

CHAPTER 5

LIFE AND DEATH IN REVELATION: A SURVEY

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

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

1. Background

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

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

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

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

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

2. Genre: Apocalypse or prophecy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. The message of Revelation in short

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a. Hope for the church amidst crisis

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

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

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

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

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

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

b. Hope for church into the future

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

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

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

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

c. Hope because God reigns victorious forever and ever

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Life and death in Revelation

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

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

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

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

5.1. God and life

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

5.2. The living Lamb

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

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

5.3. *Physical life and death*

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

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

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

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



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

5.5. *The death of Death*

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

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

6. Summary

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

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

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

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



CHAPTER 6

THE ONE WHO IS: GOD AND LIFE IN REVELATION

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

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

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

1. Revelation's portrayal of God

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

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

⁸⁴ Taken from the *Good News Bible*.

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

1.1. The incomparable God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.2. *The God beyond time*

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

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

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

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

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

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

1.3. The sovereign Ruler

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

1.4. Summary on God in Revelation

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

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

2. God and life

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.1. The living God in Revelation

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

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

⁹⁴ Cf. also Chapter 2, 3.2.2.

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

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

i) What is the context?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

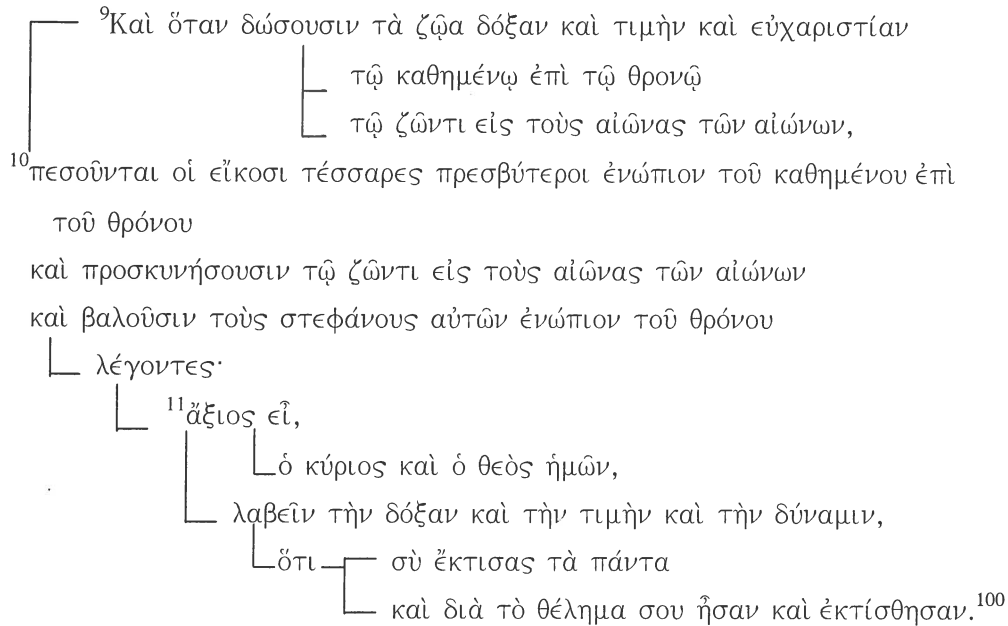
It is precisely because of this ultimate creative power that the rest of the Revelation is possible (Beasley-Murray 1981: 119). In the midst of the seemingly uncontrollable situation in which the church finds itself, the message of the vision is that “the course of history is not determined by political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

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

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

b) “He who lives forever and ever”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

c) The living Creator and King

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁶ My bracketed insert.

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

a) The faithful God who promises life

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

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

b) Worship supposes life

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iv) Summary on the living God in Revelation 4

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) What is the context?

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

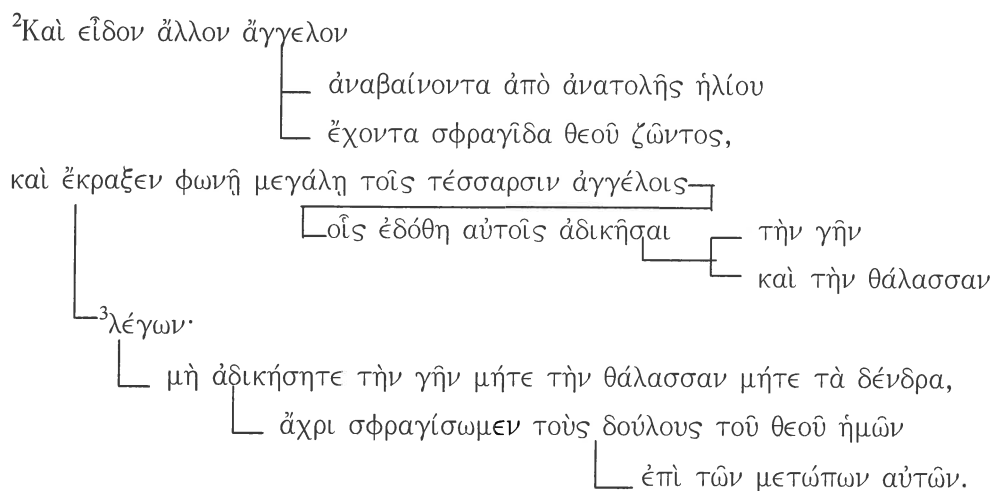
This is a structural feature John uses a number of times in Revelation, i.e. to contrast the suffering with the overwhelming blessing and life awaiting the faithful believers. In Revelation 14, in contrast to the tribulation suffered under the beast in Revelation 13, John sees the 144 000, sealed with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

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

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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



