (Rev 1:8; 21:6). In Isaiah 44:6, where the same title is used for God, the reference is to God as the sole Creator and the sovereign Lord of history. God precedes all things; and God will eventually bring all things to its conclusion (Bauckham 1993b: 27). With this John "appears to be authenticating his prophetic book by claiming that its actual source is none other than ὁ ὢν" who revealed Himself personally, much in the same way as Moses was

⁸⁹ Cf. Revelation 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5. This designation was probably familiar to Jews in Asia Minor, as can be deduced from an altar inscription in Pergamon (Aune 1997:30). Aune (1997: 33) also refers to the possibility of a common liturgical tradition shared by Christians, Jews and Greco-Romans alike from which these common titles could have been drawn.

told by God to use the divine name “I am who I am” as authenticity for his message to Israel in Egypt (Aune 1997: 31).

God Almighty is not only the One who transcends time and who will still be there in the future even after everything else has passed away. He also comes from the future to work His gracious and powerful will in the present (Beasley-Murray 1981: 54). ὁ ἐρχόμενος does not only refer to the God of the future, but also refers to the future that He is bringing [and promising to bring] with his second coming. The future is in this sense linked to God’s “coming to the world in salvation and judgment”. Hereby John links up the Old Testament prophetic promises of God’s coming to save and judge with the *parousia* of Christ (e.g. Ps 96:13; Isa 40:10; 66:15; Zech 14:5; [Bauckham 1993b: 29]), thereby giving believers hope for their future salvation.

1.3. The sovereign Ruler

In spite of the overwhelming titles used, direct descriptions of God are to a great extent absent throughout Revelation. Very little is seen and said about the appearance of God (cf. Rev 4:1-3). The closest description we have is the all-important ὁ καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου (cf. Rev 4:9; 5:1, 7, 13; 6:16; 7:15; 21:5)⁹⁰, which is a vision probably inspired by Ezekiel 1:26 (Bauckham 1993b: 33; Aune 1997: 285). In his call-vision Ezekiel sees something that resembled a throne in heaven, and on this “throne” there was something “that looked like a human being”, which was Ezekiel’s vision of God in heaven (GNB – Ezek 1:26; [cf. Zimmerli 1979: 122]).

Sitting on a throne is a sign of the highest designation (Pohl 1969: 161; Beasley-Murray 1981: 112-113). It is the seating-place for kings and judges, the place from where they make rulings and give orders. Seeing God sitting on the throne identifies Him as the King of kings and the Judge of all judges (Groenewald 1986: 75; Newman 1997a: 427). As sovereign Ruler He rules in righteousness, and as the sovereign Judge He will judge “just and true” (Rev 16:5; 19:2). He is the only One powerful

⁹⁰ The καθήμενος- ἐπὶ actually occurs 27 times in different combinations in Revelation. These titles act as circumlocutions for the name of God, as it is not used in connection with any other names to identify it is a designation for God (Aune 1997: 284). The throne plays such an important role that the throne scene dominates at the beginning of each “act” in Revelation (Du Rand 1997: 70).

enough to render judgment. His judgment is described in ominous terms in Revelation (cf. Rev 6:17; 14:10; 16:19, etc; [Newman 1997a: 428])⁹¹.

But “seeing” is also made relative. What John sees, is not the appearance of God, but the appearance of his sovereign rule, which he describes in the majestic throne room scene in Revelation 4 (Bauckham 1993b: 33). God’s incomparable, untouchable holiness and power is kept intact by never revealing the mystery that surrounds Him (Newman 1997a: 427).

No detail description is given of Him in Revelation. What can be made known about God is expressed in the descriptions of that which is around the throne (Bauckham 1993b: 32). The majestic images around the throne of the rainbow (Rev 4:3), the seven torches of fire (Rev 4:5), the sea of glass (Rev 4:6), and the golden altar (Rev 8:3), as well as the multitude of heavenly beings surrounding the throne in continuous worship and praise of God, enhance the image of the ruling power of God (cf. Newman 1997a: 427-428). Furthermore, God only speaks twice in the entire Book of Revelation (i.e. Rev 1:8; 22:1-5). So ominous is his power, He barely has to talk to be able to rule.

The throne, of course, is itself central in Revelation as a symbol of God’s sovereignty, his royal power and his authority (Bauckham 1993b: 31; Beasley-Murray 1981: 112). It is mentioned in total 42 times in Revelation (Newman 1997a: 427). The throne is also quite common in Jewish apocalypses (Dan 7:9-10; 1 En 14; 60:1-6; 71; 2 En 20-21). John is shown this throne vision in Revelation so that he can inform his readers that God’s sovereignty is already visible in heaven. It just needs to be acknowledged on earth in the same manner (Bauckham 1993b: 31).⁹²

⁹¹ It is these passages of judgment that has made Revelation a threatening and fearful book for many a reader, misunderstanding the wrath of God as aimed at everyone, while Revelation makes it explicitly clear that the wrath of God is only aimed at the unrighteous and the evil powers of this world, everyone whose names are not written into the book of the living (Rev 20:15). Those who have been marked with the seal of God will be safe and alive, regardless if they die in this world (Rev 7). It is a matter of reading the text and the symbols not in isolation, but within the wider context of the message John wants to convey to the readers of the Book of Revelation.

⁹² Actually the entire throne-room vision is an exhibition of divine sovereignty and authority. Throne-room visions are common in prophetic as well as apocalyptic literary contexts of early Judaism. These visions are mostly based on the conception of the ancient Mesopotamian divine council [also to be found in Ugarit and Phoenicia and Israel]. The focus is always on God enthroned in his heavenly court, where He is surrounded by a multitude of heavenly beings. The throne-room is the place from where

1.4. Summary on God in Revelation

The sovereign power of God is evident in Revelation. Just the manner in which John uses the name $\acute{\omicron}$ $\theta\epsilon\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$ suggests that, above all else, God is the central figure in the Book of Revelation (Coetzee 1990b: 271). John tries to portray God for the believers in words reminiscent of the Old Testament portrayal of the sovereign God who controls everything, the only living God. The greatness of God's all-embracing power is stressed in strong symbolic language (Newman 1997a: 427). The extravagant images portray God as "the most majestic, commanding and potent being in Revelation's hierarchy of beings" (Newman 1997a: 428). There must be no doubt in the minds of believers that God is the Almighty King who reigns and to whom belongs all the glory and praise $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon\delta\varsigma$ $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\alpha\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon\omega$ $\alpha\iota\omega\nu\omega\nu$ (Rev 5:13), as He is the eternal God. He is the God beyond time, the Creator of time.

The creation exists for God, and He will work His redemptive actions [i.e. through the victory won by the Lamb – Rev 5:5-6; 12:11] to recover or recreate his creation to its perfect state in a new creation (Rev 21-22; Beasley-Murray 1981: 108]). God's redemptive actions in history will not just defeat his enemies with power, but will also ensure the safeguarding of those who have been marked by the seal of God on their foreheads (Rev 7:3-4, 9-17; [Newman 1997a: 426-427]).

2. God and life

The image of God has not changed throughout the Biblical message. The sovereign God of Revelation is also the sovereign God of the Old Testament [cf. 3.1, Chapter 2]. This can be seen in the way John utilises titles and imagery for God reminiscent of Old Testament language [e.g. imagery in Rev 4:3, i.e. the text regarding the rainbow around the throne, comes from Ezek 1:28, but with a strong colouring of the covenant message of Gen 6, i.e. when God gave the rainbow as a sign to Noah, reminding him that He will never destroy the world again through a flood {cf. Bauckham 1993b: 51;

God announces his will and where He reigns as "Judge, King, Magistrate, and Executive" (Ford 1975: 77). Prophets were sometimes thought to attend these councils and then "return to earth" afterwards to announce the will of God to the people on earth (cf. Jer 23:18, 22; Am 3:7; 1 Kgs 22:19-22 = 2 Chr 18:18-22; Job 15:8) (Aune 1997: 276-277).

Michaels 1997: 853}]⁹³. The message of hope that comes with this is quite clear: the God of the Old Testament is just as much in control as He was in the past.

The use of the title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος wants to remind believers, among other possible meanings, that the God of history is the God of today, and He will be the God of the future. His sovereignty just needs to be acknowledged on earth in the same way as John has seen it being acknowledged in heaven in the throne-room vision of Revelation 4 (Bauckham 1993b: 31).

Presenting the God of Revelation as the God of the Old Testament does not necessarily mean a linear comparison between the texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The language and thoughts of the Old Testament are not just “preserved and reaffirmed but transformed” by John in Revelation (Michaels 1997: 852; cf. Pohl 1969: 32).

The reflection on God and life [and death] could be looked upon in a similar fashion [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2]. If God is the sovereign God, it can be taken that He reigns supreme over life and death. He is not just the Creator, but also the One that can [and will] bring about a new creation through the redemptive actions of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (Bauckham 1993b: 48-53). As Bauckham (1993b: 48) puts it in his theology on Revelation: “As Creator He alone has ultimate power over everything”. This is possible only because God is the “living God”, the first and the last, the only God (Isa 45:5-6; Deut 5:26; Jer 10:10; etc)⁹⁴.

2.1. The living God in Revelation

The term “living God” appears 43 times in the Old Testament (Ringgren 1980: 339). This phrase is taken up again by John in Revelation. In Revelation God is called “the living One” five times [cf. Annexure B.1]. The actual title “living God” is, however, only found in Revelation 7:2. All five of the occurrences are found in the main body of the book, i.e. Revelation 4:1-22:9.

⁹³ The same could be applied to the images when the wrath of God is poured out onto the earth, which is reminiscent again of the plagues on Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Then there are the titles for God, which could be taken back to Old Testament names for God [cf. point 1 on the portrayal of God above]. In many ways therefore John wants to reiterate that the God who was faithful in the Old Testament will be faithful to believers now.

⁹⁴ Cf. also Chapter 2, 3.2.2.

These are the only texts in Revelation where something is said about God and life in Revelation [i.e. something being said about the “life of God”].⁹⁵ In four of these cases the title is expanded upon with the addition of εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (Rev 4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7). This qualification places the term “living God” in a temporal category. It is, however, not a temporal existence that can be measured, as it surpasses the measurements of time, running into eternity. The only time John does not use the qualification εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων is in Revelation 7:2, where we find the explicit title “the living God” [cf. Annexure B.1], which in any case implies eternal existence [cf. God and life in the Old Testament – Chapter 2, 3.2.2).

2.1.1. *The living God in the theophany of Revelation 4*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 4 constitutes the start of a new stage in the revelatory vision of John. After the letters to the seven churches (i.e. Rev 2-3) the scene shifts from an earthly reality to a heavenly vision in Revelation 4:1-2a. The letters gave hope to a church having to face reality. The next vision (i.e. Rev 4-5) wants to give hope in spite of reality, because God is in control. With the heavenly visions John wants to present his readers with a new perspective on reality. It must be seen from the viewpoint of God reigning supreme [cf. Chapter 5, subsection 3].

Aune (1997: 275-276) places Revelation 4:1-6:17 into a single unit set in the heavenly throne-room. The text markers framing this unit are the phrases μετὰ ταῦτα in Revelation 4:1 and μετὰ τοῦτο in Revelation 7:1⁹⁶. Within this frame Revelation 4-5 forms a separate sub-unit as a combined theophany [and christophany]. It is clear that a new sub-section starts again in Revelation 6:1 with the opening of the seals (Aune 1997: 275-276). Schematically Revelation 4 fits into the main body of the Book as follows⁹⁷:

⁹⁵ Of course, as God is the eternal living One, nothing is mentioned about God and death in Revelation, just like in the Old Testament and the rest of the New Testament [cf. also Chapter 2]. God is life, he cannot die.

⁹⁶ According to Aune (1997: 276) this prepositional phrase is only used in Revelation to indicate major breaks in texts. μετὰ + accusative is used eleven times in Revelation as a marker of a point of time closely related to a prior point of time (Aune 1997: clxxxiii).

⁹⁷ Cf. Aune: 1997 on the detail structure of Revelation 1-5.

4:1-22:9	Disclosure of God's eschatological plan
4:1-2a	John's heavenly ascent
4:2b-5:14	Vision of the heavenly throne-room
4:2b-11	Heavenly worship of God
5:1-14	Investiture of the Lamb
6:1-17	the first six seals
7:1-17	the sealing of the 144 000
8:1-11-14	seventh seal and first six trumpets
11:15-16:21	seven trumpets and seven bowls
17:1-19:10	Revelation of the judgment of Babylon
19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
21:9-22:9	Vision of the New Jerusalem

Revelation 4 is a theophany of the almighty God as Creator and King of the universe. This theophany forms part of the fulcrum of the Book of Revelation [i.e. Chapters 4 and 5], which is an exalted vision of the throne-room in heaven and of God and the Lamb in the throne-room (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 25). It forms the pivot from where the rest of the visions dovetail into the main structure of the book (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). The centrality of these two chapters within the message of the Book of Revelation makes the interpretation that is given here [i.e. in Rev 4-5] to the meaning of life important for the understanding of life [and death] in Revelation.

It is an exalted vision of God in his transcendent majesty, reigning supreme over all (Beasley-Murray 1981: 25). The entire chapter overflows with continuous praise and worship to God Almighty. His majesty and exalted power is far removed from anything on earth. It is as if John cannot find the proper words to explain the sovereignty of the most-high God sufficiently. It is not a deistic view of a faraway God who has no concern for and contact with his creation⁹⁸, but a vision that concentrates on the only God whose glory and majesty cannot in any way be deflected or harmed by anything happening on earth (Beasley-Murray 1981: 109; cf. Mounce 1977: 140).

⁹⁸ The non-deistic view is confirmed in Revelation 5 when we see God in his redemptive power through the blood of the Lamb, making personal contact in revealing Himself and saving his people.



The importance of this throne-room vision should not be underestimated [cf. also footnote 92 above]. It is not just a loosely attached worship-insert. The revelation of God's ultimate power follows on the call to persevere amidst the troubled times in the present. It is essentially a confession of God as Creator and of his creative power. In terms of Judaic and early Christian thought, God as Creator also implied that He continues to exercise ultimate power over his creation (Bauckham 1993b: 47-48). This is made quite clear in the final worship-song in Chapter 4 [specifically Rev 4:11c], where the entire creation is put under God's will and power (Beasley-Murray 1981: 109; Bauckham 1993b: 47).⁹⁹

The understanding of God as Creator was not only historical. There was also an eschatological hope attached to it. As Bauckham (1993b: 48) puts it:

“If God was the transcendent source of all things, he could also be the source of quite new possibilities for his creation in the future. Creation is not confined for ever to its own immanent possibilities. It is open to the fresh creative possibilities of its Creator. This is how the hope for resurrection was possible.”

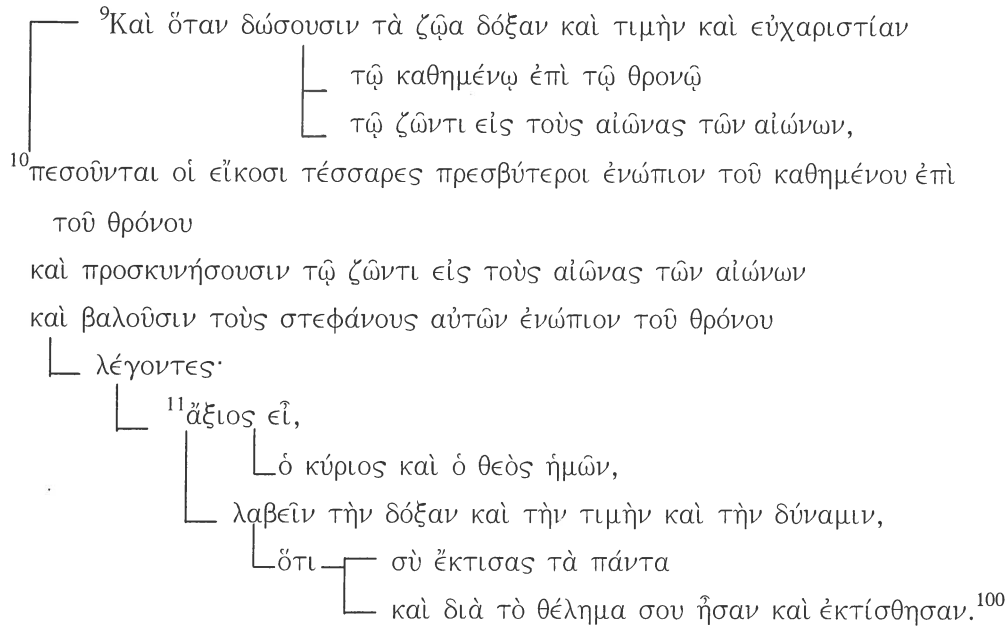
It is precisely because of this ultimate creative power that the rest of the Revelation is possible (Beasley-Murray 1981: 119). In the midst of the seemingly uncontrollable situation in which the church finds itself, the message of the vision is that “the course of history is not determined by political power but by God enthroned and active” (Mounce 1977: 131). Being active is important. God as Creator is not silent, but is continuously acting [intervening] on behalf of his creation. He is not just aware of what is happening, but is actively involved in the making of history. He participates in the realm of his creation. The fact that each of the three series of judgmental executions is preceded by a vision of the heavenly throne-room (cf. Rev 4:1-5:14; 8:1-5; 15:1-8), wants to emphasise that whatever happens in the future, God is in control. Everything will still happen under his sovereign reign (Du Rand 1999a: 1778).

⁹⁹ Cf. however 4 Ezra 6:55, 59; 7:11; 2 Baruch 14:19; 15:7; 21:24. In these passages the idea is expressed that creation came about on account of man, or at least on account of the righteous in Israel. But the general notion in the Old Testament is that God, and He alone, is the Creator of all things (Charles 1920a: 134; Beasley-Murray 1981: 119).

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

A syntactical analysis of the text of Revelation 4:9-11 could be done as follows:



The two phrases in verses 9 and 10 [τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρονῷ and τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων] are part of an explanatory sentence concluding the worship of God by the four living creatures (Rev 4:8), simultaneously leading into the worship by the 24 elders (Rev 4:11) (cf. Aune 1997:307-308).

The main focus is on the elders that fall down in front of the throne to worship the living God [the One who is sitting on the throne]. There is progression in the description of the worship by the 24 elders: whilst they fall down and worship, they put their crowns down and then they proclaim the worthiness of the living God. It is the first time in Revelation that the verbs πίπτειν and προσκυνεῖν are paired to describe two stages of a single act of adoration (Aune 1997: 308).

The reaction of the elders is directed towards the proclamation of the worthiness of God. Verse 9 [when the four living beings give...] explains the “timing” of the worship by the 24 elders. The context of the text, which is that of worship and the

¹⁰⁰ All Greek texts used in these analyses have been incorporated from *The Greek New Testament* (Aland, et al 1983) as compiled in LLS (1997).

heavenly court and God on his throne immediately suggests that the understanding of life here falls within the divine realm of eternity.

According to Aune (1997: 307) verse 9 is a hymnic summary of the doxology to God in Revelation 4:8. It has all the general features of a doxology: i) the divinity to whom praise is given [i.e. God] is written in the dative [τῷ καθημένῳ....]; ii) specific attributes listed, of which δόξα is the most prominent, is usually in the nominative [δόξαν καὶ τιμὴν καὶ εὐχαριστίαν]; iii) a formula explaining that the time the divinity will possess these attributes will be unending [εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων]. It is only the concluding “amen” that is missing from the standard text¹⁰¹ (Aune 1997: 307).

b) “He who lives forever and ever”

The phrase τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων [He who lives forever and ever] occurs twice in the throne-room vision of Revelation 4, i.e. in verses 9 and 10. It also occurs in Revelation 10:6 and 15:7 and is drawn from the LXX of Daniel 4:34 and 12:7 (Osborne 2002: 239). Text-critically there are no major optional changes proposed for the two verses [i.e. Rev 4:9 and 10], and with regard to the specific phrases referring to “the living God” there are no text-critical notes to be considered (Aland & Aland 1993: 641). One can therefore work with the text as presented.

God is “the One that lives forever” [τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων]. This is a typical acclamation in Johannine literature. In 1 John 5:20 He is the ζῶν αἰώνιος (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 340)¹⁰². In terms of God one can actually talk about the possession of life in an absolute sense. God didn’t receive life from anybody. It is part of his being (Van der Watt 1986a: 299)¹⁰³. This life is not to be compared to the known earthly existence. Life when applied [linked] to God gets an entirely new meaning. It is divine life, and cannot be equated at all with human existence¹⁰⁴ (Van

¹⁰¹ Which is added on by some manuscripts to the text of Revelation 4:10 (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 641; Aune 1997: 273).

¹⁰² Cf. Brown (1982: 626), who ascribes this title to Christ. God possesses eternal life in Himself (cf. John 5:26; 6:57) and therefore does not need to be ascribed life.

¹⁰³ In his commentary on the Gospel of John in *Bybellennium*, Van der Watt (1999: 1318) calls life a special quality of God.

¹⁰⁴ The *trisagion* in Revelation 4:8 also sets God apart from all other beings, declaring his divine holiness above all other beings (Mounce 1977: 139). According to Aune (1997: 306) the three-times “holy” [i.e. *trisagion*] must be said before it is possible to invoke the name of God [the name Yahweh

der Watt 1986a: 442). Being the living God, He is also the One who possesses life-giving power (John 5:21). He gives life to people [He created life!], and can restore life if it has been lost, because He has total control thereof (Van der Watt 1986a: 300; [cf. Chapter 4, 2.1.1 and Van der Watt (2003: 133-134)]).

The phrase τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων is an epithet of God, and is used four times in Revelation (Aune 1997: 307). τῷ ζῶντι is not a title in Revelation 4:9 [neither is it in Rev 4:10], but stands in direct relation to the all-important circumlocution for God used with it in this verse, i.e. τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ. It is therefore also written in the dative case [cf. discussion above for the reason for the use of the dative].

The phrase τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων [Rev 4:9] is the first instance where the “One who is sitting on the throne” is explained further with an epithet. τῷ ζῶντι... here does not want to identify God to the reader, as the circumlocution [τῷ καθημένῳ...] already does that (Aune 1997: 284). The “One who is sitting on the throne”, and to whom all the glory and honour belongs, is worshipped as the One who is also the eternal living God. Worship is the appropriate response to honour the eternal being of God (Mounce 1977: 139).

In verse 10 the epithet τῷ ζῶντι is not just an extension of the circumlocution, but is used separate with an extended phrase in the sentence. In this case it is not determined by the case of the circumlocution in verse 10, but acts as a further explanation thereof. It is used in verse 10 as a dative of direct object with the verb προσκυνέω (Aune 1997: clxxv). The verb προσκυνέω forms a continuous action with the verb πεσοῦνται in Revelation 4:10a, which implies that the falling down and the worship are directed at the same person. In both instances [i.e. verses 9 and 10], therefore, the epithets [τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων] must be read in conjunction with the preceding circumlocution.

was never pronounced in Jewish discussions, as it was regarded to be too holy to pronounce], thereby further emphasising the holiness and incomparability of God (Tg Deut 32:3). It is actually foreign to the Old Testament, occurring only in the Masorete Text of Isaiah 6:3 (Ford 1975: 75). It is, however, a more familiar worship cry in apocalyptic literature (cf. Aune 1997: 304-305).

The phrase εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων explains “the One that lives” [τῷ ζῶντι] further. Referring to God as “living forever” occurs quite often in the Old Testament (Deut 5:26; 32:39-40; Isa 57:15; Dan 4:34; 12:7; [cf. also Chapter 2, 3.2.2]) but “living forever and ever” seems to be a phrase foreign to Old Testament writings (Aune 1997: 307-308; Ford 1975: 75; cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 26-27). However, the phrase is found more often throughout the New Testament (Gal 1:51; Phil 4:20; Heb 13:21, etc.; cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 26). It is a phrase that positions God beyond and above creation time. It describes in temporal terms God’s eternal being, which is not to be limited by any time span at all (Newman 1997a: 427).

Brown (1966: 4) could probably be correct when he says in his commentary on John 1:1 that the pre-existence of God proclaimed in the first verse of the Gospel is rather a qualitative designation “of the sphere of God” than a temporal expression of existence. The implication is that as God is life, He cannot be explained at all in temporal terms. God’s existence cannot be defined in time, as He surpasses time, past and future. The exaggerated formula εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων [living forever and ever] stresses this eternity [everlasting life, living for evermore, even hinting on “still living after forever more” – see Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 26-27] very strong.

c) The living Creator and King

A further link must be made between the ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος [the One who was and who is and who is to come] in the doxology of Revelation 4:8 and the “one who lives forever and ever” in Revelation 4:9. As discussed in 1.2 above [“the God beyond time”], the first-mentioned phrase refers to the eternity of God, the One that existed from before beginning to [after] end. τῷ ζῶντι... here just puts into other words what ὁ ὢν καὶ... said in the doxology: the eternal God is the Almighty God who still reigns and who will reign in eternity. The phrases want to emphasise the divine attributes of God who is the “Lord of the universe, exalted in his holiness and splendour...far removed from the storms of history” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 109).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ According to Bauckham (1993b: 46-47) John shares the apocalyptic tradition of a concern that God’s righteousness and glory is currently not visible on earth, and only shines through in heavenly visions by seers and prophets. The surprise answer in Revelation comes after the two pivotal chapters [i.e. Chapters 4 & 5], when God’s active presence and control of creation will shine through in the visions of Revelation 6-19, eventually leading up to the shining through of his glory in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 (Groenewald 1986: 79).

Revelation 4:10 then links up with Revelation 4:11, although it is actually one continuous sentence, starting from verse 9. Revelation 4:11 is a doxology specifically about the creative power of God (Mounce 1977: 140; Charles 1920a: 134). The suggestion in this doxology is that things that exist only because of the eternal will of God, “and through his will [they all]¹⁰⁶ came into actual being at the appointed time” (Mounce 1977: 140). Everything should therefore “subserve” his purpose (Beasley-Murray 1981: 119). Honouring God as Creator in worship is often found in the Psalms (8:3; 33:6-9; 95:5; 102:25; 136:5-9) and Jewish Apocrypha (Wis Sol 9:1; [Aune 1997: 312-313]).

The emphasis on God as Creator is not a central theme in Revelation (Aune 1997: 312). The verb *κτίζειν* occurs only in Revelation 4:11 and 10:6 (Aune 1997: 312). But God as Creator adds some important features to the image of [and message about] God that John wants to proclaim, as Bauckham (1993b: 47-53) shows in his theology on the Book of Revelation. It is, according to Bauckham (1993b: 48), an expression of Jewish [and Christian] monotheism: there is only one God, who is also the Creator of everything that exists; all other beings are part of creation, owing their existence to God alone. From this creative power also sprung the eschatological power of God to renew his creation [Bauckham 1993b: 48; (cf. also the discussion on the context above)]. This He can do because He is the almighty God whose incomparable attributes have been worshipped in the doxology of verse 8 (Du Rand 1999a: 1779).

The interpretation of the doxological actions by the different heavenly beings surrounding the throne [Rev 4:8-11] could then be combined, as both doxologies want to proclaim the message of the eternal God who, in his majesty and glory, still reigns supreme, giving his people [i.e. those sealed on their foreheads with the seal of God – Rev 7:3] the assurance that He is still in control and his sovereignty is untouched by the actions of the evil powers trying to steal his reign on earth (cf. Pohl 1969: 169).

iii) Is there anything else playing a role in the understanding of this text?

The idea with this question is to search for any other elements or phrases within the text that could influence thinking about God and life in Revelation. Two very

¹⁰⁶ My bracketed insert.

important references that occur not only here, but are used or implied quite frequently in Revelation, can be identified for discussion in further detail: The faithful God of the covenant and the important role of worship and doxologies as proclamation of the living God.

a) The faithful God who promises life

Life in the Bible is to a large extent linked to a relationship with God [cf. chapter 2, 3.6]. This was a unique covenant relationship (West 1971: 51). In Revelation we find a hint of the covenant promises from God's side in the image of the rainbow around the throne. It reminds readers of God's covenant with Noah, when God promised that He will not destroy the entire earth again with a flood (Gen 9:1-17)¹⁰⁷. With this image John probably wants to highlight that the God of creation [cf. (ii)(c) above] is the faithful God that will not forsake His people or his promises to them (Bauckham 1993b: 51; cf. Aune 1997: 285-286). During his life on earth Jesus gave the promise of eternal life many times to his followers [cf. discussion on the Johannine concept of ζωή αιώνιος in Chapter 4, 2.2]. This could be a reminder to second generation Christians that Jesus' promises still stand, because the faithful God will not forsake his own. In Rabbinic literature the idea of the rainbow as a reminder of God's faithfulness to his promise is also evident (Ford 1975: 71). It is a message of hope that life will prevail regardless of the current situation, because God is faithful.

Of course, the encircling rainbow is also a sign of God's majestic power and divinity where He sits on his throne in the heavenly court. The concept of a nimbus around deities was familiar to the ANE, specifically amongst Greeks and Romans (Charles 1920a: 115). This adds to the message of God's undisputed and incomparable power, which should be of comfort to the believers amidst their struggles.

b) Worship supposes life

A very important feature of the throne-room scenes [including the scene of Revelation 4] is the presence of hymns of praise and worship [or the appeal to

¹⁰⁷ Although Charles (1920a: 114-115) alludes this to the vision of Ezekiel (Ezek 1:27-28), Bauckham (1993b: 51) is of opinion that John could read into Ezekiel's vision the covenant promise of Noah just as he read the Sinai theophany into Ezekiel 1:13 (cf. Rev 4:5). Bauckham (1993b: 53) concludes: "In new creation God makes his creation eternally secure from any destructive evil...first by destroying the destroyers of the earth, finally by taking creation beyond the threat of evil."

worship] to the majesty and glory of the Almighty God, who is the Creator of all things and who still reigns sovereign over all things (Pohl 1969: 169). A total of sixteen hymns or hymnal compositions are contained within various points of the visions¹⁰⁸ (Aune 1997: 315).

Praise and worship directed to God is not unique to Revelation. It is prominent throughout the Bible (Westermann 1980: 71)¹⁰⁹. According to Bauckham,

“...true knowledge of who God is, is inseparable from worship...at its heart and in its eschatological goal the creation is theocentric, oriented in worship towards its Creator.” (1993b: 32-33)

God’s majesty and his redemptive mercy stand at the centre of all songs of praise and worship in Old Testament Israel (Westermann 1980: 86). It is closely related to the doctrine of creation in Jewish theology (Bauckham 1993b: 59). Essentially it was a sign of the existence of life. Life provided a person [and the community] the opportunity to praise Yahweh (Brensinger 1997: 109). He is able to participate in the action of worshipping in the presence of God. The absence of praise and worship signalled death, even though physical life might still be present (cf. Rev 18:22). This is a prominent feature in the Old Testament literature (cf. Ps 30:9-11; Isa 38:16-20; [Richards 1992: 109-II]).¹¹⁰

Worship of God is not a sign that God lives. God’s existence [life] is not assumed and then worshipped by Israel. It is not dependent on somebody or something else. It is “proven in the manifoldness of his self-revelation” (Hasel 1975: 100). God reveals

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Rev 4:8c, 11; 5:9b-10, 12b, 13b; 7:10b, 12; 11:15b, 17-18; 12:10b-12; 15:3b-4; 16:5b-7b; 19:1b-2, 3, 5b, 6b-8 (Aune 1997: 315; cf. Newman 1997a: 428). Aune (1997: 315) arranges them in seven antiphonal units (Rev 4:8-11; 5:9-14; 7:9-14; 11:15-18; 16:5-7; 19:1-4, 5-8) with the hymn in Revelation 15:3b-4 the only hymn that stands independent.

¹⁰⁹ In the Old Testament singing and music was common in the temple (cf. 1 Chr 15:16-22; 23:1-6; 25:1-8; Sir 47:8-10; 1 Macc 4:54-55). In the apocalyptic literature this continued, with the idea that angels participated in the worship being expanded upon (2 En 18:8-9; 19:3; 42:4; 3 En 24-40). Hymns of worship were also popular amongst early Christians (cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Col 3:16; Jas 5:13) (cf. Aune 1997: 316-317).

¹¹⁰ In his article on תהי in NIDOTTE Brensinger (1997: 111) discerns three categories of praise in the Psalms: i) Praise because the Lord enables human beings to find the path of life (cf. Ps 16:11); ii) Praise because God provides in life’s deepest desires, which means man can live a life without fear (Ps 27:1; 145:16); iii) Praise because one knows God’s favour will last a lifetime (Ps 30:5-6). Therefore people could praise the Lord for as long as they lived (Ps 104:33). All of these just underscore the fact that praise is intrinsically linked to the concept of life and being alive.

Himself in great events and deeds such as the creation, the election of and covenant with Israel, the Exodus, the return from exile, etc. “At every juncture in the OT God shows himself as active” (Hasel 1975: 100-101). Therefore, God is alive, because He is seen as being actively involved in this world.

Worship is a response on the revelation of the active, living God. It is the “amen” of the people to God’s self-revelation (Weiser 1975: 55). It was the [only] appropriate response to the only living God (Bauckham 1993a: 140). In Jewish religious practice the act of worship distinguished God from every other creature that exists: “God must be worshipped; no other creature may be worshipped” (Bauckham 1993a: 118).

In this strong monotheistic outlook God is also distinguished from the gods of other nations (Pohl 1969: 169). God is the sole Creator and Source of everything that exists. All the gods of the other nations are only part of this created order. They are no more than dead idols who cannot act on their own. This understanding rolls over into the New Testament. Monotheism was generally accepted amongst Jewish and Christian believers alike (Bauckham 1993b: 32).

But there is more to worship than just acknowledging God’s sovereign power. Worship was essentially a relational reaction by the people of God: it was the “*affirmation by the people of God of their faithfulness to their God*” (Weiser 1975: 59). It confirmed that a relation existed between the only living God and the people who worship Him. And as has been discussed previously [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6], life is essentially a relational concept, depending upon the existence of a relationship with God. Worship is also important to the message in another sense: in Revelation worship becomes the deciding activity in the end times. Everybody will partake therein. You either worship God or you worship the beast (Pohl 1969: 169).

The hymns of Revelation follow the same pattern as those of the Old Testament, worshipping the almighty power and majesty of God and his redemptive actions in Jesus Christ (Newman 1997a: 428). John uses Old Testament language in his worship hymns, thereby connecting the worship of the One living God of the Old Testament with the worship in the heavenly court, with the implication that the same monotheistic view should be taken on hearing these words, but also implying that

God is just as much active and in control as He was in the Old Testament (Wu & Pearson 1997: 524).¹¹¹ However, in a unique shift John goes even further than the Old Testament. He addresses these Old Testament hymns also to Christ [the Lamb], thereby putting Christ effectively on the same level as God (Newman 1997a: 428)¹¹².

The purpose of the hymns of worship is to bring comfort and hope to believers in their situation. They must know that the Creator, God, “is still in sovereign control despite the hardships they are experiencing” (Wu & Pearson 1997: 525), just as He was in the Old Testament. The exaggerated doxologies are in part an antithetical reflection of the titles given to Roman emperors. They are also placed strategically: every stage of God’s victory [through chapters 7-19] is accompanied by songs of praise and worship in heaven (Bauckham 1993a: 35). The idea is that the God of the Bible [Old Testament for both Jewish believers and early Christians] must be worshipped, as He is the unchallenged God worthy of the praises of everyone in the created order (cf. Aune 1997: 311-312; cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 119).

This comfort and hope is promised to last forever and ever, as God is the $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\omega}\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\eta}\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\acute{\omicron}\mu\epsilon\iota\omicron\varsigma$, the One that lives in eternity [cf. 1.2 “The God beyond time” above], and therefore also reigns eternally (Mounce 1977: 139). And because worship is essentially a sign of life, the existence of continuous life is implied by the seemingly continuous worship of God [into eternity] in the heavenly court. By the same token the absence of music and worship in Babylon (Rev 18:22) implies Death for Babylon. Worshipping the living God in Revelation 4 is recognition of his power and majesty, and of creation’s dependence on Him for their existence. It all adds onto the message of hope and comfort that John is bringing to believers.

iv) Summary on the living God in Revelation 4

- The theophany of Revelation 4 wants to emphasise the sovereign power of the Creator, who still reigns in majesty in heaven, even though that sovereign power might not be visible on earth as yet. Everything in creation exists because of Him. “The whole vision climaxes in a hymnic

¹¹¹ Allusions to Old Testament hymns are found in Revelation 4:8 (cf. Isa 6:3), 15:3-4 (cf. Ex 15:1-8), and 19:1-6 (Ps 96-99).

¹¹² This comparison is even further enhanced by the fact that even the most exalted of heavenly beings refuses worship from John, urging that only God is worthy of worship (Bauckham 1993b: 59).

acclamation to the Almighty Creator” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 59). The God of Revelation is still the same God as in the Old Testament, and his power and majesty is just as unchallenged.

- The phrase “the One that lives...” in Revelation 4 is another way to describe the all-important circumlocution “He who was and who is and who is to come”. It is a further expression of the eternal being of God that is not influenced or limited by time (Beasley-Murray 1981: 109).
- Essentially the majestic vision of Revelation 4 is in its entirety a message of hope. Believers can live now, because they are in the hands of the living God who reigns forever and ever.
- God is seen to be alive, as He is seen to be actively involved in his creation as Creator, re-Creator and reigning King.
- Worship of God in Revelation is an important recognition of Him as the only living God (cf. Pohl 1969: 169). It sets God apart from any other god [or being] in creation. He is the Creator of everything that exists, even the dead idols. He is thus the only One worthy of worship.
- Worship scenes in Revelation imply endless worshipping of God and the Lamb, signifying the existence of eternal life and an eternal relationship with God. Worship will be the deciding activity in the end times.

2.1.2. *The living God’s seal: Revelation 7:2*

i) What is the context?

A new textual unit is introduced in Revelation 7:1, using the formula μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον. Schematically it fits into the main body of the Book of Revelation as follows¹¹³:

4:1-22:9	Disclosure of God’s eschatological plan
4:1-2a	John’s heavenly ascent
4:2b-5:14	Vision of the heavenly throne-room
6:1-17	the first six seals
7:1-17	the sealing of the 144 000
7:1-8	Sealing of the 144 000

¹¹³ Cf. Aune: 1998a on the detail structure of Revelation 6-16.



7:9-17	Vision of a triumphant throng in the throne-room
8:1-11-14	seventh seal and first six trumpets
11:15-16:21	seven trumpets and seven bowls
17:1-19:10	Revelation of the judgment of Babylon
19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
21:9-22:9	Vision of the New Jerusalem

It is still a heavenly vision, the same one that started in Revelation 4:1 (Aune 1998a: 450). The connection with the preceding vision (i.e. Rev 6:1-17) is, however, more contradictory than complimentary (Pohl 1969: 212). In Revelation 8:1 another new section starts, which is not to be distinguished from the former grammatically but primarily on content. According to Aune (1998a: 389) Revelation 8:1 is more an introduction to the seven trumpet plagues than a conclusion of the other six seals. Revelation 7:1-17 then acts as an interlude between the first six seals and the opening of the final seal (Aune 1998a: 389).¹¹⁴ It can be divided into two separate visions: the sealing of the 144 000 (Rev 7:1-8), which is followed by the blessedness experienced by the innumerable multitude before the heavenly throne (Rev 7:9-14). The two visions are juxtaposed (Mounce 1977: 164; Aune 1998a: 434).

Chapter 7 is deemed an *angelophany* by Aune (1998a: 434-435), a literary feature with few parallels outside of Revelation. It consists of either angelic actions (cf. Rev 7:1; 8:2; 15:1; 20:1-3) or angelic speech (cf. Rev 7:2-3; 10:1-7; 14:6-7, 8, 9-11, 14-16, 18-20; 18:2-3; 19:17-18; [Aune 1998a: 435]).¹¹⁵ The position of Chapter 7 as an interlude is important to understand. It is placed strategically as a comforting answer to the fearful outcry from the pagan world in Revelation 6:17: "Who is able to stand?" The answer is that those marked with the seal [signet – Aune 1998a: 427] of God will be safe and alive, even amidst the greatest suffering and trouble that may come over the world (Pohl 1969: 212-213; Beasley-Murray 1981: 139).

¹¹⁴ Ford (1975: 120) points to similar interludes before the floods in Noah's time (Gen 6-7), before the building of the ark (cf. 1 En 66:1-2; 67), and before the destruction of the temple (cf. 2 Bar 6:4-7:1).

¹¹⁵ Aune (1998a: 435) discusses the structural features of both these forms of angelophany, which he deems to be a literary feature developed by John (Aune 1998a: 434). Charles (1920a: 192), however, is of the opinion that the angelophany is a Jewish feature, citing analogous situations in Jewish Apocalyptic literature, although he regards the tradition to go back as far as the Old Testament, specifically the prophetic literature (cf. Nah 1:3; Zech 9:14; [Charles 1920a: 192-193]).

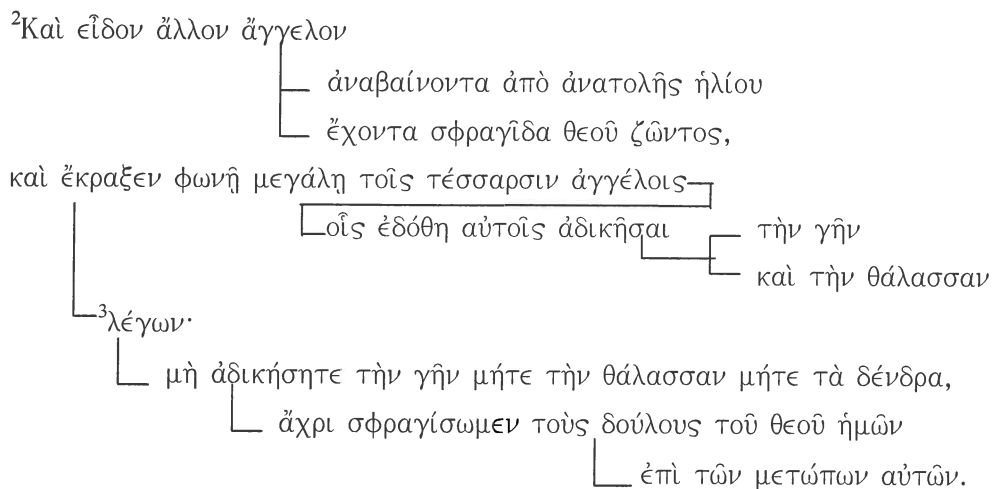
This is a structural feature John uses a number of times in Revelation, i.e. to contrast the suffering with the overwhelming blessing and life awaiting the faithful believers. In Revelation 14, in contrast to the tribulation suffered under the beast in Revelation 13, John sees the 144 000, sealed with the name of God, safely in the presence of God (Mounce 1977: 267). Ford (1975: 120) calls it “a theology of the remnant, i.e. those who are saved” (cf. Isa 10:20-27). Eschatologically this involves salvation and judgment. For the believer in Asia Minor Revelation 7 means salvation, a message of comfort and hope to the faithful remnant that they will live [i.e. be saved], regardless of what happens to them on earth.

The same message of hope and comfort is given in Revelation 14 where the believers are seen on Mount Zion with the Lamb (Swete 1907: 176; Mounce 1977: 267). Mount Zion is traditionally the place of deliverance (Joel 2:32; Isa 24:23; Mic 4:6-7; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 221]). Those who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion are the ones that have been delivered [ἀγοράζειν] and are now part of the eternal life in the presence of God (Van der Watt 1986b: 190). The number 144 000 has an even bigger purpose [cf. Excursion 3 below]. It wants to point out that not a single one of the believers have been lost. All believers can therefore be sure of their future destiny in the presence of God (Mounce 1977: 268).

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 7:2-3:



The focus in this section is on an angel being sent to perform a task on behalf of God. He must ensure that the people of God are sealed with the seal of the θεοῦ ζῶντος [i.e. the living God] before the moment of judgment (Rev 7:2). For this he has the seal of God in his hand. The use of ζωή in combination with God determines the interpretation of life within the eternal realm. The vision regarding the sealing is a message of comfort to believers, following on the terrifying results of the opening of the seals.

b) Seal of the living God

Although there are a number of textual variants with regard to Revelation 7:1-8, no suggested variant readings are given for the phrase σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος (Aland & Aland 1993: 645). The phrase is anarthrous because it is mentioned in Revelation 7:2 for the first time. The use of the article [or omission thereof] is a common feature of John's writing throughout Revelation (Aune 1997: clxv-clxvi). Where the signet [seal] is mentioned again later on [in Rev 9:4], it is accompanied by the anaphoric article (Aune 1998a: 427).

Revelation 7:2 is the only instance where the name θεοῦ ζῶντος is used as a title for God in Revelation. The title of θεοῦ ζῶντος is, however, not foreign to the Old Testament¹¹⁶ (Aune 1998a: 454; cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2). It distinguishes God as the forever-living One that is constantly acting on behalf of his creation (Ringgren 1980: 339). In the rest of the New Testament it is also a very familiar expression, especially in the Pauline epistles [six times] and the letter to the Hebrews [four times]. It is also well known in the apocalyptic literature (Jub 1:25; 21:4; 3 Macc 6:28).

“The expression in all its forms brings out the contrast between the one eternal God and the numberless ephemeral gods of the heathen” (Charles 1920a: 205; [cf. Mounce 1977: 167; Aune 1998a: 454]). Therefore, just as in the Old Testament, the θεοῦ ζῶντος declares God's eternal existence. God and life are closely related; life can only be defined in relation to Him (Van der Watt 1986a: 298; [cf. also discussion above {i.e. 2.1.1} on the living God in the theophany of Revelation 4]). The title

¹¹⁶ Cf. Deut 5:26; Josh 3:10; 1 Sam 7:26; 2 Kgs 19:4; Ps 42:2; 84:2; Isa 37:4, 17; Jer 10:10; etc. (Aune 1998a: 454).

θεοῦ ζῶντος is also appropriately used “wherever God is about to intervene on behalf of his people” (Mounce 1977: 167).

But the θεοῦ ζῶντος should not be read in isolation. It is used to highlight and describe the actual object of the sentence, which is the σφραγίδα. Seals were used for different purposes in the ANE: protection, ownership, authenticity, secrecy, approval, and identification (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 803-804). In the early church it was sometimes even applied to the Christian baptism, specifically in 2 Clement (cf. 2 Cl 7:6; 8:6; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 804]). The phrase θεοῦ ζῶντος can be called a genitive of ownership describing the owner of the seal as the living God.

The image goes back on the vision of Ezekiel 9:1-6 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 142-143; Aune 1998a: 452), where a man is send off to mark the foreheads of the righteous in Israel so that they might escape the destruction of the forthcoming judgment (Zimmerli 1979: 248; Beasley-Murray 1981: 142-143). In Revelation 7 an angel is the bearer of the seal of God. He has been given the “delegated” power to seal the 144 000 for God (Rev 7:2-3).

The seal is to be understood in an eschatological sense, and does not have any reference with the Christian baptism. It is not a physical mark, as so many popular literature tries to interpret the seals [including 666 – cf. Excursion 6 in Chapter 7 below] in Revelation today. It is probably to be related to the signet ring used by kings in the ANE to authenticate official documents (Mounce 1977: 167; Aune 1998a: 452). Sealing documents with the signet ring had a twofold meaning: firstly it protected a document from unauthorised use, and secondly it was a sign of ownership: it identified to whom a document belongs (Ford 1975: 121; Bauckham 1993a: 216).

The seal in Revelation 7:2 can be interpreted similarly: firstly believers are promised protection when they are sealed (cf. Rev 9:4), but secondly they are marked as being set apart for God as a remnant to be saved (Ford 1975: 120-122¹¹⁷; Bauckham 1993a:

¹¹⁷ Ford (1975: 121) even takes the possible origin of the sealing back as far as the seal given by God to Cain in Genesis 4:15 (cf. also Aune 1998a: 452). Charles (1920a: 205-206), on the other hand, sees the protection offered as a protection against the evil powers attacking the faithful believers. He also sees the seal as “the outward manifestation of character”, thereby lending an ethical characteristic to the seal by the angel (Charles 1920a: 206).

216; Aune 1998a: 452). It is not a protection from worldly crises, but a protection in the Day of Judgment (Hughes 1990: 94). Aune (1998a: 453) further deems this imagery as [possibly] being drawn from Jewish magic and Greco-Roman magic, where the protection through a seal was readily accepted. It is also a feature found in the Testament of Solomon (Test Sol 1:6-7; [Aune 1998a: 453-454; cf. also Aune 1998a: 456-459]). The twofold meaning could actually be combined, as the concept of ownership presupposes protection (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 804; Mounce 1977: 167). The protection promised is the giving of eternal life, by the eternal living God. Those who have been marked will receive this life (Kiddle 1940: 134).

The mark made by the seal is not identified in Revelation 7. But in the related text of Revelation 14:1-5 the identification is made, when the mark from the seal is identified as the name of the Lamb “and the name of his Father” [i.e. God]. In this way God takes ownership of his people and promises his protection to them (cf. 2 Tim 2:19; [Mounce 1977: 167]).

The text of Revelation 14:1-5 [as well as Rev 7:9-17] also implicates that these marked [sealed] people will be alive and in the presence of God. It is the σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζώντος, the seal of the living God, with which they have been marked. In a passage of hope the destiny of the sealed believers is visualised in Revelation 7:9-17. In other places in Revelation it is strongly contrasted with the destiny of the followers of the beast. They are marked in Revelation 13:16, but it is a mark that only identifies them for destruction on the Day of Judgment (Rev 14:9-10).

Excursion 3: Who does the 144 000 represent?

The identification of the 144 000 to be sealed by the angel on behalf of God, has been the subject of discussions for many years, with many possible interpretations being offered. Some scholars think of a fixed number [i.e. only 144 000] and then contrast this image with the vision of Revelation 7:9-17 [Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 67), who deems this to refer to the “faithful who will still be living at the time of the terrible cosmic dissolutions of the Last Day...”]¹¹⁸.

¹¹⁸ Aune (1998a: 443) shares this view, without understanding the figure of 144 000 as an actual figure. It is symbolic, but symbolic in the sense that it represents all the Christians that have been specifically protected by God until the final eschatological event. The innumerable multitude is then explained as

Others think of the 144 000 only as the Jews [of the Old Testament covenant] or Jewish Christians, representing the faithful remnant of Israel (cf. Aune 1998a: 440-441), or only the Christian martyrs of the present era (cf. Charles 1920a: 202-203). The metaphor of the census-list is a sign of the eschatological restoration of Israel (Deut 3:3-5; Isa 11:11-16; 27:12-13; Ezek 37:15-23; Hos 11:10-11). This concept was then transmuted into the gathering of the elect at the *parousia* (Aune 1998a: 436).

It is difficult to accept a limitation of the 144 000 to a specific number, or even to a specific group of believers. The figure is purely symbolic, and must be read against this background (Mounce 1977: 169). It is a “square number”, a number of perfection: 12 [tribes] x 12 [apostles] x 1000, as a “Christian symbol for the fullness of the new people of God” (Aune 1998a: 444). Beasley-Murray (1981: 141) suggests that the 144 000 refers to the New Israel [i.e. the church], while the innumerable multitude refers to all believers of all time (cf. also Bauckham 1993a: 216). Aune (1998a: 440) sees the 144 000 as only part of a larger group, reading the ἐκ + genitive as a partitive genitive, indicating there are more than those mentioned here in Revelation 7:4-8.

What is important is to distinguish between what John hears (Rev 7:4) and what he sees (Rev 7:9). John only hears that 144 000 will be sealed, but he doesn’t see them at that point. Only in Revelation 7:9 does he look around, and then he doesn’t see 144 000 persons but an innumerable multitude of saved people standing in front of the throne (Bauckham 1993a: 215-216).

Bauckham (1993a: 215) compares the interpretation of this vision to the vision of Revelation 5:5-6, where John first hears about the Lion of Judah that is worthy, but then he sees a Lamb, the one that has been slaughtered, standing at the throne.¹¹⁹

The fact that this is all part of a heavenly vision [which started in Revelation 4] makes the possibility that John refers to more than just [physically] living

all the Christians that have died, and not all the Christians, as the 144 000 [i.e. a symbolic figure] would still be alive at the *Parousia* (Aune 1998a: 447).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Bauckham (1993a: 216), where he draws some other very interesting comparisons between the visions of Revelation 5:5-6 and 7:1-14. Hughes (1990: 95) also compares the innumerable multitude with the promise to Abraham of an innumerable seed (Gen 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 32:12; cf. Hos 1:10; Heb 11:12; Jub 13:20; 14:4-5). According to Aune (1998a: 466-467), who also takes this route, the 144 000 is intended to contrast with the multitude of Revelation 14:1-5.

believers in Revelation 7:1-8 a real possibility. It is a vision of God's love and protection for every believer until the last day, not just those that would still be alive at the *eschaton* (Joubert 1999a: 19; cf. also Du Rand 1999a: 1782-1783). It is just the entire church of God that is described from different perspectives (cf. Aune 1998a: 447).

The vision of Revelation 14:1-5 further underscores this interpretation.¹²⁰ The identification is, however, complicated by the description of the 144 000 in Revelation 14:1-5, calling them the ἀπαρχή, generally translated as the “first-fruits”. Taking into account the use of ἀπαρχή in the LXX, Charles (1920b: 6-7) is of the opinion that ἀπαρχή rather refers to an offering, which then makes the 144 000 “sacrifices to God”, whether through martyrdom or not. This could, of course, refer to all believers, as believers in general expected martyrdom as a result of their faith [by the end of the first century AD]. Furthermore: Paul expected all believers to give their lives, even as living sacrifices, unto the Lord (cf. Rom 12:1-2). In this sense it has nothing to do with martyrdom, but with the believers dying of the old so that Christ can take full control of the new lives.

