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MARTYRDOM AS AN IMPETUS FOR DIVINE RETRIBUTION
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Joshua David Owen

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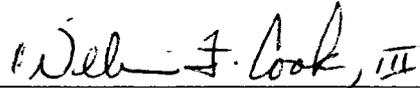
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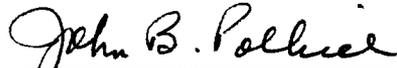
**MARTYRDOM AS AN IMPETUS FOR DIVINE RETRIBUTION
IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION**

Joshua David Owen

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John B. Polhill



Michael A. G. Haykin

Date 3/25/08

To Renae,
like a most rare jewel

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PREFACE

The company of Christian martyrs grows every year. These are not individuals who seek martyrdom, and certainly not militants who lose their lives trying to murder others. Many of today's Christian martyrs, like those in John's day, were cut down because they were faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ. For too long, it was possible for American Christians to ignore the plight of our persecuted brothers and sisters. Now, however, many of their stories make headline news. The revival of militant Islam in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries has made the prospect of martyrdom a real possibility, even for Christians in the West. This dissertation is written in part to honor those who have recently joined the noble army of Christian martyrs, filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. It is also written to exhort the church to be a faithful witness, even unto death.

This dissertation was possible because of several faithful stewards of the grace of God. Rev. Joseph E. Canady has encouraged me to pursue education since he learned of my call to the ministry of the word. His guidance as my pastor has been invaluable. Lonnie Coker, Kevin Hunt, and Jim and Dixie Rogers invested spiritual sweat and financial support.

The churches which I have been blessed to serve have had a profound impact on me. The members of Oak Grove Baptist Church suffered well under this novice, convincing me at times that I must become a seminary professor! My beloved friends at Richland Baptist Church were a constant refreshing to me, their pastor, during my course work. The hunger for God and his word at Trinity Baptist Church, my current charge, has made the pastorate most edifying, since I am constantly challenged to bring

theologically rich and practically relevant messages from God's word. I pray this academic work will be of service to them.

My professors have modeled academic excellence and genuine Christian character. I am especially grateful to Dr. William F. Cook, who understands the heart of a pastor-theologian, because he is a model of such.

I am grateful to God for Christian parents. My mother, Beverly Vaughn, has invested many prayers for my spiritual progress that have been a means of grace for me through the years. My father, Ron Owen, and his wife, Gail, have been prayer partners and encouragers throughout my academic training.

I thank God for the patience he granted to our three children, Caleb, Abigail, and Benjamin. My wife, Renae, has supported my educational pursuits from the time of our engagement. Her patient endurance these twelve years is a testimony to her faith and love.

Finally, I thank "him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, and walks among the seven golden lampstands." His promise, "Surely I am coming soon," has been the hope that has sustained me in this, and in all endeavors. Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

Joshua David Owen

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2008

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A central question of the Apocalypse is posed by the martyrs: “How long, holy and true Master, until you judge and exact justice for our blood from those who dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). This is a cry for vindication, which raises the question of the relationship between martyrdom and retribution in the Apocalypse. Does God destroy the earth-dwellers in order to avenge the blood of the martyrs? The traditional answer is that the Apocalypse encourages a beleaguered community of faith with the promise of vindication through Divine retribution (retributive justice view).¹ A contingent of scholars, however, has argued that God does not vindicate the martyrs by destroying their persecutors. Instead, God ironically uses martyrdom as a means of transforming the martyrs’ enemies (transformational view).²

While the relationship between martyrdom and judgment has been touched on by those of a “traditional” interpretation of the fate of the nations in Revelation, no

¹E.g., Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 62-64; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 28-33.

²E.g., G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (London: A. & C. Black, 1966); W. Klassen, “Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966): 300-11; J. P. M. Sweet, *Revelation*, SCM Pelican Commentaries (London: SCM, 1979); Charles H. Giblin, “Revelation 11:1-13: Its Form, Function and Contextual Integration,” *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 433-59; Walter E. Pilgrim, “Universalism in the Apocalypse,” *Word and World* 9 (summer 1989): 235-43; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); idem, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Sacra Pagina 16 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1993); idem, “Worthy is the Lamb,” *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 18 (1995): 54-70; Mark Bredin, *Jesus, Revolutionary of Peace: A Nonviolent Christology in the Book of Revelation*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003).

systematic treatment has been published from this position. This dissertation is intended to contribute to this discussion by exploring the relationship of martyrdom to judgment throughout the Apocalypse.

Thesis

While the transformational interpretation of martyrdom harmonizes with other writings in the early Christian tradition, it seems that this view downplays those passages in Revelation that suggest Divine retaliation for the murder of God's saints (e.g., 6:9-11; 11:5, 18; 14:9-13; 16:4-7; 17:6; 18:6, 20, 24; 19:1-2; 20:9).³ This dissertation argues that according to the Apocalypse, martyrdom provokes Divine retribution.⁴ Following the precedent of Old Testament prophetic traditions, John envisions a legal contest between God and the demonized nations. The saints are identified with God and testify on His

³For a survey of the theology of martyrdom from the OT to contemporary Protestantism, see Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997). The classic works on martyrdom in the early church are Hans von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964); and W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965). Also see Eduard Lohse, *Martyrer und Gottesknecht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955); William Horbury and Brian McNeil, eds., *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G.M. Styler* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); William C. Weinrich, *Spirit and Martyrdom: A Study of the Work of the Holy Spirit in Contexts of Persecution and Martyrdom in the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *Life in the Face of Death: The Resurrection Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). Mitchell G. Reddish's Ph.D. dissertation provides a helpful analysis of the background and theology of martyrdom in the Book of Revelation ("The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation," Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982).

⁴There is some disagreement among scholars concerning the referent of martyrdom language in the Apocalypse. The literal interpretation, which identifies the referent with those who seal their witness with their deaths, is upheld by Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2001), 382-83; cf. Martin Rist, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in vol. 12 of *The Interpreters Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 354. Beale (*The Book of Revelation*, 391, 394, 998-99) argues that the language of martyrdom is symbolic for all who keep the faith, whether they are murdered or die of natural causes. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to resolve the question of the extent and nature of symbolic language in the Apocalypse. However, this author suggests that the referent of martyrdom language is the "faithful unto death" as representatives of all Christ's faithful witnesses. The martyrs are not *symbols* of all the saints, but as *representatives* they are examples of how the saints can be faithful witnesses; and the outcome of the martyrs' loyalty exemplifies the rewards that faithful witnesses anticipate. Cf. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 334.

behalf against the world. The persecution of the saints confirms the saints' testimony *against* rebellious humanity. Frend wrote of martyrdom:

Thus the irony of martyrdom. From the time of Socrates, judgment is executed in the name of the well-being of the community upon the very one who could give well-being to the community. The results, for the one who has eyes to see, is a condemnation of the judges. And in this way martyrdom always reveals sin—the sin of those who put the innocent victim to death.⁵

Martyrdom becomes the climax of faithful witness;⁶ while the murder of the saints epitomizes their persecutors' refusal to repent. Because of this hardened refusal to repent, God deals with them according to their deeds. Therefore, according to the *lex talionis*, the murder of the saints is an impetus for retribution.

History of Research

G. B. Caird

G. B. Caird may be credited as the progenitor of the modern transformational school.⁷ Caird interpreted every passage concerning submission of God's enemies as the "power of invincible love" versus the more traditional "power of unlimited coercion."⁸ For example, at 3.9 Jesus promises the church in Philadelphia, "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan . . . come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you." Caird argued, contra the "gloomier interpretation" which saw this as the humiliation of unrepentant Jews, in favor of the more optimistic interpretation of the *conversion* of the Jews. Caird also argued that "the rest" who "were terrified and gave

⁵Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 185.

⁶Frend explained: "To live by this truth is to witness to it; to die by this truth is to witness to its ultimate grasp upon one's life, and therefore to provide the ultimate expression of its authenticity in one's life" (ibid).

⁷Much of Caird's interpretation of Revelation evidences a dependence on Austin Farrer's *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949), in which Farrer argued that the Apocalypse consistently uses OT imagery in an ironic fashion, so that the exclusivist, nationalist message of the OT is reinterpreted in light of the Christ event.

⁸Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 19.

glory to the God of heaven” in 11.13 represented the conversion of the nations; and he continued by suggesting that the seven thousand that were killed were actually the Christian remnant, patterned after the followers of Elijah, whose deaths were an expiation for “the rest.”

Indeed, Caird’s interpretations are predictable, as he nowhere allows for God to be truly angry toward sinners. His understanding of the wrath of God and the Lamb are epitomized in his comment on 6.16:

There is no need to find a place in John’s theology for any concept of the wrath of the Lamb, since it is not a phrase which he uses *propria persona*, but one which he puts on the lips of the terrified inhabitants of the earth. It has its source not in the true nature of Christ, but in the tragic and paranoiac delusion to which they have surrendered themselves. . . . They are men, to whom a lie has become second nature, so that faced with the love and forgiveness of the sacrificed Lamb, they can see only a figure of inexorable vengeance. ‘The wicked man runs though no one pursues’ (Prov. 28.1). To him no doubt the terror is real enough, perhaps even the only and ultimate reality; but it is nevertheless a travesty of the truth about Christ.⁹

All of the seal judgments that preceded this statement of the earth-dwellers are attributed, by Caird, to the impersonal consequences of “human sin . . . cruelty, selfishness, ambition, lust, greed, fear, and pride.”¹⁰ Even these “judgments” are woven into God’s gracious purpose: “even when the four horsemen ride out on their destructive missions, they do so as emissaries of his redemptive love.”¹¹

According to Caird, the two harvests of 14.14-20 teach that the martyrdom of the saints has expiatory virtue for the earth-dwellers. The wheat harvest is the ingathering of God’s elect, while the grape harvest represents the bloody sacrifice of the martyrs that enlarges the former harvest to include the martyrs’ own persecutors.¹² For

⁹Ibid., 92-93.

¹⁰Ibid., 92-93.

¹¹Ibid., 83.

¹²For a similar interpretation of the two harvests, see A. T. Hanson, *The Wrath of the Lamb* (London: S.P.C.K., 1957), 173-75. Hanson’s contrast between the OT concept of wrath and the NT “wrath of the Lamb” betrays a bent toward Marcion’s view of the Old Testament: “John, far from being a throw-back to the Old Testament in his treatment of the wrath, presents us in fact with a more carefully thought

Caird, the victory of the cross can only mean salvation for mankind. Judgment entails the eradication of evil and the salvation of evildoers, made effectual by the martyrdom of the saints.¹³

Josef Ton

Josef Ton, a student of Caird and an exile from Romania in the early 1980s, applied Caird's thesis to a biblical theology of martyrdom. His initial inspiration was Caird's commentary on the Book of Revelation, of which he says, "It was there that I saw how God always conquers by love that is self-giving and self-sacrificing. It was there that I understood God's method of sending His Lamb into the world, followed by many thousands of other lambs, to overcome the world by proclaiming the love of God and by dying for the sake of their proclamation."¹⁴ Overcoming the world means, "the truth shines in such a way that it penetrates the blinded eyes of unbelievers; they regain their ability to see and their minds regain the ability to comprehend."¹⁵

Ton's work surveyed the entire Bible and the intertestamental period. He argues that the concept of witness was already associated with suffering in the Old

out conception of the divine wrath even than Paul, one which is more closely related to the central message of Christianity. . . . In the Old Testament God judges by inflicting suffering; in the Apocalypse he judges by accepting suffering" (159, 169). This is an oversimplification of both testaments. In Isaiah God is burdened with his people's sin (43.24), and even afflicts his Servant vicariously for the transgressors (53.4-12). In the NT, Peter uses the pattern of OT judgments to make the point that, "the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority" (2 Pet 2.8-9).

¹³Caird's confidence in the triumph of redemptive love is hard pressed to deal with the scene of final judgment in 20.11-15. Here, he is forced to sound a discordant note: "But John makes no attempt to usurp the judgment seat of God, either by a dogmatic universalism or by an equally dogmatic particularism. There would be no point in a last judgment unless the final decisions lay in the hands of the Judge; and John is content to leave them there. We may be sure that he has a greater confidence in those decisions than many of his modern detractors who have accused him of undue severity" (*The Revelation of Saint John*, 260).

¹⁴Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom and Rewards in Heaven*, xi.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 146.

Testament. He wrote, “The word ‘witness’ already carries the import of suffering and of self-sacrifice even as early as the book of Isaiah.”¹⁶ The Servant of the Lord is a witness who will bring justice to the earth by self-sacrifice and his word (Isa 43.10). Ton argued that Isaiah foretold the suffering of the church in the Servant Songs. “After he has given his Servant to be a ransom for many, all that God is prepared to do for the salvation of the world is to send out his messengers as witnesses.”¹⁷ Ton interpreted the biblical teaching on suffering and martyrdom monolithically. Every text portrays martyrdom as the vehicle of taking God’s salvation to the nations. When he came to the Apocalypse, Ton agreed with Caird that Christian martyrdom leads to the conversion of the nations. The “mystery of God,” revealed to His servants the prophets (10.7), is the process by which God establishes His rule over the world so that all nations worship Him through the suffering of the Lamb and His followers.¹⁸

Allison A. Trites

Allison A. Trites has contributed significantly to the understanding of the concepts of witness and martyrdom in the New Testament.¹⁹ His explanation of the forensic metaphor of witness in the Apocalypse is instructive for capturing the picture of martyrdom as the seal of the saints’ witness.²⁰ His acknowledged dependence on Caird,

¹⁶Ibid., 11.

¹⁷Ibid., 16.

¹⁸Ibid., 285.

¹⁹Allison A. Trites, “*MARTUS* and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study,” *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 72-80; idem, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 31 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²⁰Trites demonstrated the meaning of “witness” and its cognates in the Apocalypse. A diachronic analysis revealed five stages through which “witness” came to mean martyr: (1) originally a witness in a court of law with no expectation of death; (2) one who witnesses to his faith in a court of law with a penalty of death; (3) death is part of the witness to one’s faith; (4) equivalent to martyr, one who witnesses to faith by being executed; and (5) the idea of witness disappears, one simply dies for what he believes (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 90). The word μάρτυς seems to imply death in Rev 1.4, 3.14 and 17.6. Trites concluded that, while μάρτυς had not reached the semantic stage of “martyrdom” in

however, has predictable results when addressing the question of the relationship between martyrdom and the conversion of the nations: “Here is a classic illustration of the familiar adage, ‘the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.’”²¹

Mitchell G. Reddish

Mitchell G. Reddish, in his dissertation, entitled “The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” agreed with Caird that martyrdom induced repentance from the worshipers of the beast.²² He also noted, however, that martyrdom in the Apocalypse has a retributive function. He said, “The unrighteous who refuse to repent, who are responsible for the martyrdoms of God’s witnesses, will be requited for the blood which they have shed.”²³ Reddish explains that Jesus is the chief figure of martyrdom in the Apocalypse. He achieved victory through His death as “faithful witness” (Rev 1.5; 3.14). This fact is underscored in the Apocalypse because of its value for the imitation of Christ. “Jesus is the proto-martyr. His followers are to follow in his path, being willing to suffer and die on account of their witness. . . . These are the ones who compose the armies of heaven who follow the rider on the white horse – an army of martyrs commanded by the Supreme Martyr.”²⁴ This “army of martyrs,” according to Reddish, is “the witnesses who bring judgment upon an unrepentant world.”²⁵

the Apocalypse, it was on an irreversible course to the dictionary definition of “martyr” (“*MARTUS* and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse,” 80). The concept of “witness” and “testimony,” accordingly, is a live metaphor in the Apocalypse, retaining its primary, forensic sense (*The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 154).

²¹Trites, *The New Testament Concept of Witness*, 170.

²²Reddish, “The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 218-19.

²³*Ibid.*, 219.

²⁴Mitchell G. Reddish, “Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (1988): 91, 90.

²⁵Reddish, “The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation,” 221.

Reddish holds the two results of martyrdom – conversion and retribution – in tension. On the one hand, he agrees with Caird that the two witnesses of 11.3-13 succeed when the nations are brought to repentance and sincere worship of God at their resurrection. On the other hand, he acknowledges that slaying God’s witnesses invites the judgment of God upon the Church’s persecutors. Reddish believes that John also held these two possibilities in unresolved tension:

Both of these views – exclusive and universal salvation – are overstatements in regard to the book of Revelation. On the one hand, John does hold out hope for all people to become a part of the kingdom of God. That seems to be the message of 21.24-26 (cf. 5.13; 11.13; 15.4; 21.3; 22.2). Yet John also warns (even in this scene; see 21.27) that certain actions and practices are not consistent with the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Those who persist in rejecting God and living apart from God face God’s judgment. These two views are held in tension in Revelation – promise and warning. Can all people and nations be saved? Definitely. Can some people be excluded – exclude themselves – from God’s presence? John knows that possibility as well. At the very least, John’s passages that seem to speak of the salvation of all people express hope that the truth embodied in the church will one day be recognized by the whole world. Recognizing that God’s judgment falls upon human sinfulness and rebellion, we can still hope that ultimately God’s grace and mercy will overcome even human resistance.²⁶

Reddish’s position does more justice to the retributive aspect of God’s response to the martyrdom of the saints than Caird’s. Yet, he falls short of the traditional interpretation in that the fate of the nations is left in question. The traditional interpretation recognizes that some *from every nation* are saved. Therefore, hope is opened to all individually. It also recognizes that the nations, in general, are represented in Revelation as armies of the Beast in opposition to the Lamb and his saints. Reddish’s open-ended interpretation of Revelation’s eschatology/hope is close to the carefully nuanced explanation of Richard Bauckham.

Richard Bauckham

Bauckham has made significant contributions to the understanding of the theology of the Book of Revelation. He has particularly focused on the nature of Christ’s

²⁶Reddish, *Revelation*, 410-11.

triumph, and the triumph of the saints through their witness to Christ. According to Bauckham, Christ's victory is the conversion of the nations.²⁷ He argues that the Apocalypse directly challenges the popular understanding of eschatology in which God delivers His people by judging their enemies, and develops the "most universalistic strain in Old Testament hope," in which God "brings the nations to acknowledge the true God."²⁸ Bauckham, however, does not completely ignore those passages that speak of the refusal of the earth-dwellers to repent and of their consequent judgment. He believes John allows a certain tension to exist:

The judgments of chapters 16-19 are primarily aimed at destroying the *systems* (emphasis original) – political, economic and religious – which oppose God and his righteousness and which are symbolized by the beast, the false prophet, Babylon, and the kings of the earth. But those who support these systems, who persist in worshipping the beast, heeding neither the call to worship God nor the threat to those who worship the beast (14.6-11), evidently must perish with the evil systems with which they have identified themselves. . . . John seems content to place indications of the universal conversion of the nations alongside references in equally universal terms to final judgment. But he is not making the kind of statements which need to be logically compatible to be valid. He is painting pictures which each portray a valid aspect of the truth. . . . The two pictures correspond to the choice presented to the nations by the proclamations of the angels in 14.6-11.²⁹

This sounds like the Apocalypse does not advocate one view of the fate of the nations over another. John does not see the future, only possibilities. Bauckham, however, clarifies his understanding of Revelation's wider hope by arguing for the priority of conversion over judgment: "If this positive aspect of the prophetic future necessarily falls out of view, while the visions of final judgment take their course, it returns to prove its theological priority – and therefore eschatological ultimacy – in the vision of the New Jerusalem."³⁰

²⁷Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 238-337.

²⁸Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 101.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 102-03.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 103.

Bauckham argued that chapter ten is actually the beginning of God's new revelation to John. Chapters 1-9 are "preparatory – necessary to the understanding of this revelation, but not itself the revelation."³¹ The preceding prophecies prepare for an understanding of the actual content of the scroll by demonstrating that judgment alone does not produce the intended result of repentance. The content of the scroll is then summarized in 11.1-13. The new revelation that John is to communicate to the churches is that God will effect the conversion of the nations through their faithful, prophetic witness unto death. The two witnesses represent the church. The resurrection spoken of is not the literal, bodily resurrection of the church at the end of the age, nor is it the ascent of the soul upon death. Rather, it is figurative of the way the martyrs faced death:

The symbolic narrative of 11.11-12 means not that the nations have to see the literal resurrection of the Christian martyrs before they are convinced of the truth of their witness, but that they have to perceive the martyrs' participation in Christ's triumph over death. In fact, the way that Christian martyrdom, in the early centuries of the church, impressed and won people to faith in the Christian God, was precisely thus. The martyrs were effective witnesses to the truth of the Gospel because their faith in Christ's victory over death was so convincingly evident in the way they faced death and died.³²

Their faithful witness until death produced repentance, as Bauckham understands 11.13.

In chapter 14 John abandons military imagery because now it is understood that the victory of the saints is the conversion of the nations.³³ The nations must choose between following the martyrs (14.7) and worshiping the beast (14.9-11). The image of the harvests depicts the consequences of the nations' choice. Bauckham argues that the grain harvest (14.14-16) is to be distinguished from the grape harvest (14.17-20), as a positive image of Christ gathering the remainder of the harvest of which the martyrs were the firstfruits (14.4). The negative image of the grape harvest, then, symbolizes the

³¹Ibid., 82.

³²Ibid., 89.

³³Ibid., 94-98.

alternative consequence of the nations' rejection of the martyrs' witness. Bauckham explained the ambiguity of the two possible endings: "The double conclusion to chapter 14 corresponds to the two possibilities opened by the proclamation of the angels (14.6-11)."³⁴ The nations may follow the lamb and be gathered in the grain harvest or follow the beast and be gathered in the grape harvest.

These texts illustrate Bauckham's interpretation of the prophecy. Though he acknowledges the tension created by pictures of irreversible judgment, he believes that the hope of the conversion of the nations triumphs in the Apocalypse. Like Caird, Bauckham conceives of Christ's victory only in terms of salvation. The visions of judgment merely illustrate the inadequacy of judgment to accomplish the victory of Christ over the nations.

Transformational View: Pressuppositions

Certain assumptions have operated together, from the time of Caird, to promote the conclusion that martyrdom is the impetus for human conversion. One assumption is that God's judgment of man is not punitive, but correctional.³⁵ The sole purpose of the catastrophes unleashed in Revelation is to lead the earth-dwellers to repentance. It is acknowledged, however, that the Divine visitations do not achieve the intended result. Therefore, God calls witnesses to testify to His eternal gospel. It is the combination of God's disciplinary judgments and the testimony of the saints that effects the salvation of the earth-dwellers. However, martyrdom, as the climax of the testimony aimed at conversion, is necessary to make the testimony effectual. In this way, martyrdom is God's saving instrument.

³⁴Ibid., 98.

³⁵E.g., Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 292-300. Caird summarizes his position in the following words: "From this it follows that the repeated attacks upon the ungodly world order by all the armament of heaven, which occupy so large a part of John's book, are designed not to destroy or to punish, but only to penetrate the defenses which the world has erected against the rule of God" (300).

How martyrdom works for the salvation of the earth-dwellers is based on either one of two assumptions. One possibility is that martyrdom has a psychological effect on the persecutors, leading to both remorse for their sin and admiration for those they sinned against in the persecution. The author of 4 Maccabees indicates that, while Antiochus was not converted due to the martyrdoms of Israel's faithful, he was impressed by them, and honored their memory as examples to his own soldiers of fearlessness in the face of death: "For when the tyrant saw the manliness of their virtue and their endurance under the tortures, Antiochus proclaimed them to his soldiers as an example for their own endurance, and this made them brave and manly for infantry battle and siege, and ravaging, he conquered all his enemies" (4 Macc 17.23-24).³⁶ Giblin wrote of the two witnesses of Revelation 11, "Even in slaying them, diabolical power provides a catalyst for the prophets' vindication in new life on a higher plane, and for God's achievement of their purpose through a further shock to their adversaries which occasions repentance."³⁷ Reddish seems to imply the same evangelistic strategy for martyrdom: "By his death, the martyr might induce repentance from the unrighteous. Such was the effect of the martyrdoms of the two witnesses in chapter 11."³⁸

On the other hand, Martin Rist has argued on the basis of certain second temple Jewish views, that martyrdom is expiatory.³⁹ In this case, the effect of martyrdom is upon God, who is turned from wrath by the atoning sacrifice of the martyrs. The expiatory virtue of the blood of martyrs is found in 2 Maccabees. In the story of the martyrdoms of the seven brothers (7.1-42), the first six brothers defy the emperor by threatening him with eternal tortures at the hands of God:

³⁶Author's translation unless otherwise noted.

³⁷Giblin, "Revelation 11.1-13," 450.

³⁸Reddish, "The Theme of Martyrdom in the Book of Revelation," 218.

³⁹Rist, "The Revelation of St. John the Divine," 347-551.

‘O accursed one, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the cosmos, since we died for his law, will raise us up to an eternal recovery of life.’

‘Dying by man, one must cherish the hope by God of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!’

‘Because you have authority among men, though you are corruptible, you do what you please. But do not think that our race is forsaken by God. Keep on, and see his great power, as you and your seed he tortures!’

‘Do not wander foolishly, for we are suffering these things on our own account, having sinned against our own God, being the cause of astonishments. But do not think that you will be unpunished for lifting your hand to fight against God!’ (2 Macc 7.9, 14, 16-19).

The brothers testify that their martyrdoms are not a sign of God’s having forsaken his people, but of his discipline: “But do not think that our race is forsaken by God. . . . [F]or we are suffering these things on our own account, having sinned against our own God, being the cause of astonishments” (2 Macc 7.16, 18). They interpret their sufferings as God’s discipline for their sins. The youngest brother declares that their suffering is not only for their own sins, but for the sins of their countrymen as well: “I, like my brothers, give up body and life for the laws of our ancestors, appealing to God to show mercy soon to our nation and by trials and plagues to make you confess that he alone is God, and through me and my brothers to bring to an end the wrath of the Almighty that has justly fallen on our whole nation” (2 Macc 7.37-38).

The author of 4 Maccabees also ascribed expiatory virtue to the deaths of these martyrs: “For being marveled at, not only by all the people, but even by their torturers, over their manliness and endurance, they established the cause of the downfall of tyranny against their nation, conquering the tyrant by their endurance, so that the country was purified through them (δι’ αὐτῶν)” (4 Macc 1.11). The eldest brother is given a voice to encourage his brothers to be faithful unto death. He exhorts them with the thought that their deaths will placate God’s wrath against Israel, and turn God’s hand against the tyrant: “Fight the sacred and noble battle for godliness, by which the Righteousness and Providence of our fathers, becoming merciful to the nation, will take vengeance on the accursed tyrant” (4 Macc 9.24). Likewise, the youngest brother expressed the hope that their deaths might eventuate in divine mercy on their nation: “I do not depart from the

valor of my brothers; but I call on the God of our fathers to be merciful to our nation. But he will take vengeance on you, both in this present life and when you are dead” (4 Macc 12.16-18). At the end of the narrative, the author again comments on the expiatory virtue of their deaths:

And they vindicated their nation, looking to God and enduring torture even to death. . . . And these, therefore, who have been consecrated for the sake of God, are honored, not only with this honor, but also by the fact that because of them our enemies did not rule over our nation and the tyrant was punished and the homeland purified, having become, as it were, a ransom (ἀντίψυχον) for the sin of our nation. And through the blood of those godly men and their propitiatory death (τοῦ ἱλαστηρίου τοῦ θανάτου οὐτῶν), divine Providence preserved Israel that had been mistreated (4 Macc 17.10, 20-22).

Though the purpose of 4 Maccabees was to prove that reason had preeminence over the emotions (4 Macc 1.1, 7.1), the theme of the expiatory virtue of martyrdom was retained.

In a rabbinic version of this story, the Emperor asks the seventh son why, if his God is so powerful, he does not deliver him and his brothers as He did the three Hebrew youths under Nebuchadnezzar. The boy (two and a half years old) replies that the emperor is not worthy, as was Nebuchadnezzar, to be the instrument of such a miracle, and that he and his brothers have been “condemned to death by heaven” (*Lam. Rab.* 53). He explains that if the emperor had not executed them, God had many other executioners (bears, wolves, lions, snakes, leopards and scorpions) that would do the job. The necessity of their martyrdoms suggests the theme of vicarious suffering.

The trial of Abraham’s faith in Genesis 22 was interpreted martyrologically. Abraham could be construed as the martyr, who sacrifices his future by placing the son of promise on the altar. Yet, a tradition arose which placed more emphasis on Isaac. Supposing that Isaac must have been a youth with more strength than the aged Abraham, the emphasis of the story became the willingness of Isaac to be bound and sacrificed. Some rabbinic interpretations of the binding of Isaac (*Akedah*) see the ram that Abraham sacrifices as the type of future martyrs of Israel, rather than Isaac being the type.⁴⁰ Just as

⁴⁰Aharon Agus, *The Binding of Isaac and Messiah: Law, Martyrdom and Deliverance in Early*

the ram died so that Isaac might live, so the martyrs die that Israel might live. This interpretation exemplifies the view of martyrdom as having expiatory value.

The expiatory virtue of the martyrs, though, extended only to their countrymen. In fact, the mercy shown to the nation was largely due to the vengeance God wrought on the persecutors of the martyrs. Therefore, these texts do not provide the background for the view that martyrdom is the impetus for conversion of the nations. They merely illustrate the idea that the blood of the martyrs satisfies God's wrath for the sins of the nation of Israel.⁴¹

In the Apocalypse, Jesus is the sole atoning sacrifice for sin. It is not, however, as a martyr that Christ ransoms people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, but as the Passover Lamb.⁴² Richard Bauckham identified the eschatological exodus motif as one of three major symbolic themes in the Apocalypse.⁴³ The slain Lamb is a development of the Passover lambs that were offered to ransom the sons of Israel in the first exodus. This background is seen in the hymn of 5.9-10, in which the Lamb is praised for ransoming a people for God and constituting them "a kingdom and priests to our God" (cf. Exod 19.5-6). The effect of Christ's atonement is later described as casting down the accuser of the brothers (12.10), a forensic image that

Rabbinic Religiosity (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 39.

⁴¹Cf. John Downing, who wrote, "So it is possible to single out four salient features of this account. The most important of all is that everything hinges on what is being done to the martyrs. Secondly, these events have a cosmic dimension. Thirdly, they involve immediate cessation of the divine wrath against Israel. Lastly, they bring about the imminent eschatological condemnation of those who have shed the martyrs' blood. It is clear from this that the concepts of vengeance and atonement are still intimately linked together." John Downing, "Jesus and Martyrdom," *Journal of Theological Studies* 14 (1963): 283.

⁴²Though note Frend's remark concerning the NT and martyrdom: "The atoning and vicarious nature of Jesus' sacrifice provides the main link between the Christian and Jewish outlook towards martyrdom" (*Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 81).

⁴³Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 70-72.

complements the Pauline understanding of justification. The ransom was more than the sacrifice of a faithful witness; it was the sacrifice of “the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty . . . the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (1.8; 5.5). And yet, as a faithful witness unto death, He set the example for His witnesses to follow (cf. 2.13; 12.11).

The martyrs of Christ are following His example of faithful witness unto death. As He conquered ironically through death, so too, His followers conquer by bearing the ultimate witness to Him through death (11.7-13; 12.11).⁴⁴ Is there evidence that this recapitulation of the faithful witness of Christ also entails atoning power? R. H. Charles analyzed the sacrificial imagery associated with martyrdom in Revelation, and concluded that the martyrs’ deaths were a sacrifice offered to God. He identified parallels between Revelation and the Jewish tradition mentioned above, as well as many later rabbinic writings, which present martyrdom as expiatory. However, he did not find the atonement motif present in John’s portrayal of Christian martyrs. Instead, he likened John’s sacrificial terminology to Romans 12.1.⁴⁵

Thompson, following Deissmann,⁴⁶ suggests that the cry of the martyrs in 6.9

⁴⁴Bauckham says that the “blood of the lamb” in 12.11 refers to both the death of Christ and the deaths of Christian martyrs: “The whole verse requires that the reference to ‘the blood of the Lamb’ is not purely to Christ’s death but to the deaths of the Christian martyrs, who, following Christ’s example, bear witness even at the cost of their lives” (*The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 75). He notes that their deaths have no value apart from the death of Christ, but inasmuch as their witness is a continuation of His witness their deaths overcome (ibid., 76). Bauckham continues by arguing that the statement in 7.14 that the 144,000 are those who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb,” is a reference to the martyr’s own deaths. His argument consists of an appeal to his interpretation of 12.11 explained above.

⁴⁵R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), 1:173-74. It should be noted that only the sin offering has the requirement to pour the blood at the base of the altar (Lev 4.18; 5.9). If this is the background for Rev 6.9, then the martyrs are represented not merely as sacrifices, but as sin offerings.

⁴⁶G. Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 424.

is related to the cry to be avenged on the Day of Atonement.⁴⁷ “If so,” writes Thompson, “the cry of ‘the slaughtered’ that John sees in heaven may echo a liturgical cry at the Day of Atonement, just as the later scene with the palm branches echoes the later Festival of Booths.”⁴⁸ This connection with the Day of Atonement might strengthen the case for an expiatory function for martyrdom in Revelation. However, while John’s use of symbols respects original context, he does not slavishly repeat traditions, but combines them so that they are at once continuous with their past and transformed by their present context.

John nowhere suggests who would be the recipients of the mercy which would result from the vicarious sufferings of the martyrs. In the Jewish tradition the nation of Israel is identified as the beneficiary of this grace. The likely candidates for this Christian apocalypse would be the church, the Jews and the nations. Since the whole church is portrayed in martyrological terms this is an unlikely candidate. The Jews are represented as the enemies of the church, even a Synagogue of Satan. Even if one argues for the salvation of the nations, as Bauckham does, it is not caused by an expiatory sacrifice of Christian martyrs, but by the repentance which their sacrifice invokes. Thus, though John does use cultic imagery of the martyrs, he does not share the expiatory view of martyrdom found in certain Jewish tradition. Frend maintains that, in the NT, the sufferings of the disciples, unlike their master’s, had no expiatory value.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Leonard L. Thompson, *Revelation*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 112.

⁴⁸Ibid., 113.

⁴⁹Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, 86. Instead, he argues, their suffering was a participation in the eschatological tribulation which would precede and usher in, the conflagration of the heavens and the earth at the Day of the Lord, now the parousia of Christ. Scott J. Hafemann (“Suffering,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993]) agrees that the suffering of the saints is not atoning, but argues that, in Paul’s theology at least, there is no amount of “messianic suffering” that must be completed before the end of the age. Paul’s suffering “demonstrates the reality of the cross and resurrection of Christ in and through Paul’s life (1 Cor 2.1-5; 2 Cor 2.14; 4.11), while at the same time making it clear that the age to come had not yet arrived in all its fullness (1 Cor 4.8-13).” In this way, Paul’s life becomes an “embodiment of the gospel” (919-20).

Some scholars argue that since God's judgments and the martyrdoms of his saints have saving intentions, and since it is unthinkable that God's saving purposes should fail, then the combination of God's judgments and the faithful witness of the martyrs must result in the conversion of the nations.⁵⁰ Rissi exemplified this line of thought when he wrote, "Because the victory of God is the victory of the Redeemer, the end will not be the triumph of destruction and nothingness, but the healing of the world."⁵¹

Each of these assumptions and arguments has been challenged. Beale rejects the suggestion that the judgments of God were failed attempts to bring about conversion. He commented on 9.20:

At the least, the plagues served as warnings, though they were not intended to have a redeeming effect but a damning effect. . . .

The plagues were never intended to cause the vast majority of idolaters to "repent" of worshiping demons, but only have the effect that those "not having the seal of God" remain in their hardened condition (cf. 9.4). These plagues will have a redeeming effect only on a remnant of compromisers inside the church and idolaters outside the church, who, it will turn out, will have been sealed beforehand and finally benefit from its protective function.

The reason for "warning" the remaining unbelievers is not to accomplish actual repentance among the majority, since they did not have it in them, so to speak, to repent. Rather the theological purpose is that God, by providing sufficient opportunities for spiritual reform, should demonstrate his sovereignty and especially his justice in finally judging the entire host of "unsealed" people at the seventh trumpet.⁵²

This interpretation of the judgments is based on the analogy of the plagues of the exodus, which provide the imagery for the trumpet plagues.

Beale also rejects the interpretation of 11.13 in which "the rest" who "were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" are converted. He argues, on a linguistic

⁵⁰E.g., Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 75; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 84.

⁵¹Mathias Rissi, *The Future of the World* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1966), 17.

