

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

The book of Revelation should be recognized and understood in a historical context, not as “timeless symbols” (Bauckham, 1993b:19). It is impossible to understand and interpret the book of Revelation correctly without considering the proper historical context. Nevertheless, Revelation has suffered various problems, for example, the extreme eschatology movement. Even though various problems in Revelation are based on the mysterious apocalyptic visions and highly symbolic language (cf. Du Rand, 1993a:243-249), De Smidt (1994:229) commented, “the Book of Revelation should be read in the same manner as all the other writings of the Bible.” It means that the Revelation should be understood in connection with contemporary relevance.

The primary message of the book of Revelation can be linked with the 1st century Christians who lived in Asia Minor. And this message has been sent to convey a message of encouragement and comfort (Kistemaker, 2001:53). This book should not be abused or ignored. Through the book of Revelation, the seven churches hear the voice of encouragement and comfort about the promised victory in their liturgical context (Decock, 1999:377). The intent of this dissertation is to describe the ‘conqueror (*νικάω*) motif’ in the face of possible persecution, suffering, and conflict. By sharing the promised victory to the conquerors by an exalted Christ, John intended to keep their faith as the conquerors unto the death (Beasley-Murray, 1992:20). Therefore, through words of encouragement and comfort, John strengthens the conquerors through promise and fulfillment.¹

I.1. The reason for this Research

The conqueror motif is difficult to understand because people ask questions as to where

¹ In order to understand this argument, I want to suggest a chart in the following way: the promise statements given to the conquerors (chapters 2-3) and the fulfillment statements given to the conquerors (chapters 19-22). For example, 1. tree of life in paradise of God (2:7) and tree of life (22:2, 14, 19), 2. second death (2:11) and second death (20:6, 14; 21:4, 8), 3. hidden manna, white stone, new name (2:17) and new name (22:4), 4. authority over the nation (2:26), rod of iron (2:27), morning star (2:28) and rule with rod of iron (19:15) and morning star (22:16), 5. white garments, the book of life(3:5) and dressed in white(19:8), and names in the book of life (20:12, 15, 21:27), 6. pillar in the temple (3:12), divine names written (3:12) and divine names written (22:14), 7. divine throne (3:21) and divine throne (20:4), White throne (20:11).

God is and why we are suffering in the present time. Concerning this conqueror motif, this question is central as to how we should understand the victory of Christianity when it seems as if God is not present. Those kinds of arguments indicate that this motif of conquering within the Christian framework should be investigated.

The Revelation was composed during a time when severe suffering and conflict of the Christian church were occurring. John had been exiled to Patmos for preaching the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 1:9). The church in Smyrna expected persecution (2:10). Antipas had been martyred in the church in Pergamum (2:13). John recognized himself as writing in a time of extreme conflict and crisis (Reddish, 1982:3). As a pastor to the persecuted Christians, John is asking for a choice of allegiance: Christ or Rome (cf. Hendriksen, 2000:29-32). Who is in control? Who is, in a real sense, the conqueror in this world? In these questions, this peculiar term ‘the conqueror’ in Revelation refers not only to the martyrs (Caird, 1966:229), but also all Christians (Beasley-Murray, 1992:76-79). Therefore, the conqueror motif in Revelation will reveal who the conquerors are from a new perspective.

The ‘conqueror motif’ arises as a prominent element in Revelation (e.g. Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). Most scholars didn’t focus on the theme of the conqueror motif. Even though some scholars focus on the conquerors in Revelation, their focusing on this theme is not enough. According to Caird (1966:229), the conquerors are the martyrs, because the martyrs are special people of God and the martyrs will have special privileges as the conquerors. The weak point of his analysis is to limit the conquerors to the martyrs. The Revelation doesn’t limit the conquerors to the martyrs.

Rosscup (1982:261-286) argues that all of the genuinely saved will turn out to be conquerors and receive the reward Christ promises them. This explanation is not enough to describe who the conquerors are, because it is not clear who all of the genuinely saved are. Therefore, to limit the conquerors to the martyrs (Caird, 1966:229) and all of the genuinely saved (Rosscup, 1982:261-286) is to simplify the conqueror motif in Revelation. Unlike them, Wilson (1996:182-185) recognizes the conquerors as an

integral title that indicates all the people of God, including the saints, slaves, witnesses and so on. Various titles about the conquerors in Revelation will expand our horizon to understand the message of Revelation. This kind of research has not been done among the scholars through detailed exegesis, which is why I would pursue this research of the conqueror motif thematically.

I.2. Purpose of the Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation is to search for understanding and to give a new perspective of the contents of the conqueror motif in the book of Revelation. For this purpose, individual passages that are connected with the conqueror motif are examined with the ultimate intention of understanding as a whole. This research will provide a new approach to the conqueror motif in terms of historical and heavenly perspectives (Strand, 1990:241). As Stevenson (2001:283) commented, the book of Revelation provides a new and transcendent vision of reality to the conquerors by offering God's victory over all who stand in opposition.²

A subsidiary purpose of this dissertation is to provide the background materials related to the conqueror motif in Revelation. How was the conqueror motif implied in Jewish literature? How did the New Testament relate to the conqueror motif? How did John use these concepts to interpret the conqueror motif? These kinds of analyses will reveal how the individual passages are related to the conqueror motif and how they expand the understanding of the message in Revelation.

I.3. Methodology of the Dissertation

The methodology of this dissertation employs an exegetical, literary,³ and theological

² As the conquerors are the main theme of this section, it must be their confession, "Now have come the salvation and power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (Rev. 12:10-11).

³ Powell (1993:85-91) describes the benefits of narrative criticism as follows: 1. Narrative criticism focuses on the text of Scripture itself. 2. Narrative criticism provides some insight into biblical texts for which the historical background is uncertain. 3. Narrative criticism provides for checks and balances on

approach as well as the historical method. In interpreting the book of Revelation, the research about the historical, social, and religious contexts is an important task in order to understand the meaning of text (see Botha, 1988:87-102; DeSilva, 1992a:273-302; Kraybill, 1996). This dissertation seriously considers the historical, social, and religious contexts.⁴ The book of Revelation was intended to be written for Christians who lived at a particular time in history (Beasley-Murray, 1992:13). Therefore, the historical, social and religious contexts of the Revelation should be considered (Thompson, 1998:30-35) because the book of Revelation is embedded in a social framework. The social framework will help one understand the imagery. Bauckham (1993b:19) is of the opinion that “John’s images echo and play on the facts, the fears, the hopes, the imaginings and the myths of his contemporaries.”

In addition, this dissertation will deal with the literary context in which the word conqueror is used. It will focus on the linguistic-syntactic analysis. This includes not only the linguistic and syntactic approach, but also the context in which the word conqueror (*νικάω*) is used in Revelation. That is, the use of the word *νικάω* will be examined for a proper understanding in terms of linguistic, syntactical and structural analysis and for the contexts in which the word *νικάω* is used in the book of Revelation. These kinds of linguistic, syntactical and structural analyses for the word *νικάω* might provide clearer textual implications about the conqueror motif used in the book of Revelation. That is why these passages are regarded not in an isolated context, but as part of a larger context. This kind of research can decode the apocalyptic power to provide consolation, hope, and ethical exhortation for the concrete situation that the seven churches faced (cf. Carey, 1999:77-92). As a thematic study, I want all the information that I can get on this word or this theme. Therefore, I am going to use the

traditional methods. 4. Narrative criticism tends to bring scholars and nonprofessional Bible readers closer together. 5. Narrative criticism stands in a close relationship with the believing community. 6. Narrative criticism offers the potential for bringing the believing community together. 7. Narrative criticism offers fresh interpretations of biblical material. 8. Narrative criticism unleashes the power of biblical stories for personal and social transformation. The weak point of narrative criticism can be explained in that it bypasses extrinsic, historical, social, cultural, and religious factors in the task of literary interpretation. It is also a report in story-form of past history. One cannot ignore the question of the historical audience or the historical Jesus of John’s story without reducing and restricting the functions of narrative.

⁴ These kinds of researches investigate the New Testament texts according to the diachronic method of biblical interpretation. That is, they focus on the origin and the development of the texts as well as their theological emphasis and life context (Egger, 1996:155).

methods that best suit the analysis of that particular text. As Egger (1996:10) commented,

Methods are not means to be applied mechanically to grasp the sense of the text.

Methods should be understood as indicating the direction we should take in collecting observations about the text and as showing how we can most appropriately draw conclusions as to the meaning of the text.⁵

I.4. Main Hypothesis

The hypothesis for this dissertation is that the conqueror motif in Revelation is a central theological theme in conveying the message of victory, encouragement, and comfort. The message of the victory, encouragement, and comfort to the conquerors is based on the victory of Christ through death (Mounce, 1977:144). In other words, this theological theme is, on the one hand, closely connected with God's sovereignty, the victory of the Lamb, and the endurance of the conquerors as the people of God. On the other hand, this is linked with the witnessing of the word of God and testimony of Jesus (Aune, 1996:279-283).

These two theological themes will be investigated to reveal the real identity of the conquerors in Revelation. The theological theme of the victory through death and the witnessing of the word of God and testimony of Jesus is primarily a message of encouragement and hope to the conquerors. The climax of the victory to the conquerors is ultimately fulfilled in the section of the New Jerusalem (Bauckham, 1993b:140-143). That must be an eschatological victory to give encouragement and hope to the conquerors that suffered in this world.

I.5. Investigative Procedure

⁵ In terms of historical criticism that rebuilt the life and teaching of Jesus and the tradition of early Christianity, literary criticism is not an appropriate method to rebuild historical origin or situation. But one must keep in mind that literary criticism is to emphasize other literary perspectives to reveal the texts, which were given (cf. Stamps, 1997:221), if historical criticism is to reveal the historical perspective. Thus, one must regard both the historical and literary perspective in the Bible together in order to understand text itself and to communicate (cf. Egger, 1996:113-120) more with text itself. Otherwise, one will miss important meanings of the text (cf. Bailey, 1995:211).

This dissertation will focus on an investigation of the conqueror motif. In chapter 1, I will deal with the introductory matter of the dissertation, including the reason for this research; the purpose and methodology of the dissertation; and the main hypothesis as a method of revealing the conqueror motif in the book of Revelation.

For chapter 2, I present the general background to better understand the meaning of the book of Revelation in terms of the social, cultural and religious circumstance in the first century. This survey will focus on the Old Testament, the Greco-Rome world, Jewish literature, and the book of Revelation (cf. Michaels, 1992: 21-33).⁶ Throughout chapter 2, I will prove that the book of Revelation was not only written to console and encourage in the time of persecution, but also to give various pastoral exhortations and to maintain their identity in a gentile environment (see Slater, 1999:13-63).

For chapter 3, I will investigate the linguistic, literary, and structural analyses of the promise saying given to the conquerors in terms of the social-scientific approach (see Wilson, 1996). It is based on the fact that the promise saying given to the conquerors of the seven churches is deeply rooted in their distinctive situations and problems (cf. Maier, 1997:140-152). Bauckham (1993b:19) is quite correct to say that John transmutes his message into elements of his peculiar Christian context.

For chapter 4, I will deal with the conqueror motif from the christological perspective. For the christological analysis of the conqueror motif, I will focus on the title “one like a Son of Man” (cf. Rev. 1:12-16 and 14:14-16), “the Lamb Christology” (cf. Rev. 5:6), and “the Divine Warrior Christology” (cf. Rev. 19:11-16). These three christological titles are frequently used as proper symbolic images to encourage and to give hope to those who lived under the pressure of Rome. Through these three christological figures,

⁶ Even though Michaels (21-33) regards the book of Revelation as an Apocalypse, Prophecy and Letter, he doesn't distinguish sharply between Apocalypse and prophecy. He regards these two as almost interchangeable. But, when we consider chapter 1:1 as an Apocalypse and chapter 1:3 as a prophecy, the demarcation between the two terms is clearly distinguished. For more information about this demarcation, see ‘the theology of the book of Revelation’ written by Bauckham (1993b:2-17). At this moment, the definition of Collins (1979:9) about genre will be helpful in understanding the book of Revelation. It can be defined as follows: “Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.”

the book of Revelation reveals its alternative world of visions and symbolic universe in a socio-economic situation (Fiorenza, 2001:9).