Theologically it is still possible to interpret the 144 000 as referring to all believers, even if the translation of Charles [see above] is used. Every believer is in the end clothed in a white robe after being washed by the blood of Christ, not just a certain group (Rev 7:14; cf. Matt 22:11-12). Being clothed in a white robe is a common metaphor for cleansing and worthiness, which is a familiar concept in the New Testament [cf. the wedding robes in the parable of the wedding – Matt 22:11-14]. The New Testament proclamation is that every believer is in the end cleansed by the blood of Jesus (1 Cor 6:11; Heb 9:14; 1 John 1:7; [Groenewald 1986: 99]). And those who have washed their clothes are clean forever (John 13:10; [Rudolph 2000: 64]).

Therefore, it is possible to see that the 144 000 is not only Old Testament believers or any other specific group standing on mount Zion, but all believers who together constitute “the Israel of God” (Mounce 1977: 267-268; Hughes 1990: 94)¹²¹. “Die ganze Gemeinde, so weit sie nur wirklich Gemeinde ist, wird

¹²⁰ Most scholars agree that the 144 000 in Revelation 7:4 and 14:1-5 are the same group. However, Aune (1998a: 804) mentions that the 144 000 is again mentioned in an anarthrous phrase in Revelation 14:1-5, suggesting that the author could have been thinking of a new group (Aune 1997: clxv-clxvi).

¹²¹ Cf. Gal 6:16; Heb 11:39-40; 12:22 (Hughes 1990: 94).

versiegelt” (Pohl 1969: 217). And because all are sealed, none of them will disappear from God’s hand (John 10:28-29; [Pohl 1969: 217]).

iii) Is there anything else playing a role in the understanding of this text?

Just as in Revelation 4, we find another doxology to the Almighty God in Revelation 7:12. The praise given here is similar to that given to the Lamb in Revelation 5:12, but is ascribed to ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν (Aune 1998a: 471). The doxology is given more impetus by adding a liturgical “amen” at the start and end of the doxology (Mounce 1977: 172; Beasley-Murray 1981: 146). In the discussion on worship [cf. above] the importance of worship as a metaphor supposing life [in a relationship with God] in the Bible has already been highlighted. The song of praise in verse 12 is a response to the life that these people have received from God [cf. discussion above “worship supposes life”].

In Revelation 7:14-17 John is confronted with a question by the angel about the identity of the 144 000. The answer He is given is that these people “have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb”, and they are therefore clean [and alive], enabling them to be with God in heaven. What is said here is not said directly about the actions of the living God, but about the Lamb [Christ] who has saved these people through his blood [i.e. his death]. The salvation through the blood of the Lamb will be discussed later on [chapter 7], as will the symbolic meaning of the white robes that believers are clothed with.

iv) Summary on the living God in Revelation 7:2

- Revelation 7 is an important interlude after the opening of the first six seals in Revelation 6, specifically answering the question: “Who will stand?” (Rev 6:17). Those marked with the seal of the living God will stand. They have been sealed with eternal life from the eternal God.
- The θεοῦ ζῶντος refers to the forever-living One that is constantly acting on behalf of his creation (Ringgren 1980: 339).
- The seal is a sign of ownership and protection. The Creator God who lives and reigns forever, has taken ownership of his people by marking them with his Name, and He will protect them and deliver them on the Day of Judgment (Hughes 1990: 94).

- In Revelation 4 the One that lives forever and ever was praised for his sovereignty and power and glory in creation, anticipating his active involvement with his created order. In Revelation 7:2 we see the God of Creation actively involved as the God who redeems and protects his people through the blood of the Lamb, blending the vision of Revelation 5 into the frame. God is still in sovereign control! His glory shines through in the redemption of his people.

2.1.3. *An oath in the name of the One that lives forever (Rev 10:6)*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 10 is another interlude breaking up a vision of plagues [cf. discussion on the context of Revelation 7 and section 2.1.2 above]. This time it occurs after the sixth of the seven trumpet plagues. It fits into the structure of the subsection Revelation 8:1-11:14 as follows¹²²:

8:1-11:14	Seventh seal and first six trumpets
8:1	Seventh seal
8:2-9:21	Vision of the first six trumpets
10:1-11	Vision of the mighty angel and the little scroll
11:1-14	Vision of the temple and the two witnesses

The purpose of the interlude is similar to that found in Revelation 7, i.e. to

“halten die Plagenkette an, um zur Sprache zu bringen, was in sie wesensmäßig nicht hineinpaßt, nämlich den besonderen Weg der Zeuggemeinde unter der Fürsorge ihres Herrn” (Pohl 1971: 53).

It is introduced in what Aune (1998a: 555) calls “a disjunctive manner”, by using the phrase καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν. The vision of Daniel 10 opens up in similar fashion in Daniel 10:4 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 169; Kiddle 1940: 166). The ἄγγελον ἰσχυρὸν occurs also in Revelation 5:2, another narrative that has to do with a mysterious scroll. According to Aune (1998a: 555) it might be a deliberate comparison by the author to remind the reader of the scroll of Revelation 5 and of the

¹²² For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

outcome of that vision. A new section starts again in Revelation 11:1, when John is given a reed to measure the temple (Aune 1998a: 555).¹²³

Mounce (1977: 205) sees the interlude not as one of comfort [cf. the interlude of Revelation 7], but as instructive on the role and destiny of the church during the last days of history. After the sixth bowl no further interlude will follow, as time will be up (Mounce 1977: 205). In any case, the announcement of the angel is that the time is already up (Rev 10:6-7; [cf. Charles 1920a: 258]).

The vision in Revelation 10 is seemingly still part of the heavenly vision John observes [which started at Rev 4 – not the throne-room vision, but a heavenly vision John observes after being taken up into the heavenly throne-room in Rev 4:1-2a]. This chapter is, however, a separate vision about the little book [a vision within a vision] that John is given to eat. The scroll itself ends up to be a symbol of something more: it is a symbolic commission to prophesy (cf. Rev 10: 8-11).

The image is modelled on Ezekiel 2:8-3:3, where the prophet is commanded to eat a scroll that God gave him, so that he can prophesy to the people of God on the content thereof (Aune 1998a: 570-571; cf. Zimmerli 1979: 135-137). The major focus points in the text are the oath that the angel takes (Rev 10:5-7) and the commission to prophesy that was mentioned just now (Aune 1998a: 555).

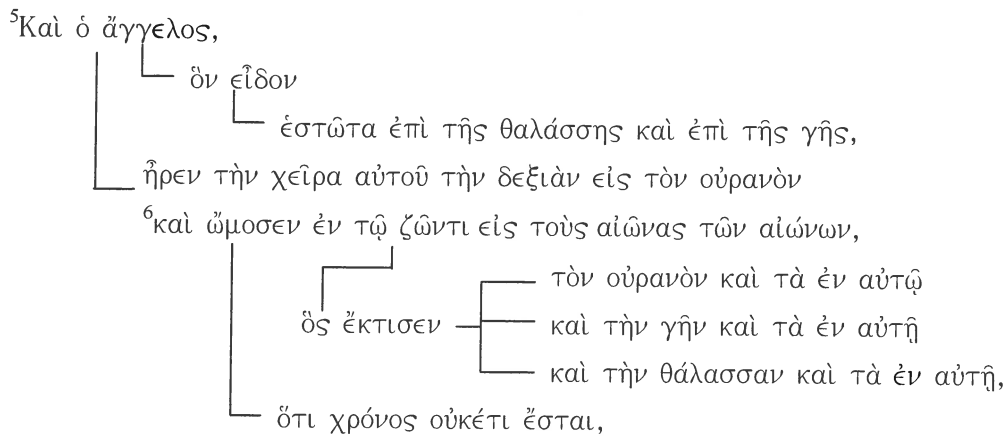
ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

The text of Revelation 10:5-6 focuses on the angel swearing an oath “by the living God” that there is no time available. There could be progression in the text in that the angel is first seen standing, then he lifts his hands up, and then he takes the oath declaring the time is up for the world. However, it could also be one single action that John observes and then describes in detail [for a discussion on the syntactical meaning of 2.1.1 (ii)(a) above].

¹²³ Cf. however Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 74) who is of the opinion that Revelation 10:1-11:13 is a single unit, for exactly the reason that there is no textual indication of a change. Charles (1920a: 256) sees Revelation 10 as an introduction to Revelation 11 [which is a vision of a prophetic call to the two witnesses to go out again].

The syntactical analysis of Revelation 10:5-6 could be done as follows:



b) Textual criticism

With regard to the text there are a couple of minor variant readings, specifically in verses 5-7, which is when the oath is taken by the angel (Aland & Aland 1993: 651). Quite a few manuscripts omit the phrase τὴν δεξιάν in verse 5. According to Aune (1998a: 550) the reason could be that the uplifted right hand is associated with an oath in the LXX text of Deuteronomy 32:40.¹²⁴ Lifting of the hand [or hands] does occur in the Old Testament (cf. Gen 14:22; Ex 6:8; Num 14:30; Ezek 20:15, 28; [Ford 1975: 159; Mounce 1977: 210]). In Daniel 12:7, to which this passage alludes, the angel lifts both hands to heaven when taking an oath by God (Aune 1998a: 564). The presence [or omission] of τὴν δεξιάν should not really influence the exegesis of the text here. The central part is the oath by the One who lives forever, taken by the angel.

A more difficult variant reading to overlook is the omission of ἐν before τῷ ζῶντι in Revelation 10:6. Manuscripts cited that offer the variant reading shift the scale heavily towards accepting the omission of ἐν (Aland & Aland 1993: 651; cf. also Aune 1998a: 550). This, however, would create interpretative difficulties. Using just the dative τῷ ζῶντι may result in an understanding of the text as if the angel has sworn against God. This is usually the interpretation when the dative is used without a coinciding preposition in a swearing formula (Aune 1998a: 550). The more

¹²⁴ The raising of the right hand is, according to Aune (1998a: 564), more likely a modern exegetical interpretation [based on legal practice in courts of law] than an ancient practice. It is not cited at all in the MT of the Hebrew Bible (Aune 1998a: 564). In the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:40 it is God Himself who raises his hand to heaven to take an oath, but it is not specified which hand is raised (Mounce 1977: 210).

common usage if no preposition determines the case is to use the accusative case for the person by whom the oath is taken (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 568). The only possibility is that John inserted the *ἐν* to coincide with the text in Daniel 12:7 [the Theodotion text], to which this text alludes (Aune 1998a: 550). The formula used by John is, however, not totally unique, and does occur elsewhere in the New Testament (Matt 5:34; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 568]). Other suggested omissions in verse 6 are, according to Aune (1998a: 550), accidental omissions, which in any case should not affect the exegesis for this study substantially (cf. Mounce 1977: 211).

In terms of verse 7 there are also a few textual variants to consider (Aland & Aland 1993: 651). However, only two or three of them need to be discussed in further detail here. In verse 7a *ἐτελέσθη* [aorist indicative] is changed to *τελεσθῆ* [aorist subjunctive]. This change is only suggested, according to Aune (1998a: 550-551), because *ἐτελέσθη* is mistakenly read as governed by *ὅταν*, while *ἐτελέσθη* is actually the main clause [verb] in the sentence [*ὅταν* is to be read in conjunction with the subjunctive *μέλλῃ*]. Again it is possible to work with the presented text.

A second variant is the insertion of *καί* after *τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ δουλοῦς* at the end of verse 7 (Aland & Aland 1993: 651). Although the suggested variants are weak, Aune (1998a: 551) is of the opinion that the insertion of *καί* would be more in line with the style of Revelation, using it often as an exegetical insertion. This will not affect our exegesis of the living God in Revelation 10 materially. It is therefore possible, without major distraction, to work with the text as presented.

c) Swearing by the God who lives forever

Revelation 10:5-7 does not refer to [or discuss] any characteristics of “the living God”. In this vision John sees an angel swearing an oath by the living God with regard to the Day of the Lord that is now at hand. This does not necessarily imply that the name of the living God is superfluous here. It is used with a very specific purpose in connection with the oath.

The same title [epithet] is used for God than in Revelation 4:9 and 10, i.e. *τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων*. Also, similar to the text of Revelation 4:8-11, the title for God is used in conjunction with the explanation of [in Rev 4:8-11 by

means of a doxology to the One who lives forever and ever] God as the Creator of everything that exists. In Revelation 4 God was worshipped as Creator. In verse 6 an oath is taken by the angel by “the One that lives forever and ever”, *who is the Creator of heaven and earth and sea*.¹²⁵ Swearing by God is done because, according to Hebrews 6:13 there is “no one greater by whom to swear” (Hughes 1990: 117). That is why God takes an oath by Himself and not by any other being (cf. Deut 32:40).

The epithet $\tau\hat{\omega}\ \zeta\hat{\omega}\nu\tau\iota$ acts as a circumlocution for the name of God in Revelation 10:6. This is done to avoid calling out the name of God and thereby risking possible blasphemy. It does not affect God’s identity, which is elaborated upon in the second part, “who is the Creator of heaven...” God is still identified as the eternal One, the sovereign God who reigns in eternity [cf. discussion on $\tau\hat{\omega}\ \zeta\hat{\omega}\nu\tau\iota$... in Revelation 4:9, 10 above; (Aune 1998a: 565)]. As the sovereign Creator and Ruler, He can bring his creation to an end and bring about a new creation through his hands. The existence of the entire creation is in his hands (Kiddle 1940: 171-172).

Mounce (1977: 211) sees the title $\tau\hat{\omega}\ \zeta\hat{\omega}\nu\tau\iota$ as very appropriate in the context of impending martyrdom. This is an example where the author wants to comfort his readers with the hopeful message that death will not be the end of everything. The sovereign, living God, is on the other side of death waiting to open a new door for them (Rev 1:18): “Only a God who lives beyond the threat of death can promise them life after the sword has taken its toll” (Mounce 1977: 211).

There is a further reason why the angel swears by the eternal living God. He is a messenger from God, and he is bringing the message of the unfolding of God’s eternal purpose for his creation to John¹²⁶. Even the rainbow around the head of the angel reminds of the covenant with Noah [cf. discussion on Revelation 4:8-11 above]. The angel swears by the name of the One who has send him to reveal his [i.e. God’s] purpose (Bauckham 1993a: 253-254).

¹²⁵ According to Charles (1920a: 263) references to the creative activity of God are frequently used in Judaism, but are rare in the New Testament, outside of Revelation.

¹²⁶ In the light of this “unfolding of the purpose of God”, Bauckham (1993a: 243-257) has identified the scroll in Revelation 10 with the scroll in Revelation 5, understanding the scroll of Revelation 10 as the opened scroll of Revelation 5 [where the scroll was still sealed with seven seals], now revealing the purpose of God for his creative order and God’s activity therein, for John to consume in a prophetic visionary act [see, however, the discussion on the context above].

This is the only occasion in Revelation where mention is made of an oath that is taken by someone. The taking of an oath does occur elsewhere in the New Testament, mostly referring to God taking an oath by His own Name (cf. Heb 3:18; 6:13; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 569]). Oaths were taken when a person wanted to confirm that he would [or would not] do something. The oath was the assurance that such a person will stick to his or her vow (Garland 1992a: 577-578). Taking an oath by the name of God is seen as a sign of allegiance to God rather than to idols¹²⁷. If the oath was violated, it was considered a profanation of the name of God, something that is to be punished severely by God (Ex 20:7; 1 Kgs 8:31-32; Wis Sol 14:30-31; [Garland 1992a: 577]).

In teaching his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus forbade the taking of an oath at all by men, as it puts them under pressure to keep to that oath (Matt 5:34-37; cf. Jas 5:12). It is possible that Jesus could have drawn from certain Old Testament texts that were intended to safeguard the sanctity of oaths and to ensure that all oaths were kept (cf. Lev 19:12; Num 30:2, Deut 23:21-23; [Garland 1992a: 577]). Jesus' demand is not about swearing as such, but about honesty and integrity. And he, who is honest, does not need an oath to prop up his integrity (Garland 1992a: 578). This is of course not a problem in Revelation 10 as the angel [as a messenger from God] swears an oath by God about the message received from God. The presumption is that a trustworthy message is to follow.

The creation is called as witness to the oath sworn by the angel (cf. Rev 10:5-6). Summoning heaven and earth as witnesses is common in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 2 Apoc Bar 19:1; Test Mos 3:12). The inclusion of the sea into the list of witnesses is, however, unique to the author of Revelation (Aune 1998a: 565).

d) There is no time left

The reason for the oath is ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται (Rev 10:6b). This is similar to the object of the oath in Daniel 12:7. The meaning of this is not that time will be no

¹²⁷ Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 requires that oaths be taken in the Name of God (Aune 1998a: 566).

more [this will be illogical in a heavenly sphere where time has no end {could even be deemed irrelevant} and can in any case not be measured realistically— cf. Beasley-Murray (1981: 173); Swete (1907: 129)]. It is a message of comfort, which could also be seen as an answer to the question by the souls of the martyrs under the altar: “How long?” (Rev 6:9-11). In the Book of Daniel the answer given to the prophet is that he has to wait three and a half years [symbolic of the reign of Epifanes IV] (Kiddle 1940: 172)¹²⁸. For the martyrs the answer is: there will be no further delay; “the period of the end is irrevocably set into motion” (Mounce 1977: 211). That the time is up indicates symbolically that the time for repentance has run out (Pohl 1971: 57).

Verse 7 concludes what the delay is all about: καὶ ἐτελέσθη τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ...(Rev 10:7b). This verse probably alludes to the MT of Amos 3:7. The Old Testament prophet’s message is that he speaks with the authority of a consistent God who always reveals his decisions to a prophet before He acts on them (Mays 1969: 61). John talks with this same authority, revealing the plan of God before He is about to act in judgment (Pohl 1971: 58).

The μυστήριον as a reference to God’s eschatological plan is an important term in apocalyptic literature (cf. 3 Apoc Bar 1:6, 8; 2:6; Tob 12:7, 11; 2 Macc 13:21; Wis Sol 2:22). Early Judaism and Christianity saw many of the Old Testament prophecies as mysteries communicated by God to prophets that would only be understood in the last days (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-16). It is probably one of the reasons why John made such elaborate use of allusions to the Old Testament prophecies throughout Revelation (Aune 1998a: 569; cf. Fekkes 1994: 38-39).

The mystery to be revealed is God’s purpose “as revealed in the consummation of history”, which is the coming [fulfilment] of God’s kingdom (cf. Rev 11: 15; [Mounce 1977: 212]). This happens when “[t]he kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of God and of his Christ” (Rev 12:10), i.e. the revelation of God’s new world order that is already in place in heaven (Beasley-Murray 1981: 174). This is probably the one important aspect to take from this text with regard to the concept of

¹²⁸ In Revelation the number “three and a half” becomes the symbolic reference to the fullness of the times of trial that believers will suffer (Du Rand 1991b: 216). Epifanes IV persecuted the Jewish believers in a harsh manner for three and a half years.

life and death. The message of hope lies therein that those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14), and have given their lives as sacrifices for God (Rev 6:9-11) can be rest assured that the promise of the eternal God that He will act on their behalf, will now be set into motion (Mounce 1977: 211).

Another important point to be noted is the active involvement of the living God in unfolding his *μυστήριον* (cf. Pohl 1971: 58). That is what is really at stake in Revelation 10:5-7, as it is prove that the living God is still reigning supreme over his creation. He is in control, and although it is not visible on earth at the moment, it will become evident as his purpose for creation unfolds in history (Mounce 1977: 211). The moment that happens, there will be no time left to repent.

iii) Summary on 2.1.3.

- God is again identified as *τῷ ζῶντι...* “the One that lives forever” [cf. Rev 4:9, 10], recognising and emphasising his sovereignty, power and majesty. There is no one greater by whom the angel can take an oath (Heb 6:13).
- The oath is taken with regard to the actions of God in history. What follows will be God’s active involvement in unfolding his plan for creation. It is a future hope based on historical reliability [i.e. the reliability of God’s actions in his sovereignty in the Old Testament].
- The angel swears that there will be no more delay in the unfolding of this plan of God [the unveiling of the *μυστήριον* of God - cf. Col 1:26-27]. Because He is the sovereign God, nothing in creation can stop Him from being involved in the bringing about of the new creation.
- The rest of Revelation will show **how** God will unfold this plan of his in history (Mounce 1977: 213). It starts off when the Lamb takes control of the scroll [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4]. This is where believers can find their hope and comfort: in the knowledge that, above all, God is in control and He will ensure that justice will prevail. The living One will fulfil his promise of life eternal to his own through the redemptive and just actions in history. That is why He is hailed as the just Ruler (Rev 15:4).

2.1.4. *The wrath of the One that lives forever: Revelation 15:7*

i.) What is the context?

This text forms part of the vision-narrative of the pouring out of the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues (i.e. Rev 15:1-16:21)¹²⁹. It is introduced with the formula καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο σημεῖον ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ in Revelation 15:1. The pouring out of the bowls only starts in Revelation 16:1 [introduced with the phrase καὶ ἤκουσα]. Within this textual unit a number of sub-units can be identified, usually introduced with the formula καὶ εἶδον. Revelation 15:5-8 is one such identifiable unit, being introduced with the formula μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον, which is a formula used only four times in Revelation (4:1; 7:1¹³⁰; 15:5; 18:1), and according to Aune (1998a: 863) always when a major textual unit is introduced¹³¹. Structurally it fits as follows into the sub-section of Revelation 15:1-16:21¹³²:

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

In the text as it is presented to us, Revelation 15:5 is not really the start of the new vision, prompting Aune (1998a: 863) to consider Revelation 15:2-4 as a later prefix added to the vision of the seven plagues [Revelation 15:1 seems to function as a pre-summary of the visions to be unfolded in Revelation 15:2-16:21 (Aune 1998a: 869)]. Important in the prefix is the presence of another hymn [doxology] glorifying the sovereign power of the Almighty God [cf. discussion on Revelation 4:8-11, specifically the part on worship]. By taking Revelation 15:2-4 as a later insert [and verse 1 as a pre-summary] Revelation 15:5-8 becomes the “original” introduction to the narrative of the final plagues in Revelation 16.

At first the seven plagues flowing from the bowls seems like a natural conclusion to the blowing of the seven trumpets. However, one must be careful not to read too

¹²⁹ The broader unit is that of Revelation 11:15-16:21, which is a vision of the judgment of the Lord (cf. Rev 14:14-20).

¹³⁰ The formula here is μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον.

¹³¹ Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 92) sees it as the starting point to a new major section of the Book. Cf. footnote 96 above.

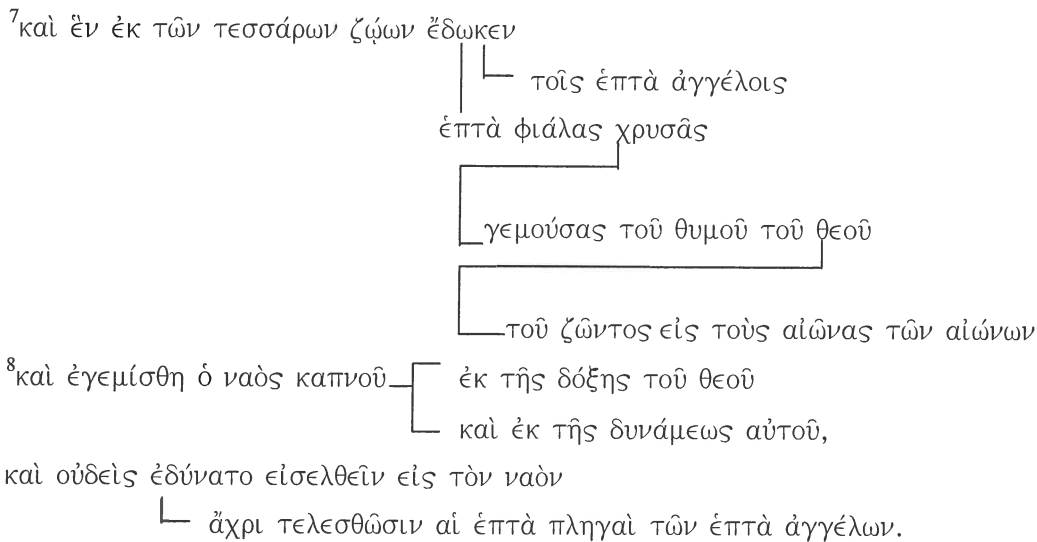
¹³² For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

much chronological history into the visions in Revelation¹³³. They are intended “more to confront man with vivid portrayals of eschatological truth” (Mounce 1977: 284). The message is to be interpreted within this broad framework of Revelation. The fact that the seven plagues follow on the judgment scene in Revelation 14 should not be taken as another step following the judgment scene. What follows here, all filters out into the revelation of God’s New Jerusalem and his new creation where no one will suffer any discomfort any more, and everybody will always be in the presence of God and the Lamb (Rev 21-22). That is ultimately the climax of Revelation (Du Rand 2004: 277). There is a systematic build-up to this climax, but not necessarily to be read and understood chronologically. It is rather a case of different viewing points [pictures – cf. Kiddle 1940: 296] from which the same thing is observed: the consummation of history in the Judgment on the Day of the Lord.¹³⁴

ii.) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

The following is the syntactical analysis of the text of Revelation 15:7-8:



¹³³ Charles (1920b: 26) seems to do just this when he tries to make a chronological link between Revelation 13 and 15. Unfortunately in his discussion he omits the important role of Revelation 14:1-5 as a comfort to those who were suffering under the beast in Revelation 13:15. Although Revelation 14 is an insert of hope and Revelation 15 continues with the judgment scene, it does not necessarily entail a chronological sequence of events. Hughes (1990: 169) connects these plagues to the third woe, which is nowhere explicitly mentioned as being put into action.

¹³⁴ Ford (1975: 254) calls it different “elements” of God’s wrath and judgment in history, while Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 93) understands the different plagues [referring specifically to the trumpets and bowls] as a symbolic illumination of the different dimensions of the “Great Day of the Lord”.

b) Textual criticism

The textual unit Revelation 15:5-8 has a couple of variant readings in different places in the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 662-663; Aune 1998a: 854). The two most important variant readings are both found in verse 6. In Revelation 15:6a there is a strong variant reading to omit *οί* before *ἔχοντες*. After taking into consideration the use of the article in similar instances elsewhere in Revelation, Aune (1998a: 854) concludes that the accepted reading is probably the original. One can therefore accept the reading of *οί* [given in brackets in the text]. This would make *ἔχοντες* a substantive participle within this context (Blass & Debrunner 1961: 212-213; cf. Aune 1998a: 854).

The second text where a strong [but very diverse] variant reading is proposed is Revelation 15:6b. The variant readings suggest *λίθον* [meaning stone or precious stone] instead of the textual reading of *λίνον* [meaning linen garment]. Aune (1998a: 854) is of the opinion that *λίνον* is the original reading, but because of the unusual meaning of *λίνον*, it was changed to *λίθον*, which fits the description of the angels best (cf. Ford 1975: 253; Beasley-Murray 1981: 237). Other variants with regard to *λίνον* are probably the result of scribal difficulties in the interpretation of *λίνον* (Aune 1998a: 854).

None of these variants affect the understanding of the text for purposes of this study in a material way. It is therefore possible to work [in this instance] with the text of Aland & Aland as presented. With regard to verse 7, which refers to the “living God”, only a few weak variant suggestions are made, which would not affect the interpretation of the “living God” in the text here (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 662-663).

c) Victoriously worshipping the righteous God

After the short introductory phrase [pre-summary] in verse 1 the vision is “interrupted” by an interlude of victory and praise to God [the prefix]. This interlude is essentially a message of hope stemming from an already won victory, confirmed by the fact that the sub-section begins with a mention of the victorious crowd standing at the mirror-like sea (Rev 15:2; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 232]). It is probably the same crowd referred to in Revelation 14:1-5 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 235). They are the people who have not abandoned their faith, even amidst fierce persecution under the

beast (cf. Rev 13:15). They sing a joyous hymn praising the holiness and righteousness of God (Rev 15:3).

The victorious image of the interlude is in stark contrast to the sombre image that would follow, when the “pouring out” of the wrath of the Lord is announced (Rev 15:5-8; [Mounce 1977: 286]). The interlude is strategically important to the overall message of hope John wants to bring to the believers in Asia Minor in their situation [cf. the discussion on Rev 7 as an interlude in 2.1.2 above – cf. also Pohl’s assessment on the role of the interlude in Rev 10 {1971: 53}]. Everyone who perseveres “until the end” [i.e. who have not given up on their faith] will participate in the “Song of Moses”¹³⁵. Although the text is not fully supportive, the context of praise as a result of victory and deliverance received rather supports a reference to the song in Exodus 15:1-8, where Moses and the people of Israel sang a song of praise to the Lord for delivering them from the hands of Pharaoh at the Red Sea¹³⁶. In similar fashion the believers have been delivered from the hands of the beast. They are singing the song that Moses would have sung, as the new world for them has become a reality (Pohl 1971: 173; Mounce 1977: 287). The image is essentially a sign of life, as they are *standing* and *worshipping* God [cf. discussion on worship and life in 2.1.1 iii (b) above]. Standing in itself implies life. A dead person cannot stand.

The righteous judgment of God is not something these people will have to fear, for they have won the victory that they were urged to pursue in the letters to the seven churches (cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; [Mounce 1977: 286]). It is at the same time the just repayment, with injury, to those who have injured God’s people on earth (cf. 2 Thess 1:6; [Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 93]).¹³⁷ The scene closes with a similar vision of the glory of God that fills the temple (Osborne 2002: 571). This glory, which could also be taken as referring to God’s glory in judgment [the smoke as sign

¹³⁵ The Bible has three possible references to songs by Moses (Ex 15:1-8; Deut 31:30-32:43; possibly Ps 90; [Aune 1998a: 872]). The additional “and the song of the Lamb” is, according to Charles (1920b: 34-35), a later addition to the text.

¹³⁶ There is a later Rabbinic tradition expecting that, just as Moses sang a song of praise at the Red Sea, he will sing another song of deliverance [a “new song” of praise] in the world to come (Aune 1998a: 873).

¹³⁷ It is important to note that the song of praise is not so much for God’s judgment, but rather for his righteousness, which is evident in his redemptive actions, even amidst the judgment scenes being portrayed (Mounce 1977: 287).

of God's presence in power and judgment¹³⁸ – Beasley-Murray 1981: 237-238], fills the temple to such an extent that no one else was able to enter (Rev 15:8). The vision is thus locked up within an *inclusio* of victory and glory.

d) The wrath of God in righteousness

The entire vision wants to emphasise God's overall control and his righteousness in judgment. The ἡβολή is a passive of divine activity, implying that God is the One acting [or in control of actions] throughout this vision (Aune 1998a: 854). This emphasis is supported by the use of θαυμαστόν in Revelation 15:1. It is a term not usually used for humans in the New Testament, but only to describe the character of God (1 Cl 60:1) or of things related to God (Ford 1975: 254-255).

The vision comes from the temple, also identified as the “the tent of witness” or “the home of God” (Aland & Aland 1993: 662; cf. also 1983 translation of the Afrikaans Bible). The temple is a symbol for the immediate presence of God (Kiddle 1940: 311; Pohl 1971: 177-178). In the same sense “the glory of God” acts as a metaphor for the presence of God (Aune 1998a: 881): “it is from the true sanctuary of God's presence that judgment and condemnation emanate, as well as grace and mercy” (Hughes 1990: 171). And the presence of God implies that He is alive and active among his own in salvation and protection.

The title used for God in verse 7 is the same as in Revelation 4:9 and 10 and 10:6, i.e. τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. The emphasis is again on the majesty, sovereignty and power of God, this time with regard to the judgment [with the interlude contrasting judgment and salvation]. This is the only instance in Revelation where a direct connotation is drawn between the name “God” and the title “the One that lives forever”. Elsewhere in Revelation the title is always implicitly applied to God, or read from the context of the vision. Aune (1998a: 880) sees the title as a “parenthetical explanation” inserted by the author, probably to emphasise the source behind the wrath to be poured out, i.e. the only One that is powerful enough to enact the judgment (Groenewald 1986: 160). In this sense the name of the living God does

¹³⁸Smoke has often been linked to the presence of God in very decisive moments of Israel's history (cf. Ex 34:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:10; Isa 6:4; [Groenewald 1986: 160-161]). It could also be used to refer to a theophany associated with the wrath of God in judgment (cf. Aune 1998a: 880).

not function in a way other than emphasising the eternal power and sovereignty of the God. It is from this sovereign God that judgment comes, and this judgment is the focus in verses 7 and 8 [the $\thetaυμὸς$ τοῦ θεοῦ (cf. Rev 15:2, 7)].

The “wrath of God” was interpreted differently through the ages [cf. Excursion 1 on “The Day of the Lord”]. It was referred to quite often in the Old Testament, sometimes expressed as “the anger of God” [translated with either $\thetaυμὸς$ or $ὀργή$ in the LXX (cf. Num 16:22; 32:14; 2 Kgs 22:13; 2 Chr 34:21; 36:16; Isa 30:33; 34:2; 51:20). In the latter prophets the “Day of the Lord” became the more prominent term for the judgment of God upon his own people who have been disobedient to Him (e.g. Am 5:18-20). That these metaphors are sometimes mixed and combined in Revelation (Rev 16:19; 19:15) can be taken as a strengthening of the message of God’s wrath [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 366)].

In the postexilic era it took on more of an eschatological meaning, where it was connected to the Day of Judgment in the *eschaton* (cf. Isa 26:20; Ezek 22:24; Zeph 1:15, 18; 2:2-3; [Aune 1998a: 870]). It is especially the prophet Ezekiel that emphasises the wrath of God, in fact, more than any other Old Testament writer (Ford 1975: 255-256). This same eschatological understanding is found in the New Testament amongst Christian writers (Luke 3:7; Rom 1:18; 2:5, 8; 3:5; 5:9; Col 3:6; Eph 5:6; [Seifrid 1997: 622]). Eschatologically the Day of the Lord could be understood as the decisive moment on eternal life or death. On this day the final destiny of every person will become a reality.

The phrase appears in total six times in Revelation, all of these towards the end of the main body of the Book [i.e. Rev 4:1-22:9]. This is where the visions of the final eschatological judgment are shown to John from different viewpoints (Rev 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1; cf. 19:15; [Aune 1998a: 870]).

The Day of Judgment in Revelation [or the wrath of God in Rev 15:7-8] always refers to the final eschatological judgment. The focus of the metaphor of the wrath of God is that those who do not hold on to their faith in God until the end [cf. Rev 2-3] will experience the wrath of God in the Day of Judgment (Aune 1998a: 870). For

believers God's wrath is not a punishment but a "Zornfreiheit" [freedom from wrath] through the redemption of Christ (Pohl 1971: 180).

Overall the vision portrayed in Revelation 15:5-8 emphasises the judgmental activity of God in history. No further opportunities will be given to the people of this earth to convert or repent of their sins. There is no new activity of redemption in the Day of the Lord. The decision on redemption [or punishment] has already been made earlier during a person's life on earth [this will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 9 on eternal life and death].

There is no victorious claim to be made with regard to the action of the wrath of God. The victory has already been won through the slaughtering of the Lamb (Rev 5:5-6; 12:11). What follows in Revelation 15-16 is God entering the fray to act in sovereign judgment on the unrighteousness of this world (Mounce 1977: 290). But the corollary of this judgment is the vindication and liberation of the righteous, i.e. those that kept onto their faith until the end (Webb 1997: 266). As mentioned above: this is only the conclusion on an already won victory (cf. Rev 2-3).

iii.) Summary on the wrath of the living God

- Revelation 15 is a vision of the wrath of God [in judgment] about to be poured onto the inhabitants of the earth. It is a sub-section of the scene of the final eschatological judgment of Revelation 14-16.
- It is a vision of the living God in action. The vision confirms God's righteousness in judging the world according to its sins, and his active involvement in reigning supreme over all. The corollary of this judgment is the redemption of those that held onto their faith until the end. They partake in the victory, which have been won on their behalf by the Lamb who has been slaughtered but is alive.
- Although Revelation 15 is a scene of judgment, the interlude of praise to the Almighty power and glory of God serves as a message of comfort to believers that righteousness will prevail and that the victory that have been won, will see them glorifying the living God in heaven, despite the looming persecution (Rev 13) and the judgment to be enacted (Rev 15-16).

Excursion 4: The τέσσαρα ζῶα in Revelation

The τέσσαρα ζῶα are referred to 20 times [individually or as a group] in the Book of Revelation [cf. Annexure A.1], of which 17 occurrences are within the heavenly throne-room vision of Revelation 4:2b-7:17.

Through the years many interpretations [more than 20] have been given with regard to the symbolic meaning of the τέσσαρα ζῶα (Groenewald 1986: 77). Although these creatures seem to have many non-human features, it would be wrong to understand them as animals or beasts [as has been done in the AV].¹³⁹ John never uses ζῶον to refer to animals or beasts [for that he only uses θηρίον - cf. Rev 13 and 17]. In Revelation ζῶον is used exclusively for the τέσσαρα ζῶα (Mounce 1977: 137). It would therefore be more appropriate to translate the τέσσαρα ζῶα with “living creatures” or “living beings”.

It seems that John based his interpretation of the τέσσαρα ζῶα on the vision of the cherubim in Ezekiel 1-3 [with a possible allusion to Isa 6 – Groenewald 1986: 78]. There the term חַיִּים is used as a vague and general term for “living creatures”, which are described more in terms of their human characteristics by Ezekiel (Zimmerli 1979: 120; cf. Aune 1997: 297). Charles (1920a: 119-123) tries to find the meaning of the “living creatures” in the history of the apocalyptic literature [200BC – 100AD], where the cherubim were interpreted quite differently from that of Ezekiel’s vision. In other apocalyptic literature very little is said about the number of cherubim. They are only described as being of the highest order of angelic beings (cf. 1 En 61:10; 71:7; [Charles 1920a: 120]).

Another possibility mentioned [and then seemingly accepted] by Charles (1920a: 122) is to identify the cherubim with the constellations of the Ox, the Lion, the Scorpion and Aquarius, in line with Babylonian astrology of the ancient times.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ This is a translation based directly on the Old Testament interpretation of the Hebrew חַיִּים [a dangerous animal, untamed, living free], the plural form of which is used only rarely in the Old Testament (cf. Isa 35:9; Ps 104:25; Dan 8:4), and which is generally translated with ζῶα in the LXX (Aune 1997: 297). Cf. also the comment of Pohl (1969: 165) on a similar interpretation of the cherubim by Luther.

¹⁴⁰ Mounce (1977: 137) rejects this interpretation on the basis that John was “wholly unacquainted” with the early stage of these developments and would therefore not have gone the route of using the zodiac and then also replace the constellation of Aquarius with that of the eagle (Mounce 1977: 137 – cf. also note 14 on that page by Mounce; cf. also Charles 1920a: 122-123). Kiddle (1940: 90-91) follows Charles, adding that the cherubim further represents in a mirror-like fashion certain qualities of

A popular and quite probable interpretation is to understand the τέσσαρα ζῶα as referring to “an exalted order of angelic beings who as the immediate guardians of the throne lead the heavenly hosts in worship and adoration of God” (Mounce 1977: 138). In other apocalyptic literature the cherubim either guards the throne or sing the *trisagion* (1 En 39:12; 71:7; 2 En 19:6; cf. Rev 4:9-10; [Charles 1920b: 120]).

Another very probable interpretation is that the τέσσαρα ζῶα represent the entirety of creation in worship of God. They represent the strongest being from each sector of creation, i.e. wild animals [lion], domesticated animals [ox], birds [eagle], and man [the most powerful of created beings].¹⁴¹ The τέσσαρα ζῶα have eyes all over their bodies, signifying that nothing will escape their attention (Hughes 1990: 73-74; Du Rand 1999a: 1778). This interpretation is supported by the symbolic meaning of the number “four”, which is the number of the universe, “the symbol of that which is global” (Hughes 1990: 74).

In Ezekiel’s vision the cherubim had the task of bearing Yahweh’s throne (Zimmerli 1979: 120). This is not the case in Revelation (Charles 1920a: 118). The τέσσαρα ζῶα have two main functions here: Worship of God (cf. Rev 4:8-9; 5:8-9, 14; 19:4), and acting as bearers of messages from God to the angels (cf. Rev 6:1, 3, 5, 7; 15:7) (Groenewald 1986: 78).

In the other occurrences in Revelation the τέσσαρα ζῶα are depicted as standing motionless in a position somewhere close or around the throne [they are seemingly always in the throne-room], seemingly just used to indicate the position of other heavenly beings in the throne-room in relation to the One who sits on the throne (cf. Rev 4:6b; 5:6, 11; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3)¹⁴².

the God they worship. Beasley-Murray (1981: 117-118), on the other hand, combines the interpretation of Charles with that of the cherubim as representatives of the entire creation.

¹⁴¹ This seems to be a very popular interpretation (cf. Mounce 1977: 138; Groenewald 1986: 78; Hughes 1990: 73; Du Rand 1999a: 1778). Pohl (1969: 167) understands them as “Sinnbilder aus der Schöpfung... sondern für große göttliche Macht.” According to Swete (1907: 71) “the four forms suggest whatever noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest in animate Nature”.

¹⁴² With regard to the correct translation of ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου in verse 6b many solutions have been given through the years (cf. Pohl 1969: 165-166; Mounce 1977: 137; Beasley-Murray 1981: 116). Charles (1920a: 118-119) sees it as a gloss or a mistranslation of the Hebrew text. Hall (1990: 612), on the other hand, conceives the cherubim “as an integral part of the throne”, “within the space taken up by the chair.”

Do the τέσσαρα ζῶα represent anything remotely with regard to life and death? In the sense that they play a prominent part in the worship scenes in Revelation, these creatures could represent life in eternity in the presence of God [according to Kiddle {1940: 91-92} “they render glory and honour and thanksgiving to him who is seated on the throne, the living God who supplies their life”]. It is the “living creation” that worships God. The dead can’t worship. They **are** motionless and silent.

Hall (1990:612), who sees the τέσσαρα ζῶα as being part of the actual throne, uses this explanation as the reason for John’s reference to “living” creatures [cf. Footnote 142]. John thereby wants to avoid an interpretation of the living creatures as being “fixed” statues by explicitly depicting them as “living” and in action in worship and service to God. If the τέσσαρα ζῶα represent creation in its entirety, it is an appropriate deduction that they represent the new living creation in the heavenly throne-room in live worship to the living God.

2.2. Summary on the living God in Revelation

- i) All the texts evaluated under this section emphasise the sovereignty and majesty of the almighty God. This is the one feature that stands out throughout Revelation. It is exactly because of this that believers can have hope: they know the living God is still in control.
- ii) This sovereignty is confirmed in the worship of God as the Creator of everything. As Creator He will then also be the Creator of [and Decider on] life.
- iii) This control of God is taken back to the Old Testament by alluding to images from the Old Testament in support of the message. John wants to give believers the assurance that the God of the Old Testament is just as much in power now as He was then. They can trust in Him to be also in power in the future to the same extent. That is why He is called ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Revelation.
- iv) God is the eternal living, the One that lives forever and ever. He is the God beyond time. His existence has no beginning or end.
- v) Worship of God is an important feature in Revelation. God’s majesty, his creative power, and his sovereign control are the subjects of praise. Worship is strongly rooted in the Old Testament (cf. Westermann 1980: 86). It is the



response of a living [acting – or rather reacting] creation to the living [active] Creator.

- vi) God is the One that redeems and protects his own (cf. Rev 5 and 7:2). His glory shines through in his redemption of his people. His redemptive actions will become evident on the Day of Judgment: it is essentially a promise of life. On that day believers can share in the life that He is.



CHAPTER 7

THE LIVING LAMB

"O How wonderful and worthy are you? You can take the book and break its seals, for you are the Lamb that has been slaughtered. You gave your blood (i.e. your life) in order that everybody can qualify to be God's people, regardless of where they stay or the language they speak." Rev 5:9.¹⁴³

1. The portrayal of Jesus in Revelation

The purpose of the first part of this Chapter is not to determine [or evaluate] the Christology of Revelation. That would be an extensive study in itself. However, if we understand the position John affords to Jesus in Revelation, we should also be able to better understand the impact He [i.e. Jesus, and his role] has on the concepts of life and death as used in the book of Revelation.

The person of Jesus Christ is central to the understanding of the message of Revelation, even though very little is mentioned about his earthly life [except for his death and resurrection]. Jesus is the central figure in God's plan for the renewal of his creation (Du Rand 1999b: 41). His centrality is already evident in the beginning of Revelation, when He is portrayed as the author of the revelation that came from God (Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). But then, He is also the content of the revelation (Newman 1997a: 427). One can say that Jesus is the single factor that binds everything [past, present and future] in Revelation together into a unity (Du Rand 1991b: 268). He brings sense into a seemingly senseless world and in this process becomes the Creator of new hope to the people of God.

The name *Jesus* occurs seven times in Revelation¹⁴⁴. According to Coetzee (1990b: 281) it is always used as a proper name, referring to the historical person of Jesus [i.e. the Jesus of the Gospels] who lived and worked here on earth. To this name can be added the extended name *Jesus Christ*, which appears only in the prologue of the book (Mounce 1977: 64). It is also used as a proper name for Jesus [similar to Paul's understanding of the name *Jesus Christ* (cf. Barrett 1994: 104)], and refers only to the

¹⁴³ Free translation from "*Die Boodskap*" (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

¹⁴⁴ Revelation 1:9; 12:17; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10; 20:4; 22:16.

earthly life of Jesus (cf. Rev 1:1, 2, 5)¹⁴⁵. Of course, the original meaning of “Christ” [i.e. God’s chosen one {the Messiah}] does not disappear from Revelation. Jesus is referred to as τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ [i.e. God’s Christ; (cf. Rev 11:15; 12:10); (Coetzee 1990b: 281)]. Bauckham (1993a: 179-185) highlights the important use of the Messianic titles of “Lion of Judah” and “Root of David” in Revelation 5:5 [in conjunction with the title of *Lamb*] to underscore that the Christ of Revelation is none other than the expected Messiah of Judaism.

However, in Revelation a number of different titles are used for Jesus¹⁴⁶. Each of these titles describes a different role or characteristic applicable to the Jesus that John wants to portray to his readers, just as different titles were also used for God (cf. Coetzee 1990b: 280-288).¹⁴⁷

It is a highly exalted view of Christ that is portrayed in this last book of the New Testament (Hurtado 1997: 176), far greater than the passages of exaltation found in the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Matt 17:1-8 = Mark 9:2-8 = Luke 9:28-36). According to Charles (1920a: cxi) none of the other books of the New Testament emphasises the glory of the exalted Christ to the extent that Revelation does. Jesus is proclaimed as the exalted Lord, who has victoriously completed his mission on earth and is now reigning supreme at the right hand of God. He is often put on the same level as God (Bauckham 1993b: 63-65).

The high Christology of Revelation is already evident in Revelation 1:4b-5a. If the idea of John was that Christ is nothing more than the Mediator of the message one would have expected the preposition διὰ in the benediction in Revelation 1:5a (cf. John 1:17), implying that the message only comes through Christ [as a pure messenger] from God. However, John prefers to use ἀπό, thereby claiming that the revelation is just as much coming from Christ as it is coming from God (Swete 1907:

¹⁴⁵ The threefold extension on the name *Jesus Christ* in the prologue could refer, according to Beasley-Murray (1981: 56), to Jesus’ death, resurrection and ascension respectively. Cf. also 2.1.1 below.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Rudolph 2000: 100-101 for a more detailed list of titles and descriptions used for Jesus in Revelation. To discuss these titles [and their meanings] in detail would require an extensive study of its own. The centrality of Jesus to the message of Revelation can already be seen in the fact that He is referred to in nearly every chapter of Revelation by one of these titles [except for Rev 9-10, 18].

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Slater (1999: 13) who assigns the functioning of the titles of Jesus into three categories: i) The Son of Man functioning primarily pastoral; ii) The Lamb, who fulfils various functions, including that of redemption; iii) The Divine Warrior, primarily functioning as eschatological judge.

6). The divine image of Christ is further emphasised when, in the christophany of Revelation 1:10-20, Jesus is described in characteristics drawn from Old Testament theophanies and angelophanies (cf. Dan 7:9-10, 13-14; 10:5-6; Ezek 1:24-28; [Hurtado 1997: 177]). Some of the titles used for God in Revelation are sometimes even applied onto Jesus [e.g. τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ in Rev 1:17 and 22:13; (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 54-58)]. At times He is also worshipped with similar acclamations as was sung unto God [cf. the worship hymns in Rev 4 and 5].

1.1. *Jesus as Redeemer*

Although very little is said explicitly about the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ in Revelation, He is firstly proclaimed as the Redeemer who, by his blood [i.e. his death on the cross], has freed his people from the claws of sin and death (Rev 1:5-8; 12:11). The how and when of salvation is not so much an issue to John. He “largely takes for granted that Christ’s sacrificial death has liberated Christians from sin” (Bauckham 1993b: 75). Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah [τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ] through whom God has achieved salvation [and established his Kingdom amongst his people] of this world (Hurtado 1997: 177).

The title that reveals the most about Jesus as Saviour of this world is that of *Lamb*. It is the most frequently used title for Jesus in the Book of Revelation. John uses it 28 times to refer to Jesus (Aune 1997: 352). The title *Lamb* appears for the first time in Revelation 5:6, when John sees standing amidst the throne *a Lamb*, looking as if it had been slain.

Revelation 5:5-6 is an image overflowing with Old Testament [messianic] traditions (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 70-71). Jesus is called Lion of Judah (cf. Gen 49:9), Root of David (cf. Isa 11:1, 10), and Lamb (cf. Isa 53:7). The title of Lamb is generally associated with the Paschal Lamb of the Old Testament that had to be sacrificed as a reminder and thanksgiving for the salvation of Israel from the hands of Pharaoh (Ex 12:12, 23; {Keener 1997: 642; Aune 1997: 353; cf. Rudolph 2000: 43-51})¹⁴⁸. This is

¹⁴⁸ Most scholars share this view (cf. also Beasley-Murray 1981: 124-125; Pohl 1969: 176-177; Cullmann 1963:79-82). It is important to note that the Paschal Lamb of Exodus 12 was technically not an action of salvation but only a reminder of a salvation already given by God (Rudolph 2000: 46). However, according to Sweet (1990: 124), the Paschal Lamb did take on the meaning of a sacrifice for sins later on in Jewish religious traditions [about the first century AD].

also how Louw and Nida (1997 LLS: s.v.) interpret it: "...the supplementary components of meaning in *arníon* involve the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross." That John links up with this reinterpretation of the Paschal Lamb is clear from Revelation 5:9-10, where the outcome of his sacrificial death is proclaimed in a worship song (Bauckham 1993b: 70)¹⁴⁹.

The redemption by the "blood of the Lamb" is important to the Christian message of hope in general, more so in Revelation where a message of hope was crucial in unfriendly circumstances (Bauckham 1993b: 71; [cf. 2.1 in Chapter 4 above]). It is precisely because of Christ's redemption that believers now have a future hope, even amidst their crises (Rev 12:11; cf. 1 Cor 2:2). The final sacrifice was brought through Christ's death on the cross. For believers this means that redemption is already completed, something that is implied in the worship song of Revelation 12. Believers just need to share in the already won victory. This is highlighted in another sense later on in Revelation when it is said that the New Jerusalem does not have a temple (Rev 21-22), as no further sacrifice will be necessary in future to obtain salvation (Davies 1997: 1071). The sacrifice of the Lamb is sufficient and final.

1.2. *Jesus as Conqueror*

The understanding of Jesus as the Conqueror over the evil powers is fundamental to the overall message of hope in Revelation (Bauckham 1993b: 73). It also, very importantly, links up to the message of Jesus as Redeemer [these two are actually inseparable]. The Lamb is worthy [ἄξιος] because He has conquered, and He has conquered by being slaughtered on the cross. There is great irony in this image of the sacrifice by the Lamb. It is the irony of a *theologia crucis* becoming a *theologia gloriae* (Aune 1997: 352). The sacrificial death of Jesus became his greatest victory, a victory over the powers of sin (Rev 1:5, 8; 12:11; cf. 1 Cor 1:23-24), whereas his resurrection has seen Him take charge of the keys to the realm of Death (Rev 1:18-19). As Trites (1998: 281) puts it:

¹⁴⁹ Paul already made this comparison in his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:7; cf. also 1 Pet 1:19). John the evangelist goes even further by seemingly altering the date of crucifixion so that Christ is crucified on 14 Nisan, precisely when the Passover lambs were to be slaughtered (Aune 1997: 353; Du Rand 1981: 19; cf. also Barrett 1978: 176). Coetzee (1990b: 287) also lists other titles that could reflect on Jesus' work as Redeemer of this world. For other possible interpretations of the Lamb, cf. Aune (1997: 367-373) and Rudolph (2000).

“It was of the utmost practical importance for John to remind suffering Christians that Jesus Christ had conquered death, and that therefore they could expect to share in his eternal victory over sin and death if they remained faithful.”

