

## CHAPTER 7

## THE LIVING LAMB

*"O How wonderful and worthy are you? You can take the book and break its seals, for you are the Lamb that has been slaughtered. You gave your blood (i.e. your life) in order that everybody can qualify to be God's people, regardless of where they stay or the language they speak." Rev 5:9.<sup>143</sup>*

### 1. The portrayal of Jesus in Revelation

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

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

The name *Jesus* occurs seven times in Revelation<sup>144</sup>. According to Coetzee (1990b: 281) it is always used as a proper name, referring to the historical person of Jesus [i.e. the Jesus of the Gospels] who lived and worked here on earth. To this name can be added the extended name *Jesus Christ*, which appears only in the prologue of the book (Mounce 1977: 64). It is also used as a proper name for Jesus [similar to Paul's understanding of the name *Jesus Christ* (cf. Barrett 1994: 104)], and refers only to the

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

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

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

However, in Revelation a number of different titles are used for Jesus<sup>146</sup>. Each of these titles describes a different role or characteristic applicable to the Jesus that John wants to portray to his readers, just as different titles were also used for God (cf. Coetzee 1990b: 280-288).<sup>147</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.1. *Jesus as Redeemer*

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.2. *Jesus as Conqueror*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 1.3. *Jesus as sovereign Ruler and Judge*

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

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

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

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

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

#### 1.4. Summary on Jesus in Revelation

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

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

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

are only followed by a verb in the singular (Rev 11:15) or a pronoun in the singular [cf. αὐτοῦ in Rev 22:3 instead of αὐτῶν; cf. also Rev 6:17<sup>151</sup>). He rather creates the impression of a unity within the one God (Bauckham 1993a: 139; Groenewald 1986: 85). This completes the exalted view Revelation portrays of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

## 2. Jesus and life in Revelation

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

### 2.1. *The living Lamb in Revelation*

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

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

##### i) What is the context?

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

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

starts when John, while in exile on the island Patmos, sees the vision of the Son of Man. Aune (1997: 74) deems Revelation 1:9-11 as probably the original beginning of Revelation, to which was then added an epistolary prescript (Rev 1:4-5c) and postscript (Rev 22:21). This set the book in the form of a circular letter sent out to the seven churches in Asia Minor. However, it is only the frame of the Book (Rev 1:4-8 and 22:21) that has these epistolary characteristics (Watson 1997a: 653). The rest of Revelation is a narrative with characteristics of both the apocalyptic and prophetic genres (Du Rand 1991b: 181). The epistolary prescript fits into the overall structure of the prologue as follows<sup>152</sup>:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Excursion 5: The Divine Trinity in Revelation?**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

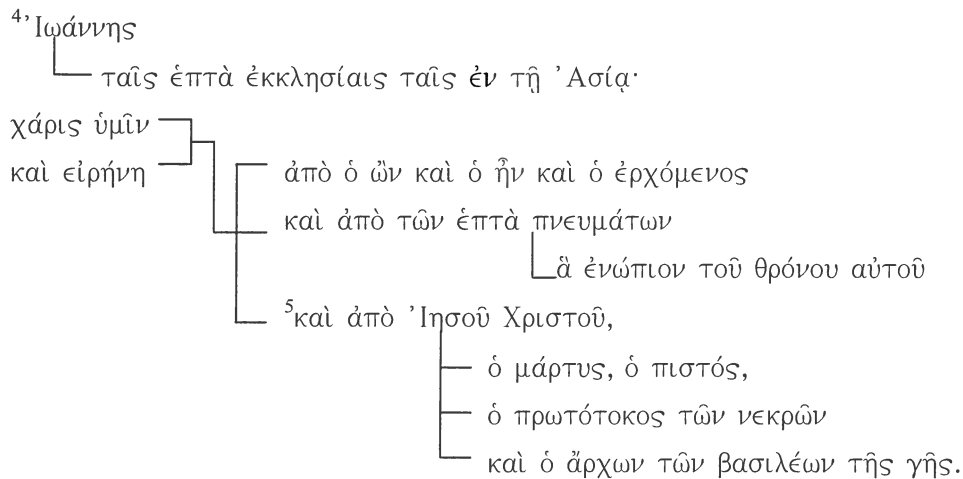
ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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

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



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

#### b) Firstborn from the dead?

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

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

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

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

In the New Testament *πρωτότοκος* is used of Jesus in two distinctive ways: i) Protological, referring to his pre-existence (cf. Col 1:15); ii) in a resurrection context (cf. Rev 1:5; Col 1:18) (Aune 1997: 38-39). In the Christological hymn of Colossians 1:15-20 Paul highlights Christ’s primacy as *πρωτότοκος* in every aspect. He is present as *πρωτότοκος*, not just in his pre-existence at creation (Col 1:15), but also through his redemptive actions, more specifically through his resurrection (Van der Watt 1988: 30-31). In a Messianic context [as Christ is portrayed even in Rev {cf. 1 and 1.1 above}] the concept of sovereignty as status of the firstborn dominates. This is the case in Revelation 1:4-5c, as this is an allusion to the Messianic interpretation of Psalm 89:27<sup>157</sup> (Beasley-Murray 1981: 56). This is also what Paul wanted to emphasise in the hymn of Colossians 1:18 (Mounce 1977: 70-71). John adds the phrase “from the dead” to qualify the Messianic term *πρωτότοκος* (Aune 1997: 39).

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

<sup>157</sup> LXX Psalm 88:28 – cf. Aune (1997: 39).

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

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

Beasley-Murray (1981: 56) sees in this threefold description of Jesus in Revelation 1:5 a possible reference to Christ’s death [faithful witness], resurrection [firstborn from the dead], and ascension and his second coming, as a final fulfilment of his ruling Kingdom [Ruler of the kings on earth] respectively. As the faithful witness [ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός] Jesus showed Himself to be the true martyr [ὁ μάρτυς], staying faithful to His commission unto the end [i.e. his death on the cross]. Through his resurrection then He opened the doors to a new life for believers<sup>160</sup>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

a) Jesus as the ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός

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

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

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

However, Aune (1997: 37-38) has proved that references in Revelation to Jesus as *ὁ μάρτυς* are generally more in connection with his exalted status than his status as a historical person (cf. Mounce 1977: 70). He is “conceived not in a limited sense in reference to His earthly life...but as the true witness of every divine revelation” (Charles 1920a: 14). It is then a reference to Christ who has already overcome death and has been exalted to the right hand of the One who sits on the throne, witnessing unto the truth of the salvation He has proclaimed. This is more in line with the overall exalted picture of Christ that John portrays in Revelation<sup>163</sup>. As the exalted Christ He “guarantees the revelation transmitted through John” (Aune 1997: 37). From this could be deducted that Christ as the faithful witness also guarantees the promise of life to believers (cf. Rev 1:17-18).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christ effectively gave his life [blood] so that believers can have theirs back (Van der Watt 1986b: 185). Again we can see the importance of blood in obtaining the freedom from sins, according to Hebrews 9:22 [a Mosaic view – cf. Lev 17:11<sup>165</sup>] the only medium by which sins could be forgiven (Fensham 1981: 86; De Cock 2004:

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

<sup>165</sup> Cf. Bruce (1990: 227).

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

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

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

iv) Summary: Jesus as *ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν*

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

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

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

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

#### i) What is the context?

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

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

The insertion of prophetic oracles between two sections of text is something regularly done by John. It shows the prophetic element within the genre of Revelation<sup>167</sup>. These two prophetic oracles fit into the structure of the prologue as follows<sup>168</sup>:

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

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

<sup>168</sup> For a detailed structure on Revelation 1-5, cf. Aune 1997.

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

ii) What is in the text?

a) Syntactical analysis

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

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

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

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

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

## b) He who was pierced

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

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

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

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

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

iii) Summary on Revelation 1:7

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

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

i) The context of Revelation 1:9-20

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

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

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

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

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

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

The vision of the Son of Man and the commission to write fit into the overall structure of Revelation as follows<sup>174</sup>:

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

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

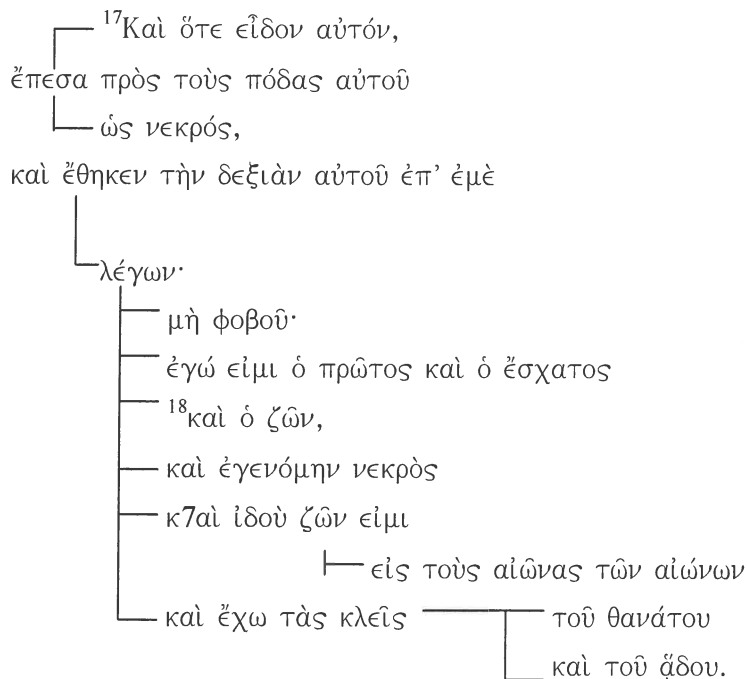
<sup>174</sup> For a detailed structure on Revelation 1-5, cf. Aune 1997. Cf. also the structure used in Annexure A to see how the prologue fits into the overall structure of the Book.

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

ii) What is in the text?

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

a) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 1:17-18



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

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

b) Revelation 1:18b

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

The verse concludes with a reference to Jesus' eternal [living] existence after his death and resurrection, specifically the fact that He has, through his death and resurrection, taken control of the "keys to Death and Hades" (Rev 1:18c)<sup>175</sup>. The entire verse serves to identify the Son of Man to John as none other than Jesus Christ (Groenewald 1986: 43). He is the eternal Judge clothed in glory and power, just as the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7:13<sup>176</sup>. Although different aspects of Jesus [i.e. temporal and eternal] are mentioned here, it is not sensible to discuss them in separate sub-sections. This will have a negative impact on the overall picture that is portrayed by the text of Revelation 1:17-18 as a whole.

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

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

<sup>176</sup> Cf. Footnote 150 and sub-section 1.3 above.

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

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

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

The consequence of Christ's victory over death is that He has control of the keys to Death and Hades (Rev 1:18c; cf. OdesSol 42:17). In this way it is proven beyond

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<sup>177</sup> The only other occurrence seems to be in Revelation 3:2, where it is used in the present imperative (cf. Aune 1997: 102).

doubt that He is Lord over all, the living **and** the dead (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68). Believers can therefore have the assurance that even in death they will not be without the presence and guidance of the Lord (cf. Rom 14:8-9). That Christ emphasises His control of the keys of death is in a way an unusual statement [cf. below], but at the same time it wants to underline his exalted status as the One with ultimate power.

Keys symbolise power. They control access or deny access (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476). In Matthew 16:13-20 Christ entrusted the keys to heaven in the hands of Peter [symbolising the church as bearer thereof – cf. Rev 3:7]. The church therefore has the power to give [or deny] access to the kingdom. With regard to Revelation 1:18 the keys to Death and Hades symbolise the power to release [or keep locked up]. This power is centred in the hands of the exalted Christ, the Judge of the world, worthy to carry them (Ryken, Wilhoit & Longman 1998: 476).

It is difficult to determine whether Christ took control over the keys with his death, and if that is the case, in which manner. In Rabbinic literature keys are mentioned, but they all belonged to God alone. One of them was the key to the grave (cf. Tg Deut 28:12; [Beasley-Murray 1981: 68]). The keys in God's hands are not even entrusted to angels (Aune 1997: 103-104). If this is the case, even Death and Hades, or their rulers, never possessed these keys, i.e. they never really possessed authority over life and death. This, of course, would not be too much of a contradiction, especially if we look back to the Old Testament. There it was made clear that God alone has the power over life [and therefore implicitly over death]. Even though Sheol was deemed to be a place outside of the realm of God, it was still God that sent someone there [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2-3.4].

