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SALVATION AS VICTORY: A STUDY ON DIVINE GRACE  
AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION IN  
THE BOOK OF REVELATION THROUGH THE  
LENS OF THE CONQUERING MOTIF

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by  
Sung Joong Kim  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

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For Three People

To my mother-in-law and father-in-law,  
whose love, prayer, and support empowered me to persevere to the end.

To my mom and dad,  
whose love, prayer, and encouragement empowered me to cross the finish line.

To my beloved wife, Un Hye Lee,  
who showed me the prime example of persevering faith..

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACNT	Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament
ACT	Ancient Christian Texts
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHGNT	Baylor Handbooks on the Greek New Testament
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CC	Continental Commentary
CCGNT	Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament
CECNT	Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DRCS	Daniel and Revelation Committee Series
EEC	Evangelical Exegetical Commentary
GNS	Good News Studies
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IRUSC	Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church
ITC	International Theological Commentary
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series

LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	The Septuagint
MNTC	Moffat New Testament Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.</i> Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTL	New Testament Library
NTT	New Testament Theology
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
REC	Reformed Expository Commentary
RSCT	Rutherford Studies in Contemporary Theology
SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

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## PREFACE

When I initially conceived the idea for this project, the very first emotion I experienced was excitement. It became even stronger as I studied more about the dissertation's topic and discovered its potential value for the soteriology of the book of Revelation. However, I have also experienced a certain degree of discouragement and, sometimes, even intimidation due to the challenging nature of the book and the fear of having to explore the least researched area of the book. Also, throughout my PhD journey, many times I got to a point where I seriously considered dropping out of the PhD program due to critical health issues that I experienced. Had it not been for those individuals who willingly offered to provide me with necessary academic support, personal encouragement, and continual prayer, I would never have had enough courage to finish such a daunting task. Therefore, I would like to express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to them by saying, "Thank you for being there for me."

First and foremost, I am immensely grateful for the never-ceasing encouragement, prayers, and financial support from my family, both my parents Yong In Kim and Choong Ja Shin, and my in-laws Young Hwan Lee and Soon Kun Song. This project would not have been possible without your love, support, and prayers. I especially thank you all for showing me what it means to conquer in real life. Thank you for always being there for me through my ups and downs along my PhD journey!

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individual interactions. I would especially like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Robert Plummer, my mentor and beloved supervisor. I am forever indebted to you for your continuous support and prayer without which this work would never have happened. I am grateful not only for his academic advice throughout the writing process, but also for showing me a living example of faith and godliness. I will never forget the day when we prayed together on our knees in your office because of which I regained hope to continue my PhD journey. You raised me up when I was down. Thank you for being there for me!

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Last but not the least, I thank my beloved wife and dear friend in Christ, Un Hye Lee. Thank you for struggling through the toughest time of our life with me. I am grateful to God for bringing you into my life. Thank you for showing me the prime example of persevering faith. Without your love and support, it would never have been possible for me to cross the finish line. I love you dearly. Thank you for always being there for me.

Sung Joong Kim

Louisville, Kentucky

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In a scholarly study of the book of Revelation, soteriology has been comparatively neglected.<sup>1</sup> One explanation for this phenomenon might be that other aspects of the book of Revelation—graphic depictions of eschatological events, the cosmic judgment of evil worldly powers, and the renewal of the old order—captivate our attention more.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many topics of the book of Revelation, such as Christ, the Spirit, salvation, the church, violence, judgment, and the eschaton, are so intricately intertwined that it is impossible to explore any one particular theme in isolation from the rest.<sup>3</sup> The same principle applies to the study of the concept of salvation in Revelation. Concerning the difficulty of exploring salvation as a single theme in the book of Revelation, Jan A. du Rand rightly notes, “A proper understanding of the function and meaning of the soteriology of the Apocalypse requires a thorough interpretation of the book as a whole.”<sup>4</sup>

Given the difficulty of isolating the concept of salvation from other important

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander E. Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, Gorgias Biblical Studies 61 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 177.

<sup>2</sup> Fred D. Layman, “Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” in *An Inquiry in the Book of Revelation from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton, NovTSup (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1981), 225.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Paulien states that the uniqueness of Revelation’s structure can be attributed to its fantastically complex interweaving of visions, symbols and ideas which enables a natural flow of thought as well as shift of scenes from one to another from beginning to end. See Jon Paulien, *Decoding Revelations Trumpets: Literary Allusions and Interpretation of Revelation 8:7–12*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 11 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1988), 159. Similarly, Bauckham asserts that among John’s primary literary methods are the overlapping and interweaving of the sections of his work. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Jan A. du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspective on Soteriology*, NovTSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 464.

themes and exploring it as an independent theme, it is not surprising that a host of scholars have taken various approaches to the study of Revelation's soteriology, each with distinct interests and emphases.<sup>5</sup> While a wide array of scholars have made significant contributions to this soteriological analysis, both through article-length<sup>6</sup> and monograph-length treatments,<sup>7</sup> there are still certain lacunae yet to be filled. The most apparent gap lies in the comprehension of the relation between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation.

The fact that not much has been done to explore the relationship between these dual soteriological concepts can perhaps be attributed to the previously stated challenge

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<sup>5</sup> The most prominent theme concerning the study on the soteriology of Revelation is the theme of "salvation through judgment." For a detailed discussion on this topic, see James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 541–51; Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John's Revelation and John's Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 147–48. Stewart argues from a rhetorical point of view that soteriology is the primary motivating factor in the argumentation of Revelation. See Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 5. Eric Joseph Spano asserts—with particular attention to Revelation 3:5b—that John primarily, if not exclusively, portrays the eschatological salvation of his audience in conditional terms. Eric Joseph Spano, "Erasure and Endurance: Aspects of Soteriology in Revelation" (PhD diss. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 9. Du Rand's study covers a wider range of soteriological data ranging from analysis of the lexical data to structural analysis and to a general overview of the book from soteriological standpoint. See du Rand, "Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John," 465–500. Du Rand also pays attention to the soteriological significance of a portion of the book, or a particular redemptive image such as the New Jerusalem. See Jan A. du Rand, "The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation: Text (Rev 21:1–22:5) and Intertext," *Neotestamentica* 38, no. 2 (2004): 275–302. Layman claims that Revelation's soteriology stands well within the mainstream of New Testament soteriology and that John shared his view of salvation history with the rest of the New Testament writers. See Layman, "Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 226.

<sup>6</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness in the Revelation of John Viewed within Its Apocalyptic Context," in *Getting "Saved": The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament*, ed. Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 265–82; Brenda B. Colijn, "Call to Endurance: Pilgrimage, Contest, Worship," in *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2010), 288–312; Mal Couch, ed., "Soteriology in the Book of Revelation," in *A Bible Handbook to Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 163–71; Michael Green, "Salvation in the Rest of the New Testament," in *The Meaning of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 190–217; Christopher Rowland, "The Lamb and the Beast, the Sheep and the Goats: 'The Mystery of Salvation' in Revelation," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honor of J. P. M. Sweet*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 181–91; Daniel Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation: A New Contribution to an Old Polemic," *Review of Ecumenical Studies, Sibiu* 9, no. 3 (2017): 426–44.

<sup>7</sup> Joël Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse: Ébauche d'une sotériologie originale*, Tesi Gregoriana: Series Teologica 167 (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2008); Eric Spano, "Erasure and Endurance"; Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*.

of studying one theological theme in isolation from the others.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, to gain a holistic understanding of the relationship between the concepts of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, there is an essential need to employ an overarching theme as the interpretive lens that could simultaneously touch on various theological threads and in turn, unify them into a coherent picture of salvation.

Salvation is the result of divine grace for the people of God achieved through the instrumental role of Christ's death and resurrection. Revelation tells the story of salvation through pictorial language. Salvation is freely given to the people of God through the death and resurrection of Christ. However, Revelation also underscores the need for faithfulness and loyalty on the part of God's people. Thus, placing too much emphasis on the freeness of salvation or rejecting the necessity of human responsibility as a proper expression of genuine faith is to do violence to the picture of salvation as presented in Revelation.

However, there is no scholarly consensus on what can best serve as the interpretive lens through which to analyze the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. Indeed, the solution to this perceived problem may vary from scholar to scholar. Considering its pervasive impact on the entirety of Revelation's narrative, perhaps the conquering motif could serve as an effective tool that facilitates the understanding of the intricate relationship between the dual soteriological concepts previously mentioned. The conquering motif, which depicts the concept of salvation as victory, consists of two foundational ideas that would prove fruitful in accounting for the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, particularly as understood in Revelation. First, the accomplished victory of Christ through his death and resurrection initiates the salvation of his people (Rev 3:21;

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<sup>8</sup> Thus, the soteriology of Revelation cannot be understood fully without dealing with other areas of theology such as theology, Christology, and ecclesiology.



5:5) and perfects and consummates it (17:14) at his return. It is in this sense that the salvation of God's people can be said to be a wholly divine gift. Second, Revelation also equally emphasizes the importance of human responsibility for salvation, as believers are called to participate in Christ's victory (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).

### Thesis

Thus, this dissertation revisits the soteriology of Revelation and aims to provide a fresh soteriological framework<sup>9</sup> that both facilitates and deepens the understanding of the soteriological tension between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation as portrayed in Revelation.<sup>10</sup> Specifically, I aim to show that the conquering motif conveyed by the verb *νικάω* provides a helpful soteriological framework through which to harmonize the apparent tension between divine grace and human responsibility for salvation, which are often seen as conflicting with each other.

Given the pictorial nature of Revelation's thought-world,<sup>11</sup> John employs a plethora of violent images associated with holy war<sup>12</sup> to depict the concept of salvation.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Nijay Gupta's survey, what most NT scholars have been debating in recent days is how to articulate a framework makes sense of the themes of both absolute divine grace and human responsibility in relation to one another. Nijay K. Gupta, *A Beginner's Guide to New Testament Studies: Understanding Key Debates* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 155.

<sup>10</sup> The ethical tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation can be felt in John's use of the verb *νικάω*. Christ has already conquered and accomplished salvation for his people in the past (Rev 3:21b; 5:5), which will be consummated when he returns in the future (17:14). However, the continuous call for believers to participate in the holy war of the Lamb in Revelation 2–3 (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) certainly makes the process of salvation seem like a work of both God and human.

<sup>11</sup> Beale notes that the revelation is not abstract but pictorial. He supports his claim by observing John's choice of *σημαίνω* over *γνωρίζω* ("make known") and concludes that this is not haphazard but intentional. He then adds that *σημαίνω* means "communicate by symbols" in Revelation 1:1, which is confirmed by the parallel use of *δείκνυμι* ("show") in the first clause of v. 1. The significance of all this bears on one's overall hermeneutical approach to Revelation. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 51–52. Along the same lines, Anthony Thiselton claims that the book of Revelation has more pictures and images than descriptive words and observes that out of 404 verses some 440 pictures or images occur. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Power of Pictures in Christian Thought: The Use and Abuse of Images in the Bible and Theology* (London: SPCK, 2018), 168. Michael Kuykendall adamantly states that Revelation's story is told through images and if readers are to grasp the meaning of the book, then they must be prepared to interpret its images. Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 1.

<sup>12</sup> According to Annang Asumang, holy war can be called "divine warfare," "Yahweh's war," "wars of Yahweh," or "herem." Annang Asumang, "'Resist Him' (1 Pet 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory

Among these, the conquering motif is prominent. Based on this, I argue that the conquering motif, as the key concept<sup>13</sup> of the pervasive theme of the holy war motif,<sup>14</sup> effectively conveys both the idea of divine grace and that of human responsibility in salvation. This is achieved by the simultaneous application of the verb *νικάω* to both the conquering of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and the conquering of believers (2:7, 11, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).

This argument aims to prove the following points. First, references to conquering, conveyed by the verb *νικάω*, portray the overall concept of salvation<sup>15</sup> as victory in warfare.<sup>16</sup> Stated differently, it serves as one of the most effective tools to

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Responses to Unjust Suffering as ‘Holy War’ in 1 Peter,” *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)* 11, no. 3 (March 2011): 18. Thus, they can be used interchangeably. However, this dissertation will consistently use the nomenclature “holy war” in order to emphasize the typological continuity of the warfare between God and Satan in Revelation with the holy wars of the Old Testament.

<sup>13</sup> Bauckham helpfully explains that derived from militant messianism is the key concept of conquering and that the image of conquering is unmistakably militaristic and one to which interpreters of Revelation hardly do justice. Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 69–70. Similarly, Tremper Longman contends that the verb *νικάω* is closely linked to the theme of divine warrior in Revelation. Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 180.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Homer Giblin makes a case that the “holy war” theme, in all its essential institutional features, structures the entire course of events in Revelation 4–22 and is also formative for the overall thought of chapters 1–3. Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 29, 25–34, 224–31. Similarly, Gordon Fee claims that the most dominant theme throughout Revelation is that of the holy war in which God is described as divine warrior and the people of God as engaged in the warfare; Fee maintains that herein lies the heart of the book. Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), xiv–xv. Along the same lines, Adela Yarbro Collins argues that major images and narrative patterns of Revelation are best understood in the framework of the ancient myths of combat and that the use of the combat myth in Revelation shows that the book should be understood primarily within the tradition of a long-standing biblical and Jewish practice of adapting the ancient Near Eastern combat myths to interpret the conflicts in which Yahweh and his people had been engaged. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 2. The pervasiveness of the theme of divine warfare makes it an effective tool to analyze the relation of human responsibility to the saving work of God through his agent Christ in militaristic terms. God wages war against those who oppose to him through his agent Christ and wins the victory; the people of God shares his victory by participating in it.

<sup>15</sup> Couch argues that references to overcoming, especially those found in Revelation 2–3, seem to refer to salvation with promises that accompany salvation. Couch, “Soteriology in the Book of Revelation,” 164. However, he makes no mention of the conquering of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), thus failing to incorporate the divine grace part of salvation into the full picture of salvation in Revelation.

<sup>16</sup> Youssouf Dembele claims that the conflict-victory motif, God fighting and triumphing over Satan to save humankind, is a major soteriological theme in the Bible, but it is neglected in modern Christian soteriology. Youssouf Dembele, “Salvation as Victory: A Reconsideration of the Concept of Salvation in the Light of Jesus Christ’s Life and Work Viewed as a Triumph over the Personal Powers of

conduct a simultaneous analysis of the role of divine grace and human responsibility in the salvation process of believers. When we refer to it as an “effective tool,” we mean that the fact that *σωτηρία* in Revelation carries undertones of victory<sup>17</sup> proves useful for analyzing the dual concepts of divine grace and human responsibility through the lens of Christ’s victory on the cross and subsequent resurrection (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and believers’ partaking of that victory (2:7, 11, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).

Second, Revelation does not advocate the synergistic mode of salvation, a divine-human partnership with each side contributing toward salvation, considering it as a product of joint effort. The soteriology of Revelation acknowledges the all-sufficiency of divine grace, as demonstrated through the work of Christ, as the sole efficient cause of the salvation of God’s people. Therefore, this dissertation advocates the view that salvation is entirely the work of God’s grace. To be more specific, while Revelation speaks of both the conquering of Christ and that of God’s people, the force is not identical. The conquering of Christ is the true and ultimate cause of the victory of God’s people, not a human achievement. Therefore, the only victory that counts toward salvation is the victory of Christ.

Third, the importance of human behavior, however, is not absent; rather, it seems to be accentuated in the concept of salvation as understood in Revelation.<sup>18</sup> Human actions or choices are not insignificant in the portrayal of salvation in Revelation. This notion is well supported by the use of the conquering language applied to the people of

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Evil” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001), iii. At least, this argument seems to be applicable to the soteriology of the book of Revelation. Aside from the application of the verb *νικάω* to both Christ and his followers, it is also applied to the rider on a white horse (6:2) and the beast (11:7; 13:7). This evidently shows that there is a war in which Christ, the people of God, and the beast are all engaged. The conquering of the beast will not be treated in this dissertation since it is outside of the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 470.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Barclay Swete comments, “The Apocalyptic dwells more frequently on ‘works’ than on ‘faith. . . .’ The Faith is rarely named in the book, and when it is, it does not appear as the primary necessity of the Christian life; the decisive place is given to works.” Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 2nd ed., CCGNT (New York: Macmillan, 1906), clxiv.

God (2:7, 11, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).<sup>19</sup> However, these references should not necessarily be seen as descriptions of works-based salvation. The conquering of God's people in Revelation, although a human act, should not be understood as a meritorious human achievement toward salvation but as a manifestation of one's genuine faith expressed through human actions.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the conquering of believers should be understood as the means by which the work of salvation accomplished by Christ is personally appropriated, with human works accompanying it.<sup>21</sup> Thus, faith is the only condition required of believers to attain salvation. However, in agreement with the grammar of Revelation 19:7–8, even believers' ability to conquer should be seen as the result of God's gracious gift.<sup>22</sup> This signifies that even the faith that produces works should be considered a gift from God. God enables what he requires.<sup>23</sup> In this respect,

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Revelation 2:26 equates the act of conquering with keeping the works of Christ: "The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations." Both Thomas R. Schreiner, "Justification Apart from and by Works: At the Final Judgment Works Will Conform Justification," in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, ed. Alan P. Stanley and Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 95, and Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 74, connect the language of conquering to the idea of works.