The victory of Christ is described in the “contest” between the Lamb and the evil powers. The beast coming from the sea mocks the Lamb by also having a wound “as if slaughtered”, and is seemingly also “resurrected” (Rev 13). The beast marks his followers in Revelation 13 [with the notorious 666], just as the Lamb sealed off the 144 000 in Revelation 7. He even has horns “like a lamb” (Rev 13:11). However, throughout Revelation the evil powers are conquered by the supreme power of Christ, the true Lamb of God. The true Lamb conquers [on behalf of believers] through his sacrifice (Rev 12:10); seals off his own so that no one can harm them and, in the end, gets to sit on the throne of God (Rev 3:21; 22:3-4; [Coetzee 1990b: 286]).

The image of Revelation 19:11 is a further example of the portrayal of Jesus as the ultimate Conqueror in the battle with the evil powers, although it is aimed at the return of Christ in the *Parousia*. It is another image drawn from the Old Testament (Isa 63:1-3), where it was originally applied to Yahweh. In early Judaism it was more commonly applied also to the Messiah (Aune 1998b: 1048-1050).

It is important to note that John portrays the victory of the Lamb as a past event. It is something that has been completed at the death and resurrection of Jesus. In his heavenly vision John sees the Lamb *standing* next to the throne in heaven. This confirms that He has conquered and is now alive (cf. Rev 5:5-6; [Bauckham 1993b: 74]). The exaltation of Christ and the assurance of his victory intend to motivate believers to persevere in their faith as they now have the hope of a future where they will share in Christ’s reign (Rev 2:25-28; 3:21; [deSilva 1997: 362]).

John works to a great extent with a realised eschatology, similar to that found in the Fourth Gospel and in Paul (cf. Cullmann 1967: 269; [cf. also Chapter 4, 2.2 & 2.3]). The victory has been won, and is already evident in heaven, even if it does not seem to be the case from an earthly point of view (Bauckham 1993b: 75).

From the pivotal point of Revelation 4 and 5 therefore comes the message to believers that God is still in control since the victory belongs to the Lamb (Bauckham 1993b: 73). The victory completes the vision of God "...accomplishing his sovereign and gracious will through the crucified and risen Christ" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 26). It is significant that the chapter on the Lamb's investiture (cf. Aune 1997: 332-338) follows directly on the chapter about God's majesty and almighty power. It is done to emphasise that this is just a continuation of the overall vision of God's supreme rule in heaven (Bauckham 1993b: 73).

1.3. *Jesus as sovereign Ruler and Judge*

According to Coetzee (1990b: 283) the primary aim of Revelation is to have God revealed as the supreme King in Jesus Christ. The Lamb has not just conquered through his blood, but He is reigning with God (Coetzee 1990b: 286). He greets his church as "Ruler of the kings of the earth" (Rev 1:5c). In Revelation 19:16 He is called "the King of kings and the Lord of lords", i.e. the supreme Ruler over all (Coetzee 1990b: 283). It is a designation traditionally reserved only for Yahweh (Aune 1998b: 1063).

He is also King in the sense that He gets to share the heavenly throne with God (cf. Rev 3:21 and 22:3-4). Revelation 3:21, which is an allusion to Psalm 110:1, is striking. It is one of the earliest texts in Jewish literature interpreted as distinctively aimed at the Messiah. In Revelation it is applied onto the exalted Christ (Aune 1997: 263). Jesus is the King chosen and sent by God as promised in the Old Testament. However, the story of Revelation goes even further. Jesus eventually joins God on the throne. He is thereby claimed to be King with God in the heavenly court. This is further emphasised by the use of the same titles for Jesus and God.

As King on the same terms as God, Jesus is portrayed as the Judge who will effect the final judgment in the *eschaton*. The passage that makes this most clear is Revelation 14:14-20. Although Aune (1998a: 840-842) discards the possibility that Revelation 14:14-20 is a reference to Christ [seeing the Son of Man rather as an angelic being], the setting of the vision is that of divine judgment. Also, the personal title used here for "judge" is the same as was used of Christ in Revelation 1:13 [where Christ is called "the Son of Man"]. The Son of Man is a title frequently used by Jesus to refer

to Himself in the Gospels (Cullmann 1963: 152)¹⁵⁰. It is an exalted title of majesty and judgment. In Daniel 7:13 God applies it to Himself as the *παλαιός ἡμερῶν* (cf. Aune 1997: 90-91; Rudolph 2000: 74-76).

The entire image is clearly that of judgment [i.e. the final judgment], which is a privilege belonging only to God (cf. Deut 32:35; Rom 12:19). The image fits in with the understanding of Jesus as the Son of Man, as explained above (cf. Kingsbury 1988: 103). In the words of Beasley-Murray (1981: 229) “...the conjunction of **the cloud**, the **one like a son of man**, and the **golden crown**, compel the identification.” Furthermore: Jesus’ participation in the final judgment is implied in Revelation 22:13, when He says that He will bring the people’s rewards [according to the lives they lived] on his return in the *eschaton*.

1.4. Summary on Jesus in Revelation

“God is related to the world not only as the transcendent holy One, but also as the slaughtered Lamb” (Bauckham 1993b: 65). This [in a sense] underlines the portrayal of Jesus, the Lamb, in Revelation. He is not only someone chosen by God to do God’s work in this world. He is the revelation of God and of God’s conquering power to the world. He has conquered, although in the most unusual way as the slaughtered Lamb [who is now alive]. He is reigning supreme on the throne in heaven from where He will return to effect the final judgment in the *eschaton* (cf. Trites 1997: 279).

A close reading of Revelation shows the large extent to which John identifies Christ with God. Titles used for God in Revelation [and in the Old Testament] are without further explanation applied to Christ (Bauckham 1993b: 55). The identification of God and Christ moves closer together throughout Revelation until, in Revelation 22:1-4, Christ ends up on the same throne as God (Bauckham 1993a: 134-135). It is clear that John prefers not to refer to God and Christ in plural terms as if they were separate entities. Sometimes the names of God and Christ, when used in conjunction,

¹⁵⁰ Kingsbury (1988: 103) identifies a number of reasons for Jesus’ use of the title Son of Man in reference to Himself: i) to declare his divine authority (cf. Matt 26:64); ii) to explain to his disciples what the world will do to Him (cf. Matt 16:27-28); iii) to explain that He who will be killed by the world, will be resurrected by God; iv) to explain that He, the exalted Lord, will one day return as the Judge of all (cf. Matt 26:64). There is a strong paradox with regard to the use of the title of Son of Man in the Gospels: the One who has divine authority, has come to serve and be killed in order to save and declare his divine authority.

are only followed by a verb in the singular (Rev 11:15) or a pronoun in the singular [cf. αὐτοῦ in Rev 22:3 instead of αὐτῶν; cf. also Rev 6:17¹⁵¹]. He rather creates the impression of a unity within the one God (Bauckham 1993a: 139; Groenewald 1986: 85). This completes the exalted view Revelation portrays of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

2. Jesus and life in Revelation

What has been said above [i.e. in point 1] about Jesus, to a great extent influences the understanding of life and death with regard to Him in Revelation. Christ as the Lamb is the one through whom God works his redemption of this world (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 48-53). Although very little is said directly about his life and death in Revelation, a number of texts reflect upon it (e.g. Rev 1:4-5; 5:5-6, 9-10; 12:10). The discussion will focus mainly on the texts identified in Annexure B.1 [subsection 2].

2.1. *The living Lamb in Revelation*

Jesus as portrayed in Revelation is the exalted Christ. In contrast to the One who sits on the throne of whom nothing is mentioned with regard to death, the death and resurrection of Christ is central to the message of Revelation. Christ has won the victory over sin and death [i.e. He died on the cross, but was resurrected – Rev 1:7,18; 5:6; 12:11; cf. 11:8]. He has ascended to the throne of God in heaven (Rev 5:5-6; cf. 3:21). It is a view of Christ victorious, reigning with God in heaven. Revelation emphasises very strongly that the Lamb's death was his victory over sin. But, just as important, He has been resurrected and is now alive. This will be stressed in the discussions on the texts.

2.1.1. *Jesus as ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν (Rev 1:5)*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 1:1-8 forms the prologue to the Book of Revelation [cf. Annexure A]. It is distinguished from the next major section [i.e. Rev 1:9-3:22] more through a change in style of writing [i.e. a letter-prescript over and against a visionary narrative] than any breaks through generally used text markers [cf. for example the use by John of μετὰ ταῦτα in Rev 4:1 and μετὰ τοῦτο in Rev 7:1]. In Revelation 1:9 a new section

¹⁵¹ Bauckham (1993a: 139) prefers the use of the pronoun αὐτοῦ instead of the plural αὐτῶν accepted by the text of Aland & Aland. Text-critical analysis of Aland & Aland (1993: 644) does not provide any greater assurance about the correct word to use.

starts when John, while in exile on the island Patmos, sees the vision of the Son of Man. Aune (1997: 74) deems Revelation 1:9-11 as probably the original beginning of Revelation, to which was then added an epistolary prescript (Rev 1:4-5c) and postscript (Rev 22:21). This set the book in the form of a circular letter sent out to the seven churches in Asia Minor. However, it is only the frame of the Book (Rev 1:4-8 and 22:21) that has these epistolary characteristics (Watson 1997a: 653). The rest of Revelation is a narrative with characteristics of both the apocalyptic and prophetic genres (Du Rand 1991b: 181). The epistolary prescript fits into the overall structure of the prologue as follows¹⁵²:

1:1-1:8	Prologue	
	1:1-2	Title
	1:3	Beatitude
	1:4-5c	Epistolary prescript
	1:5d-6	Doxology
	1:7-8	Two prophetic oracles

The structure of Revelation 1:4-5c is that of a common epistolary prescript (cf. (ii)(a) below; [cf. Aune 1997: 23])¹⁵³. Most of the elements found generally in Greek letters are present in this prescript: *superscriptio* [the name of the sender – in the nominative]; *adscriptio* [the name of the receiver – in dative]; *salutatio* consisting of two elements [a grace and peace wish, followed by an identification of the ultimate source of the grace and peace, i.e. God and Jesus Christ (Du Toit 1988: 6)].

It is very much in agreement with the letter openings found with Paul, who gave the common ancient letter type a distinctive Christian tone (cf. Du Toit 1988: 9-10; Aune 1997: 27, 40)¹⁵⁴. However, the content of the epistolary prescript differs dramatically from Paul's. The greeting in the name of God and Jesus Christ is still present. But in

¹⁵² For a detailed structure on Revelation 1-5, cf. Aune 1997. Cf. also the structure used in Annexure A to see how the prologue fits into the overall structure of the Book.

¹⁵³ The structure of the entire prologue is in accordance with standard letter types of ancient Greek writing in general (cf. Aune 1997: 26), with an introduction and greeting, then the epistolary prescript, followed by a doxology.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. O'Brien (1982: 2-6; 270-274) for more detail on the characteristics of Pauline letters, specifically the distinct Pauline greeting (cf. also O'Brien 1993a: 551). Cf. also Aune (1997: 28-29) where he discusses the hypothesis that the greeting had its origin in the liturgical greetings that started off early Christian worship services.

each part of the greeting John replaces the usual source of the salutation with an elaborate description thereof (Aune 1997: 26-28). The name of “God our Father” is replaced with the divine title $\delta\ \omega\upsilon\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \delta\ \eta\eta\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \delta\ \epsilon\ \rho\chi\acute{o}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$, while the name of “Jesus Christ” is replaced with three divine titles (cf. Rev 1:5c). John goes further than Paul or any other early Christian writer by adding a third ultimate source: that of “the seven spirits before the throne” (Aune 1997: 26-28). The result of this, is according to Aune (1997: 28)

“...a highly formal arrangement of three ultimate sources for the grace and peace wish, emphasized by the threefold repetition of the preposition $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron$, ‘from’, with the entire structure framed by three titles of God and three titles of Jesus Christ.”

The context of the greeting is important, as it is clear that John deliberately puts Jesus on the same level as God in the salutation. It immediately emphasises the high Christology of Revelation, giving divine status to Jesus Christ as the One who, together with God, affords the peace and grace to the readers. It sets the stage for the divine and exalted view on the rest of the book.

Excursion 5: The Divine Trinity in Revelation?

The unique greeting used by John brings to mind the question to what extent he gives recognition to the existence of the Divine Trinity. The discussion in 1 above has already focussed on the high Christology of John, and that he deliberately uses the same titles for Jesus as was traditionally applied unto God, thereby positively identifying Christ with God (Bauckham 1993a: 139).

Significantly John seemingly puts the Spirit [called the “seven Spirits”] on the same level as God and Christ as the ultimate source of the greeting to the readers. The use of the preposition $\acute{\alpha}\pi\omicron$ instead of $\delta\iota\acute{\alpha}$ is important in this regard (Swete 1907: 6). The preposition occurs in conjunction with all three sources of the greeting.

According to Aune (1997: 33-35) there are a number of possible interpretations for the “seven spirits” (cf. also Beasley-Murray 1981: 55-56). The two most significant interpretations is to understand the “seven spirits” as a reference to the

Holy Spirit, or to understand it as a reference to the seven principal angels of God (cf. Tob 12:15; 1 En 20). Aune (1997: 34) prefers the latter interpretation.¹⁵⁵ Bauckham (1993a: 162), however, has shown that John refers to the seven angels in different terms (cf. Rev 8:1). The reference here is thus to the Holy Spirit.

According to Bauckham (1993a: 162) the “seven Spirits” is an allusion to Zechariah 4:1-14. Revelation answers the question on how God will establish his rule on earth with the words of Zechariah 4:6: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts” (Bauckham 1993a: 163). In fact, Bauckham (1993a: 150) identifies three categories of references to the Holy Spirit in Revelation: i) four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι (Rev 1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10); ii) ten other references to the Holy Spirit, mainly in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13; 22; 14:13; 19:10; 22:17); iii) four references to the seven Spirits (Rev 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

The association by John of the Holy Spirit [or the seven Spirits – Rev 1:4d] with God and Christ in the greeting of Revelation 1:4-5c makes it more possible that he intended the Spirits to be the representation of the Holy Spirit (Beasley-Murray 1981: 55). By putting Christ last in the equation John wants the emphasis to fall on the redemptive grace flowing from his death and resurrection (Coetzee 1990b: 260).

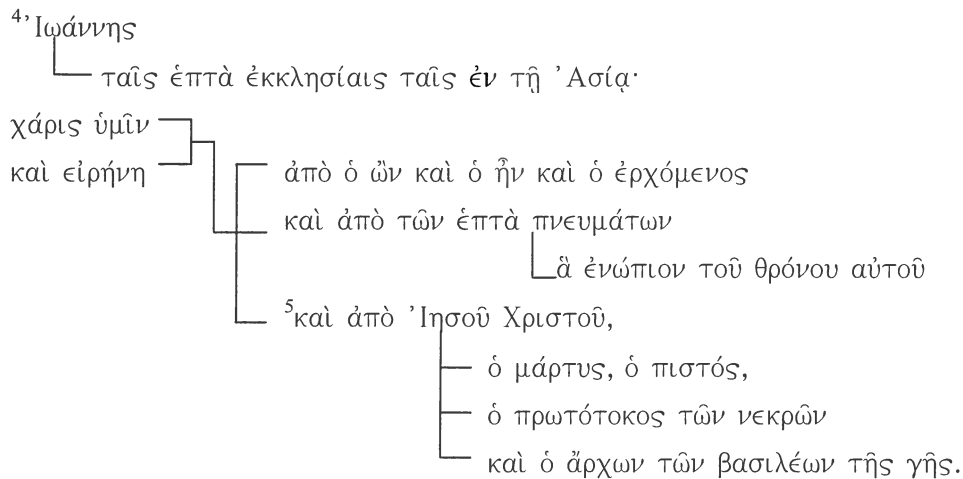
It is clear that for John the Holy Spirit has an important role to play in the establishment of God’s rule, a role so high that it places Him on the same level as God when it comes to divine acclamations. This would make Revelation the one Book in the New Testament that expresses a Trinitarian view within the one God [cf. also early reflections on this in Matt 28:19; 1 Cor 12:4-6; 2 Cor 13:13; (Coetzee 1990b: 259; Groenewald 1986: 34)].

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

The following is a syntactical analysis of Revelation 1:4-5c:

¹⁵⁵ It is important to take into consideration that the name “Spirit of God” or “Holy Spirit” does not occur at all in Revelation (Aune 1997: 36). However, as Groenewald (1986: 34) has stated, the Johannine literature in general refrains from the use of the words “Holy Spirit”.



The analysis highlights the standard epistolary features of the introduction. For the purposes of the discussion, the understanding of ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν is important. In the context of the salutation the reference is to the physical death of Christ, and more specifically his resurrection from death. This interpretation is supported by the preceding ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, probably referring to Christ's death.

b) Firstborn from the dead?

Jesus is called ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν only in Revelation 1:5. In other texts reference is made about Him being dead in the past, but that He is now alive [νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι; (cf. Rev 1:17-18; 2:8; 5:6)]. The unique use of the titles in the epistolary prescript is not coincidental. John wants to portray a higher view of God and Christ. He wants to emphasise the divine [heavenly] source from whom this document originates. But he does it in a very unusual way so as to underline the importance of this message to his readers in their situation (Aune 1997: 41). Even here, right at the start of the letter, John wants to emphasise the comfort believers can take from the knowledge that God is still in total control of everything.

Text-critically there are no major variances with regard to the phrase [and the entire verse] under discussion here. There seems to be strong support for the insertion of ἐκ before τῶν νεκρῶν (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 632). It is probably done to align the text with the reading of the earlier letter of Paul to Colossians, specifically Colossians 1:18 (Aune 1997: 25). However, it is a suggested change that would not have a major affect on the understanding of the text.

The use of *πρωτότοκος* as a title for Jesus did not originate with John. The Christians in Asia Minor [specifically the Colossians, but probably also other congregations, as the letter from Paul to the Colossians was circulated throughout Asia Minor] was probably already familiar with the title, as Paul referred to Jesus by using the phrase *ὁ πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν* (cf. Col 1:18). It is possible that this title had become part of the tradition amongst Christians in this region (Aune 1997: 38).

The title or word *πρωτότοκος* generally means “firstborn”. It is a title of status, referring to the important position of the eldest child of the household (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 734)¹⁵⁶. The title was commonly used in this literal sense in the LXX (Ex 22:28; Num 18:15). Being the firstborn was important, as the firstborn child had the principal right to the inheritance of the father (cf. Gen 25:31-34) (Beasley-Murray 1981: 56). But the word *πρωτότοκος* also has a number of “theologically significant figurative uses”, implying a “special, privileged status” (Aune 1997: 38). Sometimes Israel was called the firstborn of God in a figurative sense (LXX – Ex 4:22; LXX Jer 38:9 [MT – Jer 31:9]) (Aune 1997: 38).

In the New Testament *πρωτότοκος* is used of Jesus in two distinctive ways: i) Protological, referring to his pre-existence (cf. Col 1:15); ii) in a resurrection context (cf. Rev 1:5; Col 1:18) (Aune 1997: 38-39). In the Christological hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 Paul highlights Christ’s primacy as *πρωτότοκος* in every aspect. He is present as *πρωτότοκος*, not just in his pre-existence at creation (Col 1:15), but also through his redemptive actions, more specifically through his resurrection (Van der Watt 1988: 30-31). In a Messianic context [as Christ is portrayed even in Rev {cf. 1 and 1.1 above}] the concept of sovereignty as status of the firstborn dominates. This is the case in Revelation 1:4-5c, as this is an allusion to the Messianic interpretation of Psalm 89:27¹⁵⁷ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 56). This is also what Paul wanted to emphasise in the hymn of Colossians 1:18 (Mounce 1977: 70-71). John adds the phrase “from the dead” to qualify the Messianic term *πρωτότοκος* (Aune 1997: 39).

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Matt 1:25; Luke 2:7; Gen 25:25 – LXX (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 734). In total *πρωτότοκος* occurs eight times in the New Testament. It is used mostly in a figurative sense (O’Brien 1993b: 301).

¹⁵⁷ LXX Psalm 88:28 – cf. Aune (1997: 39).

Calling Christ πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως (Col 1:15) does not imply that Christ was Himself part of the created order [i.e. the first thereof], but is “used to emphasize the special status enjoyed by Christ” (Aune 1997: 38)¹⁵⁸. With this phrase [title] Paul emphasises that Christ already had divine status at creation as the εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (Van der Watt 1988: 29). This is a reference to the exalted Christ in heaven and not the earthly person of Jesus.

As the firstborn from the dead [ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν] He is the “founder of a new humanity” (Col 1:18; cf. Gen 49:3). He is the One coming from God to establish the new community of God (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 734). He is the inaugurator of the resurrection age (O’Brien 1993b: 302). As the first to arise from amongst the dead, He is also the first-fruit [ἀπαρχή]¹⁵⁹ that guarantees the future resurrection for believers (cf. 1 Cor 15:20, 23; [O’Brien 1982: 51; Trites 1998: 281]). “[H]e pioneers the path of resurrection to glory” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 57).

Beasley-Murray (1981: 56) sees in this threefold description of Jesus in Revelation 1:5 a possible reference to Christ’s death [faithful witness], resurrection [firstborn from the dead], and ascension and his second coming, as a final fulfilment of his ruling Kingdom [Ruler of the kings on earth] respectively. As the faithful witness [ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός] Jesus showed Himself to be the true martyr [ὁ μάρτυς], staying faithful to His commission unto the end [i.e. his death on the cross]. Through his resurrection then He opened the doors to a new life for believers¹⁶⁰.

The resurrection of Christ as the πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν is the ultimate victory that has opened up the doors of death for believers (cf. Rev 1:18). It is only as a result of this victory over the powers of death that John can offer a message of hope and comfort to believers, even in the face of possible persecution (Trites 1998: 282).

¹⁵⁸ Cf. also Rev 3:14 where Christ is called ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ (Aune 1997: 39).

¹⁵⁹ A Pauline word. With regard to redemption and resurrection Paul generally refers to Christ as the ἀπαρχή of those raised from the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:20, 23). He would, however, also refer to the first converts of his missions as the “first-fruits” (cf. Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:15). An interesting use is that of Romans 8:23, where Paul calls the Holy Spirit the ἀπαρχή. In this instance the Spirit represents for Paul a portion of what is to come with regard to goodness of salvation. Their experience then will be “just like the Spirit they now possess, but even more so” (Burge 1993: 300-301).

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Trites (1998: 278) who sees the titles as a chronology of Jesus’ earthly life [true witness in life and death], his resurrection from death [firstborn from the dead] and his present and future lordship over everything. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 41) on the other hand, thinks that the titles “express the author’s own theological interest in emphasizing the relationship of Christ to the community.”

Osborne (2002: 63) identifies a twofold understanding of πρωτότοκος: emphasising Christ's sovereignty over life and death, and identifying Jesus as the prototype for those to be raised into the new aeon. Without the resurrection there would be no message of hope to convey (cf. 1 Cor 15:19). They [i.e. believers] must therefore be faithful witnesses as their Lord was, He who has gone before them to conquer and open the way to this new life (cf. Trites 1998: 280-281; Travis 1997a: 1017).

By virtue of his victory over death [as the first from the dead] Christ has the title of Ruler of the kings of the earth [ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς]. He is now establishing God's rule over the world (cf. Travis 1997a: 1017). The title appears only here in Revelation, but corresponds with the title King of kings (Rev 17:14; 19:16). It is also an allusion to the Messianic text of Psalm 89:27-28 (Osborne 2002: 63).¹⁶¹ In a sense Revelation 1:5 can be deemed a preliminary look to what the author has in stall for his readers with regard to Christ's "open manifestation as King of kings" later on in Revelation 17 and 19 (Mounce 1977: 71). In the *eschaton* He will be acknowledged overall for the supreme Ruler that He already is in heaven (cf. Phil 2:10-11; [Mounce 1977: 71]). As King of kings all power has been bestowed upon Him on his exaltation (cf. Matt 28:19; Phil 2:11; Eph 1:20; [Groenewald 1986: 35]).

The threefold greeting can therefore be understood as the overall message of Christ's victory through death, resurrection and exaltation over the evil powers of this world, thereby constituting his overall rule over everything, specifically his control over life and death. It is a comforting greeting giving believers the strength to stay faithful unto the end (Rev 2-3), through persecutions and hardships, knowing that the final outcome for them would be to rule with Christ in heaven (cf. Rev 3:21; 20:4).

iii) Is there anything else playing a role in understanding the text?

a) Jesus as the ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός

In (ii) above mention was made of Jesus as the faithful witness in the epistolary prescript [ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός]. It is the same description used with regard to the martyrdom of Antipas in Revelation 2:13. The word μάρτυς has a number of possible

¹⁶¹ That there is a deliberate allusion to Psalm 88 [LXX] becomes clearer by virtue of the fact that all three titles used for Jesus in verse 5 appear in Psalm 88:38 [LXX], there seemingly referring to the moon as having these characteristics (Aune 1997: 39; cf. also Charles 1920a: 14).

meanings (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 495-496). The two most important ones are that of a witness in a legal sense (cf. Matt 26:65; Mark 14:63) and that of “*one who witnessed unto death, a martyr*” (cf. Acts 22:20; Rev 2:13). The last mentioned interpretation became quite popular in the persecuted church (cf. Mart Pol 2:2; Rev 17:6)¹⁶². It is in this sense that the death of Jesus was sometimes regarded as the first martyrdom (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 495). If this is the case Jesus is the “model of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God” (cf. 1 Tim 6:13; [Mounce 1977: 70; Beasley-Murray 1981: 56]). The fact that *μάρτυς* appears three times in Revelation in connection with believers that have died for their faith (Rev 2:13; 11:3; 17:6) enhances the possibility that this interpretation should also apply to Jesus Christ whenever it is used of Him (Aune 1997: 37).

However, Aune (1997: 37-38) has proved that references in Revelation to Jesus as *ὁ μάρτυς* are generally more in connection with his exalted status than his status as a historical person (cf. Mounce 1977: 70). He is “conceived not in a limited sense in reference to His earthly life...but as the true witness of every divine revelation” (Charles 1920a: 14). It is then a reference to Christ who has already overcome death and has been exalted to the right hand of the One who sits on the throne, witnessing unto the truth of the salvation He has proclaimed. This is more in line with the overall exalted picture of Christ that John portrays in Revelation¹⁶³. As the exalted Christ He “guarantees the revelation transmitted through John” (Aune 1997: 37). From this could be deducted that Christ as the faithful witness also guarantees the promise of life to believers (cf. Rev 1:17-18).

b) The doxology to Jesus: Rev 1:5d-6

The greeting in the name of Christ is followed by a doxology directed to Christ, explaining the consequences of Christ’s sacrificial death for believers. This is, according to Aune (1997: 46), the earliest doxology directed at Christ alone and not including God. It is a doxology that praises Christ for his redemptive work on the cross. It is possible that this redemption metaphor originated with Paul (Aune 1997:

¹⁶² The English *martyr* is a translation of the Greek word *μάρτυς*, suggesting the connection of this word with the early Christian martyrs.

¹⁶³ In the Gospel of John the historical [Johannine] Jesus is often the subject of the verb *μαρτυρεῖν*, as He is the One who testifies about the truth (cf. John 3:32; 4:44; 5:55; etc.; [Aune 1997: 37; Groenewald 1986: 35]).

46-47). The combination of “the one who loves us” with “being freed from sins” is found quite often in Paul (cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; cf. also Matt 20:28=Mark 10:45; John 10:11).

The phrase λύειν τινὰ ἐκ [ἀπὸ] τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι reminds the reader of the Old Testament sacrifices brought by the people of Israel as a sin offering (Lev 4-5; [cf. Groenewald 1986: 35]). By this sacrifice the people of Israel were *purified* [GNB] from their sins (cf. Lev 4:3, 21, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13; [Wenham 1979: 86-87])¹⁶⁴. This was an important ritual within Israelite religion, as sin brought about a distortion of the relationship with Yahweh, which could end up in death [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6]. The purification offering effectively restored life to the people by re-establishing the relationship with God (Van der Watt 1986b: 184). The blood of the slaughtered animal played a very important part in this purification ritual (Wenham 1979: 88). It was sprinkled all over the place to ritually purify the altar, the tent and the people (cf. Lev 4; 5; 16 – GNB; cf. also Heb 9:16-28).

The context of the abovementioned phrase requires that the word λύειν be understood as having the meaning of *setting free, releasing* (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 484-485). It is an act of redemption [being set free of] from the bondages of sin [and death for that matter] unto the new life (Rom 6:22-23). Jesus Christ is the subject of the verb λύειν. He was the overall and final sacrifice required (Van der Watt 1986b: 190).

In the context of Revelation 1:5 λύειν is synonymous to ἀγοράζειν [to purchase] in Revelation 5:9. Through his death on the cross Christ’s offering was sufficient to pay the required price for the freedom of all people of all times and ages. Those who accept the payment of this price share in the freedom brought about by this sacrifice (1 Pet 1:18-19).

Christ effectively gave his life [blood] so that believers can have theirs back (Van der Watt 1986b: 185). Again we can see the importance of blood in obtaining the freedom from sins, according to Hebrews 9:22 [a Mosaic view – cf. Lev 17:11¹⁶⁵] the only medium by which sins could be forgiven (Fensham 1981: 86; De Cock 2004:

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Wenham (1979: 86-96) for a more in depth discussion of the sin offering.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Bruce (1990: 227).

163). The connection between the blood of Christ and forgiveness of sins comes from early church tradition, and is already evident in Paul (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 42)¹⁶⁶.

It is clear that, throughout Revelation, John takes for granted the fact that Christ's death has liberated Christians from sin. That fact is stated right at the beginning of the book. The rest of Revelation is nothing more than a revelation [and evaluation] of the consequences of the decisive victory of the Lamb (Bauckham 1993b: 75).

But the result of the price that was paid doesn't stop at the freedom obtained. Through his death and resurrection as the ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν Christ has afforded royal and priestly status to all believers (Rev 1:6). Believers can therefore live in hope of the future, when all those redeemed by the blood of the Lamb will share in the joy [and exalted status] of the new life with Christ (Rev 14:3-4; 19:1-10; [cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 190]). The doxology praises the divine status of Christ evidenced in the divine salvation he brought to this world.

iv) Summary: Jesus as ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν

- What is implied with regard to Jesus' death and resurrection in the epistolary prescript [Rev 1:5] is not at all surprising within the Christian context. The greeting emphasises the importance of the death and resurrection of Christ as the core of the Christian message of hope (Trites 1998: 281). It is the central message throughout the New Testament.
- As the ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν Christ has paved the way [taken control of the doors of death – Rev 1:17-18] for believers to eternal life. Through his victory over death He has inaugurated a new age, a resurrection age (O'Brien 1993b: 302). His resurrection is a guarantee that believers will one day also be resurrected into the new life with Him (cf. Rev 1:17-18).
- His death was the final sacrifice, sufficient to pay for all people's sins so that all believers can be freed from the bondages of sin and death unto a new life (Van der Watt 1986b: 190).

¹⁶⁶ Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 41-43) also places this entire redemption scene within a baptismal tradition in the early church, which functioned within the context of a confessional formula.

- By virtue of his resurrection from the dead Christ is the Ruler over everything, underlining his victory and his ultimate power, also over life and death, in everything.
- Putting Christ and God on the same level in the epistolary prescript emphasises the divine status that John affords to Christ in Revelation (Aune 1997: 26-28).

2.1.2. *The One on the cloud who has been pierced*

i) What is the context?

In Revelation 1:7-8 we find two prophetic oracles referring to the *Parousia* of Christ. These oracles are still part of the prologue to the book of Revelation [cf. the discussion on the context of the prologue in 2.1.1 above]. The oracles are, according to Aune (1997: 51),

“two discrete units with no intrinsic literary connections, which are linked together only by virtue of the fact that they are sandwiched between two carefully defined textual units”.

The insertion of prophetic oracles between two sections of text is something regularly done by John. It shows the prophetic element within the genre of Revelation¹⁶⁷. These two prophetic oracles fit into the structure of the prologue as follows¹⁶⁸:

1:1-1:8	Prologue
1:1-2	Title
1:3	Beatitude
1:4-5c	Epistolary prescript
1:5d-6	Doxology
1:7-8	two prophetic oracles
1:7	Prophecy of the coming of Jesus
1:8	three self-predications of the Lord God

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Rev 13:9; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 21:5-8; 22:12-15, 18-20 (Aune 1997: 51-52).

¹⁶⁸ For a detailed structure on Revelation 1-5, cf. Aune 1997.

The first of these oracles is characteristically [i.e. with regard to early Christian prophetic language] introduced with the particle ἰδοῦ [behold] and concludes with the phrase ναί, ἀμήν (Aune 1997: 52)¹⁶⁹. The second oracle [verse 8] is a self-predication [threefold] of the Lord God (Aune 1997: 51).

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

7 Ἰδοῦ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν,
καὶ ὄψεται αὐτὸν πᾶς ὀφθαλμὸς
καὶ οἴτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν,
καὶ κόψονται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν
καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ τῆς γῆς.
ναί, ἀμήν.

Beasley-Murray (1981: 58) regards verse 7 as the overall theme of the prophecy of Revelation. It is an exalted view of Christ as the One returning triumphantly as the Judge of this world. The cloud in this instance acts as the throne from where judgment will be effected [cf. Rev 14:14]¹⁷⁰. It is a clear allusion to Daniel 7:13 (Aune 1997: 59). Verse 4 already prepared the believer for this coming in exaltation by designating God as the One who is coming, ὁ ἐρχόμενος (Groenewald 1986: 37). Furthermore, it is emphatically affirmed by the concluding ναί, ἀμήν at the end of verse 7. Verse 8 is a second, independent oracle about God (Aune 1997: 59).

There are no major text-critical notes for this verse. The most prominent variant suggested is to replace ὄψεται with ὄψονται (Aland & Aland 1993: 633), a reading that, according to Aune (1997: 50), was brought in to coincide with κόψονται at the end of the verse. The use of μετὰ instead of ἐπὶ is more in line with the Theodotianic version of Daniel [whereas ἐπὶ rather suggests that the LXX version of Daniel was used – Rev 14:14b (Aune 1998a: 840)].

¹⁶⁹ According to Aune (1997: 53), in Revelation ἰδοῦ always means “behold” when used in speech context [13 times in total] and always means “look” when used in narrative context [13 times in total]. In Revelation 1:7, it functions to affirm the truth of the prophecy about the coming of Jesus.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. Aune (1998a: 840-841) for a detailed discussion about the different uses of clouds as modes of transportation found in the Bible.

b) He who was pierced

The prophetic oracle in verse 7 [Ἰδοὺ ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν νεφελῶν] starts with an allusion to Daniel 7:13 (cf. Rev 1:13; 14:14), a prophecy also reflected upon in Matthew 24:30 (Aune 1997: 52-54). In Matthew 24 Jesus had the *Parousia* in mind when He applied the texts of Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10-14 [in combination] onto Himself (cf. Nielsen 1980: 49-51). The entire image is an open manifestation of his sovereignty and majesty as the exalted Lord. The divine sovereignty is affirmed with the threefold self-predications of God in verse 8. The same image about Christ is portrayed in Revelation 1:7 (Mounce 1977: 72). The overwhelming image is enhanced by the proclamation that the return of Christ will be visible to all people [Rev 1:7b]. The final part of the oracle [verse 7d] proclaims the reaction of the peoples of the earth to this return of Christ in judgment (Mounce 1977: 73).

The middle part of the oracle [verse 7c] is of concern for this subsection. It is an allusion to Zechariah 12:10-14. This part of the oracle reflects on the physical death of Jesus on the cross, specifically referring to the soldier that pierced his side to confirm his death (cf. John 19:34-37). The verb ἐξεκέντησαν is only found in these two texts in reference to Zechariah 12:10 (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 44). It is reinterpreted in Revelation to include everyone that rejects [or has rejected] Christ through the ages. The world, in effect, pierces the side of Jesus [re-crucify Him – cf. Heb 6:6] through their rejection [or ignorance] of Him (Mounce 1977: 72-73; Groenewald 1986: 37). That is why “**all tribes of the earth** will wail on account of Him” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 58).

It is not entirely clear from the text itself whether the wailing will be in repentance or in remorse for the ignorance showed. What is important, however, is that there is a definite link between the death of Christ, and the acceptance of his death by mankind as the only way to enter eternal life (cf. also John 3:16-18; 8:24; 14:6), as well as the resultant judgment in the *Parousia* where all decisions will come into effect (Beasley-Murray 1981: 58-59)¹⁷¹. Those who reject the salvation through the piercing [crucifixion] of Christ will enter eternal death at the judgment [cf. Chapter 9]. The

¹⁷¹ Mounce (1977: 73) and Groenewald (1986: 37) don't accept the idea of mourning in repentance, but the text does not say anything about it at all. The 1983 version of the Afrikaans Bible [NAV] thinks only of remorse without repentance. It is a wailing for waiting too long until it was too late to repent [cf. Osborne (2002: 68-69) who accepts the possibility in line with the allusion to Zech 12].

concluding *ναί, ἀμήν* is an emphatic affirmation that the promise coming through this prophecy is trustworthy (Aune 1997: 56; Beasley-Murray 1981: 59).

iii) Summary on Revelation 1:7

- Verse 7 is actually not about the life and death of the person Jesus, but about the exalted Christ returning in judgment. The reference to the death of Jesus is done to explain that He has conquered and that the acceptance [or rejection] of his victory will be the basis for the judgment in the *Parousia*. It also implies that although Christ was crucified, He is now alive. In fact, He will be the final Judge.
- Verse 7 could be deemed to be a fitting summary of the theme of Revelation: The exalted Christ that will return in judgment after He has already won the victory through his death and resurrection. The effect of this judgment will be discussed later in Chapter 9.

2.1.3. *He who was dead is alive (Rev 1:18b and 2:8)*

i) The context of Revelation 1:9-20

With Revelation 1:9 a new main section starts, following on the Prologue in Revelation 1:8. It is the opening vision in the Book of Revelation, and is clearly to be distinguished from the Prologue, both in terms of language [visionary versus prophetic / epistolary] and physical setting [John suddenly identifies himself to be on the island Patmos – Rev 1:9]. According to Aune (1997: 74) Revelation 1:9-11 was probably the original beginning of Revelation, to which the epistolary prescript was added later.

In Revelation 1:9-20 John [taken into a “prophetic” trance by the spirit - *ἐγενόμην ἐν πνεύματι*]¹⁷² sees in a vision the exalted Christ [the Son of Man]. He then receives the commission to put on paper what he has seen and is about to see [cf. Rev 2-3] and then send it to the seven churches in Asia Minor (Mounce 1977: 74). The vision comes to him *ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ* [“the Lord’s Day”]. It is not a reference to the “Day of the Lord” found in the prophetic literature [cf. Excursion 1], but rather refers to “the day belonging to the Lord”. Within the early church the

¹⁷² Cf. Aune (1997: 82-83) for a more extensive discussion of the possible meaning of *ἐν πνεύματι* in the Bible.

Sunday quickly became the day when the resurrection of Christ was celebrated by all Christians. It is probably in this line that John was thinking when he said that the vision came to him ἐν τῇ κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 64-65; cf. Aune 1997: 83-84).

Revelation 1:9-20 cannot be separated from the proclamations to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3. In Revelation 1:11 the command was given to write to the seven churches in Asia Minor [γράψον...καὶ πέμψον]. When we get to the letters to the churches the command to write is repeated before each individual proclamation, confirming the command given in Revelation 1:11 (cf. Aune 1997: 120-121)¹⁷³. Furthermore the characteristics listed [with regard to the Son of Man] in Revelation 1:13-18 reappear strategically at the start of each of the proclamations, linking the proclamations with the original vision of Revelation 1:9-20 (Aune 1997: 117, 121).

That is also the case with the text under discussion. The phrase καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν is repeated in Revelation 2:8, only in other words: Τάδε λέγει...ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (Beasley-Murray 1981: 72). The entire vision is reminiscent of ancient prophetic and apocalyptic revelations in general, and is probably a combination containing elements of both these genres (Aune 1997: 116, 119). A new section clearly starts in Revelation 4:1 with the formula μετὰ ταῦτα.

The vision of the Son of Man and the commission to write fit into the overall structure of Revelation as follows¹⁷⁴:

I	1:1-1:8	Prologue
II	1:9-3:22	John's vision and commission
	1:9-20	Vision of one like a Son of Man
	2:1-3:22	Proclamations to the seven churches
III	4:1-22:9	Disclosure of God's eschatological plan
IV	22:10-21	Epilogue

¹⁷³ The command to write [in the aorist imperative] occurs in total twelve [12] times in Revelation (Aune 1997: 85).

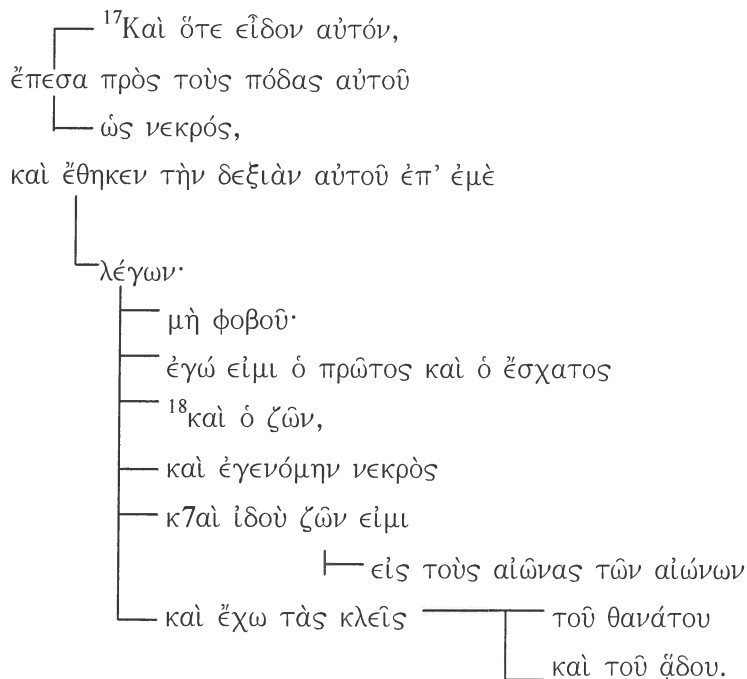
¹⁷⁴ For a detailed structure on Revelation 1-5, cf. Aune 1997. Cf. also the structure used in Annexure A to see how the prologue fits into the overall structure of the Book.

The positioning of the opening vision within the context of the Book of Revelation is important. Just after the prophetic oracles forecasting the coming of the exalted Christ on a cloud sometime in the “near future”, John sees the vision of the Son of Man as the Decider over life and death, the One who he also sees in Revelation 14:14 coming in judgment at the *Parousia* (cf. Dan 7:13; [Bauckham 1993b: 97-98]).

ii) What is in the text?

There are only minor textual variants suggested for the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 634-635). The most prominent variant is the insertion of ἀμήν after αἰώνων in Revelation 1:18, a literary feature occurring quite often in Revelation, which was probably triggered by the preceding formula αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων (Aune 1997: 66). In Revelation 2:8 there is a rather weak variant, suggesting the substitution of πρῶτος with πρωτότοκος (Aune 1997: 157). This was probably triggered by the use of πρωτότοκος in Revelation 1:5 [cf. above].

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 1:17-18



The larger context of these verses is the exalted Christ that John sees in heaven. The declaration by Christ in Revelation 1:17c-18a confirms this. He identifies Himself to

John with a list of features ranging from his exalted status to his atoning death (cf. Phil 2:5-11). The use of *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* in combination with *ὁ ζῶν* affords the life being talked about here eternal status [cf. discussion throughout Chapter 6 above]. The combination of aorist tense [I was dead] and present tense [I am living] clearly refers to the atoning death of Christ coupled with his victorious resurrection (cf. Rev 5:6; 12:11).

b) Revelation 1:18b

Revelation 1:18 contains a number of references to life and death. Firstly, Jesus identifies Himself in terms reminiscent of God in Revelation as *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος καὶ ὁ ζῶν* (Rev 1:18a). It is a phrase that implies an enormous amount about Jesus' eternal existence and divine status. The title *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* is synonymous to the title of Alpha and Omega in Revelation 1:8, confirming Christ's eternal divine existence on the same level as God (Slater 1999: 102). This is followed by an implied reference to Jesus' sacrificial death and his resurrection (Rev 1:18b).

The verse concludes with a reference to Jesus' eternal [living] existence after his death and resurrection, specifically the fact that He has, through his death and resurrection, taken control of the "keys to Death and Hades" (Rev 1:18c)¹⁷⁵. The entire verse serves to identify the Son of Man to John as none other than Jesus Christ (Groenewald 1986: 43). He is the eternal Judge clothed in glory and power, just as the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:13¹⁷⁶. Although different aspects of Jesus [i.e. temporal and eternal] are mentioned here, it is not sensible to discuss them in separate sub-sections. This will have a negative impact on the overall picture that is portrayed by the text of Revelation 1:17-18 as a whole.

The phrase *ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς* refers to the physical death of Jesus on the cross. It serves to remind the reader that Jesus did actually die on the cross, but also that his death was not the end. The aorist verb [*ἐγενόμην*] confirms that Jesus' death and "being dead" is a historical occurrence that now belongs to the past. Christ is not

¹⁷⁵ The role of Death and Hades as personified partners in Revelation and their final destiny will be discussed in Chapter 9 [cf. Chapter 9, 4.1].

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Footnote 150 and sub-section 1.3 above.

dead any more. He is alive [see below], after being resurrected into a new life (cf. Rev 1:5). Although very little is said in verse 18 about Jesus' actual death [or resurrection], the implication is clear: Christ has conquered death by virtue of his resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 15:26; [Groenewald 1986: 42]). Through his death and resurrection "he brought about an emancipation which included liberation from guilt and participation in the eternal kingdom" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68). This is confirmed in the rest of verse 18.

On the next phrase there seems to be uncertainty as to whether ζῶν εἶμι should be read as an adjectival participle [predicate nominative], or whether it is what Aune (1997: 102) calls a periphrastic present. ζῶν εἶμι must be read as an antithesis to the preceding phrase ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς, which makes it more possible that John used the [for him] rare construction of a periphrastic present to emphatically contrast Jesus' death with his resurrection (Aune 1997: 102-103)¹⁷⁷. It is striking that John never uses the verbs usually associated with the resurrection of Christ in the New Testament, i.e. ἐγείρειν or ἀνίστημι. Christ is alive, the living One, as God is the living One [cf. Chapter 6]. The verb ζῶν occurs only twice in Revelation, here and in Revelation 2:8 (Aune 1997: 161).

The contrast goes further than just measuring up death against life. Jesus' death was a temporal occurrence in the past [cf. above]. However, the new life He has been resurrected into has no temporal limits [but that is also true of his existence before his earthly life]. This is confirmed with the divine acclamation τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, a phrase reminding the reader of God, who is the "One who lives forever" (cf. Rev 4:9-10). As the ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν (cf. Rev 1:5) He has overcome the temporal powers of death and has inaugurated an eternal "state of being alive" (Aune 1997: 103). The phrase καὶ ἰδοὺ [a Septuagintism – cf. Aune 1997: 103] functions as accentuation marker underlining the truth of the statement (cf. 2 Cor 6:9 for a similar phrase; [Aune 1997: 103]).

The consequence of Christ's victory over death is that He has control of the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18c; cf. OdesSol 42:17). In this way it is proven beyond

¹⁷⁷ The only other occurrence seems to be in Revelation 3:2, where it is used in the present imperative (cf. Aune 1997: 102).

doubt that He is Lord over all, the living **and** the dead (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68). Believers can therefore have the assurance that even in death they will not be without the presence and guidance of the Lord (cf. Rom 14:8-9). That Christ emphasises His control of the keys of death is in a way an unusual statement [cf. below], but at the same time it wants to underline his exalted status as the One with ultimate power.

Keys symbolise power. They control access or deny access (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476). In Matthew 16:13-20 Christ entrusted the keys to heaven in the hands of Peter [symbolising the church as bearer thereof – cf. Rev 3:7]. The church therefore has the power to give [or deny] access to the kingdom. With regard to Revelation 1:18 the keys to Death and Hades symbolise the power to release [or keep locked up]. This power is centred in the hands of the exalted Christ, the Judge of the world, worthy to carry them (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476).

It is difficult to determine whether Christ took control over the keys with his death, and if that is the case, in which manner. In Rabbinic literature keys are mentioned, but they all belonged to God alone. One of them was the key to the grave (cf. Tg Deut 28:12; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 68]). The keys in God's hands are not even entrusted to angels (Aune 1997: 103-104). If this is the case, even Death and Hades, or their rulers, never possessed these keys, i.e. they never really possessed authority over life and death. This, of course, would not be too much of a contradiction, especially if we look back to the Old Testament. There it was made clear that God alone has the power over life [and therefore implicitly over death]. Even though Sheol was deemed to be a place outside of the realm of God, it was still God that sent someone there [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2-3.4].

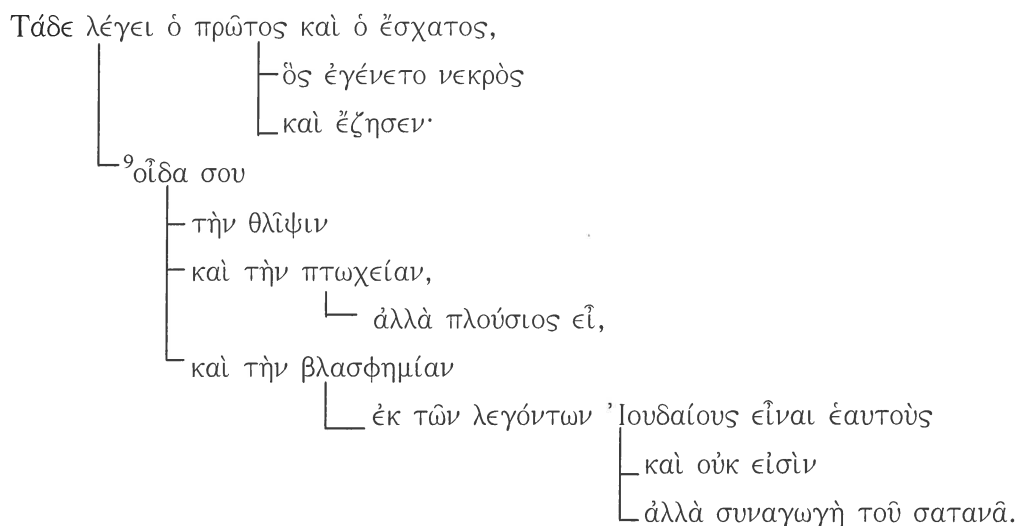
If God is the only Possessor of keys in the divine realm, it rather seems that the keys to Hades and Death have been handed to Christ [on his exaltation] by God, and was not wrestled away from their domain¹⁷⁸. Taking possession of these keys again emphasise the high Christology of Revelation (Mounce 1977: 81). The position Christ occupies in this context is one of divine authority, an authority that even includes life and death. The divine appearance is highlighted even further by the

¹⁷⁸ Cf. however 1 Pet 3:18-20, which could suggest a *descensus ad inferos*, i.e. Christ descending to the realm of Death to fight or proclaim victory (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68; Charles 1920a: 32).

divine brilliance in which the Son of Man is portrayed in the early part of the vision (cf. Mounce 1977: 80).

The divine status and authority afforded to Christ as a result of his victory over death [through his resurrection] enables John to bring a message of hope to believers. The image of the Son of Man wants to give believers the comforting news that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is in control (Slater 1999: 102). Of course, the Son of Man is the eternal Judge with the two-edged sword, but He is also the Conqueror over all evil, including death (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 52). That Christ is given the keys to Death and Hades by God implies that God has always been in control and is now sharing this control with Christ. Because Christ is in control of life and death, they can look forward to a future life where death will have no further impact on them (Trites 1998: 282). Even if death does come over them, they would still be in the hands of the One who possesses the keys to Death and Hades. That is why John need not be afraid of Him (Rev 1:17).

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 2:8b-9



The focus is on Christ addressing his church [as is the case in all the proclamations]. He addresses the congregation as the One who died, but who has overcome death through his resurrection [drawn from the vision of Rev 1:9-20]. The combination of past and present confirms the historicity of the occurrences [cf. (a) above]. As the Conqueror over death He can comfort believers facing probable death through

persecution. They also have the assurance that He knows about all the suffering they are going through, listing each of them (Rev 2:9).

d) Revelation 2:8

The letters to the seven churches are more like prophetic oracles than formal epistles (Beasley-Murray 1981: 72). Each of the seven proclamations [“letters”] starts off with a prophetic messenger formula, which is commonly found in the Old Testament, specifically in the prophetic literature: *Τάδε λέγει...*¹⁷⁹. The subject of the formula [in Revelation] is always the exalted Christ, introduced to the churches through one of the divine acclamations attributed to Him in Revelation 1:9-20 (cf. Aune 1997: 121). It is evident that the acclamations used for Christ in some or other way link up with elements of the actual situation within the church to which the proclamation is addressed (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 72; Groenewald 1986: 52).¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, they reappear [just as the eschatological promises at the end of each proclamation] in the final section of Revelation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 46).

In the proclamation to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) Christ introduces Himself as *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν*. In Revelation the phrase *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* always refers to Christ (cf. Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). It is an allusion to the divine title for Yahweh found in Isaiah (cf. Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). The title corresponds to the divine self-declaration by God in Revelation 1:8 [*τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ* - cf. (a) above (Bauckham 1993b: 54)]. It therefore attributes to Christ the same eternal status [devout from temporal barriers] as has been attributed to God throughout Revelation [cf. Chapter 6 above, 2.1.1].