⁵²Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 517-18; cf. Grant R. Osborne, "Theodicy in the Apocalypse," *Trinity Journal* 14 (1993): 63-77.

basis and on the basis of OT parallels, the parallel with Jesus' own story, and the context of the Apocalypse, that the unbelievers remain antagonistic to God, though they are compelled to acknowledge His sovereignty.⁵³

Though other scholars might be cited in favor of Beale's interpretation,⁵⁴ Eckhard Schnabel has dealt directly with Bauckham's interpretation of the outcome of the ministry of the two witnesses. Schnabel countered Bauckham's interpretation of the contents of the scroll, arguing that the phrase in 10.11 should be translated, "you must again prophesy *against* (ἐπι) peoples and nations and languages and many kings."⁵⁵ This translation suggests that the content of the scroll is a legal indictment of the nations. Furthermore, the response of dread and giving glory to God in 11.13 was not due to the witness of the saints, but to the partial judgment of God.⁵⁶

Schnabel critiqued Bauckham's interpretation of the two harvests (14.14-20); the worship of the nations (15.2-4); the open gates of the New Jerusalem (21.1-8); and the healing of the nations (22.2). His conclusion on the matter of the conversion of the nations and the victory of Christ and the saints is quite the opposite of Caird's:

John nowhere predicts mass conversions. He does not predict a conversion of humanity – whether this be a conversion of all individual human beings or a conversion of nations. He does not predict a universal success of the missionary proclamation of the church. John predicts the decisive victory that Jesus will finally win over the hostile powers and over the people who follow them when he returns (19.11-21). He predicts the eternal condemnation of Satan, of his human accomplices, and of the people who were deceived by them (20.7-15). He predicts the eternal death of "the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the

⁵³Ibid., 603-08.

⁵⁴For example, William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967; reprint, 1998), 159; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1963), 351; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 229.

⁵⁵Eckhard J. Schnabel, "John and the Future of the Nations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002): 251.

⁵⁶Ibid., 254.

fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars” (21.8).⁵⁷

Schnabel does not equate victory with missionary success. The victory of the Lamb and the saints is realized in both judgment and salvation.

Conclusion

Charles Bridges perceptibly remarked on the impious curiousness found in much theological inquiry, “Man is constantly meddling with endless questions instead of the path of duty—the way of safety—the only way to God.”⁵⁸ The Apocalypse of John has generated “endless questions.” Yet, John wrote with a concern for the Church’s continuation on the path of duty, which he termed faithful witness. One of the obstacles on the way of obedience was the human propensity to avoid suffering at all costs. In order to stir the churches of Asia Minor to fulfill their mission, John had to encourage them to embrace suffering when they encountered it on the path of duty. This encouragement came in the forms of warning and promise. They were warned of the consequences of persistent faithlessness (e.g., 2.5, 16, 22-23; 3.3, 16; 18.4-5). They were promised eternal rewards for faithfulness (e.g., 2.7, 11, 17, 26-27; 3.5, 12, 21; 6.11; 20.4-6). They were assured that their persecutions would be avenged in the heavenly courts, and therein would their testimony be vindicated. How shall the faith of any generation of Christians survive through persecution and stay on the path of duty? Resisting the temptation to meddle with endless questions surrounding the Apocalypse, this dissertation is devoted to one aspect of John’s Revelation that sustains the Church’s faithful witness: martyrdom as an impetus for Divine retribution.

In chapter 2 we will describe the method for establishing the thesis that martyrdom is an impetus for Divine retribution in the Apocalypse. Exegesis of relevant

⁵⁷Ibid., 270.

⁵⁸T. M. Moore, *Ecclesiastes: Ancient Wisdom When All Else Fails: A New Translation and Interpretive Paraphrase* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 103.

texts will be the foundation for argumentation. Revelation is full of allusions to the Old Testament, demonstrating John's understanding of himself as part of the prophetic tradition of the people of God. Therefore, our exegesis will be sensitive to the intertextuality of the book of Revelation, focusing primarily on the use of the Old Testament and early Christian traditions. We will adopt the position that John's use of the Old Testament respects the original context of Old Testament prophecy, while applying it to his contemporaries in light of the coming of the Messiah. We will also purpose to relate the parts (exegesis of individual passages) to the whole (the narrative structure of the book).

Chapter 3, "Martyrdom as Negative Testimony," examines the use of μάρτυς in Revelation. We will argue that the background for this concept is the Old Testament setting of God's legal contests with the nations and Israel. This forensic background for witness, we will argue, illustrates the church's prophetic function and posture towards the nations. The saints are portrayed as courtroom witnesses, testifying for God against the unbelieving world. We will argue that their testimony is a prelude to retribution and salvation. Just as their martyrdoms are the climaxes of their ministries as faithful witnesses, they also serve as the final argument to prove the guilt of Christ's adversaries. We will argue that God's retribution against the persecutors of the saints is one of Revelation's primary promises of the vindication of the saints and their testimony. Ultimately, because of Christ's identification with his saints, their vindication is bound up with his vindication.

In chapter 4 we will argue that martyrdom not only warrants Divine retribution, but that the nature of that retribution is determined by the fact of martyrdom. In other words, according to the *lex talionis*, the punishment of persecutors will fit their crime. We will explore the use of the *lex talionis* in Revelation in order to demonstrate that God continues to operate according to this standard of justice with his adversaries. Then we will examine passages in Revelation in which the *lex talionis* is applied to God's

vindication of the martyrs of Christ.

This dissertation will argue that martyrdom is an impetus for Divine retribution. We believe that this thesis militates against the position that martyrdom leads to the conversion of the nations. The arguments for the conversion of the nations in the Apocalypse, however, are broader than this one theme. We have not attempted to answer all of these arguments, but to remain within the parameters of the above mentioned thesis.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

The Apocalypse has not only received numerous and diverse interpretations, it has also been subjected to various hermeneutical methods. R. H. Charles is representative of the historical-critical approach, which was consumed with questions of original oracles rather than the original text. Charles dismembered the Apocalypse, rearranging the material according to his understanding of the narrative framework, often treating the final redactor as an incompetent editor.¹ On the opposite end of the spectrum are those scholars who insist on a “literal” interpretation that treats the book like a survival manual for the last seven years of earth’s history: “The scope and plan of the book as contained in the opening phrase . . . (1.1) indicate that the primary intent of the book was to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ. The book, therefore, has a special relevance for the generation which will be living on earth at that time.”² Recent commentaries have accentuated certain exegetical tasks based on the authors’ expertise.

¹Charles summarized his opinion of the final form of the Apocalypse in the table of contents, chapter 4: “The present order of 20.4-22.21 could not possibly have originated with its author. Hence the necessary hypothesis of an editor, whose existence, though suggested occasionally by certain intrusions in the earlier chapters, was not demonstrable till 20.4-22.21 was reached. The interpolations in 1-19, when restudied from the standpoint of this hypothesis, appear in a new light, and these combined with those in 20-22 make it an easy task to sketch the main lines of this editor’s character. He was apparently a Jew of the dispersion, a better Grecian than his master, but otherwise a person profoundly stupid and ignorant; a narrow fanatic and celibate, not quite loyal to his trust as editor; an arch-heretic, though, owing to his stupidity, probably an unconscious one.” R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), 1:xviii. Aune’s hypothesis of a three stage composition resulting in two editions of the Apocalypse is reminiscent of earlier critical scholarship. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), cxxii-cxxxiv.

²John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 23.

For example, Beale's commentary is an encyclopedia of intertextual allusions to the Old Testament;³ Aune's commentary is a compendium of literary and historical parallelism;⁴ while Smalley employs what he describes as a synchronic narrative approach which focuses on the literary qualities and theology of the canonical text.⁵ These are but a sample of the numerous exegetical methods presented to the student of Revelation.⁶ This chapter will explain the author's exegetical method and explain his choice of primary sources for background.

Exegetical Method

Exegesis of several texts in the Apocalypse is the foundation of this dissertation; therefore, an explanation of exegetical method is necessary. Many commentators identify four approaches to the interpretation of the Apocalypse: preterist, historicist, futurist and idealist.⁷ Mounce points out the difficulty of defining the book

³G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 76-99. Cf. G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

⁴An example of Aune's exhaustive literary parallels is his discussion of the genre of Revelation (*Revelation 1-5*, lxx-xc). An example of the use of historical parallelism is his explanation of the fervor stimulated by the circulation of the *Nero Redivivus* legends. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 737-40.

⁵Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 2.

⁶One should at least mention the liberation and feminist approaches to Revelation that find a kindred spirit in John, and interpret his Apocalypse as a piece of political protest. Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, Semeia 36 (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986); Allan Boesak, *Comfort and Protest: The Apocalypse from a South African Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁷The common identification of four approaches to the interpretation of Revelation is epitomized in Steve Gregg's four views commentary. Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 44-49; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 1-8; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 24-30; Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Milton Keynes, England: Nelson Word Ltd., 1994), 145-46.

according to any one of these approaches: “The author himself could without contradiction be preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist. He wrote out of his own immediate situation, his prophecies would have a historical fulfillment, he anticipated a future consummation, and he revealed principles that operated beneath the course of history.”⁸ The implication is that the book must be approached on its own terms, without a preconceived grid to define all of its parts. This is not to deny the legitimate application of the criteria of the analogy of faith. However, the analogy of faith is most helpful in discerning interpretative options that have been born from the text; rather than determining the interpretation to be imposed thereon.⁹ This will encourage careful listening to the text, even allowing it to nuance doctrines that are clearly taught elsewhere.

Literary Background of the Apocalypse

Genre analysis is helpful for determining which exegetical tools will prove most useful for unearthing the meaning of a text. However, because each author adapts

⁸Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 29.

⁹The analogy of faith has been abused in the Apocalypse, often justified by its seeming obscurity. Walvoord, for instance, explained that the pre-tribulation rapture is not “part of the prophetic foreview of the book of Revelation,” though he followed this observation by encouraging interpreters to assume that the church is in heaven based on the “typical representation” of the voice calling John “come up hither”: “This is in keeping with the fact that the book as a whole is not occupied primarily with God’s program for the church. Instead the primary objective is to portray the events leading up to and climaxing in the second coming of Christ and the prophetic kingdom and the eternal state which ultimately will follow. From a practical standpoint, however, the rapture may be viewed as having already occurred in the scheme of God before the events of chapter 4 and following chapters of Revelation unfold. The word *church*, so prominent in chapters 2 and 3, does not occur again until 22.16, . . . It seems that the church as the Body of Christ is out of the picture, and saints who come to know the Lord in this period are described as saved Israelites or saved Gentiles, never by terms which are characteristic of the church, the Body of Christ. . . . At the beginning of chapter 4, then, the church may be considered as in heaven and not related to events which will take place on the earth in preparation for Christ’s return in power and glory” (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 103). Interestingly, Walvoord does not seem aware of the inconsistency of his distinction between saved Israelites and saved Gentiles as two separate bodies of believers in light of the clear teaching of Scripture that the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile has been removed in Christ, bringing reconciliation and making the two one. In this case, it seems that the analogy of faith has been used for its convenience and then discarded.

genre according to his purpose, content and style, genre analysis can be highly subjective. Intertextual analysis sets parameters for the application of literary categories.

Intertextuality refers to the influence of an author's literary environment on his work, as evidenced in his appropriation and adaptation of other writings. It is the conversation that a text has with other texts written chronologically prior to it. The reader of the New Testament, for example, "hears the voice" of the Old Testament through the New Testament writings. The conversation varies in volume. At times it is easy to identify the "voices," particularly when the Old Testament is quoted verbatim following an introductory formula, such as "As it is written," or "As Isaiah the prophet said." Even when the introductory formula is missing, direct quotes are audible for those who are familiar with the Old Testament. For those who are not as familiar with the Old Testament the conversation can be signaled by literary devices like archaic expressions or Septuagintalisms. Sometimes the voices are faint, subtle allusions. These are intended for the initiated reader, that is, the reader who has a shared experience in the literature and learning of the original author. For example, a New Testament author may refer to an Old Testament text through its use in an inter-testamental text. Sometimes the voices are so faint; they are but echoes or reminiscences of the ancient texts.

After one hears the voice of the ancient text through the latter text, the question arises as to how it affects the new context. This will depend largely on whether the author made a conscious or unconscious allusion. In the case of direct quotation it is clear that the author was consciously using the text. However, in Revelation there are no such quotations (at least not quotations introduced by a citation formula). One might suggest that John used Old Testament language unconsciously, having been immersed in it. If, however, one is convinced that he used the Old Testament consciously he must then ask whether John respected the context of the Old Testament text when employing it in

his own text.¹⁰ The verdict on these issues may determine how one understands a given text.

A fruitful application of intertextuality has been the study of intra-biblical exegesis. Scholars have studied the appropriation of the Law of Moses at Sinai in Deuteronomy. The exodus tradition has been explored through the post-exilic literature, and even into the New Testament. The Psalms have proven to be a treasure-trove of literary allusion. Perhaps the most obvious source for intra-biblical interpretation in the Old Testament is the latter prophets, since these writings explain Israel's history in light of the patriarchal and Sinai covenants revealed in the Torah; and call the nation of Israel to be loyal to God in terms of that covenant. The Apocalypse of John stands at the end of this stream of inner-biblical interpretation, so that it is no exaggeration to affirm with Bauckham that,

It is a book designed to be read in constant intertextual relationship with the Old Testament. John was writing what he understood to be a work of prophetic scripture, the climax of prophetic revelation, which gathered up the prophetic meaning of the Old Testament scriptures and disclosed the way in which it was being and was to be fulfilled in the last days.¹¹

For this reason, it is important to read Revelation as the culmination of generations of intra-biblical interpretation. The awareness of this has grown in the past century of Revelation studies.¹² A summary of the recent research in this area sheds light on the use of intertextual studies in this dissertation.

¹⁰Vos concluded that John did not use the Old Testament contextually: "John merely employs the thought and terminology of the Old Testament as the garb in which to clothe his New Testament vision. The disregard for the various contexts of the Old Testament material, the application of the Old Testament promises, words, and titles to different situations, figures, and persons, as well as the general practice of combining words and phrases from various and diverse Old Testament passages support the proposition that it is mainly the Old Testament concepts which John is *employing* and not the passages which he is *quoting* [emphasis his]." Louis A. Vos, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1965), 51-52.

¹¹Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), xi.

¹²In his book, *The Synoptic Traditions in the Apocalypse*, Vos lamented the lack of research that had been done up to that time on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation: "This area of study has

R. H. Charles. Charles' contribution to the study of the intertextuality of Revelation lies especially in identifying bodies of literature alluded to in Revelation. He considered 11.1-13; 12; 17-18 to be borrowed from an independent Greek source, while chapter 13 was borrowed from a Hebrew source.¹³ In addition to these two conjectural sources Charles identified the influence of the Old Testament, the Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament upon the author of Revelation. He considered the prophets to have the most influence in Revelation with Psalms, Proverbs and Song of Solomon exercising influence in that order. *T. Levi*, 1 Enoch and the Assumption of Moses were considered undoubtedly evidenced by the author, while 2 Enoch and Psalms of Solomon were considered probable. He found the following New Testament books to have been before the author: Matthew, Luke, 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, Galatians, 1 Peter and James.¹⁴

been woefully neglected both by commentators and other New Testament scholars alike. The subject is usually dismissed with a few general remarks concerning the unparalleled extent to which the Old Testament saturates the Apocalypse" (16). Over twenty years later, Jon Paulien would similarly remark in his dissertation that although scholars recognized the importance of the Old Testament in Revelation little had been done to illuminate the field. Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8.7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 21 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 3. Seven years later Fekkes would still complain that "no single author, let alone a single book, has yet to do justice to this important subject." Jan Fekkes, *III Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 13. By the time Fekkes had written several studies had been published devoted to the examination of the use of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Exodus in the Apocalypse. Christian Wolff, *Jeremia im Frühjudentum und Urchristentum*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 118 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1976); Albert Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezechiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica* 43 (1962): 436-76; J. M. Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985); J. P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16, 17-19, 10* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989); G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984); Donatien Mollat, "Apocalisse ed Esodo," in *Atti della XVII settimana biblica*, ed. S. Giovanni (Brescia: Paideia, 1964); Jay Smith Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981). The same year that Fekkes published *III Isaiah and the Prophetic Tradition in the Book of Revelation*, J. H. Sims published a work on Daniel and the Apocalypse. J. H. Sims, *A Comparative Literary Study of Daniel and Revelation* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1994).

¹³Charles, *Revelation*, 1:lxii-lxv.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, lxv-lxvi.

From his examination of the text he concluded that John translated from the Hebrew text. He found evidence of influence from Greek versions such as the LXX and an early antecedent of Theodotion, but argued that John never quoted directly from these translations.¹⁵ He laid out in separate sections passages that were directly taken from the Hebrew, those taken from the Hebrew but influenced by the versions, passages alluding to the Pseudepigrapha, and those from the New Testament.

Charles does not have sufficient evidence to support his thesis regarding the pre-Christian Greek and Hebrew sources underlying several chapters of Revelation. He isolates passages from the larger context and then suggests that such texts could not possibly have been born in Christian soil. With regard to what Old Testament text John had, Charles' conclusion reveals the complexity of such an investigation. His solution, that John was dependent on the Hebrew but influenced in places by the versions, betrays the inconclusiveness of his study. Could it not be as easily surmised that John quoted from both, but used great liberty with both as well?

Charles did not give much explanation of John's use of particular Old Testament texts in the commentary. When he did, he seemed to follow a replacement or supersession paradigm of the relationship of Israel to the Church, though he did interpret the Millennium literally.¹⁶ Charles is primarily helpful for identifying possible allusions.

Austin Farrer. Farrer's book, *A Rebirth of Images*,¹⁷ examines several images employed in the Apocalypse. It must be said up front that Farrer's book is not so much a careful analysis of intertextuality, but of symbolism, both its roots and its meaning. Because most of the symbolism discussed is a development of Old Testament

¹⁵Ibid., lxvi.

¹⁶For example, on 1.5-6 he commented, "As respects the priesthood, the privileges of ancient Israel have passed over to the Christian Church." Ibid., clxxxiv.

¹⁷Austin Farrer, *A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St. John's Apocalypse* (Westminster: Dacre Press, 1949).

institutions and people, it is a potentially helpful resource for this study, particularly in discerning Old Testament themes exploited in Revelation.

Farrer first discussed his theory that John used the creation week as the structural paradigm for the book of Revelation. However, instead of six days of creation followed by a day of rest, John has an eight-day week. Farrer found Old Testament precedent for such a rendering from the second account of creation in Genesis 2. He understood this, not as a retelling of the first creation account in chapter one, but as an eschatological account of creation. For example, the man is not spoken into existence *ex nihilo*. Instead, man is formed from his dust, which recalls Ezekiel 37 and the resurrection of the dead. Thus, Genesis 2 is an eighth day of creation, namely, the new creation.¹⁸ Therefore, the creation accounts of Genesis 1-2 are used symbolically to describe all of world history, culminating in the new creation. Farrer lays out the structure of the book as follows:¹⁹

8 days = 1 week of history
 Rev 1-3 = Resurrection of Christ
 Rev 4-7 = Monday
 Rev 8-10 = Tuesday
 Rev 11-14 = Wednesday
 Rev 15-18 = Thursday
 Rev 19 = Friday
 20.1-21.8 = Saturday (Messianic Millennium)
 21.9 = Sunday (Eternity/Resurrection of Believers)

Farrer also argued for an additional structural paradigm, interwoven into the above mentioned. After adjusting the calendar so that each quarter of the year represented a major feast of Israel (something which the calendar does not naturally do), he divided the year as follows: (1) Passover and Pentecost; (2) Towards the New Year;

¹⁸Ibid., 76.

¹⁹Ibid., 59-90.

(3) Tabernacles and onward; (4) Dedication and onwards. However, Revelation does not fall into these four parts. Instead, argued Farrer, the book is made up of the festal year with an additional fourth quarter at the beginning, and an additional first quarter at the end. According to this model Revelation would be structured as follows:²⁰

Festal Year

- Rev 1-3 = Dedication and onwards
- Rev 4-7 = Passover and Pentecost
- Rev 8-11 = Towards New Year (Trumpets)
- Rev 12-14 = Tabernacles and onwards
- Rev 15-18 = Dedication and onwards
- Rev 19-22 = Passover and Pentecost

Some of the symbols from each section are explained in the context of these feasts. For example, “St John’s first section (1-3) begins with the vision of the seven golden candlesticks, which give form also to the Messages.”²¹ Adding to the complexity of this structure, Farrer suggested that each of the six sections were internally structured according to the macro-structure of the whole. The first section (Rev 1-3) is analyzed according to the seven messages of chapters 2-3. The first message corresponds to the first section of the book. Christ is introduced to Ephesus as the one who walks among the seven candlesticks, which parallels Christ among the candlesticks of chapters 1-3.²² Not only did Farrer see parallel ideas between the internal structure of the sections and the structure of the whole, he also attempted to demonstrate that the festal calendar also lay behind the internal structure of the sections. So, for example, the first and fifth messages, which correspond to the first and fifth sections, also correspond to the Feast of

²⁰Ibid., 91-184.

²¹Ibid., 94.

²²Ibid., 185.

Dedication, as is evident from the Christological descriptions, “He that holds the seven stars in his right hand” (2.1), and “He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars” (3.1).²³ This complex structural theory is worked out in each of the six sections. In the seals and trumpets a further structure is observed on top of this noting judgments on different parts of creation for each season of the year (sea, waters, luminaries, earth).²⁴ The last section is structured around the signs of the zodiac.²⁵ With each section the structure grows in detail and complexity, but everything is related by Farrer to the festal calendar.

Farrer has helpfully identified some festal symbolism in Revelation; however, his analysis of the structure of the book based on this symbolism is less than convincing. First of all, he must alter the calendar to make the second quarter of the year, the summer, correspond to a feast. The New Year or Trumpets celebration should fall into the third quarter with Tabernacles, if one is going to organize the calendar by the equinoxes and solstices as Farrer did. He takes New Year back into the second quarter by referring to it as “towards the New Year.”²⁶

Farrer must also answer a few questions in light of his analysis. Why would John include the Feast of Dedication and not Purim? What is the significance of the repetition of Dedication and Passover? Furthermore, if the six sections are parallel in structure to the overall structure of the book, then why are the sections structured by

²³Ibid., 189.

²⁴Ibid., 198.

²⁵Ibid., 216.

²⁶Ibid., 94.

series of seven? Farrer offers an answer to the last question, but his answer lacks literary evidence.²⁷

Farrer attempted what he called a “poetical analysis”²⁸ of the book of Revelation. He contended that the Old Testament was the primary literary resource for John. The symbols of the religion of the Old Testament were transformed by John’s (not the apostle) experience of the gospel. This transformation was begun by Jesus and passed on to His disciples. John is the heir and continuation of that transformation. However, Farrer did not lay out his methodology for identifying symbols and discerning John’s use of them. The focus of his investigation tends to be on liturgical aspects of the Old Testament. Where themes and terms can be identified with the Old Testament they are developed in multiple backgrounds in Judaism and Christianity, especially apocalyptic. There is little concern for evidence of literary relationship, rather a poetic appreciation for a vague connection between the Old Testament and Revelation.

Jan Fekkes. Fekkes made an important contribution to the study of the use of the Old Testament in Revelation with his book *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and their Development*. In the first part of the book Fekkes discussed the state of the question up to his day and suggested an approach for investigating the field. After explicitly stating his methodology and making general observations, he put his thesis to test in the second part of the book, wherein he examined all proposed allusions to Isaiah to determine the authenticity of the allusion and to examine how John used those texts that proved certain.

²⁷Ibid., 187.

²⁸Ibid., 20.

Fekkes distinguished three categories of reference. First are formal quotations, where an introductory phrase or word is used before or after the reference. Second, informal quotations are references that are nearly exact in wording, but lacking any introductory remark. Third, allusions can only be distinguished from informal quotations by their function in the new context. Fekkes explained, “The boundaries between an informal quotation and an allusion depend on the level of consciousness or visibility attached to an Old Testament text by an author, and consequently, on the degree of recognition which that author expects of the reader. . . . The more a text is broken up and woven into the passage, the less likely it is to be a quotation.”²⁹ Fekkes suggested that Revelation has true formal quotations. Though John did not use introductory phrases, he believed this was merely due to the genre John was employing.³⁰ This would prove to be a weakness when trying to compare John’s use in Revelation to the larger issue of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament.

Fekkes’ criteria for identifying an allusion seem to be verbal parallelism. There is also the use of general biblical traditions that are not specific to any one text. These traditions are categorized into four types: *dramatis personae*, divine institutions, holy and mythic geography, and religious vocabulary and concepts.³¹ He found that these verbal allusions and traditions were grouped according to theological content. He called this grouping “thematic analogues.”³² The four thematic analogues are “visionary experience and language”; “Christological titles and descriptions”; “eschatological judgment”; and “eschatological salvation.”³³

²⁹Fekkes, *III Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 63-65.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 7.

³¹*Ibid.*, 69-70.

³²*Ibid.*, 70.

³³*Ibid.*, 70-71.

As the subtitle indicates, Fekkes concluded that the Apocalypse had a pre-visionary exegetical history. That is, John had already established major categories to describe the situation the church faced in the Roman Empire before receiving his visions (i.e., Harlot/Babylon vs. Bride/New Jerusalem).³⁴ John's categories were developed from his exegesis of Old Testament texts. Fekkes observed several exegetical and literary techniques in the Apocalypse that betray the author's Jewish heritage: "repetition of Old Testament texts" (e.g., Isa 11.4b used 5x; 44.6 used 3x); "combination of two or more texts by analogy";³⁵ "use of Hebrew parallelism for Christological purposes" (e.g., Isa 44.6 in Rev 1.17b); "bridging two passages together by means of a third which shares common elements"; "clarification and augmentation of an obscure text by means of a more developed parallel text"; "interpretive handling of ambiguous Hebrew roots"; "extending the scope of a passage by subtle additions."³⁶ Fekkes made an important observation about the selection and application of Isaiah texts in Revelation. They seem to have been chosen and placed according to thematic parallelism. Based on the evidence for said hermeneutical practices, Fekkes stated very confidently that John was not using the Old Testament in a loose manner. Instead, he consistently respected the meaning of the Old Testament text in its original context.³⁷ For example, Fekkes noted that John used judgment passages from Isaiah in judgment passages in Revelation. What's more, he did not use corporate judgment passages from Isaiah for individual judgment passages in Revelation, nor did he use individual judgment passages from Isaiah for corporate judgment passages in Revelation.³⁸

³⁴Ibid., 290.

³⁵Fekkes noted two procedures within this category: "conflation of two or more texts into one integral whole" and "correlation of two or more texts which retain their independence" (ibid., 284).

³⁶Ibid., 283-84.

³⁷Ibid., 285.

³⁸Ibid., 282.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Fekkes' study is the agreement between his general observations about John's use of Old Testament themes and his identification of thematic groupings of Isaiah material in Revelation. This demonstrates that John was practicing something similar to biblical theology, and not merely proof-texting without regard for context.³⁹

Jon Paulien. Paulien's dissertation, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8.7-12*, is an excellent starting place for understanding the history and methodology of the study of intertextuality in Revelation. Paulien offered important background information at the beginning, discussing the sources with which John demonstrates familiarity; the exegetical techniques available to John (Targumic exegesis, Typological exegesis, Midrash); the Old Testament text tradition used by John; and the "solecisms" of Revelation. After a lengthy critique of earlier attempts of scholars to analyze John's use of the Old Testament in Revelation, Paulien laid out his own methodology:

The method consists of four fundamental steps: (1) basic exegesis of the passage being studied, (2) an examination of relevant parallels to that passage in other parts of Revelation, (3) a careful search of the Old Testament to find the root sources of the imagery in the passage which can be found there, and (4) consideration of how early Christians like John transformed the meaning of those symbols in the light of the Christ-event.⁴⁰

The basic exegesis of Revelation, argued Paulien, includes the same historical-grammatical/syntactical examinations of other New Testament literature, but is not completed by said investigations. For while these methods may help the exegete arrive at what was said, he may still be at a loss concerning what was meant.⁴¹ Structural analysis

³⁹Beale also commended Fekkes on this (*John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 27-28).

⁴⁰Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 156-57.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 158.

and knowledge of prior literature, while perhaps optional for other genres, is absolutely necessary for understanding Revelation.⁴²

Paulien contrasted Revelation (or apocalyptic in general) with narrative and epistolary literature. Narrative and epistolary argument tend to have a linear flow. Revelation, on the other hand, “oscillates wildly from one scene to another.”⁴³ Thus, the “context” of a particular symbol at the beginning of Revelation may be a vision at the end of the book. Recognizing parallel structures, such as the seven trumpets and the seven bowls, can also aid in interpretation.⁴⁴

Paulien’s next exegetical step is to identify allusions to the Old Testament. He follows the lead of Tenney⁴⁵ on identifying degrees of reference to previous literature in the New Testament: citation, quotation and allusion. But he adds one after allusion, following literary critic John Hollander⁴⁶, namely, echoes. Only allusions and echoes appear in Revelation. The difference between the two is one of intention. An allusion is a deliberate reference to its source, so that the author expects the reader to refer to the original source for context. An echo is an unintentional reference of which the author is unaware.

In the case of an echo the author has merely incorporated a symbol prevalent in his milieu which his readers would have understood.⁴⁷ Paulien warned against searching for a particular source when the allusion is unintentional. Instead, one should seek the general meaning of such a symbol as it is used in John’s day, “divorced from its original

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 159.

⁴⁴Ibid., 160.

⁴⁵Merrill C. Tenney, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 102.

⁴⁶John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 64.

⁴⁷Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 171-73.

context.”⁴⁸ Paulien suggested that this is particularly the case when dealing with John’s use of other apocalyptic material: “John’s direct use of apocalyptic material is generally overestimated. Scholars too readily treat parallels to Jewish apocalyptic as though they were direct allusions, when there is often only minimal evidence in favor of such an assumption.”⁴⁹

Identifying direct allusions is important, for the author expects the reader to transfer the meaning from the original context into the present context to enhance the meaning of the latter. Paulien laid out a methodology for identifying direct allusions, dividing the evidence between internal and external. Internal evidence includes verbal, thematic and structural parallels.⁵⁰ The external evidence deals with the possible literary works available to John. Paulien was confident that the canonical Old Testament, 1 Enoch, Jubilees, Wisdom of Solomon, Psalms of Solomon, and the Sibylline Oracles were at John’s disposal.⁵¹ He was less certain about other Jewish apocalypses, designating parallels with them as echoes. The parallels with other New Testament books are attributed to John’s Christian experience, and thus treated as echoes.⁵²

An allusion is evaluated on the strength of the compound evidence. In other words, a simple verbal parallel will not be as strong as a verbal and structural parallel.⁵³ If the parallel has strong evidence, then the uniqueness of the antecedent text adds more certainty to the identification of the source of the allusion.⁵⁴ External evidence plays an

⁴⁸Ibid., 176.

⁴⁹Ibid., 177.

⁵⁰Ibid., 179-84.

⁵¹Ibid., 192.

⁵²Ibid., 187-89.

⁵³Ibid., 190.

⁵⁴Ibid., 191.

important role at this juncture. If it is uncertain whether John had access to the literary antecedent, then one should treat the parallel as an echo.⁵⁵ Paulien classified allusions into five categories: certain, probable, possible, uncertain and non-allusion. The first two categories are direct allusions that should lead the exegete to take the original context into consideration for interpreting the present text. The last two categories are too weak for such an enterprise. The third category is in the middle, and requires careful and undogmatic judgment regarding identification as direct allusion or echo.⁵⁶

After exegeting the text and identifying parallels in Revelation and the Old Testament, then one must look to John's Christian experience, particularly other New Testament books to understand how Old Testament symbols were transformed by the Christ-event. Paulien was not looking for literary parallels at this juncture, but was seeking to place Revelation in a theological milieu.

Paulien has made an important contribution by using the method of literary criticism as it has been used for English literature for identifying and interpreting literary parallels in Revelation. Having a clearly defined method for identifying direct allusions is a great strength of his work. One of his weaknesses is undermining the importance of what he calls echoes. Although they may be unintentional, echoes still derive meaning from a parent text or texts. This may not result in a particular source text to analyze, but may indicate a theme that can be traced through the various literature (particularly the Old Testament) into the intellectual context of John's day. Along the same lines, Paulien may have limited the study of inter-textuality too much by looking for strictly literary parallels. Revelation may intersect with other areas of life (i.e., liturgical) that do not afford a literary contact, but form part of the *Sitz im Leben* for John and his churches. Admittedly, these cultural and historical allusions are difficult for moderns to discern

⁵⁵Ibid., 192.

⁵⁶Ibid., 193.

even with the apparatus of historical criticism.⁵⁷ In addition to these critiques, Beale complained that Paulien did not give sufficient attention or weight to Jewish exegetical tradition of Old Testament texts alluded to by John.⁵⁸ These weaknesses may simply be the result of a cautious exegesis, which can be appreciated.

Richard Bauckham. Bauckham contributed two significant works to the study of Revelation, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* and *The Climax of Prophecy*. The latter is most relevant for a study of the intertextuality of the Apocalypse. Bauckham observed that John saw himself in continuity with the Old Testament prophets. John wrote as one who stood in the age of the fulfillment of his prophetic predecessors: "It is clear that John saw himself, not only as one of the Christian prophets, but also as standing in the tradition of Old Testament prophecy. . . . His task is to proclaim the fulfilment of what God had revealed to the prophets of the past."⁵⁹

As a prophet himself, John was not merely a preacher of the Old Testament, but a herald of its fulfillment:

It seems that John not only writes in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, but understands himself to be writing at the climax of the tradition, when all the eschatological oracles of the prophets are about to be finally fulfilled, and so he interprets and gathers them up in his own prophetic revelation. What makes him a Christian prophet is that he does so in the light of the fulfilment already of Old Testament prophetic expectation in the victory of the Lamb, the Messiah.⁶⁰

What is most helpful in Bauckham's work is his attention to John's use of the Old Testament in light of contemporary Jewish exegetical methods.⁶¹ Other scholars, not

⁵⁷Colin J. Hemer demonstrates a judicious application of historical studies to the oracles to the seven churches in Revelation 1-3. Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁵⁸Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 20.

⁵⁹Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

⁶⁰Ibid., 5.

⁶¹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, xi.

considering ancient methods of exegesis, have concluded that John had little concern for the context of the Old Testament passages to which he alluded. Instead, they would suggest that his mind was so saturated with Old Testament vocabulary and expressions that these just bled into his own work, without any conscious use of particular texts. Bauckham effectively laid such views to rest.⁶² His research revealed a consistent interpretation of Old Testament texts and themes in Revelation. Of John's use of the Old Testament he said, "It is a pattern of disciplined and deliberate *allusion* to specific Old Testament texts."⁶³ The implications of this conclusion are significant for the interpretation of the book.

John's use of Old Testament texts is consistent with the Old Testament prophets' use of earlier prophecies.⁶⁴ Old Testament prophets were already interpreting and applying earlier prophetic traditions for their own day. John does this in an ultimate sense by showing their fulfillment in the Christ.

Bauckham did not include a detailed explanation of how he identified allusions. However, he explained that John used a Jewish method of interpretation known as *gezerâ šawâ*, in which Old Testament texts are brought together based on verbal links and used to mutually interpret each other. *The Climax of Prophecy* contains a number of important essays dealing with particular texts or themes in Revelation, interpreting them in the light of the Old Testament, Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions, and the historical context of John's seven churches. His literary and historical method, while not clearly explained, does seem to be consistently applied. He analyzed the structure of the Apocalypse from both an aural and graphic perspective. That is, he discerned a simple structure intended for a listening audience, as well as a complex

⁶²Ibid., x.

⁶³Ibid., xi.

⁶⁴Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 4-5.

structure for those who would more carefully study the work. The structures are complementary, not contradictory. The symbols John uses find their origin in the Old Testament, apocalyptic traditions, and in the popular culture of John's churches. The Old Testament texts alluded to seem to be discerned by Bauckham based on verbal, structural and thematic parallels, as well as the use of certain texts in other apocalyptic traditions.

Bauckham is balanced in his assessment of the evidence. He does not argue for direct dependence on apocalyptic literature. He does not doubt that John was familiar with some of these writings, but finds it more likely that John made no intentional allusions to such literature. Rather, he drew on commonly accepted symbols. Evidence for this is found in the creative way in which John uses the same symbols found in other works. This suggests that John was not slavishly dependent on such sources.⁶⁵

Bauckham's careful research and balanced proposals make it hard to criticize his work. Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced of his understanding of the conversion of the nations. We will engage with Bauckham's argument for the conversion of the nations where it depends on his understanding of the nature of the effects of martyrdom.