For chapter 5, I concern myself with some of the passages in chapters 12-13 in which I focus on the conqueror motif. This chapter shows who the real conquerors are in terms of a worldly and heavenly perspectives. The conquerors and defeated in terms of earthly or heavenly aspects distinguish the people of God from the people of Satan. As Collins (1976:185) points out, the purpose of the book of Revelation is to provide the contemporary situation as a dualistic struggle in which the people of God must decide to take the heavenly perspective and firmly resist the power of chaos.

For chapter 6, as fulfillment statements of promise statements, I examine the New Jerusalem as included in chapters 19-22 and link them to the promise statements in chapters 2-3. These fulfillment statements are given to the conquerors as the message of victory and encouragement. For this, I will search not only the Old Testament and the New Testament sources, but also Greco-Roman materials, which are related to this topic.

I conclude chapter 7 by asking why John sent this letter to the readers who were facing persecution or were in crisis. What is his intention as apostolic pastor and a theologian? Why does he suggest various christological titles, especially one like a son of man, the Lamb, and the Divine Warrior?

As Colclasure (1981:14) points out well, John's intention to send his letter was to urge God's people to overcome the world as Christ did. That is, the people of God must be conquerors, just as Jesus Christ was a conqueror through his death and resurrection. The idea of the victory and conquering that John wanted to deliver to his suffering people can be expressed through various dimensions, namely in terms of ecclesiological, christological and martyrological perspectives. John's intention, noted above, would have made sense to the people of God who suffered various problems. Thus, John provides two perspectives: from below and above, and claims to make a decision as an ethical dimension (see Carey, 1999:45-92) between Christ and Caesar. That is my potential conclusion. For this argument, I will develop my thesis in the following



chapters.

CHAPTER II. THE VICTORY MOTIF AS BACKGROUND FOR UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK OF REVELATION

II.1. Dating as background for understanding the book of Revelation

Most people who are interested in this book struggle to truly understand its meaning. Even though it is not an easy book, the thing one should remember is that it was given by God to show us something- that has already taken place. The book of Revelation therefore begins like this, “The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John: Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἣν ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ ὁ Θεὸς δεῖξαι τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει, καὶ ἐσήμανεν ἀποστείλας διὰ τοῦ ἀγγέλου αὐτοῦ τῷ δούλῳ αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννῃ.”

By considering this verse one can determine the meaning of this passage through which God gave his revelation, not to be concealed, but indeed to reveal his heavenly will to his people. The most important thing is that it was given by God and influenced by the social, cultural, and historical background in which the book of Revelation was written (cf. Childs, 1984:503). As Bauckham (1993b:19) insists, the book of Revelation would not be understood as a timeless symbol. That is why one can't ignore the background of this book, that is, when it was written⁷ and under what circumstances. What were the situations of the seven churches? Under what circumstances were the Christians of the seven churches living? Who is the enemy in the book of Revelation?⁸

In order to solve these kinds of problems, one must consider when the book of Revelation was written. It is also to reveal who the emperor was and what his policy was. And on the

⁷ During the 19th century, Nero was focused on as the written time of the Revelation, but nowadays, most commentators agree that the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian (A.D.95-96). The supporters of the Nero date are J.A.T. Robinson and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr I will discuss this topic later.

⁸ In his book ‘The Sitz im Leben of the Apocalypse’, Beagley (1987) regards the enemy of the church in the Apocalypse as just Judaism. He says “This study will provide background material against which to examine the *Sitz im Leben* of the book of Revelation, particularly in relation to the conflicts between the Church and Judaism” (.3). I think that it is partly correct. Even though there were a lot of conflicts with Judaism in Revelation, he overlooks other parts of Revelation and does not see the content of Revelation as a whole. In Revelation, there were a lot of conflicts with Rome, which was personified as a Satanic agent, as well as certain conflict with Judaism. The latter will be discussed later.

other hand, it is to reveal what the social and political situations of the seven churches were through the internal and external evidence of Revelation. Therefore, the dating as a background for understanding of the book of Revelation should be regarded as a prerequisite condition before one starts discussing any major issues. Du Rand (1997a: 228) points out that the answer to the question of the dating of Revelation would be helpful to us to understand its meaning contextually. The survey over the dating of Revelation will provide the conflict situation of the Christians and the real meaning of the victory and conquest motif as Christians who lived under the hostile social situation (cf. Kraybill, 1996:33-40, 52-56). Even though these kinds of background information are not my concern in this thesis, it would be very helpful to understand the message of the book of Revelation.

One should first of all keep in mind that the book of Revelation was sent to the seven churches, which were situated in Asia Minor. The communities of the seven churches were suffering under Roman or Jewish pressure in the 1st century. Summers (1951:93) says of the purpose of Revelation that it was formulated by way of considering the background of all that had been said to the Christians, their conditions, as well as their needs. Du Rand (1997a:285-290) also emphasizes the real socio-historical context, reflecting the present pressing situation of the seven churches in Asia Minor. Therefore, one must remember its historical interrelation with the book of Revelation, that is, when it was written.

According to internal evidence, John was on the island of Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (1:9: διὰ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ).⁹ Whenever John sent his letters to the seven churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, he used and borrowed the images (e.g. the crown of life, manna, burnished bronze, pillar, temple) of that time which were historically understood, and which were familiar to the people. On the basis of this statement, Hemer (1986:19-20) points out that some genuine and valuable local materials in the letters can be connected with the existence of local features, which were well known to his readership in Asia Minor. With particular emphasis on the ‘dating of Revelation’, I will research the historical background of the text itself, in order to better understand and more exactly

⁹ For more information about Patmos, see Hemer (1986:27-34), Ramsay (1994:59-66).

clarify the research theme as conqueror motif at hand.

II.1.1. Dating

Like other New Testament books, it is, in the case of Revelation, indeed necessary to know the date of the writing, in order to understand ‘the situation’ of the book. There were many attempts by various scholars to settle the question about the dating of Revelation among various scholars. From the 19th century until the beginning of the 20th century, the divisions fall into two general dates, a ‘late’ dating (A.D. 95-96) and an ‘early’ (A.D. 64)’ dating based on persecution.¹⁰ In response to this problem, I take a ‘late’ dating (A.D. 95-96) as that it was written in Domitian’s reign. It means that the book of Revelation was written in a situation where different problems existed (see Beale, 1999:4-20) such as persecution (e.g. 2:13), cooling down of the faith (e.g. 2:4-5) and serious external harassment (e.g. 2:9, 2:20). What I want to do is not merely to indicate and determine a specific date, but to reveal a real meaning by which the message of Revelation can be understood. According to Du Rand (1997a:228-234; see Aune, 1997:lvi-lxx), the strongest external and internal witnesses support the argument that Revelation was written at the end of the reign of Domitian (A.D. 95-96). I will now examine the evidence, both internal and external.

II.1.1.1. External Evidence

In early Christian tradition, the dating of Revelation comes from Irenaeus who was the earliest witness. In his treatise ‘Against Heresies’ (5.30.3), he writes as following: “It was seen not long ago, but nearly in our generation, toward the end of the reign of Domitian.”¹¹ On the basis of Irenaeus’ testimony, most of the early church fathers (Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Victorinus, and Jerome) believed that the book of Revelation was

¹⁰ Most scholars, who are interested in this theme, namely dating, don’t agree with this division. Sometimes Galba, Claudius, and Trajan have also been proposed. In the case of Smalley (1994:40-50), he favours the dating of Revelation as written in the period of Vespasian. Rissi (1966:81) also insists that it was written at the time of Vespasian’s reign. On the basis of the interpretation of Chapter 17:10-11, Farrer (1964:32-37) suggests that the book of Revelation was written at the time of Trajan’s reign.

¹¹ For an English translation of that passage, I used the book of ‘Irenaeus of Lyons’ written by Robert M Grant (1997:178). Against Irenaeus’ testimony, many questions have been raised. In particular, Robinson (1976:222) suggests the question in the following way: (i) that the author of the Apocalypse and of the fourth gospel is one and the same person, (ii) that this person is the apostle John, (iii) that the Apocalypse was seen at the end of Domitian’s reign. Also see, for criticism against Irenaeus’ testimony, Gentry (1989:45-67).

written in the last year of the reign of Domitian, who ruled in A.D. 81-96. Eusebius, along with other early church fathers, also follows Irenaeus in claiming a Domitianic dating for the book of Revelation. In connection with this perspective, the church historian Schaff (1960:1.834s) mentions that the traditional dating of composition at the end of Domitian's rule (95-96) depends on the clear and weighty testimony of Irenaeus that is confirmed by Eusebius and Jerome, and still has its learned defenders.

Whereas the majority of commentators agree with the testimony of Irenaeus, Robinson (1976:221-253) in his book "Redating the New Testament", and Gentry (1989:41-109) in his book "before Jerusalem fell" argue that it was written between Nero's death in A.D. 68 and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Robinson (1976:223) argues that even though Victorinus (Apoc. 10:11) suggests that Caesar Domitian exiled John to the Patmos where he saw his Apocalypse, which he published after the death of the emperor, "Yet the identification is by no means solid." One don't actually have any reason to disagree with Victorious (cf. Du Rand, 1997a:228-229). According to Terry (1974:237-238), it seems quite clear that the witnessing of Irenaeus concerning the Domitianic date of the book of Revelation could not be safely depended upon, because it is only based on a single statement by Irenaeus. In the case of Guthrie (1970:17), even though he considers that Irenaeus is uncritical in his approach, it cannot be dismissed when discussing the introductory question.

Gentry (1989:41-109; cf. Newman, 1963:133-139; Moberly, 1992:376-393) is one of the major advocates of early dating. According to him, the reference of ἐωράθη (was seen: "against heresies": 5.30.3), which is a crucial statement by Irenaeus for the late dating, could be interpreted differently according to what the subject of this verb is. Gentry (Ibid, 46-67) takes the subject of this verb ἐωράθη not as Revelation, but John. In contrast to Robinson and Gentry, Peake (1919:73) states:

Those who accept the earlier date have either to interpret the language differently or to discard the statement as untrustworthy. Some recent scholars have accepted another translation of the passage which goes back to Wetstein (vol. II. p. 746). Instead of "it was seen" they render "he was seen."... This, however, while a

legitimate, is a most improbable rendering. In the preceding clause the object of sight is the revelation.

The statement of Clement of Alexandra (A. D. 150-215), “who is the rich man that is saved” is very useful evidence for the late dating of the book of Revelation. In there (“who is the rich man that is saved”:42:2), one can find some evidence for the late dating:

After the death of the tyrant, the [Apostle John] came back again to Ephesus from the Island of Patmos; and, upon being invited, he went even to the neighboring cities of the pagans, here to appoint bishops, there to set in order whole Churches, and there to ordain to the clerical estate such as were designated by the Spirit.

The problem lies with who this tyrant was. In the book of Revelation, the tyrant executes emperor worship and imperial cult (e.g. 13:4-8, 15-16; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4) and the persecution of Christians (e.g. 1:9; 2:13; 3:8; 13:1-18; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). Kraybill (1996:57-64) suggests that John of Patmos condemned the imperial cult, emperor worship and the danger of persecution against Christians. For this argument, the prominent candidates are Nero and Domitian. As a matter of fact, even though Nero meets with the qualifications of “tyrant” as the emperor of “savage temper” (Tacitus, History, 4:8), the conditions and situations that generally occurred in Revelation are more likely to have happened in the reign of Domitian rather than earlier (Carson, Moo, & Morris, 1992:476; cf. Beale, 1999:13).