Identifying Christ as *ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν* in Revelation 2:8 wants to give believers hope in troubled times, urging them to stay faithful, even unto death (Rev 2:10; cf. Mart Pol 17:1). It functions as a reminder of Christ’s sacrificial death. They need not fear even facing the possibility of death, as their Lord has already gone through the gates of death. He has conquered death and is now alive. Implicitly this

¹⁷⁹ The formula is found 250 times in the LXX as a translation of *כה אמר יהוה* (Aune 1997: 121). It always follows the command to write in the seven proclamations. Cf. Aune (1997: 119-124) for a detailed description of the layout of these proclamations.

¹⁸⁰ This does not imply that each letter was only read at the addressee congregation. They were in all probability “intended to be read together and heeded by each of the congregations” (Aune 1997: 119).

gives readers the confirmation that they will also experience this new life (Aune 1997: 167; Mounce 1977: 92). In the interim they are urged to stay faithful throughout suffering and tribulation, just as Christ was faithful unto death (Slater 1999: 120).

To them that conquer [i.e. stay faithful unto the end], eternal life is promised (Rev 2:11). They will not experience the effects of “the second death” [i.e. death in eternity, to be distinguished from the physical death – the second death will be discussed in Chapter 9 below¹⁸¹] even though they might still experience physical death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 83). Just as Christ has conquered death, they will too (Slater 1999: 120).

e) Jesus as ὁ ζῶν: Revelation 1:18a

In Revelation 1:17-18a Jesus is described in divine terms generally attributed to God in the Old Testament (cf. Dan 7; Rev 1:8). Although it is discussed here, under a separate sub-heading, it should not be read in isolation from the rest of Revelation 1:18 [or the entire vision of Rev 1:9-20]. “It is by virtue of the Lord’s victory over death that he can properly be described with the attributes of deity” (Trites 1998: 282). It is therefore discussed here as a fitting summary to the portrayal of Christ in the vision of the Son of Man.

There are only a couple of minor textual variants suggested for verse 17-18a, none of which are supported by strong variant readings. It is therefore possible to work with the text as given by Aland & Aland (1993: 634).

Jesus identifies Himself to John as ὁ ζῶν [a present substantive participle, unlike in Rev 1:18b, where a periphrastic present is used – cf. (a) above (Aune 1997: 102)¹⁸²]. In the Old Testament God is often called “the living God”¹⁸³. Even in the New Testament God is frequently called θεὸς ζῶν, specifically in the letter to the Hebrews

¹⁸¹ The promises of eternal life to each of the seven churches will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 below.

¹⁸² Charles (1920a: 31) understands ὁ ζῶν slightly different, connecting it rather to the phrase following on it than to the preceding phrase. When taken as such, Charles argues, ὁ ζῶν is “...of full significance in the contrast between the ever abiding eternal life which He possesses and the condition of physical death to which He submitted for the sake of man.” The contrast between νεκρός and ζῶν highlights the eternity of Christ even more (Osborne 2002: 95).

¹⁸³ Cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2 and Chapter 6, where a lot more is discussed with regard to the “living God” in the Old Testament and in Revelation (cf. Deut 5:26; 1 Sam 17:26; Jer 10:10; etc.; [Aune 1997: 102]).

(Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; cf. also Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26 and others). The title is also used in Revelation 7:2 for God [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2]. The predicate form used here is, however, not found in the Old Testament, and only starts to appear in early Judaism (cf. 2 Apoc Bar 21:9, 10; [Aune 1997: 102]).

If Jesus calls Himself ὁ ζῶν, it implies that He shares the same divine and eternal characteristics ascribed to God in the Old Testament, even in Revelation (Groenewald 1986: 42). He is Life, just as God is Life (cf. John 14:6). He is not limited by the set boundaries of life and death, just as Yahweh in the Old Testament. Again we see reflections of the very high Christology of Revelation, when Jesus is effectively compared to, and put onto, the same level as the living God of the Bible (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 55).

‘Ο ζῶν could also mean that life can only be obtained through Jesus as the Giver of life (Van der Watt 1986a: 566). In John 14:6 Jesus is identified as the One who has the power to give life, which is something attributed only to God in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2]. In John 11:25-26 Jesus identifies Himself to Martha as the “resurrection and the life”, the only One with the power to give eternal life (Schnackenburg 1971: 414). By doing what only God can do Jesus confirms the communion He has with the Father (Van der Watt 1986a: 562). In the proclamations to the seven churches Jesus stands out as the Giver of eternal life to those who stay faithful unto the end [each proclamation ends with the formula “The one who conquers will...” followed by a promise of life eternal {cf. Chapters 8 and 9 below}].

The paradox in the verse lies in the fact that He who is the forever living [who has the power over life and death] actually died (Beasley-Murray 1981: 67). However, He is not dead any more, but has been resurrected into a new life, a life forever and ever. The message lies therein that, although the Jesus of history did experience death, He is alive forever, and as the forever living One has the power [i.e. the keys] over life and death (Mounce 1977: 81). “It is God and Christ alone who are eternal and make it possible to dwell in eternal bliss” (Osborne 2002: 95). Believers can therefore take heart from the knowledge that, even though life in this world might seem out of control [and might even be lost], life is safely in the hands of the One who has the keys in his hands (Thompson 2000: 703).

iii) Is there anything else playing a role in understanding the text?

The ἐγώ εἰμι sayings of Jesus are of particular importance within Johannine literature (Aune 1997: 100)¹⁸⁴. These words say a lot more than just identifying the orator of the exclamation. In the Old Testament [and rabbinic Judaism] it occurs as a distinctive divine self-proclamation by the only living God, worshipped by Israel (Smalley 1978: 186). Brown (1966: 536) is of the opinion that ἐγώ εἰμι could even have functioned as a *divine name* in the LXX version of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa 43:25). This would in any case be in agreement with God's self-proclamation in Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am" [if translated directly it would read: "I, I am"]. This formula [self-proclamation] stresses the uniqueness of God amongst all others deities. "I am Yahweh and there is no other" (Brown 1966: 536).

In the Gospel of John the ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings [used in an absolute sense] "have a special revelatory function" (Brown 1966: 533). By using the expression Jesus is presented as speaking [and acting – Burge (1992a: 356)] in the same manner in which Yahweh speaks in the Old Testament about Himself (Brown 1966: 537). Jesus therefore reveals his divine identity by applying these sayings onto Himself. He reveals the Father (Du Rand 1991b: 23). This divine interpretation is explicitly clear in John 18:6, when Jesus answers the soldiers looking for Him with ἐγώ εἰμι. The result, as Burge (1992a: 355) puts it, is that "the mere uttering of this name creates a powerful revelation which leaves the arresting party prostrate before God".

As the One revealing the Father in person, He is also the [only] One that gives life [as God is the Giver of life in the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2]. The existence [or origin] of life is in his hands, just as it is in the hands of Yahweh (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 354-355). The different life-metaphors linked to the ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings consistently confirm Jesus as the Source of all life.

The ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings are used in similar fashion in Revelation. The formulaic phrase ἐγώ εἰμι occurs five times in Revelation (Rev 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:16), always

¹⁸⁴ In the Gospel of John the seven absolute ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings are all variations on the theme of eternal life (Smalley 1978: 90). In these sayings the spiritual qualities of Jesus, his real [eternal] nature, are expressed concretely.

with a predicate [in the nominative]. It is ascribed exclusively to the mouth of God (Rev 1:8; 21:6) and to the mouth of Christ (Rev 1:17; 2:23; 22:16). The ἐγώ εἰμι-formula is consistently used in Revelation in direct speech “to make divine predications of the speaker” (Aune 1997: 100-101).

The consistent connection between ἐγώ εἰμι and life in the Gospel of John [see above], is to a great extent absent in Revelation, except here in Revelation 1:17 (cf. John 11:25; 14:6; 6:51; [Aune 1997: 101]). But this does not necessarily imply that life is absent from the formula. The phrase ἐγώ εἰμι in itself suggests existence [life] without end, and reminds strongly of the divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος used in Revelation 1:4c for God [cf. Chapter 6, 1.2]. Jesus’ “I-am” sayings {ἐγώ εἰμι} hints on his eternal [divine] status, correlating with God’s self-proclamation to Moses in Exodus 3:14 (cf. Ex 3:14 – LXX; Dan 12:7; Rev 1:4c)¹⁸⁵. “In His essential nature God possesses life” (Mounce 1977: 81). What is said [claimed] with regard to God, also applies to Christ in Revelation.

The paradox in the text is that the One who is Life experienced death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 67). But even though He went through physical death, He is alive. Through his resurrection He overcame the stranglehold death had on this world. He has ultimate control over life and death as ὁ ζῶν, evidenced through His taking [keeping] of the keys to Death and Hades in his hands (Mounce 1977: 80-81)¹⁸⁶. That is why He can promise life to those that keep faithful until the end and warn those that have fallen behind in their faith [cf. the seven proclamations in Rev 2-3].

iv) Summary on the One who was dead

- The vision of the Son of Man in Revelation 1:9-20 portrays the exalted Christ as Decider over life and death. Read as a unit it wants to bring believers to stand in awe of the conquering power of Christ. He is portrayed in divine images, very similar to that found in Daniel 7 with regard to God (cf. Groenewald 1986: 43).
- Jesus is called the “living One” [ὁ ζῶν], referring to his divine eternal existence with God. As the “living One” He has the same powers over life

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. also Ford (1975: 385) and Osborne (2002: 96).

and death as God. Having the keys of death and Hades [generally associated to be in the hands of God] underlines this divine power bestowed upon Christ. Jesus' "I-am" sayings confirms his eternal divine status.

- Paradoxically the "living One" has died. But He has been resurrected into a new life, which is to last in eternity. The predicate ὁ ζῶν has a twofold function, referring both to Jesus' divine nature and his triumph over death (Aune 1997: 100).
- In Revelation 2-3 the divine predicates used for Jesus reappear in the greeting to each congregation, confirming Christ's presence and control in each unique situation.
- To the church in Smyrna John writes to urge them to stay faithful until the end, as their Lord was faithful unto death. John specifically uses the predicate ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (Rev 2:8; cf. Rev 1:17-18), to confirm Christ's eternal existence, as well as his death and resurrection in victory (Slater 1999: 120).

2.1.4. *The Lamb who has been slaughtered (Rev 5)*

i) What is the context?

The importance of the visionary experience, reported in Revelation 4 and 5, as the fulcrum of the Book has already been discussed in Chapter 6 above [sub-section 2.1.1, (i); {Beasley-Murray 1981: 108}]. The text markers framing the vision were also discussed then and will therefore not be repeated here. The entire vision is an image that wants to give hope to believers in spite of the reality of persecution and suffering they are experiencing in the present [or to be expected in the future]. Revelation 4 and 5 is the pivotal vision from where the message of hope flows to the rest of Revelation, both forward and backward (Sweet 1990: 115).

Whereas Revelation 4 puts the focus on the creative and ruling power of the "One who sits on the throne" [i.e. God Almighty], Revelation 5 shifts the focus to the redeeming power of God, which is manifested in the redemption by the Lamb. But it is important that the vision of the Lamb not be read separately from the vision of the

Creator God (Slater 1999: 168). It is essentially one vision of the overall control of God over the course of history. According to Ford (1975: 87),

“Rev 5 is a transitional scene linking the throne vision, symbolic of divine sovereignty, with the Lion of Judah who will reign on earth (5:10b), symbolic of earthly sovereignty.”

The central theological question of Revelation 4 and 5 is: “Who is the true Lord of this world?” It is answered with elaborate cosmological imagery confirming the overall power of the Lord God Almighty (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 58). The central message in this twofold vision is that the God of creation is at the same time the God of redemption (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108; Slater 1999: 173). The visions in Revelation 4 and 5 are linked together into a single vision through the title of the “One who sits on the throne” that appears in Revelation 4:2b and 5:1, and the reappearance of the worship hymns (Rev 4:9-11) in Revelation 5 (cf. Charles 1920a: 134-135; Pohl 1969: 171).

Revelation 5 is distinguished as a subunit from the rest of the vision through a change in focus, which is brought about through the formula *καὶ εἶδον* (Rev 5:1; 6:1). The formula *καὶ εἶδον* also functions to bring about minor focus changes within the vision report of Revelation 5, dividing the chapter into three interconnected subunits: Revelation 5:1-5, 5:6-10, and 5:11-14 (Aune 1997: 329).

The central figure in Revelation 5 is the Lamb who is described [in clear Messianic terms] in the framed unit of Revelation 5:6-10 as the One worthy to take the scroll from the hands of God through his victorious redemptive actions on the cross (Aune 1997: 329). Within the main body of the Book [i.e. Rev 4:1-22:9], Revelation 5 can be slotted in as follows¹⁸⁷:

4:1-22:9	Disclosure of God’s eschatological plan
4:1-2a	John’s heavenly ascent
4:2b-5:14	Vision of the heavenly throne-room
4:2b-11	Heavenly worship of God

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Aune: 1997 on the detail structure of Revelation 1-5.

5:1-14	Investiture of the Lamb
5:1-5	A quest for somebody worthy
5:6-10	The Lamb is worthy
5:11-14	Worship of the Lamb
6:1-16:21	the seals, trumpets and bowls
17:1-19:10	Revelation of the judgment of Babylon
19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
21:9-22:9	Vision of the New Jerusalem

ii) The text of Revelation 5

Many scholars want to understand Revelation 5 as an enthronement vision, describing the enthronement of Christ as king to the heavenly court. There are, of course, many characteristics of ancient enthronement rituals evident in the vision of Revelation 5 (cf. Aune 1997: 332-335). However, Aune (1997: 336-338) puts a strong case forward to read the vision as an investiture rather than an enthronement. According to Aune (1997: 336), the vision is more a ratification [by adapting the texts of Dan 7:9-18 and Ezek 1-2] of an office [position] that Christ already holds informally than the enthronement of a new king.

a) Textual variants

A number of variant readings exist with regard to the text of Revelation 5:6 and 9-10. However, most of the proposed variants are not critical to the understanding of the text and are in many of the cases poorly attested (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 641-642; Aune 1997: 323-325).

The variant reading ἰδοὺ in Revelation 5:6a is in all probability the result of a visual confusion with the textual reading εἶδον [a confusion commonly found in the LXX]. The correct reading is probably εἶδον and not ἰδοὺ (Aune 1997: 323). Replacing ἑστηκός [accusative *neuter* perfect participle] with ἑστηκώς [nominative *masculine* perfect participle] is, according to Aune (1997: 323) an attempt to align the neuter [Lamb] with the man [Christ]¹⁸⁸. A similar construction could be the reason behind the variant options of either ἔχον or ἔχων in Revelation 5:6b (Aune 1997: 323).

¹⁸⁸ This type of construction is generally called an *ad sensum* construction (Aune 1997: 323).

Inserting ἑπτὰ [in brackets in the text of Rev 5:6c] is probably correct, taken the reference to the seven Spirits in Revelation 1:5, and also the fact that ἑπτὰ [seven] is inserted twice more in Revelation 5:6a (Aune 1997:324).

In Revelation 5:9c variant readings differ from the omission of τῷ θεῷ to the insertion of ἡμᾶς with τῷ θεῷ (Aland & Aland 1993: 642). The first mentioned reading [which is also the textual reading] is poorly attested. However, according to Aune (1997: 325) this reading still accounts best for the origin of the other readings, and is therefore probably more correct. The insertion of ἡμᾶς was in all likelihood done because the sentence seemingly missed an object (Aune 1997: 325)¹⁸⁹.

b) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 5:5-6

⁵καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι·

— μὴ κλαῖε,
— ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν — — ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα,
— — — — — ἡ ρίζα Δαβὶδ,
— ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον
— καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ.

⁶Καὶ εἶδον — — — — — ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων
— — — — — καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων
— ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον
— ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ
— καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ
— — — — — οἱ εἰσιν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ
— — — — — ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.

Not only is Revelation 4-5 the fulcrum of the Book of Revelation (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108), but Revelation 5:5-6 stands at the centre of the vision of Revelation 5. It gives the solution to John's concern to find someone worthy of opening the scroll. The central point in the solution is the introduction of the Lamb in verse 6. From there the rest of Revelation 5 [and in fact the rest of Revelation] unfolds [forward and backward] (cf. Sweet 1990: 115).

¹⁸⁹ For variant readings with regard to the rest of the text, cf. Aune (1997: 323-325) and Aland & Aland (1993: 641-642).

c) Revelation 5:5-6

The hope amidst a seemingly hopeless situation [John actually cries because nobody was found to be worthy to take the scroll] is that someone had conquered and can therefore take the scroll from the hands of God. The verb $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ [to conquer] is a technical term describing victory or perseverance in different situations: that of a military victory, a victory in a legal case, or overcoming a difficult situation (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 541)¹⁹⁰. The term is used quite often in the New Testament to describe the salvific death of Christ (Col 2:15; 1 Cor 15:54; cf. Isa 25:8). He is the One that has overcome the world (John 16:33). The irony is, however, that He has claimed a military victory (cf. Rev 12:7-12) by sacrificing Himself (Rev 12:11).

By using the verb $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ without an object in verse 5, the limits of the victory are opened up, suggesting that the victory is absolute and all encompassing. Using the verb $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ without an object is typical of the author of Revelation (McDonald 1996: 34). Nothing is excluded from this (Aune 1997: 349; Charles 1920a: 140). The premise is that believers could also overcome, just as Christ has overcome (1 John 5:4-5; Osborne 2002: 253). They must live accordingly so as to claim the victory that He has already won (Rev 2-3; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 541]).

The uniqueness about John's vision, however, is not the fact that Jesus won the victory through the cross. It is the portrayal of his sacrificial death as the fulfilment of Jewish hopes for the messianic conqueror (Bauckham 1993a: 184). In Judaism the Messiah was never portrayed as a Lamb, and more specific, not a suffering and sacrificial Lamb (Aune 1997: 353). The Jewish expectations were geared more towards that of a political conqueror [Messiah], even by the age of the Jewish apocalyptic works (Cullmann 1963: 116)¹⁹¹. That is why the One who has conquered is called "Lion of Judah" and "Root of David". These are common titles in later Judaism to refer to the conquering Messiah. Bauckham (1993a 180-181) calls them *loci classici* with regard to messianic expectations in John's time.

¹⁹⁰ Aune (1997: 322-323) mentions that it is possible to understand $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$ as meaning "to be worthy", specifically when used with an infinitive [in this case $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\lambda\acute{\iota}\xi\alpha\iota$], something found in the Aramaic texts of the Targums (e.g. Tg Ps 118:22; Tg Job 20:17).

¹⁹¹ Cf. also Test Jos 19:8-9; 1 En 90:37; 89:45 (Aune 1997: 368-369; Mounce 1977: 145).

The Lion of Judah was a popular messianic symbol in apocalyptic writings¹⁹² (Mounce 1977: 144). It is an image proposing the strength and power with which the Messiah will reign, just as it was prophesied of Judah in Genesis 49:8-10 (Von Rad 1972: 424; Bauckham 1993a: 182). John uses the combination of Old Testament and apocalyptic images of the Lion of Judah to identify the conquering Messiah in his vision as the divine warrior, in line with similar descriptions of Yahweh in the Old Testament (Job 10:16; Isa 31:4; Jer 50:44; Hos 5:14; Am 3:8; [Osborne 2002: 253]).

The Root of David is taken from Isaiah 11:1 and 10, where the prophet brings a promise to the people about the ideal king that will reign, and that a king from the “Root of David” will always reign in Israel (Snijders 1985: 148). In apocalyptic writings the title is applied onto the triumphant Messiah as the One who will judge the enemies of God (cf. Ps Sol 17:27; [Bauckham 1993a: 181]). Paul uses this messianic interpretation of the text in his letter to the church in Rome (Rom 15:12; [Charles 1920a: 140; Swete 1907: 77]). In Revelation 22:16 Jesus uses the title in reference to Himself. However, in Revelation 22:16 Jesus is not the ἡ ῥίζα...τοῦ Ἰσσαι any more. He is the ῥίζα...Δαυίδ. He *is* the Root, just as He *is* the Vine (John 15:1-3)¹⁹³. In the words of Mounce (1977: 394-395), He is the “fulfilment of the Isaianic promise that the Messiah shall come forth as a shoot from the stump of Jesse”. Both these images are promises of the hope for a better life in the future, in line with messianic expectations.

A striking feature in Revelation 5:5-6 is the contrast between what John hears and what he sees [cf. Excursion 3]. It is a textual technique used by John in Revelation upon which Bauckham (1993a: 179, 215-216) puts a lot of emphasis (cf. McDonald 1996: 33). In Revelation 5:5 John hears from one of the elders that the Lion of Judah [who is also the Root of David] has conquered and is therefore worthy to take the scroll. But when he looks towards the throne, all he sees is a Lamb [a slaughtered Lamb that was standing amidst the throne]¹⁹⁴. It is a paradoxical comparison: hearing about a powerful Lion and then seeing a slain Lamb (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-25; [Beasley-

¹⁹² Cf. 2 Esdr 12:31; Test Jud 24:5; 1 Macc 3:4.

¹⁹³ The change from Ἰσσαι to Δαυίδ is probably the result of the messianic interpretation of the text of Isaiah, i.e. the Messiah will be a descendant of David (cf. Rudolph 2000: 60).

¹⁹⁴ In Revelation 7 a similar technique is used, when John hears about the 144 000 to be sealed and saved, and then turns around and sees an innumerable amount of people around the throne [cf. Rev 21:9-10 and the discussion in Excursion 3] (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 179).

Murray 1981: 124]). But this is the heart of the Gospel message, the central theme of the New Testament: victory coming through sacrifice (Mounce 1977: 144). “Precisely by juxtaposing these contrasting images, John forges a symbol of conquest by sacrificial death...” (Bauckham 1993a: 183; cf. Rudolph 2000: 42).

Comparing Jesus to a Lamb occurs five times in the New Testament, outside of Revelation (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19). In Revelation the title is used 28 times to refer to Jesus¹⁹⁵. It is a typical Johannine title to refer to Christ’s victory over sin through his sacrificial death. That the Lamb stands ἐν μέσῳ...ἐν μέσῳ wants to emphasise that the Lamb is the focus point of attention as the only One worthy to take the scroll (Hughes 1990: 79; cf. Mounce 1977: 146).

With regard to the image of the Lamb that John sees in Revelation 5:5-6, there are two key words that play an important role: ἐσφαγμένον and ἑστηκός. What John sees in heaven is a ἀρνίον ἑστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (Rev 5:6a), i.e. a Lamb that bears the wounds as proof that He had been slaughtered (Bratcher & Hatton 1993: 101). The particle ὡς [sometimes translated with “as if” – cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 905-907] does not mean that the Lamb only appeared to have been slaughtered. It rather wants to highlight the combination of the two important theological motifs of death and resurrection. Therefore: the Lamb had actually been slaughtered, but He is now alive (Aune 1997: 353; Charles 1920a: 141).

The terminology would probably have recalled images of Old Testament sacrifices for believers – a lamb being slaughtered at the altar for the sins of the people. But there is another interpretation: in the New Testament the death of Christ was often compared to being a sacrifice on behalf of the world (cf. John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19). The primary comparison is probably with that of the Paschal Lamb from the Old Testament (Aune 1997: 353; Pohl 1969:176-177; Keener 1997: 641)¹⁹⁶.

¹⁹⁵ In Revelation 13:11 it is used for the Beast in a parody of Christ (Aune 1997: 352). Cf. also Aune (1997: 367-373) for a detailed excursion on Christ as the Lamb.

¹⁹⁶ Although the possibility of a comparison to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7 (cf. Acts 8:32-33) cannot be discarded either (Charles 1920a: lxxviii-lxx; Keener 1997: 642; Cullmann 1963: 79-82; cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 181). In the church of the second century AD this interpretation became more popular (Bar 5:2; 1 Cl 16:7; [Aune 1997: 353]). Mounce (1977: 145), Dodd (1968: 236-238) and Smalley (1978: 218-219) prefer the interpretation of the Lamb as a purely apocalyptic symbol. Aune (1997: 353) emphatically discards the idea of Malina (1995: 53) that the Lamb could refer to the astrological sign of Aries with its neck unnaturally broken (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 60). Schüssler

Although the Paschal lamb was not meant as a sin offering originally (cf. Ex 12:12, 23), it seemingly did have this added interpretation by the time of Jesus (Sweet 1990: 124). The connection between Jesus' death and the slaughtering of the Paschal Lamb is highlighted specifically in Johannine literature. In the Gospel of John, the author [seemingly] deliberately shifts the day of Jesus' crucifixion to fall in with the slaughtering of the Paschal lambs (Du Rand 1981: 19; Barrett 1978: 176).

The verb used in Revelation 5:6 to describe Jesus' death [σφάζειν], was sometimes used for the slaughtering of the sacrificial animals in the LXX (cf. LXX Ex 12:6; LXX Lev 1:5)¹⁹⁷. By using the perfect participle passive [ἐσφαγμένον] John wants to emphasise the completeness of the sacrificial death of Christ, through which eternal redemption has been effected once and for all (Sweet 1990: 128). The perfect tense implies finality, but not in the sense that Jesus' death is the final word in God's plan. Christ's death brought about an irreversible change to the outcome of history. It is a decisive victory over sin that was claimed on the cross (Mounce 1977: 146). The passive voice used for the verb [σφάζειν] indicates the divine action behind what happened here [passive of divine activity].

Whereas ἐσφαγμένον refers to Christ's death, the perfect participle verb ἐστηκός [stand] wants to emphasise the other side of the redemption: Christ is alive [the Lamb **was** dead, but **is** alive {standing}]. The verb ἵστημι when used in the perfect tense could also [and does more often] mean "existing" or "being" (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 383). This could indicate the eternal existence [being] of Christ after his resurrection and ascension. He is now the eternal living one whose life is not to be intruded anymore by death. As part of the one God before creation (Phil 2:5), He also had eternal divine status before his life on earth.

Fiorenza (1991: 61) uses the unchanged interpretation of the Paschal lamb in an exodus typology when she concludes: "As the blood of the paschal lamb signified the liberation of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so the death of Christ made possible the liberation of Christians from their universal bondage." This "bondage" then indicates the bondage of sin.

¹⁹⁷ It could also be used for the violent killing of a person (cf. 1 John 3:12; Rev 6:4), or for the mortally wounded head of the beast in Revelation 13:3 (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 803). In the light of this, Ford (1975: 90) prefers to leave the interpretation of σφάζειν open, with the possibility that the "violent killing" could indicate Jesus' death as martyrdom, an interpretation not entirely without merit.

What John sees in heaven is the risen Christ, exalted to the throne of God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 124). Him being alive is confirmation of Him conquering the powers of death. It confirms what the Son of Man already proclaimed to John in Revelation 1:18: “I have the keys to Death and Hades.” The verbs ἐσφαγμένον and ἐστηκός link up with the reference to the victorious Lion of Judah [or Root of David] in verse 5 (Aune 1997: 352-353). It highlights the fact that the Lamb [the Messiah] is worthy, as He is the Conqueror through his death and resurrection.

There is a seemingly deliberate attempt here by John to contrast Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is not as obvious in Revelation 5:5 as it is in Revelation 1:17-18 and 5:6. It is not a case of downplaying the crucifixion of Christ, as this is of utmost importance to the Christian hope, but rather to emphasise the important fact that Christ, although once slaughtered as a Lamb, is alive (Groenewald 1986: 82). This last mentioned fact is of just as much importance to Christian faith. If Christ was not resurrected, says Paul, Christian faith would be worthless (1 Cor 15:18-19).

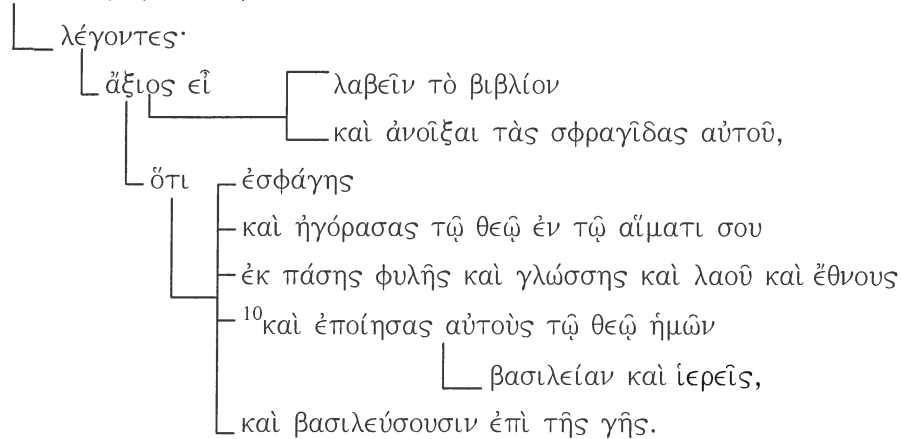
Believers in Asia-Minor can take heart from the fact that Christ, the Lamb, has overcome death. They don’t have to fear persecution, or even martyrdom, as death is not the end for them any more. They will be able to conquer as Christ did if they keep faithful until the end (cf. Rev 2-3), knowing that their Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades in his hands (Rev 1:17-18).

A striking feature is the near absence of references to Christ’s death and resurrection after Revelation 5. It is only in Revelation 12:11 that we find another clear reference to Christ’s death.¹⁹⁸ It probably has to do with the fact that John has already stated in Revelation 5:6 that the victory of Christ is a *fait accompli*. As from Revelation 6, we witness the unfolding of God’s plan in history through the exalted Lamb, up to the unfolding of the eschatological judgment and the appearance of the new world at the end of Revelation. According to Bauckham (1993a: 136) “Christ is the divine agent of salvation and judgment” and is therefore worthy to execute God’s will.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Revelation 11:8, where the crucifixion of Christ is mentioned, but only as a comparative image with regard to the death of the two witnesses [see also below]. In Revelation 7:14 the multitude of believers are identified as those that have washed their robes in “the blood of the Lamb”, signifying the only way by which salvation and victory is attainable [Rev 7:14 will be discussed in Chapter 9].

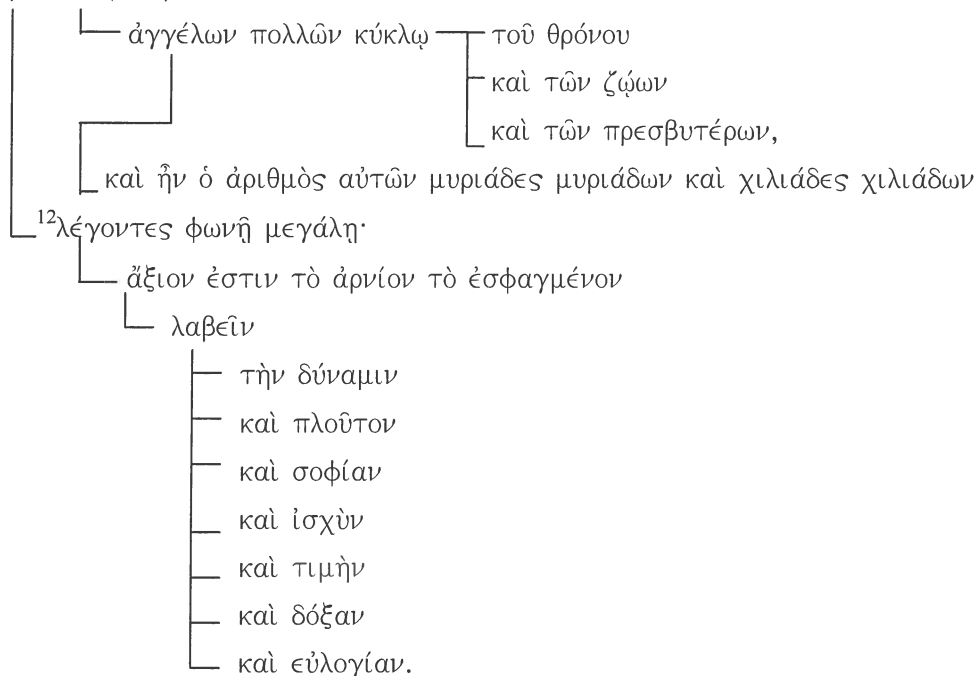
d) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 5:9-12

⁹καὶ ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν



¹¹Καὶ εἶδον,

καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν



Revelation 5:9-12 consists of two worship hymns (Rev 5:9-10 and 5:12) by the four living beings and a multitude of angels respectively. The worship hymns are the direct result of the proclamation in Revelation 5:5-6 of the worthiness of the Lamb. The hymns follow similar patterns, firstly proclaiming the worthiness to receive worship, and secondly giving a number of reasons for this worthiness. The worship hymns of Revelation 5 are not too dissimilar to the hymns sung unto God in Revelation 4 [cf. Chapter 6 above] (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 127).

e) Revelation 5:9-12

The vision of the investiture of the Lamb started off with a seemingly fruitless search for someone who is worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:1-4). Then in Revelation 5:5, one of the elders stepped forward with the consoling news that someone is actually worthy: the Lion of Judah, who in the end turns out to be the Lamb that has been slaughtered, but has overcome death (Rev 5:5-6). In Revelation 5:9-13 the entire creation bursts into worship unto the conquering Lamb [and God]. God and the Lamb are worshipped in three songs that praise their redeeming power and their almighty and everlasting rule.

The importance of worship in Jewish monotheism [and its meaning with regard to life] was already discussed in Chapter 6 above [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1 (iii) (b)]. What happens in Revelation 5:9-12 is that worship is offered to Christ in similar fashion than God was worshipped in Revelation 4 (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 127). This is an extraordinary development, as it effectively puts Christ on the same level as God (Bauckham 1993a: 118-119). The equal worshipping is even more evident in Revelation 5:12, where the words of the hymn seem to be taken from the worship songs of Revelation 4 (cf. Slater 1999: 171). As Kiddle (1940: 105) writes: “Nowhere else in the New Testament is Christ adored on such absolutely equal terms with the Godhead”¹⁹⁹. If this is the case, the worship of Christ [the Lamb] in Revelation 5 is a recognition that Christ partakes in the status of the living God²⁰⁰. Many of the worship hymns in Revelation are addressed to both God and the Lamb. “Although it is stated that God alone is to be worshipped (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9), the real implication is that the Lamb also has to be worshipped” (Du Rand 1993: 316).

¹⁹⁹ For an excellent discussion on the worship of Jesus in the New Testament, cf. Bauckham (1993a: 118-149; [cf. also Swete (1907:127)]). This combined worship of God and Christ is taken even further [to a climax] in Revelation 5:13 when the worship songs of Revelation 4:9-11 and 5:9-12 are seemingly combined in a new hymn that “anticipates the goal of God’s purpose through Christ, the universal worship in the new heaven and earth” (Bauckham 1993a: 139). Of great interest is the seemingly Trinitarian worship found in the Ascension of Isaiah (AscIsa 9:22-36).

²⁰⁰ If, according to Weiser (1975: 55), worship in the Old Testament is the “amen” of the people to God’s self-revelation, then the worship of Christ is the “amen” of the heavenly court to Christ as the revelation of God to this world in the new dispensation. It is in any case the “amen” to the worthiness of the Lamb to fulfil the position as God’s agent in the achievement of the final eschatological victory (Aune 1997: 374).

The first worship song in Revelation 5:9 is called a “new song” [ὄδῃν καινήν]. It is an expression that grows from the use thereof in the Psalms (cf. Ps 98:1), and is reflected in prophetic passages extolling God’s glorious victory (cf. Isa 42: 5-17; [Mounce 1977: 147]). In most cases in Jewish literature where reference is made of a “new song” that song celebrates a saving action by God (Aune 1997: 360)²⁰¹. The words “new song” could also be an indication of the new covenant that He came to establish through his death (Mounce 1977: 147).

Christ is worshipped in this new song for being worthy to take the scroll from the hands of God. This joyous celebration is in total contrast to the sombre atmosphere that was prevalent because no one in creation was found to be worthy (Rev 5:4). The content of the first worship song is to praise the Lamb for his redemptive actions in history. This worship song is saturated with terminology referring to the saving death of Christ: ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου...καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς (Rev 5:9c-10a).

Again we see the recurrence of the verb σφάζειν [to slaughter], this time written in the aorist tense, referring to the violent death of Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of this world [cf. (a) above; (cf. Aune 1997: 361; Louw & Nida 1997: s.v.)]. The aorist tense as it is used here has a meaning similar to the perfect tense in English, which is in line with the meaning attached to the [Greek] perfect tense usage of σφάζειν discussed in verse 6 above (cf. Goodwin 1992: 91-92). In verse 9 the Lamb is worshipped for his sacrificial death, which made Him worthy to receive glory and honour on the same level as God²⁰² (Slater 1999: 170; Aune 1997: 360).

The Lamb is also worshipped because He has ransomed [bought] for God [ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ] through his blood [ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου]. “His sacrificial death was the means whereby He purchased men unto God” (Mounce 1977: 148). The image used here is clearly that of the Paschal Lamb, the sacrifice that was to remind Israel of the redemption God worked for them in Egypt (Ex 12:14; 13:9; cf. also Mark 10:45; [Aune 1997: 361; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 61]). In 1 Peter 1:18-19 we find

²⁰¹ The word “new” is an important word in Revelation, occurring nine times in reference to recreation [renewal] of all things in creation (cf. Groenewald 1986: 83).

²⁰² Cf. Philippians 2:5-11, where the same idea is echoed in a Christological hymn about Jesus’ glorification.

another reference to Christ as the Passover Lamb. However, Bauckham (1993b: 71) is of the opinion that the Paschal Lamb was not a redemptive sacrifice, but only a celebration of an already won victory (cf. Ex 12:12, 23). In a technical sense this would be correct [from an Old Testament point of view – but cf. Sweet (1990: 124)], but then, in itself the blood of the Paschal Lamb worked salvation and life: wherever the blood was painted onto the doorposts, the angel of death passed over (Ex 12:13, 21-27; [cf. Ford 1975: 94-95]).

The term αἷμα means here, in a figurative sense, “death” (cf. Aune 1997: 325)²⁰³. In most instances in Revelation blood also denotes death (De Cock 2004: 158). But it is through the blood of Jesus’ death that life is made possible for an entire world [i.e. is from every tribe, tongue, nation – Rev 5:9d] that was destined for eternal death as a result of sin (cf. Rom 6:23). The blood of the Lamb [Christ] promises life to everyone whose clothes are “washed in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). It is the blood of the Lamb that has the power to rescue (De Cock 2004: 163). But Jesus’ blood was never disconnected from his life. When Christ “gives” his blood, He effectively gives his life, i.e. He died (Van der Watt 1986b: 185).

The blood of Christ was generally connected [compared] with that of a ransom [Greek - λύτρον]²⁰⁴ whereby redemption was brought about (cf. Rom 3:24-25; 1 Pet 1:18-19). The use of the words λύτρον (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45) and ἀγοράζειν (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3, 4) puts the emphasis on the price paid for the change in ownership (Van der Watt 1986b: 179). It is a change of ownership that brings the gift of freedom from sin, freedom to a new and eternal life (Van der Watt 1986b: 184).

In Exodus 13:13 it is also mentioned that the first-born children must be ransomed by paying a ransom-price (cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 181). This meant that the first-born child will not be sacrificed to the Lord [as was the case with other first-born {animals} and first-fruits {crops}], but will stay alive and in the father’s house. The figurative meaning of ἀγοράζειν here and in Revelation 14:3 is “to cause the release of someone by paying a price” (Aune 1997: 361). It was “based on the analogy of the

²⁰³ In Genesis 9:4 a connection is made between blood and life (Ford 1975: 95).

²⁰⁴ Cf. Van der Watt (1986b: 178-190) for an in depth discussion on the meaning of λύτρον and its derivatives.

religious law which in reality bestowed freedom on a slave purchased by a divinity” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 12) or, with regard to believers “for whom Christ has paid the price with his blood”, in which case it is followed by a dative identifying the possessor – τῶ θεῶ (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 12).

The result of this purchasing by the blood of the Lamb is that He has made believers priests and kings in his new world order (Rev 5:10). This “making of” [ἐποίησας] priests and kings relates directly to the death of Christ and emphasises that what has happened is the result of the salvific death of Christ (Mounce 1977: 149). Swete (1907: 82) is of the opinion that this concept [occurring three times in Revelation – 1:6; 5:10; 20:6] is probably derived from a primitive hymn. It promises the fruit of salvation to believers. “The promise is that the church is to share in the eschatological reign of Christ and all that it will involve” (Mounce 1977: 149), which inevitably also means sharing in eternal life with Christ in heaven. That was the promise bestowed on them in the proclamations (Rev 2-3).

In the second worship song the phrase is repeated: the Lamb that was slain, is worthy to receive honour. Only this time the chorus singing the praise comprises a much bigger audience [a multitude of angels]. This is expanded upon even further when in the third worship song (Rev 5:13) the entire creation breaks out in worship to God *and* the Lamb (cf. Slater 1999: 172; Beasley-Murray 1981: 128)²⁰⁵. In an interesting change from the other worship songs in Revelation the predicates listed in this worship song are only preceded by a single article as though they formed a single word [concept], whereas in Revelation 4:11 and 7:12 each predicate has its own article (Charles 1920a: 149).

Also of importance is to note that John steers away from talking about God and Christ in the plural. To him Christ is not an alternative [extra] object of worship. He shares jointly [singularly] in the worship of the one and only living God (Bauckham 1993a:

²⁰⁵ According to Caird (1966: 77) the universal response is the appropriate answer to the universality of Christ’s achievement. In a seemingly significant development from the Old Testament the inhabitants from Hades [those under the surface of the earth and in the sea – cf. Chapter 2] also join in the celebratory worship (Charles 1920a: 150). In the Old Testament a relationship with God was not deemed possible from within Hades (cf. Isa 38:18; Chapter 2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). If this is actually what John intended, is doubtful. He probably just wanted to emphasise the participation of the whole of creation in the worship of God.

139-140). This again confirms the high Christology of the book of Revelation, putting God and Christ effectively on the same throne (cf. Rev 3:21; 22:1, 3; [Charles 1920a: 151]). The reader could therefore apply the same conclusions with regard to life and death onto Christ than was done in Chapter 6 with regard to God. That is why He [i.e. the Lamb] could be called ὁ ζῶν in Revelation 1:18a [cf. 2.1.3 (ii) (c) above].

f) Is Revelation 4-5 also the pivot for life and death?

As noted earlier, Beasley-Murray (1981: 108) stressed the pivotal position of Revelation 4-5 in the communication of the message of Revelation. Does this then imply that these chapters also take a pivotal position with regard to the life and death-message conveyed in Revelation?

It is certain that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the understanding of the message of Revelation (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). Through his death and resurrection believers received the grace of salvation [and new, eternal life] as God's gift to redeem this world from sin. The death and eternal liveliness [after his resurrection] of Christ is crucial to the message of hope. Without that, there is no message of hope to convey (McDonald 1996: 38). From this follows that eternal life is dependent on the acceptance of this gift from God.

The message of Revelation 4-5 is therefore just as pivotal to the understanding of the message of hope with regard to life and death, as the issue of hope hinges on the question of being dead or alive, and Revelation 4-5 explains the way to the hope of life amidst all else [cf. also (i) above]. The centrality of Christ's worthiness [his death and resurrection] emphatically confirms the central role He [and his message of new life] plays in the overall message of Revelation.

iii) Summary on the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 5

- The message of hope communicated in Revelation 5 is that the Messiah has already conquered. However, He hasn't conquered in a military war, but through dying as a sacrifice.
- The verb σφάζειν [to slaughter] occurs three times in Revelation 5, every time referring to the sacrificial death of Christ. It is through this sacrifice

that Christ is declared worthy [ἄξιος] to take the scroll from the hand of God. He purchased believers by his blood to a life of freedom in eternity with God (cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 178-190). This victory is a completed fact, which is why it is written in the perfect tense in verse 6.

- Although the Lamb has been slaughtered as a sacrifice, He is not dead anymore. He is seen standing [ἑστῆκός] amidst the throne (Rev 5:6), and He is acting when He steps forward to take the scroll (Rev 5:8) and opens the seals thereof (Rev 6-7). Because Christ has overcome death and is alive, believers can have hope for eternal life, even though they might die in this life.
- The three worship songs found in Revelation 5:9-13 reiterates the fact that John thinks of Christ in no less terms than being in unity with God (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 118-149). The fact that Christ is worshipped, and worshipped with attributes generally used for God [in the Old Testament and in Rev 4] confirms this high Christology [cf. the discussion on Rev 1:17-18 in 2.1.3 above].
- Beasley-Murray (1981: 108) is correct when he sees Revelation 4-5 as the pivotal chapters in Revelation. By combining this with the important message these chapters convey with regard to life for believers, one can therefore conclude that they also play a pivotal part in the understanding of the message of life and death throughout Revelation. What follows [or even precedes] Revelation 4-5, can be related back to the message of life coming from these chapters.

2.1.5. *The place where our Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8)*

i) What is the context?

After the interlude of the little scroll in Revelation 10 [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.3 (i)], a new unit starts in Revelation 11:1. As this section starts abruptly without any of the typical introductory formulae, it is possible to see it structurally as a continuation of Revelation 10:8-11 (Aune 1998a: 603; cf. Bauckham 1993a: 257-258). However, Aune (1998a: 585) sees Revelation 11:1-13 as a “coherent literary unit”, with Revelation 11:14 functioning both as a conclusion to Revelation 11:1-13 and as an introduction to Revelation 11:15-18 (cf. Charles 1920a: 270). It can be distinguished

from Revelation 10:8-11 by the fact that different speakers seem to be talking to John [cf. λέγουσιν in Rev 10:11 and λέγων in Rev 11:1; (Aune 1998a: 585)]. The type of visionary scene also seems to be different, although there are views that the vision of Revelation 11 explains the content of the scroll discussed in Revelation 10 (Bauckham 1993a: 266; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 74-79). However, nothing is said about this. Instead John is given a reed like a staff with a new task: to measure the temple and the altar [something he seemingly doesn't even do]. Revelation 11:1-14 can be placed into the main body of Revelation as follows²⁰⁶:

8:1-11:14	Seventh seal and first six trumpets
8:1	Seventh seal
8:2-9:21	Vision of the first six trumpets
10:1-11	Vision of the mighty angel and the little scroll
11:1-14	Vision of the temple and the two witnesses
11:1-2	John instructed to measure the temple
11:3-13	prophetic narrative about the two witnesses.
11:14	Conclusion to 11:1-13
11:15-16:21	the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls

The “hearing” of voices [by John] in verse 15 is, according to Aune (1998a: 635), an indication that a new section has started. This completes the marking off of the text in the unit of Revelation 11:1-13 [with verse 14 as the connecting verse – cf. above]. It is a unit of text that reflects strong Palestinian and Old Testament traditions, with possible allusions to Zechariah 4:1-14 and Daniel 8:11-14 (Aune 1998a: 594; Bauckham 1993a: 271), which is combined with apocalyptic symbols (Bauckham 1993a: 280). Aune (1998a: 588) draws a comparison between Revelation 11:3-13, which he sees as a Christianised version of “a Jewish Antichrist myth”, and the Apocalypse of Elijah (Apoc Eli 4:7-19). The Jewish background of this text is such that many interpreters even thought this to be of an originally Jewish source (Mounce 1977: 218).

²⁰⁶ For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

Within this context the two witnesses operate as representatives of the witness of the church [the people of God] in a godless world. Just as their Lord has suffered death, but has triumphed in the end, all believers who stay faithful to their witness until the end, will also triumph over death (Aune 1998a: 603).

ii) Where our Christ was crucified

a) Syntactical analysis

⁸καὶ τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν
 — ἐπὶ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης,
 — — — — —
 — — — — — ἥτις καλεῖται πνευματικῶς Σόδομα καὶ Ἰαίγυπτος,
 — — — — — ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη.

⁹καὶ βλέπουσιν ἐκ τῶν λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν καὶ ἔθνῶν
 — τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ ἡμισυ
 — καὶ τὰ πτώματα αὐτῶν
 — οὐκ ἀφίουσιν τεθῆναι εἰς μνήμα.

The text is part of the description of the vision with regard to the two witnesses. After they have completed, they are killed, and their bodies were left lying in the streets. The reference to Christ's death in this text [called here his crucifixion] is only a symbolic way of telling the reader that the place where this all happens is Jerusalem [where Christ was crucified]. However, John also draws an implicit parallel between Christ's death and that of the two witnesses (Aune 1998a: 587).

b) The city where the Lord was crucified

Most commentators agree that Revelation 11 is one of the most difficult sections of text to interpret (Aune 1998a: 585; Mounce 1977: 218). Revelation 11:1-13 actually is not a text about the life or death of Christ. It is a prophetic vision about the church's faithful witness in the light of the victory that Christ has already won.

The prophetic vision is introduced with a command to measure the temple, the altar and those that worship there (Rev 11:1-2). The command to measure is a prophetic command generally associated [in the Old Testament] either with destruction (cf. 2 Sam 8:2a; Am 7:7-9; Lam 2:8) or with preservation (cf. 2 Sam 8:2b; Ezek 40:1-6;

42:20; Zech 2:5). The latter interpretation is probably the right one in Revelation 11 (Ford 1975: 173-176). The fact that John is specifically commanded not to measure the outer court, which will be given over to “the nations” [i.e. being outside of the realm of God], supports the view of protection for the people of God (Aune 1998a: 605). The interpretation of much of the text is probably based on the visions found in Ezekiel 40-48 about the measurement of the temple and the future revival of the people of God (Aune 1998a: 604; Groenewald 1986: 117). It gives believers right at the start of the text already the comfort that, amidst possible persecution as a result of their witness, God will still protect them.

This opening vision is followed by the prophetic vision of the two witnesses (Rev 11:3-13)²⁰⁷. In their lives of witnessing these witnesses *follow in the footsteps of Christ* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78-79; Bauckham 1993a: 280). They bring the message from God as commanded (Rev 11:3). During their time of witnessing to the world they are protected [as promised in Rev 11:1-2], even from physical harm. However, when their time of witnessing is over, they are killed and their bodies left in the streets of the city (Rev 11:7-10), and there are killed where their Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8). This doesn't end their protection by God. He resurrects them and takes them into heaven in front of the eyes of their persecutors (Rev 11:11-12). This is a sure indication to everybody that God does have authority over life and death, even though the circumstances might seem different (Mounce 1977: 228). He will therefore protect his church even through the gates of death, as He has possession of the keys thereto (cf. Rev 1:18-19).

The only direct identification made in this text with regard to the death of Christ is the phrase in verse 8c: ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη²⁰⁸. This is the only instance in Revelation where direct reference is made of Christ's crucifixion. All the other instances just refer to his death or his blood. The reference here is probably inserted by the author to [secretly] identify the place where the witnesses died as Jerusalem, the place where their Lord [a title used for the first time in Revelation in

²⁰⁷ On the identification of these witnesses there have been widespread speculation. It is, however, not of too much importance to the requirements of this study. For a detailed discussion on this, cf. Aune (1998a: 598-603).

²⁰⁸ There is a weakly attested textual variant replacing αὐτῶν with ἡμῶν or omitting αὐτῶν altogether from the text (Aland & Aland 1993: 653).

respect of Jesus – Aune (1998a: 620)] have also been crucified²⁰⁹. Charles (1920a: 287) sees this phrase as a later insertion by the author in an attempt to identify the city for his readers, although the original author most probably meant Jerusalem in the first place [i.e. with the symbolic identification of the place of their death as “Sodom and Egypt” in verse 8b – cf. Charles (1920a: 288)].

The reason why the author goes to such an extent to identify Jerusalem is probably the Jewish tradition that prophets must die in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 13:33; AscIsa 51:1-5; [Aune 1998a: 620-621]). In early Judaism there was a widespread view that martyrdom and suffering was the ultimate experience for the “true prophet” (Aune 1998a: 631). In any case, the text [and therefore also the identification of the city] is symbolic: the message conveyed is that the two prophetic witnesses die at the hand of those that are in opposition to God and God’s people and that reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 185-186). The world in opposition to God will try to destroy the church in that manner. Charles (1920a: 287) also shows how Jerusalem was designated as the τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης in Jewish apocalyptic writings [cf. Rev 11:8a; cf. also Aune (1998a: 619); Swete 1907: 137-138)].

iii) Summary on Revelation 11:8

- Referring to Christ’s crucifixion in Revelation 11 is nothing more than an attempt to identify a place of action, i.e. where the witnesses died, and confirming them as true witnesses of God. Nothing is said directly in this text about the message of hope coming from the sacrificial death of Christ.
- The message of hope that the church gets from this text is the protection from God [symbolised in the measuring of the temple and the believers], regardless of what happens as a result of their witnessing.
- The description of the death and resurrection of the witnesses will be discussed in Chapter 8 below. The possible interpretation of martyrdom after the example of Christ will also be discussed then (Aune 1998a: 646).

²⁰⁹ Cf. Mounce (1977: 226) who does not think of the physical location as Jerusalem, but rather Rome, as the interpretation elsewhere in Revelation (e.g. Rev 17-18) is to identify Rome [specifically the Roman empire] with the place of evil (cf. also Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78).