<sup>20</sup> According to Gupta, Revelation regularly carries overtones of loyalty, faithfulness, and sacrificial love and ties together works and faith as seen in 2:19. Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 92–93. Similarly, Stewart contends that saving faith is unstated but assumed to be the basis for one's conquering behavior and works; therefore, they are not soteriologically optional but are an integral component of a holistic believing human response to God's saving initiative." Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 201–2. Likewise, Daniel K. K. Wong asserts that the Christian overcomer in Johannine literature is a saved person, thus every saved person is an overcomer and spiritual overcoming is synonymous with saving faith. Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Johannine Concept of Overcomer" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995), 294. In the same vein, I. Howard Marshall asserts that victorious Christian is synonymous with true Christian whose life is a constant struggle for victory involving deeds, which are the expression of a living faith. See I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 174–75.

<sup>21</sup> Daniel Kirkpatrick, *Monergism or Synergism: Is Salvation Cooperative or the Work of God Alone?* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 42. Another definition of the nature of the biblical faith comes from Schreiner's argument that faith inevitably manifests itself in obedience, so that faith is the seed and works are the fruit. He also adds that faith and obedience are distinct but remain undivided. Thomas R. Schreiner, "The Commands of God," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 71.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation: Five Principles for Interpretation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 166.

<sup>23</sup> Talbert supports this view by arguing that if there is any distinctiveness to the soteriology of Revelation it is the emphasis on the fact that the Christian life between conversion and resurrection is lived not only with divine assistance but also by divine enablement, however that enablement is envisioned.

divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, expressed through the language of conquering, merge seamlessly without necessarily being set against each other.

Fourth, Revelation reuses, reinterprets, and reapplies the Old Testament theme of holy war and its core concept “victory” as the primary paradigm<sup>24</sup> to shape its soteriological argumentation, with a particular focus on the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation through the language of conquering.<sup>25</sup> More precisely, the pattern of holy war as depicted in the Old Testament, especially in the exodus event, serves as the conceptual framework for the conquering motif that informs the soteriological functions of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. Yahweh is the sole efficient warrior in the battle, and thus, the author of victory. Therefore, the essence of the divine warfare is that the victory is of Yahweh alone and not of men.<sup>26</sup> However, the element of faith on the part of God’s people as a condition for victory is also emphasized.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, this same reality is expressed in Revelation with a Christological focus<sup>28</sup> through the language of conquering. Christ conquered in his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5) and accomplished victory over his adversaries. And he will

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Talbert, “Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness,” 283. In his argument, if accepted as true, both “getting in” and “staying in” salvation is ultimately a matter of God’s grace in Revelation.

<sup>24</sup> This is why the salvation in Revelation follows new exodus pattern. For further argument on the new exodus salvation see, David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 162–64; Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 158–60.

<sup>25</sup> Du Rand supports this point, arguing that God’s *σωτηρία* as victory in Revelation 7:10; 12:10 and 19:1 carries the Old Testament idea of victory (Exod 14:13, 30; 15:2; Ps 74:12; 106:10, 21). Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 470.

<sup>26</sup> Tremper Longman III, “The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif,” *WTJ* 44, no. 2 (1982): 292.

<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Von Rad, Patrick Miller, and Millard Lind agree that the primary role of Israel in the battle was to have trust in Yahweh, which was decisive in accomplishing victory in the battle against Israel’s enemy. Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 45–46; Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*, Christian Peace Shelf Selection (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 171; Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 159.

<sup>28</sup> Christ takes the role of Yahweh in the Old Testament as divine warrior in Revelation. For images of Christ as divine warrior in Revelation see, Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 180–92.

consummate this victory at the Parousia (17:14). In the time between Christ's death and resurrection and his return, believers are divinely enabled to conquer through faith in the accomplished victory of Christ. Faith is the only condition required of believers to attain salvation, conceptualized as victory (2:7, 11, 17, 28; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). Consequently, Christ is the sole efficient warrior in the warfare and the author of victory. In the end, victory (salvation) is of Christ and not of men, for Christ accomplishes it all and God's people simply share in it through their faith in him.<sup>29</sup>

### History of Research

As noted earlier, soteriology<sup>30</sup> is one of the least explored theological themes in Revelation. According to Eric Joseph Spano, only a limited number of scholars and commentators have contributed to the discussion of soteriology in Revelation.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Jöel Rochette states that the question of the soteriology of Revelation has not been the subject of any systematic study until now.<sup>32</sup> Surprisingly, despite the relevance of the theme of holy war, or more narrowly, the conquering motif, to the study of

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<sup>29</sup> These two ideas are well observed in Lohmeyer's argument that the term *νικῶν* has its background in the history of religions, in which God is the sole victor and the believer his warrior who conquers through his aid. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 2nd ed., Handbuch zum Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), 23. G. R. Beasley-Murray, in his assessment of Lohmeyer's argument, adds that such a concept is appropriate for the Christian faith, since the Christ is the redeemer who has overcome all evil powers, and he grants his followers to share in his victory. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 79.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to the works cited by Spano, "Erasure and Endurance," 1–9, and Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 177–78, see also Green, *The Meaning of Salvation*, 209–17; Hartley and Shelton, *An Inquiry into Soteriology*, 225–54; Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 426–44; Colijn, *Images of Salvation in the New Testament*, 288–310.

<sup>31</sup> By dividing scholars or commentators on Revelation into three different groups, Spano argues that few commentaries, articles, and introductions on Revelation have anything more to offer on theology or soteriology. The first group, to which noted scholars such as Aune, Johnson, Metzger, Thomson, Collins, Beasley-Murray, Rowland, Mounce, and Morris belong, have no specific discussion on Revelation's soteriology. The second group, to which Michaels, Wainwright, Donelson, Boring, Ford, Harrington, Beckwith, and Charles belong, have little if anything to say about its soteriology. The third group, to which Bauckham, Schüssler-Fiorenza, Osborne, Beale, Caird, and Swete belong, discuss the soteriology of Revelation to some extent but not satisfactorily or comprehensively. Spano, "Erasure and Endurance," 2–4. Thus, this dissertation will not include those scholars already mentioned in Spano's work except for a few scholars that belong to the third category provided by him.

<sup>32</sup> Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse*, 13.

Revelation's soteriology, not many scholars have considered using this theme as a valid avenue of examining Revelation's soteriology.

Given this current situation, it would be more productive to organize the history of research around specific groups of scholars rather than merely arranging it in chronological order. Therefore, the history of research will be divided into two major groups. The first group consists of those who have conducted general studies on the soteriology of Revelation. I will focus on their contribution to understanding the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation in the context of Revelation as a whole. The second group comprises those who have considered the theme of holy war as closely linked to the concept of salvation in Revelation, serving as its background.

### **The First Group**

General soteriological studies conducted on Revelation up until recent years take various forms, including short articles, chapters in edited books, segments of commentaries, monographs, and dissertations. These works take diverse approaches that reflect various points of interest and emphases. Scholars who belong to this group are Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, Grant R. Osborne, Alexander E. Stewart, Eric Joseph Spano, Jöel Rochette, Stephen S. Smalley, Paul A. Rainbow, Fred D. Layman, Christopher Rowland, G. B. Caird, Charles H. Talbert, Brenda B. Colijn, and Daniel Mihoc.

#### *Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza*

Schüssler-Fiorenza dedicates a separate section<sup>33</sup> of her commentary to discussing the concept of redemption in the book of Revelation. She essentially views the

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<sup>33</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 68–76.

redemption accomplished by the death of Jesus Christ as liberation from bondage and slavery, thus viewing salvation primarily in political and socio-economic terms.<sup>34</sup> Her understanding of the meaning of redemption is based on Revelation 1:5–6 and 5:9–10, which she argues to be a traditional baptismal formula and its subsequent modification, respectively. Schüssler-Fiorenza primarily interprets the former passage as anthropological, signifying freedom from personal sins, evil actions, and deeds of the past. However, she cautions against misunderstanding salvation as an already-accomplished existing reality, due to the emphasis on the past aspect of salvation and that such a misconception could lead to taking less seriously the fact that Christians are still living in time and space and thus cannot be entirely certain about their final salvation.<sup>35</sup>

Building on this view of the non-realized aspect of redemption, Schüssler-Fiorenza modifies the baptismal formula in Revelation 1:5–6 and adopts a more antagonistic-ethical and eschatological understanding of redemption. She interprets the Christian community, functioning as God’s kingdom, in political terms as an alternative community to the Roman Empire, framing it as the anti-kingdom.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, she emphasizes that only those who maintain faithful witness and have been victorious in the struggle with the Roman Empire will partake in the eschatological kingship and priesthood, concluding that the author of Revelation emphasizes the imperative that must follow the indicative of Christian existence by underlining the eschatological aspect of salvation.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, Schüssler-Fiorenza’s understanding of the concept of salvation in Revelation can be characterized as political and future-oriented. She correctly recognizes

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<sup>34</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 73.

<sup>36</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 76.



both the indicative aspect of the accomplished victory of Christ serving as the foundation for believers' salvation and the imperative aspect that believers are urged to be victorious in their struggle against the Roman Empire. However, she does not give much attention to the warfare between God and Satan as the backdrop for the salvific work of Christ accomplished by his death and resurrection and the subsequent Christian struggle.

*Grant R. Osborne*

Osborne briefly addresses the soteriology of Revelation under the heading “perseverance of the Saints.”<sup>38</sup> He argues that the vertical axis of the book is centered on the sovereignty of God, while the horizontal axis is the responsibility of the saints to persevere.<sup>39</sup> Osborne recognizes the pivotal role of Christ's victory on the cross as foundational to the victory of the saints depicted in the seven letters, whose key characteristic is perseverance.<sup>40</sup>

First and foremost, Osborne views the sovereignty of God as the primary theme of Revelation as supported by the titles applied to God such as “The one who is, and was, and is to come” (1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 16:5), “The Alpha and Omega,” (1:8) and “The Almighty” (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6; 21:22) as well as the image of God sitting on the heavenly throne (Rev 4).<sup>41</sup> He also discusses the Christology of Revelation and recognizes that the blood of Jesus, the slain Lamb, freed his people from their sin, which was the great defeat of Satan allowing the saints to conquer him in the same way Christ conquered.<sup>42</sup> He adds an important insight into the theme of conquering by arguing that in Revelation, Satan is defeated by three things—the blood of Christ, the faithful

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<sup>38</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 42–46.

<sup>39</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 43.

<sup>41</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 31–33.

<sup>42</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 35.

witness of the saints, and the holy war of God.<sup>43</sup>

Moving on to the discussion of human responsibility, Osborne explains that the five concepts of endurance, faithfulness, witness, conquering, and obedience collectively convey the theme of perseverance throughout the book, unifying it around the horizontal axis of responsibility.<sup>44</sup> He demonstrates how this theme of perseverance develops throughout the book and is illustrated through various images and concepts. This exploration begins in verse 1:9, where perseverance is first linked to “suffering and kingdom.”<sup>45</sup> Osborne proceeds to highlight its development in connection with the conquering motif in the seven letters (chs. 2–3), *μαρτυρία* theme (6:9; 12:11), the concepts of obedience and faithful witness (2:10, 19; 11:3–6; 12:17b; 13:10; 14:12), the theme of divine judgment (16:15; 17:14), the concluding promise and warning (21:7–8; 21:9–22:5), and the epilogue (22:6–21). Furthermore, he provides a special insight into the nature of believers’ conquering as he identifies it with *πιστεύω*<sup>46</sup> in Paul’s writings, referring to an active trust in God that leads to faithfulness in difficult situations lived for Christ.

Overall, Osborne acknowledges the aspects of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility as the backbone of Revelation’s narrative. He even recognizes the warfare nature of these concepts. However, Osborne is unclear as to how these concepts relate to each other and fit into a single coherent picture of salvation.

#### *Alexander E. Stewart*

Stewart makes a unique contribution to the study of Revelation’s soteriology as he views the soteriology, from a rhetorical point of view, as the primary motivating factor

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<sup>43</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 38.

<sup>44</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*.

in the argumentation of the Apocalypse.<sup>47</sup> His view of the function of Revelation's soteriology as mainly motivational stems from his interpretive conviction that Revelation is primarily a motivational book.<sup>48</sup> To be more precise, he argues that John's primary rhetorical goal, in the language of the Apocalypse, is to motivate his hearers to overcome (*νικάω*), and every part of the book is designed to attain this goal.<sup>49</sup> He also states that the concept of "overcoming" serves to describe a wide range of positive responses, such as obedience, repentance, faithfulness, perseverance, witness, worship, and good works.<sup>50</sup>

Stewart correctly recognizes that believers' present experience of salvation—the "now" of salvation—is the result of Christ's sacrificial death, through which John's hearers are liberated from their sins and made into a kingdom and priests to God.<sup>51</sup> However, he further argues that the indicative (the "already" of salvation) only plays a minor role in John's motivation for believers in the seven churches to conquer since the primary grounds for the imperatives lie on the fact that believers are in danger of not receiving final salvation if they do not overcome.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the not-yet possessed dimensions of salvation form the primary grounds for John's motivation for believers to be saved. Stewart's main argument on the soteriology of Revelation, as presented above, recognizes that the verb *νικάω* contains the implication of human responsibility for salvation as made possible by the salvific work of Christ, the indicative of salvation. However, he does not go into further detail in reviewing the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility.

In addition, Stewart's work provides two important insights into the nature of

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<sup>47</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 74.

<sup>50</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*.

<sup>51</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 182–89.

<sup>52</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 181.

conquering in Revelation. First, he readily recognizes the element of faith lying behind the conquering motif and claims that saving faith is unstated but assumed to be the basis for one's conquering behavior. He then adds that works are not soteriologically optional but are an integral component of a holistic, believing human response to God's saving initiatives, grounded in faith.<sup>53</sup> Second, in his examination of Revelation 2:16, he rightly observes that the language of war, such as "fighting" (*πολεμέω*), draws upon the divine warrior motif from the Old Testament, where God fights against his enemies.<sup>54</sup> Although he successfully identifies an element of holy war as related to the conquering motif, he does not go any further to discuss the function of holy war in Revelation's portrayal of salvation.

*Eric Joseph Spano*

The thesis of Spano's dissertation titled "Erasure and Endurance: Aspects of Soteriology in Revelation" is that Revelation 3:5b ("I will not blot out") presents the potential loss of eschatological salvation,<sup>55</sup> understanding the concept of salvation in Revelation in conditional terms. According to Spano, the author of Revelation is primarily concerned with the entrance of the saints into the eschatological salvation represented by the portrait of the New Jerusalem. He further argues that John's heavy emphasis on perseverance and overcoming even unto death confirms this fact.<sup>56</sup> He takes a somewhat similar view to that of Stewart when he argues that the reason why John portrays the eschatological salvation in conditional terms is to motivate and/or persuade his readers to conquer unto death.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 202.

<sup>54</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation*, 132.

<sup>55</sup> Spano, "Erasure and Endurance," 9.

<sup>56</sup> Spano, "Erasure and Endurance," 9–10.

<sup>57</sup> Spano, "Erasure and Endurance," 9n.

To prove his thesis, he mainly draws upon Jewish apocalyptic literature, arguing that apostasy or a conditional understanding of eschatological salvation is central to the theological perspective of both Revelation and the body of Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, he correctly grasps the soteriological significance of the conquering language by emphasizing the fact that the inheritance of the eschatological salvation is solely conditioned on conquering.<sup>59</sup> However, he does not delve into the tricky question of the soteriological tension existing between divine sovereignty and human responsibility by saying, “This study in no way intended to resolve the tension that exists between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility.”<sup>60</sup>

In summary, Spano’s argument stands on the premise that Revelation conforms in many aspects to ancient Jewish apocalypses and is therefore intended to be read as an apocalypse. Although he explores the meaning and the function of the exhortations to “overcome” or “conquer” in the messages to the seven churches, he derives his understanding of these terms by identifying the genre of Revelation primarily as Christian apocalypse. Certainly, this study contributes to the soteriology of Revelation in many ways. However, it does not explore satisfactorily the manifold aspects of the conquering language, especially its connection to the ideas of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

### *Jöel Rochette*

The published version of Rochette’s doctoral thesis, *La rémission des péchés dans l’Apocalypse: Ébauche d’une sotériologie originale*, defended at the Gregorian in 2006, is a welcome addition to the soteriological study of Revelation, as it offers unique insights. Rochette’s thesis builds upon his perception of the theme of salvation as the

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<sup>58</sup> Spano, “Erasure and Endurance,” 10.

<sup>59</sup> Spano, “Erasure and Endurance,” 163.

<sup>60</sup> Spano, “Erasure and Endurance,” 167.

remission of sins and seeks to answer three successive questions<sup>61</sup> that delineate the scope of his research.<sup>62</sup>

Rochette's responses to these three questions give a glimpse into the goal of his research and his perspective on the soteriology of Revelation. First, he believes that the question of salvation can only be adequately addressed when the problem of sin in humanity is taken seriously. Second, he regards sin as an obstacle to God's intention for salvation and thus as needing to be remitted or removed by Christ. Two verses form the basis for this line of thought: Revelation 1:5 and 5:9. Third, he reasons that it must follow that there has to be some kind of change as a consequence of the remission of sins, whether ethical, dogmatic, ecclesial, or sacramental. To substantiate these contentions, Rochette takes a unique approach by establishing links with the Johannine corpus and examining how the theme of salvation is portrayed in both the Fourth Gospel and the first Johannine epistle at each stage of the journey.