Nero’s cruelty to the Christians can’t be denied. Late dating as external evidence makes sense, not only in terms of the situation of those addressed in the Apocalypse, but also in terms of the statements of the earliest Church Fathers like Irenaeus, Clement, and Eusebius, and so on (cf. Satre, 1984:63; Achtemeier, Green, & Thompson, 2001:572-573). Beale (1999:9) also agrees that “a date during the time of Nero is possible for Revelation, but the later setting under Domitian is more probable in the light of the evidence” in terms of emperor worship and programmatic legal persecution.

The argument for those who insist on Nero's dating can't be ignored. But, in spite of their

devotion to this problem, the weight of a Domitian dating based on external evidence is much stronger than a Nero dating. First of all, the most important thing is that the text itself speaks to those who were listening to the word of God in the context of their own environment in the first century. From this, I will examine the text itself to better understand the information from the receiver's point of view, also known as internal evidence.

II.1.1.2. Internal Evidence

For the advocates of the 'early' dating (Nero's time), the most important issues of dating are as follows: when was the book of Revelation written and what kind of suffering did the Christians experience? Was it a real persecution? Or was it a perceived crisis?¹² Concerning a perceived crisis, Collins (1984:84-107) suggests that there is no systematic persecution derived from Rome against Christians. It was the conflict between the Christian faith and the social situation, as he perceived it. Thus, one should interpret chapter 11:1-2 and chapter 17:10-11 to find out the real time framework in which the book was written, in terms of internal evidence. Is it a real event as a literal temple and literal kings, or is it a symbolic event to be interpreted as a symbol?

For the advocates of the 'late dating' (Domitian's time), these kinds of issues are very important because, through these issues, they are also insisting that the book of Revelation was written at the time of Domitian. For me, the most important thing is to find out what the texts themselves, like 11:1-2 and 17:10-11 say and what their historical context is in which the book of Revelation was written as 'late dating' to understand the message of the book of Revelation.

II.1.1.2.1. The Temple measuring (11:1-2) and the seven kings (17:10-11)

Until now, one has looked at the book of Revelation as crisis or persecution literature. But whether it is a "perceived crisis" (Collins, 1984: 84-107) or a "relative deprivation" (Collins, 1984:106) or a "therapy in crisis" (Gager, 1975:51) or not, it is my presupposition

¹² For more discussion of 'perceived Crisis', see Collins (1984:84-110). For the social analysis of the first Christians who were deeply involved in the Roman and pagan society, see Thompson (1990:171-197).

that the book of Revelation was written under the situation of persecution or crisis or conflict. In order to support the late dating of Revelation, the evidence of Revelation itself should be carefully evaluated. This is especially important because the references to the temple (e.g. 11:1-2) and the seven kings (e.g. 17:10-11) are very important texts to support late dating. Their careful scrutiny will prove late dating. Then, one can recognize that the crisis and conflict facing the communities of the seven churches in Asia Minor can be defined as a social, economic, historical, political, and religious conflicts (Duff, 2001:14). In response to these kinds of conflicts, John encourages his congregation to stand firmly as the conquerors through patience and suffering (cf. Howard-Brook & Gwyther, 1999:126-131).

II.1.1.2.1.1. The temple measuring (11:1-2)

Most commentators agree that this part is one of the most difficult sections (Beale, 1999:557; Mounce, 1977:218). One of the reasons for this, being part of a mysterious text, is that the problem persists as to which way one should interpret this section, literally or symbolically (cf. Mounce, 1977:218-219). For example, whereas Seiss (1974:233-241) interprets this text literally, Beasley-Murray (1992:182) gives this text symbolic meaning, indicating the church of Christ. Aune (1998a:598) also regards this text as symbolic of people of God who are protected by God. However, this section (11:1-2) is also one of the most important parts regarding the dating of Revelation, whether it should be considered as an ‘early dating’ (according to Nero’s time) or a ‘late dating’ (according to Domitian’s dating).

If one interprets the measurement of the temple literally, one could propose that it must have been written during Nero’s time, due to the presence of the temple (before A.D.70). If one considers the temple measurement to carry a symbolic meaning, one could propose that it must have been written during Domitian’s time, or possibly at a completely different time. Taking the text into consideration, the advocates of an early dating think that the book of Revelation was written prior to the fall of Jerusalem. They think that at the time Revelation was written, the Jerusalem temple was standing. Gentry (1989:174), who is an ‘early dating’ advocate, states the following: “John reveals both the prophetic certainty of

the material Temple's destruction and the fact of the preservation of His true Temple, His Church, His New Covenant people, His new priesthood.”¹³ The weak point of this argument is that if one agrees with this argument, one must accept the destruction of the temple as a literal fact. In order to effectively do this, one must consider the text itself in terms of both its macro structure, and its microstructure¹⁴ as one correspondingly considers the particular kind of language John used.

After the sixth angel sounded his trumpet (9:13-21), the scene was suddenly changed. The new scene with “Καὶ εἶδον” is begun (10:1). Due to the sudden break between the sixth and the seventh trumpet, one may refer to this as an interlude (Johnson, 2001:157). Regarding the structural aspect, it does have the same structural function as the interlude of chapter 7. That is, after the opening of the sixth seal (6:12-17), the scene was suddenly changed to the 144,000 sealed ones as an interlude (7:1-17). Following this, the scene returns to the seventh seal (8:1). In this text, the 144, 000 sealed ones as interlude give us the answer to the question "For the great day of their wrath has come, who can stand against it?" According to Beale (1999:405-406), chapter 7 does not suggest a new series of future events during a final tribulation period following that of chapter 6. Rather, chapter 7

¹³ Even though he connects this section (11:1-2) with literal-historical Jerusalem temple, he doesn't ignore the figurative-symbolic understanding of the passage. But as an 'early dating' advocate, he doesn't give up historical relevance of that section as a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction. For that argument, he connects this section with Luke 21: 24 (cf. Mt 24, Mk. 13). In Luke 21:24, we read: “They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.” He argues that the prophecy of Jerusalem in Luke 21:24 refers to the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. For that reason, he says that “Here the correspondence are so strong, they bespeak historical identity rather than mere accidental similarity” (Gentry 1989:176).

¹⁴ For the structure, recently the focus of Revelation has changed from individual symbols and passages to the structure of Revelation as a whole. Even though most commentators (cf. Collins, 1984:111-112; Fiorenza, 1985:170-177; Poythress, 2000:57-66) agree that the structure of Revelation is the key to the interpretation of Revelation, among them there are no consensuses in the structure of Revelation. To begin with, one must consider the book of Revelation as a whole in terms of structure perspective. It couldn't be separate as an individual episode and in this book one should not look for a historical relevance to the book of Revelation, because it was not written as a historical puzzle game, or a historical information collection. In the case of Gager (1975:50-51), he combines both structure and myth in relation to the concrete situation (persecution and martyrdom) and purpose (consolation) of the book as a whole. In his case, “one basic function of myth is to overcome unwelcome contradictions between hope and reality, between what ought to be and what is, between an ideal past or future and a flawed present” (51). Fiorenza (1985:170-177) divides the book of Revelation into seven patterns as a concentric theory. She divides the structure in the following way; A 1:1-8, B 1:9-3:22, C 4:1-9:21; 11:15-19, D 10:1-15:4, C' 15:1, 5-19:10, B' 19:11-22:9, A' 22:10-22:21. Collins (1976:19) also suggests the structure of Revelation according to sevenfold serious of visions in the following way: 1. Prologue: 1:1-8, 2. The seven messages: 1:9-3:22, 3. The seven seals: 4:1-8:5, 4. The seven trumpets: 8:2-11:19, 5. Seven unnumbered visions: 12:1-15: 4, 6. The seven bowls: 15:1-16:20: Babylon appendix: 17:1-19:10, 7. Seven unnumbered visions 19:11-21:8: Jerusalem appendix 21:9-22:5, 8. The Epilogue 22:6-21.

is an extension of chapter 6 explaining the vision of chapter 6 in a more detailed way and providing a larger background. Following a similar pattern of chapter 7 as an interlude, chapters 10-11:14 are a very important section to investigate in order to understand the relationship between the sixth trumpet and the seventh trumpet. Because this topic is beyond my field of expertise, I will not focus on it as much.

To begin with, chapter 11 having a structural function as interlude in which the text 11:1-2 is involved, can respectively be divided into two parts: 11:1-2 and 11:3-13. In the first part, one is informed regarding the measurement of the temple, while in the second part, one may look at the function of the two witnesses. In the first part, this section opens with the seer being given a measuring rod to measure the temple of God, together with the altar, as well as to count the worshippers there (11:1-2). Charles (1975:1.270) connects this section with the Zealots movement prior to the capture of Jerusalem.¹⁵ Whether it is related to the Zealots' movement or any historical event, one should strongly consider the text's witness of that section.

In conjunction with the function of the temple measurement, the reason for the measurement was to protect God's people or Church in terms of spiritual meaning (Witherington III, 2003:157; cf. Aune, 1998a:598). This scene is in line with chapter 10. This scene also occurs in the vision. How can one measure the temple with a physical measuring rod? Even though one accepts the measuring of the temple of God, together with the altar, with a physical measuring rod, one should strongly consider whether at all it would be possible to measure the worshipper with a physical measuring rod (cf. Lenski, 1943:326-333). If one accepts the "forty-two months" as a symbolic number (cf. Court, 2000:236-237), in which way can one explain a co-existence between the temple measuring with a literal meaning and the forty-two months with a symbolic meaning within the same section? In the case of some of the Old Testament passages, the measuring line (cf. 2 Ki. 21:13; Job. 38:5; Isa. 28:17; 34:11; Jer. 31:39; Ezk. 40:3-4; 47:3; Zec. 1:16; 2:1-2) implies the boundaries of the future city. It points out the fact that Jerusalem will no

¹⁵ Even though Charles (1975:1.270-274) regards this section with a fragment of the Zealots' prophecy movement as having a historical relevance, he reinterprets this section in terms of a protection from spiritual danger. While he denies a possibility of a literal interpretation, he doesn't miss the relationship between the contemporary history and eschatological forecasts.

longer be subject to destruction, which implies a spiritual meaning-rather than a literal meaning (Sharkey, 1986:26).¹⁶

In spite of the argument regarding this problem, it implies some spiritual meaning pertaining to the heavenly Jerusalem temple, rather than a literal meaning similar to that of the earthly Jerusalem temple. But, Robinson (1976:240-241) mentions that this passage must be referred to with some reference from a pre-70 situation. Even Adams (1966:68) says that Revelation was written before 70 A.D. They do not regard the book of Revelation as apocalyptic or crisis literature, and as symbolic literature, in order to create some “symbolic universal” (Fiorenza, 1985:24)¹⁷ or “symbolic-poetic imagery” (Du Rand, 1997a:285). As mentioned above, John didn't want to give information about historical events in this book. He rather wanted to give some theological meaning to the people who were being persecuted or were in crisis in terms of the heavenly reality in contrast with the earthly reality. Even though this section seems to relate to the earthly Jerusalem, John didn't want to relate this one to the historical Jerusalem temple. On evaluating this argument, it should seem clear that chapter 11:1-2 was written with a symbolic meaning under the theme of the protection of the church or eschatological consideration, the people of God (Wall, 1991:141-143). This topic will be dealt with at a later stage.

In contrast with ‘early dating’ advocates, ‘late dating’ advocates insist that this section doesn't indicate the historical earthly Jerusalem temple. It indicates the symbolic Jerusalem temple as a heavenly Jerusalem temple in terms of the protection of the church (cf. Rudolph, 2005:179). Regarding this point of view, the dating of Revelation couldn't be prior to A.D. 70 as 'early dating' advocates insist. It should, accordingly, seem clear that Revelation was written at a later date. Beale (1999:21) points out that:

The literal reading should be questioned in the light of the symbolism throughout the book and in ch. 11 in particular (e.g., vv3-7). Furthermore the depiction and

¹⁶ In Ezk 40-48, within the context of a visionary experience, he describes several aspects of Ezk's temple measurement in the following way: 1) the temple expressed in chapters 40-48 as being of divine and not human origin, 2) the temple is regarded as future oriented, 3) the temple of the future will be an ideal one, 4) the temple is not only described as a structure, but also as a community, the locus of God's presence. Through this statement, one can see that to him, the temple measurement is intended to suggest the ideal quality of the temple and to symbolize the perfection of the structure (Sharkey, 1986:34-35).