If God is the only Possessor of keys in the divine realm, it rather seems that the keys to Hades and Death have been handed to Christ [on his exaltation] by God, and was not wrestled away from their domain<sup>178</sup>. Taking possession of these keys again emphasise the high Christology of Revelation (Mounce 1977: 81). The position Christ occupies in this context is one of divine authority, an authority that even includes life and death. The divine appearance is highlighted even further by the

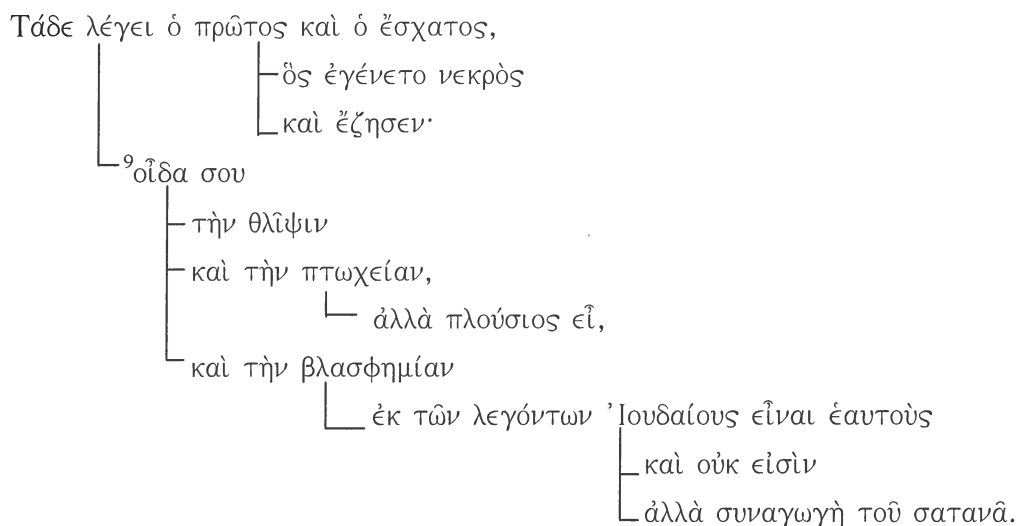
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<sup>178</sup> Cf. however 1 Pet 3:18-20, which could suggest a *descensus ad inferos*, i.e. Christ descending to the realm of Death to fight or proclaim victory (Beasley-Murray 1981: 68; Charles 1920a: 32).

divine brilliance in which the Son of Man is portrayed in the early part of the vision (cf. Mounce 1977: 80).

The divine status and authority afforded to Christ as a result of his victory over death [through his resurrection] enables John to bring a message of hope to believers. The image of the Son of Man wants to give believers the comforting news that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, is in control (Slater 1999: 102). Of course, the Son of Man is the eternal Judge with the two-edged sword, but He is also the Conqueror over all evil, including death (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 52). That Christ is given the keys to Death and Hades by God implies that God has always been in control and is now sharing this control with Christ. Because Christ is in control of life and death, they can look forward to a future life where death will have no further impact on them (Trites 1998: 282). Even if death does come over them, they would still be in the hands of the One who possesses the keys to Death and Hades. That is why John need not be afraid of Him (Rev 1:17).

c) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 2:8b-9



The focus is on Christ addressing his church [as is the case in all the proclamations]. He addresses the congregation as the One who died, but who has overcome death through his resurrection [drawn from the vision of Rev 1:9-20]. The combination of past and present confirms the historicity of the occurrences [cf. (a) above]. As the Conqueror over death He can comfort believers facing probable death through

persecution. They also have the assurance that He knows about all the suffering they are going through, listing each of them (Rev 2:9).

d) Revelation 2:8

The letters to the seven churches are more like prophetic oracles than formal epistles (Beasley-Murray 1981: 72). Each of the seven proclamations [“letters”] starts off with a prophetic messenger formula, which is commonly found in the Old Testament, specifically in the prophetic literature: *Τάδε λέγει...*<sup>179</sup>. The subject of the formula [in Revelation] is always the exalted Christ, introduced to the churches through one of the divine acclamations attributed to Him in Revelation 1:9-20 (cf. Aune 1997: 121). It is evident that the acclamations used for Christ in some or other way link up with elements of the actual situation within the church to which the proclamation is addressed (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 72; Groenewald 1986: 52).<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, they reappear [just as the eschatological promises at the end of each proclamation] in the final section of Revelation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 46).

In the proclamation to Smyrna (Rev 2:8-11) Christ introduces Himself as *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν*. In Revelation the phrase *ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος* always refers to Christ (cf. Rev 1:17; 2:8; 22:13). It is an allusion to the divine title for Yahweh found in Isaiah (cf. Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12). The title corresponds to the divine self-declaration by God in Revelation 1:8 [*τὸ ἄλφα καὶ τὸ ὦ* - cf. (a) above (Bauckham 1993b: 54)]. It therefore attributes to Christ the same eternal status [devout from temporal barriers] as has been attributed to God throughout Revelation [cf. Chapter 6 above, 2.1.1].

Identifying Christ as *ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν* in Revelation 2:8 wants to give believers hope in troubled times, urging them to stay faithful, even unto death (Rev 2:10; cf. Mart Pol 17:1). It functions as a reminder of Christ’s sacrificial death. They need not fear even facing the possibility of death, as their Lord has already gone through the gates of death. He has conquered death and is now alive. Implicitly this

<sup>179</sup> The formula is found 250 times in the LXX as a translation of *כה אמר יהוה* (Aune 1997: 121). It always follows the command to write in the seven proclamations. Cf. Aune (1997: 119-124) for a detailed description of the layout of these proclamations.

<sup>180</sup> This does not imply that each letter was only read at the addressee congregation. They were in all probability “intended to be read together and heeded by each of the congregations” (Aune 1997: 119).

gives readers the confirmation that they will also experience this new life (Aune 1997: 167; Mounce 1977: 92). In the interim they are urged to stay faithful throughout suffering and tribulation, just as Christ was faithful unto death (Slater 1999: 120).

To them that conquer [i.e. stay faithful unto the end], eternal life is promised (Rev 2:11). They will not experience the effects of “the second death” [i.e. death in eternity, to be distinguished from the physical death – the second death will be discussed in Chapter 9 below<sup>181</sup>] even though they might still experience physical death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 83). Just as Christ has conquered death, they will too (Slater 1999: 120).

e) Jesus as ὁ ζῶν: Revelation 1:18a

In Revelation 1:17-18a Jesus is described in divine terms generally attributed to God in the Old Testament (cf. Dan 7; Rev 1:8). Although it is discussed here, under a separate sub-heading, it should not be read in isolation from the rest of Revelation 1:18 [or the entire vision of Rev 1:9-20]. “It is by virtue of the Lord’s victory over death that he can properly be described with the attributes of deity” (Trites 1998: 282). It is therefore discussed here as a fitting summary to the portrayal of Christ in the vision of the Son of Man.

There are only a couple of minor textual variants suggested for verse 17-18a, none of which are supported by strong variant readings. It is therefore possible to work with the text as given by Aland & Aland (1993: 634).

Jesus identifies Himself to John as ὁ ζῶν [a present substantive participle, unlike in Rev 1:18b, where a periphrastic present is used – cf. (a) above (Aune 1997: 102)<sup>182</sup>]. In the Old Testament God is often called “the living God”<sup>183</sup>. Even in the New Testament God is frequently called θεὸς ζῶν, specifically in the letter to the Hebrews

<sup>181</sup> The promises of eternal life to each of the seven churches will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9 below.

<sup>182</sup> Charles (1920a: 31) understands ὁ ζῶν slightly different, connecting it rather to the phrase following on it than to the preceding phrase. When taken as such, Charles argues, ὁ ζῶν is “...of full significance in the contrast between the ever abiding eternal life which He possesses and the condition of physical death to which He submitted for the sake of man.” The contrast between νεκρός and ζῶν highlights the eternity of Christ even more (Osborne 2002: 95).

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2 and Chapter 6, where a lot more is discussed with regard to the “living God” in the Old Testament and in Revelation (cf. Deut 5:26; 1 Sam 17:26; Jer 10:10; etc.; [Aune 1997: 102]).

(Heb 3:12; 9:14; 10:31; 12:22; cf. also Acts 14:15; Rom 9:26 and others). The title is also used in Revelation 7:2 for God [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.2]. The predicate form used here is, however, not found in the Old Testament, and only starts to appear in early Judaism (cf. 2 Apoc Bar 21:9, 10; [Aune 1997: 102]).

If Jesus calls Himself ὁ ζῶν, it implies that He shares the same divine and eternal characteristics ascribed to God in the Old Testament, even in Revelation (Groenewald 1986: 42). He is Life, just as God is Life (cf. John 14:6). He is not limited by the set boundaries of life and death, just as Yahweh in the Old Testament. Again we see reflections of the very high Christology of Revelation, when Jesus is effectively compared to, and put onto, the same level as the living God of the Bible (cf. Bauckham 1993b: 55).

‘Ο ζῶν could also mean that life can only be obtained through Jesus as the Giver of life (Van der Watt 1986a: 566). In John 14:6 Jesus is identified as the One who has the power to give life, which is something attributed only to God in the Old Testament [cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2]. In John 11:25-26 Jesus identifies Himself to Martha as the “resurrection and the life”, the only One with the power to give eternal life (Schnackenburg 1971: 414). By doing what only God can do Jesus confirms the communion He has with the Father (Van der Watt 1986a: 562). In the proclamations to the seven churches Jesus stands out as the Giver of eternal life to those who stay faithful unto the end [each proclamation ends with the formula “The one who conquers will...” followed by a promise of life eternal {cf. Chapters 8 and 9 below}].

The paradox in the verse lies in the fact that He who is the forever living [who has the power over life and death] actually died (Beasley-Murray 1981: 67). However, He is not dead any more, but has been resurrected into a new life, a life forever and ever. The message lies therein that, although the Jesus of history did experience death, He is alive forever, and as the forever living One has the power [i.e. the keys] over life and death (Mounce 1977: 81). “It is God and Christ alone who are eternal and make it possible to dwell in eternal bliss” (Osborne 2002: 95). Believers can therefore take heart from the knowledge that, even though life in this world might seem out of control [and might even be lost], life is safely in the hands of the One who has the keys in his hands (Thompson 2000: 703).

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

The ἐγώ εἰμι sayings of Jesus are of particular importance within Johannine literature (Aune 1997: 100)<sup>184</sup>. These words say a lot more than just identifying the orator of the exclamation. In the Old Testament [and rabbinic Judaism] it occurs as a distinctive divine self-proclamation by the only living God, worshipped by Israel (Smalley 1978: 186). Brown (1966: 536) is of the opinion that ἐγώ εἰμι could even have functioned as a *divine name* in the LXX version of Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa 43:25). This would in any case be in agreement with God's self-proclamation in Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am" [if translated directly it would read: "I, I am"]. This formula [self-proclamation] stresses the uniqueness of God amongst all others deities. "I am Yahweh and there is no other" (Brown 1966: 536).

In the Gospel of John the ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings [used in an absolute sense] "have a special revelatory function" (Brown 1966: 533). By using the expression Jesus is presented as speaking [and acting – Burge (1992a: 356)] in the same manner in which Yahweh speaks in the Old Testament about Himself (Brown 1966: 537). Jesus therefore reveals his divine identity by applying these sayings onto Himself. He reveals the Father (Du Rand 1991b: 23). This divine interpretation is explicitly clear in John 18:6, when Jesus answers the soldiers looking for Him with ἐγώ εἰμι. The result, as Burge (1992a: 355) puts it, is that "the mere uttering of this name creates a powerful revelation which leaves the arresting party prostrate before God".