Rochette's extensive work on Revelation's soteriology contains many fruitful insights for studying the soteriology of Revelation. First, his analysis of sin as a more critical issue than Roman persecution for the seven churches described in Revelation 2–3 sheds light on the identity of the real enemy that Christians must confront. Furthermore, his view that Christ denounces the sins of both the adversaries of the seven churches and the seven churches themselves suggests that their status as elect does not guarantee the final salvation of believers. They will eventually face the same destiny as their adversaries unless they repent and genuinely convert. Second, Rochette recognizes the

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<sup>61</sup> The first question is: What are we saved from in the Apocalypse? Or why are we judged? The second question is: If it (sin) impedes God's intention for salvation, how can sin be remitted or removed? The third question is: What does it change? Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse*, 11–12. The above is my own translation from the original French.

<sup>62</sup> Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse*, 11.

importance of the exodus motif for the discussion of salvation in Revelation<sup>63</sup> and of the human responsibility imaged through believers' participation in the warfare and victory of Christ. He writes,

Il semble cependant que l'acte même par lequel le Christ a délivré les hommes soit aussi « participé », comme de manière contemporaine, par les sauvés. C'est le Christ qui délivre, qui sauve, qui rachète, qui remet les péchés . . . mais on peut dire, avec une certaine audace, que les croyants participent aussi à leur libération, leur propre salut.<sup>64</sup>

In summary, various points discussed by Rochette offer a solid starting point for the argument of this dissertation, especially the identification of the church's enemy as sin and the importance of the new exodus theme as the interpretive context for the thought of Revelation. Additionally, he acknowledges the element of the salvific work of Christ achieved through his death and resurrection—the indicative of salvation—as the ground for believers' responsibility to participate in the holy war of Christ. However, he does not further explore how they relate to each other.

*Stephen S. Smalley*

Smalley mainly discusses the soteriology of Revelation under the label “salvation through judgment.”<sup>65</sup> He understands the concept of salvation in Revelation to be closely related to the notion of redemption. This concept is repeatedly presented in terms of the exodus/new exodus, with Jesus as the new Moses who achieves it (5:9; 14:3–4).<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, he sees judgment (thunder) and salvation (love) as two integral components of John's discussion of redemption, meaning that God's salvation is

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<sup>63</sup> Rochette asserts that the exodus motif holds a dominant place in the thought of the apocalypse since it reads the work of Christ in light of the double lines of liberation and new creation. Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse*, 464.

<sup>64</sup> Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l'Apocalypse*, 487.

<sup>65</sup> Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 10–11; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 147–49.

<sup>66</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 10; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 81.

achieved through judgment.<sup>67</sup>

According to Smalley, both positive and negative understandings of the concept of salvation through judgment are possible. This idea is positive because the decisions taken against those who oppose God eventually lead to the vindication of those who remain faithful to him (6:9–10), making this judgment ultimately an expression of God’s love for his people.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, it can also bring about dire consequences if God’s people and the nations fall short of God’s standards and fail to repent of their sinful conduct and behavior. Therefore, as Smalley notes, judgment is the divine verdict for accountable human error and represents God’s reaction to people and nations who do not meet his standards.<sup>69</sup>

In addition to the above arguments, Smalley’s discussion of ecclesiology<sup>70</sup> in connection with the new covenant accentuates a critical aspect of Revelation’s soteriology—the covenantal relationship between God and the church. Concerning the covenantal and redemptive character of the church, Smalley writes,

John frequently alludes to the idea of a covenant relationship between God and his church in this book and associates with it the naturally corresponding motif of redemption. We have already seen that the notion of redemption is consistently present in Moses/new Exodus theology. Now we can notice that John’s ecclesiology is covenantal and redemptive in its general character, as well as fully being corporate.<sup>71</sup>

Smalley’s claim that John’s ecclesiology is laden with strong covenantal overtones sheds further light on the nature of the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility. He rightly points out that the theology of covenant manifests the fact that

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<sup>67</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 11; Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 149.

<sup>69</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 148.

<sup>70</sup> Smalley points out that John’s understanding of the church is inevitably associated with other aspects of his theology such as soteriology and eschatology. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 154.

<sup>71</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 156.



the relationship within the agreement is both divine and human.<sup>72</sup> God initiates a covenant relationship with the new Israel, the church, and he remains faithful to his agreement, but at the same time, he demands that the new Israel respond.

Smalley's covenantal understanding of ecclesiology, indeed, contributes to better grasping the nature of the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility for salvation in Revelation. It helps to view salvation as both the result of God's absolute grace flowing from his covenantal faithfulness and, at the same time, the obedient response to the grace of the covenant on the part of God's people. However, he does not sufficiently discuss how the tension between divine grace and human responsibility can be reconciled.

*Paul A. Rainbow*

Rainbow's work, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse*, is by far the most comprehensive survey of the theology of the five books of the New Testament traditionally attributed to Johannine authorship, namely the Gospel of John, the Johannine Epistles, and the Apocalypse. Rainbow's work is primarily concerned with organizing the ideas scattered throughout the five Johannine writings and integrating them to present a coherent Johannine theology that revolves around the main characters and their relationships.<sup>73</sup>

Of all the chapters in this book, he dedicates two exclusively to the discussion of soteriology, delving into the saving relationship between the believer and Christ as God's agent. Rainbow initially addresses how one gains access to salvation, specifically, how one comes to Christ, with the main emphasis on God's relationship with the

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<sup>72</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 155.

<sup>73</sup> Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 31.

individual Christian.<sup>74</sup> However, he underscores that merely coming to Christ, or attaining eternal life in the here and now, does not provide a complete picture of salvation. It necessitates an additional element to experience the eternal life in its fullness: abiding in Christ and walking with him by following, imitating, and obeying him.<sup>75</sup> Thus, by recognizing both the present and future dimension of salvation, he not only comprehends the Johannine concept of salvation as already inaugurated but also as awaiting consummation.

Rainbow contributes to Johannine soteriology through his balanced view on the interrelationship of the various components of salvation, such as divine grace, faith, and works. According to Rainbow, the basic paradigm of salvation remains the same under the new covenant as under the old, in that keeping covenant stipulations is a precondition for salvation. However, under the new covenant, God commits to renewing his subjects so that they may fulfill this requirement and turns the covenantal duty of his vassals into one basic requirement for salvation—faith.<sup>76</sup> From faith, obedience naturally flows and fulfills the ongoing requirements for salvation. This is what Rainbow calls “the twofold structure of John’s scheme of soteriology.” Faith lays hold of salvation; continuation in Jesus’s word completes it.<sup>77</sup>

Rainbow understands the notion of divine grace in salvation in Revelation to be expressed primarily in terms of the rescue from the state of condemnation (Rev 12:10–11), the forgiveness of sins (1:5), the redemption (5:9; 14:3, 4), and the cleansing from sin (7:14; 22:14).<sup>78</sup> He further argues that John certainly affirms, in words different from Paul, God’s sovereignty in saving people, signifying that salvation begins with God’s

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<sup>74</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 273.

<sup>75</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 313.

<sup>76</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 318–19.

<sup>77</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 314.

<sup>78</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 276–77.

purpose, not with people seeking God as illustrated by the picture of the Lamb's book of life.<sup>79</sup>

He further explains that Revelation uses a significant amount of figurative language to delineate the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, especially focusing on how the former enables the latter. For instance, Revelation figuratively describes this relationship through the images of Christ holding the lampstands in his right hand (1:16, 20; 2:1), protecting believers from the eschatological plagues (3:10; 7:1–3; 9:4), and stimulating them to repent (3:19).<sup>80</sup> He argues, by emphasizing both divine grace and human responsibility for salvation, that a concurrence of both divine and human elements is an inescapable condition for an individual to attain ultimate salvation.<sup>81</sup> He adds that the saints will persevere because God preserves them, meaning that divine agency operates precisely through the agency of their faithful perseverance, with God's actions always being anterior to what human beings do.<sup>82</sup> In addition, he provides special insight into the soteriological relevance of believers' conquering when he comments on Revelation 21:6b–8: "Salvation is gratuitous, yet the one who will inherit the blessings of the new creation is 'he who conquers.'" <sup>83</sup>

In summary, Rainbow correctly recognizes the necessity of both divine and human factors for a saved person to attain final salvation. He also acknowledges that human responsibility is enabled by divine grace, though he does not elaborate on how this is made possible. His work's primary point of relevance for the argument of this dissertation emerges from his recognition of the nature of believers' conquering as human

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<sup>79</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 286.

<sup>80</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 346.

<sup>81</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 346.

<sup>82</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 346.

<sup>83</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 315.

responsibility in salvation.

*Fred D. Layman*

Layman's main argument is that the book of Revelation, despite its many distinguishing features, stands well within the mainstream of NT soteriology when carefully studied.<sup>84</sup> His study is made up of three major sections. The first section explores the significance of Christ's redemptive work carried out within the historical arena. Next, Layman investigates how salvation can be experienced in the present as liberation from sin, the "already" of salvation, because of the redemptive work of Christ. The last part examines how numerous passages of Revelation look forward to the time of the consummation—the "not yet" of final salvation.

Therefore, his understanding of salvation in Revelation is Christocentric. Especially, he correctly acknowledges the redemptive significance of Christ's conquest of all his enemies carried out through his death and resurrection, through which the eschatological salvation has broken into history, bringing about the experience of salvation in the present as liberation from sin.<sup>85</sup> A natural corollary of Christ's accomplished conquest is Christians' experience of salvation in the present as liberation from sin and as conquest in spiritual conflict enabled by the accomplished victory of Christ (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7).<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, Layman insightfully delineates the ideas of divine grace and human responsibility for salvation implied in the conquering language by interpreting them in light of the bridal imagery symbolizing the church in 19:7. He argues that just as the church prepares for final salvation by appropriating the sanctifying and cleansing work of Christ through human response and acceptance, so must believers obey the

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<sup>84</sup> Layman, "An Inquiry into Soteriology," 226.

<sup>85</sup> Layman, "An Inquiry into Soteriology," 228–30.

<sup>86</sup> Layman, "An Inquiry into Soteriology," 230.

exhortations to the conquerors (2–3) through the gracious enabling of the Lord to attain the final salvation.<sup>87</sup> He further explains that John does not attempt to advocate, by reference to this bridal imagery, salvation by works, for human obedience is not the cause of divine grace in salvation but rather the condition of its effective reception. This is no more than the fruit of faith and union with Christ and the appropriate response to his working and empowerment.<sup>88</sup>

Overall, Layman is relatively explicit about the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. He does not simply explain away this intricate relationship but explains well how both divine grace and human responsibility are intimately bound up with each other and are necessary for the acquisition of final salvation. Also, he correctly notes the soteriological significance of the conquering motif in Revelation as it relates to the ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, with the conquest of Christ referring to the work of divine grace and the conquering of believers referring to human responsibility for salvation. In addition, he further explains how the former is the cause of the latter and the latter the consequence of the former, emphasizing divine grace as the sole efficient cause of salvation. However, Layman’s work leaves room for further exploration of this theme in a more systematized fashion.

### *Christopher Rowland*

Rowland provides unique insights into the soteriology of Revelation through the lens of the judgment scene in Matthew 25:31. His essay intends to explore how the book of Revelation prompts readers to examine various assumptions concerning the identity of insiders and outsiders in the divine economy and compare them with the

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<sup>87</sup> Layman, “An Inquiry into Soteriology,” 245.

<sup>88</sup> Layman, “An Inquiry into Soteriology,” 245–46.

judgment scene in Matthew 25:31.<sup>89</sup> To be more specific, Rowland claims that just as the Gospel of Matthew leaves its readers uncertain about who will be among the sheep or the goats, the book of Revelation does not allow its readers to be complacent about their salvation when facing the prospect of final judgment.<sup>90</sup>

For Rowland, the trait that truly defines an insider is non-conformity with the values of the beast and Babylon; mere confession or membership in the church does not allow certainty of one's status of destiny.<sup>91</sup> Even though he does not delve into the details of the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, his brief analysis of Revelation 15 provides a glimpse into the soteriological significance of human behavior. Rowland argues, by reference to the phrase "those who had conquered the beast"<sup>92</sup> (Rev 15:2), that this phraseology, an equivalent expression to believers' redemptive crossing of the threatening sea to God's side, describes the significance of human behavior. While this is a helpful insight into the soteriological significance of believers' act of conquering as a metaphor, denoting human responsibility for salvation, he does not go any further to address the issue of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation.

*Charles H. Talbert*

Talbert's article, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness in the Revelation of John Viewed within Its Apocalyptic Context," seeks to challenge the conventional claim that salvation in Revelation sometimes appears to be based on one's own deeds rather than on the grace of God.<sup>93</sup> He argues against this view by proposing an

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<sup>89</sup> Rowland, "The Lamb and the Beast, the Sheep and the Goats," 181.

<sup>90</sup> Rowland, "The Lamb and the Beast, the Sheep and the Goats," 188.

<sup>91</sup> Rowland, "The Lamb and the Beast, the Sheep and the Goats," 189.

<sup>92</sup> Bible verses cited in this dissertation will be my own translation of *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th ed., unless otherwise specified.

<sup>93</sup> Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 265.

alternate argument that Christian faithfulness between the beginning of discipleship and its consummation is enabled only by God's special grace. He argues that the dominant divine assistance is the revelation of the knowledge of the certainty of history's outcome. This analysis is based on the premise that the desired behavior of believers can be achieved if they knew the certain outcome of history involving God's ultimate victory and judgment with its accompanying rewards and punishments.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Talbert includes the following images in his list of additional aids: (1) the sealing of the servants of God (7:1–8) as conveying the idea of ownership and protection; (2) measuring of the inner courts of the Temple (11:1–2) linked with the idea of divine protection or the empowering of believers; (3) and the descent of the new Jerusalem (21:2, 10) as a symbol of a city not built with human hands.<sup>95</sup>

To substantiate his thesis, Talbert surveys several selected apocalypses, both Jewish and Christian, and examines their perspectives on the divine enablement of human faithfulness as applied to Revelation. After conducting a detailed comparative analysis, he concludes that in the book of Revelation, as in other Jewish and Christian apocalypses that reflect apocalyptic eschatology, the overriding motivation for human faithfulness is precise knowledge of future judgment, with its rewards and punishments.<sup>96</sup>

Talbert's essay is certainly a welcome addition to the soteriological studies of Revelation. It firmly situates Revelation within the broader NT soteriology by explicitly emphasizing the concept of "staying in" salvation as made possible only by divine enablement. Thus, he correctly recognizes the elements of divine grace and human responsibility in the context of Revelation. More importantly, he spells out the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility for salvation, especially how

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<sup>94</sup> Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 275.

<sup>95</sup> Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 280–81.

<sup>96</sup> Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 282.

divine grace enables the human response to God.

*Brenda B. Colijn*

In her discussion of soteriology in Revelation, Colijn brings together various aspects of salvation discussed thus far by other scholars to provide quite a balanced view on the image of salvation in Revelation. She argues that the primary image of salvation evoked in Revelation is the contest, which depicts salvation as a life-and-death struggle for believers and urgent concern for their faithfulness amid temptation and persecution.<sup>97</sup> To be brief, her understanding of salvation in Revelation is both conditional and eschatological without losing sight of God's provision.

First, her use of terminology like "potential apostasy," "exodus generation," "covenantal relationship," "obedient faith," "covenant commitments," and "team effort" suggests the human responsibility that God demands from his faithful people based on his covenantal relationship with his people. She notes, "Final salvation is conditional upon exercising an obedient faith that trusts in God's promise to the very end."<sup>98</sup> Second, terms like "endurance," "faithfulness," "steadfastness," and "patience" portray salvation as a process and therefore yet to be consummated. Thus, she correctly understands the nature of faith as faithfulness in the context of Revelation as she states, "In Revelation, the act of believing receives less emphasis than the steadfastness of one's belief."<sup>99</sup>

Colijn provides a helpful insight into the relation between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation as she observes, though implicitly, the connection between these notions and the conquering motif as a metaphor to describe them. First, she correctly recognizes conquering as an indispensable condition for inheriting the

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<sup>97</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 300.

<sup>98</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 308.

<sup>99</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 301.



eschatological salvation in the new heavens and earth.<sup>100</sup> Second, she correctly understands the conquering language (*νικᾶω*) to denote the idea of faithfulness referring to human responsibility in salvation.<sup>101</sup> Third, she does not lose sight of the divine grace shown through the victorious death and resurrection of Christ as the source and cause of believers' victory.<sup>102</sup> However, since she touches on this issue in passing, it leaves room for further exploration.

*Daniel Mihoc*

Mihoc's short article titled "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation: A New Contribution to an Old Polemic" is one of a few studies that best elucidate both the meaning and the role of works in the soteriology of Revelation. This article begins with a critique of Martin Luther's antagonistic stance toward the book of Revelation, which was most likely sparked by his reluctance to acknowledge the role of works in salvation, just as James's teaching on works.<sup>103</sup>

Against this background, Mihoc's article intends to evaluate the "works" statements of Revelation in their context to contribute to a better understanding of the faith-works relationship in the process of salvation.<sup>104</sup> Mihoc understands well the complex nature of Revelation's soteriology. He points out that the core of Revelation's soteriology can be understood once John's portrayal of Christ and his church is grasped correctly.<sup>105</sup>

As with other scholars previously mentioned, Mihoc provides valuable insight

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<sup>100</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 304.

<sup>101</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 302.

<sup>102</sup> Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 303–4.

<sup>103</sup> Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 432.

<sup>104</sup> Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 438.