¹⁷ For more information, see Fiorenza (1985:21-26).

measurements of the temple are based literally and architecturally not on the Herodian temple but on the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 40-48.¹⁸

When one considers the influence of the Old Testament on John's theological purpose, it couldn't have been written during A.D. 70, prior to the fall of Jerusalem. On the contrary, it must have been written during A.D. 95-96, while Domitian reigned, following the fall of Jerusalem. Therefore, I accept that the book of Revelation was written in the latter part of the first century in which the church was confronted with persecution, compromise, cooling down of the faith or a crisis at the hand of the Romans or the Jews (probably false Jews). Through these vehicles, John wanted to strengthen and to encourage the faith of the people of God (Beasley-Murray, 1997:1035). It does not reveal an exact historical fact, but an event containing a particular theological meaning, reflecting the conqueror motif in terms of a heavenly perspective. As Rudolph (2005:202) argues, it is the message of hope and life, which was given to the conquerors through the blood of Christ.

The theological meaning of this section particularly indicates the protection of the eschatological people of God from persecution, conflict, tension, or crisis. Therefore, the temple measurement implies, embedded in a symbolic-metaphorical language, a certain eschatological protection for the people of God (Beale, 1999:559-560). It happened in the later part of the first century rather than an earlier date. Fiorenza (1991:77) also points out that the measuring symbolizes the eschatological protection and strengthening of the people of God who lived in Asia Minor.¹⁹

¹⁸ The interesting application of the Old Testament's use in Revelation is currently increasing, even though the issue of the use of the Old Testament in Revelation was not paid any attention up to the 19th century. As Beale (1998:13) says, "In comparison with the rest of the New Testament, the use of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse of John had not been given a proportionate amount of attention up through the late nineteen-seventies." Even though the use of the Old Testament is now more broadly accepted among the scholars, the main focal point to interpret Revelation's overall structure and Revelation's overall key in terms of the Old Testament use differs among various scholars. In the case of the Old Testament's use of chapter 11:1-2, the use of the Old Testament is also accepted from a broader consensus. John especially used the Old Testament in the following way: Ezekiel 40-48, Zechariah 2, Jeremiah 31. In Revelation 11:1-2, in order to explain the meaning of the temple from his theological purpose, John used the Old Testament not as a direct allusion, but as an indirect allusion in terms of the restoration of the eschatological temple. One should, thus, keep in mind that on behalf of the Old Testament prophets, the theme of the temple was the restoration of the ruined Jerusalem.

¹⁹ In order to compare various opinions about this interpretation among the scholars, I will suggest some of the scholars' opinions. Kiddle (1940:189) regards the measuring of the temple as "preservation." Summers

Taking into consideration our arguments up to the present, one is probably able to confirm that the book of Revelation was written during the time of Domitian (A.D. 95-96). In order to confirm the result from the argument regarding this problem, one has suggested that chapter 11:1-2 is consulted as a proof text confirming the choice of some ‘late dating’. Through this argument, one can recognize that the first century Christians who lived in Asia Minor faced various problems and crises as a result of social and political pressures and conflicts between them and Jews (Boring, 1989:8-21). In the midst of various pressures from a conflict and crisis situation in the latter part of the first century, the demand of ‘conquering’ provides “a poetic-rhetoric construction of an alternative symbolic universal (world) on the basis of its own historical-rhetorical situation” (Du Rand, 1997a:257). Apart from these facts, I would like to argue from another text, chapter 17:10-11, to prove ‘late dating’.

II.1.1.2.1.2. The seven kings (17:10-11)

Chapters 17-18 describe fornication and the destruction of Rome. One of the most important issues in chapter 17 is the indication as to which way we should interpret the seven kings, in order to determine the exact date for understanding the message of the book of Revelation.

For this reason, this text has become a ‘battle field’. After having mentioned that the seven heads of the beasts actually resemble seven mountains, one of the seven angels who have the seven bowls continues: “They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one yet remains, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a while. The beast who once was and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction” (οἱ πέντε ἔπεσαν, ὁ εἰς ἔστιν, ὁ ἄλλος οὕπω ἥλθεν, καὶ ὅταν ἐλθῇ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μεῖναι. καὶ τὸ θηρίον ὃ ἦν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν καὶ αὐτὸς ὅγδοός ἔστιν καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐπτά ἔστιν, καὶ εἰς ἀπώλειαν ὑπάγει).

(1951:162) regards this one as a “special care and preservation.” Concerning this interpretation, Charles (1975:1.274-275) gives us good insight. He explains the measuring in terms of “the preservation of the faithful” (:274) according to its own context. After some careful research, he concludes that “In its present context the measuring does not mean preservation from physical, but from *spiritual* danger” (:275) Owing to this analysis, one can state that the temple measuring does not imply a historical temple, but indeed a symbolic temple.

Before one proceeds to verse 10 and 11, one should first check the meaning of verse 9, that is, “the seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits.” The question of this verse is who are the seven heads? It was usually recognized that Rome was portrayed as a physical threat to the church, which was then symbolized by the seven hills, known as the geographical site of Rome (cf. Newman, 1963:133; Charles, 1976:2.54-55; Boring, 1989:179; Rossing, 1999:6; 61-62; 70; Achtemeier, Green, & Thomson, 2001:566; Johnson, 2001:243-253; Kistemaker, 2001:460-461; contra Henshaw, 1963:414-416; Beagley, 1987:91). Suetonius (*The Lives, Domitian, IV*) states that “at the festival of the Seven Hills, he distributed large hampers of provisions to the senatorian and equestrian order, and small baskets to the common people, after which he encouraged them to eat by setting them the example.”

It seems clear that the ‘Seven Hills’ indicates Rome, which was known as the city of seven hills.²⁰ Gentry (1989:151) as a preterist, also stresses the fact that ‘Everywhere throughout the empire Rome was known as the city on seven hills. When John wrote Revelation (whether in the A.D. 60s or in A.D. 95-96) there was no other city conceivable that was so universally noted for its seven hills.’”

Ford (1975:282-293) insists that Ezekiel 16, which reflects a prophetic attack on Jerusalem, influences the author of Revelation. Therefore, the harlot in Revelation 17 is Jerusalem, not Rome. She doesn’t carefully regard the political and socio-religious contexts under which Revelation was written. The persecution, accommodation, complacency and other forms of problems indicate conflict between Rome and Christians over participating in the imperial cult (cf. Du Rand, 1997a: 231-233; Slater, 1999:18-26).

On the basis of this analysis, one can determine the meaning of verses 10 and 11. The problems of these verses remain: who are the five that have fallen, who is the one remaining and who is the other that has not yet come?²¹ If one wants to determine the date

²⁰ For more information, see Kiddie (1940:348), Beckwith (1967:698), Mounce (1977:313-314), Wall (1991:207), Michaels (1997:196), Beale (1999:868), Hendriksen (2000:170).

²¹ The order of the emperors into the first century is as follows: 1. Julius Caesar (49-44 B.C.), 2. Augustus (31 B.C.-A.D. 14), 3. Tiberius (A.D. 14-37), 4. Gaius or Caligula (A.D. 37-41), 5. Claudius (A.D. 41-54), 6. Nero (A.D. 54-68), 7. Galba (A.D. 68-69), 8. Otho (A.D. 69), 9. Vitellius (A.D. 69), 10. Vespasian (A.D. 69-79), 11. Titus (A.D. 79-81), 12. Domitian (A.D. 81-96).

of writing of Revelation, one must decide with whom one is going to count as the first emperor. If chapter 17:10-11 is to be understood literally, one can thus decide which emperor one should start counting. For this, if one can identify who the sixth king is, it could be helpful to determine the dating of Revelation.

Nero redivivus legend: Another problem is whether all emperors should be counted in this list or whether any of the Caesars should be omitted from this list? Some scholars (Ford, 1975:289-291; Gentry, 1989:154-159) start the counting of emperors with Julius Caesar.²² If one starts with the first emperor as Julius Caesar, the sixth king ‘the one who is’ may be ‘Nero’. As an advocate of the late dating, I will reject this theory in the light of the witness of Irenaeus (against heresies, 5.30:3) and the ‘*Nero redivivus*’. The expectation of Nero’s return was probably a well-known phenomenon in Asia Minor at the time in which Revelation was written (Beale, 1999:17-18; contra Barr, 1998:127-128). After his death there were rumours circulating that Nero would return to wreak his vengeance on Rome. This idea, that Nero was not dead but still alive and hiding somewhere was widespread among the people at that time (Rev. 13:1-18; 17:12-17).

Sibylline Oracles 4:115-124 mentions that Nero fled from Rome to Parthia and would return to wreak his vengeance on Rome. Also in Sibylline Oracles 5:93-110, Nero’s return from Persia is explained: “he will destroy your land and evil-devising men with blood and corpse, by terrible altars, a savage-minded mighty man, much-bloodied, raving nonsense, with a full host numerous as sand, bring destruction on you.” Tacitus in his book ‘History (2.8)’ describes Nero’s death, “various rumors were current about his death; so there were many who pretended and believed that he was still alive.” In his book, ‘The lives of the twelve Caesars’, Suetonius (Nero, LVII: 381) also mentions the following: “he died in the third-second year of his age... they published proclamations in his name, as if he were still

²² Gentry (1989:154-159) insists that the emperor count in that era began with Julius. In order to insist that Julius was the first emperor to be counted, he regards Julius Caesar as the first of the Roman emperors and in terms of historical records he regards the emperor worship system as started in the time of Julius Caesar (contra KÜmmel, 1975:466-469). Owing to this reason, he mentions that “To exclude him from the enumeration of a list of pagan emperors in a work such as Revelation would be highly questionable - especially when his name was given to the line of the emperors: the Caesars” (:159). Malina and Pilch (2000:212) relate these verses to the Mesopotamian tradition and the seven kings to the planets in the sky. I think that it is probably not right. Through the text, one couldn’t imagine that the first receivers were familiar with astrology or astronomy. For this reason, it must be rejected. In contrast to the one who looks for historical relevance to this text, Wilcock (1989:164) considers the real meaning of the seven kings as a political power.

alive, and would shortly return to Rome and take vengeance on all his enemies.”

If Nero was the sixth king, this kind of rumour or legend couldn’t have taken place. Owing to this, Revelation must have been written after Nero’s death (A.D. 68). This is why one can’t accept Julius Caesar as having been the first emperor²³ and therefore, I can’t accept ‘the early dating’, stating that the book of Revelation was written during the time of ‘Nero’ (cf. Kümmel, 1975:466-469).

The other suggestion is that Augustus should be regarded as the first emperor regarding the dating of Revelation (“The history of Tacitus”, Tacitus (1.1); Rissi (1966:81), Swete (1977:220). If one begins with the first emperor as Augustus, the sixth king should be Galba (A.D. 68-69; cf. Bell, 1979:98-99). Some commentators, who agree that the first emperor was Augustus, do not accept Galba as the sixth king. They prefer to omit him, owing to the fact that he ruled only briefly and was not regarded as an important emperor in Christian history. The problem is based on the fact that even though Galba, Otho, Vitellius ruled only briefly, Suetonius accepted them in the ‘The lives of the twelve Caesars’ as having been part of the emperors’ line of descent. That is, one doesn’t have enough reasons to deny their inclusion as emperors in the Roman history.