2.1.6. *Conquering by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11)*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 12:3 sees the introduction of the Dragon into the Book of Revelation. There is difference of opinion with regard to the structural breaks in the text. Mounce (1977: 234) sees Revelation 12-14 as a unit, while Beasley-Murray (1981: 191)²¹⁰ breaks the text after Revelation 14:2. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 80) sees Revelation 12:1-7 as an inclusion. Aune (1998a: 661) understands Revelation 11:19-12:17 as a single unit, with Revelation 11:19 functioning as an introductory note to the rest of the narrative of Revelation 12. The motif of the opening of the temple (Rev 11:19) is similar to that found in the LXX of Esther (LXX Esth 1:1de, 10:3a-f), as well as Isaiah 66:6-7 (cf. also Rev 15:5). Isaiah 66:6-7 is probably the text on which the narrative of Revelation 11:19 is based (Aune 1998a: 661-662). Deciding between Revelation 11:19 or 12:1 as the starting point of the new text is not critical to the outcome of the discussion. It is therefore acceptable, in the light of the above-mentioned arguments, to accept Aune's structural division [cf. Aune 1998a: (661-666) for a detailed discussion on other issues that might influence the structural unity of the text in support of his argument]. The unity is further enhanced with the three times occurrence of the aorist passive verb ὠφθῆν binding the different signs together (Rev 11:19; 12:1, 3). Within the main body of Revelation, the text fits in as follows²¹¹:

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
11:19	introductory divine manifestations
12:1-4a	introduction of the <i>dramatis personae</i>
12:4b-6	first stage of conflict
12:7-12	second stage of conflict
12:13-17	third stage of conflict
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
14:1-20	Vision of eschatological salvation and judgment

²¹⁰ Beasley-Murray (1981: 191) actually sees these chapters as the central section of Revelation, motivating it with the following rationalisation: "Not only do they come at the midpoint of the work, they provide an understanding of the nature of the conflict in which the church is engaged, and into which John sees she is to be drawn to the limit."

²¹¹ For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a. For a detail analysis of Revelation 12:10-12, cf. Du Rand (1993: 320-322).

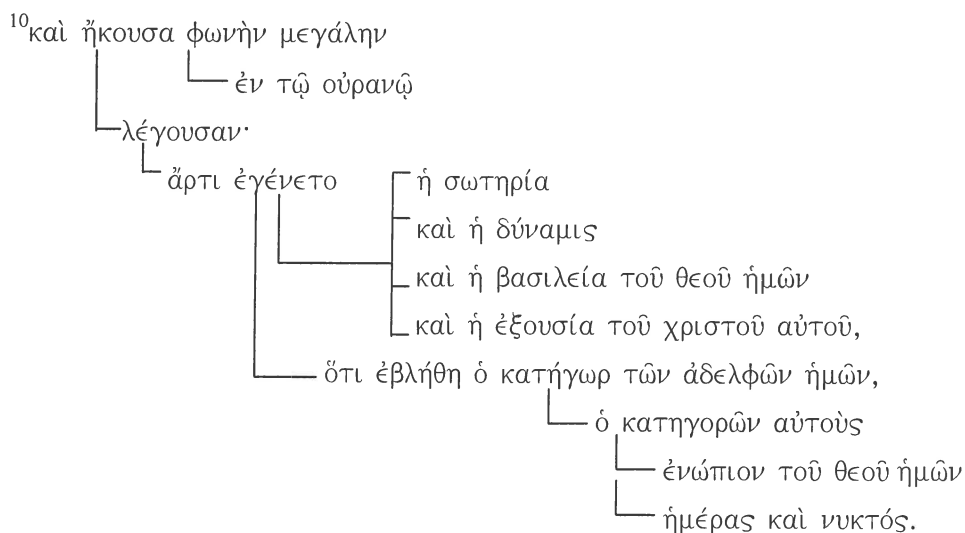
In Revelation 11:19-12:17 we find one of the few clear examples in Revelation of a mythological narrative (Aune 1998a: 674-676). The sources for these mythological visions can, according to Charles (1920a: 298-314), be found in Judaism and a commonly known myth applied messianically to the text (cf. also Mounce 1977: 235; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 80).

Within this mythological context John wants to explain to his readers that, although the victory has been won by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11), the struggle against Satan still continues on earth. The only comfort believers have is that Satan has already been conquered in heaven (Rev 12:7-9). Therefore, he cannot harm any of God's sealed children (cf. Rev 7:1-8), even if he persecutes and kills them (Mounce 1977: 234). The narrative prepares the reader for the attack against God's people by the Dragon and the Beast (Rev 13:16-17). They must expect this as a result of their continuing witness of the Gospel (Rev 11:3-13), but can take comfort from the knowledge that they will end up safely in the hands of God (Rev 14:1-5).

ii) To conquer by the blood of the Lamb

a) Syntactical analysis

A syntactical analysis for Revelation 12:10-11 is given below:



¹¹καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν
 | διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου
 | καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν
καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν
 | ἄχρι θανάτου.

Revelation 12:10-12 is a “victory hymn” coming from the heavenly court, proclaiming the reality of salvation, and the consequences thereof for believers (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 81-82). It is part of the fourth subunit of the text [cf. (i) above] narrating in mythological language the defeat and expulsion of the dragon from heaven (cf. Aune 1998a: 663). According to Aune (1998a: 663, 702) this hymnic section was added by the author more as a supplement and commentary on the significance of this victory²¹² (cf. Du Rand 1993: 323). Within the context of salvation the reference to the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11) is that of the atoning death of Christ.

b) Salvation by the blood of the Lamb

There are no major text-critical variants suggested for this hymnic section. Aune (1998a: 655-656) gives a comprehensive discussion on all the minor variants [of which there are quite a few here] suggested for the text. In the light of this, one can therefore work with the text as presented in Aland & Aland (1993: 655-656).

The first part of the hymn (Rev 12:10) announces that God’s salvation, his power, and his glory has now taken effect (Aune 1998a: 664). The temporal adverb ἄρτι [now], in conjunction with the aorist verb ἐγένετο [has occurred] indicates a temporal occurrence that has been completed [with the aorist verb acting as a verb in the perfect tense]. This salvation, this power and glory, is a reality. It further emphasises that salvation is grounded in the expulsion of Satan [the dragon] from heaven after losing the cosmic war against the archangel Michael and his army of angels²¹³ (cf. Rev 12:7-9; [Aune 1998a: 699]). But it is not to Michael that the honour belongs. The victory is attributed to the Lamb and his followers (Slater 1999: 186).

²¹² Cf. Aune (1998a: 663-664) for a discussion on the layout and functioning of the hymn as such in Revelation 12:10-12.

²¹³ In Judaism Michael was sometimes called ἀρχάγγελος [archangel] and sometimes ἀρχιστράτηγος [commander in chief] of the angelic forces (3 Apoc Bar 11:4, 7, 8; [Aune 1998a: 694]).

The key part of the hymnic section is *καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου* (Rev 12:11a). In this key phrase of the hymn two key words stand out: *ἐνίκησαν* and the composite phrase *τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου*. The verb *νικᾶν* is a notable keyword in Revelation referring to Christ's victory that came through death [cf. 2.1.4 above on the discussion of *νικᾶν*]. It is used in exactly the same manner of Christians throughout Revelation [eleven times], referring to them as conquerors through Christ's death, and more specifically, being conquerors through their own martyrdom (Aune 1998a: 702). This victory through martyrdom is common also to Jewish literature. It occurs fifteen times in 4 Maccabees, often depicting a victory that was obtained through endurance (cf. 4 Macc 6:10; 7:4b; 9:6, 30; 11:20). In Targum Job Satan claims that Job conquered through perseverance (Tg Job 27:3-9; [Aune 1998a: 702; cf. McDonald 1996: 38]).

In Revelation 12, however, it is notable that the cause for the victory is not accredited to any person affected thereby. Ironically it is the archangel Michael that fought the cosmic war against Satan, but he is not the conqueror. The believers are the victorious crowd claiming and rejoicing in the victory, but they are not the conquerors in the war, not even through their own martyrdom [although the phrase *διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν* (Rev 12:11b) might suggest that it is the case]²¹⁴.

In the end the victory is attributed to Christ as the Lamb [cf. above]. The greatest irony of all is that the victory is claimed as a result of Christ's death on the cross (McDonald 1996: 40). Again we find the connection of *τὸ αἷμα* with the sacrificial death of Christ, signifying the important redemptive power given to the blood of Christ [cf. 2.1.4 above on the impact of the blood of Christ on the salvation of the world]. The victory that the martyrs have claimed is therefore dependent upon the victory of Christ on the cross (Bauckham 1993a: 75-76). His death also becomes the model for the Christian's behaviour in trying times and the key for Christians to understanding their own suffering (Slater 1999: 187). Through their own death they share in the victorious death of Christ (Pohl 1971: 108; Bauckham 1993a: 186).

²¹⁴ Cf. Charles (1920a: 329) who thinks *τὸ αἷμα* signifies the primary cause and *τῆς μαρτυρίας* suggests the secondary cause of the victory (cf. also Mounce 1977: 243).

The victory is therefore a temporal event of the past. Christ's victory does not lie somewhere in the future. For believers it is something that is "already a part of past experience" (Aune 1998a: 703). It lies in the historically completed fact of the death and resurrection of Christ.

"The death of Christ on the cross entails the lifting up to the throne of God. This brings about the judgment of the world, the dethronement of the Devil, and the beginning of the new age of life with Christ in the kingdom" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 203).

In the end there are more to the text than just the victory by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11). The normal flow of the narrative is interrupted in Revelation 12:5 with a description of past events, i.e. the birth and ascension of the Messiah (Aune 1998a: 665)²¹⁵. The message of hope lies in the composite understanding of the entire mythological vision that John narrates.

It is the presentation of the Messiah as the ultimate conqueror, and the message of hope amidst trying times as a result of him being the Conqueror. Revelation 12 identifies the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies as the Deliverer of the world (Beasley-Murray 1981: 200). This should take the reader back to the messianic link that was already made in Revelation 5:5-6 [cf. 2.1.4 above].

Through a messianic interpretation of Isaiah 66:7 [common in Judaic literature – cf. Tg Isa 66:7] the prophecy of Isaiah is applied onto Christ in Revelation 12:5, signifying his birth (cf. Isa 7:14 LXX; [Swete 1907: 148; Aune 1998a: 687-688]). This is then joined with a reference to his ascension. This combined reference in the end forms a representation of the entire Christ-event (Beasley-Murray 1981: 200). Here again [as is the case throughout Revelation] we have no mention at all to the earthly ministry of Christ. It is, for John's purpose, not the earthly life of Christ that is important, but the hope-affording death and resurrection of Christ and his exaltation to the throne of God (Mounce 1977: 238).

²¹⁵ Cf. however, Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 81) who sees the reference to the birth of the woman's child as a reference to the exaltation and enthronement of Christ in heaven.

The message of eternal life through the death of Christ is at the centre of John's mind throughout Revelation, and in Revelation 12 it is also at the centre of his book (Beasley-Murray 1981: 191; cf. Groenewald 1986: 133). Believers' lives are to be full of suffering and misery as a result of Satan's activities on earth. These activities are the result of Satan being conquered in heaven and then cast down to earth, and now trying to claim an earthly kingdom (Rev 12:9). But even amidst this suffering believers can have the comfort that the Lamb has already conquered in heaven and therefore has left Satan without eternal powers (Rev 12:12). "...whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25b GNB; [Groenewald 1986: 134]). It is a dual perspective: a heavenly perspective on Satan being defeated and thrown out of heaven, and an earthly perspective on Satan's persecution of the church in history.

iii) Summary on the text of Revelation 12:11

- This hymn is actually not about the death of Christ, but about the victory of believers. The message of hope to believers is that they do not have to fear any suffering or persecution that they might undergo, as the victory over evil has already been claimed. This is only possible because Christ has already won the deciding victory τὸ αἶμα τοῦ ἀρνίου. Even though the victory is not visible on earth, the heavenly perspective shows an already defeated Dragon.
- The central message is that Satan has already been defeated and can do no eternal harm to believers. Even if he kills believers (Rev 13:15), they will still end up with the living Christ on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1).
- Again, as in numerous other texts, the death and resurrection of Christ is depicted as the crucial event in ensuring life.

2.1.7. The slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 13?

In the same sub-section, i.e. Revelation 11:19-16:21, John narrates a number of visions with regard to the Dragon and the two beasts, representing the evil powers in opposition to God in the book of Revelation [cf. summarised structure in 2.1.6 above; (cf. Aune 1998a: 754)]. In Revelation 12 the Dragon appears in the cosmic war in

heaven. He is, however, already defeated in heaven and cast onto the earth where he focuses his persecution on the followers of God and Christ.

In Revelation 13 a beast appears from the underworld [the depths of the sea], who becomes a cynical copyist of Christ (cf. Rev 13:3). He is followed by another beast, this time from the depths of the earth (cf. Rev 13:11). The last mentioned beast “tries to look like a Lamb” but when he speaks, his true colours shines through: he emulates the Dragon (Rev 13:11). This calling from the sea and from the depths of the earth refers to the underworld or the domain of the Leviathan (Job 41:1-11; [Beagley 1997a: 128]). It is a reference common to Jewish apocalypses (1 En 60:7-11, 24; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; [Aune 1998a: 728]). It is what Pohl (1971: 135) calls the *Nachahmungsmotiv* of the apocalyptic antagonist²¹⁶.

It is specifically with regard to the first beast [i.e. the beast from the sea] that we find references to death [and resurrection] similar to what is said about Christ in Revelation [cf. Annexure B.1, sub-section 3]. Although these are not references to Christ’s death, it is clear emulations thereof and therefore will be discussed here.

a) Syntactical analysis

The verses under discussion within this section of the text are Revelation 13:3, 13:12, and 13:14. All three verses refer to the [seeming] death [and recovery] of one the beast’s [i.e. the beast from the sea] seven heads. There are a number of minor textual variants suggested with regard to these verses, but since they would not have a major effect on the text, one can work with the text as presented²¹⁷. It must be noted, however, that Aune (1998a: 725-726) regards verse 3 as a later redactional gloss reflecting the *Nero redivivus* legend. Charles (1920a: 340-342) believes the greatest part of Revelation 13 to be modelled on an ancient Jewish apocalypse [written originally in Hebrew] directed against Rome.

A syntactical analysis of Revelation 13:3-4 will be done below. Revelation 13:12 and 14 refers to the same context regarding the “death” of the beast.

²¹⁶ Cf. Aune (1998a: 751-755) for a comprehensive discussion on the understanding of the eschatological antagonist [in Greek called the ἀντίχριστος].

²¹⁷ For a detailed discussion on these variants, cf. Aune (1998a: 716-720).

³καὶ μίαν ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην
└─ εἰς θάνατον,

καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἐθεραπεύθη.

Καὶ ἐθαυμάσθη ὅλη ἡ γῆ
└─ ὀπίσω τοῦ θηρίου

⁴καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ δράκοντι,
└─ ὅτι ἔδωκεν τὴν ἐξουσίαν
└─ τῷ θηρίῳ,

καὶ προσεκύνησαν τῷ θηρίῳ
└─ λέγοντες·
└─ τίς ὅμοιος τῷ θηρίῳ
└─ καὶ τίς δύναται πολεμῆσαι μετ' αὐτοῦ;

The text emphasises the astonishment [and resultant worship] of the world to the beast who was seemingly “killed” and “resurrected”. However, the beast’s actions are only an imitation of Christ’s, including the wordplay on his “death as if slaughtered”.

b) Looking like the slaughtered lamb

The most obvious phrase in the vision is found in verse 3 with regard to the beast that comes from the sea: καὶ μίαν ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν οὗτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον, which is an imitation after the death of Christ, narrated in Revelation 5:5-6 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 210). This identifies the first beast as the antagonist of Christ (cf. Mounce 1977: 259)²¹⁸. The next part of the verse also tries to emulate the resurrection of Christ, but the duplication of words is not as obvious: καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἐθεραπεύθη [the resurrection is more openly suggested in verse 14 where it is said that the beast was fatally wounded, *but lived*].

By using the same verb σφάζειν [slaughter] John wants the reader to see that the beast imitated his death, so that people might think that he has the same [if not more!?] powers than Christ. Although the word σφάζειν could refer to the murder or slaying of people, it is here meant to read after Revelation 5:6 (Beasley-Murray 1981:

²¹⁸ Caird (1966: 172) identifies the second beast as the parody on Christ, whereas Mounce (1977: 258) sees the second beast as the false prophet (cf. Matt 7:15). This is also how Charles (1920a: 333) understands it [Cf. Rudolph (2000: 70-71) and Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 83-84) on other imitating actions by the beast].

210). In this sense the particle ὡς has the meaning “as if”, showing that this is nothing more than an imitation [cf. 2.1.4 above where the particle ὡς takes one a more concrete meaning, emphasising the actual wounds of the slaughtered Lamb]. The beast just seems to have been killed, so that his “resurrection” and power might seem as real as Christ’s (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 83). That the beast has not been killed is implied by ἐθεραπεύθη [meaning to heal or recover from – Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 359)]. It is an effort to deceive the inhabitants of the earth. The motif of the eschatological antagonist as a great deceiver is found in the New Testament (2 Thess 2:9-10; 2 John) and in early Christian literature (Did 16:4) (Aune 1998a: 760).

This deception seems to pay off, as the beast gathers a large amount of astonished followers amongst the peoples of the earth (Rev 13:4, 8; [cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 210; Groenewald 1986: 139]). They worship [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1 (iii)(b) and Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(b) for a discussion of the importance of worship with regard to God and Christ] the beast by using phrases taken from the Old Testament (cf. Ex 15:11; Ps 35:10; [Mounce 1977: 253]).

The phrase about the apparent death of the beast is repeated again in two relative clauses in Revelation 13:12 and 13:14 (cf. Aune 1998a: 758, 762). Every time it is used to identify the beast as the one imitating Christ. It also keeps the link with the reference in Revelation 13:3. There are subtle changes in the use of words. In Revelation 13:12 it is said that the beast had ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου, and that this wound was healed [ἐθεραπεύθη]. The wound is not limited to one of the beast’s heads as was the case in verse 13, but seems to affect the entire beast (Aune 1998a: 758). This caused Aune (1998a: 758) to deem this a later interpolation by the author.

In Revelation 13:14 the relative clause reappear, again with some changes made, suggesting another interpolation by the author (Aune 1998a: 762). Now the method [instrument] of being slain is identified as τῆς μαχαίρης [from a sword]. Furthermore, for the first time it is openly suggested that the beast actually died and came alive afterwards [ἐζήσεν]. According to Mounce (1977: 260), the verb ζάω, when used in the aorist in Revelation, always means, “to come to life” (Rev 2:8; 20:4, 5). This is probably the idea, to metaphorically imitate the resurrection of Christ by having the beast also “resurrected”.

The image of the first beast's appearance is closed with the all-important admonition: "This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people" (Rev 13:10c GNB; cf. Rev 13:18). It is in light of the fact that the beast [and the Dragon] knows that he has little time to exert his power that believers are urged not to let go of their faith. This "mythological imitation" is framed by two phrases of hope: In Revelation 12 we find the praises sung for the victory of the Lamb [cf. 2.1.6 above], and in Revelation 14 John starts off with the assurance that believers will be safe in the presence of the Lord, even if they might die for their faith (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 84).

Therefore, although nothing is said directly about the death of Christ, the beast from the sea is here unmasked as the eschatological antagonist trying to imitate the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ. However, believers can hold on to their faith until the end [even through death], knowing that the victory already belongs to Christ, the Lamb.

Excursion 6: The beast and the 666 in Revelation 13:18

In Revelation 13:17 it is said that the people would be forced to take the mark of the beast [which is the name of the beast], which is then identified as the number 666. The identification of the 666 [Rev 13:18] is still one of the most controversial issues amongst Christians today. Du Rand (1999b: 53-56) gives a comprehensive list of persons in history that have been identified with the beast, mostly people who showed some signs of violence or power-hunger, or even just someone very controversial (cf. Joubert 1999a: 50).

However, to look too far away from the time frame in which John finds himself would be farfetched. Although Revelation is an apocalyptic document, its apocalyptic images are all grounded in historic events. It must be remembered that the people of ancient Israel did not live with their minds set onto the unreachable future. They lived purely for today and for the immediate future (Joubert 1999a: 22-24). It is therefore far more appropriate to look for a person from that era as the representative of the beast²¹⁹.

²¹⁹ Of course, as the image of the dragon or the beasts "conjures up the idea of evil on earth defiant to God" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 198) it is possible to link persons today to the image of the beast. But that would be purely hermeneutical interpretations, and certainly not the person John had in mind in the first place (cf. Joubert 1999a: 58).

The image of the beast with its ten diadems suggests royal power over many kingdoms. Although Roman emperors never wore diadems, it is still possible to see the diadems metaphorically referring to the emperors of Rome (cf. Rev 19:12; [Aune 1998a: 733]). The numerical $\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$ can refer to the ordinal number [i.e. first], in which case it refers to either Julius Caesar, or else Nero, the probable starting point for the enumeration of emperors in Revelation 17:9-10 (cf. Aune 1998a: 736; Sweet 1990: 209).

Another clue is the method of dying, explained in Revelation 13:14 [i.e. by sword]. Nero committed suicide on 9 June 68 with his own sword. Due to a lot of uncertainty and secrecy with regard to his death, it was not long before a rumour was spread that Nero would be revived, or even that he is still alive and has fled to Parthia from where he would return with an army to reclaim the emperorship in Rome (Aune 1998a: 738; Groenewald 1986: 139; cf. Klauck 2001: 692). This is generally known as the *Nero redivivus*. The description of the beast's wound to the head also fits the death of Nero who committed suicide by driving a dagger through his throat (Klauck 2001: 691). His arrogance and claim to deity made him an unpopular figure with both Jews and Christians, turning him into a personification of everything that was evil (Aune 1998a: 739). He was particularly fierce in his persecution of Christians, instituted in AD 64 (Mounce 1977: 252). It is not clear from the text if John buys into the legend of *Nero redivivus*, or if he just uses the well-known myth for purposes of conveying his message.

A further identification of Nero is of course the reference to the mark to be given to the followers of the beast, which is also “the name of the beast”, i.e. the controversial number 666. We seem to have here a case of *gematria*, whereby alphabetical letters are given a numerical value [which they had in any case in Hebrew and Greek]. By adding up the numerical value of the letters of a name, a numerical “name” could be given to a person [cf. Aune 1998a: 769-773 for a very comprehensive discussion on the concept of *gematria*]. In this way it was quickly realised by Christians that the name Jesus added up to the number 888 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 220-221).

The problem, of course, for interpreters today, is to find a name if you don't have much of a clue where to start looking. This problem is further complicated by

the fact that interpreters use creative methods [and local language] to identify the “owner” of the 666 (cf. Joubert 1999a: 54). The best possibility [confirmed by an Aramaic document found at Wadi Murabba`at] is to use the Hebrew transliteration from the Greek of the words “Nero Caesar”, which brings one to the number 666. Combined with Nero’s status as a controversial person famed for his tyranny against anyone opposing him, he seems to be the one John had in mind as the representative of the evil, the antagonist of Christ in this world (cf. Charles 1920a: 349-350). The concern should not be too much with regard to whom the number 666 represents, but rather what the number represents for the reader (Du Rand 1995a: 99).

Getting the mark of the beast, is the antithetical action for the sealing of the believers, which occurs in Revelation 7:1-8. Just as Christ has sealed off [marked] believers with his name to protect them from all evil, so the beast goes about marking his followers, seemingly giving them some temporal protection as a result thereof. It is, however, the eternal sealing and protection of the Lamb that really matters in the end. The sealing off is also a sign of life. Whoever has the seal of God, has received life. Whoever has the number 666, has death.

2.2. Summary on the Living Lamb

- i) As the person of Jesus Christ is absent from the Old Testament, one doesn’t expect the use of the Old Testament to a great extent with regard to Christ in Revelation. However, John uses symbolic language from the Old Testament to describe the death of Christ in sacrificial terms.
- ii) What is interesting is the usage of Old Testament titles of God onto the person of Jesus Christ, underlining John’s high Christology. There is also a deliberate attempt by John to incorporate Old Testament Messianic texts and apply them onto, e.g. the Lion and Lamb metaphors.
- iii) If God is life [cf. Chapter 6], Christ is the one through whom God has afforded life to this world. But Christ is also life (John 14:6).
- iv) The earthly life and death of Jesus Christ is the foundation on which this eschatological message of Revelation is based (Bauckham 1993b: 144; Beasley-Murray 1981: 47). This is emphasised in all the texts referring to the death and resurrection of Christ.

- v) Revelation 4-5 plays a pivotal role to convey a message of hope. The following important features with regard to the death and resurrection of Christ is mentioned by John:
- a. The hope for believers is that He is the long-awaited Messiah [i.e. the Lion of Judah and the Root of David]. However, the Messiah conquers not through war, but through sacrifice. He is worthy because He died.
 - b. He is the ὁ πρῶτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, the first one to rise from death. By doing this He inaugurated a new age, and paved the way for believers to eternal life (cf. Rev 1:17-18).
 - c. He was dead, but is now alive and standing amidst the throne (Rev 5:5-6). The visible marks and wounds of the Lamb are significant, as this is the proof that He has actually been slaughtered (Bratcher & Hatton 1993: 101).
 - d. The victory is only claimed through the blood of the Lamb (Rev 5:9; 12:11). His blood purchased believers from sin to freedom in God's kingdom (Rev 5:9). Through his blood Satan was defeated (Rev 12:11; [cf. De Cock 2004: 163]).
- vi) Christ is Himself called ὁ ζῶν (Rev 1:18a). He has the same divine power over life and death as God has. However, the eternal living One has died, but has gone through death to be called ὁ ζῶν. The implication of Revelation 1:17-18 is that Christ lived eternally as God, then died as a sacrifice, but was raised from the dead to live eternally as the exalted Lord.
- vii) The exalted view of Christ identifies Him as the Son of Man who will, in the *eschaton*, be the Judge of this world. He is “the true witness of every divine revelation” (Charles 1920a: 14).
- viii) Because Christ has already won the victory on the cross, believers are urged to stay faithful unto the end, so that they can participate in the eternal life that Christ has won for them [cf. the proclamations to the seven churches].
- ix) The beast from the sea, as the eschatological antagonist, imitates Christ's death and resurrection, but still can't stand up against the protection believers have through the blood of the Lamb, who has already conquered the beast and the dragon.

CHAPTER 8

PHYSICAL LIFE AND DEATH IN REVELATION

“Do not give up, even if people try to terrorise and harm you... see it as a test of your faith and loyalty unto Me, even if they kill you. Listen carefully... the Christian that holds onto his or her faith until the end, might still die in the flesh, but he or she will never lose the eternal life. There is no way that even death can take that life from such a person.” Rev 2:10-11.²²⁰

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

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

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

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

1. Physical life

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

²²⁰ Free translation from “Die Boodskap” (Eds. Van der Watt, JG & SJ Joubert: 2002).

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

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

1.1. Life in Relationship to God

It is only in the proclamations to the seven churches that we get any clear reference to the physical life of believers²²¹ [a lot more is mentioned about them dying, specifically as martyrs – cf. Rev 2:10, 1; 6:9-11; 20:4-6].

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

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

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

i) What is the context?

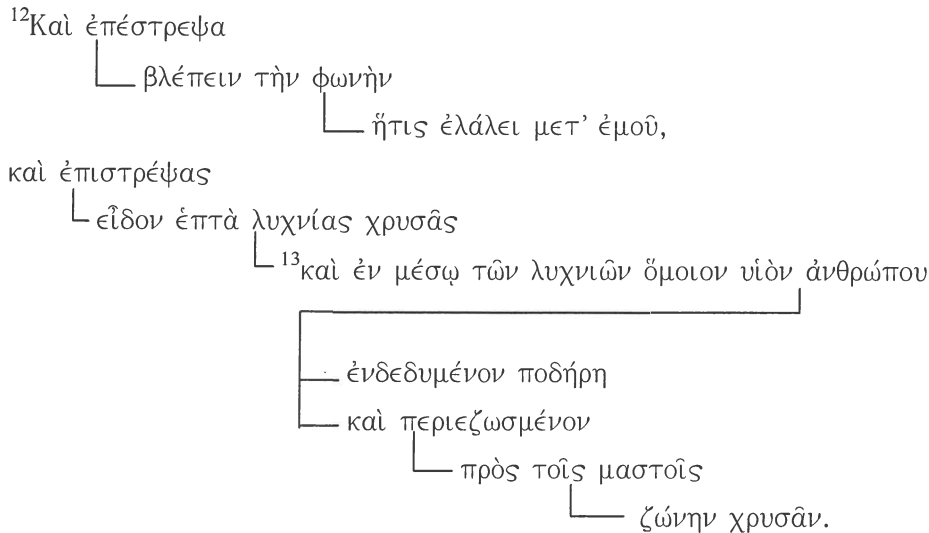
The text is part of the vision of the Son of Man (Rev 1:9-20) that John observes after the prologue to the Book of Revelation. The context of Revelation 1:9-20 have

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

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

ii) Christ is with us

a) Syntactical analysis



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

b) The glorious Son of Man with his church

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

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

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

The comforting presence of Christ is further emphasised when, in verse 16, He is seen to be holding the seven stars in his right hand. The seven stars are later on, in Revelation 1:20b, identified to be the ἄγγελοι τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐκκλησιῶν²²². That Christ holds all seven stars in his hand emphasises his sovereign control over the entire church [i.e. He is not just present, but also controlling and directing his church]. Furthermore, it emphasises that the entire church is safely within his protective hand (cf. John 10:28; [Mounce 1977: 79]). The fact that Christ is *amongst* his people, is a sign of his *living presence*, i.e. He is alive (cf. Rev 1:18).

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary

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

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

a) A spiritual preparation in this life

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

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

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

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

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

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

²²³ Italics by Aune.

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

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

b) Redemption and ethics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1.4. Summary on physical life in Revelation

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

2. Physical Death

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1. *Death through martyrdom*

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) What is the context?

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

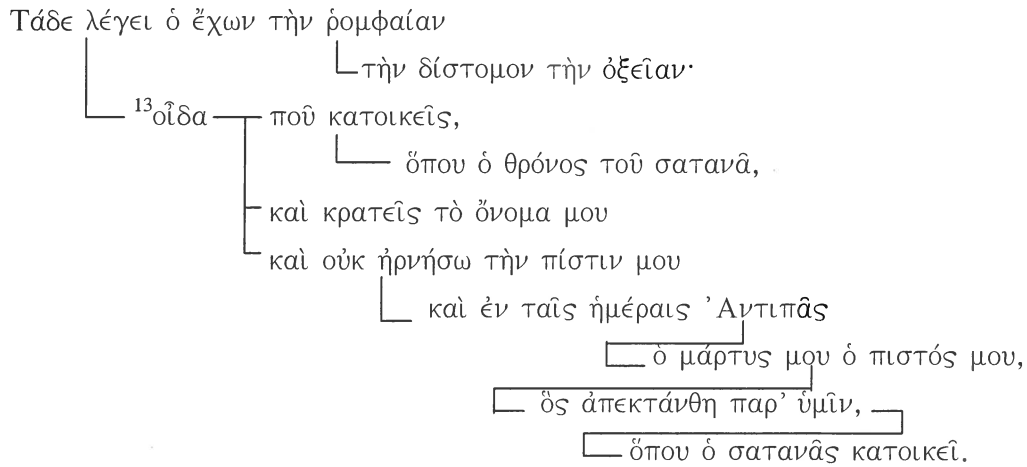
Pergamum seemingly had a history as a setting where emperor-worship was developed (Hemer 1986: 86). It was the official seat of the imperial cult in Asia (Mounce 1977: 96). Here emperor-worship was not just developed, it was also strictly enforced. This strong Roman and imperial-religious influence is most-probably the background to the reference of Pergamum as the place where the throne of Satan was situated (Hemer 1986: 87). It could refer to the proconsul’s judicial bench where, later on, many Christians from the surrounding area were brought to stand trial for their faith (Aune 1997: 182-183). It is clear from this proclamation [and the one to Smyrna] that Christians certainly had to endure persecution and even martyrdom in John’s congregations²²⁹.

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

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

ii) Antipas, ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου

a) Syntactical analysis



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

b) Killed for his faith

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²³² Italics by Bauckham.

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

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

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

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

²³³ My bracketed insert.

²³⁴ My translation.

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

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

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

iii) Summary on Antipas’ death

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

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

i) What is the context?

According to Heil (1993: 242) this section is the only prayer of supplication in the Book of Revelation, and has a very unique relationship with the rest of the Book, referring both backwards and forwards. Ford (1975: 110) sees Revelation 6:9-11 as the key to the understanding of the rest of Revelation 6, looking back towards the “martyrdom” of Christ (Rev 5) and forward to the sealed believers in Revelation 7²³⁶.

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

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

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

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

Schematically Revelation 6:9-11 fits into the vision of Revelation 4:2b-7:17 as follows²³⁷:

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

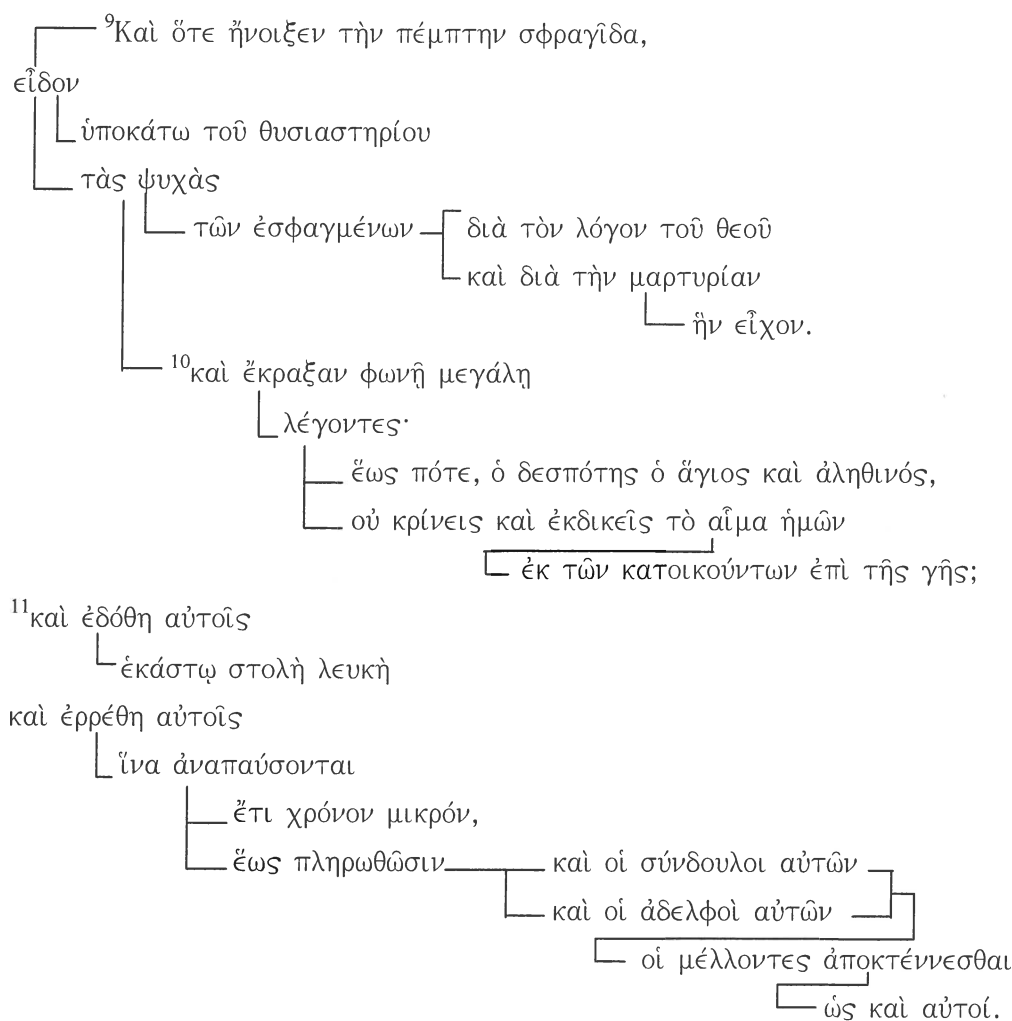
Revelation 6:9-11 can be read as another "interlude" that plays an important role in comforting believers amidst difficult times. Because of Christ's life-giving triumph

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

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

ii) The souls of the martyrs

a) Syntactical analysis



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

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

b) Souls in heaven

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

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

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

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

c) Slain witnesses

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

This vision on the fate of believers after death was supposed to act as a vision of hope to the congregations struggling amidst persecutions by shifting their focus from the problems on earth to their position in heaven (Groenewald 1986: 90). They can be rest assured that, even if they were to die here on earth, they will be close to God: the souls being under the altar signifies their closeness to God, a motif also found in Jewish traditions (Aune 1998a: 404). This protective presence of the martyrs close to God is emphasised further by the white robes being given to the “souls under the altar”. There is a close parallel in Jewish literature that “the souls of the righteous dead are protected near the heavenly presence of God” (cf. 1 En 39:4-5; 41:2; 61:12; 70:2-4). Rabbi Akiba stated that the souls of the righteous Jews were “*under the altar in heaven*”²⁴⁰ (Charles 1920a: 173). The white robes of course, could be a sign of salvation, victory, purity, or immortality²⁴¹ (Aune 1998a: 410; Beasley-Murray 1981: 136). It could also be a “token of heavenly existence” (Caird 1966: 86). The promise to believers in Sardis is that those who persevere until the end [i.e. claim the victory of Christ] will be clothed in white (Rev 3:4-5; [Heil 1993: 227-228]).

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

²⁴⁰ Italics inserted by Charles (1920a).

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

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

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

iii) Summary on the souls of the martyrs

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

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

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

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

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

- 11:3-6 mission and authority of the two witnesses
- 11:7-10 lynching of the two witnesses**
- 11:11-13 victory of the two witnesses

a) Syntactical analysis

7Καὶ ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν,
τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου
ποιήσῃ μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον
καὶ νικήσῃ αὐτούς
καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς.

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

b) Martyred witnesses

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

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

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

As an apocalyptic vision, however, the narrative should be read as a highly symbolical vision. The two witnesses are symbolic of the expected return of the eschatological prophets [presumably representing Moses and Elijah]. They are given the same powers as Moses [bringing about plagues] and Elijah [fire from their mouths, power to shut the sky] (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78). The killing of people rejecting the witnesses’ message is rather a message of God’s judgment on those that try to harm the believers or do not want to accept the salvation offered by Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 184). Furthermore the entire textual unit (i.e. Rev 11:1-14) wants to emphasise that the witnesses act under the protection [and authority] of God (Groenewald 1986: 121). Under the protection of God they are immune to the attacks of their opponents (Bauckham 1993a: 277). This interpretation of divine protection is central to the message of verse 5 and 6, and to the message with regard to life and death in Revelation²⁴³. It confirms that God will not let his message of salvation [or judgment] be interrupted in any manner by anybody. It will continue, even amidst persecution and martyrdom.

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

The protection of the witnesses on earth lasts until they have completed their witness, which lasts for 1 260 days²⁴⁴. Only then does God permit that they be overcome by the beast, just as He permitted his only Son to be killed by the Roman authorities (Beasley-Murray 1981: 185). This vision is modelled on the vision of Daniel 7 about the little horn making war against the saints (Mounce 1977: 225). The entire vision wants to emphasise God's control over history. This control was, however, already evident in the heavenly vision of Revelation 4. The message now is that God's sovereignty and control is not influenced at all by anything that happens in history. History is rather dependent on God's control and what He permits people [even the evil beast] to do.

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

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

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

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

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

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

c) Resurrected witnesses

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴⁶ Italics inserted by Aune.

d) Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) Context of Revelation 13:1-18

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

Excursion 7: The trinity of evil

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Whereas the central antagonistic figure in Revelation 12 was the Dragon, the focus shifts to the two beasts in Revelation 13. They are the agents of evil trying to establish a kingdom for the Dragon on earth. In the process of doing this, they kill anybody who is not willing to worship the beasts or the Dragon. Again we see the possibility of martyrdom for believers and the call to stay faithful regardless of the circumstances. The texts under discussion here fit into the larger subunit as follows²⁴⁹:

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

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

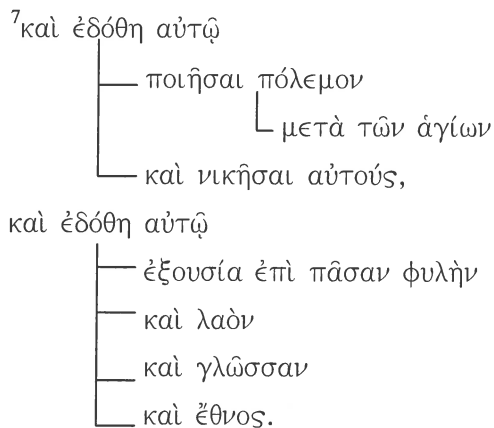
²⁴⁹ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.

ii) Persecution by Satan's agents

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

a) Waging war against God's people

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b) Destined to be killed

⁹Εἴ τις ἔχει οὖς
 ἄκουσάτω.
¹⁰εἴ τις εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν,
 εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν ὑπάγει. —
 εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι
 αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι. —
^ϵ Ὡδε ἐστὶν — ἡ ὑπομονὴ —
 καὶ ἡ πίστις — τῶν ἁγίων.

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

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

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

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

c) They who do not worship the beast

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

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

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

²⁵¹ My translation.

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary on the persecution

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

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

i) What is the context?

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

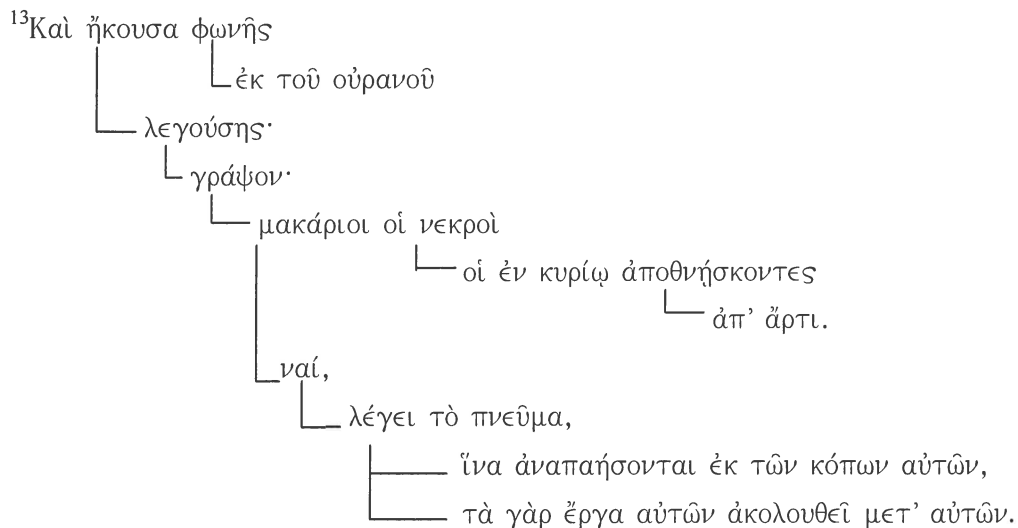
Revelation 14 forms part of the same subsection as Revelation 13 [i.e. Rev 11:15-16:21; cf. discussion on 2.1.5 above]. The subunit of text (Rev 14:1-20) is easily distinguished within the larger subtext by the frequently used text marker *καὶ εἶδον* in Revelation 14:1, which is again used in expanded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

Within Revelation 14 four subtexts can be distinguished (Aune 1998a: 794). Each of these is introduced with the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον. The only exception is Revelation 14:13, which begins with καὶ ἤκουσα. Although it might seem as if Revelation 14:14 is the start of a new larger subtext [introduced by καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ], it is linked to the rest of Revelation 14 by the frequent use of ἄλλον ἄγγελον in both Revelation 14:6-13 and 14:14-20 (Aune 1998a: 794). Within the larger subtext of Revelation 11:16-6:21 the text under discussion fits in as follows²⁵²:

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

ii) The ones dying in the Lord

a) Syntactical analysis



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

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

b) A beatitude for the faithful who die

This is one of seven beatitudes in Revelation²⁵³. Although this beatitude is in the plural [as is the ones in Rev 19:9 and 22:14 {cf. also Matt 5:3-12 and Luke 6:20-23}] there is seemingly no material difference between the use of the singular or plural in the beatitudes (Aune 1998a: 838). The beatitude comes from an unidentified voice, which in the Old Testament usually refers to God (Num 7:89; Ezek 1:28; Dan 4:31-32). In early Judaism the unidentified voice was sometimes even used as a circumlocution for God (Apoc Ezra 6:3; 7:13; Apoc Abr 9:1; 10:1, 3; [Aune 1998a: 561]). It is therefore possible that the unidentified voice in Revelation [something that is mentioned quite often in Revelation – cf. Aune (1998a: 561) for a discussion thereon] refers to God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Dying in the Lord” means having a living relationship with Christ²⁵⁴. Everybody who shares in the death in Christ will therefore also share in his resurrection (1 Cor 15:17-18; Thess 4:16; [Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 90]). Their dying off of themselves stands in sharp contrast to the death of the unbelievers, who stand to face the judgment of God (Mounce 1977: 277). The immanent judgment of God makes this decision on life and death all the more important.

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

iii) Summary on Revelation 14:13

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

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

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

Excursion 8: The seven beatitudes of Revelation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) Revelation 16:6

a) Context

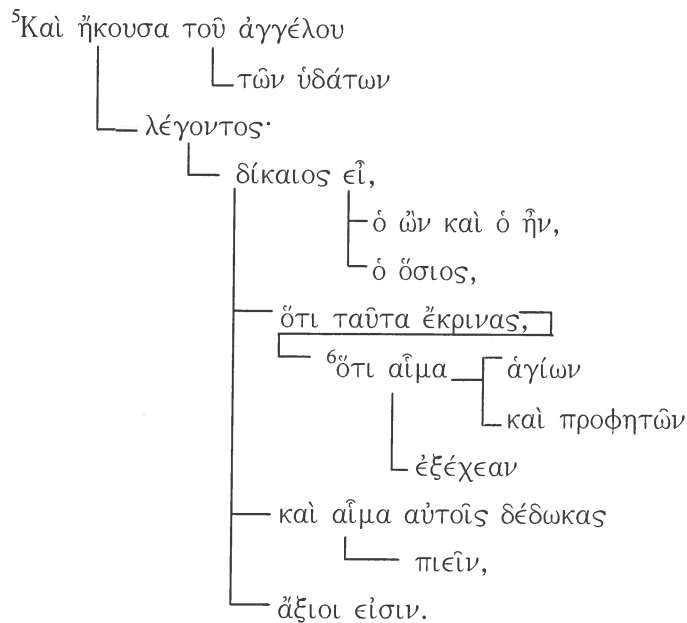
The context for this discussion is Revelation 15:1-16:21 [which is part of the larger textual unit Rev 11:15-16:21]. A new subunit of text starts in Revelation 15:1 with the familiar *καὶ εἶδον* [cf. 2.1.6 above; (Aune 1998a: 863)]. The narrative in this section differs from that of the seven seals (Rev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

Within this larger subtext Aune (1998a: 863-868) identifies a number of subdivisions, of which Revelation 16:1-21 is one subunit [introduced by another familiar text marker – *καὶ ἤκουσα μεγάλης φωνῆς*], a narrative regarding the pouring out of the seven bowls of God’s judgment (Aune 1998a: 863-864). This is the pouring out of the wrath of God on the peoples of this world (Aune 1998a: 883). Within the larger subtext of Revelation 15:1-16:21 the text under discussion here fits in as follows²⁵⁶:

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

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

b) The blood of the faithful



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

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

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



above for an interpretation of the sacrificial blood of Christ as a life-giving occurrence]). Because blood is understood as the seat of life, the shedding of blood is equal to killing (Gen 9:6; 37:22; Lev 17:4, 13; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 22; cf. De Cock 2004: 157-182]). This is the interpretation with regard to all three texts that form part of this discussion²⁵⁷. The motif of the phrase is that of martyrdom: it refers to believers who died at the hands of the dragon and the beasts as a result of their faithfulness to the testimony of Christ. In all three instances, according to Aune (1998a: 886), it is the result of a redactional addition.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ii) Revelation 17:6

a) Context

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

It is the only vision in Revelation that also incorporates a detailed interpretation of the vision²⁵⁹ (Aune 1998b: 915). The vision is introduced in verse 1 with the familiar text marker καὶ ἦλθεν [cf. also (i) above]. Although there are a number of familiar text markers used throughout the textual unit, the text of Revelation 17:1-19:10 is distinguished from the rest of the surrounding context by its content: the vision regarding the splendour and fall of the whore [and Babylon – essentially the same]. The familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον introduces a new larger subsection, which starts in

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

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

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

Revelation 17 is in effect only the introduction to the judgment of Babylon. In Revelation 17:1 the angel promises to show John the judgment of the great whore, but then goes on to show John the whore in her splendour. Only in Revelation 18 does the effects of the judgment become the actual focus of John (Aune 1998b: 915). Within the larger context of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the text containing Revelation 17:6 fits in as follows²⁶⁰:

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

b) The blood of the faithful being drunk

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

καὶ ἐθαύμασα
 └ ἰδὼν αὐτήν
 └ θαῦμα μέγα.

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

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

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

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

The blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus refer to those people who had to suffer death because of their faithfulness to Christ [cf. (i)(b) above]. It is not sure if John refers to different groups in Revelation 17:6, or if it is just one group. Aune (1998b: 937) is of the opinion that the *καὶ* in verse 6 should be read epexegetical [as “that is”], understanding the second phrase as a further explanation of the first [cf. the discussion on Rev 16:6, where mention is made of saints and prophets]²⁶¹. It is possible that John refers to both the New Testament martyrs and the Old Testament witnesses [prophets] who were killed (Beasley-Murray 1981: 253). Morris (1969: 207) is of the opinion that the combination of both is done to add solemnity to the situation²⁶².

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Revelation 18:24

a) Context

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

Aune (1998b: 976) identifies three different types of poetic compositions interlinked within the text of Revelation 18: (i) a ritual lament (Rev 18:1-3, 9-20), which is similar to the laments over Tyre in the Old Testament (Ezek 26:15-18; 27:1-8, 26-36); (ii) a command to flee (Rev 18:4-8), and (iii) a symbolic action and interpretation (Rev 18:21-24). Within the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the text under discussion fits in as follows²⁶³:

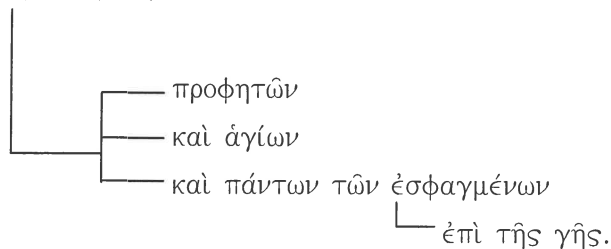
17:1-19:10	Revelations of the judgment of Babylon
17:1-2	introduction to the visions
17:3-18	allegorical vision of Babylon as the great whore

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

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

b) Babylon guilty of shedding the blood

²⁴καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα εὐρέθη



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

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

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

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

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

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

iv) Summary on the blood of the faithful

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

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

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

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

i) Context

Revelation 19:2 is still part of the larger section (Rev 17:1-19:10) discussed above [cf. 2.1.7 (ii) and (iii)]. A new subsection starts in Revelation 19:1 with the formula *μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα*, a frequent text marker in Revelation (Charles 1920b: 114). Revelation 19:1-10 comprise of two textual units [Rev 19:1-8 and 19:9-10] that both function as transitions from Revelation 17-18 through to the section on the bride in Revelation 21:9-22:5 (Aune 1998b: 1019)²⁶⁴. Revelation 19:1-8 is the “longest, most complex, and final hymnic section in Revelation” (Aune 1998b: 1021). It contains five hymnic texts, praising God for the judgment of Babylon and the redemption of his people (Aune 1998b: 1021). Beasley-Murray (1981: 271) calls it “a liturgy of Hallelujahs”. It is the only place in the New Testament that the word Hallelujah is found and it is probably taken over from the Hallel Psalms, i.e. Psalms 113-118 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 271). The structure of Revelation 19:1-10 fits in at the end of the larger section of Revelation 17:1-19:10, and has the following layout²⁶⁵:

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

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

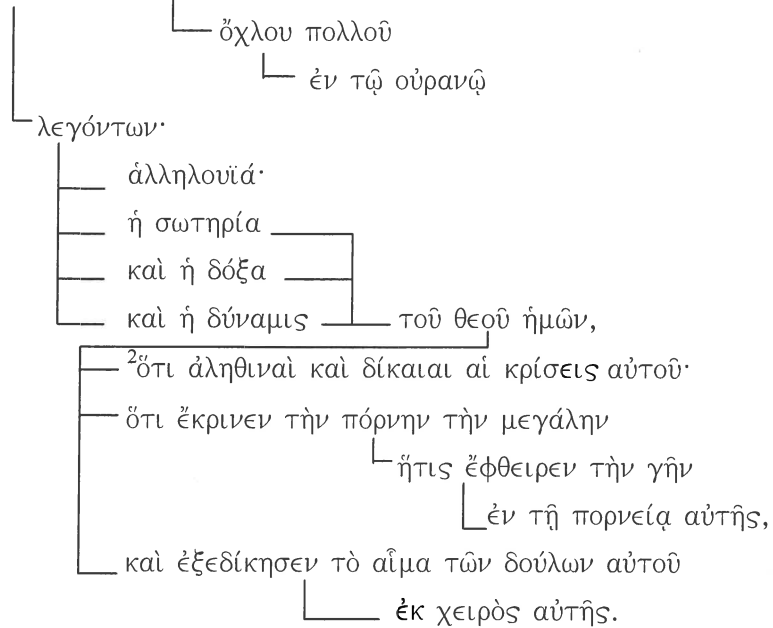
²⁶⁵ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b [cf. also Charles 1920b: 116-118 who changes the order of the verses around to what he calls its “due chronological connection” (Charles 1920b: 116)]. Many scholars break the text at Revelation 19:5, thus making Revelation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



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

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

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἤκουσα ὡς φωνὴν μεγάλην



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

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

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

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

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

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

can rejoice, because they know their redemption comes from the God to whom all the salvation, glory and power belongs (Rev 19:1; [Groenewald 1986: 189]). Interpolations of worship-hymns into the text often accompany the narrative visions of the end time in Revelation²⁶⁶ (Groenewald 1986: 189). The image of the “smoke going up” confirms the finality of the judgment, and that the effects thereof will last into eternity. The killing of God’s people has finally been avenged by righteous judgment. They can now rest in eternity from their sufferings (cf. Rev 14:13).

iii) Summary on Revelation 19:2

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

2.1.9. Summary on martyrdom in Revelation

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

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

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

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

2.2. *Death in the world*

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

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

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

i) Context

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

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

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

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

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

²²ἰδοὺ βάλλω αὐτήν

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

²³καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ

└ ἐν θανάτῳ.