As the One revealing the Father in person, He is also the [only] One that gives life [as God is the Giver of life in the Old Testament – cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2]. The existence [or origin] of life is in his hands, just as it is in the hands of Yahweh (cf. Van der Watt 1986a: 354-355). The different life-metaphors linked to the ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings consistently confirm Jesus as the Source of all life.

The ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings are used in similar fashion in Revelation. The formulaic phrase ἐγώ εἰμι occurs five times in Revelation (Rev 1:8, 17; 2:23; 21:6; 22:16), always

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<sup>184</sup> In the Gospel of John the seven absolute ἐγώ εἰμι-sayings are all variations on the theme of eternal life (Smalley 1978: 90). In these sayings the spiritual qualities of Jesus, his real [eternal] nature, are expressed concretely.

with a predicate [in the nominative]. It is ascribed exclusively to the mouth of God (Rev 1:8; 21:6) and to the mouth of Christ (Rev 1:17; 2:23; 22:16). The ἐγώ εἰμι-formula is consistently used in Revelation in direct speech “to make divine predications of the speaker” (Aune 1997: 100-101).

The consistent connection between ἐγώ εἰμι and life in the Gospel of John [see above], is to a great extent absent in Revelation, except here in Revelation 1:17 (cf. John 11:25; 14:6; 6:51; [Aune 1997: 101]). But this does not necessarily imply that life is absent from the formula. The phrase ἐγώ εἰμι in itself suggests existence [life] without end, and reminds strongly of the divine title ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος used in Revelation 1:4c for God [cf. Chapter 6, 1.2]. Jesus’ “I-am” sayings {ἐγώ εἰμι} hints on his eternal [divine] status, correlating with God’s self-proclamation to Moses in Exodus 3:14 (cf. Ex 3:14 – LXX; Dan 12:7; Rev 1:4c)<sup>185</sup>. “In His essential nature God possesses life” (Mounce 1977: 81). What is said [claimed] with regard to God, also applies to Christ in Revelation.

The paradox in the text is that the One who is Life experienced death (Beasley-Murray 1981: 67). But even though He went through physical death, He is alive. Through his resurrection He overcame the stranglehold death had on this world. He has ultimate control over life and death as ὁ ζῶν, evidenced through His taking [keeping] of the keys to Death and Hades in his hands (Mounce 1977: 80-81)<sup>186</sup>. That is why He can promise life to those that keep faithful until the end and warn those that have fallen behind in their faith [cf. the seven proclamations in Rev 2-3].

#### iv) Summary on the One who was dead

- The vision of the Son of Man in Revelation 1:9-20 portrays the exalted Christ as Decider over life and death. Read as a unit it wants to bring believers to stand in awe of the conquering power of Christ. He is portrayed in divine images, very similar to that found in Daniel 7 with regard to God (cf. Groenewald 1986: 43).
- Jesus is called the “living One” [ὁ ζῶν], referring to his divine eternal existence with God. As the “living One” He has the same powers over life

<sup>185</sup> Cf. Chapter 2, 3.2.2.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. also Ford (1975: 385) and Osborne (2002: 96).

and death as God. Having the keys of death and Hades [generally associated to be in the hands of God] underlines this divine power bestowed upon Christ. Jesus' "I-am" sayings confirms his eternal divine status.

- Paradoxically the "living One" has died. But He has been resurrected into a new life, which is to last in eternity. The predicate ὁ ζῶν has a twofold function, referring both to Jesus' divine nature and his triumph over death (Aune 1997: 100).
- In Revelation 2-3 the divine predicates used for Jesus reappear in the greeting to each congregation, confirming Christ's presence and control in each unique situation.
- To the church in Smyrna John writes to urge them to stay faithful until the end, as their Lord was faithful unto death. John specifically uses the predicate ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃ ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (Rev 2:8; cf. Rev 1:17-18), to confirm Christ's eternal existence, as well as his death and resurrection in victory (Slater 1999: 120).

#### 2.1.4. *The Lamb who has been slaughtered (Rev 5)*

##### i) What is the context?

The importance of the visionary experience, reported in Revelation 4 and 5, as the fulcrum of the Book has already been discussed in Chapter 6 above [sub-section 2.1.1, (i); {Beasley-Murray 1981: 108}]. The text markers framing the vision were also discussed then and will therefore not be repeated here. The entire vision is an image that wants to give hope to believers in spite of the reality of persecution and suffering they are experiencing in the present [or to be expected in the future]. Revelation 4 and 5 is the pivotal vision from where the message of hope flows to the rest of Revelation, both forward and backward (Sweet 1990: 115).

Whereas Revelation 4 puts the focus on the creative and ruling power of the "One who sits on the throne" [i.e. God Almighty], Revelation 5 shifts the focus to the redeeming power of God, which is manifested in the redemption by the Lamb. But it is important that the vision of the Lamb not be read separately from the vision of the

Creator God (Slater 1999: 168). It is essentially one vision of the overall control of God over the course of history. According to Ford (1975: 87),

“Rev 5 is a transitional scene linking the throne vision, symbolic of divine sovereignty, with the Lion of Judah who will reign on earth (5:10b), symbolic of earthly sovereignty.”

The central theological question of Revelation 4 and 5 is: “Who is the true Lord of this world?” It is answered with elaborate cosmological imagery confirming the overall power of the Lord God Almighty (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 58). The central message in this twofold vision is that the God of creation is at the same time the God of redemption (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108; Slater 1999: 173). The visions in Revelation 4 and 5 are linked together into a single vision through the title of the “One who sits on the throne” that appears in Revelation 4:2b and 5:1, and the reappearance of the worship hymns (Rev 4:9-11) in Revelation 5 (cf. Charles 1920a: 134-135; Pohl 1969: 171).

Revelation 5 is distinguished as a subunit from the rest of the vision through a change in focus, which is brought about through the formula *καὶ εἶδον* (Rev 5:1; 6:1). The formula *καὶ εἶδον* also functions to bring about minor focus changes within the vision report of Revelation 5, dividing the chapter into three interconnected subunits: Revelation 5:1-5, 5:6-10, and 5:11-14 (Aune 1997: 329).

The central figure in Revelation 5 is the Lamb who is described [in clear Messianic terms] in the framed unit of Revelation 5:6-10 as the One worthy to take the scroll from the hands of God through his victorious redemptive actions on the cross (Aune 1997: 329). Within the main body of the Book [i.e. Rev 4:1-22:9], Revelation 5 can be slotted in as follows<sup>187</sup>:

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

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Aune: 1997 on the detail structure of Revelation 1-5.

<b>5:1-14</b>	<b>Investiture of the Lamb</b>
<b>5:1-5</b>	<b>A quest for somebody worthy</b>
<b>5:6-10</b>	<b>The Lamb is worthy</b>
<b>5:11-14</b>	<b>Worship of the Lamb</b>
6:1-16:21	the seals, trumpets and bowls
17:1-19:10	Revelation of the judgment of Babylon
19:11-21:8	Final defeat of God's remaining foes
21:9-22:9	Vision of the New Jerusalem

ii) The text of Revelation 5

Many scholars want to understand Revelation 5 as an enthronement vision, describing the enthronement of Christ as king to the heavenly court. There are, of course, many characteristics of ancient enthronement rituals evident in the vision of Revelation 5 (cf. Aune 1997: 332-335). However, Aune (1997: 336-338) puts a strong case forward to read the vision as an investiture rather than an enthronement. According to Aune (1997: 336), the vision is more a ratification [by adapting the texts of Dan 7:9-18 and Ezek 1-2] of an office [position] that Christ already holds informally than the enthronement of a new king.

a) Textual variants

A number of variant readings exist with regard to the text of Revelation 5:6 and 9-10. However, most of the proposed variants are not critical to the understanding of the text and are in many of the cases poorly attested (cf. Aland & Aland 1993: 641-642; Aune 1997: 323-325).

The variant reading ἰδοὺ in Revelation 5:6a is in all probability the result of a visual confusion with the textual reading εἶδον [a confusion commonly found in the LXX]. The correct reading is probably εἶδον and not ἰδοὺ (Aune 1997: 323). Replacing ἑστηκός [accusative *neuter* perfect participle] with ἑστηκώς [nominative *masculine* perfect participle] is, according to Aune (1997: 323) an attempt to align the neuter [Lamb] with the man [Christ]<sup>188</sup>. A similar construction could be the reason behind the variant options of either ἔχον or ἔχων in Revelation 5:6b (Aune 1997: 323).

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<sup>188</sup> This type of construction is generally called an *ad sensum* construction (Aune 1997: 323).

Inserting ἑπτὰ [in brackets in the text of Rev 5:6c] is probably correct, taken the reference to the seven Spirits in Revelation 1:5, and also the fact that ἑπτὰ [seven] is inserted twice more in Revelation 5:6a (Aune 1997:324).

In Revelation 5:9c variant readings differ from the omission of τῷ θεῷ to the insertion of ἡμᾶς with τῷ θεῷ (Aland & Aland 1993: 642). The first mentioned reading [which is also the textual reading] is poorly attested. However, according to Aune (1997: 325) this reading still accounts best for the origin of the other readings, and is therefore probably more correct. The insertion of ἡμᾶς was in all likelihood done because the sentence seemingly missed an object (Aune 1997: 325)<sup>189</sup>.

#### b) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 5:5-6

<sup>5</sup>καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι·

— μὴ κλαῖε,  
— ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν — — ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα,  
— — — — — ἡ ρίζα Δαβὶδ,  
— ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον  
— καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ.

<sup>6</sup>Καὶ εἶδον — — — — — ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων  
— — — — — καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων  
— ἀρνίον ἐστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον  
— ἔχων κέρατα ἑπτὰ  
— καὶ ὀφθαλμοὺς ἑπτὰ  
— — — — — οἱ εἰσιν τὰ [ἑπτὰ] πνεύματα τοῦ θεοῦ  
— — — — — ἀπεσταλμένοι εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν.

Not only is Revelation 4-5 the fulcrum of the Book of Revelation (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108), but Revelation 5:5-6 stands at the centre of the vision of Revelation 5. It gives the solution to John's concern to find someone worthy of opening the scroll. The central point in the solution is the introduction of the Lamb in verse 6. From there the rest of Revelation 5 [and in fact the rest of Revelation] unfolds [forward and backward] (cf. Sweet 1990: 115).

<sup>189</sup> For variant readings with regard to the rest of the text, cf. Aune (1997: 323-325) and Aland & Aland (1993: 641-642).

## c) Revelation 5:5-6

The hope amidst a seemingly hopeless situation [John actually cries because nobody was found to be worthy to take the scroll] is that someone had conquered and can therefore take the scroll from the hands of God. The verb  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  [to conquer] is a technical term describing victory or perseverance in different situations: that of a military victory, a victory in a legal case, or overcoming a difficult situation (cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 541)<sup>190</sup>. The term is used quite often in the New Testament to describe the salvific death of Christ (Col 2:15; 1 Cor 15:54; cf. Isa 25:8). He is the One that has overcome the world (John 16:33). The irony is, however, that He has claimed a military victory (cf. Rev 12:7-12) by sacrificing Himself (Rev 12:11).

By using the verb  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  without an object in verse 5, the limits of the victory are opened up, suggesting that the victory is absolute and all encompassing. Using the verb  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  without an object is typical of the author of Revelation (McDonald 1996: 34). Nothing is excluded from this (Aune 1997: 349; Charles 1920a: 140). The premise is that believers could also overcome, just as Christ has overcome (1 John 5:4-5; Osborne 2002: 253). They must live accordingly so as to claim the victory that He has already won (Rev 2-3; [Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 541]).

The uniqueness about John's vision, however, is not the fact that Jesus won the victory through the cross. It is the portrayal of his sacrificial death as the fulfilment of Jewish hopes for the messianic conqueror (Bauckham 1993a: 184). In Judaism the Messiah was never portrayed as a Lamb, and more specific, not a suffering and sacrificial Lamb (Aune 1997: 353). The Jewish expectations were geared more towards that of a political conqueror [Messiah], even by the age of the Jewish apocalyptic works (Cullmann 1963: 116)<sup>191</sup>. That is why the One who has conquered is called "Lion of Judah" and "Root of David". These are common titles in later Judaism to refer to the conquering Messiah. Bauckham (1993a 180-181) calls them *loci classici* with regard to messianic expectations in John's time.