If one accepts the omission of the three rulers (Galba, Otho, Vitellius), one should find clarity for oneself pertaining to the issue. Who would the sixth king then be? It is seen to be Vespasian, who is the sixth in the sequence. The weak point of this theory is that Vespasian is seen as the image of ‘the Beast’. But the image of the Beast is not suitable for him. The internal evidence, as well as the external evidence for Vespasian dating does not support Vespasian as the sixth emperor. He didn’t persecute the Christian church during his rule and didn’t promote the emperor cult. (Ladd 1979:229). Suetonius (*The Lives, Vespasian, XV-XVI*, 456) mentions, “He never rejoiced at the violent death of any man; nay he would shed tears, and sigh, at the just punishment of the guilty. The only thing deservedly blamable in his character was his love of money.” Through the statement above, one can suppose that Vespasian is not a proper emperor to be counted as the sixth emperor

²³ In spite of Gentry’s insistence (1989:151-159), according to which the first emperor begins with Julius Caesar, what he said cannot easily be confirmed. In order to regard a contrasting opinion, see Collins (1984:58-64).

of Revelation.²⁴

World Empires: On the basis of Daniel 7: 3-7, the other suggestion is that the seven kings may be associated with particular respective world empires (Colclasure, 1981:149-150; Hendriksen, 2000:170-173). The advocates of this theory regard these heads, not as representing individual rulers, but representing world empires. That is, they avoid the problem of counting the heads of the ‘Beast’ as a historical figure or as a historical ruler. They recognize the seven heads, not as a succession of individual emperors, but as a succession of kingdoms. With this, the five kingdoms are seen as Ancient-Babylonia, Assyria, New-Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greco-Macedonia. One is Rome. The seventh is not yet come. They insist that this seventh head will be an anti-Christian power or empire, which will be in opposition to God’s people prior to Christ’s second coming (Ladd, 1979:229; Hendrikson, 2000:171).²⁵

Even though their theory is very interesting and persuasive, I cannot accept this theory for the following reasons: 1) In chapter 17:9, the Greek word ‘βασιλέις’ can’t be understood as a ‘βασιλεία’. This word ‘βασιλεία’ indicates ‘kingdom’ as an area or district, which is ruled by a king (Louw and Nida, 1993:1.16).²⁶ 2) While this interpretation shows good insight, the problem is with its relevance within the Old Testament, through which the book of Revelation was deeply influenced. Even though Daniel interprets chapter 7:3-7 and verse 17 to contain the theme regarding the four kingdoms, the book of Revelation must not be

²⁴ For more information about scholars regarding Augustus as first emperor, see Rissi (1966:81), Swete (1977:220), Barclay (1983:146-147). In his book “The history of Tacitus”, Tacitus (1.1) regards Augustus to have been the first emperor – in the following way: “I begin my work with the time when Servius Galba was consul for the second time with Tius Vinius for his colleague. Of the former period, the 820 years dating from the founding of the city, many authors have been treated; and while they had to record the transactions of the Roman people, they wrote with equal eloquence and freedom. After the conflict at Actium, and when it became essential to peace, that all power should be centered in one man, these great intellects passed away.” Even though Tacitus also regards Augustus as the first emperor in terms of the book of Revelation, one couldn’t accept this point of view - emphasizing only the historical perspective. This point of view ignores the intention of the author as a theologian. About this problem, Beasley-Murray (1992:257) points out well that apocalyptic traditions can not only be applied to history, if apocalyptic traditions are only applied to history, precision is not to be looked for.

²⁵ For the advocates of this theory, see Seiss (1974:392-394), Ladd (1979:228-231). Even though they regard these seven heads as a succession of secular empires, the detailed explanation is something different among them.

²⁶ According to Louw and Nida (1993:1.480), ‘βασιλεύς’ means “one who has absolute authority within a particular area and is able to convey this power and authority to a successor (though in NT times, certain kings ruled only with the approval of Roman authorities and had no power to pass on their prerogatives)-king.”

applied directly to the Old Testament. It is a fact, that Revelation is full of the Old Testament quotations and allusions. John, however, didn't quote the Old Testament directly to his sources, but rather reinterpreted his source to deliver his new message to his receiver's particular situation (Pauline, 2001:113-121). Charles (1975:1.lxvi) points out that John does not definitely make a direct quotation from the Old Testament, even though he continually incorporates his sources from the Old Testament.²⁷

Even though John was in the midst of the Old Testament tradition as a prophet, he didn't follow the Old Testament literally. As a revealer of the New Revelation, he looked for a new understanding or new interpretation of the Old Testament (cf. Bauckham, 1993b:18-22). For this reason, I can't accept this theory, regarding the seven kings (Rev. 17:10-11) particularly with respective world empires as a legitimate interpretation. 3) The historical relevance of such a literal interpretation, counting the seven heads as world empires, may be in contrast with Revelation's symbolic use of numbers.

John, as a historian, didn't want to give historical information to his suffering community. Neither did the suffering community, which was in Asia Minor, want to receive historical information from John (cf. Fiorenza, 1985:192-199; Thompson, 1986:147-171; 1990:171-197). Perhaps, they didn't want to be bothered with the endeavour of determining who the first emperor was, or whom they should count as the sixth emperor. The first century Christians would not follow the exact succession of Roman emperors without any problem (cf. Beckwith 1967:708). This is not a matter of historical information, but a matter of theological or symbolic meaning to give a "prophetic exhortation and interpretation" (Fiorenza, 2001:8). Chapter 17 is filled with symbolic characters and numbers to reveal the false and violent oppression of Rome to the people of God (Bauckham, 1993b:35-39). I would finally like to proceed to the 'symbolic interpretation' (Mounce, 1977:315; Wall,

²⁷ Beale (1998:62-63) divides the criteria of Old Testament allusions in the following way: 1) Clear allusion - these passages or words are almost identical to the Old Testament, therefore it shares some common meaning with the Old Testament. 2) Probable allusion - even though it doesn't share a common meaning with the Old Testament, it does have some idea or wording, which can be traceable to the Old Testament. 3) Possible allusion- it reflects the wording or concept of Old Testament passages. Fiorenza (1985:135-140) admits the Old Testament allusions and quotations in the book of Revelation. She doesn't miss its own historical-theological situation, that is, as a function of strengthening and consoling the Christian community in Asia Minor, which has experienced persecution and suffering 'because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (Rev. 1:9). Bauckham (1993b:4-5) also recognizes allusions of the Old Testament in the book of Revelation, but he considers that it is not a formal quotation, but a reinterpreted quotation or re-examined allusions.

1991:208), as applicable to this section.

Pertaining to this section (chap. 17:10-11), the most satisfactory theory will regard the seven kings as resembling a symbolic meaning (Johnson, 2001:249-253). Owing to this reason, the number seven represents a symbolic or spiritual number, as a number of completeness (cf. Beckwith, 1967:708). In Revelation, wherever the number seven is used (e.g. chaps. 2-3: seven churches; 6-8: seven seals; 8-11: seven trumpets; 16: seven bowls; 17: seven kings), it must be interpreted as a symbolic meaning²⁸, that is, having a complete number. For this Mounce (1977:316) mentions that

The single purpose of the apocalypticists in all such number schemes is to declare the imminent end of the age. In Revelation the seven kings represent the entire period of the Roman domination regardless of the exact number of emperors. The important point is that the end is drawing near.

John wanted to give a prophetic message to his communities who were under the pressures of conflict, crisis, persecution, and compromise (Boring, 1989:9). What John wanted to give to his faithful community was the ‘news of victory’, which is given to the conquerors. They were persecuted and differentiated at the hand of Rome or Domitian or ultimately, Satan. That is why John wrote to console his faithful community and to encourage them as the conquerors, by describing that Rome would be receiving the judgment as a harlot (e.g. 17:1). According to Bauckham (1993b:17), Revelation gives Christians a prophetic counter-image which provides its readers with a different symbolic universe. Even though they suffered and were persecuted at the hand of the enemies, the reason for ‘victory’ which would be given to the faithful Christians was in the fact that the Lamb overcame his enemies on the cross and through his resurrection (Rudolph, 2005:131-133). That is our guarantee. That is the promise of Christ to obtain materially the ‘victory’ as the conquerors.

²⁸ For the advocates of symbolic interpretation of this section (17:10-11), see Kiddle (1940:349-351); Lenski (1943:504-506); Caird (1966:217-219); Beckwith (1967:704-708); Barnes (1976:388-389); Mounce (1977:314-317); Sweet (1979:256-258); Beagley (1987:92); Wall (1991:207-208); Beale (1999:870-878). Even though these scholars regard the seven kings as having a symbolic meaning and agree to consider the number seven (the seven kings) as the Roman rulers or Roman power from the beginning to the end, one should keep in mind that it was deeply embedded in the real concrete world of history in which the first century Christian lived.

II.1.1.3. Summary

Until now, I have considered the external and internal evidences according to the dating of Domitian. According to the testimony of Irenaeus in Asia Minor, this research has revealed the dating in which Revelation was written to be in the period of the reign of Domitian. In terms of the external and internal evidences, the book of Revelation does not indicate proof of a systematic and general persecution in the period of Nero. Rather, it reveals various problems such as conflict with Jews (e.g. 2:9; 3:9), persecution (e.g. 1:9; 2:13), and self-satisfaction (e.g. 3:17; 17:3-4; 18:7) under Domitian's rule (Keresztes, 1989:1.99; contra Moberly, 1992:376-393). Reddish (1982:104) divides the persecution under Domitian rule into three categories: persecution by the Jews, persecution by pagan neighbours, and official persecution by the government.

As Du Rand (1997a:234; contra Wilson, 1993:587-605) points out, a dating of Revelation (95-96 CE) provides a suitable situation within which the message of Revelation can be read and understood. A dating of Revelation (95-96 CE) provides the social situation between the seven churches and the larger social communities (cf. DeSilva, 1992a:273-302) and what the seven churches faced. As one searched for the evidences stated above, one found that the 'late dating' seemed more suitable, owing to the 'temple measuring (11:1-2)' and 'the counting of the seven kings (17:10-11)' in terms of internal evidence.

One can't accept the fact that as 'early dating' scholars insisted, the temple measurement (11:1-2) seems suitable for the earthly Jerusalem temple (contra Du Rand, 1997a:229). And the book of Revelation was written during the reign of Nero, as the sixth emperor, if one begins with Julius Caesar. Kümmel (1975:469) regards the book of Revelation as being written toward the end of the reign of Domitian A.D. 90-95 in Asia Minor. In order to encourage the Christians who were in fact threatened by Rome's destructive persecution, John delivers a confident message of the imminent victory of Christ over the powers of the Antichrist who were against God and his people. That is why the book of Revelation encourages the Christians to be conquerors under serious conflict, crisis, and fighting.

The aim of this section is to clarify the dating of Revelation in order to understand the

prophetic message of this book. Therefore, the message of Revelation in the light of dating was not written against a historical background of recent persecution (cf. Wilson, 1993:605), but in various social, cultural, and political situations (cf. Satre, 1984:63-64). In the oppressed and compromised situations, the request for victory or conquest is a proper message to the Christians who are to be conquerors.

Then, to whom has the promise of ‘victory’ been given and why? What was the situation of the people who received this ‘news of victory’? I would, furthermore, especially like to deal with the ‘literary and social situation or ‘Sitz im Leben’ in the book of Revelation.

II.2. Literary genre and social situation of Revelation

As noted above, Revelation was written under pressure from opponents as crisis literature. Differences in details exist among scholars who regard Revelation as crisis literature. Then, what is the literary genre of Revelation? What exactly was the social situation of the first century Christian who lived in the Asia Minor (cf. Thompson, 1990:11-34)? What situations faced the seven churches to which John sent his letters? If the seven churches were in crisis, by what kind of crisis were they confronted? As Collins (1984:84-107) asked, is it a relative deprivation or perceived crisis? If they suffered some crisis under the opponent, is this crisis a very serious crisis or a sporadic one? This is my question about this section.