Steve Moyise. In his book *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, Moyise acknowledged the contribution of earlier generations to the study of the use of the Old Testament in the New. He noted, however, that most of the sources they used as Jewish exegetical background were later than the New Testament and therefore uncertain models for comparison. Since the early contributions of Bonsirven⁶⁶ and Davies⁶⁷ the Dead Sea Scrolls have proved to be invaluable for this study.

⁶⁵Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 39.

⁶⁶J. Bonsirven, *Exégèse rabbinique et exégèse paulinienne* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1939).

⁶⁷W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 4th ed. (London: SPCK, 1981).

Moyise introduced his study by discussing three areas of comparison between the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls. First, the various text-forms of quotations raises the question of whether there were many versions circulating in the first century, or if perhaps the author took the liberty to adjust the text himself, according to his purpose. Second, there seemed to be little respect for the contextual meaning of Old Testament texts. Rather, the meaning originated with the founder of the movement (i.e., Christ for the Church and the Teacher of Righteousness for the Dead Sea Scrolls community). The third area of interest is the exegetical methods of the author. Moyise introduced the concept of intertextuality at this point. His understanding of intertextuality is purely literary; how the texts of an earlier generation, and the traditions of interpretation of those texts, influenced later works. His approach was inductive, beginning with a study of the use of Scripture in Revelation 1-3.

Moyise said that intertextual allusions or echoes are not mere footnotes to older sources, but the older source affects the meaning of the new context, as the new context affects the meaning of the older source.⁶⁸ He noted the work of both Dodd and Hays in Paul's writings, where it is argued that Paul has in mind not just words and phrases from the Old Testament, but whole contexts and large themes. Yet, John is not merely repeating Old Testament passages, but transforming them. Still, the contexts of the allusions "bleed over" into the present work. For Moyise, this creates a dialectical relationship between the old text and the present text. The two texts inform one another, and no final resolution offers itself as neither text is totally subject to the other.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 12.

⁶⁹Ibid., 19.

Moyise appealed to Thomas Greene's⁷⁰ study of Renaissance poetry for categories of "imitation," or use of a previous text or tradition.⁷¹ The first form of imitation is labeled "reproduction" because it is a precise copy of the original that refuses to alter it because of its sacredness. Moyise finds no such allusions in Revelation. The second form of imitation is eclectic, "where the author draws on a wide range of sources, seemingly at random, without laying special emphasis on any one of them."⁷² He used Revelation 16.17-21 as an example of this type. His example began with a line by line investigation of the Old Testament allusions in the text (i.e., "a loud voice came out of the temple" alludes to Isa 66.6). Then he asked, what effect this allusion has on the *reader* ("reader" is italicized because he does not say "text," for that is impossible to know "objectively" according to Moyise). This may vary from reader to reader, but Moyise was willing to make some suggestions regarding Revelation 16.17-21 (i.e., Isa 66.6 suggests remembrance of evil deeds, and sends a note of retributive judgment). One might then ask what this textual interaction says about God or salvation history. Also, the experience of the community for which the work was written might be examined to see if the echo resonates with anything. Finally, the question of intra-textuality must be asked. How has the older book anticipated a certain feature?

The third form of imitation is heuristic imitation, in which the "new work seeks to define itself through the rewriting or modernizing of a past text."⁷³ In this case, the new text is the dominant voice which brings resolution to the dissonance created by the two different contexts. The fourth form of imitation, and the one with which Moyise is most comfortable is the dialectic. In this case the two texts distort each other, and

⁷⁰T. M. Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

⁷¹ Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 21.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 119.

⁷³*Ibid.*

neither dominates to resolve into a fixed meaning. An example of this is John's juxtaposition of the Lion of Judah, and the slain lamb of Revelation 5.5-6. One school of thought tries to resolve the tension by saying that everywhere the Old Testament says "lion" John would have one read "lamb."⁷⁴ Another says that John has in mind the apocalyptic destroying lamb of *T. Joseph* 19.8.⁷⁵ Instead of these two alternative schools, Moyise preferred to leave the tension and let the two images interpret each other.⁷⁶ But in the end Moyise favored Bauckham's view, which is very much like Caird's.⁷⁷

Moyise seemed to say that there are no assurances as to how John read his Bible. In fact, "We have no access to the author's mind, and even if we did, how he or she intended the text to 'work' is not the same thing as how the actual text does work with particular readers."⁷⁸ This reader-response interpretive philosophy fills the epilogue, where Moyise suggests that this was how John appropriated the Old Testament for his audience, and thus, how modern readers are to read Revelation for themselves. He

⁷⁴Caird's remarks are classic: "By this one stroke of brilliant artistry John has given us the key to all his use of the Old Testament. He constantly echoes the Old Testament writings (without ever quoting them), partly because this was the language which came most naturally to him, partly because of the powerful emotive effect of familiar associations, and partly no doubt because his vision had actually taken its form, though not its content, from the permanent furniture of his well-stocked mind. But to all this we must add that he believed the Old Testament Scriptures to be the oracles of God, and that the same God who had spoken in partial and shadowy ways through the prophets had now spoken fully in his Son. The Old Testament was indispensable to understanding the character and purpose of God, but it must be read in the light of the fuller illumination of Christ. Throughout the welter of Old Testament images in the chapters that follow, almost without exception the only title for Christ is the Lamb, and this title is meant to control and interpret all the rest of the symbolism. It is almost as if John were saying to us at one point after another: 'Wherever the Old Testament says "Lion", read "Lamb".' Wherever the Old Testament speaks of the victory of the Messiah or the overthrow of the enemies of God, we are to remember that the gospel recognizes no other way of achieving these ends than the way of the Cross." G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (London: A & C Black, 1966), 74-75.

⁷⁵J. Massingberd Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible Commentary, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 87-95.

⁷⁶Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 134.

⁷⁷Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 183.

⁷⁸Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 132.

affirmed Fiorenza's position that, "competing interpretations of Revelation are not simply either right or wrong, but they constitute different ways of reading and constructing socio-historical and theo-ethical meaning."⁷⁹ More objective approaches, such as Beale's, were useful only for showing the need for a new approach.⁸⁰ However, in the end Moyise left himself with little foundation on which to criticize anyone, for their view is just as right as his interpretation of the data.

G. K. Beale. It is no overstatement to say that Beale has made the greatest contribution to the study of the intertexture of Revelation. He has published an immense amount of research on John's use of the Old Testament in Revelation in a clear, accessible form. His dissertation at Cambridge in 1980 was on the subject of "The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John." He has written a substantial commentary on Revelation in the New International Greek Testament Commentary series, which focuses on intertextuality. In addition, he has written a companion volume, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*.

Beale recognized the difficulty of distinguishing degrees of allusiveness in his dissertation. He was careful to lay out a methodology to control the tendency toward "parallelomania," which Sandmel⁸¹ criticized. Beale listed three categories of allusions: clear allusion, probable allusion, and possible allusion or echo.⁸² A clear allusion is one in which word order and general meaning match that of the Old Testament text. A probable allusion may not be as close to the Old Testament text in wording, but contains

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 3; Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, 143.

⁸⁰Ibid., 146.

⁸¹S. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1-13. Also see T. L. Donaldson, "Parallels: Use, Misuse and Limitations," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983): 193-210.

⁸²G. K. Beale, *Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 43 n. 62.

a unique idea shared with the New Testament text. The possible allusion is more general in its association, and is perhaps less dependent on a particular text than on a general Old Testament theme.

Beale was not only concerned to demonstrate verbal parallels. He believed that the real proof of dependence lay in the structure of the parallel texts. That is, if the passage in Revelation shared the same structure as the Old Testament allusion, then the allusion is more likely intentionally text-based. Greatest certainty is achieved when a cluster of allusions to the same text is found within this structure.⁸³ Like a detective, Beale also sought a legitimate motive for the use of a particular text.⁸⁴ Beale argued that the book of Daniel provided the primary structural paradigm for the Apocalypse, especially Daniel 2 and 7. While he expanded his investigation to other Old Testament prophetic literature and Jewish Apocalyptic works, he has maintained his original thesis in his most recent publications.⁸⁵ The motive for using Daniel and other eschatological/apocalyptic texts was to emphasize that with the advent of Christ the end of the ages had come; the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations had been inaugurated in the cross of Christ.

Beale not only identified Old Testament allusions, but he sought to discern John's use or intention for including them. He explained several uses of the Old Testament in the Apocalypse: Old Testament segments as literary prototypes, thematic uses, analogical uses, universalization, informal, direct prophetic fulfillment, indirect fulfillment uses (typology), inverted uses and stylistic uses of Old Testament language.⁸⁶

⁸³Ibid., 307-08.

⁸⁴Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 62-63.

⁸⁵See his argument for the use of Dan 2.2 in Rev 1.19 (*The Book of Revelation*, 152-68; and *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 165-91). Also see his "Rejoinder to Critical Evaluations of the Use of Segments of Daniel as Midrashic Prototypes for Various Chapters in Revelation" (*John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 79-93).

⁸⁶Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 75-128; cf. idem, *The Book of Revelation*, 86-96.

Beale concluded his discussion of these uses by asking if the Old Testament were the servant or the guide to New Testament interpretation. He answered:

Therefore, the conclusion of this brief overview is that the place of the Old Testament in the formation of thought in the Apocalypse is both that of a servant and a guide: for John, the Christ event is the key to understanding the Old Testament, and yet reflection back upon the Old Testament context leads the way to further comprehension of this event and provides the redemptive-historical background against which the apocalyptic visions are better understood; the New Testament interprets the Old and the Old interprets the New.⁸⁷

Beale demonstrated that, with few exceptions, John respected the context of the Old Testament texts he employed. For the interpreter of Revelation that means an exegesis of those Old Testament texts is essential for plumbing the depth of John's message.

One further aspect of Beale's work demands to be mentioned. Many scholars have complained of the grammatical irregularities of Revelation. Beale has demonstrated that many of these solecisms can be explained as intentional markers pointing the reader/hearer to an Old Testament allusion. The irregularity causes the person to pause. In that pause he recognizes the familiar phrase from Israel's Scriptures. This is a much more satisfying explanation than suggesting that John was a poor Greek writer, or that he was in too much of a hurry, or writing from an ecstatic state. These explanations fail to appreciate the literary artistry of the book of Revelation.

Beale has provided the student of Revelation with a treasury of research on intertextuality. If one must criticize his work at all, it might be said that he undervalued the possible allusions to Greco-Roman symbols. Even this is a difficult charge to make stick since the certainty of those allusions is nearly impossible to establish.

Methodological conclusions. One thing is clear from even a cursory look at the field of intertextuality in Revelation, the need for a clear method to validate allusions. Because Revelation lacks formal quotations with introductory formulas, there are the

⁸⁷Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, 127.

dangers of either overlooking or exaggerating the presence of literary allusions. We will now attempt to state some guidelines for identifying and validating allusions.

After gathering possible allusions the researcher must evaluate them to weed out spurious suggestions and confirm legitimate allusions. The following criteria are arranged in a somewhat logical order. The most obvious clue that an allusion is present is shared vocabulary and word order. One should pay particular attention to Revelation's solecisms, because of Beale's observation that many of these can be explained as intentional literary clues pointing to an Old Testament text.⁸⁸ The rarer a given clause is, the easier to identify a parallel. One should consider the MT as well as the various versions of the Old Testament circulating at the time of John's writing (e.g. Targums and LXX), as well as the Dead Sea Scrolls and Pseudepigrapha. Rabbinic sources may also prove helpful even though they are written later than Revelation. They may preserve a traditional reading of the text not found in any literary predecessors to Revelation.

If the text in question has the same general outline as the Old Testament text the allusion is strengthened and true literary dependence is practically certain. If the immediate context of a possible allusion is replete with allusions to the same Old Testament parent, then certainty is even greater. One must also look for other passages in Revelation that are dependent on a given Old Testament passage. For example, an allusion to Psalm 78.24 in Revelation 2.17 is strengthened if Revelation 4.1; 16.4, 13; and 20.9 can be shown to allude to Psalm 78.23, 44, 45, and 18 respectively.

Intentional allusions can be validated by combining theological congruity with the above criteria. That is, do the Old Testament text and the passage in Revelation make a similar theological point (taking their respective places in redemptive history into account). External criteria include the probable availability of a certain text for John and the use of certain texts in other Christian, Jewish apocalyptic and Christian apocalyptic

⁸⁸ Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 96.

writings. When investigating the Old Testament antecedents of Revelation there is no doubt that John was well versed in the entire canon in both the Hebrew and certain Greek versions. If a certain Old Testament text seems to be a favorite of Christian writers or of apocalyptists this also supports the argument for a possible allusion in Revelation.

To answer questions concerning John's faithfulness to the Old Testament author's intended meaning of a text it is necessary to know the Old Testament author's intended meaning, thus the need for careful exegesis of the Old Testament text. It must be said that a simple grammatical-historical exegesis may not arrive at the same conclusion that John does regarding the author's intended meaning of a text. Therefore, it is necessary to include methods of exegesis current in John's day. These methods of exegesis can be discerned from Rabbinic literature, but also from the New Testament and other early Christian writings. It goes without saying that one must arrive at the general meaning and argument of given text in order to see how an intertextual allusion fits into it.

Each allusion must be examined to determine how it handles the Old Testament text and how it is used in its new context. In general, we have found Revelation to be in theological continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament. John certainly emphasizes the universal implications of their messages, rather than merely the nationalistic concerns explicit in their writings. He also applies many of their prophecies as one who stands on the eschatological horizon which they only saw from a distance. Yet, we have not found John systematically subverting the message of the Old Testament by ironic uses of the Old Testament text.

Genre

Apocalyptic imagery. Revelation is unique among New Testament books. While apocalyptic outlooks, language and themes are found within the writings of the

New Testament,⁸⁹ no other New Testament book is dominated by the apocalyptic style such that it is classified as apocalyptic literature. Yet, while some may hesitate to classify Revelation in the apocalyptic genre,⁹⁰ characteristics of that genre are remarkably prevalent throughout the entire work.

Apocalyptic writings may share a concern for eschatology, but definitions of apocalyptic that focus only on the revelation of future events are inadequate.⁹¹ The Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project proposed the following definition:

Apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.⁹²

David Hellholm added a functional description to this definition: "intended for a group in crisis with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority."⁹³

Revelation has several characteristics in common with apocalyptic literature in general.⁹⁴ Revelation is visionary, and frequently mediated by an angel. Heavenly beings

⁸⁹Examples of apocalyptic portions of the NT include the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13); 1 Cor 15; 2 Thess 2; 2 Pet 3; and Jude 14-15 (quoting *1 Enoch* 1.9).

⁹⁰Aune noted that apocalypticism is used in at least three ways: genre, eschatology and behavior. David E. Aune, *Apocalypticism, Prophecy and Magic in Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 199 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 1.

⁹¹Walvoord perpetuates this oversimplification: "The book of Revelation, beginning as it does with the Greek word *apokalypsis*, by its very title is apocalyptic in character, that is, a book which claims to unfold the future, the unveiling of that which would otherwise be concealed" (*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 23).

⁹²John J. Collins, *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, Semeia 14 (Missoula: Scholars, 1979), 9.

⁹³David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," in Adela Yarbro Collins, ed., *Early Christian Apocalypticism: Genre and Social Setting*, Semeia 36 (Decatur, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 27.

⁹⁴For further explanations of these characteristics, see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed., The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1-42; Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 221-27; and L. J. Kreitzer, "Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism," in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997): 61-66.

serve as interpreters of the visions. Reality is explained spatially by revealing heavenly effects of earthly events. Ironically, what appears to be the victory of the Beast over the saints from an earthly perspective is actually the victory of the Lamb and his followers over the Beast from the heavenly perspective. Reality is also explained temporally by contrasting the present age with the age to come, while also maintaining the overlap of the ages and explaining the presence of the future, or the present experience of the powers of the age to come. Finally, this heavenly/eschatological reality is communicated through esoteric symbols.

Ladd made an important point, however, that “apocalyptic” is a modern category for ancient texts. The Revelation of John gave this genre its name from the first verse, “The revelation [ἀποκάλυψις] of Jesus Christ . . .” The canonical Revelation differs from other writings placed in this category in several respects. Ladd noted that, unlike Jewish apocalypses of the same era, Revelation is not pseudonymous, but bears the name of a contemporary author known to the churches to whom the Revelation is addressed.⁹⁵ He also contrasted the typically pessimistic attitude of Jewish apocalyptic with the hope John expresses in Revelation. The greatest difference he highlighted is John’s authentic prophetic character. He wrote, “Jewish apocalypses are pseudo-predictive; i.e., the writer takes his stand at a point in past history and then rewrites history under the guise of prophecy by the use of symbols. John takes his stand in his own day and looks forward to the consummation of God’s redemptive purpose.”⁹⁶ Therefore while we recognize that Revelation has many features in common with other Jewish and Christian apocalypses, its independence from these other writings is also noted.

⁹⁵George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 20.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

Because of the apocalyptic nature of Revelation, we will look primarily for the author's interpretation of history, not myopically focusing on the fulfillment of predictive prophecy. Of particular relevance for this dissertation is the illocutionary force of his visions for calling the church to faithful witness even if it results in suffering and death.

Epistolary features. The Apocalypse is a letter, with an epistolary greeting (1.4-8) and benediction (22.21). This fact underscores the occasional nature of the book. It was written to specific churches, at a specific time, facing a particular situation. They are encouraged to pay attention to what is written because "the time is near" (1.3). The motivation is not that these things will happen in the indefinite future; therefore, they should be ready should they occur in their own lifetime. John expects his readers to "keep what is written in it," as it is immediately applicable to their situation. For the modern interpreter this means that the referents of the symbols John uses must have been understood by John's audience. They are drawn from the Scripture and from the political and social environment of these churches. That is not to say that the entire prophecy must have come to fulfillment in the first century. However, while the great hope of the saints lay on the horizon, much of what was written by John was true to the present experience of the church.

Prophecy. The Apocalypse is a prophecy (1.3; 22.7, 10, 18-19; cf. 22.6). Like the prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Apocalypse is not only concerned with future events,⁹⁷ but concerns the present in continuity with the past and the future. A direct revelation of God about the past, present or future is brought to bear on the present situation of the community of faith. Therefore the interpreter need not assume that the entire book narrates events that lie in the distant future from John's own day. At the

⁹⁷J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 23.

same time, the prophetic nature of the book requires that the message is more than merely a political treatise of protest against Rome, bearing the stamp of God's approval.

The Old Testament prophets had the responsibility of interpreting, explaining, amplifying and applying the covenant documents of Moses for their nation. Even the predictive elements of their prophetic oracles were specific applications of the threats and promises exemplified in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. For example, Jeremiah's prophecy of the seventy years of exile (Jer 25.11-12; 29.10) was a specific application of the threat of exile in Deuteronomy 28.36, 64-68, as well as the promise of redemption in Deuteronomy 30.1-10.⁹⁸ Revelation continues this prophetic commission of calling the people of God to covenant loyalty. The Old Testament scriptures and their fulfillment in Christ are the basis upon which history is interpreted and the church is called to faithful witness—which is the result of covenant loyalty.

Revelation is Visionary. John is instructed to “write what you see” (1.11). God gave Jesus a revelation to *show* his servants what must soon take place (1.1). Much of what John sees is beyond his linguistic expression, yet he is commanded to write what he sees. John compensates for the inexpressible nature of his experience by use of simile: “a voice *like* a trumpet,” “one *like* a son of man,” “*like* white wool, *like* snow, his eyes were *like* a flame of fire,” etc. (1.10, 13, and 14; cf. 1.15, 16; 4.1, 3, 6, 7; 6.1, 12, 14; 8.8, 10; 9.2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 17, 19; 10.1, 3; 11.1; 12.15; 13.2, 11; 14.2, 14; 15.2; 16.3, 13; 18.21; 19.6, 12; 21.11). Since much of what John saw was beyond his ordinary experience, he had to compare what he saw to the world with which he and the churches were familiar. The language he used was suggested by the geographical and cultural location of John and his churches,⁹⁹ as well as by similar visions recorded in OT

⁹⁸O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 121-26.

⁹⁹Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 10-12.

scripture. Therefore, the cultural and literary environment of Revelation will be explored for clues to the interpretation of his visions.

Revelation is symbolic. Jesus communicated it to John by signs (ἐσήμανεν). Beale demonstrated that the word σημαίνω indicates not only that Christ communicated, but also how He communicated: “to show by a sign.”¹⁰⁰ For this reason, the Apocalypse is similar to those visionary portions of Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah, upon which John shows special dependence. The symbolic nature of Revelation does not leave the interpreter in a sea of polyvalence.¹⁰¹ Poythress has suggested four levels of communication through which one must move in order to understand the symbolism of Revelation.¹⁰² The first level is the linguistic level, which consists of the text John sent to the churches. The second level is the visionary level, which refers to the scenes John saw in his visions. The third level is the referential level, which is the historical referent to which the vision refers. The fourth level is the symbolic level, in which the interpreter asks what the symbol reveals about the referent. Poythress illustrated these levels using Revelation 5.6-8:

For this passage, the linguistic level consists in the textual description sent from John to the seven churches (the actual linguistic material in vv. 6-8). The visionary level consists in the visionary experience that John had of seeing Christ represented in the form of a lamb. The referential level is the reference to the living Christ, enthroned at God’s right hand. The symbolic level consists in the symbolic significance of the imagery used. What is connoted by the imagery of a lamb, the seven horns, the seven eyes, the taking of a scroll?¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 50-55.

¹⁰¹Beale wrote, “To say that John’s language ‘deals in pictures rather than propositions’ is to misunderstand the nature of metaphorical language in general. . . . The purpose of comparing figurative subjects with literal subjects is to explain something propositionally about the nonfigurative subject” (ibid., 67).

¹⁰²Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Genre and Hermeneutics in Revelation 20.1-6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (March 1993): 41-54.

¹⁰³Ibid., 43.

It is the move from the visionary to the referential that concerns most debates over the interpretation of John's symbols. The symbolic nature of the apocalypse presents a challenge to the interpreter to understand both the referent of the symbol and what the symbol says about the referent. To borrow a phrase from Michaels, it is sometimes easier to determine what John is saying than what he is saying it about.¹⁰⁴

In order to determine "what John is saying it about," special attention will be paid to the internal context, or narrative world, of the Apocalypse. An interpreter is often present in the narrative to identify the referent of a symbol with a "this is that" expression (e.g., 1.20). While internal context is primary, special attention will also be given to inter-textual echoes and allusions. Other Johannine writings will be consulted. Other New Testament writings, especially the Synoptics, will be explored. The Old Testament has proven to be a primary source for structure, images and theology, and will be consulted as such. Extra-canonical Jewish sources may also provide insight about the referent of a symbol, as well as historical and cultural background.¹⁰⁵

John's symbols abound in paradox and irony.¹⁰⁶ An example of paradox is the way in which John uses the concept of victory. The churches are promised that those who overcome will receive rewards. In chapter 12 they are told that the saints overcome by dying for their witness to Christ (12.11). Thus, Antipas, the martyr, is offered as an example of victory (2.13). Similarly, Jesus is announced by one of the elders as "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" (5.5). But when John turns to "see" the Lion, he beholds a

¹⁰⁴Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, 13.

¹⁰⁵Colin Hemer has demonstrated the value of historical and cultural background for understanding the symbolism of Revelation, particularly in chapters 2-3. Colin Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). Cf. William M. Ramsay, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904).

¹⁰⁶We use irony in the technical sense of a rhetorical device whereby one's statements seem incongruous. For example, "The last will be first and the first last" (Matt 20.16).

slaughtered Lamb (5.6). An example of irony is found in Revelation 13.7, where the Beast is given authority to conquer the saints. What appears to be the defeat of the saints actually turns out to be their victory, as recorded in Revelation 15.2. These paradoxes become mutually interpretive. One image should not silence the witness of a related image. We believe, for example, that this is the error of G. B. Caird's interpretation of the Lion/Lamb symbols. He flattens the paradox to one controlling image, that of the Lamb. "Throughout the welter of Old Testament images in the chapters that follow, almost without exception the only title for Christ is the Lamb, and this title is meant to control and interpret all the rest of the symbolism."¹⁰⁷ Each symbol communicates something substantial about its referent. Therefore, one must resist harmonizing tendencies that mute one symbol in favor of another. Since the Lamb is a recurring image in Revelation, it should be noted that this Lamb is not dead victim. Rather, he is standing and armed with seven horns (5.6).

Following the Plot of Revelation

Narrative framework is one characteristic of an apocalypse that certainly applies to John's Apocalypse. John's referential level of communication is not necessarily a chronological ordering of events from chapter 4 through chapter 22. In fact, the evidence suggests that several of John's visions retell, or recapitulate, earlier visions.¹⁰⁸ Among the several evidences for recapitulation are the repeated announcements of the final judgment through the sign of the great earthquake and the narrative of Christ's career as promised, born of woman, persecuted by the Dragon, caught up to heaven and defeating the Dragon in chapter 12. The great earthquake,

¹⁰⁷Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 74-75.

¹⁰⁸For a helpful discussion of the structure of the book in general, and of the evidence for progressive recapitulation in particular, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 121-51. William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967)16-36, though written on a popular level, is also helpful for analyzing the parallel structures of the Apocalypse.

announcing the final judgment is found: after the opening of the sixth seal (Rev 6.12); after the ascension of the two witnesses (11.13); after the blast of the seventh trumpet (11.19); and after the pouring of the seventh bowl (16.18). Nevertheless, there is progression that climaxes in the vision of a new heaven and new earth. We will follow this story, through its various progressions, tracing the theme of martyrdom as an impetus for retribution to demonstrate the consistency of John's presentation of this theme.

The narrative of the Apocalypse draws on experiences relevant to the church of John's day. It tells the story of Christ's present reign both in heaven and as it is worked out through the church on earth. It foretells the consummation of salvation and judgment at the second coming of Christ. By the use of recapitulation, John shows that the eschatological events of salvation and judgment are already being partially expressed in the present. Thus, the Apocalypse can be said to teach an inaugurated eschatology.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

We will focus on texts that express the relationship between martyrdom and divine retribution against the persecutors of the martyrs. We will examine these texts according to sound hermeneutical principles. The important studies on intertextuality in the Apocalypse will be foundational for describing the literary environment of Revelation, as well as interpreting passages in light of intentional allusions. We will be sensitive to the unique combination of genres in the Apocalypse as a whole, and of the individual units that are analyzed. Symbolism will be interpreted with historical and literary boundaries, in order to identify the referent of the vision, and the meaning of the symbol. Our investigation of this theme will comprehend the entire movement of the plot, to demonstrate a consistent theme of martyrdom as an impetus for divine retribution in the Apocalypse.

¹⁰⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 116-51.

CHAPTER 3

MARTYRDOM AS NEGATIVE TESTIMONY

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that martyrdom is the final act of Christian witness that confirms the witness and provokes retribution. The concept of witness is often understood only as a compassionate appeal for repentance, much like God's intention for Jonah's preaching. However, the implicit concern for salvation must not obscure the forensic background of the concept of witness. The concept of witness is derived from the Old Testament metaphor of God's controversy with the nation(s). Faithful witnesses testify on God's behalf against the nation(s). In Revelation, God's opponents murder these witnesses. Yet, instead of silencing their testimony, their murderers have confirmed it, provoking divine justice.

The Use of μάρτυς in Revelation

Few scholars would argue that μάρτυς (and cognates μαρτύριον, μαρτυρία and μαρτυρεῖν) has reached the semantic stage of "martyr," by the time of the writing of Revelation.¹ Allison A. Trites presents five stages of development in a diachronic analysis of the word μάρτυς: (1) witness in a court of law with no expectation of death; (2) witness in a court of law that resulted in the penalty of death; (3) death is regarded as part of the witness; (4) equivalent to "martyr;" death uppermost, though idea of witness

¹Many note exceptions at 2.13 and 17.6. E.g., R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), 1:62; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 67, 248; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 46-47, 224-25; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 184-85.

not lacking; (5) idea of witness disappears.² Trites' investigation resulted in the conclusion that μάρτυς had not reached the fourth or fifth stages. The concept of μάρτυς retains courtroom connotations. The concept of death must still be specified in the context.³

The Old Testament Background of the Forensic Metaphor of Witness

This forensic metaphor has its roots in the Old Testament motif of God's controversy with the nations. The concept of witness was fundamental to life in ancient Israel because of the centrality of law for both civic and religious life. The first reference to legal witness is found in the Decalogue, and is a prohibition against perjury: "You shall not bear false witness (עֵד שֶׁקֶר) against your neighbor" (Exod 20.16). The commandment is a religious duty related to civic responsibility. Therefore, falsehood in the court indicates falsehood in one's covenant relationship with Jehovah. Perjury is such a serious sin in the Pentateuch that its punishment is determined according to the *lex talionis*:

If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot. (Deut 19.16-21)⁴

Exodus 23.2-3, 6 provides the background for the picture of the false witness within the context of a lawsuit (בִּיָּד): "You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be

²Allison A. Trites, "MARTUS and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse: A Semantic Study," *Novum Testamentum* 15 (1973): 72-73.

³Ibid., 72, 77.

⁴ Author's translation unless otherwise noted.

partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. . . . You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit.”

The Pentateuch’s picture of lawsuits with witnesses provides the background for the prophetic metaphor of God’s legal battle with Israel and/or the nations.⁵ In Isaiah 40, God addresses emissaries to go to the exiles of Israel and proclaim words of comfort (Isa 40.1-5). Israel protests with a lament concerning their pitiable condition (Isa 40.6-7). God’s emissary responds that human frailty will not thwart the purpose of God (Isa 40.8). In the following chapters God enters into a series of disputations with Israel in which he extols his greatness, mocks the futility of idolatry, and defends his choice of Israel as his servant (Isa 40.9-43.8). The central concern of this section seems to be to convince Israel that because there is no one like God, then his purposes cannot be frustrated (Isa 40.18, 25). The gods of the nations are invited to present their case before God,⁶ and are proven impotent:⁷ “Behold, you are nothing, and your work is less than nothing” (Isa 41.21-24).

⁵R. G. Maccini, “Testimony/Witness,” in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 812.

⁶Claus Westermann distinguishes between the criminal case and the civil, and states that the present text is in the literary form of the latter: “Thus, the background of this literary form is not the criminal case which has to do with an offence and its punishment, but the civil which turns on a claim and its admission or dismissal.” He explains the rise of this dispute as an explanation of Israel’s exile: “The form came into being because of the position in which the exiles were placed in Babylon. For their daily life, the Babylonian empire was an imposing and undeniable reality, and they knew that its nerve-centre was its cult, with its invocation of the gods, its sacrifices and processions. In such a situation the question of which claim to divinity was true and who was in fact God was inevitable.” Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 63.

⁷Westermann argues that the issue at hand was not monotheism versus polytheism. Rather, the nothingness of the gods was their impotence, which led to them becoming nothing for all practical purposes: “Here the ontological question whether these gods exist, whether ‘there are such’, is entirely wide of the mark and has to be left out of account if the trial speeches are to be properly understood. Consider the situation in which the words were spoken. When Israel was confronted with the claim of the Babylonian gods, she had just been vanquished and in every aspect of her life incorporated within the Babylonian empire. . . . As the exile went on, this claim bit still more deeply, and by the simple fact of the overwhelming reality of Babylon’s supremacy, tried to deprive the survivors, the families and individuals incorporated with her, even of hope itself. It was this overwhelming reality of the gods that surrounded the Israelites as, in their sore states, in which hope was gradually fading and withering away, they made lamentation (40.27). If in face of this Deutero-Isaiah had proclaimed that these gods were non-existent, he would have been talking at cross purposes with the situation in which his compatriots found themselves. In such a state of affairs, to teach monotheism *per se* would have been empty words. For the men and women living in this epoch, the question whether these gods did nor did not exist was of no interest. The declaration that they are nothing is to be taken in the sense of 40.15, 17, 23 and 24. That is to say, quite the

Then, Isaiah 43.9 records God's invitation to the nations to assemble for a legal contest between Jehovah and the gods of the nations: "All the nations gather together, and the peoples assemble. Who among them can declare this, and show us the former things? Let them bring their witnesses (עֵדֵי יְהוָה) to prove them right, and let them hear and say, 'It is true.'" ⁸

After calling on the nations to bring their witnesses forward, God declares that the people of Israel are his witnesses:

"You are my witnesses (עֵדֵי יְהוָה)," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. . . . I declared and saved and proclaimed, when there was no strange god among you; and you are my witnesses (עֵדֵי יְהוָה)," declares the LORD, "and I am God." (Isa 43.10, 12; cf. 44.8)

Israel is to testify to the nations that Jehovah is the only true God who does wonderful things, declares his deeds before he performs them, and saves his people according to his righteousness. They are to clarify for the nations that God delivered them to their enemies because of their transgressions (Isa 43.22-24). Israel had discovered the folly of following the gods of the nations in her exile. Therefore, she could declare to the nations: "There is no God besides Jehovah; there is no Rock; I know not any" (Isa 44.8). This vindication of Israel⁸ is essential to the vindication of God, who had delivered them to their enemies. The military victory of the nations against Israel could no longer be equated with the military victory of their gods against Jehovah. The vindication of God is dependent on the vindication of God's people (cf. Rev 3.9). Equally, this vindication

only way of taking it is as the other side of the exaltation of Yahweh. It only arises when Yahweh's hidden way of acting in history is again accepted. In this situation, the gods lose their power and become nothing" (ibid., 86). Westermann's analysis is helpful, though we do not agree that this is historical memory but predictive prophecy. Nor do we accept the multiple authorship of Isaiah.

⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien highlight the ministry of Jehovah's servant as a vindication of Israel's election: "Yahweh's Servant, however, will establish divine justice in relation to the nations (42.1-4) and this will involve his vindicating Israel's special position within the divine purposes." Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 11 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 46.

of God is at the same time a condemnation of the gods of the nations and all who trust in them.

There is evidence that the context of Isaiah 40-45 has influenced the narrative of Revelation. Revelation employs the same title to express God's sovereignty over history, humanity and all creation: "the first and the last" (Isa 44.6; Rev 1.17; 2.8; 22.13; cf., Isa 41.4; Rev 1.8). There are numerous allusions and echoes to these chapters of Isaiah in Revelation (i.e., Isa 40.10 in Rev 22.12; 40.31 in 12.14; 42.10 in 14.3; 43.18 in 21.4; 43.19 in 21.5; 44.5 in 3.12; 45.14 in 3.9).⁹

Jeremiah 25.31 records that God has an indictment against the nations: "The clamor will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD has an indictment against the nations; he is entering into judgment with all flesh, and the wicked he will put to the sword, declares the LORD." In Jeremiah 25.31 God's judgment is followed by the sword of execution, much as the rider/judge of Revelation 19.11-16 has a sword coming from his mouth, "with which to strike down the nations" (Rev 19.15). The courtroom imagery of Jeremiah 25.31 is distinct, as God has an indictment (רִיב) against the nations which leads to the execution of the wicked.

Ironically, Hosea 4.1 has Israel in the place of the nations, as God indicts his own people: "Hear the word of the LORD, O children of Israel, for the LORD has a controversy (רִיב) with the inhabitants of the land." His indictment seems to be of the people in general and of the priests in particular: "Yet let no one contend (רִיב), and let no one accuse (אִשָּׁמָה), for with you is my contention (רִיב), O priest" (Hos 4.4).

Beale has examined the various ways the Old Testament is used in Revelation. John's metaphor of a legal contest with the nations fits Beale's second category, the

⁹Cf. Beale, who wrote, "The Isaiah background also accounts for the idea of 'witness', since the other parallel new creation prophecy in Isaiah 43 affirms that 'the Servant Messiah' would be a witness to the new creation, which is even associated with being a witness of 'the new beginning' (cf. Isa 43.10-17 with 43.18-19)." G. K. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 293.

thematic use of the Old Testament, in which John develops this theme as it was introduced in the Old Testament prophets.¹⁰ The Apocalypse's use of this theme is primarily developed in the direction of Isaiah's and Jeremiah's divine contest with the nations. Just as the exiles of Israel and Judah had profaned God's name among the Gentiles, so the church's poverty, political insignificance and persecution could have been interpreted, based on historical phenomena, as evidence of Christ's comparative powerlessness. Further, just as Israel is called to the stand as God's witness, so the church is called to be a faithful witness to Jesus Christ. In Isaiah, God can appeal to the rise of Cyrus, his anointed, as evidence of his sovereignty over the nations. Thus, Israel can appeal to events on the historical horizon as evidence of God's reality and power. According to the futurist interpretation of Revelation, the faithful witnesses do not have historical evidence immediately at hand to validate their witness for Jesus Christ. Confirmation of their witness awaits the eschaton and the consummation of history at the parousia of Christ. According to the preterist interpretation of Revelation, the historical evidence is close at hand, with the destruction of the temple and the dissolution of the Jewish state. According to the idealist interpretation of Revelation, the cycle of history repeatedly confirms the church's witness to the sovereign power of Jesus. The interpretation of Revelation as inaugurated eschatology allows for partial, but not definitive, evidence in the immediate, awaiting full and final proof in the parousia of Christ at the consummation of history. This interpretation seems to do justice to the apocalyptic genre of the visions. Regardless of which school of interpretation is applied, the message is the same. The suffering of the saints is not the result of a passive or weak God. Rather, their suffering is part of his plan (6.11). Also, the beast's ability to "make war on the saints and to conquer them" (13.7) is only an apparent victory. The real victory belongs to the saint who perseveres as a faithful witness, even unto death (12.11).