<sup>190</sup> Aune (1997: 322-323) mentions that it is possible to understand  $\nu\kappa\hat{\alpha}\nu$  as meaning "to be worthy", specifically when used with an infinitive [in this case  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega\lambda\acute{\iota}\xi\alpha\iota$ ], something found in the Aramaic texts of the Targums (e.g. Tg Ps 118:22; Tg Job 20:17).

<sup>191</sup> Cf. also Test Jos 19:8-9; 1 En 90:37; 89:45 (Aune 1997: 368-369; Mounce 1977: 145).

The Lion of Judah was a popular messianic symbol in apocalyptic writings<sup>192</sup> (Mounce 1977: 144). It is an image proposing the strength and power with which the Messiah will reign, just as it was prophesied of Judah in Genesis 49:8-10 (Von Rad 1972: 424; Bauckham 1993a: 182). John uses the combination of Old Testament and apocalyptic images of the Lion of Judah to identify the conquering Messiah in his vision as the divine warrior, in line with similar descriptions of Yahweh in the Old Testament (Job 10:16; Isa 31:4; Jer 50:44; Hos 5:14; Am 3:8; [Osborne 2002: 253]).

The Root of David is taken from Isaiah 11:1 and 10, where the prophet brings a promise to the people about the ideal king that will reign, and that a king from the “Root of David” will always reign in Israel (Snijders 1985: 148). In apocalyptic writings the title is applied onto the triumphant Messiah as the One who will judge the enemies of God (cf. Ps Sol 17:27; [Bauckham 1993a: 181]). Paul uses this messianic interpretation of the text in his letter to the church in Rome (Rom 15:12; [Charles 1920a: 140; Swete 1907: 77]). In Revelation 22:16 Jesus uses the title in reference to Himself. However, in Revelation 22:16 Jesus is not the ἡ ῥίζα...τοῦ Ἰσσαιῶ any more. He is the ῥίζα...Δαυίδ. He *is* the Root, just as He *is* the Vine (John 15:1-3)<sup>193</sup>. In the words of Mounce (1977: 394-395), He is the “fulfilment of the Isaianic promise that the Messiah shall come forth as a shoot from the stump of Jesse”. Both these images are promises of the hope for a better life in the future, in line with messianic expectations.

A striking feature in Revelation 5:5-6 is the contrast between what John hears and what he sees [cf. Excursion 3]. It is a textual technique used by John in Revelation upon which Bauckham (1993a: 179, 215-216) puts a lot of emphasis (cf. McDonald 1996: 33). In Revelation 5:5 John hears from one of the elders that the Lion of Judah [who is also the Root of David] has conquered and is therefore worthy to take the scroll. But when he looks towards the throne, all he sees is a Lamb [a slaughtered Lamb that was standing amidst the throne]<sup>194</sup>. It is a paradoxical comparison: hearing about a powerful Lion and then seeing a slain Lamb (cf. 1 Cor 1:23-25; [Beasley-

<sup>192</sup> Cf. 2 Esdr 12:31; Test Jud 24:5; 1 Macc 3:4.

<sup>193</sup> The change from Ἰσσαιῶ to Δαυίδ is probably the result of the messianic interpretation of the text of Isaiah, i.e. the Messiah will be a descendant of David (cf. Rudolph 2000: 60).

<sup>194</sup> In Revelation 7 a similar technique is used, when John hears about the 144 000 to be sealed and saved, and then turns around and sees an innumerable amount of people around the throne [cf. Rev 21:9-10 and the discussion in Excursion 3] (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 179).

Murray 1981: 124]). But this is the heart of the Gospel message, the central theme of the New Testament: victory coming through sacrifice (Mounce 1977: 144). “Precisely by juxtaposing these contrasting images, John forges a symbol of conquest by sacrificial death...” (Bauckham 1993a: 183; cf. Rudolph 2000: 42).

Comparing Jesus to a Lamb occurs five times in the New Testament, outside of Revelation (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19). In Revelation the title is used 28 times to refer to Jesus<sup>195</sup>. It is a typical Johannine title to refer to Christ’s victory over sin through his sacrificial death. That the Lamb stands ἐν μέσῳ...ἐν μέσῳ wants to emphasise that the Lamb is the focus point of attention as the only One worthy to take the scroll (Hughes 1990: 79; cf. Mounce 1977: 146).

With regard to the image of the Lamb that John sees in Revelation 5:5-6, there are two key words that play an important role: ἐσφαγμένον and ἑστηκός. What John sees in heaven is a ἀρνίον ἑστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον (Rev 5:6a), i.e. a Lamb that bears the wounds as proof that He had been slaughtered (Bratcher & Hatton 1993: 101). The particle ὡς [sometimes translated with “as if” – cf. Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 905-907] does not mean that the Lamb only appeared to have been slaughtered. It rather wants to highlight the combination of the two important theological motifs of death and resurrection. Therefore: the Lamb had actually been slaughtered, but He is now alive (Aune 1997: 353; Charles 1920a: 141).

The terminology would probably have recalled images of Old Testament sacrifices for believers – a lamb being slaughtered at the altar for the sins of the people. But there is another interpretation: in the New Testament the death of Christ was often compared to being a sacrifice on behalf of the world (cf. John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32-33; 1 Cor 5:7; 1 Pet 1:19). The primary comparison is probably with that of the Paschal Lamb from the Old Testament (Aune 1997: 353; Pohl 1969:176-177; Keener 1997: 641)<sup>196</sup>.

<sup>195</sup> In Revelation 13:11 it is used for the Beast in a parody of Christ (Aune 1997: 352). Cf. also Aune (1997: 367-373) for a detailed excursion on Christ as the Lamb.

<sup>196</sup> Although the possibility of a comparison to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53:7 (cf. Acts 8:32-33) cannot be discarded either (Charles 1920a: lxxviii-lxx; Keener 1997: 642; Cullmann 1963: 79-82; cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 181). In the church of the second century AD this interpretation became more popular (Bar 5:2; 1 Cl 16:7; [Aune 1997: 353]). Mounce (1977: 145), Dodd (1968: 236-238) and Smalley (1978: 218-219) prefer the interpretation of the Lamb as a purely apocalyptic symbol. Aune (1997: 353) emphatically discards the idea of Malina (1995: 53) that the Lamb could refer to the astrological sign of Aries with its neck unnaturally broken (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 60). Schüssler

Although the Paschal lamb was not meant as a sin offering originally (cf. Ex 12:12, 23), it seemingly did have this added interpretation by the time of Jesus (Sweet 1990: 124). The connection between Jesus' death and the slaughtering of the Paschal Lamb is highlighted specifically in Johannine literature. In the Gospel of John, the author [seemingly] deliberately shifts the day of Jesus' crucifixion to fall in with the slaughtering of the Paschal lambs (Du Rand 1981: 19; Barrett 1978: 176).

The verb used in Revelation 5:6 to describe Jesus' death [σφάζειν], was sometimes used for the slaughtering of the sacrificial animals in the LXX (cf. LXX Ex 12:6; LXX Lev 1:5)<sup>197</sup>. By using the perfect participle passive [ἐσφαγμένον] John wants to emphasise the completeness of the sacrificial death of Christ, through which eternal redemption has been effected once and for all (Sweet 1990: 128). The perfect tense implies finality, but not in the sense that Jesus' death is the final word in God's plan. Christ's death brought about an irreversible change to the outcome of history. It is a decisive victory over sin that was claimed on the cross (Mounce 1977: 146). The passive voice used for the verb [σφάζειν] indicates the divine action behind what happened here [passive of divine activity].

Whereas ἐσφαγμένον refers to Christ's death, the perfect participle verb ἐστηκός [stand] wants to emphasise the other side of the redemption: Christ is alive [the Lamb **was** dead, but **is** alive {standing}]. The verb ἵστημι when used in the perfect tense could also [and does more often] mean "existing" or "being" (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 383). This could indicate the eternal existence [being] of Christ after his resurrection and ascension. He is now the eternal living one whose life is not to be intruded anymore by death. As part of the one God before creation (Phil 2:5), He also had eternal divine status before his life on earth.

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Fiorenza (1991: 61) uses the unchanged interpretation of the Paschal lamb in an exodus typology when she concludes: "As the blood of the paschal lamb signified the liberation of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, so the death of Christ made possible the liberation of Christians from their universal bondage." This "bondage" then indicates the bondage of sin.

<sup>197</sup> It could also be used for the violent killing of a person (cf. 1 John 3:12; Rev 6:4), or for the mortally wounded head of the beast in Revelation 13:3 (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 803). In the light of this, Ford (1975: 90) prefers to leave the interpretation of σφάζειν open, with the possibility that the "violent killing" could indicate Jesus' death as martyrdom, an interpretation not entirely without merit.

What John sees in heaven is the risen Christ, exalted to the throne of God (Beasley-Murray 1981: 124). Him being alive is confirmation of Him conquering the powers of death. It confirms what the Son of Man already proclaimed to John in Revelation 1:18: “I have the keys to Death and Hades.” The verbs ἐσφαγμένον and ἐστηκός link up with the reference to the victorious Lion of Judah [or Root of David] in verse 5 (Aune 1997: 352-353). It highlights the fact that the Lamb [the Messiah] is worthy, as He is the Conqueror through his death and resurrection.

There is a seemingly deliberate attempt here by John to contrast Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is not as obvious in Revelation 5:5 as it is in Revelation 1:17-18 and 5:6. It is not a case of downplaying the crucifixion of Christ, as this is of utmost importance to the Christian hope, but rather to emphasise the important fact that Christ, although once slaughtered as a Lamb, is alive (Groenewald 1986: 82). This last mentioned fact is of just as much importance to Christian faith. If Christ was not resurrected, says Paul, Christian faith would be worthless (1 Cor 15:18-19).

Believers in Asia-Minor can take heart from the fact that Christ, the Lamb, has overcome death. They don’t have to fear persecution, or even martyrdom, as death is not the end for them any more. They will be able to conquer as Christ did if they keep faithful until the end (cf. Rev 2-3), knowing that their Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades in his hands (Rev 1:17-18).

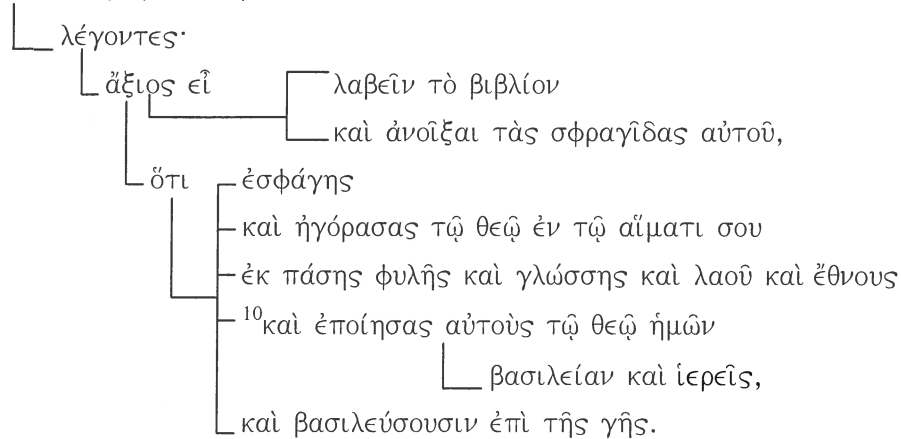
A striking feature is the near absence of references to Christ’s death and resurrection after Revelation 5. It is only in Revelation 12:11 that we find another clear reference to Christ’s death.<sup>198</sup> It probably has to do with the fact that John has already stated in Revelation 5:6 that the victory of Christ is a *fait accompli*. As from Revelation 6, we witness the unfolding of God’s plan in history through the exalted Lamb, up to the unfolding of the eschatological judgment and the appearance of the new world at the end of Revelation. According to Bauckham (1993a: 136) “Christ is the divine agent of salvation and judgment” and is therefore worthy to execute God’s will.