II.2.1. Apocalypse as crisis literature

It is certain that the apocalypse is crisis literature, even though there are various opinions regarding this. In spite of various opinions concerning the apocalypse as a genre and its life context, one couldn't deny that the apocalypse, as a literary form, was written under the pressure of the enemy, whether it was Roman or Jewish.²⁹ Mounce (1977:24) regards the

²⁹ Collins (1984:84-107) suggests the following list of enemies in the social situation: (1) conflict with Jews, (2) mutual antipathy toward neighboring gentiles, (3) conflict over wealth, which has taken the form of resistance to Rome in the east, Jewish polemic against Rome and social unrest in Asia Minor, (4) precarious relations with Rome, (5) experiences of trauma - see Fiorenza (1985:115-117). Sweet (1979:27-34) distinguishes this social situation as two main factors (1) Jewish-Christian relations (2) compromise with pagan society. Even though he tries to find out the social situation of Revelation, he does miss points in some parts, which try to find out the meaning of persecution or opposition in Revelation. For example, the

book of Revelation as being written to comfort and encourage the people of God in the midst of severe persecution. Du Rand (1997a:235) regards the book of Revelation as being written in the midst of crisis situation owing to various problems. Slater (1999:16, 35) also regards Revelation as crisis and oppression literature (cf. Richards, 1967:16).

What one should ask is that when it began, what the exact meaning and definition of the apocalypse is, and what the similarity and difference is with other apocalyptic literature and so on.³⁰ Roloff (1993:3-4) regards Daniel as the first apocalyptic book in the Old Testament. Daniel was written at the time of oppression by the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C, contra Hasel, 1981:37-49; Shea, 1986:31-36). The essential function of the Jewish apocalypse, such as the book of Daniel, is to provide consolation and to give encouragement and to make perseverance possible in the perilous present. In other words, the book of Daniel was deeply embedded in its historical and political religious circumstances of that time. When one considers the Jewish apocalyptic literature, the most important things are the religious, political, social, cultural and economical circumstances (Russell, 1964:16).

The writings of the Jewish apocalyptic literature are accepted as having been written the dangers of the time in which the people of God lived. That is, one can suppose that the written time of the apocalyptic literature in conjunction with the historical, sociological, political and religious perspectives was a very hard and difficult time for the Jew or Christian (see Collins, 1985:131-143). The message of apocalyptic literature is to exhort and console for a present conflict with the enemies of God's people (Kistemaker, 2001:53). For example, the defilement of the temple by Antiochus IV Epiphanes of 168 A.D and the defilement of the temple by emperor Caligula (39/40 A.D.), and the consequent syncretism created a sense of disillusionment and even despair within Jewish circles (cf. Lombard, 1981:33). That one must regard this kind of crisis or persecution in context is not to simplify that situation which the first Christians confronted. Hurtgen (1993:26) points out that various tribulations and sufferings in the Apocalypse of John appear as a result of

problems of the Laodicean church have included self-complacence or self-satisfaction, as well as Jewish-Christian relation and compromise with pagan society. According to this point of view, he is to simplify the social situation of Revelation.

³⁰ For more information about this topic, see Russell (1964:15-69); Lombard (1981:20-39); Rowland (1982:9-72); Aune (1986:65-96); Hellholm (1986:13-64).

several social, political, economic and religious factors.

Among the Inter-testamental literature, the prominent themes of crisis, martyrdom, and victory appear in Maccabees, because they fought against Seleucid hellenization. Through Maccabees, one discovers symbols of martyrdom and victory for the Jews. In 2 Maccabees 10:1-8, after Maccabaeus recovered the temple and demolished the altars erected by the heathen, the Jews celebrated their victory for eight days and carried garlands and palm-branches as symbols of victory (cf. Wilson, 1996:187). And, also after the victory of Maccabaeus over Nicanor in 2 Maccabees 15:1-37, the Jews praised the Lord who gave them victory.

2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees deal with a central motivation for martyrs to endure their situation in the face of death (Van Henten, 1997:132). In the case of Maccabees, martyrdom can also be considered as the behaviour of the righteous and faithful people as in Revelation (cf. Rev. 6:9-11; 20:4-6). That is why it can also be called crisis literature, because of the martyrdom. In 4 Maccabees 17:10, the people of God, namely martyrs, remain faithful to the Lord unto death and are closely linked with the theme of conquerors in Revelation. In 4 Maccabees, the theme of suffering and victory is one of the prominent features. 4 Maccabees 6:1-35 explains the death of Eleazar who endured the torment and conquered the pains (6:9-10) because of his piety to keep the divine Law. His piety ($\epsilonὐσέβεια$) is closely linked with the faithfulness ($\piστις$) to the Lord that is one of the major characteristics in Revelation (Van Henten, 1997:131; Rev. 1:5; 2:13). Eleazar can be called a conqueror because he kept his faith in God's Law, even though from an earthly perspective he was defeated through suffering and death. That is the way of victory, through suffering in 4 Maccabees (cf. 4 Macc. 9:1-9). By suffering and endurance, the conquerors can obtain the prize of virtue and be with God (4 Macc. 9:8). In terms of victory through suffering, Maccabees is intimately connected with the book of Revelation that consistently portrays victory by means of suffering by the conquerors. As Wilson (1996:193-194) pointed out, 4 Maccabees emphasizes the conqueror motif through the suffering of Jewish martyrs.

II.2.1.1. Apocalyptic literature

The book of Revelation deals with the context of the seven churches, which were deeply influenced by the cultural and historical situations of the first-century Asia Minor. When John wrote his letters to his receivers as a form of Ἀποκάλυψις, he sent his letters to his readers who lived in the complicated context of their own situation. Summers (1951:97) is of the opinion that the book is a message of encouragement for those who suffered persecution, and it provides hope from sorrow and pain in God's own time. It is a book peculiarly adapted to any age of great trouble and perplexity. Even though the context of the apocalyptic literature is to comfort those who were in sorrow, in the context of the seven churches, a number of elements such as comfort, blame, extolment, encouragement are involved.

The term-*Ἀποκάλυψις* is very important so it is necessary to have some information about its context. *Ἀποκάλυψις* means to reveal, to disclose, to make fully known, a revelation.³¹ The apocalyptic literature was written between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D. The root of emergence of the apocalyptic literature lies in the background of the Jewish post-exilic era (cf. Lombard, 1981:29-36). In this specific situation, religious syncretism or religious accommodation, the coercion of the emperor-worship and imperial cult and the conflict with pagan neighbourhood is spread out. It was the function of apocalyptic literature to console and to give hope to those who were under various conflict situations (Collins, 1984:84-107).

According to Russell (1964:16), the apocalyptic literature should be understood in terms of the religious, political, as well as economical situations of the time in the response of faith. In the case of Brown (1997:774-780), the apocalyptic literature was written for those who lived in the time of suffering and persecution. For him, the apocalyptic literature can be expressed through the intervention of an otherworldly being and the vision of the supernatural world to interpret present situations on earth (:775). Apocalyptic literature is used for the interpretation of the present situation. This kind of apocalyptic language may offer hope and consolation in the midst of conflict and persecution. Du Rand (1997a:286) also defines the apocalyptic function as the “present pressing situation.”

³¹ Louw and Nida, (1993:1.339).

In connection with these conflict and crisis circumstances, John wanted to reveal the heavenly perspective to his readers who were persecuted. If one regards the Apocalypse as crisis literature, one can assume that the receivers were at the time confronted by a very difficult situation and with some serious events and problems within and without. As Murphy (1994a:153) mentioned, apocalyptic literature was written in a hostile situation. For Murphy (:171), apocalyptic literature delivers the concrete historical circumstance and its real meaning in terms of a cosmological and eschatological perspective. Therefore, the function of apocalyptic literature is “to console those in crisis” (Murphy, 1994a:171). For example, when one turns to the church in Pergamum, one realizes that Antipas (2:13) was killed because of his faith. Even though one doesn’t know exactly who killed Antipas, when one considers the historical and social contexts of the church, there is no doubt that Pergamum was a place of emperor worship and a centre of Hellenistic culture. Here Christians were confronted by the actual threat of Roman persecution (cf. DeSilva, 1992a:277-278). This suggests that many Christians who refused to worship the emperor as “our Lord and God” (Suetonius, Domitian. 13) experienced much suffering and conflict, because of the name Christ and the title Christian.

To the Romans, Christians were regarded as absolute strangers, outsiders and law-breakers. Consequently, in this situation gradual and intensifying tensions between Rome and the Christians occurred (Kistemaker, 2001:35-37). Through the writings of the apocalyptic literature and the idea of an apocalyptic world-view, they (the Christians) criticized the concrete historical situation they faced. And they revealed emperor worship and the imperial cult as false from a cosmological and eschatological perspective. Therefore, one can say that the Apocalypse was written in response to Romans and Jews within a particular historical background. Pippin (1987:64) expresses the social context of Apocalypse by saying that the social reality of Apocalypse was not only internal but also external. It is the forces of oppression that came from within (the power structure of the indigenous population) and without (the force of Rome and its neighbouring powers). If one wants to belong to the people of God, one had to follow Jesus who was the ‘ethical model’.³² This event is an example of how to live in the face of persecution or crisis and

³² In Revelation, the theme of martyrdom is conspicuous. According to Bauckham (1993b:77), martyrs are those who “have triumphed by participating, through their own deaths, in the sacrificial death of the Lamb.” Even though the theme of martyrdom is used more with military or political issues than with religious matters,

how to live in this world a life of witness as a Christian disciple. From this point of view, Aune (1996:270) explains:

John of Patmos, the author-editor of the Apocalypse, was centrally concerned with Christian discipleship... It was his view, given the existing or imminent social and political situation of the Christians of Anatolia, that death was the almost inevitable consequence for those who remained faithful to the demands of the word of God and were faithful to Jesus.

The victory achieved by Jesus through suffering and death becomes a central paradigm for discipleship in the midst of conflict and persecution (cf. Aune, 1996:278). Therefore, the function of apocalyptic literature is built on the basis of the specific situations such as political, religious, and theological factors experienced as a result of what the people of God faced in a hostile world (Lombard, 1981:36).

II.2.1.2. Victory through death

Martyrdom, in other words death, is a central motif in Revelation (Reddish, 1982:123; Bauckham, 1993b:76-80). John expected the call for endurance and faithfulness to the communities unto death. The central point is on those who shed and keep to the end the blood of martyrdom in order to achieve a victory. According to Bauckham (1993b:79), martyrdom is connected with the victory of the Lamb's followers.

It could especially be related to ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός (Rev, 1:5) concerning Jesus. Jesus was called 'the faithful witness' through his work, which was concluded on the cross. It means that Jesus was the One who bore witness to the truth derived from God.³³ That is why

one can't separate this theme from religious matters. As time went on, this theme was much closer to the religious matters than to the military or political matters. As indicated above by Bauckham, in the book of Revelation, it is related to Jesus' suffering, death, and witness. In his dissertation, Reddish (1982:126) relates ὁ μάρτυς to the concept of martyrdom.

³³ According to Mounce (1977:70), this title assigned to Jesus as a mediator is not limited to his function. He connects this word, namely the faithful witness or witnesses, with the penalty of death, which results from a firm and constant witness. To the Asian Christians about to enter into a time of persecution, Jesus is presented as the faithful witness. He is the 'model' of how to stand firm and never compromise the truth of God. His argument that Jesus is a 'model', which we should follow, is quite correct, but I think it is necessary to expand this theme more. Wall (1991:57-58) regards the mediating function of Jesus as a faithful witness in

Jesus can be called ‘conqueror’ through his suffering and martyrdom (Reddish, 1982:124-125). In Revelation it seems especially true that one can find that any faithful witness, as a follower of Jesus, will endure suffering and persecution. The distinctive mention of faithful witness (e.g.1:5; 2:13; 3:14) indicates the specific situation of the seven churches. The mention of the faithful witness is linked with the death of Christ and the Christians (Beale, 1999:190). Mounce (1977:71) regards the ‘faithful witness’ as a title to encourage and console believer’s suffering in severe persecution and death. For this reason, John encouraged the churches as a ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός. Within chapters 2-3, it is very interesting to find the word 'endurance' (for example, 2:2: τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, 2:3: ὑπομονὴν, 2:19: τὴν ὑπομονήν σου, 3:10: τῆς ὑπομονῆς μου).