καὶ γνώσονται πᾶσαι αἱ ἐκκλησίαι

└ ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι
 └ ὁ ἔραυνῶν νεφροὺς καὶ καρδίας,

καὶ δώσω ὑμῖν ἐκάστῳ

└ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ὑμῶν.

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

b) The seductive Jezebel

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

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

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



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

c) A deadly sickbed

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary of Revelation 2:23

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

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

i) Context of the first four seals

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

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

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

times; the passive of divine activity “he was given” [ἐδόθη] is used three times (Aune 1998a: 389). Another characteristic of the first four seals is that they deal with things on earth, whereas the next two seals are concerned with things in heaven (Morris 1969: 102-103). The events occurring when the seals are opened allude to the prophecy of Zechariah 1:7:11 and 6:1-8 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 130-131; Aune 1998a: 390). Within the larger context Revelation 6:1-8 fits in as follows²⁷²:

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

ii) Death when the seals are opened

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

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

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

a) First seal: a conqueror conquering more

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

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

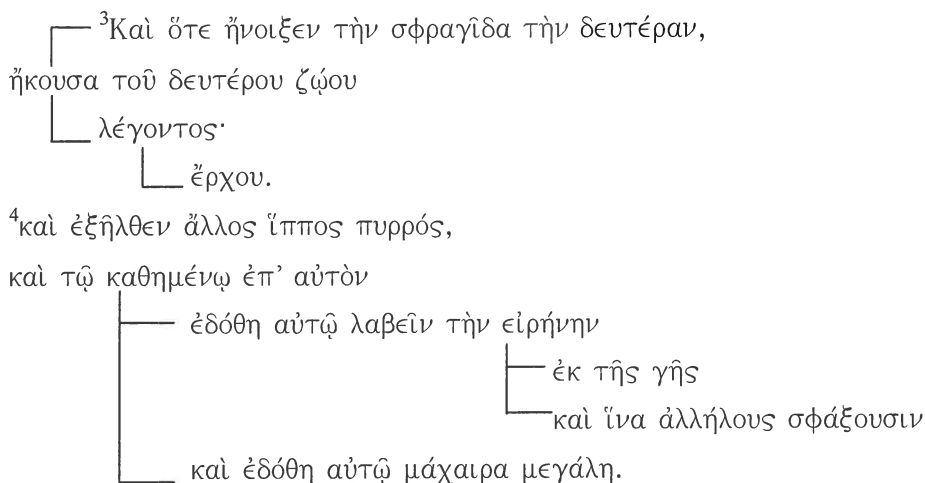
On the identification of the first cavalier there have been some speculation. Charles (1920a: 163-164) is of the opinion that it represents the Parthian empire. Many commentators have identified the rider on the white horse with Christ, citing the identification with the conquering Messiah in Revelation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

cavalier going out wears a στέφανος of victory and carries a bow for war, while the Messiah goes out wearing many διαδήματα, symbols of his unchallenged sovereignty (Swete 1907: 86). The cavaliers on the four [or at least first three] horses need not be identified with some person or group. Their mission in any case determines their identity as instruments of destruction in the hands of God²⁷³.

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

b) Second seal: war and killing

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

c) Fourth seal: Death bringing death

7Καὶ ὅτε ἤνοιξεν τὴν σφραγίδα τὴν τετάρτην,
ἤκουσα φωνὴν τοῦ τετάρτου ζώου
λέγοντος·
ἔρχου.

8καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος χλωρός,
καὶ ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ
ὄνομα αὐτῷ [ὁ] θάνατος,

καὶ ὁ ἄδης ἠκολούθει μετ’ αὐτοῦ

καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία

ἐπὶ τὸ τέταρτον τῆς γῆς
ἀποκτεῖναι — ἐν ρομφαίᾳ
— καὶ ἐν λιμῷ
— καὶ ἐν θανάτῳ
— καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν θηρίων
τῆς γῆς.

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

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

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

The word *ἀποκτείνειν* indicates the physical killing of people in general (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93). This is followed by a list of “instruments” by which the killings are to take place. Again we see the metaphor of the sword as the instrument to kill with, this time using the word *ρόμφαία* for sword²⁷⁶. The phrase *ἐν ρομφαία* can be

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) Context

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

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

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

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

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

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

Within the larger context the sounding of the first four trumpets fits in as follows²⁸¹:

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

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

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



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

ii) The trumpets sound for creation

a) Syntactical analysis

⁸Καὶ ὁ δεύτερος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν·

καὶ ὡς ὄρος μέγα

└─ πυρὶ καιόμενον
└─ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν,

καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῆς θαλάσσης αἷμα

⁹καὶ ἀπέθανεν τὸ τρίτον τῶν κτισμάτων

└─ τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ
└─ τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχὰς

καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῶν πλοίων διεφθάρησαν.

¹⁰Καὶ ὁ τρίτος ἄγγελος ἐσάλπισεν·

καὶ ἔπεσεν

└─ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
└─ ἀστὴρ μέγας
└─ καιόμενος ὡς λαμπὰς

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

¹¹καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ἀστέρος λέγεται ὅτι Ἄψινθος,

καὶ ἐγένετο τὸ τρίτον τῶν ὑδάτων εἰς ἄψινθον

καὶ πολλοὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον

└─ ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων
└─ ὅτι ἐπικράνησαν.

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

b) When the trumpets sound

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

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

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

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

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

c) Death when the trumpet sound

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

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

d) Death when a star falls

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary of the text

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

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

i) Context?

Revelation 9 [narrating the fifth and sixth trumpet-plagues] forms part of the same sub-section as Revelation 8:7-12 [the first four trumpet-plagues] of which the unity have been discussed above [cf. 2.2.3 (i) above]. The discussion of the broad context will thus not be repeated here. Within the larger sub-text of Revelation 8:1-11:14 the narrative of the sixth trumpet fits in as follows²⁸⁴:

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

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

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

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

In Revelation 8:13 the last three trumpet-plagues are announced as three woes. The announcement of the woes suggests that the plagues following from here onwards will be directed not at the cosmos anymore but at “the people of the world”. The phrase τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς has a negative connotation throughout Revelation, pointing towards the enemies of God in this world²⁸⁵. With regard to the fifth trumpet it is clearly commanded in Revelation 9:4 that the demons should direct their attention to the people and not to the cosmos.

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

b) God’s tormenting judgment

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

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

²⁸⁶ Italics as inserted by Mounce (1977: 195).

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

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

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

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

That the torment must last for five months is probably a symbolic figure indicating “a few” (Aune 1998a: 530). The meaning of the image could be derived from the five fingers on one hand²⁸⁸. The interpretation thereof could be that of a long period or a full [one full hand] period of torment (Pohl 1971: 36). It is possible to interpret it as a period in which time will still be allowed for repentance. That is why people are not killed but only tormented: God wants to bring them back while there is still time

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

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

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

c) Longing for death

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

According to Aune (1998a: 531) this preference of death over life is characteristic of descriptions of the end times in the apocalyptic literature. People are filled with anxiety and want to die in an effort to flee from the hands of the living God (cf. Rev 6: 15-17; [Pohl 1971: 36]). They will, however, learn that there is no escaping the judgment of God, even if they die in this life²⁸⁹ (Hughes 1990: 110). The unsuccessful struggle to die enhances the intensity of the torment. Giblin (1991: 101-102) sees verse 6 as the central part of the fifth trumpet-plague. It stands in the middle of a fivefold enclosure starting and closing with a reference to the abyss (Rev 9:1 and 11). It describes the “plight of human beings” (Giblin 1991: 101) seeking to escape torment through death, but finding that death keeps eluding them²⁹⁰.

²⁸⁹ This will be discussed in Chapters 9.

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

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

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

d) Is there another chance?

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

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

iii) Who is Abaddon or Apollyon?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iv) Summary on death in the fifth trumpet plague

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

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

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

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

i) Context

The sixth trumpet-plague forms part of the unified text of the trumpet-plagues that was already discussed above [cf. 2.2.3 and 2.2.4 above]. The discussion on the broad context of which the trumpet-plagues form part will therefore not be repeated here. Within the larger sub-text of Revelation 8:1-11:14 the narrative of the sixth trumpet fits in as follows²⁹²:

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

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

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

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

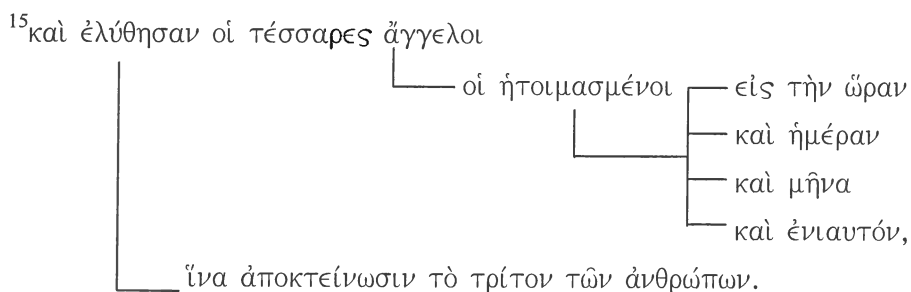
The sixth trumpet constitutes the execution of the second woe announced in Revelation 8:13. However, the conclusion of the second woe is only announced in Revelation 11:14 [after the interlude of Rev 10:1-11:13], the end of this main section of text that started at Revelation 8:1 [the completion of the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

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

ii) Killing with fire and smoke and sulphur

a) Then the angels were released

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



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

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

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

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

In Revelation 9:15 [as well as 18 and 20] the verb ἀποκτείνω is used to describe the death [killing] of people as a result of the sixth trumpet-plague. The meaning of the word ἀποκτείνω has already been discussed previously [cf. 2.1.1 (ii) above]. The meaning is that of physical death through killing. The word ἀποκτείνω was often used to describe the death of unbelievers. In Jewish religion this killing was seen as a service to God²⁹³. The word ἀποκτείνω could also refer to the causing of death through plagues, something which is clearly evident in Revelation 9:13-21 (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 93).

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

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

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

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

b) Deadly plagues

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

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

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

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

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

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

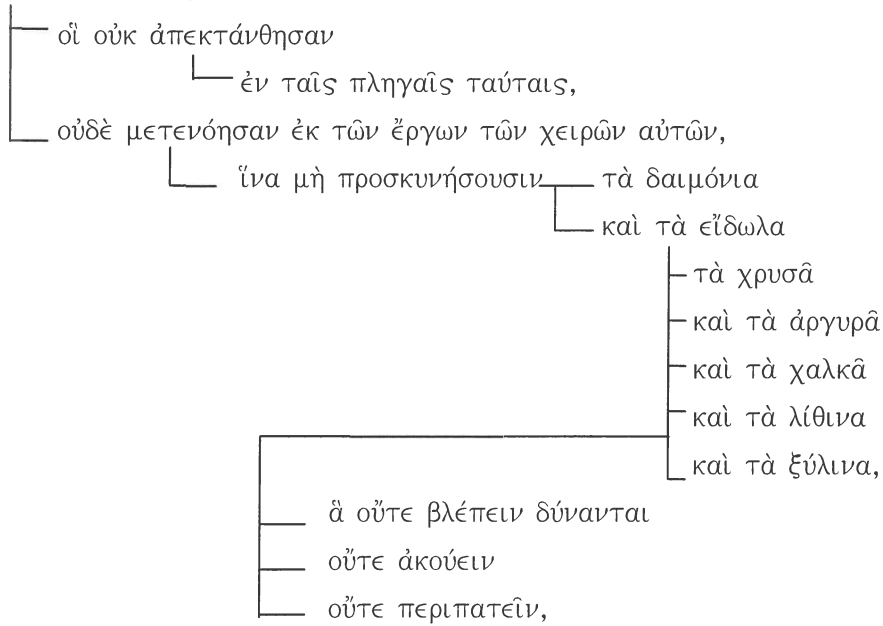
The phrase τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων has the same meaning as τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς in Revelation 8:13, referring to the unbelieving world (Charles 1920a: 252). Believers have no part in these judgments. They are clearly aimed at those who reject God (Charles 1920a: 252). This is confirmed by the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

c) Still no repentance

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



²⁰Καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων,



²¹καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν

- ἐκ τῶν φόνων αὐτῶν
- οὔτε ἐκ τῶν φαρμάκων αὐτῶν οὔτε
- ἐκ τῆς πορνείας αὐτῶν
- οὔτε ἐκ τῶν κλεμμάτων αὐτῶν.

The focus in these two verses is on the unrepentant attitude of the people, even though they have been tormented and many of them have been killed. This attitude is emphasised by listing the sins and idol worshipping that have continued.

In Revelation 9:21 a different word is used to describe death through the people of the world continuing in their lives of sin, i.e. φόνος. The general meaning of φόνος is “murder” in a physical sense, which is in line with the meaning of ἀποκτείνω as violent death or killing (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 872).

Aune (1998a: 541) is of the opinion that repentance is not the motif of the judgmental plagues [cf. 2.2.4 above]²⁹⁴. However, the reference to non-repentance in Revelation 9:20 does suggest that there was a hope [and an opportunity] for repentance emanating from the trumpet-plagues (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 72). The killing of

²⁹⁴ Aune (1998a: 541) sees repentance as a rare motif throughout the main body of Revelation (i.e. Rev 4:1-22:5). If it is mentioned, it is always in the negative sense of non-repentance (cf. Rev 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11).

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

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

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

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

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

The reference to φόνος [murder] in Revelation 9:21 probably doesn’t refer to any specific action [for instance killing of Christians], but wants to emphasise that these people just continued in their sinful ways despite the judgment that has come over a third of them²⁹⁵. They did not turn away one bit from their evil ways. Seemingly, in

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

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

It is interesting to observe the reference to the idols of gold and silver and wood and bronze and stone (Rev 9:20). The reference to hand-made idols [worshipped by the people of this world] stands in contrast to the living God [the One who could give life but whose life-giving actions in Christ have been ignored by this world]. In Jewish and Christian documents the mentioning of a list of the materials used to make idols are often done to emphasise their lifelessness in contrast to the one and only living God²⁹⁶ (Aune 1998a: 542). Eternal life only comes through a living relationship with the living God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.6]. However, these people discarded this in favour of dead idols, which they made themselves and with which they can’t even have a living relationship. That is the route to eternal death (cf. Hughes 1990: 114-115).

iii) Summary on the sixth trumpet-plague

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Revelation earthquakes are generally associated with a theophany. However, the earthquake in this vision is probably an indication of God who acts in judgment on those who disregard Him (Aune 1998a: 627). It is not said if believers are affected by the earthquake. However, the apocalyptic nature of the vision probably wants it that only non-believers [τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς - cf. Rev 8:13] are struck. The figure of seven thousand people that have been killed in the earthquake doesn't necessarily have a symbolic meaning²⁹⁹. The figure could be congruent with ten percent of the size of an average city in those days (cf. Rev 11:13; [Mounce 1977: 229]). The one-tenth is traditionally a symbol for survivors of judgment (Isa 6:13; Am 5:3). If symbolic, the usage is then a reversal of the tradition (Aune 1998a: 627).

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

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

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

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

b) Death in the sea

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

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

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

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

of blood in Revelation]). This is probably what is implied when John says that the water turned into blood, “like the blood of a dead man”³⁰¹. This is not the blood that flows in purification of sins. It is rotten [coagulated and with a smell of death] and can obviously not support or sustain life anymore (Mounce 1977: 294). This, of course, negatively affects human life. Water was [as is today] of critical importance in ancient civilisations, specifically the “more arid regions” (Mounce 1977: 294). Man needs pure water [and the fish within as food] to stay alive³⁰².

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

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

iii) Summary on the second bowl

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

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

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

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

2.2.8. *Summary on physical death in the world*

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

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

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

3. Other occurrences of life and death in Revelation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Summary on physical life and death in Revelation

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

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

CHAPTER 9

ETERNAL LIFE AND SPIRITUAL LIFE [OR DEATH]

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

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

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

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

1. They who have real life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1.1. Life in Ephesus: a fainting torch

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

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

³⁰⁹ My italics.

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

a) Saved by grace

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

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

b) Lost in love and losing their lamp

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³¹³ Cf. also Wong (1998: 212).

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

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

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

a) Faithful unto death

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

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

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

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

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

b) Receiving a crown of life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

1.1.3. Life in Pergamum: a tale of two lives

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

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



a) Having life, but...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b) Eating the wrong sacrifices

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

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

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

c) Promises of hidden manna and white stones

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a) Going forward but struggling with Jezebel

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

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

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

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

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

b) The morning star for a king

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



1.1.5. Life in Sardis: the living dead

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

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

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

a) Life is more than just a word

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

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

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

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

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

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

b) Repent and find life again

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



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

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

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

c) A promise of white garments

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

³²⁶ Translation as by Aune (1997: 222).

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

1.1.6. Life in Philadelphia: hanging on in faith

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

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

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

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

a) Greetings from the One who has the key

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

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

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

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

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

b) A pillar of strength with a threefold name

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.1.7. Life in Laodicea: the in-between people

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

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

a) The true and faithful, the Amen

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

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

b) Lukewarm Christians

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

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

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

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

c) Even Laodicea has hope!

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

1.1.8. Summary on life in the churches

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

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

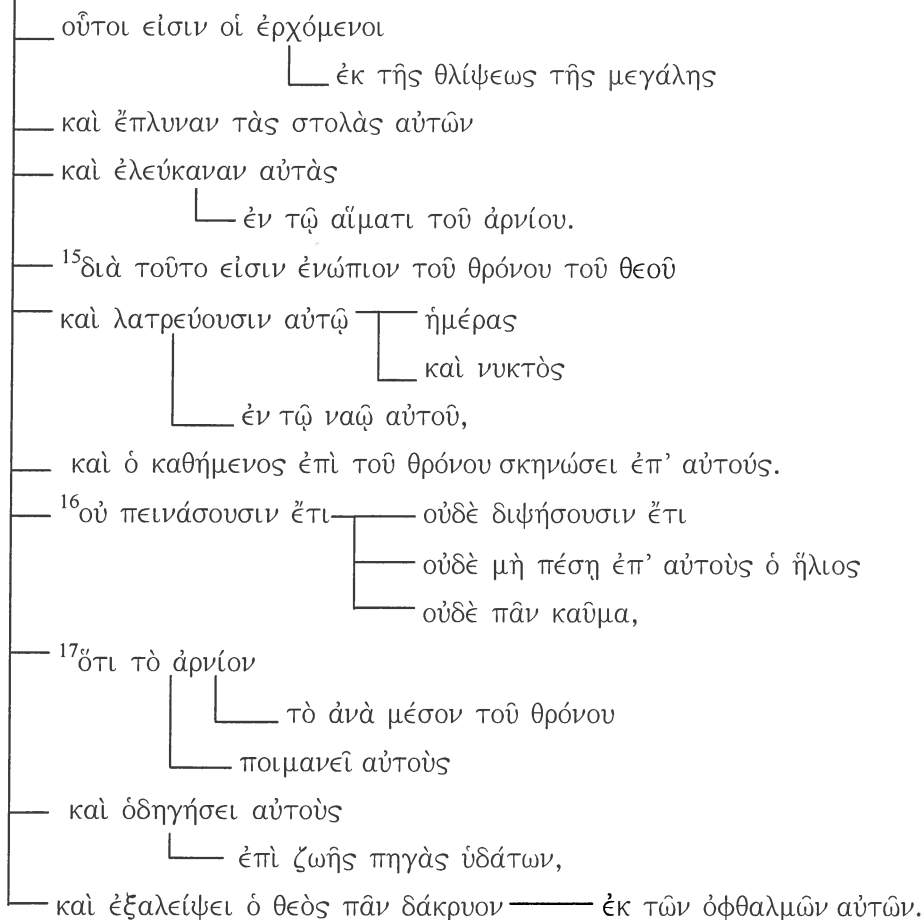
The context of Revelation 7:9-17 has already been discussed in Chapter 6 [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2. (i)]. The discussion will therefore not be repeated here. It is, however, important to note the positioning of Revelation 7 as a strategically placed text to comfort believers. After the outcry of the pagan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

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

i) Washing clothes to stay alive

a) Syntactical analysis

καὶ εἶπεν μοι·



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

b) A holy multitude

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

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

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

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

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

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

c) White garments and red blood

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ii) Summary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a) Syntactical analysis

Revelation 13:8

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

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

Revelation 17:8

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

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



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

b) Those whose names have not been written

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

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

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

c) The interpretation of ἀπό καταβολῆς κόσμου

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) Context of Rev 20:1-15

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

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

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

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

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

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

ii) The Book of Life in judgment

a) Syntactical analysis

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

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

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

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

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

καὶ ἐκρίθησαν ἕκαστος
└── κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν.

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

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

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

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

b) The Book of Life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary

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

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

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

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

1.3.3. *Summary on the Book of Life*

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

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

i) Context

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

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

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

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

ii) The text of Revelation 14:4

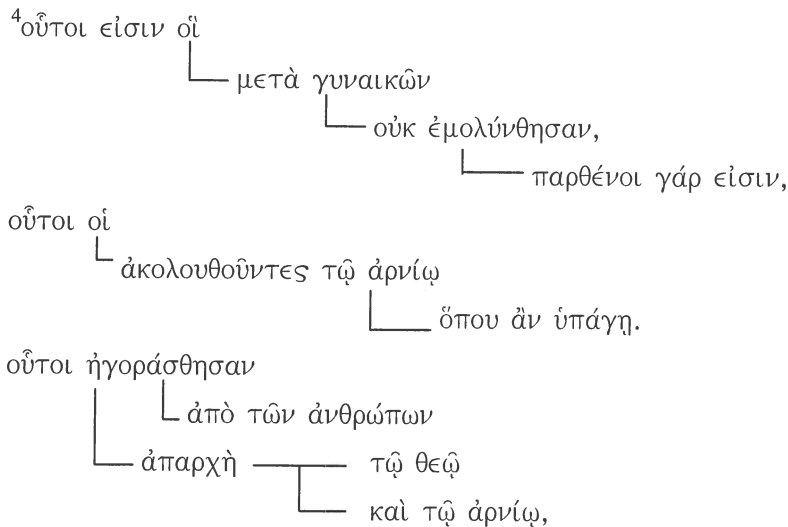
The vision of the 144 000³⁴⁸ that John sees on Mount Zion stands in obvious contrast to the preceding vision about the beast. While believers are killed in Revelation 13 (cf. Rev 13:15), in Revelation 14:1 they are seen standing [i.e. alive] on Zion. In Revelation 13:17-18 the followers of the beast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

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

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

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

a) Syntactical analysis



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

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

b) The 144 000 on Mount Zion

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

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

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

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

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

c) They were purchased from the earth

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary

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

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

i) Context

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

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

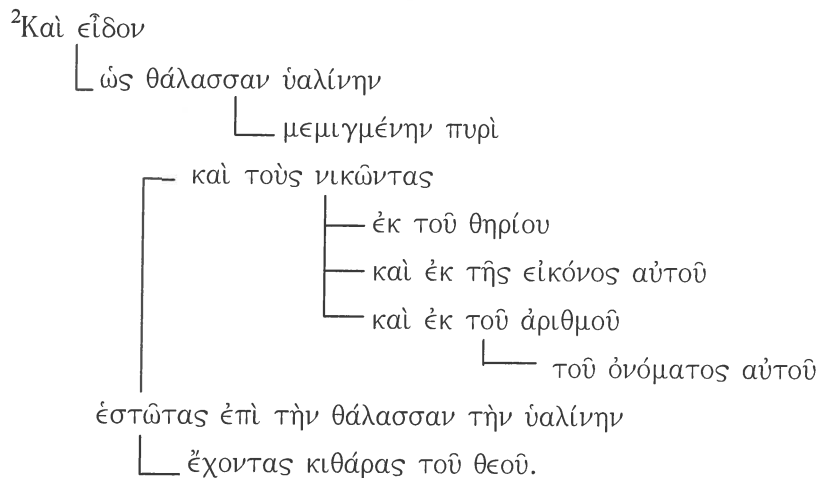
³⁵³ For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

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

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

ii) Those who have conquered the beast

a) Syntactical analysis



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

b) Conquerors by the sea

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary

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

1.6. Summary on real life in Revelation

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

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

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

2. The judgment of God over life and death

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

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

Excursion 9: God as Judge of the world

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) Context of Revelation 11:15-18

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

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

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
11:19-12:17	the woman, the child and the dragon
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
14:1-20	Vision of eschatological salvation and judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

ii) The kairos-moment for the world

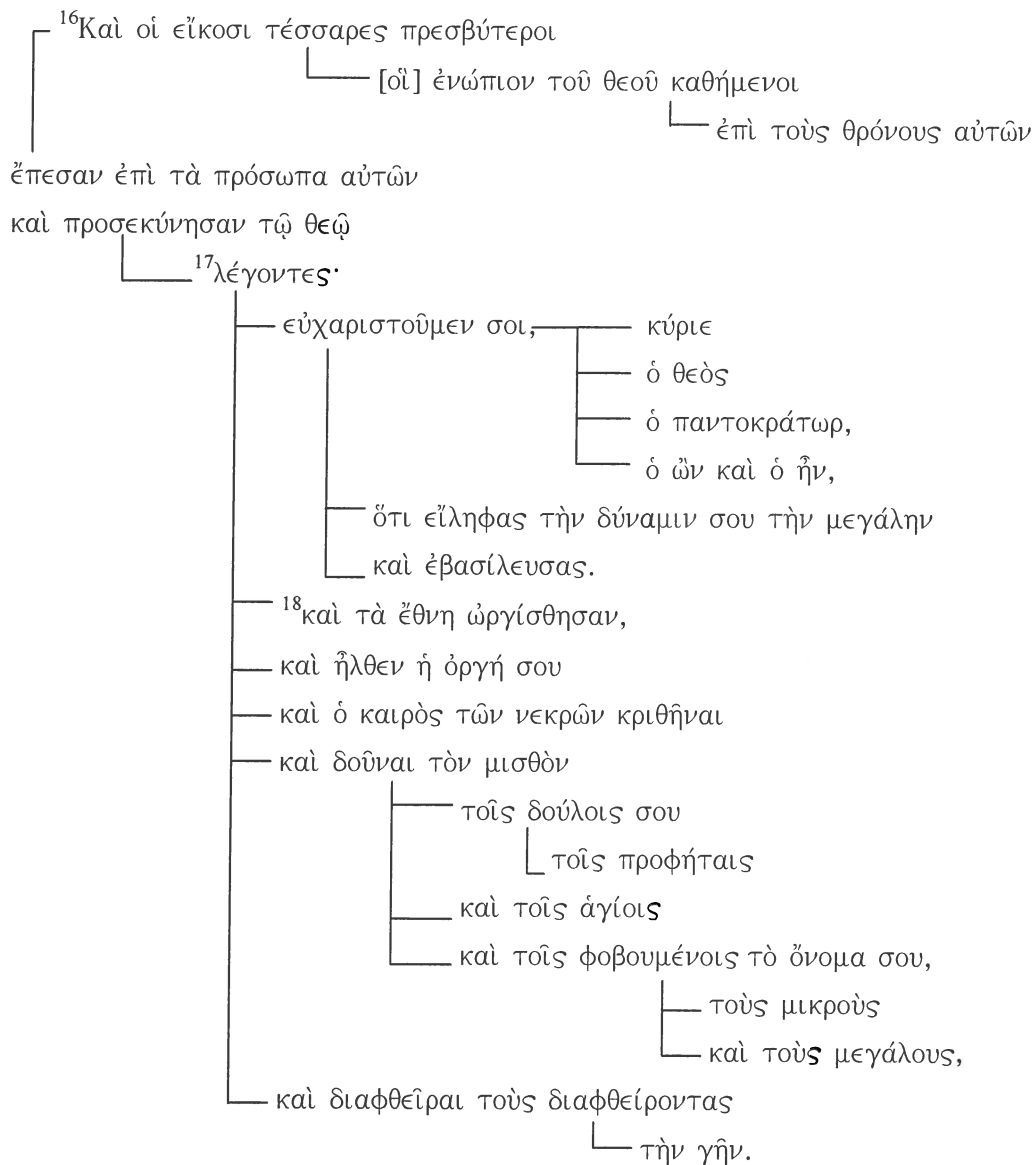
Revelation 11:15-18 narrates the sounding of the seventh trumpet. It is a short interlude announcing the judgment of the Lord upon the peoples of this world.

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

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

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

a) Syntactical analysis



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

b) The moment of judgment

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

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

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

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

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

c) Judgment in righteousness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary

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

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

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

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

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

i) Context

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

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

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

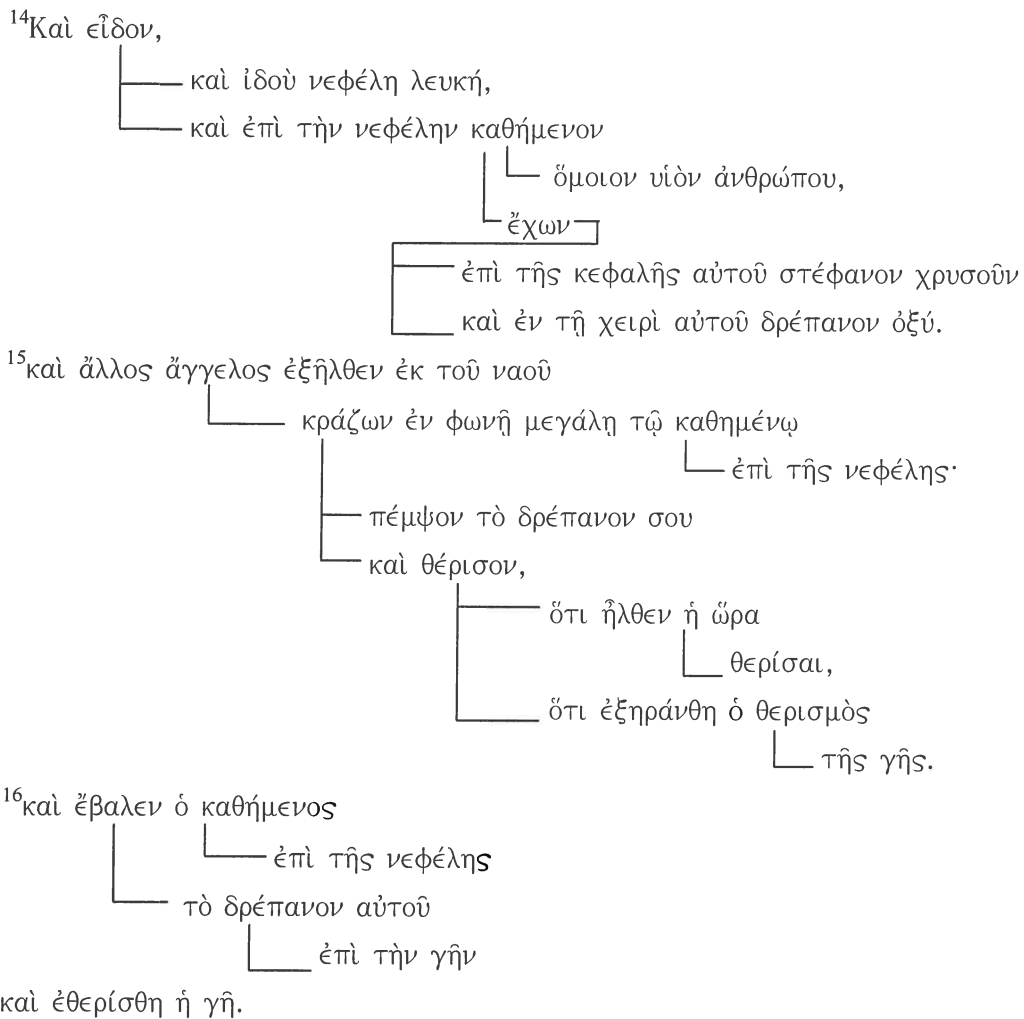
³⁵⁸ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 11:5-16:21, cf. Aune 1998a.



14:1-20	Vision of eschatological salvation and judgment
14:1-5	the Lamb and the 144 000
14:6:12	announcement of God’s judgment
14:13	audition of antiphonal beatitude
14:14-20	execution of God’s judgment
15:1-16:21	the seven bowls

ii) Judgment by the Son of Man

a) Syntactical analysis



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

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

b) Harvesting the world

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary of the judgment scene

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

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

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

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

i) Context

The context of Revelation 19:11-21:8 has already been discussed above [cf. section 1.3.2.]. Within this section Revelation 19:11-21 forms a unit. It fits into the larger subsection as follows³⁶²:

19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
19:11-21	the Divine Warrior and his conquests
20:1-10	Final defeat of Satan
20:11-15	Vision of the final judgment
21:1-8	Transition to the new order

The unit of Revelation 19:11-21 is marked off by using the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 19:11 and 20:1. Both these phrases are combined with an angel that is seen, either in heaven (Rev 19:11) or coming down from heaven (Rev 20:1). Although the phrase καὶ εἶδον appears twice more within the text [Rev 19:17, the beginning of the second subunit {cf. below}, and Rev 19:19] it is not a change to another vision. Specifically with regard to the use of καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 19:19, Aune (1998b: 1064) comments: “[It] functions to focus on a new aspect of a continuing vision report”³⁶³. Within the subunit of Revelation 19:11-21 Aune (1998b: 1046) identifies two subsections:

- 19:11-16 Eschatological coming of the Divine Warrior
- 19:17-21 Capture of the beast and the false prophet³⁶⁴

³⁶² Cf. Aune: 1998b on the detail structure of Revelation 17-22. Bauckham (1993a: 339) calls Revelation 19:11-21:8 a “transition from the fall of Babylon to the arrival of the New Jerusalem.”

³⁶³ My bracketed insert.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 105), who divides the text into three subunits by using the text marker καὶ εἶδον. There is certainly a lot of merit in this argumentation. It is, of course, also possible to understand Revelation 19:17-18 and 19:19-21 as two subunits of the subtext Revelation 19:17-21.

The vision of the Parousia of the Messiah in Revelation 19:11-21 is loaded with images from the Old Testament and early Judaism. The vision of the bloodstained Messiah goes back to Isaiah 63:1-3, but also has similarities with the narrative of Exodus 15:3-4 (Aune 1998b: 1048-1050).

ii) Conquering Prince

a) Syntactical analysis

¹²οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτοῦ
 └ [ὡς] φλόξ πυρός,
 καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ διαδήματα πολλά,
 ἔχων ὄνομα
 └ γεγραμμένον
 └ ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν
 └ εἰ μὴ αὐτός,
¹³καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον
 └ βεβαμμένον αἵματι,
 καὶ κέκληται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ.

The emphasis is on a description of the exalted Christ. John uses the conjunction δὲ twice in Revelation to emphasise his description of the exalted Christ (Aune 1998b: 1054). John uses a familiar image of bloodstained clothing of a divine warrior (cf. Ex 15; Deut 33; Isa 26:16-27; [Aune 1998b: 1057]). It is an eschatological motif as part of the scene of the Final Judgment, therefore referring to eternal death.

b) The divine warrior with bloodstained clothes

The text of Revelation 19:11-21 has many suggested variants. However, many of the variants are not well attested. Furthermore, none of the variants would influence the text in a material way. It is thus possible to work with the text as presented by Aland & Aland (1993: 672-673) [cf. Aune (1998b: 1042-1045) for a detailed discussion of the merit of all the suggested variants; cf. also Ford (1975: 320-321), specifically on the suggested variants for the perfect tense verb βεβαμμένον in Rev 19:13].

Revelation 19:11-21 [and specifically Rev 19:11-16] is “a description of the return or Parousia of Jesus Christ” (Aune 1998b: 1046; Kreitzer 1997b: 870-871). According

to Bauckham (1993a: 18), from Revelation 19:11 onwards nothing is seen or heard about anything that happens in heaven³⁶⁵. Although the pericope does not contain any of the traditional early Christian conceptions with regard to the Parousia, the context is that of the Messianic Warrior going out victoriously to conquer the enemies of his Kingdom (Aune 1998b: 1046-1047). The “*symbolic description*” (Aune 1998b: 1047)³⁶⁶ of the Divine Cavalier supports the décor of the scene as that of the Final Judgment. The image of the winepress (Rev 19:14) is similar to that found in Revelation 14:14-20, where the Final Judgment is announced [cf. 2.2 above]. Also, the image of the feast on the corpses of the peoples of the world [i.e. the unbelievers] puts the emphasis on the righteous judgment of God. He will not let any evil pass unnoticed (Morris 1969: 232; Mounce 1977: 348-349). Only those “who have washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb” and “whose names are written in the Book of Life” will survive (Rev 7:14; 20:12-15). They will partake in the festival as the guests of the King.

The same applies with regard to the identification of the Cavalier as the Messiah. He is coloured in the language of judgment (Aune 1998b: 1047). John uses some features from the introductory section of Revelation in his description of the Messiah (cf. Rev 1:5, 14, 16; 3:7, 14; [Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 105; Bauckham 1993a: 20]). He is identified as “the Word of God”, a title found in the New Testament only in Johannine literature (John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; cf. Heb 4:12; [Mounce 1977: 345-346]).

The Cavalier on the white horse is none other than Christ. He is going out in glory to wage war on the nations of the world [i.e. the unbelieving world, the enemies of God] and to judge in glory and righteousness (Aune 1998b: 1048). The strong militaristic language is controlled by adding judicial imagery (Bauckham 1993b: 105). That Christ is called *ὁ καθήμενος* (Rev 19:11b) could be a subtle word play on the circumlocution that is used throughout Revelation for God. It is another example of the divine status that John affords to Christ in Revelation.

³⁶⁵ Cf. however Gourgues (1985: 678-680) who is of the opinion that one must be careful to just place an entire vision either on earth or in heaven. Throughout Revelation John tends to jump around between heaven and earth.

³⁶⁶ Italic by Aune (1998b: 1047).

As in the judgment scene of Revelation 14:14-20 the blood mentioned in Revelation 19:13 is not the blood of Christ in salvation, but the blood of his enemies that have been destroyed by Christ in the Messianic war (Aune 1998b: 1057). It is thus not life-giving blood [as thought by the patristic writers (Beasley-Murray 1981: 280)], but the blood of death [i.e. life passing out of the body (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 100; cf. De Cock 2004: 158); cf. also discussion on blood in section 2.2 above and Chapter 7, 2.1.4]. The text from which this image was drawn (Isa 63:1-3) also implies that the death of God's enemies is what John has in mind. The image of blood in this instance [as in Rev 14:19] expresses the final cleaning of the earth by pouring the blood of those in opposition to God (De Cock 2004: 160). Furthermore: "It indicates his function as executor of the divine wrath" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 280). Although He is only riding out to war in the vision, the blood on his clothes symbolises his victory [beforehand] in the war that He is about to enter into (Mounce 1977: 345)³⁶⁷.

The image of a bloodstained warrior going out to destroy his enemies is found in a number of texts in the Old Testament (Ex 15; Deut 33; Hab 3; Isa 26:16-27:6; 59:15-20; 63:1-6; Zech 14:1-21; [Aune 1998b: 1057]). The clothes of the Messiah are dipped [stained – βεβαμμένον] in the blood. The use of the perfect tense indicates the permanence of this action (Morris 1969: 230). It confirms that the punishment of death in judgment [or life in judgment] will last in eternity.

iii) Killing in judgment

a) Syntactical analysis

²¹καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν
 └─ ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ
 └─ τοῦ καθημένου ἐπὶ τοῦ ἵππου
 └─ τῇ ἐξελεύσει ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ,
καὶ πάντα τὰ ὄρνεα ἐχορτάσθησαν
 └─ ἐκ τῶν σαρκῶν αὐτῶν.

The image is that of the eschatological judgment. The description of the Messiah is in terms of Him going out to conquer in judgment. The use of words such as τῶν σαρκῶν and ἀπεκτάνθησαν implies physical death, whereas the imagery

³⁶⁷ For the meaning of νικᾶν, cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4.



supports the idea of eternal death. Of course, physical death would spell eternal death for the unbeliever.

b) The text of Revelation 19:19-21

The “war of judgment” seemingly never occurs. The next vision that is revealed is that of the Messiah capturing the beast and his followers (Rev 19:20). It could be that no actual war will take place. A war is not necessary anymore, as the Messiah has already won the decisive victory on the cross (cf. Rev 12:11). The Final Judgment is nothing more than a confirmation of this victory and the sentencing of God’s enemies to eternal death (Morris 1969: 232). In Revelation 12:7-9 Michael and his army of angels also rides out to conquer the Dragon and his angels. However, the victory is not attributed to them [and nothing is mentioned about the war]. The victory ultimately belongs to Christ (Rev 12:11).

Furthermore, the believers [the army of warriors] accompanying the Messiah never partake in any conquering action. The victory belongs to the Messiah only [cf. Rev 12:11 where a similar notion is followed]. This is in stark contrast to Jewish apocalyptic literature where believers play a significant role in the Messianic victory (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 210-212).

That the beast and his followers *were captured* [ἐπίασθη - passive] refers to actions performed by the Messiah [i.e. divine passive] (Aune 1998b: 1065). The destruction of the beast and the false prophet is completed when they are thrown *alive* into the Lake of Fire [for a discussion on the Lake of Fire including the discussion of Rev 19:20, cf. 3.2 below].

“The rest” of the people were killed [ἀπεκτάνθησαν - divine passive] by the “sword projecting from the mouth of the one mounted on the steed” (Aune 1998b: 1067). “The rest” refers to the kings and their armies that were mentioned for the first time in Revelation 19:19a (Aune 1998b: 1067). Kill [ἀποκτείνω] is not to be interpreted in a literal sense here. It is an eschatological metaphor referring to the final judgment. In the words of Mounce (1977: 350): “...the sword is the proclamation of divine retribution that slays all who have...arrayed themselves against God and the forces of righteousness.” This eschatological destruction of the enemies of God is in

accordance with apocalyptic texts such as 1 Enoch 38:5 (Aune 1998b: 1067). “The sword” that is used is a metaphor for the Word of God, with parallels in Isaiah 11:4 and Hebrews 4:12 (Morris 1969: 233)³⁶⁸. It finds expression particularly in the language of judgment, which is the context for the rest of Revelation 19, as well as that of Revelation 20 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 284). Death in this case thus refers to eternal death following on the judgment of God.

The metaphorical language of Revelation 19:19-21 seems to result in different judgments for different groups of people, with the beast and the false prophet ending up in the Lake of Fire and the rest being killed by the sword from the mouth of Christ. The entire décor of the scene is, however, that of the Final Judgment. It wants to emphasise the completeness and finality of God’s judgment on the beast and his followers, a fact that is further enhanced by the statement that the birds of prey “gorged themselves on the flesh of the wicked” (Mounce 1977: 350; cf. Du Rand 1999a: 1802)³⁶⁹.

In Revelation 20:11-15 another window of this judgment scene is opened. There it is said that upon judgment everyone whose name was not written into the Book of Life was cast into the Lake of Fire. This “double judgment scene” has prompted Charles (1920b: 140) to interpret Revelation 19:11-20:15 as a reference to two different occasions: the death of the wicked (Rev 19:20-21) and the judgment of all (Rev 20:11-15). In the interim then the souls of the dead would wait in Hades upon their moment of judgment (Charles 1920b: 140). This interpretation, however, tries to force Revelation into a chronological narrative, which it is not [cf. Du Rand (1999b: 109) for a discussion on this interpretation by supporters of premillennialism]³⁷⁰.

³⁶⁸ Aune (1998b: 1067) notes that the phrase τῆ ἐξελεύσεως ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ could be regarded as a gloss “intended to emphasize the metaphorical interpretation of the sword.” Hughes (1990: 203) connects the sword-metaphor with the warning by Christ that the words He has spoken will in the end be the judge of those who don’t adhere to his words (cf. John 12:47-48).

³⁶⁹ Cf. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 106) who is of the opinion that the distinction made between the punishment of the beast [and the false prophet] and the “rest of the people” is important: being thrown alive in the Lake of Fire means eternal torment, while being killed instantly saves one from the torment. This distinction, however, misses out on the goal of the Judgment scene, i.e. to destroy the enemies of God, regardless if they were leaders or followers. Also: according to Revelation 20:11-15 nobody will avert the Day of Judgment.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Ford (1975: 359) who distinguishes two possible judgment scenes, one for the living (Rev 19:19-21) and one for the dead (Rev 20:11-15). A similar line is followed by Knight (1999: 129). Hoekema (1977: 56), on the other hand, takes Revelation 20:1-3 back to the beginning of the New

According to Du Rand (1999b: 118) the judgment of God in Revelation 20 is not a new judgment [following on Rev 14 and 19] but only a pronouncement of the judgment of God that has already been effected. Revelation 19-20 is a continuous vision that starts with the Parousia in Revelation 19:11, followed by the resurrection and then the Final Judgment. Judgment in Revelation 19 is thus not a separate vision from that in Revelation 20, but a different view upon the Final Judgment of God (cf. Du Rand 1999b: 116-117).

iv) Summary

- Revelation 19:11-21 is another “judgment scene” in the Book of Revelation. It is “a description of the return or Parousia of Jesus Christ” (Aune 1998b: 1046) and as such a description of the Final Judgment, which is incorporated with [or follows directly on] the Parousia.
- The Cavalier on the white horse is the Messiah [i.e. Christ] returning as King and Judge of the world.
- The blood mentioned in Revelation 19:13 is not that of the Messiah but of the enemies of God struck by his judgment.
- The capturing of the beast and the false prophet alive and the killing of the “rest of the people” are eschatological metaphors for the utter destruction of the enemies of God in the Final Judgment.
- The judgment scene is not a different one from that in Revelation 20:11-15, but probably only a different window being opened on the scene of the Final Judgment, which would result in eternal death for all God’s enemies. It starts with the Parousia of Christ (Rev 19:19-21), which is followed by the resurrection and the judgment (Rev 20:1-15). It could be that Revelation 20:1-3 refers not to this period, but goes back to the first coming of Christ (Hoekema 1977: 56). That is when the victory was won (Rev 12:11).

Testament. This is possible, if the a-millennial view is followed, where the millennium is seen as referring to the period of Christ’s reign between his first coming and the Parousia.



2.4. *Death giving back the dead (Rev 20:13)*

i) Revelation 20:13

The context of Revelation 20:1-15 has already been discussed above [cf. 1.3.2. above]³⁷¹. A syntactical analysis of the text was also done then. It is the scene of the eschatological judgment at the Parousia. The entire vision [i.e. of God on his throne, the Books being opened, etc.] supports the idea that John portrays the Final Judgment.

In Revelation 20:13 John mentions that Death will give back the dead [actually he lists Death, Hades, and the sea – all places where the dead were traditionally thought to have gone after physical death]. The idea that Death [or Hades – always used together in Rev] will “give back the dead” at judgment is a “fundamental image of resurrection” (Bauckham 1993a: 62), which is found in many texts from the first and second centuries AD (cf. 1 En 51:1; 4 Ezra 7:32; 2 Apoc Bar 21:23; 42:8; 50:2; Apoc Pet 4:3-4, 10-12; [Bauckham 1993a: 56-61]). The “resurrection”-idea could be questioned, however, as both Revelation and 1 Enoch only talks about a “giving back” of the dead and not resurrecting them [cf. also below]. It could be an allusion to the text of Isaiah 26:19 (Bauckham 1998a: 277). The Isaiah text could, of course, be understood metaphorically as a spiritual revival [cf. Chapter 2, 3.7].

That Death [or Hades or the Sea] will return the dead implies that they didn’t have an absolute right over the dead. They were just entrusted with the safekeeping of the dead by God. God still has ultimate control over the dead and could reclaim them at any time. This is a huge step away from the old Israelite conception that the dead falls beyond the sovereignty of God when they entered Death or Hades [cf. Chapter 2, 3.4 and 3.5; (Bauckham 1993a: 62)]. For the purposes of John’s message of hope and comfort it serves to remind the reader of God’s Almighty power, even over the realm generally thought to be out of his reach.

As Death and Hades are personified throughout Revelation together, it is probably not strange to find both here, even though only Hades was traditionally seen as the abode of the dead. It could also be that John used Death here in the place of Abaddon, the name he used for the “king” of Hades in Revelation 9:11 (Bauckham 1993a: 67).

³⁷¹ Cf. also 1.3.2 (ii) for a discussion on the textual variants for Revelation 20:11-15.

The peculiar mentioning, however, is that of the sea. If John really wanted to make a distinction between those that died at sea [i.e. without a proper burial who were thought to have been in the subterranean ocean] and those who died [and were buried] on earth, he would most probably have mentioned earth here too (Bauckham 1993a: 67-68). However, according to Aune (1998b: 1103) the distinction is appropriate, as Death and Hades were often associated only with death on the earth. Being “buried” in the sea was deemed inappropriate as it deprived someone of a proper burial (Aune 1998b: 1102). According to Bauckham (1993a: 68), the sea should not be seen as anything more than another metaphor for Sheol or Hades (2 Sam 22:5-6; Job 26:5; Ps 69:15)³⁷². The idea with this is probably just to show that nobody will escape judgment (Mounce 1977: 366; Beasley-Murray 1981: 302). Furthermore, by referring to the sea here, John prepares the way for the reference to its disappearance in Revelation 21:1 (Bauckham 1998a: 289).

John’s concern in this verse is not so much the how of this “resurrection” [he mentions more about resurrection in Rev 20:4-6] but rather the fact the “resurrection” took place [the context for the narrative under discussion] (Bauckham 1993a: 69).

The question of who is included in this “resurrection” could be a problem. In Revelation 20:4-6 it seems that the righteous have already been resurrected into a new life of glory with Christ. And in Revelation 6:9-11, 7:9-17, and 14:1-5 John saw the righteous in the presence of God in heaven, alive. Is it therefore only the unrighteous that is resurrected here to face the Final Judgment? Although Hades could sometimes stand for all the dead [as in the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.5], it was later on [i.e. in the New Testament and apocalyptic literature] interpreted as the biding place for only the wicked dead (Luke 16:23; cf. however Acts 2:27, 31; [cf. Chapter 4, section 3] (Ford 1975: 359; Mounce 1977: 366). As mentioned above, it rather seems as if John wanted to emphasise the universality of the resurrection and the judgment. Nobody will be excluded from either of the two. That is the only purpose of this

³⁷² Charles (1920b: 195-196) is of the opinion that the author substituted τὰ ταμεία [i.e. the place where the souls of the righteous were seemingly kept] with ἡ θάλασσα [the sea] to emphasise the physical resurrection of all the dead.

verse. The when of the resurrection can only be detected from the other texts mentioned [this will be discussed in more detail in 2.5 below].

It must be noted that John doesn't call the "gathering of the dead" from Death, Hades and the sea [i.e. the giving back of the dead] a resurrection [as is done in Rev 20:4-6 with the first resurrection]. The reason could be the fact that John is not so much concerned with the "how" of the gathering. However, it could be that John deliberately refrains from calling it a resurrection, as he prefers to reserve this term for the raising of Christ from the dead and of the believers into eternal life with God (Travis 1997a: 1018). Therefore, although this is the expected resurrection before the Final Judgment, it is not called as such, as the believers specifically are not specified here as being raised [they were seemingly raised already?].

ii) Summary

- Revelation 20:11-15 narrates the "resurrection" of the dead unto the Final Judgment. The purpose of the description of the "giving back of the dead" by Death, Hades and the sea is to emphasise that nobody will escape the judgment of God.
- John is not so much concerned about the how and the when of the Final Judgment [or the "resurrection"] as with the fact that it will take place.
- The fact that he specifically refrains from calling this occurrence a resurrection [while he specifically mentions the resurrection of the believers in Rev 20:4-6] probably confirms that he is thinking about the raising of the wicked dead unto judgment. Many other texts (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5) give the impression that the believers are in any case already in the presence of God, immediately after death.