¹⁰Ibid., 93.

Just as Israel was called upon to testify to the sovereignty of God in light of Israel's exile, so the church is called upon to testify to the present session of Christ in light of the church's temporal afflictions. The eternal gospel which the saints proclaim is the gospel of the crucified, resurrected and ascended Lord.

Although this contest with the nations is the primary picture behind the concept of witness in Revelation, the motif of God's contest with his own people found in Hosea is also echoed in Revelation. A similar adversarial role is played by Jesus Christ, "the Faithful Witness," in the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3 (with the exception of Smyrna and Philadelphia), in which he testifies for and against elements within the churches. Note the constant refrain, "I have this against you" (2.4, 20), or "I have a few things against you" (2.14). Though the phrase, "I know your works," is positive in 2.2 and 19, it has the sense of indictment in 3.1 and 14. The Faithful Witness is also identified as a counselor in 3.18, and functions as such for each of the churches. Furthermore, the Witness is also the judge who passes and executes sentence against his opponents (2.7, 11, 17, 23, 26-28; 3.5, 9, 12, 21). This illustrates the fact that the forensic metaphors are mixed, so that one cannot draw one tidy picture of this scene of judgment. Yet, it does indicate that the witness of Revelation is a favorable word for one party, namely Christ, implying a condemnation of the opposing party.

The background for the forensic concept of the saints as witnesses for God/Christ against the nations is found in the Old Testament. The motif is introduced in the Law as God instructs the people on how to establish justice in the land. The contrast is marked between true and false witnesses in this national context. The prophets use this forensic background as a metaphor for God's controversy with the nations. Isaiah and Jeremiah portray God as entering into judgment with the nations and their so-called gods, with a chastened Israel as his witness. The Apocalypse echoes this metaphorical usage by portraying believers as Christ's witnesses against earthly/demonic kingdoms.

Witness and Prophecy

The proclamation of the testimony of Jesus Christ by the churches is prophetic. John received God's word, or Christ's testimony (τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, 1.2), from Jesus Christ the Faithful Witness (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός, 1.5), through the agency of an angel. John then testified (ἐμαρτύρησεν) to the churches, God's servants (τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ, 1.1). Finally, the churches mediated this testimony to the world (11.3-14).¹¹ As witnesses to the testimony of Jesus Christ, the churches have a prophetic ministry.¹²

First, prophecy is a primary form of witness in the Apocalypse. John refers to his witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ as a prophecy (1.3; 22.7, 10, 18-19). The two witnesses of 11.3 begin their task by prophesying for 1,260 days (cf. 11.6), and in 11.10 they are referred to as "these two prophets."

Second, John says, rather enigmatically, "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (19.10). The sense of this verse would seem to be that the testimony from and to Jesus is the substance of Spirit-inspired prophecy.¹³ Therefore, the churches hold and proclaim the testimony of Jesus prophetically inspired by the Spirit.

¹¹For an ecclesiological reading of this text, see the exegesis below.

¹²Strathman argued that the prophets are distinguished from other Christians. In commenting on 19.10c, Strathman wrote, "According to the parallel 22.9 the brothers referred to are not believers in general but the prophets. . . . If they have the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ, they have the spirit of prophecy, i.e., they are prophets, and as such they stand alongside the divine, who is himself a prophet, like the angel who simply stands in the service of the μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ. This is why the prophets are His δούλοι in a special sense, cf. 1.1; 10.7; 11.18; 22.3; also 19.2 and perhaps 2.20. The μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ is the witness which they have, not as Christians, but as Christian prophets." Ironically, in the very next paragraph he notes, "In the other verses, however, μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ refers to the Christian revelation in general," though "Only in 12.17 does ἔχειν τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ seem to refer to Christians in general." Strathman is correct to note a distinct group of Christian prophets, of whom John is one. Yet, their function within the church seems to be representative of the church's function among the nations. This notion is missing from Strathman's analysis of the concept of witness in the Apocalypse. H. Strathmann, "μάρτυς, κτλ.," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:474-514.

¹³For detailed discussion of this phrase, see J. M. Ford, "'For the Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy' (Rev. 19:10)," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 42 (1975): 284-91; and G. W. H. Lampe, "The Testimony of Jesus Is the Spirit of Prophecy (Rev. 19:10)," in *The New Testament Age: Essays in Honor of Bo Reicke*, ed. W. C. Weinrich (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1984), 245-58; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109-25.

God's servants in Revelation seem to be the churches in general with an emphasis on their prophetic function. The book opens with God's intention, "to show to his *servants* the things that must soon take place" (1.1). The blessing is then pronounced on those who receive this revelation: the one who reads aloud, those who hear and those who keep what is written. This seems to imply that the servants identified in verse 1 are not an exclusive group within the church. This is confirmed when the trumpet-like voice commands John to send a record of his visions "to the seven churches" (1.11). This follows the same line of communication set out in verse 1: God gives to Christ; Christ gives to angel; angel gives to John; John gives to servants/seven churches. In 2.20, the church of Thyatira is rebuked for tolerating the false prophetess, Jezebel, who "is teaching and seducing my servants," namely the church. John describes the church as both the New Israel, arrayed for battle, and a great multitude from every nation (7.4-9).¹⁴ They are all sealed because they are "the servants of our God" (7.3). Twice the martyrs are spoken of as being drawn from among the saints, who are designated the servants of God (6.11; 19.2).

Within the church a distinction can be made between saints in general and prophets. Such seems to be the case in 16.6: "For they have shed the blood of saints *and* prophets" The close parallel in 18.24, in which the order is reversed to prophets and

¹⁴Caird called students of Revelation to note the connection to what is seen and what is heard: "It is always worth while to examine closely the connection between what John hears and what he sees . . ." G. B. Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (London: A. & C. Black, 1966), 73. In this case John hears the number of the sealed; then he looks, and behold, "a great multitude that no one could number . . ." Beale gives the following reasons for taking the 144,000 as the full company of the redeemed: (1) the background of Ezekiel 9 makes no distinction between groups of saints; (2) the seal of Satan, which is for all of his followers, is paralleled by God's seal, which is also for all *his* people; (3) the numbers of Revelation are highly symbolic; (4) elsewhere, the 144,000 are "those purchased from the earth" and those who "were purchased from people . . . for God (14.3-4); (5) those being sealed are called the servants of God, which consistently refers to believers. Possible exceptions would be 10.7; 22.6, which may refer to prophets alone, and 15.3, which refers to Moses. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 412-20. Christopher R. Smith argues that the 144,000 represent the New Israel based upon the unique arrangement of the tribes. Christopher R. Smith, "The Portrayal of the Church as the New Israel in the Names and Order of the Tribes in Revelation 7.5-8," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39 (1990): 111-18.

saints, seems to confirm this. This latter passage also identifies a third and larger group of victims, “all who have been slain on earth.”¹⁵ It seems that the saints are a part of this latter category, just as the prophets are a part of the larger category of saints. Prophets seem to be distinguished from the larger group of people who obey the words of the Apocalypse in 22.9: “but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.’” The prophets are singled out as John’s “brothers”, since John is clearly among their number. Yet, “those who keep the words of this book” are joined with John and the prophets as the angel’s fellow *servants*.¹⁶

Only in 10.7 is the title “servant” used exclusively of prophets.¹⁷ The Old Testament frequently used “servant” as a title of privilege for God’s prophets (i.e., 2Kings 9.7; 17.13, 23; 21.10; 24.2; Ezra 9.11; Jer 7.25; 25.4; 26.5; 29.19; 35.15; 44.4; Ezek 38.17; Dan 9.6, 10; Amos 3.7; Zech 1.6). This honorable title was first used of Moses, because of his unique relationship with the Lord, as one to whom God speaks as a

¹⁵Aune suggests that John, sympathizing with his Jewish countrymen, has their plight in mind when he refers to the slain of all the earth: “John’s Jewish origins may have made him sensitive to the slaughter of Jews right after the beginning of the first Jewish revolt and the enormous slaughter following it (A.D. 66-73). 1,100,000 people, probably an exaggerated figure, were reportedly killed (Jos. *J.W.* 6.420; John Malalas *Chron.* 10.45). After the revolt began in A.D. 66, fighting erupted in the Greek cities of Palestine (Hippos, Gaulantitis, Tyre, Ptolemais, Gaga, Sebaste, Ascalon, Anthedon, Gaza, Scythopolis, and Damascus [where 10,5000 Jews died]), resulting in the slaughter of scores of thousands of Jews (Jos. *J.W.* 2.457-86, 559-61). The victorious Titus took Jewish captives to Caesarea Philippi, Berytus, and Antioch, where they were thrown to wild animals and forced to fight and die as gladiators (Jos. *J.W.* 7.2.23-24; 3.37-40; 5.100-111).” David E. Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1011. Mounce believes these events provided illustrations of the type of violence prophesied in these chapters. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 340. Yet, Smalley is probably correct that John’s imagery owes more to his Old Testament background (i.e., Jer 51.49 and Nah 3.4) than to any particular historical event. Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 466.

¹⁶Bauckham commented on the application of this verse: “This is an acknowledgement that the role to which Revelation calls all Christians is, in essence, the same as that of prophets: bearing the witness of Jesus, remaining faithful in word and deed to the one true God and his righteousness” (Bauckham, *The Theology of Revelation*, 121).

¹⁷Of course, at 1.1 it is used to designate a prophet, namely John. It is used of Moses, as a title of honor at 15.3.

friend, face to face (i.e. Exod 14.31; Num 12.7, 8; Deut 34.5; Josh 1.1, 2, 7, 13, 15; 8.31, 33; 9.24; 11.12). John also designates Moses “the servant of God” (15.3).

This prophetic testimony inspired by the Holy Spirit is positive in the sense that it is a testimony for Jesus Christ. It is negative in the sense that any testimony *for* one party in a suit is *against* the opposing party. Therefore the earth-dwellers rejoice over the deaths of the two witnesses because their prophecies had been a torment to them (11.10).

In this section we have argued that the witness of the saints is part of the prophetic function of the church. The special designation “servants” as a reference to God’s prophets can also be applied to the church as prophetic witnesses.

Revelation 10.11: Witness as Prophecy “Against” the Nations

John is told to act as witness to the nations in 10.11: δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ ἔθνεσιν καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς. How should the preposition ἐπὶ be translated? Some argue that it should be translated as “about,” “concerning,” or “to.”¹⁸ Bauckham recognizes the Old Testament background of this passage, and of the particular phrase προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ. He contends that because the formula עַל הַנְּבִיאַת (LXX προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ) cannot be translated “prophecy against” in select cases, therefore, it should always be translated “prophecy to.”¹⁹ The sense of all words and formulas are affected by context. However, exceptions to the rule do not disprove the rule. There are good reasons to understand this formula in a technical sense of “prophecy against.”

¹⁸Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 263-66; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:269; Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 148. Caird probably has the most optimistic interpretation of John’s commission: “The word of grace, which not all the angel trumpeters of heaven can utter, must be spoken by the prophet-martyrs not only with their lips but with their lives. This is why the scroll tasted as sweet as honey but was bitter to swallow. The way of victory is the way of the Cross” (Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 130).

¹⁹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 263. Bauckham cites only Ezek 37.4.

Jeremiah 25.30 (LXX 32.30) uses the phrase *σὺ προφητεύσεις ἐπὶ αὐτοὺς τοὺς λόγους τούτους* for Jeremiah's commission to announce God's indictment (25.31)²⁰ of the nations: "You, therefore, shall prophesy against them all these words, and say to them: 'The LORD will roar from on high, and from his holy habitation utter his voice; he will roar mightily against (ἐπὶ) his fold, and shout, like those who tread grapes, against (ἐπὶ) all the inhabitants of the earth (τοὺς καθημένους ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν).'" The translation of ἐπὶ as "against" is warranted by the description of this prophecy as an announcement of punishment and disaster: "For behold, I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the LORD of hosts" (Jer 25.29).

Jeremiah 25.13 refers to God's judgment of Babylon following the Jewish exile of seventy years. The judgment which Jehovah will bring is that "which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations." The Masoretic Text reads *יְרֵמְיָהוּ עַל כָּל־הָעַמִּים*, which the LXX renders Ὅσα ἐπροφήτευσεν Ἰερεμίας ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη. This prophecy against the nations is characterized in the next verse: "For many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them, and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands." These are not prophecies "to" the nations; nor are they merely about the nations in a general sense. Rather, they are prophecies against them, in terms of terrible judgment for sin.

Ezekiel uses this phrase several times (Ezek 4.7; 6.2; 11.4; 13.2, 16, 17; 21.2; 25.2; 28.21; 29.2; 34.2; 35.2; 38.2; 39.1).²¹ Seven of these are accompanied by the

²⁰Jeremiah 25.31 describes this prophecy in forensic terms: "for the LORD has an indictment (יָדָן, LXX κρίσις) against the nations; he is entering into judgment (יָשָׁף, LXX κρίνεται) with all flesh."

²¹There are three instances in which "prophecy to/concerning" would fit the context better than "prophecy against" (Ezek 13.16; 37.4, 9). In the first instance, God accused the prophets of Israel of prophesying peace when there was no peace for Jerusalem. In the latter two instances, Ezekiel is told to prophesy to the dry bones and to the spirit/wind to enter the resurrected corpses. Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, "John and the Future of the Nations," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 12 (2002): 251.

command to, “set your face against” the nation(s) (Ezek 20.4; 21.2; 25.2; 28.21; 29.2; 35.2; 38.2), which emphasizes the adversarial posture of the prophet, whose face has been made hard for this difficult prophetic commission (Ezek 3.8-9).

Ezekiel’s commission, no doubt, lies behind Revelation 10.11. Both prophets are given a scroll to eat, which represents the message they are to deliver. If the scroll of Revelation 10 is to be identified with the scroll of chapter five, then both scrolls are described as inscribed on front and back (Ezek 2.10; Rev 5.1). Both prophets testify to the sweetness of the taste (Ezek 3.3; Rev 10.9-10). Though only John’s stomach is made bitter by the eating, Ezekiel’s message is certainly a bitter one: “and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe” (Ezek 2.10b).

Bauckham argues that this text presents us with a dramatic rebirth of an image, in which Ezekiel’s image is not simply borrowed, but is actually subverted. For Ezekiel was sent to Israel, not to foreign nations. God told the prophet that if he had been sent to a foreign people, they would listen. As it is, Israel will not listen, even though there is no communication barrier to keep them from hearing.

And he said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them. For you are not sent to a people of foreign speech and a hard language, but to the house of Israel—not to many peoples of foreign speech and a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to such, they would listen to you. But the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, for they are not willing to listen to me. Because all the house of Israel have a hard forehead and a stubborn heart.” (Ezek 3.4-7)

Bauckham argues that John has keyed in on this suggestion that “if I sent you to such, they would listen to you.” Indeed, John is sent to prophesy to “many peoples and nations and languages and kings.” So, Bauckham concludes, the implication is that they will listen.²²

²²Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 264.

Bauckham made passing reference to a weakness in his argument, but was not deterred in his insistence of this position.²³ The problem with this supposed rebirth of images is that Ezekiel is later commanded to speak to the foreign nations,²⁴ after addressing Israel's sin.²⁵ The canonical and extra-canonical witnesses demonstrate that this did not lead to national repentance on the part of any of these peoples. Thus, God's statement that foreigners would listen, while his own people remain hardened, seems to be a device to shame his rebellious house, rather than a promise that other nations truly will be more willing to hear God's voice than Israel.²⁶

The translation of προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ as "prophesy against" is preferred over a more generic "prophesy to" or "prophesy about" based on the common use of this phrase in the Old Testament prophets and the Ezekiel 3 background of the vision. Contextually, there is one further reason to adopt this understanding. The fourfold description of the nations has an irregular member that points to the negative evaluation of them, namely "and kings." The kings of the earth are consistently portrayed as in opposition to God and his saints until the vision of new creation (21.24).

²³Ibid.

²⁴The nations he was to address are Ammon (25.1-7); Moab (25.8-11); Edom (25.12-14); Philistia (25.15-17); Tyre (26.1-28.19); Sidon (28.20-24); Egypt (29.1-32.32); Gog (38.1-39.24).

²⁵This is not to suggest that Ezekiel was sent to these nations as Jonah was sent to Nineveh. Yet he is commanded to speak to them. It is most likely that few if any outside of Israel heard these messages. And the literary intention was probably for Israel's hope, more than for the nations' repentance. The situation with the Book of Revelation is similar. Though John has much to say concerning the persecutors of the church, the visions were not recorded for their eyes, but for the seven churches of Asia, the followers of the Lamb. Bauckham, again, recognizes this, but explains that "John's prophecy is initially a revelation to the churches of the role they are to play as prophetic witnesses to the nations. But also, indirectly, it is [emphasis original] the content of the prophetic witness of the churches to the nations" (Bauckham, *The Theology of Revelation*, 83). The same could be said of Ezekiel's message to a nation that was to be a kingdom of priests, even if their mission was centripetal rather than centrifugal.

²⁶One might contend that in the New Testament the nations receive what Israel as a nation rejected. However, there is no suggestion in the Acts of the Apostles that any people group was particularly receptive of the gospel. The two largest numbers of recorded conversions were in Jerusalem among Jews and Jewish proselytes (Acts 2.41; 4.4; 21.20). While many from the nations believed the gospel, the gospel was still considered subversive by the populace.

In 6.15 “the kings of the earth” are at the head of a list of people receiving divine retribution at the opening of the sixth seal. This judgment falls, at least in part, in response to the cry of the martyrs in 6.10:²⁷ “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” They recognize that they are under the judgment of God, which they describe as “the wrath of the Lamb.”²⁸

The kings of the earth are the consorts of the great harlot, Babylon (17.2, 18; 18.3, 9). When she is destroyed²⁹ they do not rejoice that they have been liberated from their oppressor; rather, they mourn because they had “lived in luxury with her” (18.9). After the Harlot Babylon is destroyed, the Beast draws up to the battle line against “him who was sitting on the horse and against his army.” The Beast’s allies are “the kings of the earth with their armies” (19.19). Earlier John had explained why they rush into war against an enemy they cannot defeat: “. . . demonic spirits, performing signs, who go abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (16.14).

The concepts of king and rule are not negative in themselves in the Apocalypse. The saints are called a “kingdom”, βασιλείαν (1.6, 9; 5.10;). Jesus is called ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλείων τῆς γῆς (1.5), and κύριος κυρίων . . . καὶ βασιλεὺς καὶ βασιλέων (17.14; cf. 19.16). God, Christ and the saints are said to reign or have dominion (1.6; 5.10; 11.15, 17; 19.6; 20.4, 6; 22.5). Yet, Babylon is said to have “dominion over the

²⁷So also, Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 395; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 150; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 166.

²⁸Caird dismisses the concept of the wrath of the Lamb, asserting that it has no place in the theology of Revelation, on the basis that the words were spoken by wicked unbelievers who did not know the truth about Christ (Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 93). However, John has infused their response with so much biblical imagery that it is clear that he is communicating his theology through their words (see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 400-04).

²⁹Ironically, God puts it into their hearts to destroy their lover in obedience to the beast (17.16-17). This hints at the self-destructive nature of evil, while also affirming God’s sovereign destruction of evil.

kings of the earth” (18.18); and the Beast clearly commands their allegiance against the Harlot and against the Lamb (17.12-17; 19.19). The positive image of royalty is used of Christ and his saints, who reign through their faithful witness to Christ. The negative image of royalty is used of those who do not identify with Christ, but with the Beast and the Harlot. It is not against the former that John is commissioned to prophesy in 10.11, but against the latter.

There is one positive picture of the kings of the earth in 21.24. Bauckham correctly demonstrates that in 21.24 John uses the hermeneutical method of *gezērā šāwā*³⁰ to link the universal promise of Isaiah 60.3 with the particularism of Isaiah 2.5 to emphasize that the blessings of the new creation encompass all the nations.³¹ He also contrasts the mention of the kings of the earth bringing their glory into the New Jerusalem with the kings of the earth giving their allegiance to the beast. However, he presses the connection too far when he identifies the kings of 21.24 as the same as the kings who followed the beast.³² Indeed, the scene of 21.24 is contrasted with the scenarios depicted in earlier references to the kings of the earth. This is one of a number of differences between the original creation and the new creation. In the new creation there is no more sea (21.1); no need for a temple (21.22), nor for sun or moon to shine (21.23); there is no night there (21.25); and nothing unclean will ever enter it (21.27). Furthermore, the kings of the earth will not be hostile to the Lamb nor to his followers, but will pay homage to the Lamb as his subjects. The kings of the earth who joined with the Beast against the Lamb were destroyed in John’s vision (19.19-21). At the visionary level, they are not the same kings of the earth mentioned in 21.24. Therefore, the positive reference to the kings of the earth in 21.24 should not be read into the reference to kings

³⁰Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1093-1101.

³¹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 312-16.

³²Bauckham wrote of this connection that “the kings of the earth offer their own glory to God’s glory. In place of their old idolatrous allegiance to the beast, they now give glory to God” (ibid., 315).

in 10.11 because the context of new creation is radically different than the context of John's commission to prophesy in the inaugural era of the kingdom of God on earth.

The arguments for translating προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ as "prophesy against" are the Ezekiel 3 background for the commissioning narrative of 10.8-11; the use of the phrase προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ in the Old Testament prophets, especially Ezekiel; and the substitution of βασιλεῦσιν for φυλαῖς in the fourfold description of the nations. This translation is also consistent with the forensic background for the use of μάρτυς in the Apocalypse. Further support for this translation is gained by examining the content of the prophecy against the nations following this commission. Therefore, the following section is important substantiation for this interpretation.

Revelation 11.3-10: Witness as Prelude to Judgment

Revelation 11.3-10 provides important insight into the nature of the church's prophetic testimony as a prelude and portent of final judgment. The text does not reveal the *message* of the church's prophetic testimony; rather, it uses symbolic pictures to illustrate its *nature*. While there are a number of interpretive issues to be addressed in this passage, the burden of this section is on the nature of the church's testimony and its effect on those who reject it.

The two witnesses introduced in verse three have been identified with numerous personalities and/or institutions throughout the history of interpretation.³³ Tertullian, representative of patristic interpretations, identified the two witnesses as Enoch and Elijah because both of these Old Testament saints had been translated to heaven without dying.³⁴ Matthew Henry, the English non-conformist minister and Bible

³³For a survey and analysis of the many interpretations see Aune, who organizes them into three categories: (1) traditional Jewish eschatological figures; (2) historical figures; and (3) symbolic interpretations. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 598-603.

³⁴Tertullian *Quinti Septimii Florentis Tertulliani Liber De anima* 50, ed. J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina* (Paris: Migne, 1844), 2:734-36. This text is used as proof of his argument that all humans will meet with death, Enoch and Elijah not being exceptions. For although they were preserved

commentator, was aware of an interpretation which identified the two witnesses as the church of believing Jews and Gentiles. Henry believed them to represent all faithful Christians who profess their faith “in the worst of times.”³⁵ Modern scholars, apart from any traditions regarding eschatological prophets, identify the two witnesses with (not necessarily as)³⁶ Moses and Elijah because of the similar mighty works performed by the prophets of old and these two witnesses.³⁷ However, these two prophets, styled in the likeness of the two great prophets of the Old Testament, are not Moses and Elijah *redivivus*. Instead, they are symbolic of all faithful witnesses in the present age.³⁸

The two prophets/witnesses are called two lampstands, which creates an internal literary association with the seven lampstands in chapters 1-3, that are interpreted as “the seven churches” (1.20). The number is limited to two because this was the Law’s requirement for establishing any testimony, two witnesses (Num 35.30; Deut 17.6; 19.15). An allusion is also made to the two olive trees of Zechariah 4.1-14, representing

from death in their own generations, “they are reserved for the suffering of death, that by their blood they may extinguish Antichrist.”

³⁵Matthew Henry, *Exposition of the Old and New Testament*, ed. George Burder and Joseph Hughes (Philadelphia: Towar & Hogan, 1828-1829; repr. Mcclean, Virginia: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.): 6:1157.

³⁶The intertextual allusions to the mighty works of Moses and Elijah do not demand an interpretation that envisions a reincarnation of these two prophets. The fact that both prophets share the same abilities, rather than each one being modeled on his respective OT counterpart, suggests that Moses and Elijah are simply being used as model prophets.

³⁷Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 603; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 273-77; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 573; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 217; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 275.

³⁸Contrary to Daniel K. K. Wong, who argues for a literal interpretation of two unidentified prophets to be raised up during a period of tribulation immediately preceding the second coming of Christ. Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Two Witnesses in Revelation 11,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (July-September 1997): 344-54. His arguments against a corporate view of these two witnesses all arise from a failure to distinguish between the visionary level and the referential and symbolic levels of apocalyptic visions as explained by Vern Poythress. Vern Sheridan Poythress, “Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20.1-6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (March 1993): 41-54. Furthermore, Bauckham makes the argument that the prophets in Revelation speak to the churches. The churches then speak to the nations. If this is correct, it is contextually sound to interpret the two witnesses in a corporate sense, since their mission is directed to the nations (Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 118-25).

the two anointed ones, most likely the High Priest Joshua and Zerubbabel. The two olive trees flank either side of a menorah with seven lamps (Zech 4.2-3). John adopted this picture of God's dwelling/people to portray the church in chapters one through three. The metaphor of the lamps is combined here with the metaphor of the olive trees that provide an endless supply of fuel for the lamps.³⁹ In this way John portrays the faithful, prophetic witness of the church as the Spirit-wrought fuel that keeps the church alive and functioning among the nations. The significance of the passages in both Zechariah and Revelation are captured in the angel's interpretation for the prophet in Zechariah 4.6b-7a: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts. Who are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain."

Though the following argument will adopt the corporate interpretation of the two witnesses, it is not dependent on this interpretation. Even if one identifies the witnesses as two individuals at the referential level, they would still be representative of the church in their function as prophets/faithful witnesses. The concern of this section is with the nature and effect of the prophetic witness.⁴⁰

The time period of this prophetic activity, 1260 days, is the inter-advent age symbolically identified with the "half week" in Daniel 9.27, a time of suffering at the

³⁹Further evidence for the corporate interpretation of the two witnesses is provided by the fact that John mixes these two metaphors with reference to the two prophets. The lamps are a corporate metaphor in Rev 1 and Zech 4. The olive trees are references to two individuals, anointed ones, in Zechariah. The two are brought together to be mutually interpretive. At the visionary level, of course, the prophets are two individuals, but the vision itself contains clues that at the referential level, the church is intended. For example, people from the "peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies" after they are attacked by the beast. Unless one supposes that this became an immediate tourist attraction in Rome, or, even less likely, that this was televised, the witnesses must have died among many nations (cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 574).

⁴⁰Charles H. Giblin argues that the function of the church's witness is the thrust of this text: "It seems unwise, especially on the basis of a subordinate portion of this well-knit text, to identify these figures more concretely . . . as 'the Church' or as a set of ecclesial communities. For, in Rev 11.1-13, John is concerned with the function of prophetic witness, not with delimited, localized institutions in which that function is exercised." Giblin argues that the two witnesses do not represent people at all, whether corporate or individual, but the function of prophetic witness. Charles H. Giblin, "Revelation 11.1-13: Its Form, Function, and Contextual Integration, *New Testament Studies* 30 (1984): 443.

hands of a pagan ruler (cf. Dan 7.25; 12.7, 11-12).⁴¹ Again, this symbolic interpretation of the time period is not necessary for the argument of this section. It is enough to note that the time of prophetic witness concurs with the time of the church's persecution (Rev 11.2; 12.4, 14; 13.5-6).⁴²

It is clear from the context that the prophets engender the world's hatred. Verse five speaks of their foes (ἐχθρούς αὐτῶν) and those who would harm them (τις αὐτούς θέλει ἀδικῆσαι). For their protection "fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes" (11.5). This is reminiscent of the episode in which Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume two companies of fifty that had been sent by the wicked king Ahaziah. A third company was spared because the captain of the fifty knelt and humbly entreated Elijah for his life and the lives of his men and the angel of the Lord instructed him to go with him without fear (2 Kgs 1.9-16). Based on this allusion it would be reasonable to interpret the power of these two prophets as possessing the authority to call down fire, if not literally breathe fire.⁴³ However, while at the visionary level the power to breathe fire, shut the sky, turn water to blood and strike the earth with every kind of plague (11.5-6) can be taken literally, at the referential level these powers should be understood to refer to the condemnatory effect of rejecting the testimony of God's

⁴¹Beale traces the intertextual allusions of these Danielic texts back through the Elijah narratives to the Exodus wanderings. He concluded that this was a further development of the Exodus theme in Revelation: "Therefore, all four of the references to three and a half years in chs. 11-13 represent an eschatological and typological interpretation of Elijah's ministry and Israel's wilderness journeying, via Daniel" (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 566).

⁴²Beale helpfully points out that the outer court of the temple in verse two, which he takes as symbolic of the saints' external lives, is "given" (ἐδόθη) to the nations for the same timeframe as the two witnesses are given (δώσω) authority to prophesy (ibid., 572).

⁴³Walvoord wrote, "Anyone who attempts to hurt them will be destroyed by fire proceeding out of their mouths. . . . Taking all the facts furnished, it is evident that these two witnesses have a combination of the greatest powers ever given prophets on earth, and this accounts for their ability to withstand their enemies for the entire period of 1,260 days" (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 180).

witnesses. It may also indicate that the testimony includes a word of warning about impending disaster.

Just as the Elijah narrative provides background for the visionary level of reading, Jeremiah 5.14 provides background for the figurative interpretation at the referential level. The Lord said to Jeremiah, “Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them.” Perhaps this is the background for Jeremiah’s lament: “If I say, ‘I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,’ there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot” (Jer 20.9). The fiery message that Jeremiah proclaimed was a warning of invasion and destruction:

Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the Lord. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty warriors. They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword. (Jer 5.15-17)

The figurative use of fire for a prophetic message of doom is clear in Jeremiah, and may be intended by John. The prophetic word spurned already brings the condemnation to be consummated at the final judgment (cf. John 3.18-20; 12.48). The same testimony that brings people from every nation into the blessing of the inaugurated reign of Christ through repentance and faith, also brings every nation into the prolepsis of divine retribution for persistent unbelief.⁴⁴

The literal reading of verse six at the visionary level contains further allusions to the Elijah narratives as well as the plagues brought on Egypt under Moses. Elijah shut the sky in the days of Ahab because of his wickedness and idolatry (1 Kgs 17-18). God

⁴⁴It is also instructive to note that at the symbolic level of interpretation the church’s spiritual protection from the Beast and his allies is her faithful witness to Jesus Christ. It will not keep the saints from persecution and martyrdom, but it will preserve the life of the church unto the end, and will accompany the saints to their abode with Christ (19.8).

struck the Nile so that the waters of Egypt turned to blood and demonstrated his sovereignty over Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt through a series of plagues announced by the prophet Moses (Exod 7-12). Verse six also connects the prophetic ministry of the two witnesses to the plagues of the Apocalypse.⁴⁵ The drought and famine conditions implicit in the shutting of the sky (11.6) parallel the same conditions brought on the earth at the blast of the first trumpet (8.7). The fire (11.5) and bloody waters (11.6) are parallel with the second trumpet (8.8; cf. 8.10). The varied plagues (11.6) are especially reminiscent of the plagues unleashed by the demonic hordes of the sixth trumpet (8.18). This connection with the trumpet plagues is strengthened by the fact that the vision of the two witnesses is interlocked with the series of trumpets. Not only does the vision come in between the sixth and seventh trumpets, but the announcement that the sixth trumpet/second woe has occurred comes after the vision of the two witnesses (11.14).⁴⁶

At the visionary level, the ministry of the two prophets is literarily tied to the warnings of impending judgment brought by Jeremiah, Elijah and Moses. This suggests that at the symbolic level, the faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ carry a message to the nations that includes warnings of divine retribution. This testimony, inasmuch as it is the word of God, carries with it the effect of what it announces, so that those who spurn the witness are already under condemnation.

Further support for the interpretation given above of the nature and effect of the testimony of the church is found in verse 10. After the church has completed its mission the Beast successfully wages war on the church. As their dead bodies lie in the street, those who dwell on the earth “will rejoice over them and make merry and

⁴⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 585-87.

⁴⁶See Beale for the argument that the three woes comprise the last three trumpets. If the seventh trumpet is the announcement of the consummation, then the narrative of the two witnesses is interlocked with the trumpet judgments on the inaugural side of judgment and salvation (ibid., 609-10).

exchange presents, *because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth*” (11.10, emphasis added). Those who dwell on the earth correctly identify their woes with the prophetic ministry of these two prophets. Yet they mistakenly celebrate their martyrdoms, not understanding that the blood of the martyrs confirms the witness they have given for the final judgment. Thus, far from alleviating their suffering under Divine retribution, their complicity in the murder of the witnesses will exacerbate it.

Bauckham argued the opposite thesis, namely that the death of the martyrs produces repentance and faith among their persecutors. In order to arrive at this, however, he must overlook the reaction of the world to the death of the witnesses.⁴⁷ He does not identify the referential and symbolic significance of the death of the two witnesses. Instead, he moves directly to their vindication when they are brought to life and recalled to God. He seems to say that verses 11-12 refer to the manner in which the saints died:

The symbolic narrative of 11.11-12 means not that the nations have to see the literal resurrection of the Christian martyrs before they are convinced of the truth of their witness, but that they have to perceive the martyrs’ participation in Christ’s triumph over death. In fact, the way that Christian martyrdom, in the early centuries of the church, impressed and won people to faith in the Christian God, was precisely thus. The martyrs were effective witnesses to the truth of the Gospel because their faith in Christ’s victory over death was so convincingly evident in the way they faced death and died.⁴⁸

Bauckham has not demonstrated that the phrases “a breath of life from God entered them” and “they went up to heaven in a cloud” indicate “the way they faced death and died.” The resurrection of these witnesses, rather, symbolizes the resurrection and vindication of the church after a relatively brief period (three and a half days) of

⁴⁷Bauckham does note that “at first, the inhabitants of the world can suppose their message to have been refuted by their death and can rejoice at being relieved of the torment of an uncomfortable call to repent (11.9-10). Only when their witness is seen to be vindicated as the truth (11.11-13), do all who recognize this repent” (Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 278). The problem is that Bauckham does not explain how they come to recognize that the witnesses were right. By interpreting the saints’ resurrection and ascension at the symbolic level as their manner of death he has essentially left verses 9-10 void of meaning.

⁴⁸Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 87-88.

humiliation. The vindication of the saints is the terror of their persecutors. Their deaths on the other hand, have quite the opposite effect. After the plagues of the sixth trumpet, John saw the reaction among the earth's inhabitants: "The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts" (9.20-21). Rather than contrasting the vision of the two witnesses with the sixth trumpet, the reaction of the earth-dwellers to the deaths of the saints in verse 10 seems to suggest a parallel. The dishonor of refusing the witnesses burial, and the merriment of the peoples do not suggest repentance.

Several commentators argue that verse 13 narrates the conversion of the nations at the vindication of the saints.⁴⁹ After the great earthquake destroyed a tenth of the city leaving seven thousand dead, "the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven." "The rest," οἱ λοιποὶ, is understood in the positive sense of "the remnant."⁵⁰ "Were terrified," ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο, is translated as "feared" or "reverenced," in the sense of "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 9.10). "Gave glory (ἔδωκαν δόξαν) to the God of heaven" is contrasted with the Revelation 16.9 where unbelievers "did not repent and give him glory (δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν). Based on this contrast, to give God glory would imply repentance, according to this line of interpretation.