<sup>105</sup> Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 432.

into the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, noting, “Once the salvific work is done and the Church is inaugurated, humans can enter in communion with Christ and participate in his kingdom, but the entrance and the participation require action.”<sup>106</sup> To substantiate his thesis, he identifies four stages of salvation, based on his analysis of chapter 7, with the first and the last stages focusing on Christ’s/God’s actions while the middle stages belong to Christians’ actions. Consequently, Mihoc understands salvation to be synergistic, requiring active human participation through good works to fulfill God’s plan of salvation. However, he does not overlook the importance of faith as the fundament, source, and precondition of all Christian works.<sup>107</sup>

Mihoc’s view on the salvific meaning of the conquering motif as closely tied to works as a condition for salvation is beneficial for studying the role of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation in the context of Revelation. He states, “In the book of Revelation, the most used image for the accomplishment of the salvation process is that of victory.”<sup>108</sup> He then adds that the conquering motif connects Christ’s works with the Christian’s works, suggesting that just as Christ has conquered and sits on the throne of God, so too must his followers conquer to be granted the same privilege.<sup>109</sup> He concludes that the image of conquest underscores the value of acting for salvation, but it also points to Christ as the ultimate author of their victory, which expresses a parallel idea to Philippians 2:12–13, where Paul exhorts believers to “work out with fear and trembling” their own salvation.<sup>110</sup>

Mihoc offers a fruitful insight into the relationship between divine grace and

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<sup>106</sup> Mihoc, “The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” 432.

<sup>107</sup> Mihoc, “The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” 443.

<sup>108</sup> Mihoc, “The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” 440.

<sup>109</sup> Mihoc, “The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” 440.

<sup>110</sup> Mihoc, “The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation,” 443.

human responsibility in salvation. He correctly acknowledges the necessity of both divine grace and human responsibility for believers to inherit the final salvation. His view on the image of conquering as the most used image for the accomplishment of salvation in Revelation shows the potential usefulness of the conquering motif as an effective soteriological framework through which to analyze the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation in the context of Revelation.

### **The Second Group** *Richard Bauckham*

Bauckham discusses the theme of warfare within the pages of his two most acclaimed works on the book of Revelation, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*<sup>111</sup> and *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation*.<sup>112</sup> Bauckham makes a connection, albeit subtly, between the holy war motif and the theme of salvation as he discusses the theme of believers' conquering.

First, Bauckham argues that “conquering” is presented as the only way for Christians to reach their eschatological destiny.<sup>113</sup> This point is reinforced by the promise God gives to the conquerors in 21:7, in which believers are left with only two options: to conquer and inherit the eschatological promises or to suffer the second death in the lake of fire (21:8).<sup>114</sup> Bauckham interprets the core meaning of “conquering” as witnessing to the truth of God and non-conformity with the idolatrous lies of the beast, which would cause the martyrdom of every faithful Christian.<sup>115</sup> In this light, for Bauckham, the call to conquer signifies active participation in the divine purpose, and it allows no middle

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<sup>111</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 66–108.

<sup>112</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 210–37.

<sup>113</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 92.

<sup>114</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 92.

<sup>115</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 93.

ground where Christians may hope to avoid death by compromising with the beast.<sup>116</sup>

Bauckham also contends that the promises to “the one who conquers” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) function to invite the readers to participate in the eschatological war so they may gain their place in the new Jerusalem.<sup>117</sup> This argument implies an important soteriological message: eschatological salvation cannot be obtained without believers’ active participation in God’s eschatological warfare. While dealing with the theme of the messianic army (7:12–14), he further discusses this point soteriologically and implicitly indicates two different stages of redemption. In the first stage, Christians are purely passive recipients of the redemption accomplished by the death of Christ, as shown in passages 1:5b and 5:9.<sup>118</sup> However, he hints, in comparison with 12:11, the next stage of the salvation process demands the participation of Christians in the eschatological war of Christ and his victory through faithful witness to the point of martyrdom.<sup>119</sup>

According to Bauckham, in portraying the idea of apocalyptic militancy, John reinterprets the Old Testament prophecy in a Christian sense to show that God has already decisively won the battle against all evil, including the power of Rome, by the faithful witness and sacrificial death of Christ; Christians are called to participate in his war and victory by bearing witness of Jesus to the point of martyrdom.<sup>120</sup> In addition, he understands this war to be one of sovereignty between God and the devil in which believers are called to take sides with God by playing their part in resisting the evil forces that stand behind the pagan society.<sup>121</sup> He adds that to convey this idea, the imagery of

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<sup>116</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 93–94.

<sup>117</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 213.

<sup>118</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 228.

<sup>119</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 228.

<sup>120</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 234.

<sup>121</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 234.

holy war is the most effective vehicle.<sup>122</sup>

In summary, Bauckham offers helpful insights into how the holy war motif serves as the framework within which the notions of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are to be understood. However, it must be admitted that Bauckham's works do not provide any further details as to how these two concepts can be understood in relation to salvation. This is understandable, for the purpose of his study was centered on human participation in the holy war of the Lamb.

*Jan A. du Rand*

In an essay entitled "Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John," du Rand sought to provide a general analysis of the book of Revelation from a soteriological perspective. He begins with the conclusion from his survey of soteriological studies conducted by other scholars that in Revelation, the Lamb's death and Christ's victory function in the same semantic field.<sup>123</sup> From his terminological analysis of three specific soteriological terms, including *σωτηρία* (7:10, 12:10; 19:1, 2), *ἀγοράζω* (5:9; 14:3, 4), and *λύω* (1:5), he concludes that the application of these soteriological terms in Revelation indicate that God is the initiating origin of salvation, while the death of Christ the Lamb is the means through which believers are freed from sin and their identity is constituted.<sup>124</sup> His analysis of the term *σωτηρία* (7:10, 12:10; 19:1, 2) provides a point of departure for understanding the concept of salvation in Revelation as victory, as he argues that all three occurrences of *σωτηρία* are used with the undertones of victory over evil, Satan and Babylon by the sacrifice of the Lamb, carrying the Old Testament idea of victory (Exod 14:13, 30; 15:2; Ps 74:12; 106:10, 21), including his judgment over Satan (12:7–9) and Babylon (18:1–24) as part of the soteriological process. Of particular interest is his

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<sup>122</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 235.

<sup>123</sup> Du Rand, "Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John," 466.

<sup>124</sup> Du Rand, "Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John," 471.

mention of the verb νικάω. He regards νικάω, which occurs seventeen times in Revelation with Christ as its subject (e.g., 5:5), as related to the idea of victory mentioned above.<sup>125</sup>

Another central soteriological feature of Revelation, according to du Rand, is its consistent use of the exodus motif as its soteriological paradigm. He contends that Revelation portrays the oppressed believers' experience of salvation and liberation in Revelation in terms of the exodus liberation, not only from spiritual sin but also in socio-economical categories, as evident in passages like 1:5–6 and 5:9–10.<sup>126</sup>

Of all the soteriological insights provided by du Rand, the most relevant to my argument is his mention of the holy war motif as a possible soteriological background for the concept of salvation in Revelation. Du Rand explicitly mentions that the holy war motif, in combination with exodus themes, could be a possible soteriological background in Revelation.<sup>127</sup> At least four main ideas can be discerned from his discussion of the holy war motif combined with that of the exodus as a possible soteriological background in Revelation.

First, the holy war motif used in Revelation may be drawing on the tradition of an eschatological holy war. The prime example is the exodus deliverance, where God alone overthrows the Egyptians (Exod 14:13–14).<sup>128</sup> In another work titled *The Song of the Lamb Because of the Victory of the Lamb*, he mentions that the most evident example in which the war and exodus perspectives appear intertwined is Revelation 15:2–4, the scene of the heavenly Red Sea with the new exodus people singing the song of the Lamb.<sup>129</sup> This scene suggests that the holy war is all about deliverance. He adds that in

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<sup>125</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 470.

<sup>126</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 499–500.

<sup>127</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 487.

<sup>128</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488.

<sup>129</sup> Jan A. du Rand, “The Song of the Lamb Because of the Victory of the Lamb,” *Neotestamentica* 29, no. 2 (1995): 208–9.

the holy war tradition, the ideal holy war is one in which the divine warrior requires no human involvement.<sup>130</sup>

Second, the image of Messiah as a sacrificial victim alongside that of the military conqueror is to be read within a soteriological framework. He argues that the image of the Messiah as a slaughtered lamb in 5:6, immediately following the image of the Messiah as a military leader expressing Jewish hopes for messianic victory by military violence, are to be read together, indicating that Jesus delivered his people from sin and the Gentiles by defeating evil through his sacrificial death.<sup>131</sup> The combination of the 144,000 and the Lamb in 14:1–5 should also be read in the sense that holy war, as part of the process of salvation, must be fought and won by the Lamb’s sacrificial death.<sup>132</sup>

Third, the holy war motif is linked to the image of the 144,000, the great multitude, depicted in 7:2–14. He argues that the Lamb’s followers’ victory should be the same kind as that of their leader, not in the sense of nationalistic militarism.<sup>133</sup> The image of the white robes granted to the victorious believers and the washing of their robes white in the blood of the Lamb expresses the idea of soteriological victory, which is reinterpreted in terms of purification.<sup>134</sup>

Fourth, the suffering and death of Christians are described in military language as part of a holy war. He asserts that, according to Revelation’s description of believers, they not only conquer through their suffering but also through their faithful witness to the point of martyrdom.<sup>135</sup> He adds that John’s martyrological reinterpretation of holy war

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<sup>130</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488.

<sup>131</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488.

<sup>132</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488–89.

<sup>133</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488.

<sup>134</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 488.

<sup>135</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 489.

finds its roots in the Maccabean literature and the Testament of Moses, as well as in the new exodus theme of Deutero-Isaiah (53:7).<sup>136</sup>

In summary, du Rand contributes many insights to the soteriological study of Revelation. In particular, he offers important insights in regard to the use of the holy war motif combined with the exodus theme as a possible soteriological background for the concept of salvation as depicted in Revelation. Also, he has aptly shown how the concept of victory, as a core idea of the holy war motif, is used to denote the concept of salvation. However, it has to be admitted that his treatment of the holy war motif as a possible soteriological background of Revelation is insufficient and leaves much room for fuller treatment. This is understandable, for engaging with this theme in depth in such a limited space is impossible. Nevertheless, du Rand's analysis offers a good point of departure for exploring the conquering motif, the key concept of the holy war motif, as a possible soteriological framework for salvation, especially the theme of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation.

### **Summary**

The history of research presented above demonstrates the following points. First, most studies on the soteriology of Revelation consist of short essays or articles, indicating a need for a more comprehensive treatment of this area of study in Revelation. Second, all the soteriological studies surveyed above support the idea, to varying degrees, that both divine grace and human responsibility are necessary for believers to attain salvation, although they do not go into details as to how these two notions relate to each other. Third, a few scholars have provided insights into the holy war motif as an appropriate soteriological background for exploring the concept of salvation, which interprets the concept of salvation in terms of victory in Revelation. This approach

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<sup>136</sup> Du Rand, "Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John," 489.



suggests the potential usefulness of the conquering motif as an effective vehicle to study the concept of salvation in Revelation. Building on these points, this dissertation aims to develop the thesis that the conquering motif, with its roots in the holy war tradition of the Old Testament, serves as an effective soteriological framework to comprehend the apparent tension between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation as depicted in Revelation.

### **Methodology**

To achieve this goal, this dissertation will adopt four fundamental interpretive steps proposed by Jon Paulien as its primary approach. Paulien maintains that these steps must be recognized and considered when interpreting the text of Revelation: (1) make a basic exegesis of the passage under analysis; (2) examine relevant parallels in other parts of Revelation; (3) identify the Old Testament root sources of the imagery; and (4) determine whether the New Testament expands or reinterprets the meaning of those symbols in the light of the Christ event.<sup>137</sup> It should be emphasized that the third step, “finding the Old Testament influence,” and its interplay with the passage or image of Revelation under study will take priority over the other steps. I will provide the rationale for this interpretive decision when elaborating on the third step. These interpretive steps require more explanation to indicate how each one contributes to the development of my thesis.

First and foremost, this study utilizes exegetical analysis to develop the thesis. The goal of exegesis is to discover the meaning of a passage as intended by the original author.<sup>138</sup> According to David Alan Black, the exegetical process generally consists of

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<sup>137</sup> Jon Paulien, “Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 82.

<sup>138</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *New Testament Exegesis and Research: A Guide for Seminarians* (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 1999), 1.

three basic areas concerned with the question of *context, meaning, and significance*. Context largely can be divided into historical and literary context, with the historical context being related to the religious, political, and cultural situation facing the author and the original audience. The literary context concerns the way in which the text under study fits into its immediate surroundings and considers the genre of the document containing the text under analysis.<sup>139</sup> The questions of meaning are related to six areas: textual, lexical, syntactical, structural, rhetorical, and tradition-critical.<sup>140</sup> Finally, the questions of significance involve two steps: theological analysis (discerning biblical truth)<sup>141</sup> and homiletical analysis (seeking a best way to preach).<sup>142</sup> These steps will be taken into account when analyzing the conquering motif in the context of Revelation as a whole. However, additional methods are necessary, as Paulien points out, since the exegetical method does not do full justice to Revelation, yielding unsatisfying results.<sup>143</sup>

Next, examining how the symbols, structures, and wordings of a given passage are used elsewhere in Revelation is of paramount importance, for it enables a more accurate interpretation of the author's intended meaning in a given passage. Paulien argues that Revelation is known for its incredibly interwoven structure; therefore, examining such parallel structures in Revelation enables an interpreter to interpret difficult passages more accurately in the light of insights obtained from the more

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<sup>139</sup> David Alan Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry: A Practical Guide for Students and Pastors* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 65–66. According to Hagner, the literary context can be further divided into the immediate context dealing with the meaning and function of the passage under study in relation to both the preceding and following material, and the larger context dealing with the meaning and function of a passage both within section of and entirety of the book, or even in relation to other writings by the same author and the NT as a whole. Hagner, *New Testament Exegesis and Research*, 4.

<sup>140</sup> Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry*, 66.

<sup>141</sup> William J. Larkin explains that *theological exegesis* views the Bible as a closed canon of sacred Scripture, interpreting any given passage with the conviction that this is God speaking; thus, it interprets the truth of the passage within the context of the whole canon. William J. Larkin, *Greek Is Great Gain: A Method for Exegesis and Exposition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 17–18.

<sup>142</sup> Black, *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry*, 66.

<sup>143</sup> Paulien, “Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” 82.

straightforward passages.<sup>144</sup> According to Michael Kuykendall, this interpretive approach to Revelation, sometimes called *intra-textual interpretation*, is seriously neglected by many interpreters and modern Bible translations.<sup>145</sup> Thus, I will look at how the verb *νικάω*, used in different contexts throughout Revelation, shapes the overall meaning of conquering by paying close attention to how this verb used in a particular context clarifies the meaning of the other.

However, the dominant approach of this dissertation will be “the use of the Old Testament in Revelation.” Paulien notes that the next important step is to recognize that Revelation is thoroughly saturated with Old Testament language, history, and ideas, and one must subsequently determine to which passage(s) of the Old Testament John is alluding.<sup>146</sup> In another work titled *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets: Literary Allusions and the Interpretation of Revelation 8:7–12*, he equally emphasizes that Revelation, as a book thoroughly dependent on the Old Testament, makes heavy use of major aspects of Israel’s past drawn from the Prophets, the Psalms, imagery related to the exodus event, the cultus, and the covenant—virtually representing the whole history of Israel in the book.<sup>147</sup> Similarly, G. K. Beale contends that the Old Testament and Judaism are the primary background against which the images and ideas of Revelation must be understood.<sup>148</sup> If recognizing the symbolic nature of Revelation is a crucial step when approaching the interpretation of the book,<sup>149</sup> recognizing the heavy influence of the Old Testament on its symbols, images, and ideas is the key to unlocking their meanings.

It is important to note that the use of the Old Testament holy war motif belongs

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<sup>144</sup> Paulien, “Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” 83.

<sup>145</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 8.

<sup>146</sup> Paulien, “Interpreting Revelation’s Symbolism,” 83–84.

<sup>147</sup> Paulien, *Decoding Revelation’s Trumpets*, 15–16.

<sup>148</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 56.

<sup>149</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 54.

to a special category of interpretation referred to as “thematic use of the Old Testament,” falling under the umbrella of the general nomenclature “the use of the Old Testament in Revelation.” According to Beale, the author of Revelation develops important Old Testament themes in addition to alluding to specific Old Testament texts, one of which is the theme of holy war.<sup>150</sup> Jan Fekkes further clarifies the nature of the thematic use of the Old Testament in Revelation:

Analysis of John’s thematic application of Scripture suggests that his method transcends special authors and particular books. The prophet’s strategy for employing OT texts appears to be determined more by the issue concerned than by its canonical source. . . . often within a single visionary unit John brings together elements from a variety of books of isolated texts within a single OT book. Special books do not appear to play as important a role as special themes. Thus, it misses the point to ask whether the book of Daniel, Ezekiel or Isaiah is more important to John. For it is not the book or author which dictates his choice of passages, but the topic.<sup>151</sup>

Fekkes’s analysis sheds light on how one should understand the use of the holy war motif in Revelation to arrive at the correct interpretation. What matters is discerning the thematic parallels between Revelation and the Old Testament and examining how they are reinterpreted in the light of Christ’s accomplished victory through his death and resurrection rather than conducting a random study on particular lexical data, images, or symbols related to the holy war motif. Giblin takes this point further by asserting that the book of Revelation contains a high percentage of the key elements of the holy war as found in the accounts of the early wars of Israel, or perhaps all of them.<sup>152</sup> Bauckham emphasizes that John, while making lavish use of holy war language, reinterprets it in a Christian sense, transferring its meaning to a non-military sense.<sup>153</sup> He adds that John’s martyrological reinterpretation of the holy war derives from his understanding of the

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<sup>150</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 89.