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<sup>198</sup> Cf. Revelation 11:8, where the crucifixion of Christ is mentioned, but only as a comparative image with regard to the death of the two witnesses [see also below]. In Revelation 7:14 the multitude of believers are identified as those that have washed their robes in “the blood of the Lamb”, signifying the only way by which salvation and victory is attainable [Rev 7:14 will be discussed in Chapter 9].

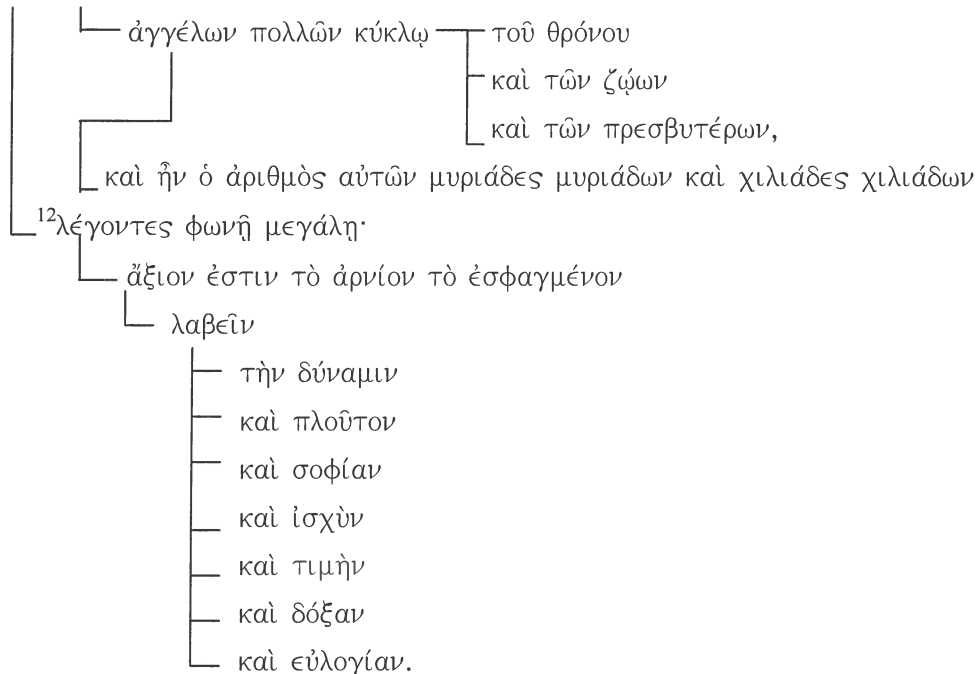
## d) Syntactical analysis of Revelation 5:9-12

<sup>9</sup>καὶ ἄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν



<sup>11</sup>Καὶ εἶδον,

καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν



Revelation 5:9-12 consists of two worship hymns (Rev 5:9-10 and 5:12) by the four living beings and a multitude of angels respectively. The worship hymns are the direct result of the proclamation in Revelation 5:5-6 of the worthiness of the Lamb. The hymns follow similar patterns, firstly proclaiming the worthiness to receive worship, and secondly giving a number of reasons for this worthiness. The worship hymns of Revelation 5 are not too dissimilar to the hymns sung unto God in Revelation 4 [cf. Chapter 6 above] (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 127).

## e) Revelation 5:9-12

The vision of the investiture of the Lamb started off with a seemingly fruitless search for someone who is worthy to open the scroll (Rev 5:1-4). Then in Revelation 5:5, one of the elders stepped forward with the consoling news that someone is actually worthy: the Lion of Judah, who in the end turns out to be the Lamb that has been slaughtered, but has overcome death (Rev 5:5-6). In Revelation 5:9-13 the entire creation bursts into worship unto the conquering Lamb [and God]. God and the Lamb are worshipped in three songs that praise their redeeming power and their almighty and everlasting rule.

The importance of worship in Jewish monotheism [and its meaning with regard to life] was already discussed in Chapter 6 above [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1 (iii) (b)]. What happens in Revelation 5:9-12 is that worship is offered to Christ in similar fashion than God was worshipped in Revelation 4 (cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 127). This is an extraordinary development, as it effectively puts Christ on the same level as God (Bauckham 1993a: 118-119). The equal worshipping is even more evident in Revelation 5:12, where the words of the hymn seem to be taken from the worship songs of Revelation 4 (cf. Slater 1999: 171). As Kiddle (1940: 105) writes: “Nowhere else in the New Testament is Christ adored on such absolutely equal terms with the Godhead”<sup>199</sup>. If this is the case, the worship of Christ [the Lamb] in Revelation 5 is a recognition that Christ partakes in the status of the living God<sup>200</sup>. Many of the worship hymns in Revelation are addressed to both God and the Lamb. “Although it is stated that God alone is to be worshipped (Rev 19:10; 22:8-9), the real implication is that the Lamb also has to be worshipped” (Du Rand 1993: 316).

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<sup>199</sup> For an excellent discussion on the worship of Jesus in the New Testament, cf. Bauckham (1993a: 118-149; [cf. also Swete (1907:127)]). This combined worship of God and Christ is taken even further [to a climax] in Revelation 5:13 when the worship songs of Revelation 4:9-11 and 5:9-12 are seemingly combined in a new hymn that “anticipates the goal of God’s purpose through Christ, the universal worship in the new heaven and earth” (Bauckham 1993a: 139). Of great interest is the seemingly Trinitarian worship found in the Ascension of Isaiah (AscIsa 9:22-36).

<sup>200</sup> If, according to Weiser (1975: 55), worship in the Old Testament is the “amen” of the people to God’s self-revelation, then the worship of Christ is the “amen” of the heavenly court to Christ as the revelation of God to this world in the new dispensation. It is in any case the “amen” to the worthiness of the Lamb to fulfil the position as God’s agent in the achievement of the final eschatological victory (Aune 1997: 374).

The first worship song in Revelation 5:9 is called a “new song” [ὄδῃν καινήν]. It is an expression that grows from the use thereof in the Psalms (cf. Ps 98:1), and is reflected in prophetic passages extolling God’s glorious victory (cf. Isa 42: 5-17; [Mounce 1977: 147]). In most cases in Jewish literature where reference is made of a “new song” that song celebrates a saving action by God (Aune 1997: 360)<sup>201</sup>. The words “new song” could also be an indication of the new covenant that He came to establish through his death (Mounce 1977: 147).

Christ is worshipped in this new song for being worthy to take the scroll from the hands of God. This joyous celebration is in total contrast to the sombre atmosphere that was prevalent because no one in creation was found to be worthy (Rev 5:4). The content of the first worship song is to praise the Lamb for his redemptive actions in history. This worship song is saturated with terminology referring to the saving death of Christ: ὅτι ἐσφάγης καὶ ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου...καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς (Rev 5:9c-10a).

Again we see the recurrence of the verb σφάζειν [to slaughter], this time written in the aorist tense, referring to the violent death of Christ as a sacrifice for the sins of this world [cf. (a) above; (cf. Aune 1997: 361; Louw & Nida 1997: s.v.)]. The aorist tense as it is used here has a meaning similar to the perfect tense in English, which is in line with the meaning attached to the [Greek] perfect tense usage of σφάζειν discussed in verse 6 above (cf. Goodwin 1992: 91-92). In verse 9 the Lamb is worshipped for his sacrificial death, which made Him worthy to receive glory and honour on the same level as God<sup>202</sup> (Slater 1999: 170; Aune 1997: 360).

The Lamb is also worshipped because He has ransomed [bought] for God [ἠγόρασας τῷ θεῷ] through his blood [ἐν τῷ αἵματι σου]. “His sacrificial death was the means whereby He purchased men unto God” (Mounce 1977: 148). The image used here is clearly that of the Paschal Lamb, the sacrifice that was to remind Israel of the redemption God worked for them in Egypt (Ex 12:14; 13:9; cf. also Mark 10:45; [Aune 1997: 361; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 61]). In 1 Peter 1:18-19 we find

<sup>201</sup> The word “new” is an important word in Revelation, occurring nine times in reference to recreation [renewal] of all things in creation (cf. Groenewald 1986: 83).

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Philippians 2:5-11, where the same idea is echoed in a Christological hymn about Jesus’ glorification.

another reference to Christ as the Passover Lamb. However, Bauckham (1993b: 71) is of the opinion that the Paschal Lamb was not a redemptive sacrifice, but only a celebration of an already won victory (cf. Ex 12:12, 23). In a technical sense this would be correct [from an Old Testament point of view – but cf. Sweet (1990: 124)], but then, in itself the blood of the Paschal Lamb worked salvation and life: wherever the blood was painted onto the doorposts, the angel of death passed over (Ex 12:13, 21-27; [cf. Ford 1975: 94-95]).

The term αἷμα means here, in a figurative sense, “death” (cf. Aune 1997: 325)<sup>203</sup>. In most instances in Revelation blood also denotes death (De Cock 2004: 158). But it is through the blood of Jesus’ death that life is made possible for an entire world [i.e. is from every tribe, tongue, nation – Rev 5:9d] that was destined for eternal death as a result of sin (cf. Rom 6:23). The blood of the Lamb [Christ] promises life to everyone whose clothes are “washed in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). It is the blood of the Lamb that has the power to rescue (De Cock 2004: 163). But Jesus’ blood was never disconnected from his life. When Christ “gives” his blood, He effectively gives his life, i.e. He died (Van der Watt 1986b: 185).

The blood of Christ was generally connected [compared] with that of a ransom [Greek - λύτρον]<sup>204</sup> whereby redemption was brought about (cf. Rom 3:24-25; 1 Pet 1:18-19). The use of the words λύτρον (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45) and ἀγοράζειν (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3, 4) puts the emphasis on the price paid for the change in ownership (Van der Watt 1986b: 179). It is a change of ownership that brings the gift of freedom from sin, freedom to a new and eternal life (Van der Watt 1986b: 184).

In Exodus 13:13 it is also mentioned that the first-born children must be ransomed by paying a ransom-price (cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 181). This meant that the first-born child will not be sacrificed to the Lord [as was the case with other first-born {animals} and first-fruits {crops}], but will stay alive and in the father’s house. The figurative meaning of ἀγοράζειν here and in Revelation 14:3 is “to cause the release of someone by paying a price” (Aune 1997: 361). It was “based on the analogy of the

<sup>203</sup> In Genesis 9:4 a connection is made between blood and life (Ford 1975: 95).

<sup>204</sup> Cf. Van der Watt (1986b: 178-190) for an in depth discussion on the meaning of λύτρον and its derivatives.

religious law which in reality bestowed freedom on a slave purchased by a divinity” (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 12) or, with regard to believers “for whom Christ has paid the price with his blood”, in which case it is followed by a dative identifying the possessor – τῶ θεῶ (Arndt & Gingrich 1975: 12).

The result of this purchasing by the blood of the Lamb is that He has made believers priests and kings in his new world order (Rev 5:10). This “making of” [ἐποίησας] priests and kings relates directly to the death of Christ and emphasises that what has happened is the result of the salvific death of Christ (Mounce 1977: 149). Swete (1907: 82) is of the opinion that this concept [occurring three times in Revelation – 1:6; 5:10; 20:6] is probably derived from a primitive hymn. It promises the fruit of salvation to believers. “The promise is that the church is to share in the eschatological reign of Christ and all that it will involve” (Mounce 1977: 149), which inevitably also means sharing in eternal life with Christ in heaven. That was the promise bestowed on them in the proclamations (Rev 2-3).

In the second worship song the phrase is repeated: the Lamb that was slain, is worthy to receive honour. Only this time the chorus singing the praise comprises a much bigger audience [a multitude of angels]. This is expanded upon even further when in the third worship song (Rev 5:13) the entire creation breaks out in worship to God *and* the Lamb (cf. Slater 1999: 172; Beasley-Murray 1981: 128)<sup>205</sup>. In an interesting change from the other worship songs in Revelation the predicates listed in this worship song are only preceded by a single article as though they formed a single word [concept], whereas in Revelation 4:11 and 7:12 each predicate has its own article (Charles 1920a: 149).