2.5. *A second death for the dead (Rev 2:11; 20: 6, 14; 21:8)?*

i) Context

The second death is mentioned only four times in the New Testament, all of the occurrences appearing in the Book of Revelation (Rev 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). All the texts under discussion [except for Rev 2:11] fall within the subsection of Revelation 19:11-21:8, which narrates the Parousia of Christ and the Final Judgment [cf. 2.4



above]. The context of the proclamations [i.e. Rev 2-3] has already been discussed [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3, where the context of this particular proclamation is discussed]. Within the larger section of Revelation 19:11-21:8 the other texts referring to the second death fits in as follows³⁷³:

19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God’s remaining foes
19:11-21	the Divine Warrior and his conquests
20:1-10	Final defeat of Satan
20:11-15	Vision of the final judgment
21:1-8	Transition to the new order

a) Revelation 20:1-10

Revelation 20:1-10 [and specifically Rev 20:4-6 regarding the millennial reign of Christ] has been one of the most discussed [and probably most controversial³⁷⁴] verses in the Book of Revelation. However, as Mounce (1977: 351) noted, the controversy should not distract one’s attention from more important issues within the text, such as the resurrection, the Parousia, the Judgment and the removal of all wickedness. Aune (1998b: 1078-1080) divides this subsection into three smaller parts:

- 20:1-3 Imprisonment of Satan for thousand years
- 20:4-6 Millennial reign of Christ [The Judgment Scene]
- 20:7-10 The eschatological war

The first two subsections are identified by the familiar text marker καὶ εἶδον that appears in Revelation 20:1 and 4. The third subsection is introduced with the phrase Καὶ ὅταν τελεσθῆ..., thus inserting a time lapse between Revelation 20:6 and 20:7. It is specifically Revelation 20:4-6 that is of concern for this discussion regarding the second death. The text is actually framed by phrases regarding the completion of the thousand years (Rev 20:3bc and 7a). Although the scene appears to portray that of a Judgment vision (cf. Rev 20:4a), it is never said that the believers [or martyrs] act as judges. They end up reigning with Christ for the period of a thousand years (Rev

³⁷³ Cf. Aune: 1998b on the detail structure of Revelation 17-22

³⁷⁴ According to Kreitzer (1997a: 871) the section about the millennium has become “the playground of the eccentrics”.

20:4d), a promise of life given to the believers in Thyatira (Rev 2:27) and Laodicea (Rev 3:21) if they conquer (cf. Aune 1998b: 1079). Aune (1998b: 1079) emphasises that the scene lacks many of the typical features generally associated with such a Judgment scene. Revelation 20:4-6 is dominated by two very prominent phrases: the first resurrection and the second death.

b) Revelation 20:11-15

The context of this subsection [which narrates the Final Judgment] has already been discussed [cf. 1.3.2 above]. A syntactical analysis was also done then.

c) Revelation 21:1-8

Revelation 21:1-8 is the last of the subsections of Revelation 19:11-21:8. It is framed by the text marker καὶ εἶδον (Rev 21:1) and the appearance of one of the bowl angels in Revelation 21:9 (Aune 1998b: 1113). It can be subdivided into two subunits:

- 21:1-4 An angelic speech from the throne
- 21:5-8 A speech by “The One sitting on the throne”

The first saying by God (Rev 21:5a) acts as a conclusion to the angelic speech (Rev 21:1-4) as well as an introduction to the divine announcements of the following verses (Rev 21:5-8). According to Aune (1998b: 1114-1115) it is quite possible that Revelation 21:5-22:2 was a later insertion and that Revelation 21:4 was originally directly linked to Revelation 22:3-5 as a continuous vision of the new world of God after the judgment.

Revelation 21:1-8 announces the inauguration of the New World by God, going hand in hand with the termination of all wickedness [i.e. everything standing between God and man as a result of sin] in the Judgment in Revelation 20:11-15. Revelation 21 announces that from here on nothing will come to stand between God and his people anymore, not even death.

ii) The second death

Revelation 19:11-21:8 narrates the Parousia of Christ and, going hand in hand with it, the so-called “general resurrection” [i.e. the calling or gathering of the dead from

Hades] and the Final Judgment. The text of Revelation 20:1-21:8 [which applies to this discussion] is well attested with regard to the applicable verses. There are some changes suggested for all the verses in the text (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 674-676). However, none of the suggested variants are critical to the understanding of the text for purposes of this discussion. The discussion will therefore focus on the text as presented³⁷⁵.

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:5-6

οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν
└─ ἀχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.
Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη.
ὁ μακάριος └─ οὗ ἔχων μέρος
καὶ ἅγιος └─ ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῇ πρώτῃ.
ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν,
ἀλλ' ἔσονται ἱερεῖς └─ τοῦ θεοῦ
└─ καὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ βασιλεύσουσιν
└─ μετ' αὐτοῦ
└─ [τὰ] χίλια ἔτη.

The text contrasts the first resurrection and the second death. There is no chronological flow in the sense that a first death or a second resurrection is mentioned. The intention is probably only to show the difference with regard to eternal destiny between believers and non-believers. It is clearly eschatological language, suggesting that life and death discussed in this section refers to eternal life or death.

b) A first resurrection and a second death?

Two phrases stand out in Revelation 20:4-6 amidst the controversial mentioning of the millennium: ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a) and ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος (Rev 20:6b). These phrases, coupled with the mentioning of the millennium, have led to many a scholar trying to find a chronological explanation for the Parousia and the

³⁷⁵ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1073-1074; 1111-1112) for a discussion on the merit of all the suggested variants.

Final Judgment [commonly known as millennialism]. This has resulted in the development of, amongst others, the theories of pre-millennialism and post-millennialism (Dodd 1997: 740-741)³⁷⁶.

Excursion 10: Views on the millennium³⁷⁷

The term *millennium* refers to the period of a thousand years mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6. In Jewish as well as Christian eschatology this period refers to the intermediate period just before the full establishment of God's kingdom (Dodd 1997: 738-739). The concept of the millennium is, according to Charles (1920b: 142), a very late development in apocalyptic Judaism. The only clear reference to the millennium in the New Testament is found in the abovementioned text of Revelation 20. The basis thereof seems to be Psalm 90:4 (Sanders 2004: 444). But, "scholarly opinion on the origin of the millennium is...by no means unanimous" (Sanders 2004: 448). The controversy surrounding the millennium comes from the different interpretations that evolved regarding the Parousia of Christ. Using the millennium as basis many scholars try to interpret the timing of the Parousia, something the text of Revelation 20:1-6 does not explicitly answer (Dodd 1997: 739).

The more common pre-millennial interpretation expects the return of Christ before the start of the millennium, after which He will reign literally with the church for a thousand years (cf. Meale 1992). The thousand years will be preceded by a seven-year period of persecution (cf. Dan 9:24-27). Believers will, however, not experience this persecution. They will be taken away to heaven during the Rapture (cf. 1 Thess 4:17; [Du Rand 1999b 80-81]). The thousand years only starts after the seven-year period of persecution (Vosloo 1999b: 1847).

The pre-millennial view works with a schema of two resurrections as well as a second Parousia (Du Rand 1995a: 128-129). The problem with this view is that the Bible neither teaches the concept of the Rapture before the Parousia [not in 1 Thess 4, nor in Matt 24], and more important, that believers will be spared the sufferings of persecution (Kreitzer 1997b: 872). In fact, in Matthew 24 and in Revelation believers are constantly reminded that they must prepare for the very real possibility of persecution and suffering (Du Rand 1999b: 80-86).

³⁷⁶ A standpoint of a-millennialism is also identified, discarding the existence of an actual millennium.

³⁷⁷ This is just a short excursion on a subject that many books have been written about. For further reading one can refer to, amongst others, Meale (1992) and Clouse (1977).

Furthermore, the text of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 [used as basis for the theory of the Rapture] does not foresee the Rapture but the Parousia of Christ (Bolkestein 1980: 112-129). It is given to believers as a message of comfort to explain that fellow believers who have already died are not lost [or privileged in a specific way]. All of them will eventually stand [i.e. alive] in front of Christ (Du Rand 1999b: 84).

The post-millennial view foresees the thousand years as the period of the church's reign on earth. Christ reigns [or will reign] with believers in the Spirit until the end of the thousand years. During this period nothing will stop the spreading of the Gospel-message. The thousand years will start sometime in the future. By the end of the thousand years the conversion of all nations will have occurred (Aune 1998b: 1089). When Satan is released after the thousand years a short period [seven years?] of persecution will follow before the Parousia of Christ (Vosloo 1999b: 1851-1852). According to this view, the first resurrection is a spiritual resurrection. Only at the Parousia [and the Judgment] will the bodies of the dead be resurrected (Du Rand 1999b: 110-111).

The a-millennial view doesn't foresee a thousand year reign on earth but interprets the millennium as the "state of holiness" of the believers in heaven awaiting the Parousia (Du Rand 1995a: 127). "It is a symbol for the whole period of time between Jesus' first and second comings" (Dodd 1997: 741; Hughes 1990: 211; cf. Mounce 1977: 358). Augustine of Hippo is regarded as the champion of this view. In this view the first resurrection is the birth into the life of grace (cf. Col 3:1-2; Phil 3:20; [Ford 1975: 351]). A-millennialism proposes this period of the millennium to be "the golden era" of the church in the world (Vosloo 1999b: 1855). According to Dodd (1997:74), the only problem with this view is that it disregards the existence of evil in this world.

It could, however, be possible to understand the millennial reign as the reign of Christ in heaven [and the believers who have died reigning with Him] for the full period determined by God [symbolised by the complete number of a thousand (Groenewald 1986: 203)], which is simultaneously the complete time of persecution suffered by the church on earth [i.e. three and a half years]. In this sense every believer who have died already participates in the triumphant new world order of God [which has been inaugurated with the resurrection and

ascension of Christ], while believers in this life still suffer the pains of persecution and evil (Joubert 1999a: 66-68).

This view, in a way, compensates for the so-called deficiency of a-millennialism [i.e. that the reign of Christ cannot be seen in the evil of this world]. Nothing in Revelation 20:1-10 specifically indicates that the setting is fixed either on earth or in heaven. The alternation between heaven and earth occurs frequently throughout Revelation. It could be that Revelation 20:1-3 is set on earth, whilst Revelation 20:4-6 is set in heaven (Gourgues 1985: 679-681). In this sense the last-mentioned view is quite possible. In the light of this interpretation, Gourgues (1985: 681) rightly feels that there is no need to look for a terrestrial reign of Christ before the end of time. This is the same as the view held by Joubert (1999a) above. It is also the view from which this thesis looks upon resurrection and judgment.

By implication the mentioning of a first resurrection presupposes an expectation of a second resurrection, which many scholars thought to be the resurrection referred to in Revelation 20:11-15 (cf. Groenewald 1986: 200)]. However, as Morris (1969: 238) notes, John never mentions a second resurrection. He deliberately refrains from calling the raising of the dead [Rev 20:11-15] a second resurrection [cf. 2.4 above].

Ford (1975: 350) thinks of the first resurrection as referring to “the first group to enjoy resurrection”, with reference to 1 Corinthians 15:23. This is never implied or stated by John. To the contrary, John calls those who share in the first resurrection blessed (Rev 20:6a), for they will not be influenced by the second death (Rev 20:6b; [Aune 1998b: 1091]). With the second death being eternal (cf. Rev 20:14) the first resurrection cannot be reserved only for the death of certain believers, e.g. the martyrs [cf. Chapter 10 below for a discussion of the first resurrection]. All believers are blessed, and therefore none of them will be affected by the second death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 295; Osborne 2002: 708; [cf. Charles 1920b: 185, who thinks differently]). The fact that they are also called “holy” [ἅγιος] in Revelation 20:6a probably has to do with the literary setting of the beatitude (Aune 1998b: 1091)³⁷⁸.

³⁷⁸ Cf. Mounce (1977: 359-360) who is of the opinion that the first resurrection is reserved for the Christian martyrs only. Meale (1992: 103-107) thinks of them as the 24 elders, mentioned for the first time in Revelation 4:9-10.

The second death is clearly reserved only for the unbelieving people of this world. In Revelation the second death is linked with the Lake of Fire [ἄβυσσος] (Rev 20:14; 21:8). It is the result of the judgment by God on the deeds of man (Osborne 2002: 707-708). The second death is the destiny of every person whose name is not written into the book of life (Rev 20:15). Hughes (1990: 215) calls it "...total death, the utter destruction of final judgment executed against the obdurate enemies of God." Although Jesus does not refer to it as such in His warning in Matthew 10:28, it could be seen as referring to the second death in the sense meant by John in Revelation: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Watson 1992: 111-II).

The Lake of Fire is a place of punishment, away from the face of the Lord. It is the final destiny [at the Day of Judgment] of all the unrighteous (Rev 20:15; 21:8), as well as the false prophet and the beasts (Rev 19:20), the devil (Rev 20:10) and even of Death and ἄδης (Rev 20:14) [cf. subsection 3 below].

According to Beasley-Murray (1981: 83) the concept of a second death was familiar within Jewish thought:

"...it implied a contrast between the death which all must suffer and the fate of those who are doomed never to escape its power, whether because they do not qualify for resurrection, or because they suffer judgment in the world to come."

Believers in Smyrna [cf. the proclamation to Smyrna in Rev 2:8-11] therefore do not have to fear the second death if they conquer, because they will not experience the effects thereof at all (Rev 2:11). They will only experience the joy of life in eternity with God. Eternal life is the promise to each of the seven congregations in Revelation 2-3. Whoever has eternal life, will not suffer the second death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 83). They must, however, stay faithful unto death, knowing that Death does not have any power over them (Rev 2:10). For believers in Smyrna it is a message of comfort: they need not fear death, for they will not suffer eternally judgment and punishment.



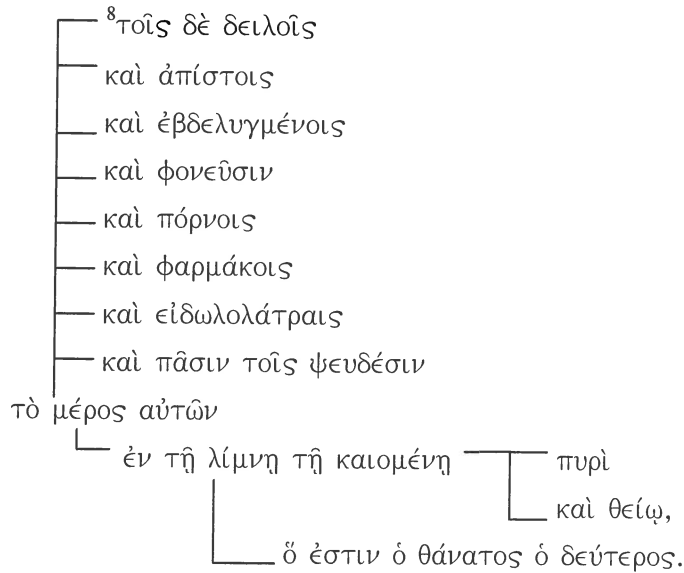
This promise [as is the case with all the other promises of eternal life in the proclamations] is then carried forward into the final chapters of Revelation (Rev 20-22), where believers are given a view on the “future result” of their lives in faith [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 and Chapter 9, 1.1.2 above for a more detailed discussion regarding the situation of the church in Smyrna].

In Revelation 20:6 ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος seems to have been used in direct contrast to ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a). Aune (1998b: 1090) notes that it is quite possible that the *first* resurrection was modelled, as a kind of counterpoint, to the concept of the *second* death. The last mentioned was a familiar way of referring to eternal death in rabbinic literature [cf. above]. The contrasting message of the first resurrection and the second death was supposed to comfort believers with the knowledge that, because their names appear in the Book of Life, they will be resurrected to reign with Christ in the first resurrection.

If, by implication, the second death were to be preceded by a first death, this first death would then be the death of the body [i.e. physical death]. It is “...a consequence of the death and mortality by which humanity as a whole is pervaded” (Hughes 1990: 215). Therefore, none will escape the “first death” [i.e. those that were to die before the Day of the Lord]. But believers need not fear, as Christ has overcome death and has the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18). He will let believers rise into the *first* resurrection so that the *second* death will not get hold of them (Rev 20:5-6).

It is specifically in Revelation 20:14 where it is made clear that the second death is to be equated with eternal punishment of non-believers. This is the first instance in Revelation where the Lake of Fire is equated with the second death. In the previous instances only the second death was mentioned. Revelation 20:14 could be deemed “an explanatory gloss” linking these two concepts together (Aune 1998b: 1103). This explanation is given amidst the scene of the Final Judgment (Rev 20:11-15), confirming the second death and the Lake of Fire as the final destiny for those judged by God to enter eternal death.

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 21:8



Revelation 21:8 is a vice list, similar to that found in Revelation 9:20-21 and 22:15 (Aune 1998b: 1130). The categories of sinners listed in these lists are parallel to the Ten Commandments and traditional applications thereof [cf. Aune (1998b: 1131) for a comprehensive list of texts under each category]. The sins listed are all those sins that exclude a worshipper from the temple. In the list in Revelation 21:8 they are now excluded from the heavenly city, the place of God's perfect life (Aune 1998a: 1132).

d) Eternal destiny of the world

The contrast between the destiny of the believer and unbeliever is further enhanced when John sees the vision of the new heaven and earth (i.e. Rev 21:1-8), immediately following on the vision of the judgment (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 304). In fact, the vision of the new heaven and earth concludes with the same statement as the vision of the judgment, i.e. that the Lake of Fire [or the second death] will be the destiny for all the unrighteous people (Rev 21:8). Revelation 21:8 is given here as the direct opposite of what lies ahead for the believers (Rev 21:6c-7; [Morris 1969: 246])³⁷⁹.

According to Aune (1998b: 1133) the words of God in Revelation 21:5-8 "succinctly summarizes the central message of Revelation". It reveals the options open to

³⁷⁹ Aune (1998b: 1132) notes the importance to recognise the influence of Isaiah 65:17-20 on Revelation 21:1-5, and that the portrayal of the second death here in Revelation 21:8 is also found in Targum Isaiah 65:6 and 15.



believers: stay faithful unto death and receive the crown of life [as they were constantly urged to do in the proclamations], or give up on your faith and follow in the ways of the world, the end result of which is eternal punishment (Beasley-Murray 1981: 313-314; Aune 1998b: 1133). Again the message is not meant as a threat to believers. Rather it comes with a promise, directly from the mouth of God, that those who stay faithful will receive the gift of life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 314). They are promised a special relationship with God in his new world (Morris 1969: 246).

e) Eternal death or eternal torment?

The one question that comes up is whether the second death is a final destruction where such a person ceases to exist [i.e. motionless as in physical death], or whether it is only an eternal suffering of punishment [i.e. an experience of pain and suffering without being dead]³⁸⁰. There seems to be different points of view, even within Judaic literature.

Philo seemed to understand the second death as a suffering of dying “which is deathless and unending” [i.e. unending torment in hell]³⁸¹. In the Jewish Targums we find different views on the second death. The second death could either mean exclusion from resurrection (Tg. Jer 15:39, 57), or on the other hand, according to the Targum Isaiah where the second death is seen in the light of an eternal torment after judgment (Tg Isa 65:5-6). The last mentioned passage actually comes close to the description of Revelation 20:14 and 21:8 and to that of Philo (Watson 1992: 112-II).

If this is the case, the second death is not necessarily a death where there will be no existence [as in physical death], but rather a state of being alienated from God (Osborne 2002: 723-724). This would be in line with the Old Testament, which interpreted the Realm of Death in this light. God was not present in the Realm of Death, and therefore life could not exist there, as there is no possibility of a relationship with God and no possibility of participation in life in the realm of God [cf. Chapter 2, 3.5].

³⁸⁰ It could also be termed in the question “How dead is the dead in the second death?”

³⁸¹ Aune (1998b: 1092) describes Philo’s thinking as “death itself and existence in a continued state of dying”. Aune (1998b: 1092-1093) also notes the existence of the term of a second death in nearly contemporary Greek literature.

In Revelation the second death always stands in contrast to eternal life in the Kingdom of God in heaven. The second death could therefore be interpreted eschatologically as the state of being deprived of a relationship with the living God after the occurrence of physical death and the effecting of the Final Judgment. Although someone could be deemed dead while still alive [i.e. if they don't have a living relationship with God through the blood of the Lamb], they only experience the second death after death and judgment. This eschatological interpretation is clearly the understanding in each of the four texts where the second death is mentioned.

iii) Summary

- In Revelation 20:4-6 two phrases stand out, acting as contrasting images of the eternal existence of believers after physical death and after the Day of Judgment. These phrases are: ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη (Rev 20:5b and 6a) and ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος (Rev 20:6b). According to Aune (1998b: 1090), the concept of the *first* resurrection was probably modelled, as a kind of counterpoint, to the *second* death.
- The first resurrection seemingly implies a second resurrection later on. However, John never mentions such a resurrection. He deliberately refrains from calling the gathering of the dead for judgment in Revelation 20:11-15 a resurrection. Also, the resurrection of Christ is seen on another level. John just mentions that Christ is alive [or came to life].
- The second death is clearly a death in eternity. In Revelation 20:15 and 21:8 it is equated with the Lake of Fire, which is the place where the unrighteous dead go after death and judgment.
- By implication the first death [not mentioned directly] probably refers to physical death in this world.
- The second death stands directly in opposition to eternal life. In this sense it is a message of comfort and motivation to believers. If they hold onto their faith until the end they have the promise from God that they will not suffer the second death, but will live and reign with God in eternity [cf. Chapter 10 below].

2.6. *Summary on the judgment over life and death*

- The eschatological judgment of God is a central theme throughout Revelation. In the Final Judgment the decision on life and death in eternity comes into effect. Those that hold onto their faith, receive life in eternity, while those that forsake their faith or live ungodly, are doomed to eternal punishment.
- Judgment is not only reserved for the Parousia of Christ. His sacrificial death is already an occurrence of judgment (Du Rand 1995a: 110-111).
- The phrase ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι refers to the judgment of God [the hour of judgment or the Day of Judgment], which is the day that the final decision on life and death in eternity is announced.
- The righteousness of God comes through in each of the judgment scenes in Revelation. God will punish and erase the wickedness from this world, and He will reward the faithful accordingly, not because of their good lives, but because their clothes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 7:9-17; 11:15-17).
- In Revelation 14:14-20 John uses images from Joel 3 to describe the judgment. However, the judgment is not effected by Yahweh [as in Joel], but by the Son of Man [i.e. Christ].
- References to blood in the judgment scenes of Revelation 14:14-20 and 19:11-21 do not point to the salvific blood of Christ. It is the blood of the unrighteous being destroyed in judgment.
- In Revelation 19:11-21 John describes the Parousia of Christ and coupled with it, the Final Judgment. Again the judgment is effected by Christ, described as a Divine Warrior going out in a war of judgment.
- The metaphors used in Revelation 19:11-21 convey the message of the utter destruction of all God's enemies [i.e. eternal death].
- The resurrection described in Revelation 20:11-15 is sometimes termed a "general resurrection". However, John doesn't call it a resurrection. Furthermore, it is probably only the unrighteous people being called to stand before the throne in judgment. The believers have already been resurrected in the first resurrection (Rev 4:4-6).



- The first resurrection does not necessarily entail a second resurrection. It is a term coined by John, probably to stand in direct contrast to the second death.
- The second death is death in eternity [By implication the first death would then be physical death]. In Revelation 20:15 it is related directly to the Lake of Fire, the place of eternal punishment for the unrighteous.
- The message of comfort to believers is that they have the promise of eternal life, which John contrasts directly with the second death in Revelation 20-21. Therefore, believers need not fear eternal death.
- The judgment scene in Revelation 20:11-15 is not a new judgment. According to Du Rand (1999b: 118) it is only the revelation of God's continuing judgment. The separation of believers [in heaven] and unbelievers [in Hades] at death is already the judgment.

3. Hell and the realm of death in Revelation

In Revelation a distinction is drawn between the Realm of Death [where the unrighteous dead go in waiting until the Day of Judgment] and the Lake of Fire [the place of eternal punishment] (cf. Shogren 1997c: 459-460). In Revelation 9 John uses the word φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου [shaft to the underworld], a concept that is related, and probably refers, to Hades [i.e. the Realm of Death]. In Revelation 17 the word ἡ ἀπώλεια is used as the final destiny for the beast from the earth [said to come up from the underworld – Rev 17:8, 11].

3.1. Death and Hades in Revelation

The word ᾄδης is used four times in the book of Revelation (Rev 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14), and is always linked up with θάνατος [read as a personification of death] (Böcher 1980: 73; Bauckham 1998a: 280). Although there might be difference of opinion, ᾄδης is also personified in each instance (cf. Aune 1998a: 401). The specific contexts of these four texts have already been discussed previously [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3; Chapter 8, 2.2.2; Chapter 9, 1.3.2].

Hades [as a place] seems to be a separate kingdom [although the place is not called ᾄδης in Revelation, but by the term ὁ ἀβύσσος - cf. Rev 9:1]. It even has its own

king named ὁ Ἄββαδών (Rev 9:11). It is important that Hades be distinguished from hell [the place of torment – the Lake of Fire]. According to Aune (1998a: 401) it could be that Death is seen as the ruler over Hades [the kingdom], as Death is always mentioned first in each of the four occurrences found in Revelation. Hades is not the place of eternal torment after death, but only the place where the wicked dead await their punishment, which would be meted out at the Parousia (cf. Rev 20:11-15; [Mounce 1977: 81; Lunde 1992: 310]; cf. also Chapter 3, section 3 and Chapter 4, 3.2 for a discussion on the clear shift in interpretation of Hades in apocalyptic literature and the New Testament).

The position of Hades [and by implication its ruler] is portrayed to be inferior to that of God and Christ. The Lamb has the keys to both ἄδης and θάνατος (Rev 1:18). This is the result of Christ's **physical** resurrection [cf. Chapter 4, 2.1.3 and Chapter 7, 2.1.3]. As the Lord of both life and death He ultimately decides who stays alive and who not. Death's powers [and coupled to that the powers of Hades] have been severely limited. It only has biological influence on the lives of people (Bailey 1979: 89). As a result of this the followers of Christ can have a new outlook on life and death (cf. Rom 6:4). Death is still regarded as evil, but its evil does not affect the people of God (Bailey 1979: 93). The belief in the **physical** resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resulting resurrection for believers in the new world is a major shift from belief in the Old Testament regarding Death and Hades (cf. Wright 2003: 85-128; cf. also Chapter 2, 3.5 above).

3.1.1. *Who really controls Death and Hades (Rev 1:18c)?*

The vision of the exalted Son of Man (Rev 1:9-20) serves to confirm the almighty power and glory of the One who is to act as Judge and rule as supreme King over his people [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 for a more in-depth discussion on the Son of Man in Rev 1:9-20, also for a syntactical analysis of the text]. According to Osborne (2002: 100) this section “introduces the reader to the purpose and content of his book as a whole”. With this elaborate description of the exalted Christ [which is not meant to be understood literally] John wants to “...call forth from his readers the same response of overwhelming and annihilating wonder which he experienced in his prophetic trance” (Caird 1966: 25-26). It is an image that wants to leave readers standing in awe picturing the almighty power of Christ, as much as it did to John.

According to Aune (1997: 103) the genitives [τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου] could be read either as objective genitives [i.e. understood spatially – cf. Rev 20:13] or as possessive genitives [in which case they would be personifications, as is the case in Rev 6:8]. Aune (1997: 103) prefers the objective use of the genitives, as “Death is never described in ancient texts as possessing keys”³⁸². Osborne (2002: 96) thinks that there could be a double reference here [i.e. incorporating both of the mentioned uses of the genitive], or as he calls it, “another case of both-and”, because it seems as if Death and Hades are personified in each of the four occurrences in Revelation. But then Death and Hades is also by implication the *biding place* of the dead [in any case some of them – cf. section 3 below] in this text (cf. Beale 1999: 214-215)³⁸³.

The mentioning of the keys follows Jewish and Hellenistic thought with regard to the realm of the dead (Osborne 2002: 96). The keys provide access to the gates or doors of death (cf. Job 17:16; Ps 9:13; Isa 38:10; [Osborne 2002: 96]). They symbolise the authority over access to these places (Morris 1969: 55). But they also emphasise the trustworthiness of the bearer of the key, in this case the Son of Man (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476). In early Jewish mythology nothing is mentioned about doors or gates for death [in which case it would make a key superfluous]. In Odes of Solomon 42:17, however, the existence of doors for hell is presupposed in the cry by the dead to Christ to open the door for them to come out (Aune 1997: 104).

According to some texts from rabbinic literature the keys to Death and Hades belongs to God alone (cf. Tg Deut 28:12; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 68; Aune 1997: 103]). From this point of view it is quite possible to say that Christ didn’t wrestle the keys away from the hands of death’s authorities, but received it from God upon his resurrection [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.3]. If this is the case, the “authorities” in charge of Death and Hades *never* had possession of the keys to their own domain.

³⁸² The difference is that the translation could be either “the keys **to** Death and Hades” or “the keys **of** Death and Hades” (Osborne 2002: 96). Cf. however, Aune (1998a: 401), where he also sees Death and Hades as both being personified and therefore able to hold keys.

³⁸³ Cf. Morris (1969: 55) who connects Hades with hell, distinguishing it from *Gehenna*, which is according to him the place of eternal torment [i.e. the Lake of Fire in Revelation].



This interpretation should not have been too unfamiliar to the readers of Revelation. From the Old Testament it is already clear that God in any case possesses all the power over life and death [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2-3.4]. This authority is “transferred” to Christ on his resurrection (cf. Rev 5:5-6). The fact that the keys of [to] Death and Hades are handed to Christ emphasises the high Christology of Revelation: He is effectively put onto the same level as God, i.e. being the ultimate controller over life and death and the ultimate Judge of the living and the dead (Mounce 1977: 81)³⁸⁴.

To the contrary keys also enable one to escape, or get out of, a place. In Revelation 9:1-2, the key to the abyss is given to an angel and is not held by God or given to Christ [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.4]. The angel opens the door for the evil locusts to come out. The image of Revelation 9 must, however, be read in the light of the specific vision regarding the trumpets and not confused with the control of God over the realm of the dead [i.e. the abyss]. Furthermore, it is still God who sends the angel, confirming his control over the abyss.

The “turning point” for Death and the Realm of Death [i.e. Hades] is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is hinted upon in Revelation 1:17-18b [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.3 for a discussion on this]. He is identified as the living One [ὁ ζῶν] over whom death can exercise no further power. Because of his own victory over death Christ has the “proprietary rights” over Death and Hades (Wright 2003: 470). Through his resurrection He has shown that Death and Hades are not immune to his power and authority, even though its domain is alien to that of Christ, whose domain is the kingdom of life (Hughes 1990: 29).

As a result of this, death can have no greater effect on believers than it had on Christ. Those whose clothes have been washed in the blood of the Lamb will not remain entombed eternally. They will be resurrected from death as their Lord has overcome death (Rev 1:18a-b; [Giblin 1991: 19]). Even if death [i.e. physical death] does come over them, they can be rest assured that they are still safely in the hands of the One who has control over the keys to Death and Hades. He will open the door to the new

³⁸⁴ Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman (1998: 476) distinguish the keys that Christ has with the keys being handed to Peter (Matt 16:13-20). The church has been entrusted with the authority to open [or close] the kingdom of heaven by setting people free with the message of the Gospel. However, the authority of judgment resides with Christ, and nobody else.

life [i.e. the life in eternity] for them. They can joyfully look forward to a future life with God in his kingdom, not in the realm of Death (Trites 1998: 282; [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.3 above for a discussion on the life and resurrection of Christ, and the impact thereof on the powers of Death and Hades]).

The position of Death and Hades [as personified partners] in Revelation 1:18c is thus that control over access to their domain is not in their own hands [it seemingly never was!] but in the hands of the living Christ. Therefore, the important message for believers in Revelation 1:17-18 is that

“Death and the grave...hold no terrors for Christ’s people, nor need they fear those who have the power to inflict death and send them to the grave” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68).

3.1.2. *Death and Hades on the warpath (Rev 6:8)*

In Revelation 6:8 it is quite clear that both Death and Hades are personified (Aune 1998a: 401). Death is identified as the cavalier on the “pale-coloured” horse, while Hades is said to be following Death [cf. Chapter 8, 2.2.2 (ii)(c) for a more in-depth discussion on the physical death and destruction caused by Death and Hades and the possible ambiguity with regard to the translation of θάνατος. A syntactical analysis of the text is also done there]. Death and Hades in partnership do what is expected of them as destroyers of life: they go out as warriors of destruction to destroy and kill.

The vision is part of the opening of the seals [specifically the fourth seal] of the scroll that the Lamb took possession of in Revelation 5:7 [cf. Chapter 7, 2.1.4]. The proclamation of Christ’s authority to open the scroll confirms his power as the only One able to judge and control history (Osborne 2002: 258). It also reaffirms his divine authority over life and death, and in this case even over the domain of Death and Hades. Although at first sight the content of the text could be frightening to the reader the restricted powers of those acting in destruction brings the comforting news that God is still in control (Morris 1969: 107).

Groenewald (1986: 89) mentions that the opening of the fourth seal functions as a summary of the consequences flowing from the opening of the first three seals (cf.

Beasley-Murray 1981: 134; Aune 1998a: 402). The fourth seal actually forms a fitting conclusion to the opening of the first three seals. It could be interpreted as if Death and Hades goes out to collect the “harvest” [i.e. the dead] left behind by the destruction of the cavaliers in the first three seals.

Osborne (2002: 282) is of the opinion that the fact that Hades is said to follow Death makes Hades the harvester of the destruction caused by Death [the destroyer]. Hades clearly acts here as a personified partner, not as a kingdom [it is important to note that Hades is never personified alone, but always in conjunction with Death, even in the Old Testament – cf. Isa 28:15, 18; Hos 13:14; Hab 2:5; [Aune 1998a: 401)].

Believers will not necessarily be spared the suffering and pain prevalent in this world [contrary to the believe by some millennialists – cf. Excursion 10 above]. It is important to note that, throughout Revelation, there is no comfort given to believers regarding the preservation of their earthly lives (Osborne 2002: 283). This is in line with Jesus’ warning to his disciples in Matthew 24:3-28 that they must prepare themselves for hardship and persecution in the last days before the Parousia (Beale 1999: 372-373)³⁸⁵.

The message of comfort for believers lies therein that even Death and Hades can’t act without being sent out by the Lamb [through the opening of the seals]. Christ still has ultimate control over everything. Death and Hades are not as powerful as it might seem when the first four seals are opened (Hughes 1990: 87). However: even if believers die in this world they will still be safely in the presence of God, which is symbolised by the vision of the souls under the altar in Revelation 6:9-11. Believers can find comfort in the knowledge that they will have life, even in the face of death.

On the other hand, for Death and Hades there is the knowledge that they can only harvest whatever they are allowed by Christ, and in Revelation 6:8 they are given authority [divine passive] over only a quarter of the world to “harvest” (Hughes 1990:

³⁸⁵ Cf. Osborne (2002: 283), who is of the opinion that only the wicked are struck by this judgment. This would make the interpretation of Revelation 6:9-11 more difficult. Revelation 6:9-11 is a message of comfort to those who suffer that they will be safe with God (Heil 1993: 222-223). The interpretation by Osborne is probably aligned with his exegesis on the comparative text that this passage alludes to, i.e. Ezekiel 14:12-23. In the vision of Ezekiel the “righteous remnant” are promised that they will be spared the effects of the judgment [and therefore of death].

87; cf. Mounce 1977: 156). They are actually immensely restricted in their powers, because the Son of Man is the bearer of the keys to their domain (Rev 1:18c). He alone decides who stays in the realm of death and who is resurrected into the new life. So even if Death and Hades reap the quarter they were given Christ still decides who ultimately stays in Hades. For Death and Hades there is thus nothing positive to look forward to. Even worse: In judgment they will have to return their harvest (Rev 20:13). Ultimately they are destined for the Lake of Fire [i.e. eternal death – cf. 3.1.3 below] on the Day of Judgment (Rev 20:13-14).

3.1.3. *The end for Death and Hades (Rev 20:13-14)*³⁸⁶

In Revelation 20:13-14 the peculiar occurrence is mentioned of Death and Hades being thrown into the Lake of Fire, the place of eternal death or punishment [cf. 3.2.2 below]. At first sight it sounds illogical that death could be sentenced to death. It is, however, possible here since Death and Hades are again personified. Aune (1998b: 1103) rightly mentions that John is probably not referring to two separate entities but to the Realm of the Dead of which Death [and Hades personified] is the provider and ruler. However, if Death is said to be no more [i.e. in God's new world (Rev 21:4)] the peculiar occurrence could be true that death [i.e. physical death] itself disappears in Revelation 20:13-15.

In Revelation 20:13 Death and Hades are portrayed as the keepers of the bodies [and souls] of the dead [John doesn't really distinguish between body and soul here]. This vision emphatically highlights the supreme power of God [and Christ] over the Realm of the Dead. Initially they were given the "right" to "store" the [wicked] dead for a specified period. However, on the command of Christ [the King of kings and the Lord of lords – Rev 19:16], Death and Hades had no other choice than to return the dead that have been entrusted to them for safekeeping [cf. 2.4 above for a discussion on the giving back of the dead in Rev 20:11-15]. They don't have the keys to control their own domain (Rev 1:18; [Hughes 1990: 219]).

The question is whether Death and Hades are keepers of only the wicked dead or of all the dead. Indeed, in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.5] the idea was that all the

³⁸⁶ Cf. section 1.3.2 above for a syntactical analysis of the text.

dead go to Sheol, not just the unrighteous [cf. Morris (1969: 241) who still holds this view even with regard to Rev]. In the New Testament and apocalyptic literature the focus shifted towards a view where only the wicked dead go to Hades, while the righteous who die go directly to God in heaven [cf. Chapter 3, section 3 and Chapter 4, 3.2]. A number of texts in Revelation support the view of the righteous dead being with Christ directly after death, thus not awaiting judgment in Hades (Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-17; 14:1-5). Revelation 20:4-6 also implies that believers are not in Hades. They are reigning with Christ until the dawning of the Parousia.

If this is the case, the “giving back of the dead” in Revelation 20:12-14 is not a resurrection of *all* the dead to face judgment. It is only the wicked dead that would be called out from Death and Hades unto judgment [cf. 2.5 above on the second death vs. the first resurrection. As was mentioned there, it is interesting to note that John refrains from calling this “giving back” of the dead a resurrection]. According to Morris (1969: 241) the mention of Death and Hades and the Sea wants to emphasise that all the dead are included in this instructive calling [for the sea as a biding place of the dead, cf. 2.5 above. Osborne (2002: 722) calls all three of them “personifications of evil”, i.e. as a single entity]. This is surely the case regarding the wicked dead: none of them will escape. All will be called to judgment.

The righteous people who died have already risen according to the texts mentioned above (cf. Rev 20:4-6). They are seemingly not entrusted to Hades at all. In an interesting [but very convincing] conclusion Osborne (2002: 721) equates the “dead...standing before the throne” with the righteous dead who were resurrected in Revelation 20:4, while those called to judgment in Revelation 20:13 is the dead “who did not come to life until the thousand years were completed” (Rev 20:5a), which would then be the wicked dead [cf. Chapter 10 below for a more in-depth discussion of the resurrection of the believers].

After judgment has been completed the unfamiliar occurrence is then described where Death and Hades are sentenced unto the second death (Rev 20:14). The second death is described in Revelation 20:14 as the Lake of Fire [cf. 2.5 above for a discussion on the second death]. Death and Hades end up at the same place where the one they kept [i.e. Satan] were sentenced to: the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev 20:15). The difference

between Death [and Hades] on the one hand and people on the other hand in the second death is that the first-mentioned have not experienced the first death. In fact, they were the holders of the consequences of the first death.

The symbolic death of Death and Hades is important within the context of Revelation's eschatology. They represent part of the evil forces in opposition to God. They are just as evil as the other enemies that were thrown into the Lake of Fire earlier (cf. Rev 19:20; [Morris 1969: 242; Beasley-Murray 1981: 303]). In order for the new heaven and earth of God to be established the eradication of all evil must be completed. This is done when even Death is sentenced to eternal death.

When Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire [i.e. the second death] the message to believers is: all evil, everything coming between God and man has now been removed [Giblin (1991: 193) notes that Death and Hades are the adversaries of both God and man]. Even though this will only happen at the Parousia, believers need not fear death now, as they will immediately be resurrected to reign with Christ. The second death will have no power over them (Rev 20:6). Neither will the first death [or physical death] as Christ has overcome this in his resurrection [cf. 1.3.1 above].

The death of Death and Hades is also in accordance with the teaching by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death" (Osborne 2002: 723)³⁸⁷. From this point onwards there will be only life (cf. Rev 21:4; [cf. Chapter 10, which expands on this very important conclusion]).

3.1.4. Summary on Death and Hades in Revelation

- In Revelation the pairing of Death and Hades happens throughout. In at least three of the four instances they are personified partners of evil and death (Rev 6:8; 20:13, 14). However, it is also possible to read a personification into the text of Revelation 1:18c, although the interpretation there is rather spatial.

³⁸⁷ Cf. Aune (1998b: 1103) who is of the opinion that the death of Death and Hades rather refers to the unrighteous dead who have been thrown into the Lake of Fire. Although this is a possibility the very next verse (Rev 20:15) mentions that the wicked people were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This would then be a double reference, which of course would not be entirely uncommon in Revelation [cf. Osborne (2002: 723) for a discussion on the different possible interpretations of Death and Hades in Revelation 20:14].

- The important message to believers with regard to Death and Hades is that their powers have been restricted: they can only act when Christ allows and in the manner that He allows (Rev 6:8), they don't have the keys controlling entrance [or exit] to their own kingdom (Rev 1:18c), and they are destined for eternal death (Rev 20:14).
- It is not the place of eternal torment, but only the biding place of the wicked dead awaiting judgment. Although Death and Hades are entrusted with the safekeeping of the wicked dead [the righteous are resurrected with Christ – Rev 20:4-6], they must return them on the order of Christ at the Parousia. This is contrary to the belief in the Old Testament that all the dead, not just the wicked, end up in Hades and seemingly don't return from there.
- Death and Hades also suffer the second death, which is eternal death. This is symbolic of the removal of all the evil forces [including death] before the establishment of the new heaven and earth of God. The death of Death as the last enemy is also what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 15:26.

3.2. The Lake of Fire in Revelation

The Lake of Fire becomes the place of eternal punishment according to Revelation (Du Rand 1995: 76). All the wicked, everybody in opposition to God, end up in the Lake of Fire (Shogren 1997c: 460). It is also called the second death (Rev 20:15; 21:8; [cf. 2.5 above]).

The Lake of Fire as a place is mentioned in the New Testament only in Revelation 19-21 (Osborne 2002: 690). The name has no close parallels in either the Old Testament or Jewish literature as such. It is only in Egyptian literature that the phrase is used in a similar understanding than in Revelation (Aune 1998b: 1065-1066).

3.2.1. The dragon-devil in the abyss (Rev 20:1, 3)

The context of the text of Revelation 20:1-10 has already been discussed [cf. 2.5 (i)(a) above]. The following three sub-sections have also been identified:

- 20:1-3 Imprisonment of Satan for thousand years
- 20:4-6 Millennial reign of Christ [The Judgment Scene]
- 20:7-10 The eschatological war

The discussion for this specific subsection of the thesis will focus upon the first three verses (i.e. Rev 20:1-3). In Revelation 20:1-3 the strange occurrence of Satan being thrown into the abyss “for a thousand years” is narrated.

a) Syntactical analysis

Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον
├── καταβαίνοντα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ
└── ἔχοντα ─── τὴν κλεῖν
 ├── τῆς ἀβύσσου
 └── καὶ ἄλυσιν μεγάλην
 └── ἐπὶ τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ.

²καὶ ἐκράτησεν τὸν δράκοντα,
├── ὁ ὄφεις ὁ ἀρχαῖος,
├── ὅς ἐστιν Διάβολος
└── καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς,

καὶ ἔδησεν αὐτὸν
└── χίλια ἔτη

³καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν
└── εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον

καὶ ἔκλεισεν

καὶ ἐσφράγισεν ἐπάνω αὐτοῦ,
└── ἵνα μὴ πλανήσῃ ἔτι τὰ ἔθνη
 └── ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη.

μετὰ ταῦτα δεῖ λυθῆναι αὐτὸν
└── μικρὸν χρόνον.

The text consists of three sentences of which the middle sentence is a long description of the defeat, capturing and binding of Satan. Satan is identified with titles going back as far as The Fall in Genesis 3 [i.e. the snake]. The limited power of Satan is emphasised by listing a number of actions being performed with him: he is grabbed, bound, thrown into the abyss, and the door of the abyss is locked and sealed. The

surrounding context of Revelation 20:1-10 is that of the *Eschaton*, describing the defeat of Satan in eschatological, even mythological language.

The text of Revelation 20:1-3 has a parallel in Revelation 12:7-9 [the mythological narrative regarding the defeat of Satan and his throwing out of heaven], where the same titles for Satan are used as is the case here. A similar motif is found in the Old Testament only in Isaiah 24:21-22, but there are comparative texts also in the apocalyptic literature, specifically in 1 Enoch 10:4-6 and 10:11-13 (Aune 1998b: 1078). According to Aune (1998b: 1083) the motifs of binding and sealing combined together are also found in Aramaic Jewish incantation texts.

b) Satan under house arrest?

The ἄβυσσος, the place where Satan is locked up, is mentioned seven times in Revelation (Rev 9:1, 2, 11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3; [Aune 1998a: 525-526]). The abyss [as being looked upon in Rev] is a chamber [seemingly under the surface of the earth], which has a shaft leading down to it with a door at the end [enabling it to be closed and locked – Rev 9:1-3]. It serves as a prison for the dead wicked [this interpretation, however, is not used in Rev] and the demons in opposition to God (Rev 9:2-3; 20:7; cf. Luke 8:31; 1 Pet 3:19; [Shogren 1997c: 459-460]). As is the case in Revelation 9:1-2, the key to the abyss is entrusted to an angel of God. However, this time around he is not unlocking the abyss for a plague of locusts to be set forth. He is locking it, imprisoning Satan for “a thousand years” (Osborne 2002: 699).

The ἄβυσσος is often equated with Hades [this is done more often in the Old Testament]. In New Testament [and apocalyptic] Hades is interpreted to be the “waiting-room” of the dead awaiting their judgment (Aune 1998a: 525-526; [cf. also Chapter 4, 3.2 and Chapter 8, 2.2.4(iii)]). Groenewald (1986: 106) is of the opinion that the abyss should be distinguished from Hades. The abyss is only the biding place of the demons and of Satan, whereas Hades is the “waiting-room” for the souls of the dead (Groenewald 1986: 106; Du Rand 1995: 76-77)³⁸⁸. It would seem as if John understood the term ἄβυσσος in the abovementioned sense [i.e. as the biding place for

³⁸⁸ Cf. Du Rand (1999b: 121) where he clearly distinguishes between Hades, ἄβυσσος and hell in Revelation.

{or kingdom of} demons and Satan]. Hades and ἄβυσσος are thus clearly to be distinguished in Revelation.

Osborne (2002: 363) calls the abyss “a closed prison”, the place where the fallen angels were imprisoned (cf. 1 En 10:4-6; 18:9-16; Jub 5:3-11; [Osborne 2002: 363]). It is possible that these angels are imprisoned temporarily, awaiting their eternal destiny after their “trial” [i.e. at the Day of Judgment], just as the wicked dead are temporarily “imprisoned” in Hades, awaiting their punishment, until the Day of Judgment (Osborne 2002: 699). When Satan is then thrown into the abyss it effectively means that he is locked up in his own kingdom [similar to house arrest].

That Satan is chained and thrown into the abyss [which is then sealed AND locked] emphasises his powerlessness in the face of God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 285; Osborne 2002: 700-702)³⁸⁹. The message is not the discontinuance of Satan’s efforts to deceive the world, but a severe limitation of his powers. When God “seals” Satan in the abyss, it shows God is in control of the situation, not Satan (Osborne 2002: 702). He is restricted to an extent that he is nothing more than a dog on a chain barking his deceiving message from a distance to the world³⁹⁰.

c) Where Satan was really defeated

The binding of Satan is in agreement with the words and healings performed by Jesus (cf. Mark 3:22; Luke 10:17-19; John 1:31-32). That He was able to cast out demons “was an evidence, not only that the house of ‘the strong man’...was being plundered, but also that the ‘strong man’ Satan had been bound” (Hughes 1990: 210). That the message of hope and salvation is now open and available to every nation [through the witness of the church] is further proof that Satan is limited in his powers. He cannot wilfully deceive the nations any more (Hughes 1990: 209-211).

The important message to believers in this mythological narrative is that Satan and the demonic powers in opposition to God are doomed by the Word of God (Beasley-

³⁸⁹ S. Thompson (as referred to by Osborne 2002: 701-702) identifies three stages in the demise and fall of Satan narrated in Revelation: (i) his fall from heaven to earth (Rev 12:7-9); (ii) his fall from earth to the abyss (Rev 20:1-3); (iii) his final fall into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10).

³⁹⁰ Cf. Ostella (1975: 236-238) who is of the opinion that Satan is deprived of deception during the millennium [which is still to come after the Parousia], and will continue his deception after the millennium (Rev 20:7-9) until Judgment Day.

Murray 1981: 287). Their destiny is eternal death, and it is not in their own hands to decide their destiny. God is the One in control. Throughout Revelation this is made clear. John constantly reminds his readers that Satan “was given” [i.e. divine passive] powers, stressing God’s *permission* for Satan’s actions (Morris 1969: 235-236). In fact, Satan’s unimportance in the eyes of God is highlighted [as was the case in Rev 12:7-9] by the fact that neither God, nor Christ, performs the act of binding Satan. The job is done by an unnamed angel [in Rev 12:7-9 the angel Michael was named] (Morris 1969: 235).

Going back to Revelation 12:10-12 [the mythological narrative regarding the defeat of Satan in heaven], the victory over Satan was won at the salvific moment of the cross and the resurrection of Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 285). If the view is taken that the millennium started with this victory of Christ [cf. Excursion 10 above], then the binding of Satan into the abyss [seemingly] happens simultaneously. This might sound illogical if understood temporarily. However, reading the narrative as a myth [cf. Rev 12:7-9], and taking into account the high symbolic [and apocalyptic] nature of Revelation [something which Mounce (1977) stresses frequently in his commentary], it is quite possible to connect these occurrences to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. According to Hughes (1990: 211)

“...the thousand years during which Satan is bound and confined had their beginning with the incarnation of the eternal Son, namely, the conquest of Satan and his realm on the cross of Calvary...a conquest confirmed and assured by Christ’s resurrection from the dead and his ascension and enthronement in glory at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb 1:3; 12:2)”.

“The point is that the advent of Christ brought about a change in relationship between Satan and the nations” (Hughes 1990: 209).

d) Parole after a thousand years

Satan’s release from prison was anticipated in Revelation 20:3 (Mounce 1977: 361). The fact that Satan is loosened after the thousand years “for a little while” (Rev 20:7) to deceive the nations into war against the elect people of God emphasises that this



period of his imprisonment is limited (Hughes 1990: 209)³⁹¹. But it also emphasises that Satan will never change. Even a thousand years in jail wouldn't alter him from his deceitful nature (Mounce 1977: 361). However, on his conquest to deceive again the nations he will not succeed, as he is caught and thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10). Satan is overwhelmed by the total power of God again (Morris 1969: 239). Hughes (1990: 217-218) mentions similarities with the vision of Ezekiel 38:1-9 where the armies of Gog are defeated by God in his wrath (cf. Mounce 1977: 361).

The phrase “until the thousand years are over” is found in Revelation 20:3 and 5. It acts as a frame around Revelation 20:4, which narrates the victorious reign of the righteous with Christ during the thousand years [cf. Chapter 10 below where this life will be discussed in more detail] (Aune 1998b: 1083). The emphasis therefore is on the victory of God's people, not on the inadequacy of Satan to deceive. It is a message of comfort to believers to hold onto their faith, because Satan's power is insignificant when measured up against the almighty power of God's reign. They should not be distracted by Satan's limited powers, but rather look upon Christ's overwhelming strength.

e) Is the abyss the Lake of Fire?

Is the abyss referred to in Revelation 20:1 and 3 the same as the eternal Lake of Fire? No. In Revelation 20:7 it is said that the devil is released from the abyss where he was held “for a thousand years” [cf. Du Rand (1995a: 75-77) on the differences between Hades, hell and the abyss; cf. also Du Rand 1999b: 121]. Similarly, in Revelation 9:1-2 demons [in the form of grasshoppers] were released from the abyss to torment the people of the world. Hades, as mentioned, is the “waiting-room for the wicked dead and the Lake of Fire the place of eternal torment. Satan is freed from the one only to be thrown into the other. He stands powerless in the face of God.

In summary: The mythological image of Satan being caught, bound up and thrown into the abyss emphasises his insignificance when measured against the Almighty God. Although he might seem mighty from an earthly perspective, he is actually limited in his powers [something John stresses throughout in Revelation] and cannot

³⁹¹ It is this “short while” of release of Satan that prompted some views on the millennium to fit the rapture of the believers into this period or just before it starts [cf. Excursion 10 above].

harm the believers. They will reign eternally with God, regardless of what happens in their earthly lives. Satan cannot overcome those sealed with the name of God and the name of the Lamb. The abyss [actually Satan's kingdom] is not his eternal destiny. That awaits him in the Lake of Fire after he is freed from the abyss (cf. Rev 20:6-10).

3.2.2. *The Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8)*

The Lake of Fire [ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός] is mentioned [with variations] six times in the Book of Revelation. All of the occurrences are found within the subsection of Revelation 19:11-21:8, the last main section of the Book of Revelation, narrating the Judgment of God and the inauguration of God's new world (Rev 19:20c; 20:10, 14-15 [3 times]; 21:8; [Aune 1998b: 1065]). This already suggests the role of the Lake of Fire in Revelation, namely, as a place of eternal punishment after the final judgment. No discussion of the context will be done here, as the context of all these texts has already been discussed [cf. 2.3; 2.4; 2.5 above for a discussion on the different contexts]. A syntactical analysis for Revelation 19:20 will be done³⁹². There are no critical variants influencing the text³⁹³.