<sup>151</sup> Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 102–3.

<sup>152</sup> For a comprehensive list of the key elements of the holy war as discerned by Giblin, see Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 26–27. See also von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 41–51.

<sup>153</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 233.

messianic war consistent with his Christian faith in the crucified Messiah.<sup>154</sup> Thus, recognizing John's reinterpretation of the holy war with a Christological focus is crucial to correctly understanding the use of the holy war motif in Revelation. The same principle applies to the study of the conquering motif.

One important point to be noted in reference to the use of the Old Testament in Revelation is that it recognizes the typological relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Buist Fanning states that although the typological interpretation of the Old Testament is more evident in such New Testament books as Matthew, John, Hebrews, 2 Peter, Judges, and some passages in Paul, it is equally as important in Revelation as in those books.<sup>155</sup> Robert L. Plummer spells out the significance of the New Testament authors' typological use of the Old Testament in light of the shared assumptions between the biblical authors and their contemporary readers. Even though he provides five guidelines to understanding the typological use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, I will only mention three that I regard as more relevant to the current study: (1) biblical authors assumed a continuity in God's dealings with Israel, with earlier events foreshadowing later ones; (2) God's prior actions recorded in the Old Testament find its climactic fulfillment in the New Testament; and (3) this fulfillment happens in and through the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>156</sup> These three typological assumptions underlying the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, when applied to the holy war motif, can be summarized in one sentence: *The same God, who fought victoriously on behalf of Israel, will fight once again to rescue his new covenant people through his agent Jesus Christ.*

A further methodological point to consider is that among five major

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<sup>154</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 237.

<sup>155</sup> Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 46.

<sup>156</sup> Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 2nd ed., 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 225–26. For more details on the definition and nature of typology, see G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 13–28.

approaches to interpreting Revelation,<sup>157</sup> this dissertation acknowledges that the eclectic approach does full justice to the interpretation of Revelation, including the conquering motif as the key concept of the typologically reinterpreted theme of holy war in the book. The eclectic approach draws the strengths and insights from all of the approaches and combines them in a single picture but, at the same time, limits the weaknesses of each approach.<sup>158</sup> All the approaches except for the historicist view have some benefits to offer: (1) Revelation must be interpreted in the light of the historical situation of its original audience, the seven churches (preterist); (2) the symbols must have meant something to the original audience, yet Revelation conveys timeless truth that every generation throughout the church age must apply to their own situation (idealist), suggesting that multiple fulfillments of a general pattern would occur throughout the history; and (3) Revelation recognizes future events such as final judgment and the second coming.<sup>159</sup> In this respect, Plummer rightly recognizes the usefulness of the eclectic approach for interpreting various parts of Revelation. He states, “In my opinion, parts of Revelation are read best through the preterist lens (e.g., Rev. 2–3), but most of the book should be understood according to the idealist approach. Still, in accord with futurist interpretations, some portions of Revelation await a one-time fulfillment at the end of time (e.g., Rev. 20:7–22:21).”<sup>160</sup>

Beale’s words about the eclectic approach must also be heeded before undertaking an interpretation of any passage in Revelation: “The crucial yet problematic task of the interpreter is to identify through careful exegesis and against the original

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<sup>157</sup> According to Beale, there have been four main interpretative approaches to Revelation: the preterist view, the historicist view, the futurist view, and the idealist view. To these four main approaches he adds a fifth view, which would be best called as “eclecticism” or “modified idealism.” For more details on these five major approaches, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 44–49.

<sup>158</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 5.

<sup>159</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 38.

<sup>160</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 233–34.

historical background those texts which pertain respectively to past, present, and future.”<sup>161</sup> Thus, this dissertation’s main approach will be eclecticism with more emphasis on the idealist view, for the idealist view recognizes that Revelation portrays the age-long conflict between the forces of God and of Satan,<sup>162</sup> which does justice to the typological continuity established between the holy war of ancient Israel and the transformed holy war in Revelation.

### **The Plan of Dissertation**

This study explores the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation through the lens of the conquering motif, a key concept derived from the reinterpreted Old Testament holy war theme in Revelation. Consequently, this study is organized into four major sections.

Chapter 2 examines how the conquering language applied to Christ’s redemptive victory (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) conveys the notion of divine grace in salvation. To accomplish this goal, I will first examine how the concept of salvation is primarily expressed in terms of victory in Revelation, thus proving the usefulness of the conquering motif as the primary lens through which to analyze the two important concepts related to salvation—divine grace and human responsibility. I will then examine how the three instances of the verb *νικάω* occurring in relation to Christ’s victory are used in three strategic places (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), portraying Christ as a divine warrior and reinterpreting his victory in terms of his death and resurrection. I will then look at each one of these images performs a specific soteriological function—initiation of salvation (5:5), motivation in the present (3:21), and consummation of salvation (17:14)—followed by a

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<sup>161</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 49.

<sup>162</sup> C. Marvin Pate, ed., introduction to *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*, by Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. et al., Zondervan Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 23. Another interpretive benefit that can be gained from the idealist view is that it does not follow chronological order of events, which is suitable for interpreting the symbolic visions of Revelation that often do not follow a chronological sequence.

brief study of other redemptive imagery and language denoting the idea of divine grace in salvation.

Chapters 3–5 explore the notion of human responsibility in salvation through the lens of the conquering language applied to believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2, 21:7). The main argument in these chapters is twofold. First, the conquering language applied to believers refers to “faith(fulness)” as the only human part to be played for attaining salvation. Second, this faith is not a human achievement since it is enabled by divine grace. To substantiate this argument, chapter 3 will first lay the interpretive foundation for the development of arguments in the subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 will consist of the exegetical analysis of specific passages such as 12:11 and 15:2, where the verb *νικάω* is used of believers to convey the idea of human responsibility in salvation. This chapter will conclude with a brief study of other redemptive imagery and language denoting human responsibility in salvation. Chapter 5 will investigate the role of the Spirit in enabling the conquering of believers—the human responsibility for salvation. Thus, this chapter will be an extension of what has been discussed in chapter 2, focusing on the divine enablement of human responsibility in salvation.

Chapter 6 will show the central role played by the holy war tradition of the Old Testament in shaping the soteriological argument of Revelation. I will pay close attention to how Revelation preserves the two basic typological ideas drawn from the monergistic pattern of holy war in the Old Testament and use them to shape its ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. These two basic ideas are (1) God fights on behalf of his people with no human involvement, showing that God’s saving grace is monergistic, and (2) faith on the part of God’s people is the sole requirement for achieving victory. These ideas are carried over into the conquering of Christ and that of believers to convey the ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation.

Chapter 7 synthesizes the study’s findings.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE CONQUERING OF CHRIST: DIVINE GRACE IN SALVATION

#### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the notion of divine grace in salvation conveyed by the image of Christ's conquering of the evil forces. This idea is expressed by the verb *νικάω* as applied to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ accomplished through his death and resurrection, which occurs in three strategic places (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). The main argument of this chapter is that Christ's accomplished victory through his death and resurrection, reflecting a typological parallel to the Old Testament ideal holy war in which God fights alone to deliver his people, achieves new exodus salvation for God's people. This indicates that salvation is wholly a divine gift, a result of God's absolute grace achieved through the work of his agent Jesus Christ. To substantiate this argument, this chapter endeavors to demonstrate the following points. First, salvation conceptualized as victory is best represented by the conquering motif conveyed by *νικάω*, which develops throughout Revelation as a whole. Second, the notion of Christ's victory conveyed by the verb *νικάω* in three strategic places shows that the salvation of God's people is to be attributed only to divine grace, for each one of its occurrences performs a specific soteriological function in the salvation process—initiation of salvation (5:5), motivation in the present (3:21), and its consummation (17:14), demonstrating that salvation, from beginning to end, is God's work through his agent Jesus Christ. Third, Revelation uses other salvific imagery to denote divine grace in salvation.

#### **Salvation as Victory**

The use of the term *σωτηρία* in passages like 7:10, 12:10, and 19:1 provides a

good point of departure for understanding the idea of salvation in terms of victory in Revelation. When examining how this term is treated in these passages, at least four major characteristics are discernible. First, all three instances of *σωτηρία* are found in hymnic pericopes.<sup>1</sup> This means that they are used to signal confessional doxologies, that is, praising God for his deliverance.<sup>2</sup> Second, *σωτηρία* is to be understood as “victory” rather than its ordinary meaning, “salvation.” As Steven Grabiner points out, there is a key interpretive issue revolving around whether the term *σωτηρία* carries the frequent New Testament idea of “redemption from sin,” or the final victory of God’s sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> In support of the latter view, the majority of scholars lend support to the view that *σωτηρία* must primarily be interpreted as “victory”<sup>4</sup> given the larger narrative context of holy war between God and Satan in which it is used.<sup>5</sup> Third, the use of the dative of possession τῶ θεῷ ἡμῶν and τῶ ἀρνίῳ in 7:10 and the genitive of possession τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν and τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ in 12:10<sup>6</sup> in connection with *σωτηρία* indicate that salvation

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, LNTS 511 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 123.

<sup>2</sup> Jan A. du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspective on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt, NovTSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 470.

<sup>3</sup> Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 123.

<sup>4</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2nd ed., BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1984), 100; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 225; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 431; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, Intertextual Bible Commentary (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 327; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 490; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 177; Osborne, *Revelation*, 320. For a list of the proponents of the former view, see Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 123–24.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas argues that the first occurrence of *σωτηρία* with a connotation of victory occurs within the context in which the multitude is celebrating its triumphant passage through persecution. He then goes on to claim that the other two occurrences also show that this meaning fits into their respective context, with 12:10 speaking of the victory over the dragon and 19:1 of the victory over Babylon and the persecutors of the saints. See Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 490. By the same token, Grabiner contends that John mingles the concepts of salvation and victory in his introduction of the Lamb (5:5–6) by portraying Christ as the victorious conqueror through his sacrificial death that brings victory over Satan in the cosmic war. According to Grabiner, this concept constitutes the main thrust of Revelation’s storyline. Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 124–25.

<sup>6</sup> This is opposed to Mathewson’s choice (subjective genitive); see David L. Mathewson, *Revelation: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX:

comes from God and Christ the Lamb. Fourth, *σωτηρία* is used in close connection with the “blood of the Lamb” (7:14; 12:11), suggesting that God provides salvation through the cross of Christ, who is frequently depicted in the image of the lamb in Revelation.<sup>7</sup>

Based on the brief analysis above, the following points can be inferred. First, God implements his plan of salvation through the agency of Jesus Christ. Second, Christ’s death and resurrection are the primary means through which God accomplishes his redemptive plan. Third, the use of *σωτηρία* with the undertones of victory suggests that the holy war serves as the conceptual background to Christ’s death and resurrection, with Christ fulfilling the role of divine warrior, which role was originally ascribed to God alone.<sup>8</sup> Fourth, the depiction of Christ as divine warrior indicates divine monergism in salvation, requiring no human assistance.<sup>9</sup>

Many have argued that the holy war motif is pervasive and crucial for interpreting Revelation.<sup>10</sup> David L. Barr aptly catches this point well when he observes that John constructs the narrative of Revelation on the paradigm of the impending divine

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Baylor University Press, 2016), 163, David Aune’s view that the genitive of possession in 12:10 and 19:1 is used in the same way as the dative *τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν* in 7:10 is more convincing considering the immediate context in which *σωτηρία* occurs. David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*. WBC, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word, 1998), 470.

<sup>7</sup> The word “lamb” occurs twenty-nine times, with twenty-eight referring to Christ and one to Satan’s false prophet. Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 58.

<sup>8</sup> Tremper Longman III argues that the use of the holy war motif as the conceptual background to Christ’s death and resurrection is one way that the NT uses this motif. Tremper Longman III, “The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif,” *WTJ* 44, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 302.

<sup>9</sup> Bauckham argues that the kind of holy war tradition that seems to continue from the OT into the book of Revelation is the one in which God fights alone or with his heavenly armies, which can be traced as far back as to the proto-apocalyptic passages (Isa 59:16; 63:3) and to the exodus (Exod 14:13–14). Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 210.

<sup>10</sup> For a more thorough-going treatment of the theme of divine warfare as a motif in Revelation, see Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 210–37; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67–70; Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation*; J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 38 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991); Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001); Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation*, New Covenant Commentary 18 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011).

warfare.<sup>11</sup> This perspective has also been persuasively demonstrated by scholars like Charles Homer Giblin,<sup>12</sup> Gordon D. Fee,<sup>13</sup> and Adela Yarbro Collins.<sup>14</sup> Notably, the theme of holy war serves as a significant interpretive backdrop for many key ideas and themes in Revelation, including victory, violence, and judgment.

Of all the themes associated with the holy war motif, the most prominent one is undoubtedly the theme of victory. The importance of the victory motif as the key concept of the holy war motif has been variously emphasized by scholars for interpreting Revelation.<sup>15</sup> For instance, Kenneth A. Strand contends that the “overcomer” motif throughout the entirety of Revelation as a macrodynamic theme.<sup>16</sup> In like manner, after examining several proposed themes for Revelation, Mark Wilson concludes that the coming of Jesus and the victory of the saints stand as the two central macrodynamic themes of Revelation.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, William Hendriksen views the victory of Christ and his church over the dragon and his minions as the central theme of the book. This is based on

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<sup>11</sup> David L. Barr, “Violence in the Apocalypse of John,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 291.

<sup>12</sup> Giblin asserts that the thematic of God’s holy war pervades the entire composition of Revelation. Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 29, 224.

<sup>13</sup> Fee claims that the most dominant theme throughout Revelation is that of the holy war in which God is described as divine warrior and the people of God as engaging in the warfare and that herein lies the heart of the book. Fee, *Revelation*, xiv–xv.

<sup>14</sup> Collins argues that major images and narrative patterns of Revelation are best understood in the framework of the ancient myths of combat and that the use of the combat myth in Revelation shows the book should be understood primarily within the tradition of a long-standing biblical and Jewish practice of adapting the ancient Near Eastern combat myths to interpret the conflicts in which Yahweh and his people had been engaged. Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Kenneth A. Strand argues that the “overcomer” motif is developed throughout the entire book of Revelation as a macrodynamic theme. Kenneth A. Strand, “Overcomer: A Study in the Macrodynamic of Theme Development in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 28, no 3 (1990): 249. In like manner, Mark Wilson concludes, after examining several themes that have been proposed for Revelation, that the coming of Jesus and the victory of the saints are the two macrodynamic themes of Revelation. Mark W. Wilson, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 240; Similarly, William Hendriksen argues that the core theme of Revelation is the victory of Christ and of his church over the dragon (Satan) and his helpers. William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1967), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Strand, “Overcomer,” 249.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *The Victor Sayings*, 240.

the portrayal of Christ as the Conqueror (1:18; 2:8; 5:9; 6:2; 11:15; 12:9; 14:1, 14; 15:2; 19:16; 20:4; 22:3) and Christians as conquerors, which is achieved through Christ's victory even in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges.<sup>18</sup>

Considering that the victory motif serves as the overarching theme of Revelation, I argue that the victory or the conquering motif,<sup>19</sup> which is the central concept of the holy war motif, provides an effective lens through which to study Revelation, particularly in examining the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. To elaborate, the conquering motif is the central concept of the holy war motif in Revelation, employing the key verb *νικάω* for both Christ himself and his followers who share his victory. His followers are depicted as victorious over the same enemy, Satan, and his minions.<sup>20</sup> Christ's conquest of the enemy is achieved through his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). Thus, it is soteriological in nature since the picture of Christ's redemptive work is frequently portrayed in terms of the victory in a holy war in the New Testament, mirroring the victory of Yahweh, the divine warrior, in the Old Testament, through which he delivered his people.<sup>21</sup> This is further supported by Richard Bauckham's argument that Christ's main role in Revelation is to establish God's kingdom on earth (11:15), whose inevitable outcome is both salvation and judgment.<sup>22</sup> The establishment of God's kingdom only comes through Christ's warfare against the enemy and the decisive victory he won through his death and resurrection. This concept is typologically connected to the Old Testament idea of holy war, where Yahweh fought

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<sup>18</sup> Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Hereafter, "the conquering motif" will consistently be used to avoid any confusion.

<sup>20</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Peterson argues that the picture of Christ's saving accomplishment comes from the sphere of conflict and combat between God and his enemies, which appears in the Old Testament as divine warfare theology and in the New Testament under the image of *Christus Victor*. Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 460.

<sup>22</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 67.

on behalf of his people to deliver them from their oppressors, as best exemplified in the exodus event (Exod 14–15).<sup>23</sup> The typological significance of holy war recapitulated in Revelation is that God will fight once again for the deliverance of his faithful people under the new covenant, just as he did in the past when he triumphantly fought for Israel.<sup>24</sup> I argue that this soteriological reality is best represented by the application of the verb *νικάω* to Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), describing his redemptive victory accomplished through his death and resurrection, thereby expressing the idea of divine grace in salvation.