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

b) Seal of the living God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Excursion 3: Who does the 144 000 represent?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

i) What is the context?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

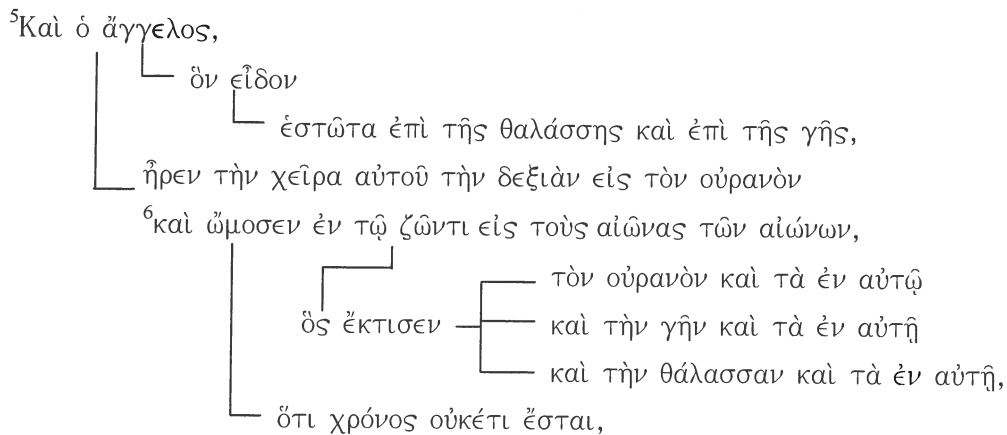
ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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

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

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



b) Textual criticism

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

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

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

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

In terms of verse 7 there are also a few textual variants to consider (Aland & Aland 1993: 651). However, only two or three of them need to be discussed in further detail here. In verse 7a $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\theta\eta$ [aorist indicative] is changed to $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\sigma\theta\eta$ [aorist subjunctive]. This change is only suggested, according to Aune (1998a: 550-551), because $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\theta\eta$ is mistakenly read as governed by $\acute{\omicron}\tau\alpha\nu$, while $\acute{\epsilon}\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\theta\eta$ is actually the main clause [verb] in the sentence [$\acute{\omicron}\tau\alpha\nu$ is to be read in conjunction with the subjunctive $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\lambda\eta$]. Again it is possible to work with the presented text.

A second variant is the insertion of $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$ after $\tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \acute{\epsilon}\alpha\nu\tau\omicron\upsilon \delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ at the end of verse 7 (Aland & Aland 1993: 651). Although the suggested variants are weak, Aune (1998a: 551) is of the opinion that the insertion of $\kappa\alpha\acute{\iota}$ would be more in line with the style of Revelation, using it often as an exegetical insertion. This will not affect our exegesis of the living God in Revelation 10 materially. It is therefore possible, without major distraction, to work with the text as presented.

c) Swearing by the God who lives forever

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

The same title [epithet] is used for God than in Revelation 4:9 and 10, i.e. $\tau\hat{\omega} \zeta\omega\nu\tau\iota \epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma \tau\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu\alpha\varsigma \tau\hat{\omega}\nu \alpha\acute{\iota}\omega\nu\omega\nu$. Also, similar to the text of Revelation 4:8-11, the title for God is used in conjunction with the explanation of [in Rev 4:8-11 by

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

d) There is no time left

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary on 2.1.3.

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

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

i.) What is the context?

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

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

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

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

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

¹³⁰ The formula here is μετὰ τοῦτο εἶδον.

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

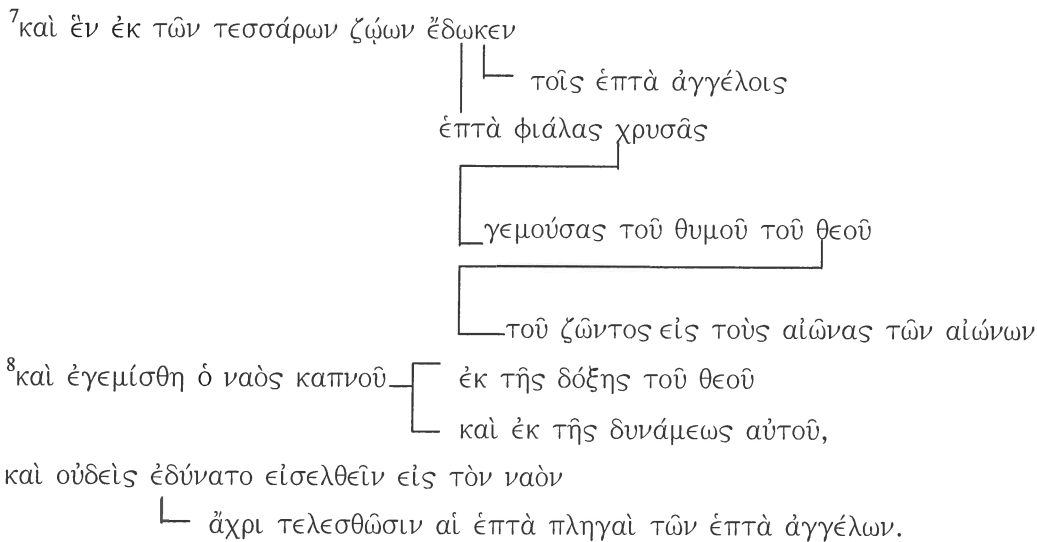
¹³² For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.

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

ii.) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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



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

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

b) Textual criticism

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

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

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

c) Victoriously worshipping the righteous God

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

d) The wrath of God in righteousness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

iii.) Summary on the wrath of the living God

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

Excursion 4: The τέσσαρα ζῶα in Revelation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2. Summary on the living God in Revelation

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

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

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