Also of importance is to note that John steers away from talking about God and Christ in the plural. To him Christ is not an alternative [extra] object of worship. He shares jointly [singularly] in the worship of the one and only living God (Bauckham 1993a:

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<sup>205</sup> According to Caird (1966: 77) the universal response is the appropriate answer to the universality of Christ’s achievement. In a seemingly significant development from the Old Testament the inhabitants from Hades [those under the surface of the earth and in the sea – cf. Chapter 2] also join in the celebratory worship (Charles 1920a: 150). In the Old Testament a relationship with God was not deemed possible from within Hades (cf. Isa 38:18; Chapter 2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6). If this is actually what John intended, is doubtful. He probably just wanted to emphasise the participation of the whole of creation in the worship of God.

139-140). This again confirms the high Christology of the book of Revelation, putting God and Christ effectively on the same throne (cf. Rev 3:21; 22:1, 3; [Charles 1920a: 151]). The reader could therefore apply the same conclusions with regard to life and death onto Christ than was done in Chapter 6 with regard to God. That is why He [i.e. the Lamb] could be called ὁ ζῶν in Revelation 1:18a [cf. 2.1.3 (ii) (c) above].

f) Is Revelation 4-5 also the pivot for life and death?

As noted earlier, Beasley-Murray (1981: 108) stressed the pivotal position of Revelation 4-5 in the communication of the message of Revelation. Does this then imply that these chapters also take a pivotal position with regard to the life and death-message conveyed in Revelation?

It is certain that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the understanding of the message of Revelation (Beasley-Murray 1981: 108). Through his death and resurrection believers received the grace of salvation [and new, eternal life] as God's gift to redeem this world from sin. The death and eternal liveliness [after his resurrection] of Christ is crucial to the message of hope. Without that, there is no message of hope to convey (McDonald 1996: 38). From this follows that eternal life is dependent on the acceptance of this gift from God.

The message of Revelation 4-5 is therefore just as pivotal to the understanding of the message of hope with regard to life and death, as the issue of hope hinges on the question of being dead or alive, and Revelation 4-5 explains the way to the hope of life amidst all else [cf. also (i) above]. The centrality of Christ's worthiness [his death and resurrection] emphatically confirms the central role He [and his message of new life] plays in the overall message of Revelation.

iii) Summary on the slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 5

- The message of hope communicated in Revelation 5 is that the Messiah has already conquered. However, He hasn't conquered in a military war, but through dying as a sacrifice.
- The verb σφάζειν [to slaughter] occurs three times in Revelation 5, every time referring to the sacrificial death of Christ. It is through this sacrifice

that Christ is declared worthy [ἄξιος] to take the scroll from the hand of God. He purchased believers by his blood to a life of freedom in eternity with God (cf. Van der Watt 1986b: 178-190). This victory is a completed fact, which is why it is written in the perfect tense in verse 6.

- Although the Lamb has been slaughtered as a sacrifice, He is not dead anymore. He is seen standing [ἑστῆκός] amidst the throne (Rev 5:6), and He is acting when He steps forward to take the scroll (Rev 5:8) and opens the seals thereof (Rev 6-7). Because Christ has overcome death and is alive, believers can have hope for eternal life, even though they might die in this life.
- The three worship songs found in Revelation 5:9-13 reiterates the fact that John thinks of Christ in no less terms than being in unity with God (cf. Bauckham 1993a: 118-149). The fact that Christ is worshipped, and worshipped with attributes generally used for God [in the Old Testament and in Rev 4] confirms this high Christology [cf. the discussion on Rev 1:17-18 in 2.1.3 above].
- Beasley-Murray (1981: 108) is correct when he sees Revelation 4-5 as the pivotal chapters in Revelation. By combining this with the important message these chapters convey with regard to life for believers, one can therefore conclude that they also play a pivotal part in the understanding of the message of life and death throughout Revelation. What follows [or even precedes] Revelation 4-5, can be related back to the message of life coming from these chapters.

#### 2.1.5. *The place where our Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8)*

##### i) What is the context?

After the interlude of the little scroll in Revelation 10 [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.3 (i)], a new unit starts in Revelation 11:1. As this section starts abruptly without any of the typical introductory formulae, it is possible to see it structurally as a continuation of Revelation 10:8-11 (Aune 1998a: 603; cf. Bauckham 1993a: 257-258). However, Aune (1998a: 585) sees Revelation 11:1-13 as a “coherent literary unit”, with Revelation 11:14 functioning both as a conclusion to Revelation 11:1-13 and as an introduction to Revelation 11:15-18 (cf. Charles 1920a: 270). It can be distinguished

from Revelation 10:8-11 by the fact that different speakers seem to be talking to John [cf. λέγουσιν in Rev 10:11 and λέγων in Rev 11:1; (Aune 1998a: 585)]. The type of visionary scene also seems to be different, although there are views that the vision of Revelation 11 explains the content of the scroll discussed in Revelation 10 (Bauckham 1993a: 266; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 74-79). However, nothing is said about this. Instead John is given a reed like a staff with a new task: to measure the temple and the altar [something he seemingly doesn't even do]. Revelation 11:1-14 can be placed into the main body of Revelation as follows<sup>206</sup>:

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
<b>11:1-14</b>	<b>Vision of the temple and the two witnesses</b>
11:1-2	John instructed to measure the temple
<b>11:3-13</b>	<b>prophetic narrative about the two witnesses.</b>
11:14	Conclusion to 11:1-13
11:15-16:21	the seventh trumpet and the seven bowls

The “hearing” of voices [by John] in verse 15 is, according to Aune (1998a: 635), an indication that a new section has started. This completes the marking off of the text in the unit of Revelation 11:1-13 [with verse 14 as the connecting verse – cf. above]. It is a unit of text that reflects strong Palestinian and Old Testament traditions, with possible allusions to Zechariah 4:1-14 and Daniel 8:11-14 (Aune 1998a: 594; Bauckham 1993a: 271), which is combined with apocalyptic symbols (Bauckham 1993a: 280). Aune (1998a: 588) draws a comparison between Revelation 11:3-13, which he sees as a Christianised version of “a Jewish Antichrist myth”, and the Apocalypse of Elijah (Apoc Eli 4:7-19). The Jewish background of this text is such that many interpreters even thought this to be of an originally Jewish source (Mounce 1977: 218).

<sup>206</sup> For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a.



42:20; Zech 2:5). The latter interpretation is probably the right one in Revelation 11 (Ford 1975: 173-176). The fact that John is specifically commanded not to measure the outer court, which will be given over to “the nations” [i.e. being outside of the realm of God], supports the view of protection for the people of God (Aune 1998a: 605). The interpretation of much of the text is probably based on the visions found in Ezekiel 40-48 about the measurement of the temple and the future revival of the people of God (Aune 1998a: 604; Groenewald 1986: 117). It gives believers right at the start of the text already the comfort that, amidst possible persecution as a result of their witness, God will still protect them.

This opening vision is followed by the prophetic vision of the two witnesses (Rev 11:3-13)<sup>207</sup>. In their lives of witnessing these witnesses *follow in the footsteps of Christ* (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78-79; Bauckham 1993a: 280). They bring the message from God as commanded (Rev 11:3). During their time of witnessing to the world they are protected [as promised in Rev 11:1-2], even from physical harm. However, when their time of witnessing is over, they are killed and their bodies left in the streets of the city (Rev 11:7-10), and there are killed where their Lord was crucified (Rev 11:8). This doesn't end their protection by God. He resurrects them and takes them into heaven in front of the eyes of their persecutors (Rev 11:11-12). This is a sure indication to everybody that God does have authority over life and death, even though the circumstances might seem different (Mounce 1977: 228). He will therefore protect his church even through the gates of death, as He has possession of the keys thereto (cf. Rev 1:18-19).

The only direct identification made in this text with regard to the death of Christ is the phrase in verse 8c: ὅπου καὶ ὁ κύριος αὐτῶν ἐσταυρώθη<sup>208</sup>. This is the only instance in Revelation where direct reference is made of Christ's crucifixion. All the other instances just refer to his death or his blood. The reference here is probably inserted by the author to [secretly] identify the place where the witnesses died as Jerusalem, the place where their Lord [a title used for the first time in Revelation in

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<sup>207</sup> On the identification of these witnesses there have been widespread speculation. It is, however, not of too much importance to the requirements of this study. For a detailed discussion on this, cf. Aune (1998a: 598-603).

<sup>208</sup> There is a weakly attested textual variant replacing αὐτῶν with ἡμῶν or omitting αὐτῶν altogether from the text (Aland & Aland 1993: 653).

respect of Jesus – Aune (1998a: 620)] have also been crucified<sup>209</sup>. Charles (1920a: 287) sees this phrase as a later insertion by the author in an attempt to identify the city for his readers, although the original author most probably meant Jerusalem in the first place [i.e. with the symbolic identification of the place of their death as “Sodom and Egypt” in verse 8b – cf. Charles (1920a: 288)].

The reason why the author goes to such an extent to identify Jerusalem is probably the Jewish tradition that prophets must die in Jerusalem (cf. Luke 13:33; AscIsa 51:1-5; [Aune 1998a: 620-621]). In early Judaism there was a widespread view that martyrdom and suffering was the ultimate experience for the “true prophet” (Aune 1998a: 631). In any case, the text [and therefore also the identification of the city] is symbolic: the message conveyed is that the two prophetic witnesses die at the hand of those that are in opposition to God and God’s people and that reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Beasley-Murray 1981: 185-186). The world in opposition to God will try to destroy the church in that manner. Charles (1920a: 287) also shows how Jerusalem was designated as the τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης in Jewish apocalyptic writings [cf. Rev 11:8a; cf. also Aune (1998a: 619); Swete 1907: 137-138)].

### iii) Summary on Revelation 11:8

- Referring to Christ’s crucifixion in Revelation 11 is nothing more than an attempt to identify a place of action, i.e. where the witnesses died, and confirming them as true witnesses of God. Nothing is said directly in this text about the message of hope coming from the sacrificial death of Christ.
- The message of hope that the church gets from this text is the protection from God [symbolised in the measuring of the temple and the believers], regardless of what happens as a result of their witnessing.
- The description of the death and resurrection of the witnesses will be discussed in Chapter 8 below. The possible interpretation of martyrdom after the example of Christ will also be discussed then (Aune 1998a: 646).

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<sup>209</sup> Cf. Mounce (1977: 226) who does not think of the physical location as Jerusalem, but rather Rome, as the interpretation elsewhere in Revelation (e.g. Rev 17-18) is to identify Rome [specifically the Roman empire] with the place of evil (cf. also Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 78).

2.1.6. *Conquering by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11)*

i) What is the context?

Revelation 12:3 sees the introduction of the Dragon into the Book of Revelation. There is difference of opinion with regard to the structural breaks in the text. Mounce (1977: 234) sees Revelation 12-14 as a unit, while Beasley-Murray (1981: 191)<sup>210</sup> breaks the text after Revelation 14:2. Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 80) sees Revelation 12:1-7 as an inclusion. Aune (1998a: 661) understands Revelation 11:19-12:17 as a single unit, with Revelation 11:19 functioning as an introductory note to the rest of the narrative of Revelation 12. The motif of the opening of the temple (Rev 11:19) is similar to that found in the LXX of Esther (LXX Esth 1:1de, 10:3a-f), as well as Isaiah 66:6-7 (cf. also Rev 15:5). Isaiah 66:6-7 is probably the text on which the narrative of Revelation 11:19 is based (Aune 1998a: 661-662). Deciding between Revelation 11:19 or 12:1 as the starting point of the new text is not critical to the outcome of the discussion. It is therefore acceptable, in the light of the above-mentioned arguments, to accept Aune's structural division [cf. Aune 1998a: (661-666) for a detailed discussion on other issues that might influence the structural unity of the text in support of his argument]. The unity is further enhanced with the three times occurrence of the aorist passive verb ὠφθην binding the different signs together (Rev 11:19; 12:1, 3). Within the main body of Revelation, the text fits in as follows<sup>211</sup>:

11:5-16:21	seventh trumpet and the seven bowls
11:15-18	seventh trumpet
<b>11:19-12:17</b>	<b>the woman, the child and the dragon</b>
11:19	introductory divine manifestations
12:1-4a	introduction of the <i>dramatis personae</i>
12:4b-6	first stage of conflict
<b>12:7-12</b>	<b>second stage of conflict</b>
12:13-17	third stage of conflict
12:18-13:18	the two beasts
14:1-20	Vision of eschatological salvation and judgment

<sup>210</sup> Beasley-Murray (1981: 191) actually sees these chapters as the central section of Revelation, motivating it with the following rationalisation: "Not only do they come at the midpoint of the work, they provide an understanding of the nature of the conflict in which the church is engaged, and into which John sees she is to be drawn to the limit."