There is an increase in importance of those cast into the Lake of Fire: first the beast and false prophet are mentioned (Rev 19:20), followed by Satan (Rev 20:10), and then the "last enemy" [Death and Hades]. After God's direct enemies have been wiped out, everybody "whose names does not appear in the Book of Life" are thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:14-15). Revelation 21:8 is a summarised confirmation that nothing in opposition to God will exist in his new aeon [cf. Chapter 10 below].

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 19:20

²⁰καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον

└─ καὶ μετ' αὐτοῦ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης

└─ ὁ ποιήσας τὰ σημεῖα ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ,

└─ ἐν οἷς ἐπλάνησεν

└─ τοὺς λαβόντας τὸ χάραγμα τοῦ θηρίου

└─ καὶ τοὺς προσκυνούντας τῇ εἰκόνι αὐτοῦ.

³⁹² Cf. 1.3.2 (ii)(a) and 2.5 (ii)(c) for a syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:11-15 and 21:8 respectively.

³⁹³ For a discussion of the suggested variants for these texts, cf. Aland & Aland (1993: 673, 675-676) and Aune (1998b: 1045, 1074, 1075-1076, 1112).

ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν οἱ δύο
 _____ εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς τῆς καιομένης ἐν θείῳ.

The sentence describes the capturing of the beast after the eschatological battle. Of course, the consequences [i.e. with regard to life or death] of an eschatological battle could be interpreted within either the physical or the eternal realm. The beast being captured alive and thrown into the Lake of Fire alive suggests that it is physical life that John talks about. It emphasises the torment that awaits unbelievers in hell, being burnt alive (Osborne 2002: 690). The image is an allusion to Numbers 16:33, where Korah, Dathan and Abiram were swallowed up by the earth “alive” (Aune 1998b: 1065; [cf. subsection (f) below]).

b) A lake filled with fire?

The Lake of Fire is a peculiar image with no parallels in the Old Testament or early Jewish literature [not even in the Greco-Roman literature]. It is especially the image of a “lake” [ἡ λίμνη - cf. Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 476)] as a place of eternal punishment that is unfamiliar. Similar images are found in Jewish apocalyptic writings, specifically in 1 Enoch 54 and 2 Enoch 10 (Mounce 1977: 350). It is interesting to note, however, that in Egyptian literature this association does not only exist, but the Lake of Fire is there also connected with the second death (cf. Rev 20:6 and 21:8; [Aune 1998b: 1065-1066])³⁹⁴.

According to Bertrand (as referred to by Osborne 2002: 690) the idea of a “lake” in hell stems from the “Hellenistic mythical portrayals of hell” (Osborne 2002: 690). Osborne (2002: 690-691) is of the opinion that John uses the image of a lake to distinguish it from the sea, which is traditionally the symbol of evil. The evil forces don’t go to the place of evil [the sea], but to the place of eternal torment [the Lake of Fire]. Daniel 7:10 is the closest parallel in the Old Testament, and implies the existence of a river of fire flowing in hell (cf. 2 En 10:2; [Aune 1998b: 1066; Osborne 2002: 690]).

³⁹⁴ Cf. also 2.5 above.



The image of fire as a means of divine punishment, of course, has many parallels, specifically in the second temple period. Already in Genesis 19:24 God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone (cf. Ezek 38:22). In Isaiah 66:24 it is first mentioned as a means of eternal punishment in the underworld (cf. 1 En 10:6, 13; Matt 5:22; 13:42, 50; 18:9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48; [Aune 1998b: 1066]). In Jude 7 the threat of an “eternal fire” is mentioned as awaiting the unfaithful. It is not clear if those in the fire will feel the burning pain (Shogren 1997c: 461).

According to Justin Martyr (Shogren 1997c: 461) the “eternal fire” was “certainly intended to intimate everlasting suffering” (cf. Groenewald 1986: 198). This would imply that the inhabitants are actually feeling the pain caused by the fire. This is also the interpretation of the word *γέεννα* [the term generally used to describe hell in the Gospels, but which is absent from Revelation]³⁹⁵ (cf. Matt 23:33; Mark 9:43-47; Luke 12:5; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 152]).

The image of fire in God’s eternal judgment over evil probably goes back to the vision in Daniel 7:9-11 (cf. Osborne 2002: 690-691). There are many parallels between the two texts. In Daniel 7:9 the throne of God is seen (cf. Rev 20:11), whereas in Daniel 7:10 the author sees a “river of fire” [i.e. fire flowing from the throne]. After that the “books are opened”, which implies the scene of divine judgment (cf. Rev 20:12). Then in Daniel 7:11 the beast is judged and thrown into the river of fire as eternal punishment (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:14-15). It is interesting to note that in Daniel’s vision the beast is slain before he is thrown into the fire (cf. Dan 7:11; [Porteous 1979: 109]).

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 20:10

Revelation 20:10 describes the casting of Satan into the Lake of Fire. A syntactical analysis of this verse looks as follows:

³⁹⁵ The word *γέεννα* has its origins with the valley of Hinnom. As the site of cultic offerings of human beings [specifically children] it built up a reputation as a place of ungodliness (Mounce 1977: 350; Beasley-Murray 1981: 303; Osborne 2002: 690). Because of the prophetic denunciation of the place by Jeremiah (cf. Jer 7:32; 19:6), the valley was often associated with God’s judgment, and was later on equated with hell, believing that an eternal fire would torture the ungodly there (Du Rand 1995a: 76).

¹⁰καὶ ὁ διάβολος
└─ ὁ πλανῶν αὐτοὺς
└─ ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου
└─ ὅπου καὶ τὸ θηρίον
└─ καὶ ὁ ψευδοπροφήτης,
καὶ βασανισθήσονται ———— ἡμέρας
└─ καὶ νυκτὸς
└─ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

The sentence can be divided into two separate statements. Firstly it identifies the place where Satan goes as there where the beast and the false prophet also ended up. Secondly, John describes the duration of the torment as lasting day and night, into eternity. It serves to distinguish the final destiny of evil in opposition to the destiny of believers, which is the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21-22).

d) Progressive casting into the Lake of Fire?

Is there a progression in the casting of the different groups into the Lake of Fire, with an actual time lapse between the occurrences? The answer to this depends on which view is taken on the millennium. Premillennialism, for example, would see the vesting of the beast and the false prophet into the Lake of Fire as taking place before the start of the millennium. Satan is then cast into the Lake of Fire after the millennium, at the Parousia (cf. Osborne 2002: 716-717). Osborne (2002: 715) further mentions that this punishment will occur “in stages” (cf. Osborne 2002: 715, specifically footnote 21).

However, from the point of view from which the author goes out [cf. Excursion 10] the texts mentioned are only different viewing points on the Day of Judgment. “[T]he end of Babylon and the other adversaries will take place simultaneously, in an instant” (Giblin 1991: 183; cf. Beale 1999: 1029-1030)³⁹⁶. There is thus not necessarily a time laps between the occurrences narrated in Revelation 19:1-21:8 [inserting time lapses into Revelation is in any case a dangerous exercise as John moves around in his visions between earth {time-bound} and heaven {where time is

³⁹⁶ Giblin (1991: 183) explains the reasoning behind the different viewpoints of the judgment as follows: “Apocalyptic, however, requires sequences of particular visions and sequences of appropriately grouped visions in order adequately to present its theology.”

eternity and therefore cannot be expressed in human language}, and even within history between past, present and future].

The “overarching theme” of the entire section is that of judgment (Giblin 1991: 178). The purpose of the image is to confirm that everyone [and everything] in opposition to God will be removed to make way for God’s new world order. In God’s New Jerusalem there will be no place for any of these things. That is why even the sea disappears in the new world (Rev 21:1), because it personified evil for the people living in the Biblical era (Beagley 1997a: 129; Osborne 2002: 722-723). Judgment, of course, is also a confirmation of God’s righteousness. Righteousness will in the end prevail when all unrighteousness have been removed at the Final Judgment.

The beast and the false prophet are the first to be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev 19:20). The imagery symbolises the “purging of their defiling hostility and antichristianity from creation” (Hughes 1990: 208). They were part of the “Trinity of Evil” in opposition to God (Beagley 1997a: 127; [cf. Excursion 7]). Probably as the “subordinate” partners their punishment is mentioned first [although there need not be a specific reason for the order of mentioning]³⁹⁷.

The beast and the false prophet were the ones that deceived the people of the world with their wonders and signs, gathering a multitude of followers on behalf of the Dragon (cf. Rev 13). However, after the judgment of God there will be no space for any deception of people on the path away from God. The problem of deception for God’s people is thereby removed: they need not fear, as Christ has already overcome the deceivers and will eventually remove them from His presence and his people [this occurrence is described in the vision of Rev 19:20].

When Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:10) the main opponent of God is removed. Wellhausen (as referred to by Aune 1998b: 1100) deems this to be an interpolation into the text by John. Satan, who initially tried to dethrone God (cf. Rev

³⁹⁷ Cf. Giblin (1991: 178) who discusses an enclosing schema for the destruction [in inverse order from the partners first appearances in Revelation]. In line with this schema Satan is the first to appear on the scene (Rev 12) and the last to disappear from the scene (Rev 20:10). Around this one could even mention that Death and Hades appears first (Rev 1:18) and is thrown into the Lake of Fire after Satan (Rev 20:13-15; [Giblin 1991: 178]).

12:1-9), but was defeated at the cross (Rev 12:11) and bound up in the abyss during the thousand years of Christ's reign with the saints (Rev 20:1-3), is now finally removed so that he cannot harm God's people any more. Satan cannot stand up against the sovereignty of God (Giblin 1991: 190). The message of hope to believers with this visionary image is that

“...the Devil is not God, nor is he in any real sense a rival to God. He cannot stray beyond the permission of God for his action, and at the appointed time it will cease” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 298).

e) Removal of all evil completed

Their punishment [i.e. Satan and the false prophet and the beast] is said to last *ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων* (Rev 20:10b). The idea is a never-ending, eternal punishment. Aune (1998b: 1100) calls the phrase *ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς* a hendiadys, implying a twenty-four-hour day [i.e. torment without interruption]. The eternal lasting of this punishment comforts believers with the knowledge that “their [i.e. Satan and his followers] elimination from God's creation, renewed in Jesus Christ, will be *for ever and ever*”³⁹⁸ (Hughes 1990: 217). Their doom, their eternal punishment, is certain and it is irreversible (Hughes 1990: 217). Believers therefore need not fear Satan [the Dragon or the Snake or the Deceiver]. Although he is like a roaring lion (cf. 1 Pet 5:8) he has already been defeated on the cross.

The image of Death and Hades being cast in the Lake of Fire (Rev 20:13) has already been discussed [cf. 3.2.1 above] and will thus not be repeated here. It is sufficient to note that when Death and Hades are thrown into the Lake of Fire [i.e. the second death] the message to believers is: all evil, all the adversaries of God and his people have now been removed (Giblin 1991: 193). According to Osborne (2002: 723) one possibility is that this could symbolise that physical death is “now swallowed up and superceded by the “second death”, eternal torment”.

The casting of the unbelievers [those “whose names were not written into the Book of Life”] completes the removal of all evil and ungodliness so that God's new world

³⁹⁸ Highlighted italics inserted by Hughes. Bracketed insert by author.

could become visible to all. God's new world is a place of perfection. Nothing unclean will be allowed there (Rev 21:27). The people that are thrown into the Lake of Fire are the dead that were waiting in Hades for the Day of Judgment and were now "released" by Death and Hades for this moment (cf. Rev 20:11-12). Furthermore: the casting of "those whose names are not in the Book of Life" into the Lake of Fire has a contra statement – those whose names do appear in the Book of Life [i.e. the faithful believers]. The believers can be sure that they will not be cast into the Lake of Fire.

According to Aune (1998b: 1133) the divine speech in Revelation 21:5-8 "succinctly summarizes the central message of Revelation". It also serves as a conclusion stating the consequences of the judgment of God, which was narrated in Revelation 19:11-20:15. The message of hope, directly from the mouth of God, is that those who stay faithful will receive the gift of life (Beasley-Murray 1981: 314). They are promised a special relationship with God in his new world (Morris 1969: 246). Those in opposition to God will be deprived of the privilege of a relationship with God. Being deprived of a relationship with God effectively means death for a person [cf. 2.5 above; cf. also Chapter 2, 3.6].

f) Are the eternal dead really dead?

Are those cast into the Lake of Fire dead or alive? On the one hand nothing is said about anyone being killed before he or she is thrown into the Lake of Fire. The implication, however, is that they are thrown into the lake alive. The punishment is thus something they will be conscious of. A similar notion is found in Numbers 16:30-33, where it is said that the earth swallowed Korah, Dathan and Abihu *alive*. The purpose of the image of a living death is to emphasise the intensity and horror of the punishment (Osborne 2002: 690). Also, in Revelation 20:10 it is said that Satan and his partners will suffer eternal torment in the Lake of Fire, suggesting that they will be conscious of this torment.

On the other hand the casting into the Lake of Fire is specified as "the second death". The implication is therefore death. Morris (1969: 233) is of the opinion that the second death in the Lake of Fire symbolises "utter destruction", which is what is generally understood with the term death. Eternal death, however, must be distinguished from physical death. Eternal death is not necessarily a case of physical

annihilation. It surely implies death in the sense that they who end up in the Lake of Fire are cut off from having a relationship with God. Death could be defined “not as extinction but as existence in the inferno (Rev 20:14)” (Shogren 1997c: 461; cf. Osborne 2002: 723-724).

In summary: The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal punishment. It is to be distinguished from Hades, the waiting room for the wicked dead. The equivalent of the Lake of Fire in the Gospels is γέεννα. Everybody in opposition to God is cast into the Lake of Fire on the Day of Judgment. In this manner they are removed from the presence of God to the place of eternal punishment. It is not a place of eternal deadness, but of eternal absence from God in the lake burning with fire and brimstone. It was not intended as a message of fear, but to emphasise that everything in opposition to God will in the *eschaton* be removed so that it could never interfere with God’s new world again. Believers should be comforted by the news that in God’s new world they will not have to worry about any of them any more.

3.2.3. *What is the ἀπώλεια in Revelation 17:8, 11?*

In Revelation 17:8 and 11 it is said that the beast, coming from the abyss, is destined to go to perdition [ἡ ἀπώλεια] (Amplified Bible – 1496). Is the ἀπώλεια to be equated with the hell [or γέεννα or Lake of Fire] or is it a metaphor for the Realm of the dead? It is clearly distinguished from the abyss [cf. 3.2.1 above].

i) Context of Revelation 17

The broad context of Revelation 17:1-19:10 has already been discussed and will not be repeated here [cf. Chapter 8, 2.1.7(ii)]. Within the larger context of Revelation 17:1-19:10, the texts of Revelation 17:8, 11 fits in as follows³⁹⁹:

17:1-19:10	Revelations of the judgment of Babylon
17:1-2	introduction to the visions
17:3-18	allegorical vision of Babylon as the great whore
17:3-6a	vision of the great whore
17:6b-18	interpretation of the vision

³⁹⁹ For a detail discussion on the structure of Revelation 17:1-19:10, cf. Aune 1998b.



18:1-24	destruction of Babylon
19:1-8	heavenly throne-room audition
19:9-10	concluding angelic revelation

Revelation 17:6b-18 follows on Revelation 17:1-6a as an interpretation thereof (Aune 1998b: 925). It is distinguished from the first six verses by the perplexed reaction of John (Rev 17:6b) on the vision he saw in the first six verses (Rev 17:1-6a). John's reaction functions rhetorically to introduce the interpretation that follows (Aune 1998b: 938). The interpretation by the angel actually only starts in Revelation 17:7. It then continues until Revelation 17:18. Revelation 18:1 introduces a new section, distinguished by the text marker μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον. Osborne (2002: 606) takes Revelation 17:15-18 to be a separate subsection describing the destruction of the great whore Babylon. This however, could still be seen as part of the interpretation.

ii) The beast destined for the ἀπώλεια

a) Syntactical analysis

A syntactical analysis for Revelation 17:8 was done in subsection 1.3.1 (a) above. The following is therefore a syntactical analysis for Revelation 17:9b-11 only:

Αἱ ἑπτὰ κεφαλαὶ ἑπτὰ ὄρη εἰσὶν,
 └ ὅπου ἡ γυνὴ κάθηται ἐπ' αὐτῶν.

καὶ βασιλεῖς ἑπτὰ εἰσιν·

¹⁰οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν,

ὁ εἷς ἔστιν,

ὁ ἄλλος οὐπω ἦλθεν,

└ καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ
 └ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μέναι.

¹¹καὶ τὸ θηρίον └ ὃ ἦν
 └ καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
 └ καὶ αὐτὸς ὄγδοος ἐστιν
 └ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν,
 └ καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει.



Revelation 17:9b-11 is a detailed description [in symbolic language] of the beast. The idea with the description is to enable readers to identify the beast. John uses “an eschatological dogma with roots reaching into past millennia” (Beasley-Murray 1981: 257) in his description. The description ends with the words *καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει*, confirming the beast’s eternal destiny in hell. This is also in line with the earlier words of the angel that John should not be overawed by the glamour of the harlot or of the beast. They will both perish.

b) Destined to be destroyed

In the vision of the great whore Babylon John is warned [or maybe comforted?] by the angel not to be overawed by the greatness of Babylon. She is destined for the *ἀπώλεια*. And with her the seven-headed beast is destined for the *ἀπώλεια*. It is only those whose names are not written in the Book of Life that would in the end be astonished by her works (Rev 17:8b).

The text of Revelation 17 is well attested, although a number of smaller suggested variants are given (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 665-667). In Revelation 17:8 there is a suggestion that *ὑπάγει* [present indicative] be changed to *ὑπάγειν* [infinitive]. Aune (1998b: 910) chooses the text version as used by Aland & Aland (1993: 666) [*ὑπάγει*], reasoning that, “Assimilation to the inf. in the preceding periphrasis (*μέλλει ἀναβαίνειν*) is more probable than a change from the inf. to a present ind.”. In Revelation 7:11 there is a stronger suggestion that the textual reading [*αὐτός*] be changed to *οὗτος*. However, as Aune (1998b: 911) mentions, *αὐτός* should be retained as “an emphatic use of the nom.”.

The noun *ἀπώλεια* is generally translated with “destruction”, “annihilation” or “ruin” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 103). This is the interpretation used mostly throughout the New Testament (Acts 25:16; 1 Tim 6:9; 2 Pet 3:16; cf. 2 Cl 1:7). In many cases it is equated with eternal destruction as the punishment of the wicked (Matt 7:13; Heb 10:39) (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 103). Jesus uses the same verb in his prayer, describing what would happen to Judas in contrast to the other disciples (John 17:12). Brown (1970: 760) describes *ἀπώλεια* as referring to a person “who belongs to the realm of damnation and is destined for final destruction.” In Revelation 9:11 the king

of the abyss is appropriately identified as Ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου, from the word ἀπολλύναι [i.e. to destroy]. It is thus the destroyer himself that is destined for destruction.

It is clear from the text that ἀπώλεια is to be distinguished from ἄβυσσος [for a discussion regarding the ἄβυσσος, cf. 3.2.1 above]. In verse 8 it is said that the beast is coming from the ἄβυσσος and is destined for ἀπώλεια, implying that they are two different “identities”. The ἀπώλεια seems to refer to eternal destruction, which would mean that ἀπώλεια has the same meaning as the ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός [cf. 3.2.2 above]. The only difference is that the Lake of Fire is seemingly not a place of destruction or annihilation, but a place of eternal pain and torment away from the presence of God (Rev 20:10b). However, this should not be regarded as a problem. The message of the apocalyptic text is still the same: the beast’s existence will be terminated, whether by destruction or by torment in the place where God is not.

The “prophecy” of Revelation 17:8 and 11 is “fulfilled” in Revelation 19:20, when the beast is cast into the Lake of Fire (Groenewald 1986: 175). Osborne (2002: 616) calls the ὑπάγει [cf. above on the discussion of the textual variants] a prophetic present, implying: as soon as the beast ascends from the abyss [an occurrence expected sometimes in the near future], he will be sent to the place of destruction [ἀπώλεια]. John’s interest “...is not in what the beast does, nor in his power. It is in his destruction: he *goeth into perdition*. So ultimately perishes all evil.”⁴⁰⁰ (Morris 1969: 211). Hughes (1990: 186) understands this to happen at the final judgment (Rev 20:7-10). This makes sense, specifically in light of the fact that the beast is captured and punished in Revelation 19:20 [a text which was earlier identified with the judgment scene at the Parousia – cf. 2.3 above].

c) The beast unmasked?

On the identification of the beast’s seven heads as explained in Revelation 17:8-11 there has been much speculation. Most interpreters think of it as a reference to Roman emperors (Osborne 2002: 617). One of the most difficult decisions is where to start counting. Through the years different scholars have come up with different answers as to whom the seventh and eighth kings are that John refers to [cf. Aune

⁴⁰⁰ Italics inserted by Morris.

(1998b: 945-949) and Osborne (2002: 617-621) for an extensive discussion on the possible identification of the different kings]. If the sixth king, who is said to be the one “that is”, is equated with Domitian [i.e. taking into account that Rev was probably written about 95AD during the reign of Domitian – Beasley-Murray 1997: 1028], the next in line [i.e. the seventh king] would probably be Nerva (Aune 1998b: 950).

The image of the beast that was, is, and is yet to come is an imitation [parody] of Christ, but his end is different – he is destined for perdition whereas Christ lives forever (Osborne 2002: 620-621). The image is probably modelled on the *Nero redivivus*-legend, i.e. the expectation that Nero would return in the near future to continue his reign of terror (Osborne 2002: 618).

Of course, it is also possible, as Osborne (2002: 619-621) discusses, that the kings could symbolically represent different empires [of which Rome is then the sixth, with the seventh and eighth still to come], or they could be nothing more than apocalyptic symbols [with the number seven referring to the completeness of the kings’ reign], similar to Daniel’s vision of the four empires (Giblin 1991: 164-165). The symbols are based on the apocalyptic symbol of the *Nero redivivus*-legend, combining it with the ancient representation of the chaos-dragon (Beasley-Murray 1981: 255).

This apocalyptic interpretation is supported by the “stereotypical apocalyptic motif” (Aune 1998b: 949) that the king who is yet to come will only reign for a short period of time. With this motif John wants to emphasise that the end is expected to be near (Aune 1998b: 949). This is, in the end, also the main purpose of the motif: if the readers knew that they are now with number six [whom they would certainly have been able to identify] in the list of evil kings they would also know that it is but a short while before the seventh and eighth kings have come and gone, and then all evil would have been removed (Bauckham 1993a: 406).

iii) Summary

- The noun ἀπώλεια in Revelation 17:8, 11 should be equated with the Lake of Fire in Revelation, i.e. referring to the eternal destruction of the beast in the judgment as narrated in Revelation 19:20.

- Although in Revelation 19:20 the beast is captured alive, the fact that he is said to be destroyed should not be regarded as a problematic contrast. The message is the same: the life of the beast will be terminated so that he will not be able to harm the people of God anymore.
- John pictures the beast as a parody of Christ, an image based on the *Nero redivivus*-legend. He is also called the one who was, who is and who is to come. But his end is different. He enters eternal death at the judgment, whereas Christ is the forever-living One effecting the judgment.

3.3. Summary on the realm of death in Revelation

- With regard to the realm of death in Revelation one should distinguish between the pairing of Death and Hades [personified throughout Revelation], the ἄβυσσος [the underworld – the bidding place of Satan and the demons], and the ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός [the Lake of Fire or hell - γέεννα in the Gospels].
- The Realm of Death in Revelation is the place where persons go after physical death while awaiting judgment. Whereas in the Old Testament Hades was the bidding place for all the dead, it is now only the place where the wicked dead go. In Revelation the faithful who die is throughout said to be alive and with God in heaven [cf. Chapter 10 below].
- Although the Realm of death is a place where God is said not to be, he still controls access thereto. As ultimate Controller of life and death He decides who stays in Death and Hades. He has the keys to the kingdom of Death and Hades, keys that has been entrusted to the Son of Man on his resurrection (Rev 1:18).
- John emphatically shows the limitation of the powers of Death and Hades. They can only harvest whatever God allows them. And even if believers are killed in the process, they don't remain in Hades. Death has no power over the people sealed by God.
- The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal destruction, or commonly known in modern language as the hell. References to the Lake of Fire are only found in the final section of Revelation [regarding the Final Judgment].

- The imagery of the Lake of Fire wants to emphasise that at judgment God will remove everything in opposition to His will in order to establish his new world. In this new world nothing unclean will be allowed (Rev 21:27).
- Although different images are given regarding the casting of the different opponents into the Lake of Fire, the best is to understand all of these as different viewpoints of the Final Judgment. Revelation 19-21 is therefore not visions of different judgment scenes but different visions of the one judgment at the Parousia.
- The Lake of Fire is equated with “the second death”. It is, however, not death as in destruction, but a death of eternal torment away from the presence of God.
- The message of comfort to believers regarding the Realm of Death and the Lake of Fire is twofold: Firstly they are assured that these evil powers cannot extinguish their life, and secondly they are assured that these evil powers will be destroyed, or rather removed from the presence of God. At the Parousia they will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

4. Summary on eternal life and death in Revelation

- i) The idea of “eternal life” as a concept is foreign to the Old Testament. Belief in the return of the dead to life only appears in Israelite religion at a late stage (2 Macc 7:9, 23, 29; cf. Wis Sol 3:4; 6:18-19; 8:13, 17; [Martin-Achard 1960: 185]). In Biblical literature it is only in the New Testament that we read of eternal life.
- ii) Although the phrase “eternal life” does not appear in Revelation, the idea is visible throughout. “Real life” [life in relationship with Christ] is nearly always interpreted as eternal life or leading unto it (Du Rand 1990: 233).
- iii) Eternal life is linked to a relationship with God. The ethical call to the congregations is to hold onto this relationship in order to have life. Persons, who do not have “life”, are already deemed dead even if they are still alive.
- iv) To believers the message of life is a message of hope and comfort. They can look forward to a life in God’s new world if they hold on to life in the world.

It doesn't matter what happens to them in this life [even if they are killed] they are assured of having eternal life.

- v) The eschatological judgment is the moment where the decision on life and death will be revealed. Judgment is not an occurrence only at the Parousia. The death and resurrection of Christ is already an occurrence of judgment.
- vi) Judgment is an act of righteousness. This is in line with the Old Testament concept of God's righteousness and his judgment over unrighteousness. According to John believers are righteous if they wash their clothes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:17).
- vii) Believers who washed their clothes in the blood of the Lamb will have their names written into the Book of Life. They will not be judged, but will receive life. However, those whose names are not in the Book of Life will be judged in righteousness according to their deeds (Rev 20:11-15).
- viii) Revelation 19-21 does not describe multiple judgment scenes. It is only different viewpoints on the one eschatological judgment.
- ix) The conclusion to judgment is that everybody in opposition to God is thrown into the Lake of Fire.
- x) The Lake of Fire is the place of eternal punishment. It must be distinguished from Hades [the place where the wicked dead await their judgment] and the abyss [the biding place of the demons].
- xi) When Satan, the beasts, and even Death and Hades, are thrown into the Lake of Fire, it confirms that in God's new world everything in opposition to God will be removed from his presence. Only perfection will prevail.
- xii) The capture and destruction of Satan and his partners confirms that their powers are restricted, and they have been [and will be] overcome by God. They will not be able to interfere with God's plan for his people.
- xiii) Overall the message of Revelation confirms the Old Testament view that God is in control: of life, of death, of the Realm of Death, of Satan and his partners. Believers can trust him to give them life.

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 *τά* 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.

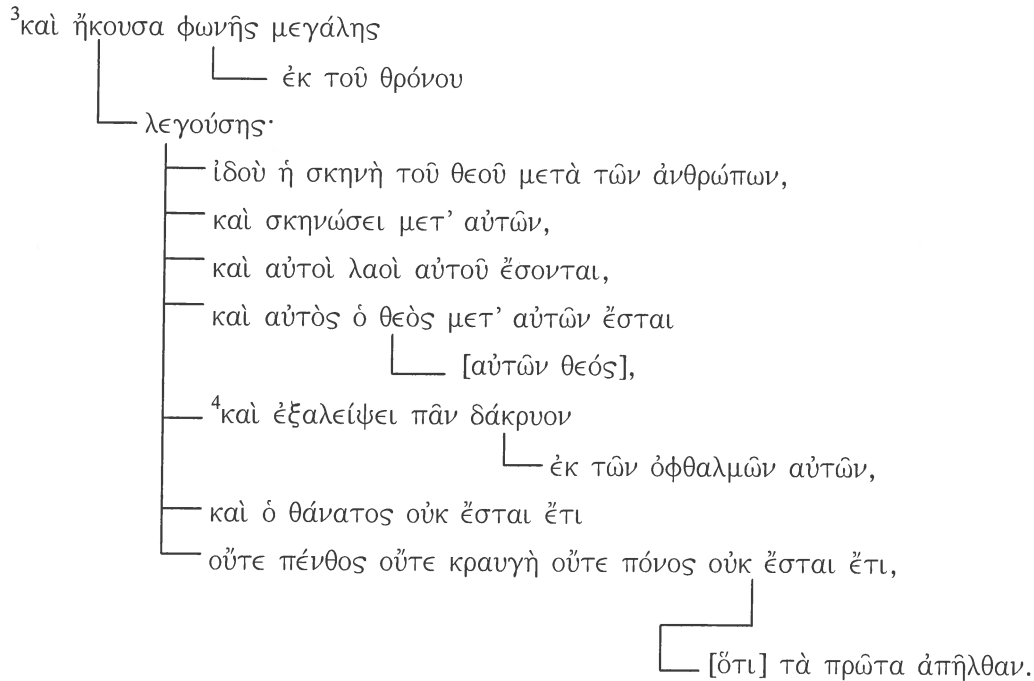
That a new unit of text starts in Revelation 21:1 is identified by the text marker Καὶ εἶδον in Revelation 21:1a. The subsection of Revelation 21:1-4 is framed by the phrases πρῶτος...πρώτη...ἀπῆλθαν (Rev 21:1b) and τὰ πρῶτα ἀπῆλθαν (Rev 21:4b). It is an announcement by the angel [identified only as “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.

inaugurated. Osborne (2002: 729) sees Revelation 21:1-8 as “a transition passage similar to the hallelujah choruses of 19:1-10.” The section is dominated by the theme of joy and newness (Osborne 2002: 729).

ii) No death anymore (Rev 21:4)

a) Syntactical analysis



The section is a description in the form of a list of what can be expected in the new heaven and new earth that God will bring to his people. It deals with the consequences of the inauguration of God’s new world (Giblin 1991: 194). This text is an audition by an unidentified voice, “as a commentary on the three foci of John’s vision, in reverse order, forming a chiasmus” (Aune 1998b: 1113). It starts of with the dwelling of God amongst his people, which has the effect that anything in opposition to God will no longer exist, because the former things have now passed away (Aune 1998b: 1113).

b) No death

Text-critically there are many suggested variants (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 675-676). None of these, however, would have a major influence on the discussion of this thesis [cf. Aune (1998b: 1110-1111) for a detail discussion of the variant readings].

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):

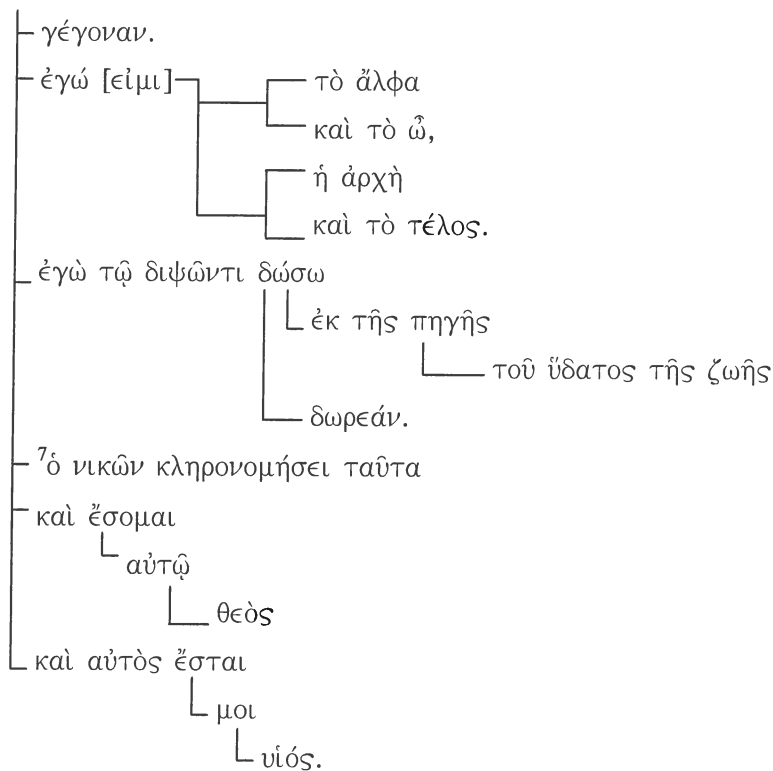
- 22:10-11 Admonitions of the angel
- 22:12-16 Sayings by Christ
- **22:17** **Invitation to take the water of life**
- 22:18-19 Additional warnings and curses to the hearer
- 22:20ab Christ’s promise to return soon
- 22:20c Responses by the author

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 ζῶης] coming from a fountain [ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς]. The phrase ὕδωρ ζῶης 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 ζῶης 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).

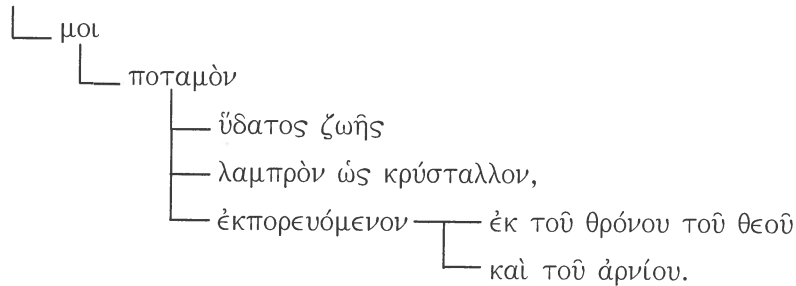
⁴¹⁷ Italics inserted by Arndt & Gingrich.

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

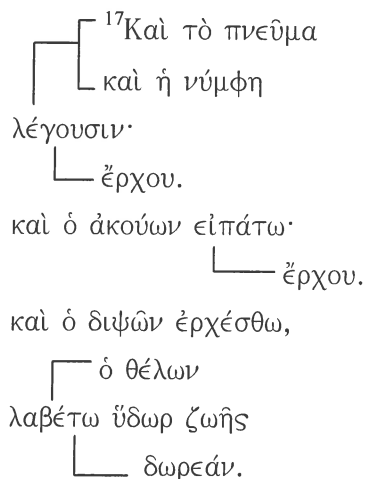
Revelation 22:1

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 affects 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

$\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{ἔν μέσω τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς} \\ \text{καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ} \\ \text{ἐντεῦθεν καὶ ἐκεῖθεν} \end{array} \right\} \text{ξύλον ζωῆς ποιοῦν καρποὺς δώδεκα,}$
 $\left. \begin{array}{l} \text{κατὰ μῆνα ἕκαστον ἀποδιδούν τὸν καρπὸν αὐτοῦ,} \\ \text{καὶ τὰ φύλλα τοῦ ξύλου} \end{array} \right\} \text{εἰς θεραπείαν τῶν ἐθνῶν.}$

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).

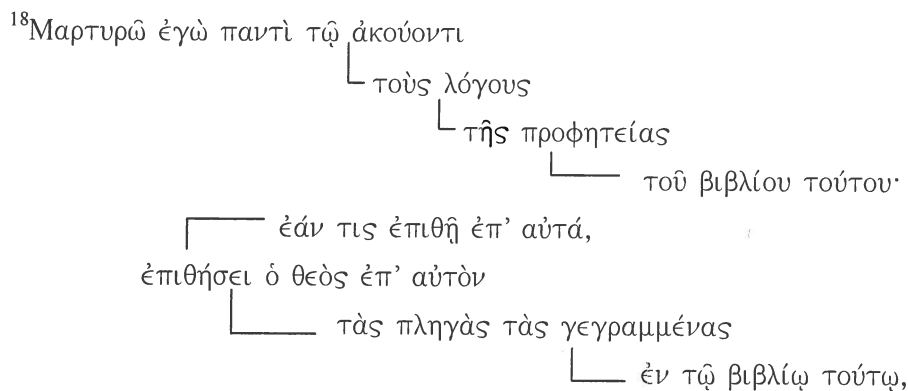
The promise of Revelation 2:7 is again picked up in Revelation 22. There it is said that those “who conquer” [ὁ νικῶν] will have access to the tree of life. The two symbols have the same meaning: it includes all faithful believers (Aune 1998b: 1219). By giving the fruits of the tree of life to everyone “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.

19 καὶ 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 $\nu\upsilon\chi\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \omicron\upsilon\kappa\ \epsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\iota\ \epsilon\kappa\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \tau\omicron\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \nu\upsilon\kappa\tau\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, 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 $\acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\omega}\nu\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \eta\acute{\nu}\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\epsilon}\rho\chi\acute{\omicron}\mu\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ 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.

Annexure A.1

Life (ζῶν, ζῶον, ζωή, ψυχή)

I	II	III (4:1-22:9)						IV (22:10-21) ⁴³³		
1:1-8	1:9-3:22	4:1-2a	4:2b-7:17	8:1-11:14	11:15-16:21	17:1-19:10	19:11-21:8	21:9-22:9	22:10-20	22:21
	1:18		<i>4:6⁴³⁴</i>	10:6	13:8	17:8	19:20	21:27	22:14	
	1:18		4:7	11:11	13:14	<i>19:4</i>	20:4	22:1	22:17	
	2:7		4:7		<i>14:3</i>		20:5	22:2	22:19	
	2:8		4:7		14:4		20:12			
	2:10		4:7		<i>15:7</i>		20:15			
	3:1		4:8		15:7		21:6			
	3:5		4:9		16:3					
			4:9				20:5⁴³⁵			
			4:10				20:6			
			5:6							
			5:8							
			<i>5:11</i>							
			<i>5:14</i>							
			<i>6:1</i>							
			<i>6:3</i>							
			<i>6:5</i>							
			<i>6:6</i>							
			<i>6:7</i>							
			<i>7:2</i>							
			<i>7:11</i>							
			<i>7:17</i>							
ψυχή										
			6:9	8:9	12:11	18:13	20:4			
					16:3	18:14				
TOTALS:										
	7		22	3	9	4	7+2	3	3	

⁴³³ There is not absolute uniformity with regard to the structure of Revelation. The broad outline structure as suggested by Aune (1997: c-cv) is used in this thesis. For some other approaches to the structure, cf. Du Rand (1991b: 255-268); Beasley-Murray (1981: 32); Bauckham (1993a: 21-22); Mounce (1977: 47-49).

⁴³⁴ Texts printed in italics refer to the “four living creatures” (τέσσαρα ζῶα).

⁴³⁵ Bold texts refer to “resurrection” (ἀνάστασις).

Annexure A.2

Death and the realm of Death (θάθος, ἄβυσσος, θάνατος, ἀποθνήσκω, ἀποκτείνω, νεκρός)

I	II	III (4:1-22:9)						IV (22:10-21)		
		4:1-2a	4:2b-7:17	8:1-11:14	11:15-16:21	17:1-19:10	19:11-21:8	21:9-22:9	22:10-20	22:21
1:1-8	1:9-3:22									
1:5	1:17		6:8	8:9	11:18	17:8	19:21			
1:7	1:18		6:8	8:11	12:11	17:11	20:1			
	1:18		6:8	9:1	13:3	18:8 ^a	20:3			
	1:18		6:8 ^a	9:2	13:3		20:5			
	2:8		6:11	9:5	13:10		20:6			
	2:10			9:6	13:10		20:12			
	2:11			9:6	13:12		20:12			
	2:13			9:6	13:15		20:13			
	2:23 ^a			9:11	14:13		20:13			
	2:23			9:11	14:13		20:13			
	3:1			9:11	16:3		20:13			
	3:2			9:15	16:3		20:14			
				9:18			20:14			
				9:20			20:14			
				11:5			21:4			
				11:7			21:8			
				11:7						
				11:8 ⁴³⁶						
				11:13						
				11:8 ⁴³⁷						
				11:9						
				11:9						
TOTALS:										
2	12		5	19+3	12	3	16			

^a θάνατος does not refer to death in these cases, but means “plague” or “deadly illness”.

⁴³⁶ ἔσταυρώθη refers to the Cross of Jesus here.

⁴³⁷ Texts printed in bold refer to “corpses” (πτώμα).

Annexure A.3

Other words that can also be associated with death
(αἴμα, διαφθείρω, σφάζω)

I	II	III (4:1-22:9)							IV (22:10-21)	
1:1-8	1:9-3:22	4:1-2a	4:2b-7:17	8:1-11:14	11:15-16:21	17:1-19:10	19:11-21:8	21:9-22:9	22:10-20	22:21
1:5			5:6	8:7	11:18	17:6	19:13			
			5:9	8:8	11:18	17:6	19:20			
			5:9	11:3	12:4	18:24	20:4			
			5:12	11:5	12:11	18:24	20:9			
			6:4		12:15	19:2	20:10			
			6:9		13:3		20:14			
			6:10		13:8		20:14			
			7:14		14:20		20:15			
					16:3		21:8			
					16:4					
					16:6					
					16:6					
TOTALS:										
1			8	4	12	5	9			

Annexure B.1

DETAIL ANALYSIS OF LIFE AND DEATH IN REVELATION**4. Life and death with regard to God:**

- 4:9 ...τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας...
- 4:10 ...προσκυνήσουσιν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων
- 7:2 ἄγγελον...ἔχοντα σφραγίδα θεοῦ ζῶντος
- 10:6 καὶ ὤμοσεν ἐν τῷ ζῶντι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων
- 15:7 τοῦ θυμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων

5. Life and death with regard to Christ:

- 1:5 Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ...ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν
- 1:5 καὶ λύσαντι ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ
- 1:7 οἵτινες αὐτὸν ἐξεκέντησαν
- 1:17-18 ἐγὼ εἶμι...ὁ ζῶν, καὶ ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἶμι...
- 2:8 Τάδε λέγει...ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν
- 5:5 ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα
- 5:6 ...ἄρνιον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον...
- 5:9 ἄξιός ἐστι...ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου...
- 5:12 ἄξιόν ἐστιν τὸ ἄρνιον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον λαβεῖν...
- 11:8 ...ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη
- 12:11 καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου

6. Life and death with regard to the beast:

- 13:3 καὶ μίαν ἐκ τῶν κεφαλῶν αὐτοῦ ὡς ἐσφαγμένην, καὶ ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἐθεραπεύθη
- 13:12 ἵνα προσκυνήσουσιν τὸ θηρίον τὸ πρῶτον, οὗ ἐθεραπεύθη ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ
- 13:14 ποιῆσαι εἰκόνα τῷ θηρίῳ, ὃς ἔχει τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης καὶ ἔζησεν
- 17:8 Τὸ θηρίον...ἀναβαίνειν ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει
- 17:11 ὄγδοός ἐστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ ἐστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει

7. Physical death:

4.1. Martyrdom

- 2:13 Ἐναντιπᾶς ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου, ὃς ἀπεκτάνθη
- 6:10 ἕως πότε...οὐ κρίνεις καὶ ἐκδικεῖς τὸ αἷμα ἡμῶν
- 6:11 οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτῶν οἱ μέλλοντες ἀποκτείνεσθαι ὡς καὶ αὐτοὶ
- 11:7 ὅταν τελέσωσιν τὴν μαρτυρίαν αὐτῶν, τὸ θηρίον τὸ ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς ἀβύσσου ποιήσει μετ' αὐτῶν πόλεμον καὶ νικήσει αὐτούς καὶ ἀποκτενεῖ αὐτούς
- 11:8 καὶ τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τῆς πλατείας τῆς πόλεως...
- 11:9 τὸ πτώμα αὐτῶν ἡμέρας τρεῖς καὶ ἡμισυ καὶ τὰ πτώματα αὐτῶν οὐκ ἀφίουσιν τεθῆναι εἰς μνήμα
- 11:11 Καὶ μετὰ τὰς τρεῖς...πνεῦμα ζωῆς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ εἰσῆλθεν ἐν αὐτοῖς
- 12:11 καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄρχι θανάτου
- 13:7 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ποιῆσαι πόλεμον μετὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ νικήσαι αὐτούς
- 13:10 εἴ τις ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι αὐτὸν ἐν μαχαίρῃ ἀποκτανθῆναι
- 13:15 ἐὰν μὴ προσκυνήσωσιν τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου ἀποκτανθῶσιν
- 14:13 μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες ἀπ' ἄρτι
- 16:6 ὅτι αἷμα ἁγίων καὶ προφητῶν ἐξέχεαν καὶ αἷμα αὐτοῖς...πιεῖν
- 17:6 καὶ εἶδον τὴν γυναῖκα μεθύουσαν ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ἐκ τοῦ αἵματος τῶν μαρτύρων Ἰησοῦ
- 18:24 καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ αἷμα προφητῶν καὶ ἁγίων εὐρέθη καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐσφαγμένων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
- 19:2 καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς

4.2. Physical death of the world

- 1:17 Καὶ ὅτε εἶδον αὐτόν, ἔπεσα πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ὡς νεκρὸς
- 2:23 καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ
- 6:2 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ στέφανος καὶ ἐξῆλθεν νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ
- 6:4 ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην ἐκ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἵνα ἀλλήλους σφάξουσιν
- 6:8 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἐξουσία...ἀποκτείναι...ἐν θανάτῳ
- 8:9 καὶ ἀπέθανεν τὸ τρίτον τῶν κτισμάτων τῶν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ τὰ ἔχοντα ψυχὰς...
- 8:11 ...καὶ πολλοὶ ἀνθρώπων ἀπέθανον ἐκ τῶν ὑδάτων ὅτι ἐπικράνησαν
- 9:5 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἵνα μὴ ἀποκτείνωσιν αὐτούς

- 9:6 καὶ...ζητήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν θάνατον...ἐπιθυμήσουσιν ἀποθανεῖν
καὶ φεύγει ὁ θάνατος ἀπ' αὐτῶν
- 9:15 ἵνα ἀποκτείνωσιν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων
- 9:18 ἀπὸ τῶν τριῶν πληγῶν τούτων ἀπεκτάνθησαν τὸ τρίτον τῶν ἀνθρώπων
- 9:20 οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἱ οὐκ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν ταῖς πληγαῖς ταύταις
- 9:21 καὶ οὐ μετενόησαν ἐκ τῶν φόνων αὐτῶν...
- 11:5 ...πῦρ ἐκπορεύεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτῶν καὶ κατεσθίει τοὺς ἐχθροὺς
αὐτῶν· καὶ εἶ τις θελήσῃ αὐτοὺς ἀδικῆσαι, οὕτως δεῖ αὐτὸν
ἀποκτανθῆναι
- 11:13 καὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῷ σεισμῷ...
- 16:3 καὶ ἐγένετο αἷμα ὡς νεκροῦ, καὶ πᾶσα ψυχὴ ζωῆς ἀπέθανεν
- 18:13 καὶ ψυχὰς ἀνθρώπων

8. Physical life:

Revelation 1:12-13 Christ amidst his church

Revelation 2-3 Life in the churches

Revelation 11:3-13 the call to witness

9. Spiritual life and death:

- 2:5 καὶ κινήσω τὴν λυχνίαν σου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου αὐτῆς....
- 3:1 οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ὄνομα ἔχεις ὅτι ζῆς, καὶ νεκρὸς εἶ
- 3:2 στήρισον τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν
- 17:8 θαυμασθήσονται οἱ κατοικοῦντες...ὧν οὐ γέγραπται...ἐπὶ τὸ βιβλίον
τῆς ζωῆς
- 18:14 τῆς ἐπιθυμίας τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπῆλθεν ἀπὸ σοῦ

10. Eternal life and death:

- 2:7 Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ φαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς
- 2:10 γίνου πιστὸς ἄρχι θανάτου....καὶ δώσω σοι τὸν στέφανον τῆς ζωῆς
- 2:11 Ὁ νικῶν οὐ μὴ ἀδικηθῆ ἐκ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ δευτέρου
- 2:17 Τῷ νικῶντι δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου καὶ....
- 2:26-28 Καὶ ὁ νικῶν....
- 3:5 Ὁ νικῶν...οὐ μὴ ἐξαλείψω τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς
- 3:12 Ὁ νικῶν ποιήσω αὐτὸν στῦλον...



- 3:21 Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ...
- 6:9 εἶδον ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν ἐσφαγμένων
- 7:14 καὶ ἐλεύκαναν αὐτὰς ἐν τῷ αἵματι τοῦ ἀρνίου
- 7:17 καὶ ὀδηγήσει αὐτοὺς ἐπὶ ζωῆς πηγᾶς ὕδατων
- 11:18 καὶ ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι
- 11:18 καὶ διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν
- 13:8 οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου
- 14:4 οὗτοι ἠγοράσθησαν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπαρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ ἀρνίῳ
- 14:20 καὶ ἐπατήθη ἡ ληνὸς...καὶ ἐξῆλθεν αἷμα ἐκ τῆς ληνοῦ...
- 15:2 Καὶ εἶδον...τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου...
- 19:13 καὶ περιβεβλημένος ἱμάτιον βεβαμμένον αἵματι
- 19:21 καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπεκτάνθησαν ἐν τῇ ῥομφαίᾳ
- 20:4 ...καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πεπελεκισμένων διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ...
καὶ ἔζησαν καὶ ἐβασίλευσαν μετὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ χίλια ἔτη
- 20:5 Αὕτη ἡ ἀνάστασις ἡ πρώτη
- 20:5 οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν νεκρῶν οὐκ ἔζησαν ἄχρι τελεσθῆ τὰ χίλια ἔτη
- 20:6 μακάριος καὶ ἅγιος ὁ ἔχων μέρος ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει τῆ πρώτης
- 20:6 ἐπὶ τούτων ὁ δεύτερος θάνατος οὐκ ἔχει ἐξουσίαν
- 20:9 καὶ κατέβη πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέφαγεν αὐτούς
- 20:12 καὶ εἶδον τοὺς νεκροὺς...ἐστῶτας ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου. καὶ βιβλία
ἠνοίχθησαν, καὶ ἄλλο βιβλίον ἠνοίχθη, ὃ ἐστὶν τῆς ζωῆς, καὶ ἐκρίθησαν
οἱ νεκροὶ ἐκ τῶν γεγραμμένων ἐν τοῖς βιβλίοις
- 20:13 καὶ ἔδωκεν ἡ θάλασσα τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτῇ
- 21:4 καὶ ὁ θάνατος οὐκ ἔσται ἔτι
- 21:6-7 ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν. ὁ
νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα...
- 21:8 τοῖς δὲ δειλοῖς καὶ...ἐν τῇ λίμνῃ τῇ καιομένῃ πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ, ὃ ἐστὶν
ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος
- 21:27 εἰ μὴ οἱ γέγραμμένοι ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου
- 22:1 Καὶ ἔδειξέν μοι ποταμὸν ὕδατος ζωῆς λαμπρὸν ὡς κρύσταλλον
- 22:2 ἐν μέσῳ τῆς πλατείας αὐτῆς τῆς καὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ἐντεῦθεν καὶ
ἐκεῖθεν ξύλον ζωῆς



- 22:14 Μακάριοι οἱ πλύνοντες τὰς στολὰς αὐτῶν, ἵνα ἔσται ἡ ἐξουσία αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὸ ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς
- 22:17 καὶ ὁ διψῶν ἐρχέσθω, ὁ θέλων λαβέτω ὕδωρ ζωῆς δωρεάν
- 22:19 ἀφελεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸ μέρος αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τοῦ ξύλου τῆς ζωῆς

11. Death and Hades:

- 1:18 καὶ ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου
- 6:8 ὁ καθήμενος ἐπάνω...θάνατος, καὶ ὁ ᾄδης ἠκολούθει μετ' αὐτοῦ
- 20:13 καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾄδης ἔδωκαν τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς
- 20:14 καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾄδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς

12. The abyss and the lake of fire:

- 9:1 καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ ἡ κλεῖς τοῦ φρέατος τῆς ἀβύσσου
- 9:2 καὶ ἤνοιξεν τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου
- 9:11 τὸν ἄγγελον τῆς ἀβύσσου, ὄνομα αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστὶ Ἄβαδδῶν, καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἑλληνικῇ ὄνομα ἔχει Ἀπολλύων
- 19:20 καὶ ἐπιάσθη τὸ θηρίον...ζῶντες ἐβλήθησαν...εἰς ἡν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς....
- 20:1 Καὶ εἶδον ἄγγελον...ἔχοντα τὴν κλεῖν τῆς ἀβύσσου
- 20:3 καὶ ἔβαλεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν ἄβυσσον
- 20:10 καὶ ὁ διάβολος...ἐβλήθη εἰς ἡν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς
- 20:14 οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός ἐστιν, τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς
- 20:15 καὶ εἶ τις οὐχ εὐρέθη ἐν τῷ βίβλω τῆς ζωῆς γεγραμμένος, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρὸς



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