In light of the consistently negative response to the testimony of the saints and the judgments of God throughout the book, it is not likely that John is portraying the conversion of the nations in this verse. First, it must be noticed that this response comes, not as a result of the witness of the saints, but in response to the portent of final judgment,

⁴⁹Ibid.; G. A. Krodel, *Revelation*, The Augsburg Commentary of the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 228; J. S. Considine, "The Two Witnesses: Apocalypse 11.3-13," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 8 (1946): 392; Giblin, "Revelation 11.1-13," 445; Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 140; Charles, *Revelation*, 2:290-92.

⁵⁰Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 283.

a great earthquake.⁵¹ Second, ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο is not used, in the New Testament, of a godly fear, but of terror.⁵² Third, the “worship” represented by the phrase δοῦναι αὐτῷ δόξαν is most likely an acknowledgement that a righteous judgment is about to fall on these persecutors of the church. The relation of this coerced worship to the statement in 16.9 is not incongruous. All through the ordeal of the outpouring of God’s wrath, the impenitent refuse to give God glory (16.9). Yet, the day will come when every knee will bow (11.13; cf. Phil 2.10-11). Fourth, if the conversion of the nations were meant it is strange that John should not account for it in the third woe, the next picture in the vision. Instead we find a celebration of God’s wrath exercised on the nations: “The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged” (11.18a).

The effect of the martyrdom of God’s witnesses is not the sweeping conversion of the nations. Rather, they bow in recognition of the righteous judgment of God. The nature of the church’s testimony is a declaration of the sovereignty and righteousness of God displayed in the Lion/Lamb’s victory against those who have sworn their allegiance to the Beast. While it is salvific if received with repentance and faith, it also carries the sentence of condemnation for those who refuse it. In this latter sense, it is a portent of the judgment to come.

Revelation 12.11: Martyrdom as the Confirmation of Witness

Revelation 10.11 set the prophetic testimony within a courtroom in which the church testifies for God against the nations. In chapter eleven the nature and effect of this witness was seen to carry in it a sentence of condemnation on those who rejected it. In chapter eleven the rejection of the testimony of God’s witnesses culminated in their martyrdoms. This section will demonstrate that martyrdom is not only the culmination of

⁵¹Cf. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 224.

⁵²See the evidence in Schnabel, “John and the Future of the Nations,” 253.

the nation's rejection of their witness, but also the climax of their testimony that puts into effect the very truth it contains.

According to Beasley-Murray, Revelation 12.11 is the most significant statement in the central section of the book.⁵³ Chapter 12 explores the spiritual depths of the church's conflict with the world. The arch nemesis is identified as the Great Dragon, Satan (12.9). He is the spiritual evil working through the evils of this world against God's saints. He calls up the Beast from the sea (12.17-13.1), who commands the allegiance of the Beast from the earth (13.11) and the Harlot Babylon (17.3). He had aimed at the destruction of the Christ, the "male child" of the woman representing the people of God (12.1-4). The life of Christ is succinctly summarized in verse five: "She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne." Following his royal ascension, the people of God enter a time of trial and testing symbolically portrayed as "the wilderness" and "1260 days" (12.6).

Though Christ's life is summarized in one verse, the effects of his victory are portrayed in verses 7-12. Michael and his angelic army defeat the Dragon in a heavenly war. The Dragon is thrown down from heaven so that he no longer has the legitimacy to accuse Christ's saints before God (12.10). This is celebrated as good news in heaven, but a woe is pronounced for earth and sea, because the devil has come down "in great wrath, because he knows his time is short" (12.12). The devil's fury on earth is directly related to the frustration of his purposes in heaven. Satan makes war on the physical lives of the saints only when he has already lost the war on their spiritual lives (12.17).

Verse 11 shows the participation of the saints in Christ's victory over the devil. The antecedent of they (αὐτοὶ) is τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν. These brothers might be spoken of

⁵³G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, The New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1974), 191, 203.

as Christians, but more specifically they are those who have maintained a faithful, prophetic witness in a hostile courtroom. Elsewhere in Revelation the term “brothers” is associated with a circle of prophets to whom John seems to belong (19.10; 22.9); though it is used of martyred Christians in general once (6.11). In this instance, the “brotherhood” seems to encompass Christian martyrs⁵⁴ (“they loved not their lives even unto death”) as representatives of all faithful witnesses of Christ.

The brothers have conquered the Dragon/accuser. The victory of heaven was expressed as the dragon’s defeat in verse 8 (καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν). In verse 11 it is expressed as the saint’s victory (αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν). The concept of victory dominates the Apocalypse. Christ conquers through death (5.5). The churches are encouraged to conquer by the promise of blessing/reward (2.7, 11, 17, 26-28; 3.5, 12, 21). The first horseman came out “conquering and to conquer” (6.2). The Beast conquers Christ’s faithful witnesses (11.7; 13.7). Finally, the saints conquer the Dragon, the Beast and his allies (12.11; 15.2; 17.14).

One fruit of victory is the authority to rule (2.26-27; 3.21; 5.5, 9-10, 12; 20.4-5). Christ’s title “King of kings and Lord of lords” (19.16; cf. 17.14) is a declaration of his victory. The efficient cause (διά + accusative) of the brothers’ victory is twofold: διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν. The brothers are able to conquer the Dragon precisely because Christ’s sacrifice on their behalf (τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου) made every accusation against them obsolete. The accuser no longer has a case against the saints of God: “there was no longer any place for them in heaven” (12.8); “for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down” (12.10). He is stripped of the one weapon that could destroy their souls, namely, their sins. The experience of their victory was as constant as their faithful witness to Christ (καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας

⁵⁴Contra Beale, who argues that ἄχρι refers to “the extent to which believers suffer” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 665).

αὐτῶν).⁵⁵ The efficacy of their testimony is further explained in the final clause of verse eleven: καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου. The testimony of the saints was climaxed in their faithfulness unto death. The Dragon's ultimate defeat is tied directly to the seeming⁵⁶ defeat of the saints in martyrdom. The death of the witnesses was not only part of their testimony; it was the vindication and proof that their testimony was true. In this way they overcame. The Dragon, no longer able to accuse the saints with his testimony, murdered Christ's witnesses, thereby validating their testimony. Raising the Beast to make war on the saints (13.7) God seals the saints' testimony with their own blood.

**Revelation 6.9-11:
Vindication of the Testimony of the Martyrs**

God, the judge of all the earth, has called his witnesses to testify against the nations (e.g., 10.11). The witnesses have held firmly to the testimony of Jesus Christ. The enemies of God were so enraged by the testimony of Christ's witnesses that they murdered them (e.g., 11.7; 12.17). The witnesses' faithfulness unto death validated their testimony against God's enemies (12.11). Following their martyrdom, the witnesses await the Divine vindication of their testimony, as John reports from his vision of the opening of the fifth seal (6.9-11).

⁵⁵τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν could be interpreted as an objective genitive. In that case it would be the word of testimony which they received from God. I have interpreted it as a subjective genitive because of the clarifying remark of the last clause. Beale suggests that both nuances may be intended (Ibid., 664).

⁵⁶Stephen L. Homcy says of the Beast's murder of the two witnesses: "In Rev 11.11-12 God has the last laugh in the face of the enemy's pseudo-victory: After a mere three and one half days (remember that the witnesses had testified with powerful signs and wonders for three and one half years) God's Spirit of life raises up the witnesses from death and God's voice calls them home to heaven, with their enemies looking on in disbelief." Homcy also identifies this theme in chapters 13-14. Stephen L. Homcy, "'To Him Who Overcomes': A Fresh Look at What 'Victory' Means for the Believer According to the Book of Revelation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38, no. 2 (June 1995): 199-200.

Non-Christian Martyrs?

Some commentators stumble over the martyrs' cry for vindication, calling it sub-Christian.⁵⁷ The cry of the martyrs, "How long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?," is contrasted by these commentators with Jesus' prayer from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," (Luke 23.34) and Stephen's similar request of Jesus for those who stoned him (Acts 7.60). How is this sentiment to be compared to Jesus' command, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt 5.44)?

Interestingly, Charles finds a similar motif in Jesus' teaching (Luke 18.7-8), but attempts to alleviate the similarity by arguing that Jesus' teaching is justified in that it only seeks justice for the oppressed, not vengeance on the oppressor:

The teaching of the Gospel passage of our text is, however, different. In Luke the entire passage refers to the *living* elect (cf. 18.1), and the spirit of the teaching must be construed in keeping with the context. In our text, however, the *departed souls* are referred to, and the note of personal vengeance cannot be wholly eliminated from their prayer. The *living* pray to God to free them from unjust oppression and secure them their just rights. On the other hand, the *departed* pray for vengeance for what they have suffered or lost. The former is prospective and breathes the spirit of justice, the latter is retrospective as well as just. . . .

We thus discriminate the temper underlying our text from that in Luke 18.1-8 [emphasis original].⁵⁸

Charles finds the true origin of the martyrs' cry in Jewish traditions such as 1 Enoch 47.2, 4:

The prayer of the righteous (that the shedding of their blood) may not be in vain before the Lord of Spirits, that judgment may be done unto them, and that they may not have to suffer for ever. And the hearts of the holy were filled with joy, because . . . the prayer of the righteous had been heard, and the blood of the righteous been required before the Lord of Spirits.⁵⁹

⁵⁷I. T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 526; Charles, *Revelation*, 1:176; C. H. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 40-41.

⁵⁸Charles, *Revelation*, 1:175.

⁵⁹Ibid., 176.

Jesus' parable and subsequent interpretation is not fundamentally different than the prayer of the martyrs. The widow in the parable seeks justice (ἐκδίκησόν με ἀπὸ) "against my adversary" (Luke 18.3). Jesus finishes the parable and asks, "And will not God give justice (τὴν ἐκδίκησιν) to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?" (Luke 18.7).⁶⁰ A discernable difference between the spirit of Jesus' teaching and the martyrs' cry seems to be that the latter seem discontent at the slowness of God's justice (ἕως πότε). In addition, it might be added that the woman in Jesus' parable pleads for personal justice, whereas the martyrs seem to be concerned for public justice. Caird wrote along these same lines:

The point at issue here is not the personal relations of the martyrs with their accusers, but the validity of their faith. They have gone to their death in the confidence that God's word, attested in the life and death of Jesus, is the ultimate truth; but unless in the end tyranny and other forms of wickedness meet with retribution, that faith is an illusion.⁶¹

They were murdered before the world for their testimony. The world could see this as a well-deserved execution if God does not vindicate them.

While the Apocalypse does not contain the second greatest commandment in so many words, it is far from sub-Christian, especially as it expresses the heart-cry of the faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ. Smalley reminds the critic of this prayer that the New Testament abounds with curses, as well as blessings (e.g., Matt 25.41; Acts 13.10-11; 1 Cor 16.22; Gal 1.8-9; Rev 22.18-19).⁶²

Much like the Old Testament psalms that call for retribution on the psalmist's enemies, the prayer of the martyrs is a call for justice to triumph over iniquity (e.g., Pss 7.6-9; 17.13; 28.4-5; 54.5; 56.7; 58.3-11; 69.22-28; 79.5-7; 109.6-20; 112.8; cf. Jer 11.20; 15.15; 18.19-23). These martyrs are not terrorists, taking justice into their own hands;

⁶⁰Though Charles goes to some length to distinguish the spirit inherent in each text he still seems dissatisfied with the text in the Gospel, since he attributes it as well to Jewish tradition.

⁶¹Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 85.

⁶²Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 161.

rather, they are those who suffered for the good, entrusting themselves to God. Even now, in heaven they entrust the cause of justice to God, whom they call “holy and true” (6.10). This is the attitude of trust in providence commended by the apostles of the Lord (e.g., Rom 12.19; 1 Peter 2.23).

Those scholars who consider the cry of the martyrs sub-Christian have ignored key Christian voices within the canon. Divine retribution is a consistent theme that runs through every corpus of the NT. John the Baptist preached, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Matt 3.11-12; cf. Luke 3.16-17). Jesus taught that those who do not inherit the kingdom will suffer the punishment of eternal fire (e.g., Matt 25.41, 46). In the Gospel of John, those who do not believe are condemned already (John 3.18). Paul’s gospel included a day in which God would judge all men by Jesus Christ (Rom 2.16; cf. 1.18). The author of Hebrews warned the church using an argument from the lesser to the greater that if, “Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God . . . ?” He then quotes Deuteronomy 32.35, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay” (Heb 10.28-30). Peter applies the message of retribution to the false teachers plaguing the church: “Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” (2 Peter 2.3). Mark Seifrid explains:

The expectation of a final judgment not only motivated the apostolic mission and witness of the earliest church but is basic to all instruction, exhortation and comfort in the New Testament. . . .

Of fundamental significance for Christian theology and ethics is the broadly attested stance of the New Testament writers that judgment and retribution belong to God alone and that believers consequently are not to take vengeance themselves or to condemn one another (Mt 7.11; Rom 12.19-21; 14.10-12; Jas 2.4, 12-13; 5.9; cf. 1 Cor 5.1-13: church discipline is not thereby excluded). To assume such authority is to trespass upon the divine role itself, an act of hubris that even the angels of God do not dare (Jas 4.11-12; 2 Peter 2.11; Jude 9). Following the pattern

of Christ, Christians are to entrust their rights to “the one who judges righteously (1 Pet 2.21-23; 4.19; Jas 5.7-11; Rev 6.9-11).⁶³

These martyred saints are not only Christians, they are representative of what every Christian is called to in the Apocalypse, namely, faithful witness.

Theodicy of Retribution

The Apocalypse is not unique in its teaching on Divine retribution, although it devotes more space to the portrayal of retribution than other New Testament authors. This emphasis on Divine retribution arises, at least in part, from the question of theodicy. Grant Osborne examines theodicy in the Apocalypse by tracing four themes through the book: God’s judgment as revelation of his righteous character; God’s judgment as a necessity in light of humanity’s depravity and final rejection; God’s judgment as execution of his righteous punishment; and God’s judgment as vindication of his righteous ones.⁶⁴ It is the fourth theme that is prominent in Revelation 6.9-11.

The question of theodicy arises from the disjunction of a monotheistic, creational theology and one’s experience of evil in this world. Osborne explains:

God has created this world and continues to control it; therefore wisdom is accepting one’s proper place in his created order and living by his rules. Yet this was challenged by common experience, namely the prosperity of the wicked and the indiscriminate nature of suffering that imposes itself on the just and the unjust alike. Wisdom answered this problem in two ways. First, wisdom stresses the principle of retribution, which says that God is ruler and judge and will both vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked in his own time (cf. Prov 10.27; 11.21; 12.21; 13.25). Death is the great equalizer and will demonstrate the fleeting nature of all earthly glory (cf. Ps 49:14-20; 73.18-20). Second, wisdom thinking emphasizes human inability to comprehend the divine order of things. In time of crisis, God’s people must simply wait for his greater wisdom to manifest itself (Job 42.1-6). Prophetic and apocalyptic literature picked up on these themes. . . . This is especially evident in terms of theodicy. Prophecy added to wisdom the idea that faith in divine providence is future oriented, linked to divine judgment on this present world order and the promised restoration of the people of God. In apocalyptic thought both wisdom and prophetic theodicy are found, with the added

⁶³Mark Seifrid, “Judgment,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Development*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 623.

⁶⁴Grant R. Osborne, “Theodicy in the Apocalypse,” *Trinity Journal* 14 (1993): 63-77.

stress on a final dissolution of this age and the inauguration of the eternal kingdom of God.⁶⁵

Hays may have overstated when he refers to Revelation as “a political resistance document.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the experience of persecution in John’s community of churches, both real and perceived, explains the call for a theodicy of retribution.

Smalley’s remarks on this are instructive:

If the prophet-seer set out his apocalyptic visions after his return from exile in Patmos, in AD 70, he would be writing with the experience of previous and impending oppression from Rome very much in mind. The persecution of Nero in the past, and that from Domitian to come, together with the imminent fall of Jerusalem, and the rage John felt as a result of his own captivity, might well have colored the tone of the Apocalypse, with its thunderous contrast between light and darkness, and good and evil, and its theme, so relevant to the apostle’s personal experience, of salvation through judgment. His own suffering, moreover, would have been reflected in that of the Johannine circle, which was undergoing harassment and persecution from imperial forces and some Jewish opponents, as well as living with internal divisions, both doctrinal and practical, among its own members. A community which feels pushed to the edges of society and its own endurance will more easily express sentiments of resentment, and even revenge.⁶⁷

The theme of retribution serves as an answer to the charge of injustice in this world. The saints are not only seeking personal vindication, but the salvation of the cosmos from the presence of evil and chaos embodied in those systems and individuals that oppose Christ and his witnesses.

Under the Altar: Liturgical Imagery

The souls (τὰς ψυχὰς) should be understood, not as the immaterial aspect of the martyrs, but as their life-blood. The blood of ritual sacrifice was to be poured at the base of the altar, because the life is in the blood, and the life of every living creature belongs to God (Gen 9.4; Exod 29.12; Lev 4.7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5.9; 8.15; 9.9; 17.11, 14;

⁶⁵Ibid., 64.

⁶⁶Richard B. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 169-85. Cf. Richard Bauckham, “The Economic Critique of Rome in Revelation 18,” in *The Climax of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 338-83.

⁶⁷Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 162.

Deut 12.23; cf. John 6.53-54). Just as the first martyr⁶⁸ Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground (Gen 4.10), so the blood of Christ's martyrs cries for vindication.

The mention of the altar (τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) places the slaughter (τῶν ἐσφαγμένων)⁶⁹ of the martyrs in a liturgical context in which their lives were the offerings. The passive voice of σφάζω suggests the agency of their persecutors, though they are not cast in priestly garb. The sacrifice was offered by the martyrs willingly, but not recklessly as some later martyr enthusiasts would hasten to martyrdom.⁷⁰ The martyrdom of the saints is portrayed as an act of worship. That their blood cries out like Abel's indicates that they and their offering were accepted by God, while their persecutors were not.

For the Witness They Had Borne: Forensic Imagery

The emphasis is on the cause of their deaths, not the manner. They were slain “for (διὰ) the word of God and for (διὰ) the witness they had borne” (6.9). Aune argues that διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν ἣν εἶχον refers to the fact that they had received and preserved the testimony that Jesus gave them.⁷¹ Mounce is surely correct, though, that, “holding this testimony would involve their own testimony as well. The two could hardly be separated.”⁷² John's churches were situated in communities determined to prove their

⁶⁸For Abel as the proto-typical martyr, see Flavius Josephus *Antiquitates Judaicae* 1.53, in *Flavii Iosephi opera*, ed. B. Niese, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (Berlin: Weidmann, 1955), 0526.001, 1.53; *Tg. Neof.* Gen 4.8; 1 Enoch 22.6-7; 47.1-4; *T. Abraham* 13.3-9; Jubilees 4.3. Cf. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9.6-7; Matt 23.35; Heb 11.4, 12.24; 1 John 3.12. For a helpful discussion of the Cain and Abel tradition in the NT and early Jewish and Christian literature, see John Byron, “Living in the Shadow of Cain: Echoes of a Developing Tradition in James 5.1-6,” *Novum Testamentum* 48, no. 3 (2006): 261-74.

⁶⁹This term has already been used with sacrificial overtones in reference to the slaughtered lamb (ἀρνίον ἑστηκός ὡς ἐσφαγμένον) of Rev 5.6. However, it is not the word σφάζω alone that indicates sacrifice, as its use in 6.4 demonstrates.

⁷⁰Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies 307 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 16-39.

⁷¹Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 406.

⁷²Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 147.

loyalty to Rome. The proof of their allegiance was in the eager promotion of the Emperor Cult.⁷³ Thus, the church was confronted with a story that contradicted their own, using a similar vocabulary, which involved them in an ideological conflict with a politically powerful opponent. Middleton challenges L. L. Thompson's thesis of a merely perceived persecution, and argues for widespread local persecution, fueled, not by Imperial decree, but by loyalty to the *Imperium*:

The Christians, however much they may have wished, could not be good citizens of the Roman Empire. The standard for even the most nominal display of good citizenship was set far in excess of what the Christians could meet.

The Christians' problem with Imperial Rome was not simply an inherited antipathy to idolatry, preventing them from taking part in local cultic activity, and prohibiting sacrificing to the Emperor. Christian theology and Roman Imperial ideology were meta-narratives competing for the same ground. Both made claims to universality; both had as their focus a *theios aner*. Christianity and the *Imperium* were totalities seeking to explain the physical (and spiritual) realm in ways that were mutually incompatible.⁷⁴

For example, in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* several people seek to persuade Polycarp to evade execution by complying with the authorities; and the question is asked of Polycarp: "What harm is there in saying, 'Caesar is Lord,' and in sacrificing, with the other ceremonies observed on such occasions, and so make sure of safety?"⁷⁵ The harm, of course, is that one of the earliest "creeds" of the church was "Jesus is Lord," and there is only one Lord (e.g. Acts 2.36; Rom 10.9; 1 Cor 8.6; 12.3). Polycarp's Lord was greater

⁷³Philip A. Harland, "Honouring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 77 (March 2000): 99-121. Cf. S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984), 78-124; and S. J. Friesen, *Twice Neokoros* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 142-68.

⁷⁴Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, 40. Cf. Sweet, who wrote, "It is not only verbal witness to the true God and his will that attracts persecution, but also the obedience to his commands that goes with it: purity of life, over against the immorality that stems from idolatry, is equally painful to the godless" J. P. M. Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 106.

⁷⁵*Epistula ecclesiae Smyrnensis de martyrio sancti Polycarpi* 8.2, in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* (Irvine: University of California, 2007), 1484.001, 8.2.

than Caesar, just as Hell burns hotter and longer than the pyres of Rome.⁷⁶ According to the Imperial cult, Caesar is Lord. This was not a mere semantic contradiction with the Christian confession, it was an ideological divide.

Middleton examined several points at which the church and Rome would clash: Caesar alone is king (e.g., John 19.15; Acts 17.1-7) and Jesus is the King of kings (e.g., Rev 17.14; 19.16); Caesar's *parousia* and triumph (e.g., 2 Thess 2.8-9 and the coming man of lawlessness) and Christ's *parousia* and triumph (e.g., 1 Thess 4.17; 2 Thess 2.1; 2 Cor 2.14; Col 2.15; cf. Rev 22.7 ἔρχομαι); Rome's promise of peace and safety (cf. 1 Thess 5.2-3) and Christ's promise of eternal peace and safety (cf. Rev 13.16-18 and Rev 7.3; 14.1; 22.4); and Caesar is the savior of the world and Jesus is the Savior of the world (e.g., 1 Tim 4.10).⁷⁷ Rome had her temples and theaters to propagate her stories. The church told her story through liturgy and lifestyle. As long as the church holds fast to the testimony of Jesus, she will be in conflict with the idolatries of Rome. The fact that they were not simply murdered, but martyred, in the sense that their deaths were part of their testimony,⁷⁸ illuminates the concern for public justice in the cry for vengeance (6.10).

The Endurance and Faith of the Saints

The "complaint" of the martyrs (ἕως πότε) is qualified by the titular addresses to God that express undaunted faith in his righteousness and power. Bietenhard suggests that δεσπότης was not used of God often in the LXX because it expresses an arbitrary exercise of power that would have been foreign to Israel's concept of God.⁷⁹ When it is

⁷⁶*Epistula ecclesiae Smyrnensis de martyrio sancti Polycarpi* 11.

⁷⁷Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, 56-61.

⁷⁸Trites, "MARTUS and Martyrdom in the Apocalypse," 72-73.

⁷⁹H. Bietenhard, "Lord, Master," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 2:509.

used of God it seems to suggest his Sovereignty, and in the five occurrences of its use for God and Christ in the New Testament it seems to carry the idea of man's redemption from slavery, and therefore emphasizes the relationship of master (God) to servant (man) (Luke 2.29; Acts 4.24; Rev 6.10; 2 Peter 2.1; and Jude 4). In this context, it is an expression of faith in God's control and of an attitude of submission to God's will. Having made a faithful confession to the point of death on earth, they are not now questioning their testimony to God's sovereignty.

The title ὁ ἅγιος καὶ ἀληθινός may allude to Deuteronomy 32.4, where it is said of God: ἀληθινὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ . . . ὅσιος κύριος,⁸⁰ though it is more likely a more general allusion to the themes of God as Holy One of Israel⁸¹ and the True God in contrast to the false gods of the nations (Exod 34.6; 2 Chr 15.3; Jer 10.10; cf. John 17.3; 1 John 5.20). These confessional titles confirm that the martyrs have not bought into the lie (idolatry and particularly the deification of Roman power) of the Beast, even after their apparent defeat (Rev 13.7, 12). These have answered the call for endurance and faith (13.10).

The Prayer for Vindication

Though the martyrs are confident of God's sovereignty and faithfulness, they are troubled by a seeming delay in God's response to the injustice that has been perpetrated against them and at the discredit this delay heaps on their testimony. "How long," (ἕως πότε) suggests impatience more than a lack of faith. God's action often seems delayed from the creature's perspective (cf. Pss 6.3; 13.1, 2; 35.17; 74.10; 79.5; 94.3; 119.84; Hab 1.2; Zech 1.12). There is good reason for this concern, for delayed judgment does encourage unbelievers to scoff (e.g. 2 Peter 3.3-10).

⁸⁰Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 393.

⁸¹E.g., Isa 1.4; 5.19, 24; 10.17, 20; 12.6; 17.7; 29.19, 23; 30.11, 12, 15, 29; 31.1; 37.23; 41.14, 16, 20; 43.3, 14, 15; 45.11; 47.4; 48.17; 49.7; 54.5; 55.5; 60.9, 14; Jer 50.29; 51.5; Ezek 20.39; 39.7; Hos 11.12.

Their expectation is that God will “judge (κρίνεις) and avenge (ἐκδικεῖς) our blood.” Though judgment is unpleasant and destructive for the wicked, it is often celebrated in the Old Testament (e.g., Pss 96.10-13; 98.7-9; Isa 30.18). The root meaning of κρίνω is “to distinguish.” It is because God is a God of κρίσις that he can be trusted to distinguish between the oppressor and the poor. Isaiah grounds Israel’s experience of grace and mercy in the justice of God (Isa 30.18). God’s justice/judgment is salvific, for it does more than mete out punitive sentences; it restores order and peace where injustice has brought chaos. Isaiah says that the messianic Servant of the Lord will bring justice/judgment to the nations (Isa 42.1). The Creator God is the ground for confidence in his mission (Isa 42.5), which will issue in the restoration of God’s creation to that which was pronounced “good”:

. . . . to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the LORD; that is my name. My glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.

It is this salvation through judgment that will ultimately issue in the creation of a new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65; Rev 20.11-21.8).

Justice/judgment issues in beauty; yet, from earth’s perspective there is nothing beautiful about the martyrdom of God’s witnesses. Rather, their deaths appear to confirm the lie of the oppressor’s authority and power. Hence, the cry for judgment.

The term “avenge” (ἐκδικεῖς) is used one other time in the Apocalypse (19.2). From that context it is clear that the martyrs seek just punishment on their persecutors. The judgment that produces restored order and beauty entails the negative aspect of retribution. Theirs is not an individualistic concern for vengeance, but a desire for their testimony to be upheld by the action of heaven. God’s judgment, in both its salvific and punitive aspects will vindicate the testimony of the witnesses who were displayed as losers in the courts of men, but welcomed as victors in the sanctuary of heaven.

The Promise of Vindication

The actions of verse eleven are in the passive voice; God is the unnamed actant. It is instructive that God does not correct the martyrs' desire for vindication through Divine retribution. Instead, his actions symbolize a promise that their prayer will be answered after a little time. The white robe (στολή) is the garment of the victor (Rev 3.5; 7.9-17), and the symbol of righteousness (19.8) in contrast to the nakedness that will befall the prostitute of the beast (17.16). In other words, the white robe is God's pledge to vindicate the testimony they held, and for which they died.

In the meantime, the church on earth will continue to suffer under persecution. Yet, the number of the martyrs is already fixed. It is a matter of God's timing, and they will all be vindicated. The martyrs are not left to wonder *whether* God will avenge their blood. The only question that remains is *when* God will avenge their blood, (cf. 6.11 and 10.6). God withholds the answer to the question of timing as a means of promoting trust in God's promises (cf. Matt 24.36; 25.13; 1 Thess 5.1-2; Acts 1.7).

Conclusion

The burning question that John's vision voices is a humble request for a theodicy, posed by those who trusted the sovereignty of God such that they were willing to be slaughtered for the word of God. The question presupposes that the proper exercise of God's justice includes retribution against the persecutors of God's faithful witnesses. This presupposition is consistent with the early Christian expectation of a final judgment in which the wicked will perish. These witnesses had testified for God in his contest with the nations. The larger context of Revelation indicates that this testimony included a condemnation of the violent oppression that stemmed from their insatiable greed and lust for power. The earth-dwellers confirmed the evidence against them by adding to their crimes the murder of God's witnesses. In heaven, the injustice of these executions was known. Yet, Christ's witnesses were impugned as criminals on the earth, calling their testimony into question. Therefore, their vindication will be the vindication of the

testimony which they held. The cry for vengeance was not a personal vendetta, but a public vindication of the word of God. God affirms the expectation of the martyrs by rewarding them with white robes, a symbol of God's pledge to avenge their blood.

Thus, the very text that poses the question of the relationship of martyrdom to divine retribution anticipates the answer given consistently throughout the book, namely, martyrdom is an impetus for divine retribution. The text does not leave open the question of whether God will avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth. God will exact justice on their persecutors. In the meantime, they are urged to be patient: "until their fellow-servants and their brothers who were to be killed as they were should be fulfilled." Any interpretation that censors the martyrs' cry is not in harmony with the answer of heaven.

The Identification of Christ with His Faithful Witnesses

The severity of the crime against Christ's witnesses is not only that the innocent have been made to suffer. Ultimately, it is Christ's identification with his saints that makes the crime against them so horrendous. An assault on the church, whether internal or external, is an affront to Christ, a reenactment of the slaughter of the Lamb.

Jesus as the Proto-Martyr

The Apocalypse portrays Jesus as the model of faithful witness which is sealed in death; or, as Reddish stated, Christ is depicted as "the supreme martyr."⁸² Jesus is introduced as ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός (1.5). The only other use of this description is found in 2.13 of Antipas, where Christ adds the possessive pronoun "my": ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου. This description is clarified in the following phrase: "who was killed among you, where Satan dwells." Thus, Antipas is regarded as a faithful witness precisely because he

⁸²Mitchell G. Reddish, "Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33 (1988): 85.

was faithful unto death. Likewise, Jesus is *the* Faithful Witness because he was faithful unto death.

The title ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός contains a proclamation of the death of Christ, just as ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν contains a proclamation of the resurrection of Christ (1.5). The three titles actually outline the career of Christ from humiliation to exaltation.⁸³ The first two titles imply the passion of Christ (death and resurrection from the dead), but that suffering is spelled out as victory. He wasn't silenced; he was "the Faithful Witness." He wasn't abandoned to the grave; he was "the Firstborn from the dead." Through the victory of his passion he is hailed as the "ruler of kings on earth." Jesus exemplifies God's program of victory through suffering witness.

Though Jesus is presented as the Faithful Witness for imitation, his death as the atonement for sin is unique in the Book of Revelation. As we argued in the introduction, the martyrs' deaths, while sacrificial, do not have any expiatory virtue.⁸⁴ In contrast, Jesus is uniquely qualified to take the scroll from the one seated on the throne precisely because he was slain, and by his blood he ransomed people for God (Rev 5.9). Furthermore, it was the death and resurrection of Christ that effected the ejection of the devil from his heavenly position as accuser of the brothers (12.1-12).⁸⁵ While Revelation maintains the importance of martyrdom for God's plan for the nations, only Jesus' death is redemptive.

The Testimony of Jesus

John's visions are called "the word of God and . . . the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1.2). The phrase τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ could be understood as an

⁸³So F. J. A. Hort *The Apocalypse of St. John I-III* (London: MacMillan & Company, 1908), 11. "The order of the three clauses suggests Christ's human life and death, then Resurrection, then Ascension."

⁸⁴See pp. 15-16.

⁸⁵Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 650-68.

objective genitive, and rendered, “The testimony about/concerning Jesus Christ.” It is true that the visions of Revelation are Christ-centered; however, the parallel terms “the word of God” are generally understood as “the word from God,” or “God’s word.” It would be natural to take both genitives as subjective, thus, strengthening the grammatical symmetry of the pair. Understanding “the testimony of Jesus Christ” as the testimony which Christ himself bore and gave to John would also coincide with the flow of revelation presented in verse one: God gave a word to Jesus, Jesus testified to this word and gave it to his angel, who communicated it to John for the churches. Furthermore, the description of Jesus as “the Faithful Witness” implies that he had a testimony for which he died. At least part of the content of the testimony of Jesus appears to be ethical, upon consideration of the description of the church militant in 12.17: “those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” It is the testimony that Jesus bore and gave to his servants that inspires the churches’ prophetic life and witness (19.10). Finally, Jesus is described as “he who testifies to these things,” at the end of the book (22.20).

Therefore, Christ is portrayed as the quintessential witness who seals his witness with his death. This is the background of the scene in the court of heaven in chapter five. First, Jesus is symbolically portrayed as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, who has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals” (5.5). Immediately, the language of victorious conquest is circumscribed by the language of sacrificial suffering: “I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (5.6). The slain Lamb, now standing, approaches the throne to take the scroll, dramatizing 1.1-2. The heavenly chorus also explains his victory and consequent worthiness in terms of his sacrificial death: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain . . .” (5.9; cf. 5.12). Christ overcame by the word of his testimony, and he loved not his life even unto death (cf. 12.11).

The Imitation of Christ

Reddish explained the purpose of the Revelation's martyr-Christology for John's afflicted churches: "Of particular importance to John in his portrayal of Christ as a martyr was the imitation value. Jesus is the proto-martyr. His followers are to follow in his path, being willing to suffer and die on account of their witness. Jesus, the faithful witness, is their example."⁸⁶

Jesus and the church are connected by virtue of a common bond in the truth (Rev 3.7, 14; 6.10; 15.3; 16.7; 19.2, 9, 11; 21.5, 6; cf. 14.5), namely, the testimony of Jesus Christ, versus Satan's lie (Rev 3.9; 12.9; 13.14; 18.23; 19.20; 20.3, 8, 10). The church imitates Christ by holding to the same testimony Christ held (e.g., 1.9; 12.17; 20.4). Just as Jesus' weapon is his word (1.16; 19.15, 21), the saints are protected by their prophetic witness (11.5). The imitation is pressed to the point of death (e.g., 11.7; 12.11; 20.4). Just as the Lamb was slain (ἐσφαγμένον), so also were his witnesses slain (ἐσφαγμένων) (cf. 5.6 and 6.9). Christ's identification with his faithful witnesses incorporates them, not only in his suffering and death, but also in his eternal reign: "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (3.21; cf. 2.26-27). Sweet said of the "stories" of the Lamb and his witnesses, "The two 'stories' are ultimately one (12.11)."⁸⁷

Conclusion: The Vindication of the Lamb

The Apocalypse identifies Jesus with the confessing church. Jesus is introduced as "the Faithful Witness," just as the church militant is represented as his faithful witness. Jesus' faithful witness included his martyrdom, just as the conquering saints testified faithfully unto death. They shared the same message, "Jesus' testimony."

⁸⁶Reddish, "Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse," 91.

⁸⁷Sweet, "Maintaining the Testimony of Jesus," 101-17.

Since Jesus is portrayed as the “proto-martyr,” the exhortation to faithful witness can be described in terms of the imitation of Christ.

Christ’s identification with his faithful witnesses gives their vindication cosmic significance. The testimony Jesus held is the testimony that his followers hold. Therefore, when their testimony is rejected, Jesus and his testimony are rejected. The offense of the church’s persecutors is ultimately against the Lamb. John interpreted the nations’ persecution of the church as hostility against the Lord and against his anointed. In 11.18 “the destroyers of the earth” are the nations who raged against the Lord and his anointed (cf. Ps 2.1-2). This allusion to Psalm 2 equates the earth-dwellers’ enmity with the church as the nations’ enmity with Christ.⁸⁸ The fact that the judgment of God’s enemies is paralleled with the rewarding of God’s servants strengthens this equation. It is not that these events merely transpire at the same time, but that the judgment of God’s enemies is the partial reward of the saints, inasmuch as it contributes to their vindication. Along the same line, the vindication of the saints is the vindication of the testimony of Jesus and ultimately of the Lamb, himself.