<sup>211</sup> For a detailed structure on Revelation 6-16, cf. Aune 1998a. For a detail analysis of Revelation 12:10-12, cf. Du Rand (1993: 320-322).

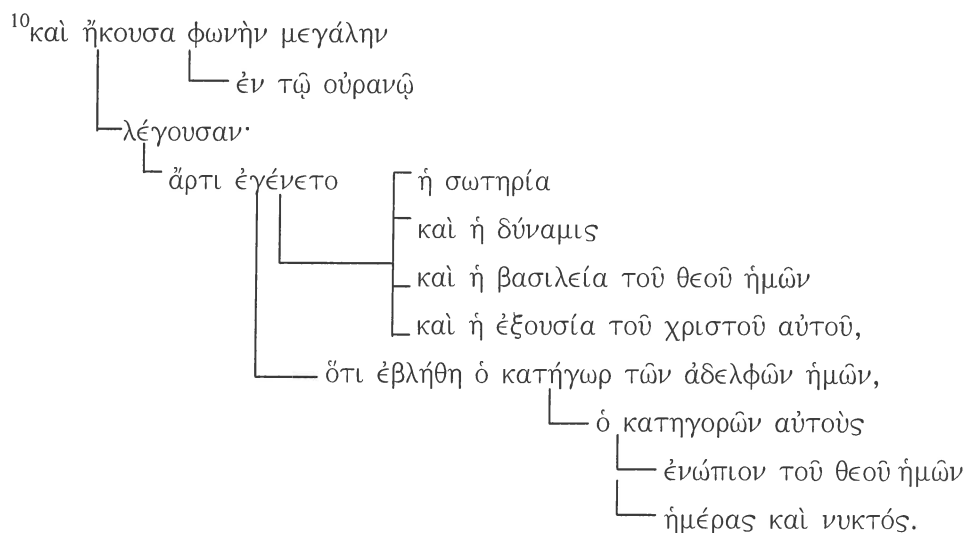
In Revelation 11:19-12:17 we find one of the few clear examples in Revelation of a mythological narrative (Aune 1998a: 674-676). The sources for these mythological visions can, according to Charles (1920a: 298-314), be found in Judaism and a commonly known myth applied messianically to the text (cf. also Mounce 1977: 235; Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 80).

Within this mythological context John wants to explain to his readers that, although the victory has been won by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11), the struggle against Satan still continues on earth. The only comfort believers have is that Satan has already been conquered in heaven (Rev 12:7-9). Therefore, he cannot harm any of God's sealed children (cf. Rev 7:1-8), even if he persecutes and kills them (Mounce 1977: 234). The narrative prepares the reader for the attack against God's people by the Dragon and the Beast (Rev 13:16-17). They must expect this as a result of their continuing witness of the Gospel (Rev 11:3-13), but can take comfort from the knowledge that they will end up safely in the hands of God (Rev 14:1-5).

ii) To conquer by the blood of the Lamb

a) Syntactical analysis

A syntactical analysis for Revelation 12:10-11 is given below:





<sup>11</sup>καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν  
 ┌ διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου  
 └ καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν  
 καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν  
 └ ἄχρι θανάτου.

Revelation 12:10-12 is a “victory hymn” coming from the heavenly court, proclaiming the reality of salvation, and the consequences thereof for believers (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 81-82). It is part of the fourth subunit of the text [cf. (i) above] narrating in mythological language the defeat and expulsion of the dragon from heaven (cf. Aune 1998a: 663). According to Aune (1998a: 663, 702) this hymnic section was added by the author more as a supplement and commentary on the significance of this victory<sup>212</sup> (cf. Du Rand 1993: 323). Within the context of salvation the reference to the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11) is that of the atoning death of Christ.

#### b) Salvation by the blood of the Lamb

There are no major text-critical variants suggested for this hymnic section. Aune (1998a: 655-656) gives a comprehensive discussion on all the minor variants [of which there are quite a few here] suggested for the text. In the light of this, one can therefore work with the text as presented in Aland & Aland (1993: 655-656).

The first part of the hymn (Rev 12:10) announces that God’s salvation, his power, and his glory has now taken effect (Aune 1998a: 664). The temporal adverb ἄρτι [now], in conjunction with the aorist verb ἐγένετο [has occurred] indicates a temporal occurrence that has been completed [with the aorist verb acting as a verb in the perfect tense]. This salvation, this power and glory, is a reality. It further emphasises that salvation is grounded in the expulsion of Satan [the dragon] from heaven after losing the cosmic war against the archangel Michael and his army of angels<sup>213</sup> (cf. Rev 12:7-9; [Aune 1998a: 699]). But it is not to Michael that the honour belongs. The victory is attributed to the Lamb and his followers (Slater 1999: 186).

<sup>212</sup> Cf. Aune (1998a: 663-664) for a discussion on the layout and functioning of the hymn as such in Revelation 12:10-12.

<sup>213</sup> In Judaism Michael was sometimes called ἀρχάγγελος [archangel] and sometimes ἀρχιστράτηγος [commander in chief] of the angelic forces (3 Apoc Bar 11:4, 7, 8; [Aune 1998a: 694]).

The key part of the hymnic section is καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου (Rev 12:11a). In this key phrase of the hymn two key words stand out: ἐνίκησαν and the composite phrase τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου. The verb νικᾶν is a notable keyword in Revelation referring to Christ's victory that came through death [cf. 2.1.4 above on the discussion of νικᾶν]. It is used in exactly the same manner of Christians throughout Revelation [eleven times], referring to them as conquerors through Christ's death, and more specifically, being conquerors through their own martyrdom (Aune 1998a: 702). This victory through martyrdom is common also to Jewish literature. It occurs fifteen times in 4 Maccabees, often depicting a victory that was obtained through endurance (cf. 4 Macc 6:10; 7:4b; 9:6, 30; 11:20). In Targum Job Satan claims that Job conquered through perseverance (Tg Job 27:3-9; [Aune 1998a: 702; cf. McDonald 1996: 38]).

In Revelation 12, however, it is notable that the cause for the victory is not accredited to any person affected thereby. Ironically it is the archangel Michael that fought the cosmic war against Satan, but he is not the conqueror. The believers are the victorious crowd claiming and rejoicing in the victory, but they are not the conquerors in the war, not even through their own martyrdom [although the phrase διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν (Rev 12:11b) might suggest that it is the case]<sup>214</sup>.

In the end the victory is attributed to Christ as the Lamb [cf. above]. The greatest irony of all is that the victory is claimed as a result of Christ's death on the cross (McDonald 1996: 40). Again we find the connection of τὸ αἷμα with the sacrificial death of Christ, signifying the important redemptive power given to the blood of Christ [cf. 2.1.4 above on the impact of the blood of Christ on the salvation of the world]. The victory that the martyrs have claimed is therefore dependent upon the victory of Christ on the cross (Bauckham 1993a: 75-76). His death also becomes the model for the Christian's behaviour in trying times and the key for Christians to understanding their own suffering (Slater 1999: 187). Through their own death they share in the victorious death of Christ (Pohl 1971: 108; Bauckham 1993a: 186).

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<sup>214</sup> Cf. Charles (1920a: 329) who thinks τὸ αἷμα signifies the primary cause and τῆς μαρτυρίας suggests the secondary cause of the victory (cf. also Mounce 1977: 243).

The victory is therefore a temporal event of the past. Christ's victory does not lie somewhere in the future. For believers it is something that is "already a part of past experience" (Aune 1998a: 703). It lies in the historically completed fact of the death and resurrection of Christ.

"The death of Christ on the cross entails the lifting up to the throne of God. This brings about the judgment of the world, the dethronement of the Devil, and the beginning of the new age of life with Christ in the kingdom" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 203).

In the end there are more to the text than just the victory by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 12:11). The normal flow of the narrative is interrupted in Revelation 12:5 with a description of past events, i.e. the birth and ascension of the Messiah (Aune 1998a: 665)<sup>215</sup>. The message of hope lies in the composite understanding of the entire mythological vision that John narrates.

It is the presentation of the Messiah as the ultimate conqueror, and the message of hope amidst trying times as a result of him being the Conqueror. Revelation 12 identifies the Messiah of the Old Testament prophecies as the Deliverer of the world (Beasley-Murray 1981: 200). This should take the reader back to the messianic link that was already made in Revelation 5:5-6 [cf. 2.1.4 above].

Through a messianic interpretation of Isaiah 66:7 [common in Judaic literature – cf. Tg Isa 66:7] the prophecy of Isaiah is applied onto Christ in Revelation 12:5, signifying his birth (cf. Isa 7:14 LXX; [Swete 1907: 148; Aune 1998a: 687-688]). This is then joined with a reference to his ascension. This combined reference in the end forms a representation of the entire Christ-event (Beasley-Murray 1981: 200). Here again [as is the case throughout Revelation] we have no mention at all to the earthly ministry of Christ. It is, for John's purpose, not the earthly life of Christ that is important, but the hope-affording death and resurrection of Christ and his exaltation to the throne of God (Mounce 1977: 238).

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<sup>215</sup> Cf. however, Schüssler Fiorenza (1991: 81) who sees the reference to the birth of the woman's child as a reference to the exaltation and enthronement of Christ in heaven.

The message of eternal life through the death of Christ is at the centre of John's mind throughout Revelation, and in Revelation 12 it is also at the centre of his book (Beasley-Murray 1981: 191; cf. Groenewald 1986: 133). Believers' lives are to be full of suffering and misery as a result of Satan's activities on earth. These activities are the result of Satan being conquered in heaven and then cast down to earth, and now trying to claim an earthly kingdom (Rev 12:9). But even amidst this suffering believers can have the comfort that the Lamb has already conquered in heaven and therefore has left Satan without eternal powers (Rev 12:12). "...whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt 16:25b GNB; [Groenewald 1986: 134]). It is a dual perspective: a heavenly perspective on Satan being defeated and thrown out of heaven, and an earthly perspective on Satan's persecution of the church in history.

iii) Summary on the text of Revelation 12:11

- This hymn is actually not about the death of Christ, but about the victory of believers. The message of hope to believers is that they do not have to fear any suffering or persecution that they might undergo, as the victory over evil has already been claimed. This is only possible because Christ has already won the deciding victory τὸ αἶμα τοῦ ἀρνίου. Even though the victory is not visible on earth, the heavenly perspective shows an already defeated Dragon.
- The central message is that Satan has already been defeated and can do no eternal harm to believers. Even if he kills believers (Rev 13:15), they will still end up with the living Christ on Mount Zion (Rev 14:1).
- Again, as in numerous other texts, the death and resurrection of Christ is depicted as the crucial event in ensuring life.

*2.1.7. The slaughtered Lamb in Revelation 13?*

In the same sub-section, i.e. Revelation 11:19-16:21, John narrates a number of visions with regard to the Dragon and the two beasts, representing the evil powers in opposition to God in the book of Revelation [cf. summarised structure in 2.1.6 above; (cf. Aune 1998a: 754)]. In Revelation 12 the Dragon appears in the cosmic war in

heaven. He is, however, already defeated in heaven and cast onto the earth where he focuses his persecution on the followers of God and Christ.