In the following pages, I will examine how the application of *νικάω* to Christ expresses the idea of divine grace in salvation by its placement in three strategic locations, 3:21, 5:5, and 17:14, portraying the salvation of believers from beginning to end as the work of divine grace through the accomplished victory of Christ. One important interpretive issue to keep in mind is, as Bauckham rightly points out, that the conquering language applied to both Christ and believers is used in all the three stages of Christ's victory: he conquered in his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5), his followers conquer in the time before the end (12:11; 15:2), and Christ will conquer at his return (17:14).<sup>25</sup> Christ's conquering through his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5), however, can be further divided not according to the time of its occurrence, but according to the time of its application. I argue that while 5:5 depicts the timeless application of Christ's victory to all believers living throughout the church age, 3:21 specifically applies, first

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<sup>23</sup> I will not go into details at this point as to how the Old Testament holy war motif is typologically reused in Revelation since this will be the focus of chapter 6 detailing the OT influence in the reuse and reinterpretation of holy war in both NT and Revelation. For now, suffice it to say that Christ's victory over Satan through his death and resurrection is an equivalent picture to that of Yahweh fighting for his people, delivering them from the hands of their enemies.

<sup>24</sup> Hans K. Larondelle, "Armageddon: Sixth and Seventh Plagues," in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies, Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists], 1992), 379–80.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 70.

and foremost, to the believers in the historical seven churches of Asia Minor and, by extension, to the universal church. Thus, Christ's victory is applied in the present context of believers living throughout the church age.

### **The Conquering of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14): Divine Grace in Salvation**

In this section, I intend to address the question of how Christ's act of conquering relates to the concept of salvation as the gift of divine grace. The foundational arguments of this section are as follows.

First, the verb *νικάω* occurs strategically in three locations related to the image of Jesus Christ as a divine warrior (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), suggesting that he fights for his people as a divine warrior to deliver them.<sup>26</sup> Second, all three occurrences of *νικάω* applied to Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) point to the same soteriological reality: Christ's redemptive victory through his death and resurrection. Revelation portrays the accomplished victory of Christ through his death and resurrection as the primary means through which God's people are saved, reinterpreting the victory in the holy war in terms of Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>27</sup> Third, all three occurrences of *νικάω* in relation to the accomplished victory of Christ portray all three tenses of salvation, each performing a specific soteriological function: (1) the initiation (5:5); (2) motivation in the present

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<sup>26</sup> Peter S. Williamson argues that Revelation provides us with three major depictions of Jesus: the glorious son of man and ruler (1:13; 14:14), the slaughtered Lamb (5:6), and the divine warrior (19:11–16), each emphasizing different aspects of his person and work. Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 55. Each use of the verb *νικάω* in application to Christ occurs in relation to each of these three images of Christ: the glorious son of man giving the promise of salvation to the Christians in Laodicea (3:21), which is the fitting ending for Christ's address to the seven churches; the slain Lamb who redeemed his people through his death and resurrection (5:5); and the divine warrior who will come in judgment (17:14).

<sup>27</sup> Paul Middleton supports this view by noting that in each of the extended presentations of Christ—the Son of Man (1:12–20); the slain Lamb (5:1–14); and the Rider on the white horse (19:11–16)—Jesus's death forms an integral part of these lofty images. Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 586 (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 130.

context of the believers of the seven churches;<sup>28</sup> and (3) consummation (17:14). This provides convincing evidence that the entire process of Christian salvation, from beginning to end, is accomplished by divine grace alone through the agency of Christ, the divine warrior. To substantiate the arguments presented above, I will examine each occurrence of the verb *νικάω* as applied to Jesus.

### **The Conquering of Christ in 3:21**

#### *The Identity of Christ: The Son of Man as Divine Warrior*

The first use of *νικάω* in connection with Christ's victory through his death and resurrection is found in 3:21, which reads: 'Ο νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς καὶ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

Determining who Christ is in Revelation 2–3 is crucial as it illuminates the intended meaning of addresses to the believers of the seven churches. My contention is that the promises and judgments proclaimed by the exalted Christ to the seven churches are the proclamations of the coming divine warrior. This argument is grounded on the following points.

To begin with, the martial character of *ἐνίκησα* (“I conquered”) indicates that the exalted Christ speaks as a divine warrior to the believers in the seven churches, specifically addressing those in Laodicea. Bauckham argues that the image of conquering in Revelation unmistakably carries a militaristic tone, closely linked with the language of battle (11:7; 12:7–8, 17; 13:7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19), though interpreters of Revelation do not always acknowledge this aspect.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> I will provide a fuller discussion of the application of salvation to believers in the present beginning with chapter 3, for it is closely related to human responsibility in salvation.

<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69. This point is further supported by Craig Koester's argument that the language of conquering as applied to the Christians of the seven churches in Asia Minor anticipates scenes of holy war, where local issues facing the churches become part of a cosmic battle. Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 270. In addition, the use of *νικάω* in Revelation 3:21b in application to Christ as well as in 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21 in application to the Christians



Furthermore, the self-description of Christ in Revelation 2–3 is drawn from Revelation 1, which portrays the exalted Christ with the attributes of a divine warrior. According to Beale, passages like 2:12, 16 and 2:18, 22–23, 26, 27 depict Christ with the attributes of the son of man from 1:13–16, interpreting them as denoting the idea of judgment.<sup>30</sup> The assertion that the words of the exalted Christ addressed to the seven churches throughout the whole discourse of Revelation 2–3 are the proclamations of Christ depicted as a divine warrior in 1:13–16 is further strengthened by their link, from a syntagmatic point of view, to the present participle λέγων in 1:17. This implies that the whole unit of Revelation 2–3 is a continuous utterance of a celestial being — “one like a son of man”—in the form of a prophetic oracles.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, the Danielic portrait of the divine warrior underlies the description of the exalted Christ as “one like a son of man” (1:13). According to Hans K. LaRondelle, John’s inaugural vision (1:12–20), particularly the designation of the exalted Christ as “one like a son of man,” is an apocalyptic expression derived from Daniel’s vision of the messianic king-judge.<sup>32</sup> Tremper Longman III equally emphasizes that this designation is an allusion to Daniel 7:13–14.<sup>33</sup> He adds further insight by referencing Christ’s return on clouds (1:7), that the New Testament references to Christ’s return on clouds indicate his role as the divine warrior, with clouds being strongly associated with

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clearly refers to winning in a battle or contest. William Arndt et al., “Νικάω,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 673. Contra Wilson, *The Victor Sayings*, 85, who argues that the military imagery is a secondary aspect of the victor imagery and that the victor sayings fit best with the related imagery of ancient games—wreaths, palm branches, and white robes.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 777.

<sup>31</sup> Dong Yoon Kim, “Νικάω as an Over-Arching Motif in Revelation” (PhD diss., University of St Andrews, 2009), 137–38.

<sup>32</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible: A Biblical-Contextual Approach* (Bradenton, FL: First Impressions, 2007), 70.

<sup>33</sup> Tremper III Longman, *Revelation through Old Testament Eyes, A Background and Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022), 43.

the Old Testament idea of war chariot and his warring activity.<sup>34</sup> G. K. Beale underscores the significance of the use of Daniel 7 in Revelation 1 as follows. First, Christ is viewed as the one who has initiated the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel 7 concerning the son of man's reception of authority to rule over the divine kingdom, with Revelation 1:13–16, 20 showing Christ's present position of sovereignty among the suffering churches of his kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Second, the prediction of the rule of the saints, as depicted in Daniel 7, has reached its initial fulfillment (1:6, 9).<sup>36</sup>

Based on the interpretation of Daniel 7 provided by these scholars, it can be said that Christ unquestionably presents himself as both the sovereign king and divine warrior to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3.<sup>37</sup> John first employs the aorist verb ἐνίκησα (“I conquered”) for Christ in 3:21, signifying the redemptive victory he achieved on the cross. This verse is strategic as it contains the final words of promise uttered by

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<sup>34</sup> Longman, “The Divine Warrior,” 297.

<sup>35</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 177.

<sup>36</sup> Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 177.

<sup>37</sup> It is surprising that almost no scholarly attention has been given to the identification of Christ as divine warrior in his address to the church in Laodicea. Presumably, it is because there is already a consensus that the identity and the role of Christ in the entire unit of Revelation 2–3 is that of the sovereign judge over the seven churches. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 146; Brighton, *Revelation*, 63; Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 92; Osborne, *Revelation*, 38; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1219; Jan Lambrecht, *Collected Studies on Pauline Literature and on the Book of Revelation*, AnBib 147 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2001), 382; Jan A. Du Rand, *Johannine Perspective: Introduction to the Johannine Writings, Part 1* (Halfway House: Orion, 1997), 314; Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 44; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 95. However, the role of Christ as both the judge and the divine warrior cannot be separated in Revelation 2–3. According to Leivestad, in the portrait of Christ as the Son of Man, the royal functions of judge and military commander are inseparable. Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 219. In addition, some scholars successfully identify the role of Christ as divine warrior in Revelation 2–3 but all too often tend to limit it only to such churches as Pergamum and Thyatira, where the idea of judgment, that is, the concept of divine warrior's fighting against the unfaithful people of God is explicitly present. Tremper Longman III and Daniel Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 188; Osborne, *Revelation*, 37; Roy R. Millhouse, “Re-Imaging the Warrior: Divine Warrior Imagery in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2012), 321–28. The point of the negative image of divine warrior is clear. It serves as a warning to those tempted to compromise their faith in Christ and a poignant reminder that the Lord of the second covenant is the same as the Lord of the first, zealous for the holiness of his people. Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 188.

Christ as the divine warrior for the conquerors, marking the apex of the vision of the seven messages.<sup>38</sup> Laszlo Gallusz argues that 3:21, serving as the conclusion of the seven messages vision, climaxes the promises of these messages by portraying God, Christ, and the conquerors on the throne.<sup>39</sup> Christ fulfills the roles of the sovereign king and the divine warrior in line with the Danielic vision of the Son of Man.

*Soteriological Function of ἔνικησα  
in 3:21: Motivation*

The soteriological value of ἔνικησα, as used in 3:21, should not merely be sought in the past victory of Christ on the cross. Instead, its distinctive soteriological function is performed in the present context of the lives of the believers in Laodicea, all the seven churches of Asia Minor, and, by extension, the universal church. Therefore, my argument is that ἔνικησα, employed in 3:21, performs a specific function in motivating not only the believers in Laodicea but all believers of the seven churches in Asia Minor and, by expansion, the universal church. This motivation aims to guide them in fulfilling all the requirements set forth by the exalted Christ and ultimately reach their eschatological destiny.

The point mentioned above requires further elaboration. Scholars such as du Rand, Strand, and Wilson have variously emphasized the close relationship between Revelation 2–3 and 21–22, highlighting that the eschatological blessings promised in chapters 2–3 find fulfillment in chapters 21–22.<sup>40</sup> In this context, ἔνικησα, positioned at the high point of the seven messages, performs an important rhetorical function by propelling the Christians of the seven churches toward their eternal inheritance—the

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<sup>38</sup> Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, LNTS 487 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 183.

<sup>39</sup> Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 267.

<sup>40</sup> Jan A. du Rand, “The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation: Text (Rev 21:1–22:5) and Intertext,” *Neotestamentica* 38, no 2 (2004): 277; Strand, “Overcomer,” 241; Wilson, *The Victor Sayings*, 173.

eschatological salvation. Several scholars support the rhetorical function of the conquering language in Revelation 2–3. For example, Stuart argues that John’s primary rhetorical goal is to motivate his audience to conquer, with every part of the book designed to transform them into conquerors.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, after examining various possible functions of “the conqueror sayings,” Wilson concludes that the three most likely functions consistent with the analysis of the form of the letters are “the eschatological,” “paraenetic,” and “prophetic.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, placed within the paraenetic and motivational context of 2–3, ἐνίκησα, a pointer to the salvation brought about by the victory of Jesus on the cross, serves as the core component of Christ’s exhortation to believers, propelling them toward their eschatological destiny.<sup>43</sup>

To elaborate on how exactly ἐνίκησα functions as an exhortation motivationally grounded in the accomplished victory of Christ, the answer is threefold. Firstly, ἐνίκησα conveys the finality of the victory that Christ achieved on the cross.<sup>44</sup> Based on the finality of the victory he accomplished as the divine warrior, Christ provides full assurance of ultimate victory to believers, assuring them that they will surely attain their eschatological salvation as long as they place complete faith in him and obey his words.<sup>45</sup> This idea is expressed through the formulaic expression ὁ νικῶν (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12,

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<sup>41</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Wilson, *The Victor Sayings*, 254.

<sup>43</sup> Stewart argues that soteriology is the primary motivating factor in the argumentation of the apocalypse; John presents salvation as a future event that would not decisively culminate until Christ’s return in order to motivate his hearers to overcome in the present through complete faithfulness to Jesus unto death. Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, 5–6.

<sup>44</sup> According to Charles Sherlock, the several battle narratives recorded in Revelation do not concern distinct events but are literary means of presenting different facets of a single, all-encompassing victory. Charles Sherlock, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture*, RSCT 6 (Lewiston, NY: Rutherford House, 1993), 365. He adds that it is not a question of two conflicts, that of the Lamb and that of others, because (1) the final victory depends on the inaugural victory of the Lamb together with the victory he makes possible for the vast throng of martyrs, and (2) seeing an inaugural victory of suffering followed by a final victory of destructive conquest would call into question the whole character of the work of the Lamb. Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 371.

<sup>45</sup> The idea of human responsibility is deeply related to the concept of faith and works, which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter.

21). In other words, Christ, the divine warrior, commands the believers of the church in Laodicea, as well as the other six churches, to make choices, take actions, and live in the light of the upcoming consummation of Christ’s eschatological victory.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, *ἐνίκησα* reveals both the type and nature of the victory that believers must win to inherit the final salvation. Christ’s conquering provides an example for believers to emulate. He is the model for the victory of believers.<sup>47</sup> The believers in both the church of Laodicea and the other six churches will not automatically gain the right to salvation through their own works unless their lives conform to the pattern of Christ’s life. This demonstrates an important aspect of divine grace in salvation: even as the way to entry into salvation was Jesus, he still remains the way to “staying in salvation” in the present and toward its future consummation.

Third, in connection with the preceding point, the conquering language *ἐνίκησα* in 3:21 sheds light on the relationship between Christ’s conquering (*ἐνίκησα*; 3:21) and that of believers (*ὁ νικῶν*; 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), highlighting the military unity between Christ himself and believers, with Christ victory serving as the foundation for the victory of believers. The promise statement given to the believers of the church in Laodicea in 3:21 can be divided into two parts as follows:

Table 1. The promise statement given to the believers of the Laodicean church

(a) Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσει μετ’ ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου
(b) ὡς καὶ γὰρ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρὸς μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.

<sup>46</sup> Abner Chou analyzes that Revelation 2–3 do not merely contain practical applications for the church but rather they express how the churches ought to live in light of the upcoming consummation of Christ’s eschatological victory. Abner Chou, *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 196. My view is that *ἐνίκησα* does not merely emphasize the pastness of the victory Christ won on the cross, thus an event completed at a historical point, but also the completeness of his victory including past, present, and future.

<sup>47</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 215.

As observed here, the connection between (a) and (b) is established by the particle  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ , and the analogy it draws between the conquering of Christ and that of believers suggests that the victory of believers must mirror the victory won by Christ himself, or they will not inherit the eternal blessing of eschatological salvation. To be more specific, Jesus Christ, by emphasizing the military unity between himself and believers established by the particle  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ , is paraenetically alerting the Christians in Laodicea, assisting them in awakening to the eternal significance of their earthly participation in the Messianic warfare.<sup>48</sup>

However, the expression “the one who conquers” ( $\delta\ \nuικ\acute{\alpha}\omega\nu$ ) should not be seen merely as a human attempt to earn salvation but rather as a product of divine grace. This is because it is something made possible by divine agency—the conquering of Christ ( $\acute{\epsilon}\nuικ\eta\sigma\alpha$ ). This implication is evident in the use of the particle  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma$ , connecting the conquering of believers and that of Christ. The victory of Christ is the ultimate cause of, and absolute basis for believers’ victory.<sup>49</sup> Believers’ victory is a soteriological consequence, not a soteriological accomplishment. Thus, Christ not only motivates believers, emphasizing their responsibility to participate in his victory to gain the final salvation, but also assures them that he will grant them this victory by empowering them to achieve this goal.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Dong Yoon Kim argues that John paraenetically uses the term “conquering” as a key word of the messianic war to alert the Christians in the seven churches to the eternal significance of the churches’ earthly participation in the messianic warfare. Kim, “Νικᾶω as an Over-Arching Motif,” 159.

<sup>49</sup> Drawing on the similarities between 3:21 and 12:11, Friedrich Dürstler argues the relationship between  $\delta\ \nuικ\acute{\alpha}\omega\nu$  and the  $\acute{\omega}\varsigma\ \acute{\kappa}\acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega\ \acute{\epsilon}\nuικ\eta\sigma\alpha$  in 3:21 is entirely analogous to the relationship described in the presentation of the victory of believers and that of the Lamb in 12:11, where the blood of the Lamb is described as the cause of the victory of the redeemed. Friedrich Dürstler, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, CECNT (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 349.

<sup>50</sup> I will discuss “the divine enablement of human responsibility in salvation” in more detail in chapters 3–5.