Conclusion: Martyrdom Confirms the Testimony against the Lamb’s Enemies

The Book of Revelation depicts a battle between reality and illusion, or truth and falsehood. The forensic metaphors of judgment and witness combine with the military metaphors of war and conquest to portray a true legal battle. In this contest, Satan attacked Christ, the Faithful Witness, and suffered a terrible defeat (Rev 12.1-10). Frustrated at his loss, Satan turns his rage on Christ’s witnesses (12.12-17). The saints imitate Christ by testifying against the nations who have bought into the illusion of Satan’s sovereignty embodied in the Beast from the sea, and perpetuated by the Beast from the earth (13.2, 12-17).

⁸⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 615.

Employing the typical irony of a subversive piece of literature, the Apocalypse portrays the martyrdom of the saints as the defeat of the Dragon and his followers, the nations who swore allegiance to the Beast (12.11). The martyrs' deaths would be the height of the earth-dwellers' rejection of their witness. At the same time it would be the climax and seal of the saints' testimony against the nations. The martyred saints long for God's judgment to vindicate them, not as mere personal vengeance, but as public vindication of the testimony they held, the testimony of Jesus, and of the Lamb with whom they are identified as faithful witnesses. God affirms that they will be justly vindicated. Thus, the martyrdom of the saints seals their witness against the enemies of the Lamb.

CHAPTER 4

MARTYRDOM AS THE DETERMINATION OF THE SENTENCE AGAINST PERSECUTORS

In the last chapter the relationship between faithful witness and the judgment of persecutors was shown to be one of cause and effect. The blood of the martyrs cried for judgment, and was answered favorably from heaven. A promise of judgment and vindication was given. In this chapter, it will be seen that the judgment meted out to the persecutors of the church, or their sentence, is also determined by the martyrdom of Christ's witnesses. The sentence against Christ's enemies is determined according to the *lex talionis*.

Lex Talionis in the Apocalypse

This section will examine the use of the *lex talionis* in the Bible and identify examples of the application of *lex talionis* in the Apocalypse.

The *Lex Talionis* in the Bible

The principle of retaliation is as old as the story of Cain and Abel. Even though God does not pronounce the sentence of death over him, Cain seems to understand that his life will be required for the taking of his brother's life: "whoever finds me will kill me" (Gen 4.14). Cain pleads for mercy,¹ and God forbids anyone from executing the law of retaliation on him (Gen 4.15). Lamech, the seventh from Adam of the descendents of Cain, either appealed to God's clemency toward Cain after he had

¹"My punishment is greater than I can bear" (4.13) is sometimes treated as repentance and confession. It can be translated, "My guilt/iniquity is greater than I can bear." See John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 113-14.

murdered a man in self-defense,² or he sinfully boasted of exceeding God's vengeance by murdering a man simply for wounding him (Gen 4.23-24).³ The former interpretation demonstrates an understanding of the appropriateness of the *lex talionis* in cases of murder. The latter interpretation has Lamech trespassing on God's prerogative of vengeance by exceeding the boundaries of the *lex talionis*, which serves to illustrate the moral degeneracy of Cain's descendants. Both interpretations of this passage assume the standard of justice to be the *lex talionis*, the former by a positive example and the latter by a negative example. After God had destroyed every living thing in the flood, he restrained the evil of men's hearts by requiring the law of retaliation in cases of murder: "And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man: Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen 9.5-6). The law of retaliation appears to be an expression of the just nature of God, and not a culturally conditioned command of the Sinaitic Covenant.⁴

The law of retaliation was designed to extend the rule of law equally in society. Childs explains: "The effect was to provide protection to members of inferior social standing and provide equality before the law from acts of physical violence. The wealthy could no longer escape punishment for their crime by simply paying a fine."⁵ The Law of Moses applies the law of retaliation at times in a manner that focuses less on

²Ibid., 115.

³Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 111-12; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 114; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 334-36.

⁴The talion has been discovered in many Ancient Near Eastern texts from Eshnunna (2000 BC), Lipit-Ishtar (1860 BC), and the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (1700 BC). The Babylonian code distinguishes between penalties for injuring an equal versus those for injuring a slave or freedman (Code of Hammurabi 195-205).

⁵Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical Theological Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974), 472.

retribution and more on compensation (Exod 21.22-27; Deut 19.15-21).⁶ In these cases, “an eye for an eye” does not literally demand that a person remove his eye for injuring another man’s eye, but that a fine must be exacted that will cost the offender an equivalent of what he took from the victim.

No evidence exists that any judges in the ancient world ever actually required a literal application of talion law beyond the first of its terms, “life for life.” In cases of murder, the murderer was put to death as a “life for life” satisfaction of the law. But beyond that, there was no actual taking of someone’s eye in exchange for his having ruined the eye of another person, nor was a tooth knocked out of a person in exchange for a tooth knocked out of someone else by that person and so on through the “bruise for bruise” penalty. Instead, expressions like “eye for eye” were understood idiomatically to mean “a penalty that hurts the person who ruined someone else’s eye as much as he would be hurt if his own eye were actually ruined also.” The precise penalty was left up to the judges by talion law; it might involve anything from banishment to loss of property to punitive confinement to special financial penalties to corporal punishment to public humiliation, or any combination of these.⁷

The exception to this non-literal application of the law of retaliation was, as Stuart noted, the first terms, “life for life.” This seems to stem from the principle stated in the Noahic administration, “for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9.6). The narrative of Moses’ calling also illustrates a non-literal application of talion, but in this case the cost is as high as human life.

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, “thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’ If you refuse to let him go, behold I will kill your firstborn son.” (Exod 4.22-23)

The firstborn son not only had the rights of primogeniture, but it was expected that all of a man’s sons would serve him in the advancement of his estate and vocation. This was God’s right with regard to his firstborn son, Israel. If Pharaoh should refuse to let them go, insisting that they must serve Egypt instead, then God would remove Pharaoh’s

⁶Eugene J. Fisher, “Lex Talionis in the Bible and Rabbinic Tradition,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 19 (Summer 1983): 582-87.

⁷Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 493-94.

firstborn son from his service in the most absolute terms. Childs explains the force of this warning:

The form of the threat makes use of a subtle figure of speech. That Israel is Yahweh's firstborn son is a metaphor which expresses the unique relation between God and his people (cf. Hos 11.1), but then the threat moves immediately beyond the metaphor to speak in grim, realistic terms of Pharaoh's firstborn. . . . The conflict is over paternal power, and in the claim of the firstborn the God of Israel and the king of Egypt have clashed in a head-on encounter. Later on in the narrative the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn is attributed to 'the destroyer' (12.23b), but there was never any doubt within the tradition that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the ultimate power behind that destruction.⁸

The law of the false witness is another example of the non-literal application of the *lex talionis*. In Deuteronomy 19.16-21 the Law says:

If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

If a person falsely accuses someone of a capital crime with the intention of seeing that one put to death, when his fraud is revealed, he is to be put to death (cf. Christ's judgment of Jezebel, the false prophetess; Rev 2.20-23).

In the Old Testament, the talion was both punitive and compensatory. With regard to the former, the one who committed the crime received retribution equal to the crime, no more and no less. For the injured party, compensation was made equal to the loss. The basis for the *lex talionis* in the biblical tradition stems from the creation of man in God's image. Because all people are made in the image of God, all people have attributed value from God. Even the foreigner is to be treated with the dignity of the talion (Lev 24.17-22).⁹

⁸Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 102-03.

⁹A difficulty presents itself in Exod 21.20. A distinction seems to be made between people in general and slaves. Some interpret the penalty for murdering the slave to be vague: "he shall be punished." Childs interprets the passage to teach, "The master is fully exonerated from injuring his slave 'because he is

Some suggest that Jesus sets aside the talion in favor of a policy of non-retaliation and non-resistance. Matthew 5.38-39 records these words of Jesus: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. . . .” Jeremias comments on this passage, “The way in which Jesus strictly forbids his disciples . . . to apply the *ius talionis* (5.38-42) also amounts to an abolition of precepts of the Torah.”¹⁰ However, in light of the larger context of Matthew’s portrayal of Jesus’ teaching on the law, Childs is much closer to the heart of Jesus’ teaching:

It is a basic misunderstanding of these verses to see here evidence that Jesus merely sought to abrogate a particularly cruel law for a more humane, liberal approach. As if he offered a higher spiritualized ethic to replace Israel’s primitive morality! It is clear from the other contrasts (cf. v. 39) that the issue at stake in the Sermon on the Mount is on a different level. A far more radical claim is being made. The Gospels are not simply an extension of broad Hellenistic liberalism. The law of Ex. 21.24 is chosen as a good example of human law. Society in general functions on the basis of retaliation. Jesus does not seek to replace it with a better law, but cuts the ground out from under all human law. The evangelist formulates the teaching of Jesus by the conscious use of paradox. The law of God transcends completely the limits set by human society in demanding a complete and limitless response to God. The positive formulation comes in v. 44: ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’ This is not intended to be a social program (Tolstoy), but an imperative which grows out of a highly theological reflection on the stark discontinuity between God’s call and the rules of human society. In sum, although the Covenant Code is cited, it is used simply illustratively of a highly theological

his property” (ibid., 471). The translation “he shall be punished,” however, is not preferred. The verb נָקַם is more accurately translated “to suffer vengeance,” than merely “to be punished.” Thus the penalty for murdering a slave is vengeance. It seems that the master is exonerated only when the servant’s injuries are not severe (21.21). Permanent injuries that did not result in death resulted in the slave’s freedom (Exod 21.26-27). This implies that slaves, though property, retained personhood under the Mosaic legislation. Stuart stated that according to this text there was no distinction between slave and free when murder is involved (Stuart, *Exodus*, 490).

¹⁰ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971), 207. Cf. Werner Georg Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973), 54; T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1937), 159. Ladd is careful to avoid the language of abolishing the law, but he comes close when he affirms of the law of retaliation: “The result is in effect that the regulations themselves can no longer function directly as guides to conduct.” George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 224. Similarly, I. H. Marshall comments with ambiguity about Jesus’ position on the law, “. . . if some of them are made redundant (e.g., Mt 5.38-39), the redundant command still remains in force as a kind of safety net.” I. H. Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 99.

issue and does not touch directly on the question of the Christians' use of Jewish law.¹¹

Jesus is calling on his disciples to surrender to the rule of God over their lives in a very radical manner. However, this does not abrogate the principle of just punishment in any absolute sense. The broader teaching of the New Testament actually grounds the call to “non-retaliation” in the abiding principle of God’s perfect justice and promise to avenge innocent sufferers. First Peter 2.22-23 uses Jesus as an example of the righteous sufferer for his flock to imitate. Jesus endured without retaliation fully trusting in the just judgment of God: “he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” Paul also appeals to the justice of God to encourage non-retaliation for personal offenses: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom 12.19). In the New Testament, the call to non-retaliation among Jesus’ disciples is grounded in the disciples’ trust in the justice of God. The Apocalypse reveals that God’s justice can still operate according to the *lex talionis*.

Revelation 3.9: Restoring Honor

Behold, I will give some from the synagogue of Satan, who keep saying that *they* are Jews, and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and lie prostrate before your feet and they will know that I loved you.

Who say they are Jews. In this passage, an appeal is made to the talion in order to comfort the saints of Philadelphia who have endured affliction. The adversaries of the church are described as “the synagogue of Satan,” a title also found in 2.9. In both passages they are described as those, “who say they are Jews and are not.” Their claim to be Jews was probably made to contradict the claim of the Christians to be the heirs of the patriarchal promises. The basis of their claim was most likely more than mere natural

¹¹Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 490.

descent,¹² but had to do with their adherence to the Law of Moses as well. They could dismiss the church on two grounds. First, there were uncircumcised Gentiles among their number, which would exclude them from the commonwealth of Israel. Second, any Jews among the Christians were considered to be in violation of the Law for embracing Gentiles and worshiping a cursed criminal (Gal 3.13; Deut 21.23) as the Messiah.

And they are not. The Jewish synagogue was confident of its position before God on the grounds of physical descent and Law keeping—symbols of their covenant with the Lord. Jesus’ rejection of their claim to be Jews is an indictment of their confidence on both accounts (cf. Matt 3.9-10; John 8.39-40; Rom 2.28, 29). Jesus’ assessment that they are not Jews is essentially a rejection of their status as the people of God. Moreover, they are not only rejected as the people of God, but have acted in a way that betrays their allegiance to Satan; thus they are called “the synagogue of Satan” or the “gathering of the Adversary of God’s people.”

The synagogue of Satan. Four of the seven churches of Asia Minor are said to be troubled by Satan, or satanic activity: Smyrna (2.9; and 2.10 ὁ διάβολος); Pergamum (2.13); Thyatira (2.24); and Philadelphia (3.9). Satan’s attacks on the churches are varied. At Smyrna, the synagogue of Satan slanders (τὴν βλασφημίαν) the church. The church is warned of suffering that is described as, “the devil is about to throw some of you into prison.” The satanic slander and the diabolical imprisonment are probably related. The Jewish synagogue would have little coercive power against the Christians, other than to exclude them from the synagogue. However, they could slander the Christians to the provincial authorities, thereby bringing them into conflict with the local cults. Monotheism was considered Atheism by the pagans; and a refusal to sacrifice

¹²Contra John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 61.

to the gods on behalf of the emperor,¹³ or to burn incense to the emperor himself could be interpreted as disloyalty and insubordination. The Jews were exempted from Rome's idolatrous cults because of the antiquity of their religion. However, new religions were treated with suspicion. If Christianity were not recognized as a sect of Judaism, then it would be regarded as a new religion, and a monotheistic religion at that. Any close examination of the Christian worldview would bring it into conflict with the antithetical claims of the Roman, provincial cults. With regard to the imprisonment of Christians, Hemer wrote: "Jewish hostility was at least likely to have been a factor: their rejection of the Christians placed the latter outside the protection and toleration which the Jews themselves enjoyed."¹⁴ The Jews had simply to expel the Christians from the synagogue and denounce them before the authorities as a new religion unrelated to Judaism, defining Judaism according to their own heritage and practice.

The church in Pergamum is located "where Satan's throne is" and "where Satan dwells" (2.13). Hemer listed a number of possible historical allusions to "Satan's throne" in Pergamum, the most likely being: the throne-like altar of Zeus Soter; the Serpent symbol of Asklepios Soter; and the center of the emperor cult in Asia Minor. He opts for the latter.¹⁵ Whatever the referent, the activity is clear—murder. The mention of Satan's throne before the mention of Antipas' martyrdom, and the mention of Satan's dwelling afterward, focuses on another aspect of Satan's activity, namely persecution and murder.

The activity of Satan in Thyatira is associated with the false prophetess, Jezebel. The teaching of "Jezebel" is called by some "the deep things of Satan." Beale

¹³ Geoffrey Ernest Maurice de Ste. Croix, "Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted," in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, ed. Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 111-12.

¹⁴ Colin J. Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

has argued that the “woman” is a reference to a party within the church, based on the reference to “her children” (v. 23). He compared this with metaphorical uses of women and children elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to communities (2 John 1; 1 Peter 5.13).¹⁶ While there is some difficulty in identifying the referent of “Jezebel,” there is less debate regarding her destructive influence in the church. She seems to have been encouraging the participation in local trade guilds as a legitimate exercise of Christian freedom. This freedom included idolatry and the immorality¹⁷ bound up with worshipping pagan deities.

The “deep things of Satan” is a reference to her teaching, though it is not clear whether the “some” who call it such are members of her party or of John’s. Hemer suggests that Jezebel may have claimed esoteric knowledge into the “deep things of God” (cf. 1Cor 2.10); but John’s circle has ironically called it the depths of Satan. He suggests that this would explain how she was able to gain a foothold in the church.¹⁸ However, it is possible that she could have claimed knowledge of the devil and evil spirits, much like that found in certain Jewish sects¹⁹ and Greek magical texts.²⁰ This sect could have applied this knowledge/power to justify their participation in the cultic activities of the

¹⁶G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 260-61. Hemer argues that Jezebel is an individual woman in the church. She is named “Jezebel” by her opponents to undermine her influence in the church (Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, 117-23).

¹⁷“Sexual immorality” may be literal or figurative (spiritual adultery).

¹⁸Hemer, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting*, 122.

¹⁹Scrolls discovered at Qumran reveal a developed demonology (4Q560; 11Q11; 11QPsApa; 11Q5; 1QapGen). These scrolls contain exorcist traditions about David and certain Patriarchs. They contain instructions on how to ward off evil spirits using designated Psalms followed by prayers for protection. For further information on first-century demonology, see Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

²⁰The Greek Magical Papyri and the Aramaic, Syriac, and Mandaic amulets and bowls contain rituals for both acquiring and exorcising demons. Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), PGM I.1-42; IV.1227-64. Also see Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, eds., *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity*, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1987).

trade guilds. Either way, Jesus describes her activities in the same terms ascribed to the Babylonian harlot in chapter 18.²¹ Babylon has infiltrated the church in the “person” of Jezebel. Satan’s attack in Thyatira is internal, involving the deception of members of the church.

Each of these features of Satan’s activity is portrayed in subsequent visions. Satan is “the deceiver of the whole world (12.9), who brings slanderous accusations against the saints (12.10), and makes war on the church (12.17). Therefore, the Jews in Philadelphia, who congregate against the feeble church, are identified by Christ with the archetype of evil, Satan, no matter how they may view themselves (cf. Jesus’ statement regarding his own Jewish opponents; John 8.44).

Prostrate before your feet. Jesus promises that the church will be compensated by the synagogue of Satan for the honor they stole from them in the courts of men. The synagogue had claimed to be the true people of God, and had slandered the church before the authorities, denying the Christians’ status as the people of God. Jesus promises that some²² of those same Jews will bow before the church in acknowledgment that they are the true Israel of God (cf. Gal 6.16)—beloved by Christ. Isaiah used the military image of prisoners of war lying prostrate as slaves of the Jews, to communicate the reversal God would accomplish, redeeming Israel from the nations who had oppressed them (Isa 45.14; 49.23; 60.14). Ironically, the honor that Isaiah had prophesied would be given to Israel by the Gentiles who afflicted them would now be bestowed on the Gentile/Jewish church by Jews (Isa 60, esp. v. 14).²³ The door of the synagogue may have been barred to the Philadelphian church, but Jesus had opened a

²¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 262.

²²Aune noted that the phrase διδῶ ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς contains a partitive genitive. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 238.

²³Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005), 91.

door for them which “no one is able to shut” (2.8). In accord with the *lex talionis* the church will be compensated for the slanderous lie of the synagogue of Satan. The hostile synagogue will be humiliated, while the faithful witnesses of Christ will be honored.

Revelation 11.18: Destroyers Destroyed

And the nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and to give the reward to your servants, the prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth.

The seventh trumpet. In this passage, heaven celebrates the perfect justice of the kingdom of Christ, which is portrayed in terms of the law of equal proportions. Paulien wrote of the significance of trumpets in the Old Testament: “In Old Testament times trumpets were used to create two different moods. One was the mood of fanfare, rejoicing, and celebration (cf. Pss 47.5; 150.5; and 2Sam 6.15), and the other was the mood of awe, dread, and solemnity (illustrated, for example, by the theophany on Mt. Sinai described in Exod 19.13-19).”²⁴ Whether trumpets were used to announce worship or warfare, the primary purpose was to call God to remember his people:²⁵

And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets. The trumpets shall be to you for a perpetual statute throughout your generations. And when you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, *that you may be remembered before the LORD your God*, and you shall be saved from your enemies. On the day of your gladness also, and at your appointed feasts and at the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings. They shall be *a reminder of you before your God: I am the LORD your God.* (Num 10.8-10)

The trumpet was used not only for signals during warfare, but also for warning of invasion (e.g., Jer 4.5; 6.1; Amos 3.6; Ezek 33.1-6). By analogy, the trumpet was used to announce the eschatological day of the Lord. The sound of the trumpet had been associated with theophanies and the voice of the Lord at least as early as Israel’s

²⁴Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretations of Revelation 8.7-12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 21 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1987), 203.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 207.

experience at Sinai (Exod 19.13, 16, 19; cf. Deut 5.22). The latter prophets combine the awe of the theophany with the warning of invasion to announce the coming Day of the Lord (Isa 27.13; Joel 2.1; Zeph 1.16; Zech 9.14; cf. Ezek 33.7-9). Just as the Levitical trumpets were to remind Yahweh of his covenant people, the trumpet of Yahweh was to remind the people of their covenant with him.

The seven trumpeters are numbered according to the structure of the book. However, Friedrich suggests a connection with seven trumpeters used on other occasions in Israel's history (e.g., Josh 6.4, 8, 13; Neh 12.41; 1Chron 15.24).²⁶ The commonality of these references to seven trumpeters is the worship setting. Even in Joshua, where warfare is prominent, the seven are Levites who blow the trumpets before the Ark of the Covenant (Josh 6.8). The trumpets of Revelation are tied to the prayers of the saints by the literary feature of interlocking. Beale explains the interlocking structure of 8.1-6: "The placement of v 2 before vv 3-5 allows vv 2-5 to act as a parenthetical transition both concluding the seals and introducing the trumpets. The transition functions on both a literary and thematic level. The narration of the trumpet series resumes in 8.6."²⁷ The introduction of the seven trumpets includes the prayers of the saints, which are offered on the golden altar before the throne. These prayers ascend to God, who then responds with portents of eschatological wrath: "Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake" (8.5).²⁸

²⁶Gerhard Friedrich, "σάλπιγξ, σαλπίζω, σαλπιστής," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 7:71-88.

²⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 454.

²⁸Cf. Paulien, who wrote, "God's response would be to deliver them militarily and culturally. In Revelation the trumpets are unleashed by the prayers of the saints and signal God's response to those prayers. This strong thematic parallel with Num 10 argues that the trumpets in Rev 8-11 are to be understood in relation to worship and prayer as is the case in much of the Old Testament" (Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 222).

The seventh trumpet follows after an interlude (10.1-11.14), which connects the trumpet judgments with the commissioning vision of the little scroll (10) and the vision of the two witnesses (11.1-14). Just as the seal judgments ended with an announcement of the final judgment (8.5), so the seventh trumpet heralds the same (11.19b).

The kingdom celebrated. The phenomenological signs of imminent eschatological wrath are attended by shouts of victory and sighs of thanksgiving for God's just reign (11.15-18). Loud voices from heaven celebrate the ultimate victory of Christ's kingdom over all worldly kingdoms (11.15). The twenty-four elders proceed to prostrate themselves before the throne of God in grateful adoration for exercising his power and rule over the nations. Their prayer summarily narrates the events of the eschaton (11.17b-18). First, God has begun to reign. Both ἐβασίλευσας and the following ὠργίσθησαν are taken as ingressive aorists. Thus, on analogy with Psalm 99.1 (98.1 LXX)²⁹ the people of the earth are enraged by God's reign: "the nations raged (ὠργίσθησαν)." John's description of the next action seems as though he has the *lex talionis* in mind as the standard for God's response: "Your wrath (ἡ ὀργή σου) came." The punishment (ἡ ὀργή σου) is determined by the crime (ὠργίσθησαν).

The judgment celebrated. The next three phrases require the verb ἦλθεν to be supplied. In addition, ὁ καιρός, which appears in the third phrase of verse 18, must be supplied in the fourth and fifth phrases.³⁰ These three clauses are grammatically parallel, each containing an aorist infinitive. This arrangement sandwiches the promise of reward between two promises of judgment.

καὶ (ἦλθεν) ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι

²⁹ Ο κύριος ἐβασίλευσεν. ὀργιζέσθωσαν λαοί.

³⁰ Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 637.

καὶ (ἦλθεν ὁ καιρὸς) δοῦναι τὸν μισθὸν τοῖς δούλοις σου τοῖς προφήταις
καὶ τοῖς ἁγίοις καὶ τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου,
τοὺς μικροὺς καὶ τοὺς μεγάλους,
καὶ (ἦλθεν ὁ καιρὸς) διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντας τὴν γῆν.

The proliferation of five titles for those who are to be rewarded makes the promise of reward a significant portion of this unit. Yet the statements that bracket this promise make the theme of judgment emphatic. This structure suggests that the judgment of the raging nations is related to the reward of the saints inasmuch as it is part of their vindication.³¹

Destroyers destroyed. If the application of the *lex talionis* at the beginning of verse 18 was subtle, it is no longer so at the end of the verse: “and for destroying (διαφθεῖραι) the destroyers (τοὺς διαφθείροντας) of the earth.” Again, the punishment corresponds equally to the offense. Caird identifies the destroyers as spiritual realities, and is careful to exclude any human embodiment from the list of those to be destroyed:

It is the purpose of the succeeding chapters to tell us in detail who and what are these powers who destroy the earth, but already we have had five clear pointers to their identity: the four horsemen, but especially Death with his companion Hades (6.8); the blazing mountain which recalled Jeremiah’s dirge over Babylon, ‘destroyer of the whole earth’ (8.8); the fallen star Wormwood, the embittered rival of God (8.11); the angel of the abyss whose name was Destroyer both in Hebrew and in Greek (9.11); the monster that rises from the abyss (11.7).³²

Caird’s list is not to be disputed for the agents of destruction he included, but for the one culpable agent that he exonerates from the list—the nations. The nations “raged.” God’s response was not, “and your deliverance came;” but, “your wrath came.” The reference to “the nations” and “the dead,” who were to be judged,³³ militates against a view that

³¹Cf. Beale, “The reward of the faithful is sandwiched literarily between statements about judgment to indicate that part of their reward is the satisfaction arising from knowing that God has vindicated them by judging their persecutors” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 616).

³²Caird, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (London: A. & C. Black, 1966), 143. Caird completely exonerates man in the last judgment: “The wrath of God against the destroyers is an integral part of John’s doctrine of salvation. There can be no security for mankind as long as the destroyers are at large to ravage the earth. Babylon must be destroyed if her citizens are to be set free from her seductions to enter the heavenly city, and the monster must be destroyed if men are to be liberated from its worship to do homage to the one true God” (144).

would see humanity merely as a victim of the destroyers. Rather, it places the onus of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the human embodiment of spiritual wickedness.

The justice that is celebrated in the consummation of the kingdom of Christ is measured according to the *lex talionis* as both compensation and punishment. In terms of compensation, the servants of God are rewarded, at least in part, with vindication for the unjust condemnation they endured by their persecutors. In terms of judgment, the persecutors of the church receive precisely what they inflicted—wrath and destruction. Revelation maintains the vision of a just world in which punishment is proportionate to the crime.

Revelation 18.4-8: Pay Her Back

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds. Mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed. As she glorified herself and lived in luxury, so give her a like measure of torment and mourning, since in her heart she says, ‘I sit as a queen. I am no widow. And mourning I shall never see.’ For this reason her plagues will come in a single day, death and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for mighty is the Lord God who has judged her.”

The principle of the *lex talionis* permeates this judgment oracle against Babylon the fallen.

The great prostitute. Who is the great prostitute? Smalley was quite general in his identification of the great prostitute: “The great whore, Babylon, stands for the ultimately seductive expression of secular wrongdoing.”³⁴ Others have attempted to be

³³Beale counters any suggestion that the judgment of the dead refers to anything other than eschatological wrath: (1) κρίνω refers to the judgment of the ungodly in every other context in Revelation (6.10; 16.5; 18.8, 20; 19.2, 11; 20.12-13); (2) κρίσις always refers to the judgment of non-Christians (14.7; 16.7; 18.10; 19.2); (3) the word ἐκδικέω was available had John intended “vindication”; (4) the parallel passage of 20.12-13 clearly refers to the judgment of the unbelieving dead; (5) the allusion to Psalm 2 points to the nations as a hostile force to be defeated (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 618).

³⁴Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 427.

more specific, basing their conclusion on the designation of the woman as, “the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth” (17.18). Brown mentioned the view that this “great city” was Jerusalem, who had rejected her Messiah for the political and economic stability of Rome, discovering the true bestial nature of her lover only after he had devoured her in the first and second centuries.³⁵ Others have found Rome to be a more likely referent for the symbol of the prostitute who, “sits on many waters” and “has dominion over the kings of the earth.”³⁶ The interpretation of the prostitute depends on one’s interpretation of the Beast, for they are intricately related as the picture of mount and rider indicates.

The beast of the sea is the embodiment of the dragon. The association with the dragon is made explicit, first, by the fact that the dragon stood on the sand of the sea (12.18b), from which the Beast emerged, as though summoned by the Dragon (13.1). The Dragon’s war on the saints (12.17) is waged through the activity of the Beast (13.7). They are both worshiped together, since the Dragon gave his authority to the Beast (13.2, 4). They both are described as having seven heads and ten horns (12.3; 13.1); though the seven crowns of the Dragon are manifested as ten crowns on the Beast, in conformity with the fourth Beast of Daniel’s vision whose ten horns represented ten kings (Dan 7.7, 24). In addition to this association with the Dragon, the Beast is also a mocking parody of Christ. Jesus is “the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore” (1.18). The Beast is described as the one who “was, and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction” (17.8). Just as Christ is presented as the one who “died and came to life” (2.8), so the beast received a mortal wound and was “miraculously” healed (13.3, 12).

³⁵Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 793-94.

³⁶Ibid.

Scholars are not agreed on the exact referent of the Beast. Aune considered the Beast from the sea as the Roman Empire, with his ally, the beast from the earth as the civil and religious administration of the province of Asia.³⁷ Walvoord also considered the Beast, not as an individual, but as an empire. Yet it is not the Roman Empire of the early church, but a revived Roman Empire in the latter days.³⁸ Ladd identified the Beast as the Antichrist of the last days—an individual who represented civil authority: “The beast then is the eschatological Antichrist who was foreshadowed in certain aspects of Rome, and in other totalitarian states as well. . . . The first beast represents civil power, satanically inspired.”³⁹ Bauckham argued extensively that the Beast is depicted upon the basis of two forms of the *Nero Redivivus* myth then current in some Jewish and Christian writings. He summarized his interpretation in these words:

Yet, if chapter 13 is read in its own terms and if we are not already convinced that the healing of the mortal wound must represent Nero’s own resurrection, the most natural way to read 13.3, 12, 14 is to understand that the mortal wound sustained by Nero (the head) was also a mortal wound to the imperial power as such (the beast) and that it was the imperial power, not Nero himself, which recovered. Such an interpretation can give the image an obvious historical reference. Nero’s suicide, which was also the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, was a death-blow to the imperial power, because it coincided with the beginning of the period of chaos, the so-called ‘year of the four emperors,’ in which more than one claimant was contesting the imperial title, in which various provinces hoped to be able to throw off Roman rule, and in which the survival of the empire was put in very serious question. Jews and Christians alike must have hoped that this near-disintegration of the empire was the divine judgment from which Rome would never recover. But the imperial power in fact fully recovered under Vespasian, the Jews in Judaea and other movements of revolt were utterly quashed, and the subjects of the Empire were impressed even more than before with its apparent invincibility: ‘Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?’ (13.4).⁴⁰

³⁷Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 729.

³⁸Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 197.

³⁹George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 177-83. Cf. Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Beast from the Sea in Revelation 13,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003): 337-48. “Is the beast out of the sea a man or an empire? The answer is both” (337).

⁴⁰Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1993), 442-43.

Beale rejected any identification of the Beast with one incarnation of the Dragon. Rather, he interpreted the Beast as a trans-temporal reality that found embodiment in the former persecutors of God's people (e.g., Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Rome), as well as all later embodiments. He also suggested that the Beast may find a final embodiment in the Antichrist at the end of history.⁴¹

Bauckham has convincingly drawn parallels between the Beast and the political situation of Rome in the first century, including allusions to the *Nero Redivivus* myths of the latter half of that century. The occasional nature of the Apocalypse supports an interpretation of the symbols that has an immediate referent in the contemporary situation of the original recipients. The narrative of the Beast is a mixture of intertextual and intercultural allusions drawing on the ancient text of Scripture and the contemporaneous social and political environment of the first century church. That John draws on these resources for his symbolism and referents does not limit the application of his prophecy to his own generation. The imagery of the Beast was fashioned to point to the corrupt powers of the day. Rome was representative of the spirit of Antichrist, just as the seven churches of Asia were representative of the universal church.⁴² Bauckham stated his conclusion similarly:

The riddle of the number of the beast pointed specifically to Nero as the figure whose history and legend displayed, to those who had wisdom, the nature of the Roman Empire's attempt to rival God. Any contemporary reappropriation of Revelation's images that aims to expose the dynamics of power in the contemporary world in the light of the Gospel would also have to be specific.⁴³

If the beast is to be understood as the oppressive imperial power represented in Nero, then the prostitute represents an aspect of empire that thrives on its military/political strength. Her "lovers" are "the nations," "the kings of the earth" and

⁴¹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 682-94, 868-76.

⁴²Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48-49.

⁴³Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 452.

“the merchants of the earth” (18.3). The kings of the earth are associated with her wealth and luxury (18.9). The immorality associated with her may be literal or figurative. The spiritual wickedness that is generated from their association with her may be intended by “sexual immorality” (18.3, 9). Most of the laments over her fall are attributed to the merchants of the earth, and those associated with the shipping trade (18.11, 15, 17). There is a detailed list of the cargo these merchants depended on her to buy (18.12-13). While there are intertextual echoes of Ezekiel’s list of products for the city of Tyre (Ezek 27.12-24), there are also intercultural echoes of the wares of trade in first century Rome.⁴⁴ This evidence has led Bauckham to identify the Babylonian prostitute as the economic system of Roman dominion. The empire’s economic prosperity depended on its military power and political stability. Religion and economics could not be easily separated in that context, as Paul’s experience in Ephesus exemplifies (Acts 19.23-41). Babylon’s advocate in the church, Jezebel (2.20-23), was encouraging involvement in civic networks, or trade guilds, in order to enjoy the economic benefits of living in the Asian province of the Roman Empire. This involvement included communal meals at idolatrous temples and burning votives to the gods in honor of the imperial family; or directing the sacrifice to the emperor himself.⁴⁵

Thus, the referent of the Babylonian prostitute appears to be the economic system of the Roman Empire. The symbolism of “Babylon” suggests the nemesis of God’s people from the Old Testament. Both the oppressiveness and the arrogance of Babylon are epitomized in the Roman Empire. Nebuchadnezzar had boasted, “Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the

⁴⁴Bauckham wrote, “Closer study of John’s list will reveal that what he has done is to substitute for Ezekiel’s, which is an accurate account of Tyre’s trade in the sixth century B.C., a list which is just as accurate in representing the imports of the city of Rome in the first century A.D.” (ibid., 351).

⁴⁵Philip A. Harland, “Honoring the Emperor or Assailing the Beast: Participation in Civic Life among Associations (Jewish, Christian and Other) in Asia Minor and the Apocalypse of John,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 77 (March 2000): 111.

glory of my majesty?” (Dan 4.30). Nebuchadnezzar’s subsequent madness foreshadowed the fall of Babylon prophesied by Jeremiah. This fall was prompted by Babylon’s aggression against the Lord’s inheritance:

“I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion,” declares the Lord.

“Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain,” declares the Lord, “which destroys the whole earth. . . .”

“Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me; he has crushed me; he has made me an empty vessel; he has swallowed me like a monster; he has filled his stomach with my delicacies; he has rinsed me out. The violence done to me and to my kinsmen be upon Babylon,” let the inhabitant of Zion say.

“My blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea,” let Jerusalem say.

Therefore thus says the Lord: “Behold I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you.” (Jer 51. 24-25a, 34-36a)

The imagery of the prostitute signifies the seductiveness of wealth and luxury that intoxicates those who engage in commerce with Rome, and thereby participate in her oppressive system. She also appeals to the church to compromise their witness to Christ by participating in her immorality.

Come out of her. Rome, with its promise of economic prosperity and even luxury, had a seductive effect on the kings of the earth. Even the church was in danger of being intoxicated with her apparent beauty (17.6b-7). Therefore, the voice from heaven calls the saints to come out of her (18.4). This is not a physical flight to the mountains, such as Jesus advised in view of the destruction of Jerusalem (e.g., Matt 24.16). Rather, it is a call to holiness in an unholy environment: “lest you take part in her sins.” Those who take part in her sins, who entrust their welfare to the oppressive economic systems of this world, will suffer when they fall. The people of God are called to self-examination in this passage. Will they be among the mourners who lose everything when Babylon falls? Or will they be among those who rejoice that God has judged the great prostitute (19.2)?

The height of her sins (Rev 18.5) is important, for it will determine the measure of her punishment. Jeremiah had foreseen the destruction of Babylon, whose

judgment had “reached up to heaven and been lifted up even to the skies” (Jer 51.9). He also exhorted his people to “flee from the midst of Babylon,” so that they would not be “cut off in her punishments” (Jer 51.6).