The request for endurance implies that within the seven churches, something happened that was crisis to the congregation (Morris, 1999:37). But one does not have any reason to limit these problems merely to persecution or a crisis. The argument that the function of the apocalypse is to console those in crisis is not a satisfactory explanation for the seven churches, which experienced various problems. Tiggelaar (1996:263-265; cf. Collins, 1998:9, 37-42) argues that to regard only the crisis situation in Revelation is to have only a limited value. At best it identifies one of many factors that had an apocalyptic influence.

Antipas, the faithful witness (μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου), is the only person who died as a martyr in Revelation. The verb ἀποκτείνω means that “a person was deprived of physical life” (Rudolph, 2005:208) for his or her faith. The fact that Antipas was killed is based on his being a faithful witness. Antipas expected martyrdom for faith and eschatological victory as conqueror. Reddish (1982:136) argues that faithful believers would participate in the victory as well as the suffering as the conquerors. This is the conqueror motif given to the faithful believers of the seven churches (Bauckham, 1993b:76).

For John, the symbolic and cosmological language as the expression of apocalypse was the communicative instrument to reveal the crisis situation. This resembled hidden dimensions of the world, implying the destruction of evil and the blessing of eternal life to the conquerors (Sappington, 1991:112-137). For the Christians, day to day life was tough.

terms of the restoration of the covenant between God and the community of faith.

Whether the crisis was “relative deprivation” (Cook, 1995:2; contra Meeks, 1983:172) or “perceived crisis” (Collins, 1984:84-107) or not, it can't be denied that the book of Revelation was written in the midst of polarization between God's promise to his faithful people and the harsh reality of history. With regard to the crisis, Collins (1984:113) points out that in most cases the social situation in Revelation reflects not a general characteristic of the life of faith, but the stance to be taken in the context of persecution and suffering, which is seen as the tribulation of the last days.

The intention of John in giving his word of endurance was not limited just to the word endurance, but even beyond it. It is also a proclamation of victory within the suffering (Song, 2003:172). It is a shouting of victory to the world, Rome and Satan. It is a proclamation that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, as well as that he will reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).” It has the function of proclaiming the victory of Jesus, as well as our victory in and through him. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” It implies that the suffering of Jesus should be our suffering and the victory of Jesus should be our victory. The suggestion of Trites (1992:1049) is quite correct in that just as Christ had conquered suffering and death on the cross, so the Christians that faced the situation of suffering and death would conquer and share his victory over the forces of evil too. Just as their Lord had witnessed faithfully even unto death, they also must bear an unflinching testimony.

Revelation must be seen as crisis literature or persecution literature. In spite of this fact, one must keep in mind that it proclaims victory (cf. Russell, 1986:44-45). I don't intend to deal with all the persecution references and crisis passages, but some of them will be dealt with later.

II.2.2. Persecution or Compromise

To begin with, I argued that Revelation was written in Domitian's time. For this, one must look at the social, political and cultural situations of Asia Minor at that time. Otherwise, one won't be able to understand the exact meaning of the message that John wanted to

present to his audiences. Because John was a man conditioned by social, cultural, and political situations in the first century, it is necessary to see Revelation in the light of a framework in Asia Minor. Malina (1993:67-68) mentions as follows:

Instead of individualism, what we find in the first-century Mediterranean world is what might be called a strong group orientation. Persons always considered themselves in terms of the group(s) in which they experienced themselves as inextricably embedded. ... our first-century person would perceive himself or herself as a distinctive whole set in relation to other such wholes and set within a given social and natural background.

In Revelation, one finds various verses that indicate persecution throughout the text (e.g. 1:9; 2:3, 9, 10, 13; 3:10; 6:9; 13:10; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2; 20:4). Why were Christians being persecuted at the hand of their opponents? Why did Christians have to suffer – was it due to their commitment to the word of God and their testimony regarding Jesus? Some of these verses indicate that Christians had to endure severe suffering and even persecution. The reason that these Christians suffered was not due to criminal activities, but to the fact that they were Christians, following Christ (Reddish, 1982:120). Among the reasons, one should consider their situations such as the emperor worship and imperial cult, which were widespread in Revelation.

II.2.2.1. Emperor worship and Imperial cult

In contrast to the fact that the most important church leaders were killed (e.g. the death of Peter and Paul at the hands of Nero as emperor)³⁴, persecution against Christians, in the

³⁴ As most commentators agree, the death of Peter and Paul could be have happened at the time of Nero. Especially, on the basis of I Clement, V. 4-7, it was known too that Peter and Paul were killed as victims of the Neronic persecution (Goppelt, 1970:102-107). In spite of consensus about the persecution situation, there are some hot debates as to when Peter and Paul were killed. Generally the three emperors' times were considered as suitable dating, that is, Nero, Domitian and Trajan's time. According to tradition, Domitian and Trajan's time was rejected by most commentators. In the case of Peter, one can suppose that the civil persecution could not have happened, because of the positive attitude toward the state (e.g. I Pe. 2:13). If one compares this text with Revelation, one can easily find some disharmony. As the advocates of 'early dating' insist, if Revelation was written at the time of Nero, in contrast with Peter, John doesn't show a positive attitude toward the state. That is why one can't accept Nero's time as a written time of Revelation (although one can't deny hostility between Christians and Romans in Nero's time). There are lots of conflicts, persecutions, crises, compromising and terrible events, which one can't properly understand in Revelation. If

days that John wrote to the seven churches, was most probably not systematic, but a sporadic phenomenon with limited persecution (Sweet, 1979:26). The persecution of Christians was limited and only a few people were persecuted and suffered at the time of Domitian. Even though he was called the “second Nero” (Beale, 1999:18), he had done some good work as emperor. He rebuilt many buildings that had been destroyed by fire (Suetonius, Domitian:V). He served the people with shows, races, and games (Suetonius, Domitian:IV). Domitian tried to deal with legal affairs diligently and tried to suppress corruption.

Whenever one thinks about Domitian, one must consider him as having both good and bad traits. In spite of certain good traits he had, one can't deny that he could be recognized as a bad emperor in the light of Christian history (Thompson, 1990:16). The ancient historians divide a boundary between the ‘good emperors’ and the ‘bad emperors’. The good emperors were Titus, Nerva, and Trajan as the saviours of Rome, but the bad emperors like Nero and Domitian were regarded as the destroyers of Rome (Pippin, 1987:23).³⁵ One of the reasons for Domitian’s persecution of Christians was that of ‘emperor worship’.

For the Roman Empire, the emperor and imperial cult was the “complex web of symbols that constituted the imperial cultural order” (Howard-Brook & Gwyther, 1999:102). In those days, the emperor worship and imperial cult were a social phenomenon that influenced all areas of life (Price, 1984:15-16). The book of Revelation was not written in a vacuum. The emperor worship and imperial cult of Rome combined the people of the cities in the broader situation of the empire. As Bauckham (1993b:17) insists, Revelation’s readers in Asia Minor were constantly faced with powerful images of the Roman vision at emperor worship and the imperial cult. In Revelation, that is why one can see many objects participating in professional and civic life. For example, in the Pergamum and Thyatira churches, John was in conflict with local church leaders who were eating food sacrificed to

one considers these two writings as a same dating (Nero’ time), how can one harmonize and overcome this irony?

³⁵ Pippin (1987:1-60) looks at Revelation as ‘resistance literature’. As the hermeneutical key for the Apocalypse, she uses the Marxist literary hermeneutic method as a major method. Rather than ‘a view from above’, in order to reveal the relevance of the social situation of Domitian’s time, she uses ‘a view from below’. I think that this is a good insight to reveal the social situation of Domitian’s time. For this reason, she regards the holy book of Christianity as the stories and struggles of the oppressed. She divides the aspects of Domitian’s rule threefold: ‘the relation to the senate’, ‘the policy in the East’, ‘the ruler-cult’ (1987:24).

idols (e.g. 2:14, 20). Eating food sacrificed to idols means “an act of idolatry, a bowing down to their gods” (Thompson, 1990:122). That is, eating food sacrificed to idols can closely be connected with emperor worship and the imperial cult that John rejected. One will now focus on this issue of ‘emperor worship’.

II.2.2.1.1. Emperor worship

Since Julius Caesar, emperor worship appeared in Rome and the emperor himself was the descendant of divine ancestors. Julius Caesar himself was “the major object of the worship” (Taylor, 1931:181). As the Roman elite participated in the emperor-worship, recognizing both Augustus and Julius Caesar as divine (Thompson, 1990:104), the senate decided to include Caesar in the line of their gods. After his death, the deification of Caesar became a model to be followed (cf. Schowalter, 1993:62). As a matter of fact, the divinity, which Caesar tried to establish during his life, was the essential feature in the Roman Empire. Therefore, the cult of emperor-worship in the Roman Empire appeared not instantaneously by decree at the time of Domitian, but was a “prolonged process beginning with Julius Caesar” (Reddish, 1982:90; cf. Thompson, 1990:104-107).

One is certain that Domitian insisted on his claim to divinity more than any other emperors prior to him. That’s why Domitian promoted the cult of emperor-worship and his divinity to the people who were under his rule. One should especially keep in mind that religion is either a political phenomenon or a political matter (Price, 1984:15-16). In contrast with the modern era, in ancient times politics and religion couldn’t be separated from each other. The policy of imperial cult was a good political field in order to maintain the power of Rome. In Rome, power was connected with emperor-worship (cf. Botha, 1988:90). Price (1984:242, 247) mentions:

Power was not a possession of the emperor, wielded over his subjects and supported ultimately by force; power is a term for analyzing complex strategic situations... Religion just as much as politics is concerned with power..., both are

ways of systematically constructing power.³⁶

Domitian enforced his claim as emperor and as a god unto his people. When Domitian sent out a letter to his procurators, he wrote: “Our lord and our god” (*Dominus et deus noster*) (Suetonius, Domitian, xiii). He called himself a lord and god. Concerning his personality, Suetonius (Domitian, xi) mentions his cruelties as “not only excessive, but also subtle and unexpected.” To be sure, Domitian presented himself as a god during his lifetime,³⁷ and thereby executed his power through the use of improper symbols (Schowalter, 1993:69; cf. Keresztes, 1989:1.83-101).³⁸ When one considers these kinds of social and political situations, he must have been a terrible emperor who demanded emperor worship during his rule.

In Revelation, persecution and conflict occurred because Christians rejected worshipping the worldly king (Beale, 1999:5; e.g. 2:13, 24; 6:9; 11:7; 13:7, 15). If Christians didn’t participate in the emperor worship, they experienced an intolerance of society because “the worship of emperors played an increasingly important role in society at many levels” (Kistemaker, 2001:37). Chapters 2-3 suggest that Christians were tempted to avoid persecution and conflict by participating in emperor worship (e.g. Pergamum, Thyatira, and Philadelphia). In Revelation chapter 13 provides an example of emperor worship personalized as the beast (cf. Barclay, 1979:76-97). The characteristics of the beast in chapter 13 explain their power as evil, which is specified as imperial images (Botha,

³⁶ In order to avoid a range of problems when dealing with the imperial cult, Price (1984:1-22) suggests the following: 1) the problem of the imperial cult or imperial ritual ⇒ the emphasizing the evocative power of ritual and symbolism as a cognitive system; 2) christianizing assumptions and categories must avoid as a major stumbling block in interpretations of the imperial cult ⇒ in terms of Christianity perspective, to apply other religious phenomenon is to avoid in the analysis of the imperial cult; 3) the fact that politics and religion should be separated ⇒ politics and religion are both sides of the same coin, therefore they can’t be separated from each other; 4) the problem of the ethnocentric prejudice, through statement above Price wants to give a correct understanding concerning cultic ritual and doesn’t miss the power structure behind them.