*The Exalted Christ: The Sign of Christ's Death and Resurrection*

The aorist verb ἐνίκησα used in 3:21 doubtless refers to the victory of Christ achieved through his death and resurrection. This is evident because the aorist form of the verb νικάω is consistently used in Revelation in reference to a completed action, either Christ' accomplished victory through his death and resurrection or the conquering of believers to the point of death in imitation of Christ.<sup>51</sup> However, a close examination of the immediate context of 3:21 provides clues that Christ's conquering is what granted him the right to sit on the divine throne with God the Father. This is indicated by the link between two aorist verbs ἐνίκησα ("conquered") ἐκάθισα ("sat"), with the idea of enthronement being associated with the latter verb.<sup>52</sup> From this, it can be inferred that the exaltation of Christ to the throne of God is the result of his conquering accomplished through his death and resurrection.<sup>53</sup>

As noted earlier, the entire discourse of Revelation 1:17–3:22 comprises the words spoken by the exalted Christ, the divine warrior, to the believers of the seven churches. It has also been observed that passage 1:13–16 virtually portrays Christ as the Son of Man, the coming divine warrior, to whom various divine attributes are ascribed, attributes originally reserved for God. Unsurprisingly, these passages are filled with numerous depictions and titles of the exalted Christ, emphasizing his presence with the Father in a glorified status.

More importantly, some of these titles and depictions metaphorically describe

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<sup>51</sup> For example, the aorist tense ἐνίκησεν in Revelation 5:5 signifies that the conquest was accomplished once and for all at an historical point, in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Fred D. Layman, "Salvation in the Book of Revelation," in *An Inquiry in the Book of Revelation from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton, NovTSup (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1981), 228. Another example is 12:11 in which ἐνίκησαν is used in reference to the conquest of the Christians. Layman argues that only when Christians are viewed from the perspective of having completed their earthly pilgrimage is the aorist tense used. Layman, "Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 235.

<sup>52</sup> Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 180.

<sup>53</sup> The idea of conquering through Christ's death and resurrection is most evident, as I will discuss shortly, in Revelation 5:5–6, where the conquering of Christ is interpreted in the light of the image of Christ as the slain lamb, suggesting Christ conquered through his death and resurrection.

the exalted status of Christ as a direct result of his death and resurrection. The clearest reference to the death and resurrection of Christ in connection with his exalted status is found in 1:18—ὁ ζῶν (“I am the Living One”) and ἔχω τὰς κλεῖς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾄδου (“I have the keys of Death and Hades”).

According to Buist Fanning, it is not until 1:18 that the identification of the figure of the Son of Man (1:13–16) as Jesus Christ becomes explicit.<sup>54</sup> 1:17b–18, as part of the literary unit 17b–20, interprets the vision of the Son of Man by first providing the Son of Man’s self-descriptions.<sup>55</sup> He initially calls himself the “first and last,” self-designations of Yahweh frequently found in the book of Isaiah (Isa 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).<sup>56</sup> It is significant that the divine title of God mentioned in both Isaiah and Revelation 1:8 is now applied to Christ because of his death and resurrection, which has placed him in his exalted office.<sup>57</sup> Jon K. Newton argues in support of this view that the self-designation of Christ, “I am the Living One” (1:18:a), a claim of deity, and the phrase “I became dead and behold, I am alive forever and ever” (1:18:b) work in tandem to refer to the death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>58</sup> Louis Brighton nicely summarizes the significance of Christ’s glorified status as a result of his death and resurrection: “...as he sees Christ he is reminded that his Lord is now in this glory because he has completed his mission through his death and resurrection.”<sup>59</sup> This mission, in the light of the close connection between the conquering of Christ (ἐνίκησα) and his exaltation to the throne of God (ἐκάθισα) described in 3:21, most probably refers to the accomplished victory of Christ through his

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<sup>54</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 99.

<sup>55</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

<sup>56</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

<sup>57</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

<sup>58</sup> Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, ed. Christopher L. Carter, Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 73.

<sup>59</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 49.



death and resurrection.

In addition to Christ's self-description "I am the living one," his claim "I have the keys of Death and Hades" further reinforces the idea that Christ's exalted status is achieved through his death and resurrection. Newton asserts that this phrase does not merely describe a resuscitated corpse but, rather, it portrays Christ's unique position of power and authority granted to him as a consequence of his death and resurrection.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Brian K. Blount argues that the consequence of Christ's resurrection goes beyond describing his eternal status to emphasizing his uniquely empowered status. This means that his possession of the keys represents his ability to control the process of judgment and salvation.<sup>61</sup> It is against this background of Christ's sovereignty that the exhortation "do not fear" (μὴ φοβοῦ; 1:17) must be understood. Beale explains that the expression μὴ φοβοῦ in 1:17 not only seems to refer to Christ's exhortation not to be afraid of his exalted appearance but also of the suffering because of trust in Christ's victory over death and consequent supremacy over history, as shown by the same formula μὴ φοβοῦ used in the exhortation to the church in Smyrna (2:8–11).<sup>62</sup>

Based on the evidence provided above, it can be concluded that the image of the exalted Christ represents his death and resurrection. More precisely, it indicates that his glorified status is achieved as a consequence of his death and resurrection. This relationship is most observable in the link between ἐνίκησα ("conquered") and ἐκάθισα ("sat") in 3:21, signifying that Christ's victory is accomplished through his death and resurrection.

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<sup>60</sup> Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 73.

<sup>61</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 46.

<sup>62</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 214.

## The Conquering of Christ in 5:5

### *The Identity of Christ: The Slain Lamb as Divine Warrior*

The term *νικάω* occurs again in Revelation 5:5 in reference to the second extended vision of Christ. This section is a second strategic place, which provides a detailed portrait of Christ as the divine warrior through the image of the Lion/Lamb.<sup>63</sup>

The verse reads as follows: “καὶ εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων λέγει μοι· μὴ κλαῖε, ἰδοὺ ἐνίκησεν ὁ λέων ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαβὶδ, ἀνοῖξαι τὸ βιβλίον καὶ τὰς ἑπτὰ σφραγίδας αὐτοῦ.” These verses are situated in the throne-room vision scene comprised by chapters 4–5, which serves as the broader context of verse 5:5.

Many commentators and interpreters agree that these chapters serve as the book’s theological center, playing a pivotal role in understanding the entire book of Revelation.<sup>64</sup> They are interconnected and, as noted by Blount, are intended to be read as a unit.<sup>65</sup> For example, Beasley-Murray argues that chapters 4–5 can be regarded as the fulcrum of the Revelation.<sup>66</sup> In response to Beasley-Murray’s argument, Smalley offers a more detailed explanation of what is meant by the phrase “fulcrum of the Revelation.” He explains that chapters 4–5, in relation to chapters 1–3, provide a fuller understanding of the Christ who is seen in glory during the vision of Revelation 1 and walks among the lampstands of the seven churches in Asia Minor recorded in chapters 2–3. In relation to the rest of the book (6–22), they signal the initiation of a series of messianic judgments,

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<sup>63</sup> As previously noted, the term *νικάω* occurs three times in reference to Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), which in turn, is related in various ways to the three main portraits of Christ: (1) the Son of Man (1:12–20); (2) the Lion/Lamb (5:1–12); and (3) the Divine Warrior (19:11–16).

<sup>64</sup> David L. Mathewson, *A Companion to the Book of Revelation*, Cascade Companions (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 57; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 164; Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors*, 84; Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. John E. Alsup, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 68; James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse*, Biblical Interpretation Series 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 105; M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 102.

<sup>65</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 108.

which follows immediately (6:1–17; 8:1–5) and lead to the final coming of Christ and the descent of the city of God to earth (21–22).<sup>67</sup>

Set within this context, “the conquering of Christ” conveyed by the aorist verb ἐνίκησεν in 5:5 is closely related to the concept of divine grace in salvation, as the image of the Lamb” plays a dominant role in the soteriology of Revelation.<sup>68</sup> In particular, the Lamb is depicted as having inaugurated the new Exodus salvation, as evidenced in 5:9–11. The key action of the Lamb that brings about the new Exodus redemption is his accomplished victory through his death and resurrection (5:5), which is further confirmed by the blood imagery in 5:9.<sup>69</sup>

But who is the Lamb that brings about the new exodus salvation? The short answer to this question is that the Lamb is presented, in continuity with the image of Christ as “the Son of Man” (1:12–20), in this scene as Divine Warrior. The validity of this assertion is supported by several scholars. For instance, Osborne argues that there is a distinct divine warrior aspect to the Lamb motif in 5:5–6, as John employs a transformation technique in those texts by switching from the image of a lion to the lamb to the slain lamb to the conquering ram.<sup>70</sup> Also, Longman asserts that the messianic title “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (5:5) identifies the slain Lamb with the Davidic warrior Messiah, who is described in Revelation as a figure of strength and warfare (6:17; 17:14).<sup>71</sup> According to Johns, the reason why the Lamb in Revelation can be said to be a

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<sup>67</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 110.

<sup>68</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 480.

<sup>69</sup> According to the context of 5:9–10, the new exodus redemption is effected by the death and the blood of the Lamb. This is simply another way of expressing the same reality already implied in the aorist verb ἐνίκησεν used in 5:5.

<sup>70</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 256.

<sup>71</sup> Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 181–82. Along the same lines, Kuykendall interprets that the messianic title “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” reveals Christ as Judah’s greatest descendent and the one with the sovereign power to be the conquering divine warrior. Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 223.

description of Divine Warrior is because his victory is consistently portrayed in terms of his death and resurrection, which forges a new understanding of the means by which one conquers.<sup>72</sup> Owens, in his book review of *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus* by Dan Lioy, critiques that Lioy devotes little (if any) attention to the Apocalypse's use of "divine warrior" traditions, with 5:5–6 being one of the key texts to study.<sup>73</sup> In addition, there is further evidence that shows the identity of the Lamb to be that of the divine warrior—the scriptural background behind the throne-room vision.

Daniel 1, Ezekiel 1–2, and Isaiah 6 have been proposed for the possible background of the throne-room vision.<sup>74</sup> All three of these books are commonly known to be "apocalyptic books" of the Old Testament.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, as Longman has pointed out, Revelation draws heavily on the imagery of divine warrior from the Old Testament apocalyptic books.<sup>76</sup> This suggests that the image of Christ as the slaughtered lamb portrays him as the typological fulfillment of the coming of the divine warrior predicted in the apocalyptic portion of the prophetic books mentioned above, illustrating the divine monergism in salvation. Of all those apocalyptic texts describing the future coming of the divine warrior, Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1 deserve particular attention.

As far as the first section of the throne-room vision (4:1–5:1) is concerned, the

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<sup>72</sup> Loren L. Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse of John: An Investigation into Its Origins and Rhetorical Force*, WUNT 2. Reihe 167 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 183, 185.

<sup>73</sup> Mark D. Owens, review of *The Book of Revelation in Christological Focus*, by Dan Lioy, *Faith and Mission* 23, no 1 (2005): 94. Owens, however, does not state explicitly on what grounds he argues this.

<sup>74</sup> Gerald L. Stevens, *Revelation: The Past and Future of John's Apocalypse* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 379. Mitchell Reddish argues that John's description of the heavenly throne room is heavily indebted to Ezekiel's vision. Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 93. In contrast, Beale asserts more convincingly, by providing a detailed structural analysis between Daniel 7 and Revelation 4–5, that Ezekiel 1 should not be seen as the model for chapters 4–5 because the structure and allusiveness of Ezekiel 1–2 fade in Rev 5:2, and the structure of Daniel 7 emerges as the overall pattern when chapters 4–5 are considered as one vision. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 367.

<sup>75</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbook for New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 21.

<sup>76</sup> Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 300.

influence of Ezekiel 1–2 outweighs that of Daniel 7, though Daniel 7 dominates the whole of Revelation 4–5 when the overall structure of the vision is considered.<sup>77</sup> The throne-room vision of Revelation 4–5 (chapter 4, in particular) shares many features with that of Ezekiel 1–2, but the primary theological significance of the use of Ezekiel’s throne-room scene in Revelation is that it provides the background against which the image of God sitting on the throne in Revelation 4 is to be interpreted as a divine warrior, who comes to the aid of his people in time of danger on his chariot throne covered by cloud.<sup>78</sup> Massyngberde further corroborates this point by noting that the throne room visions in Ezekiel 1 and 10 suggest the fact that the throne room functions as the point from which God, the divine warrior, departs for war and to which he returns from war.<sup>79</sup>

This point becomes clearer in the throne room scene in Revelation 4. Often, the weather-related phenomena are evocative of the wrath of the Divine Warrior, and therefore, it is not insignificant that such weather-related phenomena as lightnings, rumblings, and thunders first appear on the throne of God (4:5). Traditionally, their role is to herald the coming of God in judgment.<sup>80</sup> It is noteworthy that the same formula of lightnings, rumblings, and thunders appear three more times (8:5; 11:19; 16:18–21) in conjunction with the seventh plague of each septet series of judgment, whether that be seals, trumpets, or bowls. Bauckham rightly points out that the later references to the weather-related formula hark back to 4:5, which serves to anchor the expectation of

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<sup>77</sup> G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1099. Beale argues, however, that when chapters 4–5 are considered as one vision, the structure and allusiveness of Ezekiel 1–2 fade out in 5:2, and the structure of Daniel 7 emerges as the overall pattern. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 367. The scope of study on the influence of Ezekiel 1–2 over Revelation 4 will be limited to the imagery of divine warrior. For a detailed analysis on the dependence of Revelation 4–5 on Ezekiel 1–2, see Jeffrey Marshall Vogelgesang, “The Interpretation of Ezekiel in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1985).

<sup>78</sup> Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 31.

<sup>79</sup> Ford, *Revelation*, 77.

<sup>80</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 202.

God's coming to judge and rule the world in this initial vision of his rule in heaven.<sup>81</sup>

Also, it should be noted that the seventh of all three-septet series of judgments portrays divine warfare and, therefore, describes the Divine Warrior theophany accompanied by lightning, thunder, and earthquake, which fights for the Divine Warrior.<sup>82</sup> The imagery of lightning, rumblings, and thunders coming from the throne as harbingers of the coming judgment of God in Revelation 4 resembles the chariot-throne vision in Ezekiel (1:13). The purpose is clear. By incorporating the judgment nuance conveyed in Ezekiel's vision into the throne-room vision in Revelation 4, John attempts to bring full assurance of God's cosmic reign and dominion to his audience in terms of his warring activity as a divine warrior expressed in judgment, followed by redemption as its end-result.<sup>83</sup>

The attention now shifts to the scene of the Lamb in chapter 5. Revelation 5 is a continuation of the throne room vision initiated in Revelation 4. Moreover, it serves as the main scene for the appearance of the slain Lamb, focusing now on the resurrected and exalted Christ. This scene involves the transfer of authority from God to the Lamb, symbolized by the Lamb taking the scroll, and it unfolds with his redemptive activity followed by the worship of all creation directed towards "the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

Revelation 5 has been variously interpreted and is generally understood as the

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<sup>81</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 203.

<sup>82</sup> Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 300.

<sup>83</sup> Chou argues that the resemblance between the throne-room vision in Revelation 4 and that of Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1 suggests the fact that the idea of judgment conveyed in Ezekiel's vision is now a part of the purpose of John's vision. Chou, *I Saw the Lord*, 201. Beale gives a more detailed and extended explanation that the combination of such scenes as Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1–2 with the predominant scene from Daniel 7 express a judgment nuance in the vision; therefore, the thought of judgment should be kept in mind since they present a vision of God's cosmic reign and dominion that issues first in judgment, followed by redemption. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 368.

enthronement scene of the slain Lamb.<sup>84</sup> Many commentators have proposed Daniel 7 as the most likely background to this scene.<sup>85</sup> The link is established between the enthronement scene Revelation 5 and that of Daniel 7, suggesting that the predictive vision of the enthronement of the Son of Man, the divine warrior, in Daniel 7 is ultimately fulfilled in the enthronement scene of the Lamb in Revelation 5. Kovacs offers an insightful interpretation that this scene probably follows the ancient Near Eastern pattern of victory and enthronement of the divine warrior as a reward for victory. This pattern is then adapted and applied to Jesus' faithful death, implying that his death is the victory over the forces of evil, leading to his enthronement.<sup>86</sup> Thus, the enthronement scene of Daniel 7 as background to Revelation 5 functions as the interpretive lens through which to identify the slain Lamb as a divine warrior.

One further piece of evidence that enhances the identity of Christ the Lamb as the divine warrior is the presence of the new song in 5:9–10. In Revelation, a new song holds a particular meaning of victory shout, a song of praise, in response to, or in anticipation of, the victory of the Divine Warrior.<sup>87</sup> Wu goes even further to claim that the new song in 5:9–10 continues the tradition of singing song, rooted in the Song of the

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<sup>84</sup> Traugott Holtz, *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Berlin: AkademieVerlag, 1962), 27–54; John Sweet, *Revelation*, Trinity Press International New Testament Commentary (London: SCM, 1990), 121–27; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 72–73. Aune, however, considers the term “investiture” to be more appropriate based on the literary adaptation of Daniel 7 and Ezekiel 1–2. David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 332. I follow Beale's suggestion, who argues against van Unnik's rejection of this chapter as an enthronement scene, that Revelation 5 is to be understood as an enthronement scene based on the fact that such passages as 3:21, 22:1, and perhaps 7:17 envision the Lamb sitting on the throne. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 357. Several other commentators also support this view. See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 165–66; Brighton, *Revelation*, 140; Osborne, *Revelation*, 214; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006).

<sup>85</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 90; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 167; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 337. Beale maintains a more balanced view compared with other commentators on the use of the OT scripture as background to Revelation 5 by explaining that although there are more numerous allusions to Daniel 7 allusions to Ezekiel 1–2 do not disappear in Revelation 5.