Pay her back. Verse 6 is rife with the language of recompense. The command is given: “Pay her back” (ἀπόδοτε αὐτῇ). The verb ἀποδίδωμι alone suggests recompense. Yet the verb does not stand alone, but is clarified by the adverbial phrase: “as she herself has paid back others” (ὡς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπέδωκεν). The pronoun is placed in a position that emphasizes her responsibility for the judgment she is about to suffer. She is to receive according to the measure that she gave. The idea of equivalency is reinforced by using the same verb (ἀποδίδωμι) for the punishment and the crime.

Repay her double. This phrase seems to contradict the standard of the punishment being equal to the crime. However, Kline has demonstrated that the verb διπλόω is used in the LXX to translate words that can have the sense of “duplicate,” “copy” (cf. Matt 23.15; 1 Tim 5.17).⁴⁶ The phrase καὶ διπλώσατε τὰ διπλά, instead of being rendered as, “and repay her double,” could be rendered “and repay her fully.” The idea would then be equivalent punishment, not double. This would be in keeping with reading the qualifying prepositional phrase κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῆς as the standard (“according to her deeds”), instead of the purpose (“for her deeds”). This would be consistent with the translation of this phrase elsewhere in the Apocalypse (2.23; 20.12; cf. 22.12). Based on this data, one could translate the phrase in this way: “and repay her fully according to her deeds.”

The last phrase of verse 6 appeals to the earlier imagery of Babylon’s cup which was, “full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality” (17.4). In

⁴⁶Meredith G. Kline, “Double Trouble,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 2 (1989): 177-78.

this same cup, a portion is to be mixed for her. John uses a cognate of the same word used above, which most translations render “double” (διπλοῦν), to describe the portion to be mixed. John more likely intends to communicate a full portion, rather than a double portion. Granted that John’s symbolic world does not have to “make sense” in the real world, Kline’s remarks on this issue are still appropriate: “The idea of pouring her a double amount of punishment would be incongruous with this emphasis on the identity of the vessel of sin and of judgment. Indeed since Babylon’s cup is described as filled to the brim with her abominations (17.4), getting double that amount of punishment into the very same container would be quite a feat.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the idea of the punishment fitting the crime is expressed both by the identity of the instrument for punishment with that of the crime (the cup) and by the adverb διπλοῦν.

Pride as a standard of measure. Once again, a standard measurement is stated for the determination of Babylon’s punishment (18.7a). The operative words for the argument of this section are ὅσα and τοσοῦτον. Τοσοῦτος is the pronoun of degree, both size and quantity.⁴⁸ It is the correlative of ὅσος, so that the standard is set by whatever follows the relative pronoun of quantity: “as much as she glorified herself and lived in luxury.” The correlative pronoun then applies this standard to the measure of punishment to be meted out in return: “so give her *a like measure* of torment and mourning.” One could imagine a scale that started at zero with mere existence and climbed higher based on the amount of glory and praise one heaped on himself along with the luxuries and amenities that accompany one’s self-estimation. God removes the labels “glory and luxury;” he replaces them with “torment” and “mourning.”

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 710.

The ὅτι clause (18.7b) following the statement regarding the measure of punishment, is the ground for that statement, though it also provides the ground for what follows (18.8). Babylon's boast is like a taunt that dares the very justice of God.⁴⁹ John alludes to Isaiah 47.8: "Now therefore hear this, you lover of pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your heart, 'I am, and there is no one besides me; I shall not sit as a widow or know the loss of children.'" The Lord's retort in Isaiah also follows the principle of the *lex talionis*: "These two things shall come to you in a moment, in one day; the loss of children and widowhood shall come upon you in full measure" (Isa 47.9).

The principle that "God resists the proud" (Jas 4.6; 1 Pet 5.5; cf. Prov 3.34 LXX) is illustrated repeatedly in the Old Testament, as God charged the nations based on their boasting:

At the end of the twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (Dan 4.29-32)

Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, "Thus says the Lord God: Because your heart is proud, and you have said, 'I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,' yet you are but a man, and no god, . . . therefore thus says the Lord God: 'Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you . . .'" (Ezek 28.2, 6-7; cf. Isa 14.12-14)

Even the false prophets of Israel are condemned for their unjustified security in false pretense: "They have spoken falsely of the Lord and have said, 'He will do nothing; no disaster will come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine'" (Jer 5.12).

⁴⁹Aune compares 18.17b to Niobe's boasting in Ovid *Metam.* 6.170-202: "I am queen of Cadmus' royal house. . . Surely I am happy. Who can deny it? And happy I shall remain. This also who can doubt? My very abundance has made me safe. I am too great for Fortune to harm; though she should take many from me, still many more will she leave to me." David E. Aune, *Revelation 18-22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 995.

Babylon's soliloquy (18.7b) reveals the height of her arrogance. The measure ("as much as") of the first half of the verse is portrayed in Babylon's boasting. This is how much she has glorified herself: she has exalted herself as the queen of heaven, whose fortunes cannot be turned back, even by the providence of God.

For this reason her plagues will come. Verse 8 does not use the pronouns of degree to express the justness of Babylon's punishment. Instead, the punishments are described by concepts which correspond to Babylon's boasting. She boasted that she is no widow, yet she will know death. She boasted that she would never mourn, yet she would indeed mourn for the death, the famine and the fire that come upon her in a single day. Just as Nebuchadnezzar was humbled so that he could testify to the sovereign majesty of the Lord, so too here, Babylon is brought down from her arrogant throne because, "mighty is the Lord God who has judged her" (18.8). The original sin of Babylon was to "make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11.4). This contradicted God's design to make his name great; therefore he frustrated their efforts. This same spirit of hubris repeatedly tries to arrogate to the creature what only properly belongs to the Creator (e.g., Isa 42.8; 48.11). Babylon's fall removes her boasting and restores all glory to God.

In line with the *lex talionis* the judgment on Babylon is both compensatory and punitive. Babylon must compensate God for the honor that she stole for herself; and her punishment will be equal to her crime.

**Revelation 20.11-15:
According to What They Had Done**

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

This passage of Scripture portrays the final judgment. It is important for the argument of this dissertation because it demonstrates that the principles of God's judgment have not changed from the time of his revelation to Moses.

The one seated on the throne. John first describes the judge. He is pictured as seated on a great white throne. This is most likely a reference to God the Father, as he is the one seated on the throne throughout the book (e.g., 4-5; 19.4; 21.5); although one might also find Christ there since the Lamb is presented as "in the midst of the throne" (5.6), and Jesus said that it had been granted to him to sit on his Father's throne (3.21).

The passing away of earth and sky is necessary since God is making all things new (21.5). The language that "no place was found for them," is reminiscent of the statement made of the Dragon and his angels (12.8). It indicates that the judgment of humanity is of cosmic significance.

I saw the dead, great and small. Next, John identifies those who are to be judged. "The dead" is a clear reference to humanity. The final judgment is not merely the end of corporate sin, or systemic evil. It is the judgment of morally responsible individuals. Nor is the judgment limited to the kings and merchants of the earth. It is a universal judgment involving "great and small," a merism for every human being (cf. Gen 44.12; 1 Sam 20.2; 2 Chr 31.15; 34.30; Esth 1.5, 20; Jer 6.16; Jonah 3.5; Amos 6.11). The universality of the judgment is portrayed also in the regions from which the dead arise: "And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them" (20.13).

According to what they had done. Books were opened in the court. This alludes to the books of Daniel 7.10, which were used in the judgment of the persecutors of God's people. The content of the books is "what they had done." Smalley states that

this does not indicate “a legalistic idea of retributive justice.”⁵⁰ Yet retributive justice is exactly what is denoted by the phrase κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν. God’s judgment is not arbitrary, but is measured in proportion to a person’s work. That is retribution. Smalley is correct that there is a covenantal/relational element that makes this judgment more than simply a list of good versus evil deeds; but it is certainly not less than that. Retribution insures that the dead receive punishment equal to the crime, no more, no less.

There is a reminder of redemption with the mention of the book of life. However, in this context it is used to portray the universal condemnation of those who are judged out of the aforementioned books: “And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (20.15). There have been many objections to the harshness of this description of judgment. Yet, the charge of injustice is removed by the fact that the sentence was passed, not arbitrarily, but “according to their works.”

The death of Death. “Death and Hades” are paired four times in the Apocalypse (1.18; 6.8; 20.13, 14). The locative pronoun (αὐτοῖς) referring to the pair in verse 13 seems to identify Death and Hades as abodes. Yet, in 6.8, they are personified, Death as the fourth horseman with Hades following behind. The reference in 1.18 could be interpreted as either the abode of the dead, or the keepers of that abode. Jesus is said to possess the “keys of Death and Hades.” If τοῦ θανάτου and τοῦ ᾠδου are taken as objective genitives, then they refer to the abode of the dead. If they are taken as possessive genitives, then they are either personifications or powers related to death.

Homer used ᾠδης as the proper name of the god of the underworld (e.g. *Iliad*, IX, XVI, XX), and the genitive ᾠδου as the place belonging to that god (e.g. *Iliad*, I, VIII; cf. “house of Hades” *Iliad* III, VI, VII, XIII, XIV, XXI, XXII, XXIII, XXIV). In

⁵⁰Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 517.

the LXX, ᾗδης translates “Sheol” sixty-one of sixty-two occurrences (2 Sam 22.6 translates with θανάτου).⁵¹ Sheol appears to be equivalent to the grave in the earliest chapters of the Old Testament (Gen 37.35; 42.38; 44.29, 31; Num 16.30, 33). Numbers 16.30 portrays a horrible death in which the rebels go alive into Sheol; in other words, they are buried alive. In this sense, Sheol does not permit communication with others, nor the praise of God (e.g., Ps 6.5). Later biblical traditions reveal another picture of Sheol, one in which the deceased do have communion with each other (e.g. Isa 14.9-11; 1 Sam 28.14).⁵² Yet the identification of Sheol with the place of burial persisted alongside this tradition (e.g., Job 17.16 where Sheol is in poetic parallelism with the dust).

Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Humanity’s last enemy had subjected man to corruption. Through numerous instruments, this malevolent power sought the destruction of humanity. Death itself will undergo the eschatological death prepared for the devil and his angels. There will be no more death in the new creation (21.4). Death and Hades receive punishment equal to their crime; and humanity is compensated for the indignity of the grave.

Death and Hades subject to *lex talionis*. The scene of the final judgment allows only one alternative to the *lex talionis*—the book of life. All of the dead are judged “according to their works.” Retribution will be measured in equal proportion to the crime committed. Even Death and Hades are subject to the *lex talionis*, for their demise is “the second death, the lake of fire.” The death of Death is a most fitting illustration of divine retribution operating according to the *lex talionis*.

⁵¹H. Buis, “Hades,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 7.

⁵²Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 210-16.

**Conclusion:
The Comfort of God's Justice**

The *lex talionis* was instituted by God to insure that justice was required equally at every level of society. It prevented the wealthy and powerful from buying their way out of suits brought by the underprivileged people they may have abused. It also set limits on the compensation that could be demanded when the roles were reversed. When such laws were not observed judicial inequities abounded against those who belonged to the lower classes. According to Scripture, this latter situation existed quite often. The wicked prospered at the expense of the righteous; and no authority advocated the cause of the oppressed. The only comfort that pertained during these times was that God, the righteous Judge, promised to contend for the oppressed. All of creation rejoiced at the prospect of his coming, because he would restore peace, punishing evil doers and rewarding the righteous. Such was part of the hope of the Apocalypse. This was particularly the case for the martyrs of Jesus.

Martyrdom and the *Lex Talionis*

**Revelation 6.9-11; 8.3-5:
Avenge Our Blood**

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for God's word and for the testimony which they held. They cried out with a loud voice saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge those who dwell on the earth and avenge our blood?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest yet a little time, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been."

And another angel came and stood at the altar having a golden censer, and much incense was given to him to offer with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the hand of the angel. Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.

Revelation 6.9-11 has already been touched on to demonstrate the relationship between martyrdom and witness. This section will provide a more comprehensive exegesis of this passage and 8.3-5, also arguing for a literary and theological connection

between the two. The relationship of these two passages reveals the relationship between martyrdom and the *lex talionis*.

John sees the souls of the slain. When John opens the fifth seal he finds the souls of the martyrs under the heavenly altar. The “soul” (ψυχή) is a reference to the life of the individual.⁵³ The life is in the blood, according to the Law (Lev 17.10-14; Deut 12.23). God forbade the Israelites to eat the blood of any creature: “If any Israelite or any strangers who dwell among them eats any blood, I will come against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people; for the life (חַיָּוִת; LXX ψυχή) of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17.10-11a). Instead it was to be poured at the base of the altar, because the life/blood belongs to the Lord (e.g., Exod 29.12; Lev 4.7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5.9; 8.15; 9.9).⁵⁴ The martyrs are portrayed as sacrifices whose life-blood has been poured out to God.

The idea of blood crying out to God is as ancient as the record of Cain and Abel (Gen 4.10; cf. Heb 11.4; 12.24). As the first martyr, Abel’s blood cried out to God (Matt 23.35; Luke 11.51).⁵⁵ This was an expression of bloodguilt against the murderer. It is similar to the idea of blood being on a person’s hands. Blood on the hands or head was a visible indicator of someone’s guilt. In the same way, the blood is personified as an accuser, calling for justice. It is a dramatic way of portraying the inescapability of the

⁵³Eduard Schweizer, “ψυχή,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 9:653-54.

⁵⁴On hunting expeditions, the blood was to be poured into the ground and covered with dirt (Lev 17.13).

⁵⁵Westermann says of Gen 4.10: “Externally the climax of the course of events is the execution of the murder in v. 8. But the narrator has portrayed the deed so tersely that he has succeeded in shifting the real weight of the action to the sentence: the blood of your brother is crying out. It is this sentence that really gives the narrative its dramatic character. . . . This is one of the monumental sentences in the Bible. It needs no explanation and retains its validity through the centuries for each generation. The most important word in the sentence is לִי, ‘to me.’ It is no empty sentence that the blood of the victim cries out; there is someone there to whom it cries out. Cain cannot hide his deed. This is but the other side of the situation which he cannot avoid when faced with the question: ‘What have you done?’ The murderer has no escape when faced with this question because there is someone who hears the victim’s blood crying out. . . . It is the cry of the blood that overcomes Cain” (Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 305).

guilt. Wenham commented on the cry of Abel's blood as succinctly expressing the Old Testament's foundation for criminal justice:

Compressed into [this cry] is a whole theology whose principles inform much of the criminal and cultic law of Israel. Life is in the blood (Lev 17.11), so shed blood is the most polluting of all substances. Consequently, unatoned-for murders pollute the holy land, making it unfit for the divine presence. To prevent such a catastrophe, the cities of refuge were established (Num 35.9-34; Deut 19.1-13). In cases where the murderer could not be traced, the rite prescribed in Deut 21.1-9 had to be carried out. Because man is made in God's image, homicide must be avenged (Gen 9.5). Here Abel's blood is pictured "crying" to God for vengeance. קָרָע "cry" is the desperate cry of men without food (Gen 41.55), expecting to die (Exod 14.10), or oppressed by their enemies (Judg 4.3). It is the scream for help of a woman being raped (Deut 22.24, 27). It is the plea to God of the victims of injustice (Exod 22.22, 26). The law, the prophets (Isa 19.20; cf. 5.7), and the Psalms (34.18; 107. 6, 28) unite with narratives like this (cf. 2 Sam 23; 1 Kgs 21) to assert that God does hear his people's desperate cries for help.⁵⁶

The blood of the martyrs of Jesus calls for two divine actions. The first is judgment. Judgment is primarily a positive concept, pointing to the restoration of right relations. "Judgment" has semantic overlap with "condemnation," but the two concepts are not synonymous. When the oppressed are judged, the idea is that justice is obtained for them (e.g., Jer 5.28). When the wicked are judged, punishment is in view.⁵⁷ Where the prescribed boundaries have been transgressed, judgment restores design. Where pollution has contaminated, judgment restores purity. Where the innocent have been condemned, judgment restores righteousness. The desire for judgment is not a desire for the wicked to be punished as an end in itself. Rather, the punishment of the wicked is but a part of a much larger picture of judgment that includes salvation (e.g., 11.18). The hope for judgment is realized in the vision of new creation (21).

⁵⁶Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 107. Cf. von Rad, who wrote, "According to the Old Testament view, blood and life belong to God alone; wherever a man commits murder he attacks God's very own right of possession. To destroy life goes far beyond man's proper sphere. Spilled blood cannot be shoved underground; it cries aloud to heaven and complains directly to the Lord of life. In this statement that dismal, primitive feeling of shuddering before spilled blood is wonderfully combined with the most mature faith in God as the protector and guardian of all life" (von Rad, *Genesis*, 106).

⁵⁷W. Schneider, "κρίμα," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

Avenge our blood. The call to “avenge” or “vindicate” the blood of the martyrs is more narrowly focused than the call to judge. While the latter encompasses both wrath and reward, the call to avenge (ἐκδικεῖς) is a direct call for punishment. However, the exegesis of 11.18 demonstrated that the punishment of the persecutors cannot be separated from the reward of the saints, since the punishment of the wicked was the vindication of the righteous: “And your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged and to give reward to your servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear your name.”

The call for vengeance does not arise from malicious intent, but from a hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Not only had the martyrs of Jesus been wrongfully condemned and executed, the veracity of their testimony had been called into question. The apparent victory of the Beast over the saints may have been interpreted as the final word on the matter of the testimony of Jesus Christ. For example, the earth-dwellers celebrate the murder of the two witnesses in chapter 11 as though their only torment was the annoying preaching of these prophets. It was not until the resurrection of the prophets that great fear fell on those who saw (11.11). Therefore, the vindication of the saints was essential for the vindication of the word of God. Beale noted that John alludes to Psalm 78.10 LXX (79.10 MT), calling on God to defend his own reputation:

In Psalm 78 this expression of vindication is introduced earlier by the question of “how long?” it would be until God acted against the enemy (vv 5-6). The psalmist appeals to God to uphold his glorious name (v 9) and to demonstrate the truth of his existence (v 10) by judging sinners because they have not called on God’s name and have wrongly oppressed his people (v 6). Not by coincidence v 2 of the Psalm also mentions that as a result of persecution from the nations the saints’ bodies were eaten “by the wild beasts of the earth,” a phrase virtually identical to the one in Rev. 6.8b. Those who have persecuted the saints have done so because they rejected their testimony about the truth of God. Therefore, part of the appeal is for God to judge these persecutors *in order to demonstrate that he is the only true God* [emphasis mine].⁵⁸

⁵⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 393.

The saints do not cry out for a personal vendetta, but for a demonstration of the righteousness of God that restores order to chaos.

The persecutors of the church are labeled “those who dwell on the earth.” This is a critical title which ties the destiny of these people with the present order which is passing away (20.11b). Bauckham summarized the appearances of this title:

The inhabitants of the earth are guilty of the blood of the martyrs (6.10), come under God’s judgments (8.13), are the enemies of the two witnesses (11.10), are deceived by the second beast and worship the beast (13.8, 14; 17.8), and are drunk with Babylon’s wine (17.2). They are distinguished from God’s people (3.10) and above all they are those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life (13.8; 17.8). . . . The phrase “the inhabitants of the earth” is thus clearly used to indicate the universal worship of the beast and the universal corruption of the earth by Babylon (cf. 19.2).⁵⁹

Beale recognized the phrase κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς as a technical term for “unbelieving idolaters, who suffer under various forms of retributive tribulation.”⁶⁰ The imprecation is not thoughtlessly called down on those who have wronged the martyrs. Rather, the objects of the sought-after vengeance are the allies of the Beast and the sworn enemies of the Lamb.

Rest a little longer. The passive voice of ἐδόθη and ἐρρέθη may have been used out of reverence for Christ; for it seems that Christ is the one who bestows rewards on his faithful witnesses, according to the promises in chapters 2-3 (e.g., 2.7, 17, 26-28; 3.5, 12, 21).⁶¹ Yet, since John does not consistently use the divine passive, its use here is probably to place emphasis on the gift. The white garment (στολὴ) recalls the reward

⁵⁹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 239-40. Bauckham notes a deliberate contrast between the earth-dwellers and those whose home is heaven (13.6; 18.20; 19.1-8). The two groups are distinguished by the verbs for dwelling. The verb κατοικέω is reserved for the earth-dwellers, while God’s people are described by the verb σκηνώω (ibid.).

⁶⁰Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 290. Cf. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 92.

⁶¹Aune makes a similar point, though he ascribes the action to God (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 410-11).

promised by Christ to those who overcome in Sardis (3.4-5, ἰμάτια). As a symbol of victory, the robe also anticipates the vindication of the martyrs.

The robe was the assurance of their vindication. The next statement indicates that there is a fixed time and prescribed condition for that vindication: all of the martyrs of Jesus must overcome. The words ἔτι χρόνον μικρόν ἕως confirm that vengeance will come, but it is deferred. The message for John's readers is that they can face their persecutors with faith, entrusting their souls to him who judges justly.

The opening of the fifth seal revealed the cry of the martyrs for justice, which involved the punishment of their persecutors. This prayer was not met with censure, but was answered with a promise of vindication. The opening of the sixth and seventh seals reveals God's response to this prayer. The effect of the prayer, however, is made more explicit in the related passage of 8.3.

The altar of 8.3 is the altar of 6.9. Revelation 8.2-5 is a transitional passage which concludes the vision of the seals and opens the vision of the seven trumpets. The opening of the seventh seal announces the eschatological day of the Lord. The mention of the altar in 8.3 recalls the altar introduced in 6.9. The tabernacle had two altars. The first was located outside of the tabernacle in the court; and was used for offering sacrifice (e.g., Exod 20.24; Lev 1.5). The other altar was located in the holy place.⁶² It was used to offer incense to the Lord (e.g., Exod 30.1). In the Apocalypse, the two altars have been combined into one.

Charles researched the Jewish and Christian apocalypses from the second century BC to the second century AD in order to determine the features of the heavenly temple in these writings. He concluded that there is only one altar in heaven as far as

⁶²Stuart suggested that this placement "front and center" before the curtain would allow the smoke of the incense to reach the holy of holies, enhancing the symbolism of the prayers of the people reaching the ears of God (Stuart, *Exodus*, 634).

these writings are concerned.⁶³ He noted that Revelation, like these other apocalypses, consistently refers to “*the* altar” (τὸ θυσιαστήριον), indicating only one.⁶⁴ The first mention of the altar in 8.3 is identical to 6.9—τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου. The second mention of the altar identifies it as “the golden one before the throne,” which would be consistent with the altar of incense in the Tabernacle (Exod 30.1-10), thus bringing together the altar of incense and the altar of sacrifice. This amalgamation of the altars seems to have already taken place in 6.9-10, since the martyrs are represented as sacrificial victims under the altar, while at the same time their prayer ascends to God. Furthermore, this entire visionary experience takes place (in the Spirit) in the throne-room of God, that is, in the heavenly temple. We should expect, therefore, that when an altar is mentioned it would be “before the throne,” unless otherwise specified. Identifying the altars of 6.9 and 8.3 as one allows us to see the parallels between the prayers of 6.10 and 8.3, as well as the effect of those prayers on the persecutors of Christ’s witnesses.

The prayers of all the saints ascend. In 6.9, the martyrs serve as representatives of all faithful witnesses. The faithful witnesses appear as major participants themselves in 8.3-5.⁶⁵ The worship imagery of sacrifice again appears. The martyrs of the earlier vision were represented as the sacrificial victims. Here, the prayers of all the saints are offered on the altar as sacrifices. These prayers are mingled with

⁶³R. H. Charles, *Revelation*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920) 1:227-28.

⁶⁴Ibid. Aune stated that John distinguished between the altar of incense (8.3, 5; 9.13) and the altar of burnt offering (6.9; 9.13; 11.1; 14.18; 16.7); though he offers no explanation for the distinction, and even places the altar of 9.13 in both categories (Aune, *Revelation 6-16*, 511).

⁶⁵I refer to the distinction between major and minor participants in Greek narrative as set forth by Stephen Levinsohn. Major participants are defined as those that are “introduced formally in some way, and typically are involved in a series of events.” Stephen H. Levinsohn, “Participant Reference in Koine Greek Narrative,” in *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black et al. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 32.

incense to create a sweet aroma that ascends to God, “from the hand of the angel.” The prayers of the saints (8.3) are parallel to the “cry” of the martyrs in 6.10.

The content of these prayers is not explicitly stated. The context, however, indicates that they call for vindication and vengeance. Paulien notes an allusion to Numbers 10.8-10 with the blasting of the trumpets. These trumpet blasts, he states, come as a result of the prayers of the saints.

In their context the seven trumpets are unleashed in answer to the prayers of the saints. This is a remarkable parallel to Num 10.8-10. There the sounding of a trumpet was understood as an act of prayer reminding God of His covenant with His people. God’s response would be to deliver them militarily and cultically. In Revelation the trumpets are unleashed by the prayers of the saints and signal God’s response to those prayers. This strong thematic parallel with Num 10 argues that the trumpets in Rev 8-11 are to be understood in relation to worship and prayer as is the case in much of the Old Testament.⁶⁶

This altar-vision serves as an inter-locking transition between the seals and the trumpets.⁶⁷ It is a continuation of the seventh seal; yet it contains the action that unleashes the seven trumpets. Thus, the prayers of all the saints are set within the context of retribution.

Fire from the altar thrown to earth. The prayers of the saints ascend to God in verse 4. Verse 5 reveals the effect of that prayer on earth. The angel who had offered the incense with the prayers takes his censer and fills it once again with fire from the altar, the altar on which incense and prayers are mixed. He then casts the fire/prayers to the earth. Consequently, fire falls from heaven at the blast of the first three trumpets (8.6-11). The prayers ascend to heaven as a pleasing aroma to God. The earthy effect of the prayers is the eschatological warning: “and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.” The phenomena of thunder, rumblings, lightning and earthquake are preludes to the final cataclysmic judgment.⁶⁸ These

⁶⁶Paulien, *Decoding Revelation's Trumpets*, 222.

⁶⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 454, 460-64.

phenomena are recorded four times in the Apocalypse (4.5; 8.5; 11.19; 16.18-21).⁶⁹ Each time they announce the final judgment of God. The prayers of the saints result in eschatological wrath. This is the vindication that the saints cried for in 6.10.

The saints' prayer honored. The faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ were represented in two ways in 6.9 and 8.3-5. In the earlier passage they were given a voice through the souls of the martyrs under the altar upon the opening of the fifth seal. Then their prayers were offered at the literary transition between the seals and the trumpets.

Revelation 16.4-7: Blood to Drink

The third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel in charge of the waters say, "Just are you, the One who is and who was, the Holy One, for you brought these judgments. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!"
And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, Lord God the Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments!"

The judgment which results from the pouring of the third bowl (16.4), interpreted in light of the angelic benediction which follows (16.5-7), suggests a symbiotic relationship between martyrdom and judgment. In this final outpouring of God's wrath (15.1), vengeance is had for the blood of the martyrs. The murder of God's saints and prophets provides the basis and justification for this plague. As the following exegesis will demonstrate, there is a cause and effect relationship between the murder of the saints and the judgment of their persecutors.

The completion of God's wrath. The bowl judgments constitute the last of three numbered series of seven judgments in Revelation. While these three series of judgments extend from the first advent to the parousia of Christ, and thus to the final

⁶⁸Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 199-209.

⁶⁹The "earthquake" is missing from 4.5. Bauckham explained: "The theophany is confined to heaven, judgment on earth is not yet in view, and so the earthquake would be inappropriate. But the later references back to 4.5 serve to anchor the expectation of God's coming to judge and rule the world in this initial vision of his rule in heaven" (ibid., 203).

judgment, each is also more complete than the preceding series.⁷⁰ The angels who receive the seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God are said to have “the seven last plagues”⁷¹ (15.1). Unlike the previous series of judgments, these are not only intrusions of the eschatological judgment into the present, these *are* the eschatological judgment for, “in them the wrath of God is complete.”⁷² Several aspects of the text support this conclusion. First, as in 11.19, the sanctuary of God in heaven is opened to emphasize that it is God who will ultimately strike his enemies (15.5). Second, the attire of the seven angels is similar to that of the heavenly Son of Man in 1.13, which may suggest that they are his representative agents of judgment (15.6).⁷³ Third, after the angelic agents of judgment receive their bowls, the sanctuary is too dangerous to enter until the judgment is finished. God is burning against his foes. Mounce succinctly states the heart of this image: “The time for intercession is past.”⁷⁴ Fourth, the statement in 16.17, “It is

⁷⁰The opening of the fourth seal (6.7-8) leads to the decimation of one fourth of the earth. The trumpet judgments see one third of the trees (8.7), sea (8.8) and sea life (8.9), fresh waters (8.10-11), and celestial lights (8.12) affected. Finally, the bowl judgments are universal.

⁷¹The seven plagues allude to two Old Testament texts (Exod 7-12 and Lev 26.21). The actual phrase, πληγὰς ἐπτά, comes from Lev 26.21. The plagues are modeled on the plagues of the Exodus. The entire scene from 15.1-16.21 portrays the eschatological judgment as a New Exodus.

⁷²Beale argues that 15.2-4 is both the conclusion of the unnumbered series of judgments in 12.1-15.4 and the introduction to the bowl judgments in 15.1, 5-16.21. He applied this to the nature of the bowl judgments: “Part of the interlocking function of 15.2-4 is to resume the idea of the last judgment, which has been announced in 14.6-13 and depicted as occurring in 14.14-20” (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 784). He goes on to say, however, that the bowl judgments “go back in time before what is depicted in chapter 14 and explain in greater detail the woes throughout the age culminating in the final judgment” (786). He argues that “last” refers to the order in which the visions were received, and not to the chronological order of the events, particularly their occurrence at the end of the age (786). Likewise, he argues that ἐτελέσθη refers to the metaphor of the full cup of God’s wrath, as in 15.7 and 21.9, and not that God’s wrath is exhausted in these plagues (788). His interpretation of ἐτελέσθη would be more convincing if the subject were “bowl” or “plague.” But it is the wrath of God that is “complete” or “fulfilled.” Even in light of the immediate context, Beale’s interpretation is forced.

Mounce says that “in them the wrath of God is complete” is not the final judgment because the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all whose names are not written in the book of life are yet to be thrown into the lake of fire. Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 284. However, this is based on an overly chronological reading of the visions, and does not account for the literary recapitulation of events.

⁷³Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 804.

⁷⁴Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 289.

done” (γέγονεν), suggests finality. This same statement is made in 21.6 (γέγοναν) which clearly refers to the consummation of both salvation and judgment (note the reference to the second death in 21.8).⁷⁵ Fifth, the description of “flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake” is John’s technical phrase for the final judgment.⁷⁶ Sixth, both the seals and the trumpets are delayed completion by a literary interlude. The bowl judgments, on the other hand, are poured without interruption.⁷⁷ Also noteworthy is the imagery of the plagues of the exodus, which became standard images of eschatological judgment in Jewish tradition.⁷⁸

Just as important as the nature of judgment in this unit is the relation of this vision to the prayers of the saints in 5.8 (cf. 6.9-11 and 8.3-5). The allusion to Isaiah 51.17, 22 is well established.⁷⁹ Even stronger is the allusion to the heavenly, throne-room vision in chapters 4-5. First, the “one from the four living creatures” is a reference to 4.6-9 and 5.6, 8, 11, 14 (cf. 6.1, 6; 7.11; 14.3; 19.4). Second, the living creatures give them “golden bowls full of the wrath of God,” while in 5.8 the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders, “fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”⁸⁰ Third, the description of God as “who lives forever and ever” is the same title used in 4.9, 10.

⁷⁵Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 842.

⁷⁶Bauckham called this phrase a “herald of the end” (*The Climax of Prophecy*, 199-209). He also identified this phrase with other important images of the end: “the harvest, the vintage, the last great battle, the Lamb’s wedding banquet” (209).

⁷⁷Mounce captures this literary alteration: “Unlike the seals of chapter 6 and the trumpets of chapters 8-9 in which the sixth plague is followed by an interlude, the bowls move relentlessly to a close. They are the final series depicting the outpouring of God’s wrath and as such there is no place for yet another interlude” (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 291).

⁷⁸Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 465-67.

⁷⁹Ibid., 806.

⁸⁰Mounce noted this relationship: “Since the mention of the golden bowls in Revelation is limited to these two contexts, John may be calling our attention to the relationship between prayer and divine retribution” (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 289).

The connection between the bowls full of the prayers of the saints and the bowls full of the wrath of God may seem weak, until the connection between 5.8 and 8.3-5 is considered. In 5.8 the priestly angels hold bowls full of incense. The incense is the prayers of the saints. In 8.3 an angel stands at the altar before the throne with a golden censer, offering incense with the prayers of the saints. Suddenly, the text jars the reader with the effect of these prayers: “Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth, and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake” (8.5; cf. 6.9-11). We demonstrated above that these phenomena herald the final judgment. Massyngberde Ford stated the relationship between the prayers of the saints and the following judgment: “The prayers of the saints return to the earth in wrath.”⁸¹ The links between the prayers of the saints and the judgment of God are strong. In 5.8 and 6.9-11, the emphasis is on the ascent of the prayers to God. In 8.5, the prayers ascend, and are answered with judgment coming down. The emphasis in the bowl judgments is on the judgment, yet the prayers of the saints still echo in the background. The text under consideration (16.4-7) brings those voices to the fore, and makes explicit the subtle connection John has maintained between martyrdom and judgment.

Before leaving the surrounding context, one more important point must be made. The vision of 15.2-4 performs a characteristic interlocking function for 12.1-14.20 and 15.1, 5-16.21.⁸² In this position it provides the salvific context for the retribution which precedes and follows: the final outpouring of God’s wrath described in the harvest of 14.14-20 preceding, and the seven bowls of chapter 16 following. That is, over these scenes of divine judgment hovers the victory of the saints. Those who overcame the Beast, loving not their lives even unto death, are the ones who proclaim, “Just and true

⁸¹J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 38 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 131.

⁸²Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 621-24.

are your ways, King of the ages!” They can rejoice at God’s justice because it is their vindication.

The third angel poured out his bowl. The bowl (φιάλην) is an instrument of priestly service, already mentioned in 5.8 (cf. 15.7; 16.1, 2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17; 17.1; 21.9). Aune concludes his discussion of the possible allusions to tabernacle utensils noting that the bowl of Revelation 5.8 corresponds most closely to the incense pans described in Exodus 25.29; 37.16.⁸³ These pans belonged to the table of the presence. He sees the bowls of 15 and 16 as allusions to the libation bowls of Exodus 27.3; 38.3; and Numbers 4.14 (cf. Exod 24.6, 8; 29.16, 20; Num 7.13, 19, 25, 31; 2 Kgs 16.13, 15; Zech 9.15).⁸⁴ Animal sacrifices were accompanied by libations (2 Kgs 16.13; Hos 9.4). Aune concludes that the angels are portrayed as heavenly priests conducting temple service.⁸⁵

In 8.5 the angelic priest took the fire from the altar of incense and cast it to the earth, resulting in judgment. Similarly, the cultic instrument of 16.4 is used to transfer God’s wrath from the altar to the persecutors of the saints and prophets.⁸⁶ Already, the connection between the martyrs and the final judgment is evident. Verses 6-7 will clarify and strengthen this relationship.

Water changed to blood. The first plague to strike Egypt (Exod 7.19) was the turning of water into blood. This plague strikes in successive stages in the bowl judgments. The sea was affected by the second bowl (16.3), while the rivers and streams became blood when the third bowl was poured (16.4). The former plague may have been

⁸³Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, 356-58.

⁸⁴Ibid., 879.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Though the altar is not mentioned when the bowls are given to the angels (15.7), it is significant that the angels proceed from the sanctuary of the tabernacle of witness in heaven, and that a voice from the altar speaks in 16.7.

an attack on the lucrative seafaring industry of the empire of the beast (8.9; cf. 18.8-19). Can the same economic interpretation apply to the third plague? Beale argued that it does, based on the figurative use of “blood” in Revelation “for suffering in general.”⁸⁷

What does John signify with the word “blood” in Revelation? In 1.5 John refers to Jesus as the one who wrought deliverance “by His blood.” While Jesus’ suffering in general is significant, it is His death, the climax of His suffering, which liberated the saints from their sins (cf. 12.11). This is made clear in 5.9: “for You were *slain*, and purchased for God with Your *blood* from every tribe” The metaphor of purchasing by blood is interpreted by the cultic imagery of being slain (σφάζω). The same connection of cultic slaughter and blood is made with regard to the saints in 6.9-10: “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been *slain* for the word of God saying; ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true until you judge and avenge our *blood*’” (cf. 18.24). Twice John refers to the Harlot Babylon as being responsible for the blood of the saints (17.6; 19.2). The language of the blood of the saints being “poured out” (16.6) is consistent with the imagery of slaughter. Therefore, “blood” is not a metaphor for suffering in general, but for death as the climax of suffering. The martyrs are neither a class apart, nor merely a symbol of suffering in general. Rather, they function in a representative capacity for all faithful witnesses. Within the narrative framework of Revelation all saints are martyrs because the martyrs exemplify the faithful testimony to which all saints aspire. On the other hand, the blood poured out on the enemies of God graphically portrays their deaths.