³⁷ The custom of the Romans was usually to deify their emperors who died (Ferguson, 1970:96). While the early emperors were very careful to accept direct worship or divine cult in Rome during their lifetime, later emperors like Domitian accepted their emperors-worship or divine honours without any problem. For more information about this topic, see Taylor (1931:142-180); Ferguson (1970:88-98). The emperors who demanded emperor-worship in their lifetime were Caligula, Nero, Domitian and Commodus. In the case of Claudius, he did not accept any divine honour. After his death (A.D. 14), Augustus was accepted by the senate as one of the gods of the state (Ferguson, 1970:91).

³⁸ In order to understand Plinys’ discussion of the relationship between the emperor and the gods, Schowalter (1993:55-61) involves these three elements in the ritual activity as quoting Pliny’s comments; 1) prayer 2) sacrifice 3) priesthoods.

1988:94-96). If Christians worship the beast, they should engage in intimate relationship with Rome. But if Christians do not worship the beast, they should engage in intimate relationship with God. That is why Revelation 13:10 demands that Christians should stay faithful as the conquerors in the midst of emperor worship (cf. Rudolph, 2005:227).

II.2.2.1.2. Imperial cult

In Rome, power was “a network of relations” (Pippin, 1987:58) in all areas of life including the social, cultural, political, and religious fields. For a tyrant like Domitian, the imperial cult was a very important strategy to maintain imperial policies like the ‘Pax Romana’. At the time, the execution of the ‘Pax Romana’ was a widespread social policy in Rome’s provinces as well as in Rome itself (Wengst, 1987:8-9). One must keep in mind that the ‘Pax Romana’ was a political goal of the Roman emperor and senate who wanted to maintain peace through the provinces. Through this kind of imperial policy or emperor-worship, the emperor constructed power for himself and offered “*imperium Romanum*” (Wengst, 1987:10) to his people by a deification of himself. Therefore, one should recognize that the cult of emperor worship played a significant political role in ensuring power for the rulers of the empire.

In terms of the imperial cult and emperor-worship ensuring an intimate relationship with Rome, Price (1984:248) mentions that the imperial cult in the light of its power structure was like the cults of the traditional gods that formed a relationship of power structure between the subjects and their rulers. The imperial cult was a major part of the web of power that enhanced the fabric of society. The imperial cult was expressed in the worship of personified powers, virtues, and vital religious phenomena under the Republic (Ferguson, 1993:198).

As Ferguson (1970:93) argued, at the time, the imperial cult was vigorously widespread in Asia Minor. Biguzzi (1998:280-290) also suggests that the Asian cities were the centre of imperial cult and the major cities [Pergamum (B.C. 29), Smyrna (A.D. 21), and Ephesus (A.D. 89-90)] vied for the privilege of erecting a temple. This implies that persecution or discrimination caused a crisis within the churches of Asia Minor. They wanted to escape

their present situation. That's why John sent his prophetic message to his suffering people to encourage them and to console them. His prophetic message gave them a heavenly perspective of what was wrong and why and how their lives as Christians in a pagan environment should be organized. This was the social and political situation that the first Christians were confronted with at the time.

In the midst of the background of the emperor-worship, imperial cult and the social-political situations, Revelation appeared. According to DeSilva (1992a:273-281), there is little evidence of widespread persecution. But the relation between the state and Roman religious life enforced tremendous pressure on all citizens because the imperial cult was an important tool to maintain the imperial system towards the citizen. The first century Christians who received John's letter were confronted with a 'life-death' conflict between the Church and Rome. The Christians had to decide to choose between "Christ and Caesar" (Pippin, 1987:49). To make a decision between 'Christ and Caesar' was the dilemma for the first century Christians who lived in difficult conditions. If they confessed 'Christ' as their Saviour, they might have been persecuted at the hand of the Roman authorities. But if they denied 'Christ' as their Saviour, the Roman authority would have saved them as followers of the Roman doctrines (Boring, 1989:18-21).

Revelation didn't allow for a neutral stance. If Christians wanted to follow Jesus as John had done, Christians should be ready even to die for him. That is the perspective 'from above, from heaven', which John wanted to communicate to his community (cf. Pippin, 1987:45-52). John provided a prophetic criticism of the system of Roman power (Bauckham, 1993b:38).³⁹ John suggested a perspective 'from above' so that his people may be 'conquerors' in Christ, even though they lived in terrible times.

³⁹ Bauckham (1993b:35-39) portrays the Roman Empire as a system of violent oppression built on conquest and oppression. He divides this system of violent oppression into two categories: 1) political tyranny, 2) economic exploitation. He furthermore explains these two major symbols as a sea-monster (e.g. Rev, 13,17) and the harlot of Babylon (e.g. Rev, 17-18). He also explains that the Beast represents the military and political power of the Roman Empire and the harlot of Babylon the economic exploitation of the Empire. The perspective of Bauckham that the beast represents the political aspect and the harlot of Babylon the economic aspect is quite correct, but as noted above, during the ancient times, it was not really possible to separate those fields from each other. When one considers chapter 13, as Bauckham said, it is true that chapter 13 mainly emphasizes the political aspect. But when one considers chapter 13:16-18, it seems clear that it is connected to an economic problem. In the case of chapters 17-18, ostensibly these chapters mainly emphasize an economic problem. But it seems quite clear that this was also connected with a political problem. Both sides of these should be emphasized accordingly.

The book of Revelation provides a ‘New Perspective’ towards the worldly power through the emperor worship and imperial cult. The imperial cult in those days existed everywhere (Friesen, 2005:363). *Neokoros* (temple warden) was an official centre for the imperial cult in Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira. All citizens must participate in the official religion, implying temple worship and the idolatrous guild banquets that were at the centre of daily life (Kraybill, 1996:130-132). Roman rule is based on the military victory, shedding the blood of people, but John provided an ‘alternative vision’ towards the society, emperor and imperial cult through the book of Revelation (Friesen, 2004:309; cf. Bauckham, 1993b:10; e.g. 13:4). John criticized the economic, social, and religious situations of the Roman Empire in the cities and portrayed it as “a system of violent oppression” (Bauckham, 1993b:35). According to Harland (2000:117), “honoring Roman emperors or representatives in any form is utterly opposed to honouring and worshipping God and the Lamb: the former is idolatry or ‘fornication’.” Therefore, the Christians who lived in Asia Minor were encouraged to stay firm in the word of God and the testimony of Christ in order to obtain an eschatological blessing in the New Jerusalem as the conquerors.

Thus far, I have mainly argued about the relationship between Rome and the Christians in the light of a literary genre and social and political conflict situations (e.g. 13:4, 14-17; 14:9; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). I would, henceforth, like to deal with the seven churches, which are present in Revelation, chapters 2-3.

II.2.3. Summary

Until now I have endeavoured to explain the background of the book of Revelation in terms of the dating, literary genre and social and political situations in order to illuminate the major theme of this dissertation, which will be discussed later. I believe that the work rendered above forms the groundwork for an analysis of Revelation, prior to endeavouring on some research on the main parts of Revelation, because, without a proper understanding of the background, it is not possible to understand the text as it is.

First of all, the book of Revelation was written as crisis literature for those who were in a very difficult situation in a hostile world. But the crisis that the first Christians faced

consisted of various elements such as political, economical, and religious factors (Hurtgen, 1993:26). When one defines the book of Revelation as crisis literature, one doesn't need to define the crisis only in terms of persecution. That is, the crisis situation reflects one of many crisis situations that were revealed in the apocalyptic text.

Among many crisis situations, such as leaving their first love (2:4), conflict with Jews (2:9), compromise (2:14, 20), and self-satisfaction (3:17), emperor-worship and imperial cult were prominent motifs, reflecting the crisis situation for the first Christians. Emperor worship and imperial cult revealed the violent oppression of the Roman Empire in order to rule the whole world in the light of the earthly perspective. The Emperor was called a god and the imperial cult was enforced. For example, Domitian was called “Our lord and our god” (*Dominus et deus noster*; Suetonius, Domitian, xiii). The fact that emperor worship and the imperial cult were vigorously enforced in Asia Minor reflected the life situation of Christians in a hostile world (Friesen, 2005:352-356). In contrast with an earthly perspective wherein the Roman Empire had been regarded as the object of worship to the whole world, the book of Revelation provided a new understanding for the present reality – a heavenly perspective. Christians must choose the right way: whether to worship God or to worship Satan (cf. Pippin, 1987:49). According to Guthrie (1992:70-83), God is the centre of Christian worship.

II.3. Conclusion

The dating of and situation under which Revelation was written were very important elements in revealing the meaning of Revelation. The advocates who insist on the ‘early dating of Nero’ (cf. Gentry, 1989:17-120) and the persecution situation of Revelation (cf. Morris, 1999:35-41; contra Bell, 1979:102) suggest that Revelation through internal and external evidences was written at the early date, and then in response to the persecution situation. But, because these kinds of arguments simplify the content of Revelation, one could not see the dynamic power of Revelation within the text. That is, in the book of Revelation, one couldn’t find any mention of systematic persecution, but only a sporadic phenomenon with limited persecution against Christians (Harland, 2000:103). In contrast with the statement noted above, John was aware of and engaged with the various social,

cultural, political, and religious forces, which the conquerors had to face. I accept Domitian dating as the time of writing of Revelation as a result of the internal and external evidence. But, one is not able to accept that Revelation was only written in a response to a situation of persecution (cf. Kraybill, 1996:24-40). It means that Christians in Asia Minor have been surrounded by many problems through persecution, crisis, compromising, self-satisfaction, sloth, and social conflict (DeSilva, 1992a:286-298).

The rhetorical situation of John's prophetic message to the seven churches was based on the crisis and conflict situations. That is why Christians were expected to conquer their life situations in terms of an eschatological war (Bauckham, 1993b:88). According to Duff (2001:14), the crisis situation of Revelation came from a social conflict within the churches (contra Friesen, 2005:352-356) and because of this kind of conflict John sent his prophetic message rhetorically to strengthen his community. As Duff argued, Revelation was sent to solve some problems the seven churches had to confront. But the categories of conflict should be expanded to other dimensions like emperor-worship and the imperial cult. Therefore, one should recognize that the crisis situations were derived from various social, historical, economical, and religious elements without and within the churches.

In terms of the rhetorical situation, John's purpose was to provide a true but hidden understanding of the present reality (Gilbertson, 2003:56). That is why John used to provide various symbolic images, such as the tree of life and the golden crown, to deliver the message of salvation and judgment, and to give a new understanding of the present reality. Their rhetorical situations were based on the urgency of the churches as a marginalized group in a hostile world. According to Wilson (1996:45), the rhetorical situations of the churches were as follows: first, present or imminent persecution by the Roman Empire; secondly, pressure by social and religious forces from Jewish and pagan societies; finally the mind that was unprepared for the coming, and the eschatological kingdom of God. The different rhetorical situations of the seven churches were well matched with the promise statements that were given to the conquerors. It means that to be conquerors in their own contexts they needed to conquer their own difficult contexts. Thus, the whole church can be described as belonging to the conquerors (Lee, 2001:263).

This hermeneutic understanding of the rhetorical situations (cf. Kirby, 1988:197-204; Du Rand, 1997a:258-259) might be helpful in interpreting the book of Revelation. This does not actually form part of the major focus of this dissertation. To focus on this current topic in this section, I will consider the promise statements regarding the ‘conqueror’, focusing on chapters 2-3. In the promise statements, John delivered the prophetic message through which he exhorted the Christians to endure and conquer in the present time of distress (Vanderkam, 1998:306; cf. Rogers, 1990:69-78). Why then were these promise statements given to each of the churches? It should also be determined who the ‘conquerors’ were in this situation. Whom will God reward in the end? What is the framework of these promise statements? These kinds of questions could be dealt with by evaluating the conquerors’ hostile circumstances and their task to conquer it. In chapter 3, in attempting to reveal the identity of the conquerors, I try to deal with the promise statements that were given to the conquerors such as the tree of life (2:7), the crown of life (2:10), the white stone (2:17), the morning star (2:28), the white robe (3:5), the pillars (3:12), and the throne (3:21) against the background of the seven churches.