In Revelation 13 a beast appears from the underworld [the depths of the sea], who becomes a cynical copyist of Christ (cf. Rev 13:3). He is followed by another beast, this time from the depths of the earth (cf. Rev 13:11). The last mentioned beast “tries to look like a Lamb” but when he speaks, his true colours shines through: he emulates the Dragon (Rev 13:11). This calling from the sea and from the depths of the earth refers to the underworld or the domain of the Leviathan (Job 41:1-11; [Beagley 1997a: 128]). It is a reference common to Jewish apocalypses (1 En 60:7-11, 24; 4 Ezra 6:49-52; [Aune 1998a: 728]). It is what Pohl (1971: 135) calls the *Nachahmungsmotiv* of the apocalyptic antagonist<sup>216</sup>.

It is specifically with regard to the first beast [i.e. the beast from the sea] that we find references to death [and resurrection] similar to what is said about Christ in Revelation [cf. Annexure B.1, sub-section 3]. Although these are not references to Christ’s death, it is clear emulations thereof and therefore will be discussed here.

#### a) Syntactical analysis

The verses under discussion within this section of the text are Revelation 13:3, 13:12, and 13:14. All three verses refer to the [seeming] death [and recovery] of one the beast’s [i.e. the beast from the sea] seven heads. There are a number of minor textual variants suggested with regard to these verses, but since they would not have a major effect on the text, one can work with the text as presented<sup>217</sup>. It must be noted, however, that Aune (1998a: 725-726) regards verse 3 as a later redactional gloss reflecting the *Nero redivivus* legend. Charles (1920a: 340-342) believes the greatest part of Revelation 13 to be modelled on an ancient Jewish apocalypse [written originally in Hebrew] directed against Rome.

A syntactical analysis of Revelation 13:3-4 will be done below. Revelation 13:12 and 14 refers to the same context regarding the “death” of the beast.

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<sup>216</sup> Cf. Aune (1998a: 751-755) for a comprehensive discussion on the understanding of the eschatological antagonist [in Greek called the ἀντίχριστος].

<sup>217</sup> For a detailed discussion on these variants, cf. Aune (1998a: 716-720).



210). In this sense the particle ὡς has the meaning “as if”, showing that this is nothing more than an imitation [cf. 2.1.4 above where the particle ὡς takes one a more concrete meaning, emphasising the actual wounds of the slaughtered Lamb]. The beast just seems to have been killed, so that his “resurrection” and power might seem as real as Christ’s (Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 83). That the beast has not been killed is implied by ἐθεραπεύθη [meaning to heal or recover from – Arndt & Gingrich (1975: 359)]. It is an effort to deceive the inhabitants of the earth. The motif of the eschatological antagonist as a great deceiver is found in the New Testament (2 Thess 2:9-10; 2 John) and in early Christian literature (Did 16:4) (Aune 1998a: 760).

This deception seems to pay off, as the beast gathers a large amount of astonished followers amongst the peoples of the earth (Rev 13:4, 8; [cf. Beasley-Murray 1981: 210; Groenewald 1986: 139]). They worship [cf. Chapter 6, 2.1.1 (iii)(b) and Chapter 7, 2.1.4 (ii)(b) for a discussion of the importance of worship with regard to God and Christ] the beast by using phrases taken from the Old Testament (cf. Ex 15:11; Ps 35:10; [Mounce 1977: 253]).

The phrase about the apparent death of the beast is repeated again in two relative clauses in Revelation 13:12 and 13:14 (cf. Aune 1998a: 758, 762). Every time it is used to identify the beast as the one imitating Christ. It also keeps the link with the reference in Revelation 13:3. There are subtle changes in the use of words. In Revelation 13:12 it is said that the beast had ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου, and that this wound was healed [ἐθεραπεύθη]. The wound is not limited to one of the beast’s heads as was the case in verse 13, but seems to affect the entire beast (Aune 1998a: 758). This caused Aune (1998a: 758) to deem this a later interpolation by the author.

In Revelation 13:14 the relative clause reappear, again with some changes made, suggesting another interpolation by the author (Aune 1998a: 762). Now the method [instrument] of being slain is identified as τῆς μαχαίρης [from a sword]. Furthermore, for the first time it is openly suggested that the beast actually died and came alive afterwards [ἐζήσεν]. According to Mounce (1977: 260), the verb ζάω, when used in the aorist in Revelation, always means, “to come to life” (Rev 2:8; 20:4, 5). This is probably the idea, to metaphorically imitate the resurrection of Christ by having the beast also “resurrected”.

The image of the first beast's appearance is closed with the all-important admonition: "This calls for endurance and faith on the part of God's people" (Rev 13:10c GNB; cf. Rev 13:18). It is in light of the fact that the beast [and the Dragon] knows that he has little time to exert his power that believers are urged not to let go of their faith. This "mythological imitation" is framed by two phrases of hope: In Revelation 12 we find the praises sung for the victory of the Lamb [cf. 2.1.6 above], and in Revelation 14 John starts off with the assurance that believers will be safe in the presence of the Lord, even if they might die for their faith (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1991: 84).

Therefore, although nothing is said directly about the death of Christ, the beast from the sea is here unmasked as the eschatological antagonist trying to imitate the redemptive death and resurrection of Christ. However, believers can hold on to their faith until the end [even through death], knowing that the victory already belongs to Christ, the Lamb.

#### **Excursion 6: The beast and the 666 in Revelation 13:18**

In Revelation 13:17 it is said that the people would be forced to take the mark of the beast [which is the name of the beast], which is then identified as the number 666. The identification of the 666 [Rev 13:18] is still one of the most controversial issues amongst Christians today. Du Rand (1999b: 53-56) gives a comprehensive list of persons in history that have been identified with the beast, mostly people who showed some signs of violence or power-hunger, or even just someone very controversial (cf. Joubert 1999a: 50).

However, to look too far away from the time frame in which John finds himself would be farfetched. Although Revelation is an apocalyptic document, its apocalyptic images are all grounded in historic events. It must be remembered that the people of ancient Israel did not live with their minds set onto the unreachable future. They lived purely for today and for the immediate future (Joubert 1999a: 22-24). It is therefore far more appropriate to look for a person from that era as the representative of the beast<sup>219</sup>.

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<sup>219</sup> Of course, as the image of the dragon or the beasts "conjures up the idea of evil on earth defiant to God" (Beasley-Murray 1981: 198) it is possible to link persons today to the image of the beast. But that would be purely hermeneutical interpretations, and certainly not the person John had in mind in the first place (cf. Joubert 1999a: 58).

The image of the beast with its ten diadems suggests royal power over many kingdoms. Although Roman emperors never wore diadems, it is still possible to see the diadems metaphorically referring to the emperors of Rome (cf. Rev 19:12; [Aune 1998a: 733]). The numerical  $\mu\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$  can refer to the ordinal number [i.e. first], in which case it refers to either Julius Caesar, or else Nero, the probable starting point for the enumeration of emperors in Revelation 17:9-10 (cf. Aune 1998a: 736; Sweet 1990: 209).

Another clue is the method of dying, explained in Revelation 13:14 [i.e. by sword]. Nero committed suicide on 9 June 68 with his own sword. Due to a lot of uncertainty and secrecy with regard to his death, it was not long before a rumour was spread that Nero would be revived, or even that he is still alive and has fled to Parthia from where he would return with an army to reclaim the emperorship in Rome (Aune 1998a: 738; Groenewald 1986: 139; cf. Klauck 2001: 692). This is generally known as the *Nero redivivus*. The description of the beast's wound to the head also fits the death of Nero who committed suicide by driving a dagger through his throat (Klauck 2001: 691). His arrogance and claim to deity made him an unpopular figure with both Jews and Christians, turning him into a personification of everything that was evil (Aune 1998a: 739). He was particularly fierce in his persecution of Christians, instituted in AD 64 (Mounce 1977: 252). It is not clear from the text if John buys into the legend of *Nero redivivus*, or if he just uses the well-known myth for purposes of conveying his message.

A further identification of Nero is of course the reference to the mark to be given to the followers of the beast, which is also “the name of the beast”, i.e. the controversial number 666. We seem to have here a case of *gematria*, whereby alphabetical letters are given a numerical value [which they had in any case in Hebrew and Greek]. By adding up the numerical value of the letters of a name, a numerical “name” could be given to a person [cf. Aune 1998a: 769-773 for a very comprehensive discussion on the concept of *gematria*]. In this way it was quickly realised by Christians that the name Jesus added up to the number 888 (Beasley-Murray 1981: 220-221).

The problem, of course, for interpreters today, is to find a name if you don't have much of a clue where to start looking. This problem is further complicated by

the fact that interpreters use creative methods [and local language] to identify the “owner” of the 666 (cf. Joubert 1999a: 54). The best possibility [confirmed by an Aramaic document found at Wadi Murabba`at] is to use the Hebrew transliteration from the Greek of the words “Nero Caesar”, which brings one to the number 666. Combined with Nero’s status as a controversial person famed for his tyranny against anyone opposing him, he seems to be the one John had in mind as the representative of the evil, the antagonist of Christ in this world (cf. Charles 1920a: 349-350). The concern should not be too much with regard to whom the number 666 represents, but rather what the number represents for the reader (Du Rand 1995a: 99).

Getting the mark of the beast, is the antithetical action for the sealing of the believers, which occurs in Revelation 7:1-8. Just as Christ has sealed off [marked] believers with his name to protect them from all evil, so the beast goes about marking his followers, seemingly giving them some temporal protection as a result thereof. It is, however, the eternal sealing and protection of the Lamb that really matters in the end. The sealing off is also a sign of life. Whoever has the seal of God, has received life. Whoever has the number 666, has death.

## 2.2. Summary on the Living Lamb

- i) As the person of Jesus Christ is absent from the Old Testament, one doesn’t expect the use of the Old Testament to a great extent with regard to Christ in Revelation. However, John uses symbolic language from the Old Testament to describe the death of Christ in sacrificial terms.
- ii) What is interesting is the usage of Old Testament titles of God onto the person of Jesus Christ, underlining John’s high Christology. There is also a deliberate attempt by John to incorporate Old Testament Messianic texts and apply them onto, e.g. the Lion and Lamb metaphors.
- iii) If God is life [cf. Chapter 6], Christ is the one through whom God has afforded life to this world. But Christ is also life (John 14:6).
- iv) The earthly life and death of Jesus Christ is the foundation on which this eschatological message of Revelation is based (Bauckham 1993b: 144; Beasley-Murray 1981: 47). This is emphasised in all the texts referring to the death and resurrection of Christ.

- v) Revelation 4-5 plays a pivotal role to convey a message of hope. The following important features with regard to the death and resurrection of Christ is mentioned by John:
- a. The hope for believers is that He is the long-awaited Messiah [i.e. the Lion of Judah and the Root of David]. However, the Messiah conquers not through war, but through sacrifice. He is worthy because He died.
  - b. He is the ὁ πρῶτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν, the first one to rise from death. By doing this He inaugurated a new age, and paved the way for believers to eternal life (cf. Rev 1:17-18).
  - c. He was dead, but is now alive and standing amidst the throne (Rev 5:5-6). The visible marks and wounds of the Lamb are significant, as this is the proof that He has actually been slaughtered (Bratcher & Hatton 1993: 101).
  - d. The victory is only claimed through the blood of the Lamb (Rev 5:9; 12:11). His blood purchased believers from sin to freedom in God's kingdom (Rev 5:9). Through his blood Satan was defeated (Rev 12:11; [cf. De Cock 2004: 163]).
- vi) Christ is Himself called ὁ ζῶν (Rev 1:18a). He has the same divine power over life and death as God has. However, the eternal living One has died, but has gone through death to be called ὁ ζῶν. The implication of Revelation 1:17-18 is that Christ lived eternally as God, then died as a sacrifice, but was raised from the dead to live eternally as the exalted Lord.
- vii) The exalted view of Christ identifies Him as the Son of Man who will, in the *eschaton*, be the Judge of this world. He is "the true witness of every divine revelation" (Charles 1920a: 14).
- viii) Because Christ has already won the victory on the cross, believers are urged to stay faithful unto the end, so that they can participate in the eternal life that Christ has won for them [cf. the proclamations to the seven churches].
- ix) The beast from the sea, as the eschatological antagonist, imitates Christ's death and resurrection, but still can't stand up against the protection believers have through the blood of the Lamb, who has already conquered the beast and the dragon.