The third bowl is an attack on the fresh water supply, and thus on the lives of those who depend on it.⁸⁸ This is supported by the ironic statement in vs. 6: “and you

⁸⁷Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 816.

⁸⁸Beale argues that both the second and third bowls symbolize economic disasters, since they both draw on the same exodus imagery, which is also in the second and third trumpets, and which he parallels with 18.8, 10-19 (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 816). According to this interpretation of “blood,” the justice extolled in v. 6 is that the persecutors will have to suffer the same economic hardships

have given them blood to drink.” Those who caused the deaths of God’s saints are now put to death. Psalm 78.44, which looks back to the first plague on Egypt, is echoed in these verses: “He turned their rivers to blood, so that they could not drink of their streams.”

This judgment is paralleled by the third trumpet (8.10-11) in which a star falls on a third of the rivers and streams and contaminates the water, making it bitter, and killing many who drink. Consistent with the parallelism of the trumpets and bowls, if the third trumpet affected a third of the fresh water and killed many, then the world-wide effect of the bowls would result in the death of all those who dwell on the earth. Indeed, in verse 6 the judgment is said to have fallen on the saints’ persecutors, which refers to the same people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped his image (16.2); the kingdom of the Beast (16.10); and Babylon the Great (16.19).

Just are you. The angel in charge of the waters addresses God as the Holy One, which relates to God’s transcendent uniqueness and echoes God’s covenant loyalty as the Holy One of Israel. The second title, “who is and who was,” is conspicuously missing the third member “who is coming.” This is because the bowls of wrath are representative of God’s final coming, which is evident in the complete destruction of their plagues versus the partial judgments of the seals and trumpets. The angel proclaims that this Holy God, who is present in the outpouring of his wrath, is just (δίκαιος).

He is just because of the judgments he brought on the earth (ὅτι πάντα ἔκρινας). The judgment of God is both punitive and restorative. In this case, the focus is on the plagues as the retributive side of judgment.

that they caused for the saints. This interpretation does not contradict my thesis, though I disagree that this is what the text means. It may be applied in this manner, but economic hardship is not the picture John paints here.

You have given them blood to drink. “The angel of the waters” should probably be understood as the angel who had been given authority to strike the waters with this plague.⁸⁹ The angel testifies that God’s judgment is just, “Just are You, the One who is and who was, the Holy One, because You judged these things.” God’s sovereignty is invoked with the threefold title, “who is and who was, the Holy One.” God is no longer coming; He has come. He has come as the Holy One to execute the end-time judgment.

The justness of God’s judgment is two-fold: it is a fitting judgment and they are deserving of it. The latter reason is affirmed by the unusual phrase “they are worthy.” While the NT usually uses “worthy” in a positive sense, it can denote deserving of punishment (cf. *Wisdom* 11.5-7, 16; 16.9; 18.4; 19.4; Gen 9.6). The fitness of the judgment follows the *lex talionis*: as they poured out the blood of the saints, he has given them blood to drink. Verse six explains the angel’s equation of these judgments with the justice of God. It is not simply that the wicked are punished; but that the way they are punished is perfectly suited to the crime. The persecutors of the saints and prophets poured out (ἐξέχεαν) the blood of God’s people. Taken alone, the word ἐκχέω may be translated as “shed.” However, the parallel with πειν in the next clause favors the translation “poured out,” so that the action of the third angel (ἐξέχεεν τὴν φιάλην αὐτοῦ) is in direct response to the pouring out of the blood of the saints. That giving them blood to drink refers to their deaths has been argued above. Their treatment of God’s saints makes them deserving of judgment, and particularly of death. The punishment is equal to the crime: “It is what they deserve.”

⁸⁹Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 817. Contra Smalley, who distinguishes between the angel who poured the plague on the waters, and the angel of the waters. He points to the “thought of Judaism” that spiritual powers represented earthly realities, including the elements of nature (Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 402).

I heard the altar speak. The picture of the altar speaking harks back to 8.3-4 and 6.9-10.⁹⁰ The prayers of the saints and the cry of the martyrs have been heard and justice has been restored. Therefore, the altar, as a heavenly witness on behalf of the saints and prophets, or the martyrs, joins with the angel in celebrating the judgments of God. God's judgments are true (ἀληθινὰ). This refers to the faithfulness of God to his promise to vindicate the blood of his martyrs (6.11). "Just" (δίκαια) echoes the praise of the angel of the waters, who sees in this judgment the necessary punishment to restore perfect peace. Here God is addressed as "the Lord God Almighty," and his judgments are said to be "true and just." Both cries concern justice: "How long, Master, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood . . .?" (6.10); "True and just are your judgments" (16.7). The justice longed for in 6.9-10 is emphatically (ναὶ) acknowledged by the martyrs as they witness the final judgment and their vindication.

The third bowl illustrates the *lex talionis*. This text emphasizes the cause and effect relationship between the deaths of the martyrs and the judgment of their persecutors. The bowl judgments as a unit point in this direction, suggesting a relationship between the sacrificial nature of the saints' deaths and the judgment that proceeds from the altar of their sacrifice. The doxologies following the third bowl, in particular, demonstrate that Christian martyrdom leads to God's judgment of His enemies, as well as determining the nature of that judgment, namely death. Other key texts support this conclusion (i.e., 6.9-10; 8.3-5; 17.6; 18.24). This passage teaches that the *lex talionis* is the basis upon which God judges those who persecute his people. The sentence passed and executed on the perpetrators is determined by their treatment of the saints: blood to drink for blood poured out.

⁹⁰Beale is less certain, suggesting the voice belongs to Christ, an angel, or the "corporate declaration" of the martyrs. Yet, he only substantiates the latter (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 820).

**Revelation 17.6; 18.20, 24:
The Blood of the Martyrs of Jesus**

And I saw the woman, drunk on the blood of the saints, that is, the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has judged her judgment against you!

. . . Because your merchants were the great men of the earth; because, with your sorceries, you deceived all the nations; and [because] in her the blood of prophets and saints was found—and of all those who had been slain on the earth!

These verses portray the economic system of the Roman Empire as a culpable accomplice in the persecutions of the saints.⁹¹ The fall of this system is the result of the judgment of God for sins perpetrated against his people.

Revelation 17.6. John wrote, “I saw the woman drunk on the blood of the saints.” The metaphor of drunkenness could refer to her enjoyment and revelry in the persecution of God’s people; or it could refer to the judgment of God already working itself out in her disorientation, which ultimately leads to her fall. The same ambiguity exists in 17.2, with reference to the kings of the earth being drunk on the “wine of her sexual immorality.” Isaiah spoke of the sword of the Lord as having drunk deeply, becoming sated on the blood of his enemies (Isa 34.5-7; cf. Jer 46.10). The surrounding imagery seems to have more to do with satisfaction than with drunkenness, however (cf. Ezek 39.18-19; Judith 6.4). In a context very similar to Revelation, God promised to contend with those who contend with Israel. Isaiah wrote: “I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine” (49.26a). Their inebriation is not the lighthearted merriment of a party, but the unnerving loss of equilibrium that eventuates in a fall. Jeremiah is told to take the cup of the wine of wrath, and make Babylon, Edom, Moab, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia and Egypt drink and stagger and

⁹¹Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 338-83. Bauckham described the ferocious nature of the empire that sustained the artificial *Pax Romana*: “He knows that the *Pax Romana* was, in Tacitus’s phrase, ‘peace with bloodshed,’ established by violent conquest, maintained by continual war on the frontiers, and requiring repression of dissent. Like every society which absolutizes its own power and prosperity, the Roman Empire could not exist without victims. Thus, John sees a connection between Rome’s economic affluence, Rome’s idolatrous self-deification, and Rome’s military and political brutality” (349).

go crazy because of the sword of the Lord (Jer 25.15-29). This drunken stupor is metaphorical for “disaster” and “punishment” (Jer 25.29). Later Jeremiah prophesies that Babylon will fall into a “perpetual sleep” because God has made her drunk (51.57). In the prophets drunkenness is associated with madness (Jer 51.7), stupor (Jer 51.39, 57), and confusion (Isa 19.14). Blood and wine are related in the vision of the great winepress of the wrath of God (14.20). The immediate context of 17.1-6 may suggest that the drunkenness of the prostitute represents her heart being cheered by the oppressive power she enjoys over the saints. However, the larger context reveals that this same intoxicating drink is the symbol of her demise (e.g., 18.6).

Though there is no scene in which the martyrs’ blood is placed in the winepress of Rome, their blood, signifying the murder of the saints, is nonetheless mixed in the cup of abominations and impurities from which the kings of the earth are intoxicated with Babylon (17.2, 4).⁹² The Roman economy was fueled by the suffering and oppression of those on the fringe of society, such as the Christians, who would not participate in the aspects of that economy that could have been interpreted as infidelity to Christ. Fiorenza sums up the imagery of the prostitute: “Babylon is the powerful personification of international oppression and murder throughout the Roman empire. . . . Its decrees are carried out in the provinces that support Roman idolatry and instigate persecution of Christians.”⁹³

Aune suggests that the conjunction between “the blood of the saints” and “the blood of the witnesses of Jesus” should be taken to distinguish two different groups.⁹⁴

⁹²An interesting, if late, parallel is found in 4 Ezra 15.46-54. Asia is condemned because in her drunkenness she humiliated God’s people. As part of her punishment some of her people would drink their own blood.

⁹³Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 98.

⁹⁴Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 937.

Mounce, on the other hand, argues that it should be translated “that is” instead of “and.”⁹⁵ The exegetical use of καὶ reads: “I saw the woman, drunk on the blood of the saints, that is, on the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” The identification of saints as witnesses reminds the reader why the saints were murdered by the prostitute. Their faithful witness tormented Babylon and her courtiers.

Revelation 18.24. The imagery of a drunken prostitute gives way to the description of Babylon as the great city (17.18; 18.10, 21). Ford makes a compelling case for identifying Babylon with apostate Jerusalem (cf. 11.8).⁹⁶ Nevertheless, “the consensus view of contemporary critical scholars,” as Boxall states, is that the great city is Rome, not Jerusalem.⁹⁷ The historical referent for the symbolism is not crucial to our argument in this section.⁹⁸

After John announces the demise of Babylon, he relates the reasons for her fall (18.23b-24): “Because your merchants were the great men of the earth; because, with your sorceries, you deceived all the nations; and [because] in her the blood of prophets and saints was found—and of all those who had been slain on the earth!” First, her culpability is increased by the scope of her sovereignty—“*your* merchants.” Second, she abused her influence by deceiving all the nations. This deception probably refers to

⁹⁵Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 312.

⁹⁶Ford, *Revelation*, 283-89.

⁹⁷Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, Black’s New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 243. Smalley identified the “great city” of 17.18 as “Babylon.” He then explained that Babylon is a symbol for the “institutionalized prostitution of political, economic and religious ideas in any age and setting, to which satanic forces have surrendered their worldly powers” (Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 442). This is the application also made by Beale and Mounce, though they, unlike Smalley, point out that Rome satisfied this symbol in John’s day.

⁹⁸Babylon has often been identified with apostate Christianity. See Ian Boxall, “The Many Faces of Babylon the Great: *Wirkungsgeschichte* and the Interpretation of Revelation 17,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Steve Moyise (New York: T & T Clark, 2001), for the history of the interpretation of this symbol. Walvoord is a contemporary proponent of the ecclesiastical interpretation of the prostitute. He calls her “ecclesiastical Babylon” (Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 243).

securing the nations' allegiance to the Beast.⁹⁹ The climax of the charges brought against her says, "in her the blood of prophets and saints was found—and of all those who had been slain on the earth!" It's as though the streets are stained with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. John holds Babylon responsible for all the murders on earth (cf. Matt 23.35).

Revelation 18.20: God judged her verdict. The persecuted people of God are commanded to rejoice over the fall of Babylon, because God has corrected the verdict which Babylon used to denounce the witnesses of Christ. God had the economic system of Rome on trial particularly for the crimes it fostered against his people.

Babylon, the seductive economic system, had instigated provincial governments and local guilds to persecute the people of God who would not participate in the idolatrous practices of that system. The suffering of Christ's witnesses is visited on the head of Babylon and on those who pined for her when she fell in ruin. Aune pointed out the aesthetic quality of *paronomasia*, which supports the concept of retribution: "The principle of *lex talionis*, i.e., the law of retribution in kind, is evident here through the use of *paronomasia*; i.e., τὸ κρίμα, "the condemnation" was exercised by Babylon against Christians, and now God has judged (ἐκρίνευ) her."¹⁰⁰

Martyrs and destruction of Babylon. The ground of Babylon's judgment, namely her unjust judgment of the saints, is framed by symbolically graphic descriptions of her treatment of them. The judgment of Babylon is designed to rectify her false

⁹⁹Mounce wrote, "It is intended to be taken in the broader sense of that art of deception by which Rome had bewitched the nations into a false sense of security, leading them to believe that she was in fact the eternal city" (Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 339).

¹⁰⁰Aune, *Revelation 17-22*, 1008. Cf. Beale, who wrote: "God will judge Babylon just as severely as she persecuted others, thus making the punishment fit her crime. This 'eye for eye' judgment is apparent from the fact that those commanded to rejoice over Babylon's judgment are the very same ones who suffered from her persecution. This principle of justice is a fitting conclusion to a chapter that was introduced by the pronouncement of the same judicial principle (vv 5-7)" (Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 916).

judgment of the saints. Since she murdered them, she must be executed. Martyrdom determines the sentence against the persecutors of God's people. We might say that they write their own sentence of condemnation with the blood of the martyrs.

**Revelation 19.2:
The Blood of His Servants**

For true and righteous are his judgments. For he judged the great prostitute, who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and he avenged the blood of his servants from her hand.

The announcement of the fall of Babylon was accompanied by the laments of those whose lives were based on her prosperity. The mourners were the kings of the earth, the merchants of the earth, and those whose trade is on the sea. "After this" (19.1) is a transitional phrase that moves, not merely chronologically, but spatially, from earth to heaven. While the earth-dwellers mourn on earth, John heard what sounded like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven rejoicing. This multitude may have included every creature surrounding God's throne as recorded in 5.13. Among their number are the faithful witnesses of Jesus. In contrast to the mourners of chapter eighteen, this voice rejoices at the salvation of God that came through the judgment of the prostitute.

The judgment of the great prostitute is celebrated as the "salvation and glory and power" of God. Judgment is not the entire picture of salvation. Yet, in this sinfully corrupt system which is compared to beasts and prostitutes and is empowered by a malevolent being likened to a great dragon, judgment is a necessary part of salvation.

God's judgments true and righteous. One evidence that salvation and glory and power belong to God is his judgment of the great prostitute. This judgment is described as "true and righteous," a pair that already appeared in praise of justice at 16.7. "True" is not only in contrast to the false judgment passed by the prostitute against the saints; but it speaks of the faithfulness of God in vindicating the saints' testimony.¹⁰¹

This judgment is the answer to the prayers of the martyrs (6.10; 8.3-5). In response to the cry of the martyrs God had said, “Rest a little while” (6.11). Now, in response to the judgment of Babylon, the altar/saints cry out, “True,” because God had fulfilled his promise.

The judgment of the prostitute is also celebrated as “just” or “righteous.” This description links the judgment of the prostitute with the larger purpose of God in salvation and new creation. God declared that he was making all things “new” (21.5). This involved the passing away of the former things, particularly those things that corrupt the earth with immorality.

The fall of Babylon is not a later judgment than the bowl judgment celebrated in 16.4-7 as true and just; it is simply a different aspect. Just as the people who bore the mark of the Beast and worshiped his image are not a separate group of people from the kings and merchants of the earth, but a different aspect of those people, even so John has narrated the judgment of God against the persecutors of the church from these two perspectives; and on both accounts God’s judgment is declared true and just.

The blood of his servants avenged. Two grounds are given for the confession that God’s judgments are true and just: he judged the prostitute who corrupted the earth, and he avenged the blood of his servants. The first ground focuses on the punishment inflicted on the prostitute for her immorality. The second ground focuses on the compensation awarded to the saints in their vindication.

The immorality with which she seduced the kings and merchants of the earth, increasing her wealth and her sense of security, corrupted the earth and became the source of her own corruption and fall. In order for the new order to be established, everything that pollutes (21.27 ὁ ποιῶν βδέλυγμα) must be removed from the sphere of new things. Therefore, the judgments of God are just.

¹⁰¹Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 245.

One of the ingredients mixed in the cup of abominations (17.4) from which the dwellers of the earth became intoxicated was the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (17.6). This immorality was singled out by John as an especial cause of the prostitute's demise: "he has avenged on her the blood of his servants." The language of vengeance has already been examined above. It was introduced in the cry of the martyrs from under the altar (6.10). The vindication promised then finds a fulfillment in the demise of Babylon; therefore, the judgment of God is declared to be "true." The justice is said to be exacted "out of her hand" (ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς, 19.10). Vindication is the compensation that is due to the saints; and it will be taken from their persecutors as members of an economic system that was sustained by the unjustified afflictions of the saints. Martyrdom determines the sentence of condemnation for the persecutors of the church.

**Conclusion: Martyrdom Determines
the Sentence against Persecutors**

God's justice is unchanging. He revealed his standard of justice to the ancient Israelites in the *lex talionis*. This principle called for punishments to be equivalent to the crime. In cases where the wronged person had suffered loss, this punishment included compensation. It also demanded that the perpetrator suffer in equal proportion to the suffering that he caused. In the case of murder, therefore, the standard was life for life.

In the Apocalypse, the *lex talionis* is still the operative principle of God's justice. This standard of justice is a warning to those tempted to compromise with the world, and a comfort to those who find no justice from the courts of men. Ironically, because of the principle of equivalent punishment, the persecutors of the church guarantee a death penalty for themselves by murdering Christ's witnesses. Martyrdom determines the sentence against the persecutors of the church.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The goal of this dissertation has been to demonstrate that the Book of Revelation depicts martyrdom as an impetus for Divine retribution against the persecutors of the church. This may be called the “traditional” view in light of a recent trend toward a transformational view of martyrdom in the Book of Revelation. According to the transformational view, the death of the martyrs leads to the conversion of the nations. The transformational view has not been rejected on a dogmatic basis; for this view may be defended from biblical and other early Christian writings. The Book of Revelation, however, has a different message to encourage saints to be faithful witnesses of Christ. Revelation’s message includes a promise of vindication for those who do not compromise, but remain faithful until death. An important aspect of the vindication of Christ’s witnesses is the condemnation of those who slandered and persecuted the saints with satanic hatred. Those who accused and injured Christ’s witnesses in human courts because they held the testimony of Jesus Christ will be tried in the Divine court. They will be condemned for their rebellion against the Lamb; and their guilt will be compounded because of their complicity in the murder of the saints. Divine retribution will be measured according to the *lex talionis*. Therefore, the sentence of death will fall on those who falsely accused and condemned to death Christ’s witnesses.

In the first chapter we explored the development of the transformational view from the work of G. B. Caird to its most formidable proponent, Richard Bauckham. We demonstrated that the foundation of Caird’s view of the relationship between martyrdom and retribution was his conviction that every mention of the submission of God’s enemies

was to be interpreted as the “power of invincible love,” not as the “power of unlimited coercion,” and certainly not as the wrath of God and the Lamb. The important works of Josef Ton and Allison Trites on martyrdom and witness in the Book of Revelation were found to be heavily indebted to the commentary of Caird—so much so that their interpretative conclusions were predictable for one already familiar with Caird. Mitchell Reddish’s dissertation on the theme of martyrdom in the Book of Revelation, showed both an appreciation of and an independence from Caird’s interpretation. Reddish explained that he found the two themes of retribution and conversion held in tension in Revelation. He concluded that John presented these as possibilities, not as prophetic predictions. The reality would not be known until the end. Bauckham, likewise, argued that John presented the options of retribution and conversion. Bauckham, however, argued that God’s plan for the conversion of the nations was to join the temporal judgments of God with the verbal witness and eventual martyrdom of his witnesses to create an effectual call that would finally secure the nations’ repentance and faith toward Christ. According to Bauckham, God presents two possibilities, but John gives conversion priority over retribution.

After tracing the development of the transformational view, we examined some of the assumptions underlying this interpretation of the data. First, we noted that judgment was considered correctional instead of punitive. Judgment constituted the negative side of discipline. Second, martyrdom, as the climax of evangelical witness, was considered the positive side of the discipline that would lead to repentance. Most scholars assumed that martyrdom has a psychological effect on persecutors, which prompts admiration for the persecuted and remorse for unjustly afflicting them. Some argued that martyrdom actually had expiatory value, based on parallels with certain Jewish traditions. Since these assumptions were brought together to form God’s plan for the nations, it was unthinkable to suppose that God would fail, therefore, some concluded that Revelation must portray martyrdom as the means of winning the nations.

We noted that the trend toward the transformational view of martyrdom had not gone unchallenged. G. K. Beale dissented from this position consistently in his commentary. Beale argued against the interpretation of the partial judgments that saw their primary function as warnings. He pointed out that the consistent response of the enemies of God in the book of Revelation was that they did not repent. Eckhard Schnabel specifically debated several of Bauckham's interpretations of key passages that supported his view of the conversion of the nations. This dissertation is designed, not only to debate the interpretation of certain passages, but to make the case that martyrdom is an impetus for Divine retribution.

Chapter 2 explained the approach this dissertation would take to establish the thesis. The heart of this dissertation is exegesis. Therefore, we explained the exegetical method employed. We began with a detailed discussion of the literary background of the Book of Revelation. Several studies on John's use of the Old Testament in Revelation have been produced in the past several decades. These studies in intertextuality have revealed a literarily genetic connection between Revelation and the inner-biblical exegesis of the latter prophets and writings of the Hebrew Bible. Recognizing that John is the culmination of a long line of prophetic interpreters suggests that the relationship of Revelation to antecedent biblical literature is of greater importance than its relationship to extra-biblical writings of a similar character.

We discovered that John's use of the Old Testament affected his theology, language and structure. The pervasiveness of scriptural allusion and the repeated use of key passages led us to agree with Beale, that John's use of the Old Testament was contextually sound. John was a careful exegete and a biblical theologian with a keen eye for Messianic fulfillment in Jesus.

We also explained the methodological conclusions derived from genre studies. As apocalyptic literature, we expect Revelation to deal with the interpretation of history and eschatology. As epistolary literature, we expect Revelation to deal with the

immediate situation at hand in the first century churches of Asia Minor. As prophetic literature, we expect Revelation to deal with Christ's covenant loyalty to his people, and his people's call to absolute allegiance to Christ. Because John received his revelation in the form of visions, we expect him to verbalize those visions in images drawn from his literary and cultural environment. Following Vern Poythress, we interpret these visions on four levels, the linguistic, the visionary, the referential, and the symbolic.

Like other apocalyptic writings, the Book of Revelation tells a story. This narrative form insists that any theological conclusions must follow from the resolution of the plot, and not simply from isolated movements within the narrative. The story of Revelation, we noted, does not run uninterrupted from chapter one through chapter twenty-two. Some sections recapitulate the events that lead up to the final judgment. Therefore, we not only looked at the overall development of the themes of martyrdom and retribution, but we also saw a consistent motif repeated as the scenes of the eschaton were replayed.

This exegetical methodology, we explained, would be applied to those texts dealing explicitly and implicitly with the relationship of martyrdom to Divine retribution. This study would involve the interpretation of relevant Old Testament passages, particularly those that are alluded to by the texts under examination. We also recognized the wisdom of reading Revelation, and the themes of martyrdom and retribution, in light of other New Testament and early Christian writings. With these principles in place argumentation was underway.

Chapter 3 attempted to demonstrate that martyrdom is the climax of a testimony for God against the nations. We first examined the use of *μάρτυς* in Revelation. Trite's study provided us with helpful etymological background. Since Revelation is heavily indebted to the Old Testament prophetic tradition, we explored the concept of witness as a forensic metaphor. The metaphorical picture of God's legal contest with the nations is founded on Israel's legal practice as outlined in the Pentateuch.

God was often spoken of as the judge of the earth. Isaiah, however, also portrays God as a plaintiff. God calls upon witnesses to testify on his behalf. Israel is sometimes cast in the role of God's witness. God also calls on the nations to bring forth their witnesses, either their gods, or those who would speak on behalf of their gods. The impotence of the gods of the nations becomes evident when God vindicates his people according to his prophetic word. Based on Isaiah 40-45, Jeremiah 25.31 and Hosea 4.1, we concluded that John's use of the metaphor of a legal contest with the nations was thematic.

Revelation primarily follows Isaiah's use of this metaphor, in which God's people are his witnesses against the nations; although John also applies the theme to God's relationship with his own people.

In the next section we examined the concept of witness as an aspect of the church's prophetic ministry. The Revelation is said to be a prophecy, which was to be mediated through John to the churches (Rev 1.1). The churches were to take this prophetic testimony to the world (Rev 11.3-14). The evidences of the church's prophetic function are (1) the fact that prophecy is a primary form of witness in the Apocalypse; (2) "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19.10); (3) the honorable title "servants" is used of the church; (4) and the presence of a particular group of prophets ministering within the church. Just as the prophets had a prophetic role within the church, the church had a prophetic role within the world.

We continued by arguing that Revelation 10.11 should be understood as a commission to testify *against* the nations. The more general translation found in many English Bibles ("prophesy to" or "prophesy about") was found to be inadequate because of the use of the formula προφητεύειν ἐπὶ in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. John's bitter reaction to the eating of the scroll also indicates that his prophetic commission would be one of salvation and judgment. We also demonstrated that the irregular use of the word "kings" in the fourfold description of the nations gave the object of the prophecy a negative

connotation. The strongest argument in favor of the translation “prophesy against” is the contextual argument, which we took up in the next section.

We argued that Revelation 11.3-10 portrays witness as a prelude to judgment. Based on the literary association of the two lampstands with the seven lampstands in chapters 1 through 3, we concluded that the two witnesses represented the church militant. We then focused on the nature and effect of their prophetic witness. These prophets have a fiery message, symbolized by their ability to breathe fire that destroys those who seek to harm them. The allusions to the ministries of Jeremiah, Elijah and Moses suggest that the church has a message for the nations that includes warnings of divine retribution. Furthermore, the reaction of those who dwell on the earth to the death of the two prophets suggests that the prophetic message was not simply an invitation to life, but a condemnation of their ways. The earth-dwellers “rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth” (Rev 11.10).

We considered the reaction of the earth-dwellers to the great earthquake which announced the coming judgment. They feared and gave glory to God. While some have taken this as a positive sign of repentance, we marshaled evidence that this was more likely an acknowledgment of defeat than an expression of heartfelt worship. Therefore, we concluded that Revelation 11.3-10 reveals that the church’s testimony is a declaration of the righteous judgment of God which the Lamb is going to bring on those who have sworn allegiance to the Beast. The church’s witness becomes a portent of judgment on those who refuse to repent.

In the next section, we examined the link between faithful witness and martyrdom. The Dragon waged war with the saints. They overcame him by the sacrificial death of Jesus and by their testimony to Jesus, who himself overcame through suffering and death. Their faithful witness to Jesus was proven in that they maintained that witness even in death. The testimony which they bore was for Christ *against* the

Dragon and his allies. When the Dragon perpetrated the murder of these witnesses, he validated their testimony against him. Therefore, we found that martyrdom confirms the church's testimony against the persecutors of the church.

After establishing that martyrdom exposes and heightens the guilt of those who persecute the saints, we turned to the saints' hope of vindication. We looked back at the text that initially raised the question of martyrdom as an impetus of divine retribution, Revelation 6.9-11. We rejected the sentiment of some that the cry of the martyrs is sub-Christian. We found, instead, that the cry for vengeance has precedent in Old Testament spirituality, as well as in other New Testament texts. The longing for vindication which is expressed in the martyrs' cry arises from the larger question of theodicy. The question, however, is not whether God will uphold the cause of the martyrs, but how long before he will. The persecuted church that finds a voice in the martyrs under the altar has an interest in how this question is answered. God does not condemn nor correct the expressed desire of the martyrs. His answer suggests that he has a purpose for the suffering of his servants. When that purpose is fulfilled, then he will vindicate them. Therefore, as soon as the issue is raised, John assures the church that God will vindicate them by exacting vengeance on their persecutors.

In the final section of chapter 3 we argued that the vindication of the martyrs was essential because of their identification with Christ. First, Christ blazed the path to glory through suffering. He is represented in Revelation as the quintessential martyr. Second, the message of the martyrs is called "Jesus' testimony" (Rev 1.2; 12.17; cf. 19.10; 22.20). Third, the call of the saints to be faithful witnesses is a call to the imitation of Christ. Jesus is closely identified with his suffering saints. Therefore, the vindication of the saints is the vindication of their testimony about Jesus and of Jesus himself.

The argument of chapter 3 led to the conclusion that martyrdom is a negative testimony against the persecutors of the church. Other Christian writings may focus on another aspect of the effect of martyrdom, namely, its appeal to the conscience of the

persecutors. Revelation, however, focuses on martyrdom as the ultimate evidence against the persecutors, thus confirming their testimony.

Chapter 4 built on the argument of chapter 3. Martyrdom not only confirms the testimony of the saints against the persecutors of the church, it also determines the sentence against them, according to the *lex talionis*. We examined the use of the *lex talionis* in biblical tradition and theology. We found that it was used by Israel to extend the rule of law equitably in society. This protected the weaker members of society, while holding the wealthy and influential accountable.

In order to be truly equitable, the principle of eye for an eye was not always applied literally. Instead, the punishment was designed to fit the crime. The goal of *lex talionis* is twofold: to punish the offender and to make restitution to the offended party. The exception to the non-literal application of the law of retaliation was the punishment for murder. In the case of the taking of a human life, the standard was literally life for life. In the New Testament, Jesus teaches his disciples not to retaliate against evildoers. This is not, however, to set aside the principle of *lex talionis* in absolute terms. Jesus' specific illustrations have to do with personal vengeance, not the government's use of capital punishment. In fact, one motivation for refraining from personal vengeance is the hope that God will avenge his people. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord" (Rom 12.19).

We examined passages from Revelation that employ the *lex talionis*. Revelation 3.9 deals with honor and dishonor in Philadelphia. The Jewish synagogue had dishonored the Christian assembly by slandering them and disassociating them from the Jewish faith and community. Without the distinction of the time-honored religion of Israel, the church was seen by the Romans as a suspicious, new superstition. This slander was causing the church hardship. This activity is related to the work of Satan, the accuser of the brethren, as pictured in 12.10. Christ promises that the Jewish synagogue will lose its honor, being prostrated at the feet of the Christian assembly. The church will

consequently be compensated, having their honor restored as their enemies confess that they are loved by Christ. In accord with the *lex talionis*, the enemies of the church will be humiliated, and the faithful witnesses of Christ will be honored.

We discussed another example of the *lex talionis* in 11.18. The rage of the nations is met with the wrath of God. The result of this confrontation fulfills the twofold purpose of the *lex talionis*. The dead are judged; and the saints are rewarded. The application of the principle of the punishment fitting the crime is even more evident in the phrase, “destroying the destroyers of the earth.”

The language of *lex talionis* was blatant and strong in Revelation 18.4-8. The voice from heaven uses several phrases that call for a punishment of Babylon that fits her crimes. First, her sins are measured and accounted for by God. Then the voice exclaims, “Pay her back as she herself has paid back others.” The next phrase appears to go beyond the principle of *lex talionis* since many translations render the phrase, “repay her double. We argued that the word διπλοῦν is better rendered “full” than “double.” This is lexically sound and fits the context. She is to be humbled in proportion to the extent to which she glorified herself. Her plagues will come upon her precisely because she has arrogantly exalted herself. John is careful to report that her punishment is just in that it fits her crimes, in keeping with the *lex talionis*.

The great white throne judgment demonstrates the principle that the punishment fits the crime. The dead whose names were not found written in the book of life were judged “according to what they had done” (Rev 20.12). Death and Hades are fittingly cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death.

After demonstrating the consistent application of the *lex talionis* in the book of Revelation, we looked at texts that applied the *lex talionis* to the judgment of those who martyred Jesus’ witnesses. First, we argued that the prayers of the saints for vengeance against their persecutors were answered by eschatological judgment (Rev 6.9-11; 8.3-5).

These prayers were not sub-Christian. We found that they came from a pious hunger and thirst for righteousness.

In Revelation 16.4-7, the *lex talionis* is stated in terms of blood for blood. The persecutors of the church had shed the saints' blood; therefore, they are given blood to drink. We argued that the expression "blood to drink" denotes death. God is said to be just, because he gave them "what they deserve."

We argued that the drunkenness of the prostitute in Revelation 17.6 was a negative image, indicating the cause of her fall. Her drunkenness was not all merriment, but was confusion and stupor. She indulged in the suffering of the saints, becoming intoxicated on their blood. Her indulgence would lead to her demise. Again, in Revelation 18.24, the prostitute is implicated with the blood of the saints. Babylon had passed a guilty verdict against the saints. God has overruled her judgment against the saints and passed his own judgment against Babylon (18.20). The blood of the martyrs leads to the destruction of Babylon.

Finally, we argued that the judgments of God are declared to be true and righteous because they avenge the blood of his servants according to the *lex talionis* (19.2). Revelation consistently portrays God's justice to be in line with the *lex talionis*. Therefore, the just punishment for murdering the faithful witnesses of Jesus is death. The persecutors of the saints ironically determine God's sentence against them.

There may be great encouragement in the dictum: "The blood of the martyrs is seed." Sound arguments, based on solid exegesis, have demonstrated that Paul had a similar understanding of his own sufferings for the sake of the gospel.¹ The Revelation to John, however, must not be censored in an attempt to bring it into conformity with other Christian traditions. Revelation encourages the witnesses of Jesus to be faithful even unto death by assuring them that God will avenge their blood against their persecutors.

¹For Example, Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997).

We do not believe that the transformational view and the traditional view are irreconcilable. However, we do not find the transformational view to be expressed in the Revelation to John.

It is the task of systematic theology to show the compatibility of these effects of martyrdom. This is a worthy task, and a necessary one as the church continues to bear witness in Babylon. We offer this thesis in order to allow the voice of Revelation to inform the subject until the full number of the martyrs is fulfilled (Rev 6.11).

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ABSTRACT

MARTYRDOM AS AN IMPETUS FOR DIVINE RETRIBUTION IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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This dissertation examines the relationship between martyrdom and divine retribution against the martyr's persecutors in the book of Revelation. The argument is made that Revelation portrays martyrdom as an impetus of Divine retribution against the persecutors of the martyrs. Chapter 1 traces the trend in recent scholarship to view Revelation's portrayal of martyrdom as contributing to the conversion of the nations. Basic assumptions of this view are discussed, as well as some replies from traditionalists.

Chapter 2 discusses the methodology and sources used to defend the thesis. A discussion of intertextuality in the book of Revelation leads to the conclusion that the Old Testament, and particularly the prophetic tradition of Israel, is the primary background. The genre analysis leads the author to adopt a modified idealist approach to the symbolism of the book.

Chapter 3 argues that martyrdom is the confirmation of the saints' testimony against the persecutors of the church. It is argued that the concept of witness is drawn from the background of God's legal contest with the nations in the Old Testament prophets. The climax of the witnesses' testimony is their martyrdom.

Chapter 4 argues that martyrdom determines the sentence against the persecutors based on the *lex talionis*. The persecutors of the church seal their own fate by

striking down God's faithful witnesses. The evil of persecution that leads to martyrdom is exacerbated by the identification of Christ with his witnesses. The vindication of the martyrs is also the vindication of their witness to Christ.

This dissertation contends that Revelation's theology of martyrdom should not be conformed to Paul's theology of suffering, but should be understood as a complement to it. John's encouragement is not that the blood of the martyrs is seed, but that the blood of the martyrs is precious to Christ, who will avenge it in God's time.

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Pastor, Richland Baptist Church, Owenton, Kentucky, 2003-2005
Pastor, Trinity Baptist Church, Fayetteville, North Carolina, 2006-

ACADEMIC

Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003-2005
Adjunct Professor, Carolina Bible College, Fayetteville, North Carolina,
2006-