<sup>86</sup> Judith L. Kovacs, “‘Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out’: Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36,” *JBL* 114, no. 2 (Summer 1995): 245.

<sup>87</sup> Longman, “The Divine Warrior,” 300–301.

Sea in Exodus 15:1–18, and highlights the completion of God’s will in redemptive history and the final fulfillment of God’s salvific action through Jesus Christ.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, with Daniel 7 as the primary background behind the overall structure of Revelation 5 and Exodus 15:1–18 as the source of 5:9–10, taken together, they point to a soteriological reality that the Lamb is enthroned and praised as both divine warrior and redeemer because he has won the victory over the forces of evil. As a result, he has accomplished an Exodus-like redemption for the end-time people of God.<sup>89</sup>

*Soteriological Function of Ἐνίκησεν in 5:5:  
Initiation of Salvation*

The specific soteriological function that Christ’s conquering (ἐνίκησεν; 5:5) fulfills is the initiation (or inauguration) of salvation on behalf of God’s people through judgment. The salvific nature of Christ’s conquering, mentioned in 3:21, is explained in 5:5–6 through the imagery of the slain Lamb depicting his death, resurrection, and the resulting receipt of kingship.<sup>90</sup> The real significance of Christ’s conquering, achieved through his death and resurrection, becomes more evident in the scene of the new exodus redemption described in 5:9–11. The description of the saints becoming a priestly kingdom as a consequence of Christ’s complete victory<sup>91</sup> through his death and resurrection means that just as Christ’s kingship is perceived as an already inaugurated

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Jung-chu Wu, “Worthy Is the Lamb: The New Song in Revelation 5:9–10 in Relation to Its Background” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2005), 1–2.

<sup>89</sup> Patterson argues that exodus imagery is preserved in the Old Testament apocalyptic texts including Daniel 7–12, though to a lesser degree compared with other OT apocalyptic texts, with new applications of the traditional features of exodus tradition such as attention to the sea and to the one who comes in the clouds. Richard Duane Patterson, “Wonders in the Heavens and on the Earth: Apocalyptic Imagery in the Old Testament,” *JETS* 43, no. 3 (September 2000): 400. If his argument is assumed to be true, then it makes all the more sense that Daniel 7 stands behind the overall structure of Revelation 5.

<sup>90</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 312. Similarly, Stevens argues that the throne-room vision has multiple connections to the previous act of Revelation 1–3 showing that they are related integrally with the theme of overcoming being one of them, which recapitulates in 5:5–6. Stevens, *Revelation*, 379.

<sup>91</sup> J. Hampton Keathley explains that the tense of ἐνίκησεν is aorist, and it is what grammarians call a culminative aorist which views an event or series of events from the standpoint of an accomplished act. J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation: Christ’s Victory over the Forces of Darkness* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1997), 121.



reality, so is theirs, although it is yet to be consummated in the future.<sup>92</sup> This implication is underscored by the hymn in 5:9–10, which reflects on Jesus' death in the past and anticipates the reign of Christians on earth in the future.

In other words, the inaugurated kingship of the saints indicates that the salvation of God's people is not portrayed merely as a future reality but, rather, as an already inaugurated reality, suggesting “the inaugurated soteriology.”<sup>93</sup> The beginning of the establishment of the messianic kingdom and the redemption of God's people from sin, death, and Satan emerge as a natural consequence of Christ's conquering through his death and resurrection. This point is further reinforced by the relationship of ἐνίκησεν to the infinitive ἀνοίξαι (“to open”).

Verse 5:5 explicitly states that it is through his accomplished victory on the cross that he acquired worthiness to break seals and open (ἀνοίξαι) the scroll.<sup>94</sup> The clause introduced by ἀνοίξαι is to be understood as a result clause,<sup>95</sup> signifying that the opening of the scroll is the result of Christ's conquering (ἐνίκησεν). Given this grammatical relationship between ἐνίκησεν and ἀνοίξαι, it follows that Christ's redemptive victory accomplished on the cross enables him to initiate the divine plan of redemption and judgment symbolized by the opening of the scroll and the breaking of its seals, beginning

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<sup>92</sup> This is supported by Beale's argument that, in the light of 1:5–6 and 5:9–10, it is probable that this kingdom began immediately after the death and resurrection of Christ since these two passages portray the creating of saints as a kingdom as a direct result of Christ's redemptive death. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 363.

<sup>93</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, PAGE. Stewart supports this idea by noting that the idea of the present possession of salvation by the believing community is conveyed in 1:5–6 and 5:9–10, which draws on descriptions of the people of Israel who had just been delivered from Egypt through the Passover Lamb.

<sup>94</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 105.

<sup>95</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 105; Brighton, *Revelation*, 132. In contrast, R. H. Charles claims that the infinitive ἀνοίξαι is to be taken as an infinitive of purpose. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburg: T&T Clark, 1920), 140. However, A. T. Robertson claims that one option should not be rejected in favor of the other because it is hard to draw a line between conceived result and intended result (purpose) since it is largely a matter of standpoint. But he himself has put ἀνοίξαι under result category. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 1089.

in chapter 6.<sup>96</sup> Therefore, the expression *ἐνίκησεν*, symbolizing the victory of Jesus won on the cross, initiates, on the one hand, the process of the judgment for the wicked and, on the other, salvation for God's people.

One caveat must be expressed concerning the interpretation of the soteriological function of *ἐνίκησεν* as the initiation of salvation. I argue that Christ's conquering, described in 5:5, should not be seen as if it is somehow incomplete, therefore suggesting a partial victory. This point is corroborated by the fact that Revelation speaks of no other fight or victory than the fight and victory that Christ fought and won on the cross. As I will argue shortly, even the future victory of Christ (17:14) refers to his victory won on the cross. This is probably why, as Johns observes, when one appears to be on the verge of a real battle, it turns out that it is already over.<sup>97</sup> He goes on to claim that no real battle scene is narrated, or better said, no battle story is possible since the decisive battle is long over at the cross.<sup>98</sup> This truth is implied in all the usages of *ἐνίκησεν* in connection with Christ the divine warrior (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). It is just that there is an already/not yet quality about the accomplished victory of Christ.<sup>99</sup> Daniel L. Gard drives this point home when he notes: "...we think not of Jesus' return as the completion of his victory won at Calvary; rather, Easter is the completion of that victory."<sup>100</sup> According to Charles Sherlock, it is imperative to know, when interpreting

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<sup>96</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 350. Similarly, Boxall argues that the movement of the rest of the book suggests that there is indeed some direct connection between the opening of the scroll and the unfolding visions of judgment and salvation. Ian Boxall, *Revelation: Vision and Insight* (London: SPCK, 2002), 57. Dong Yoon supports this idea by insightfully arguing that the three series of seven judgments, which form the major structural flow of the first visionary block (4–16), thematically denote Christ's militant conquering in a proleptic and heightening way. Kim, "Νικᾶω as an Over-Arching Motif," 212.

<sup>97</sup> Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse*, 183.

<sup>98</sup> Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse*, 184–85. In this respect, Caird's argument is to the point—God knows no other victory and needs no other victory than that which is won by the Cross of Christ. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 58.

<sup>99</sup> Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 304.

<sup>100</sup> Tremper Longman III, "The Case for Spiritual Continuity," in *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, by C. S. Cowles, Eugene Merrill, Daniel Gard, and Tremper Longman III, *Counterpoints: Exploring Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 203.

the warfare motif in Revelation, that the several battle narratives described in Revelation do not concern distinct events but are literary means of presenting different facets of a single, all-encompassing victory of the cross.<sup>101</sup> Thus, the future Christ's victory is not another victory that contributes to the completion of his victory on the cross. Rather, it will be the full manifestation of Christ's already-completed victory on the cross before all eyes in a more open manner.

*“The Slain Lamb Standing”: The Sign of Christ's Death and Resurrection*

This section aims to demonstrate that the image of Christ as the slain lamb standing portrays his death and resurrection as the primary means through which he accomplishes the salvation of God's people. The main clue for the interpretation of the image of Christ as the slain lamb standing as referring to Christ's death and resurrection comes from the word *σφάζω* and *έστηχός* in 5:6. Based on the use of this term in 5:6, several scholars argue that the language of “ransom or purchase” (*ήγόρασας*) in 5:9 is to be understood politically rather than expiatorily since Jesus Christ, the Lamb, is not “sacrificed” but is executed or murdered in Revelation.<sup>102</sup> This is the term frequently used

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<sup>101</sup> I am indebted to Sherlock for this interpretative insight. Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 365.

<sup>102</sup> Johns convincingly argues that, in keeping with the anti-imperial Christology presented in Revelation, Jesus's death is portrayed primarily in political rather than expiatory terms as it is confirmed in the use of *σφάζω*, which is frequently used in Revelation to refer to murder or assassination (6:4, 9; 13:3; 18:24), though the author of Revelation seems to accept Jesus's death as expiatory in some places (1:5). Loren L. Johns, “Jesus in the Book of Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook on the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 229. Similarly, Blount contends that the book of Revelation has numerous uses of blood language and the majority of them more generally refer to conventional ideas of the bleeding that results from combat, suffering, or both. Blount, *Revelation*, 115n14. Therefore, it is erroneous to quickly associate the death of Christ portrayed in the image of the slaughtered lamb with the sacrificial death of the Passover lamb at the time of exodus because, as Hoskins notes, nowhere in the story of the exodus is the act of paying a price involved. Instead, Hoskins argues, on close examination, the focus of the redemption and purchasing language is on the “transfer of ownership,” suggesting that God frees his people from servitude while also buying them for himself. They are now completely his servants rather than those of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. See Paul M. Hoskins, *The Book of Revelation: A Theological and Exegetical Commentary* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2017), 133. In support of this view, Blount claims that this metaphoric language most likely refers to the ransom of prisoners of war who were transferred to the countries of the victors and might be paid for by a purchasing agent from their own home country. Blount, *Revelation*, 115. All this supports the martial character of the victory won by Christ the Lamb at the cross. In fact, this is a minority view in comparison with the majority view that sees the death of Christ as expiatory. See J. Daryl Charles, “An Apocalyptic

in Revelation to refer to murder (6:4, 9, 13:3; 18:24). The expression “standing” (ἔστηχός) represents the resurrection, indicating that death did not triumph over Christ.<sup>103</sup>

Thus, 5:6 portrays both death and resurrection as essential to the conquering of Christ.

Beale explains this well:

But the present victorious effect of the Lamb’s overcoming resides not only in the fact that the Lamb continues to “stand” but also in the fact that it continues to exist as a *slaughtered* Lamb; the perfect participle ἐσφαγμένον (“having been slain”) expresses an abiding condition as a result of the past act of being slain (like perfect tense “crucified” in 1 Cor. 2:2).<sup>104</sup>

The connection between the image of Christ as the slain lamb and his redemptive victory on the cross, conveyed by ἐνίκησεν, suggests that Christ’s victory is reinterpreted in the light of his death and resurrection. This becomes even more evident in the contrast between the image of Christ as “Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David” (5:5) and as “the slain lamb” (5:6).

In 5:5, John hears that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” “the Root of David” has conquered, but when he turns to see the lion, he encounters “the slain Lamb” instead in 5:6. The combined messianic titles in 5:5 unmistakably designate Christ as the fulfillment of all Jewish messianic hopes.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, in conjunction with ἐνίκησεν, the sense of the conquering messianic figure from the Old Testament prophecy (Gen 49:8; Isa 11:1), who will conquer his enemy through judgment, is more emphatically

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Tribute to the Lamb (Rev 5:1–14),” *JETS* 34, no. 4 (December 1991): 468; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 127; Allan J. McNicol, *The Conversion of the Nations in Revelation*, LNTS 438 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 119–20; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 117–18; Osborne, *Revelation*, 47; Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 296; Fanning, *Revelation*, 213; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 49.

<sup>103</sup> Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 120.

<sup>104</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 352.

<sup>105</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World*, Proclamation Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 60.

brought out.<sup>106</sup> However, an interpretative difficulty<sup>107</sup> arises when these messianic titles are considered in relation to the most prominent Christological title of Revelation—the slain “Lamb” (5:6).<sup>108</sup>

As a result, interpreters of Revelation are divided over the major source of the Christological title “the Lamb.”<sup>109</sup> Thus, the complexity of interpreting the Lamb symbolism in 5:6 is what may have led some scholars to conclude that the better approach is to acknowledge the multivalent character of this powerful symbol rather than seeing the Lamb imagery as being drawn from only one source or having one meaning, thereby creating a new symbol.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 349.

<sup>107</sup> The difficulty in interpreting the incongruity between these two images is well expressed in the words of Beale:

Some see only the Old Testament-Jewish notion of a conquering messianic figure who defeats enemies in some literal or militaristic fashion, since that background utilizes both lion and lamb images in that manner. On the other hand, some see the New Testament context of the crucified Christ portrayed as a slain lamb as swallowing up any original Old Testament notion of a literal conquering messiah, which Gen 49:9–12, for example, conveys by reference to Judah and to a ruler from Judah being compared to a lion. (G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, JSNTSup 166 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 44)

<sup>108</sup> The Lamb is the most used Christological title in Revelation, which appears twenty-eight times as a metaphor for Jesus.

<sup>109</sup> For example, Fiorenza argues that Revelation seems either to invoke the notion of the paschal lamb to refer to the sacrificial lambs of the temple or to allude to the astrological sign of Aries. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 60. Beasley-Murray claims, by reference to the Testament of Joseph 19:8 and Exodus typology, that the slain Lamb in 5:6 is the warrior lamb who conquered by accepting the role of the Passover lamb. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 125. Mounce designates Isaiah 53:7 and 1 Enoch 90 and the Testament of Joseph as possible sources of the Lamb imagery in Revelation 5. See Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 132–33. As opposed to the aforementioned scholars, Casey places full emphasis on the Passover lamb imagery as the most plausible background to the presentation of the Lamb in Revelation 5 based on the fact that the citation of Exodus 19:6 in 5:10 confirms that the Passover lamb is John’s mind in this passage. Jay Smith Casey, “Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation” (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981), 145. Beale provides a more balanced view on this interpretative issue, arguing that neither the OT Passover lamb nor Isaiah 53:7 should be excluded since both have in common with the metaphorical picture in Revelation 5:6 the central function and significance of the sacrifice of a lamb, which accomplishes redemption and victory for God’s people. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 351. For the most comprehensive study on the Lamb symbolism, see especially chapters 2–5 of Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse*, 22–149.

<sup>110</sup> For instance, L. W. Hurtado and Mitchell Reddish are proponents of this position. See L. W. Hurtado, “Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies,” in *The Johannine Writings*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, Biblical Seminar 32 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 216–217; Reddish, *Revelation*, 109. Creation of the new symbol by combining the messianic titles “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” and “the Root of David” of 5:5 with the Lamb imagery of 5:6 is probably what Moyses meant when he states that the new affects the old and the old affects the new; consequently, John is offering new understandings of Old Testament text. See Steve Moyses, *The Old Testament in the Book of*

However, what must be consistently kept in mind is that Christ is certainly the expected Davidic messiah, the messianic warrior, who has come to fulfill all the hoped-for messianic hopes, as indicated by the messianic titles “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” and “the Root of David” of 5:5. But the imagery of “the slain Lamb” of 5:6 behaves as the new interpretive lens through which the earlier portions of the Old Testament texts are reinterpreted and redefined. This new reality is well summarized in the words of Bauckham:

By juxtaposing the two contrasting images, John has forged a new symbol of conquest by sacrificial death. The messianic hopes evoked in 5:5 are not repudiated: Jesus really is the expected Messiah of David (22:16). But insofar as the latter was associated with military violence and narrow nationalism, it is reinterpreted by the image of the Lamb. The Messiah has certainly won a victory, but he has done so by sacrifice and for the benefit of people from all nations (5:9). Thus, the means by which the Davidic Messiah has won his victory is explained by the image of the Lamb, while the significance of the image of the Lamb is now seen to lie in the fact that his sacrificial death was a victory over evil.<sup>111</sup>

As seen above, the idea that Christ is the fulfillment of the long-awaited messianic divine warrior who will redeem his people through judgment is not repudiated. But, through the slain Lamb imagery, John has forged a new understanding, as Johns rightly notes, of the means by which he conquers: that of a consistent, nonviolent resistance born of clear allegiance to God that may well result in death.<sup>112</sup> This confirms

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*Revelation*, JSNTSup 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 19. But Beale, in response to Moyise’s view on the use of the Old Testament in Revelation, critiques that it is important to provide a more nuanced explanation of what it means to say that John expresses new understanding of the Old Testament. See Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament*, 43. He then goes on to argue that John’s new interpretations of the Old Testament texts are the direct result of his new, presuppositional lenses through which he is now looking at the Old Testament, showing respect for Old Testament original contexts, that is, seeing new interpretations as organically growing out of the Old Testament itself. See Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament*, 45. If Beale’s analysis is true, Morton’s conclusion that the imagery of the Lamb is derived from the Hebrew Bible, Jewish apocalypticism, and John’s own understanding of the Christian *kerygma* is further enhanced. See Russell S. Morton, *One upon the Throne and the Lamb: A Tradition Historical/Theological Analysis of Revelation 4–5*, SBL 110 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 167. Morton helpfully notes that the Lamb’s complete *power and authority* is indicated by the equation of the messianic titles of 5:5 and possessing seven horns, which was a recognized feature of the horned lambs in Jewish apocalyptic literature such as 1 Enoch 90:20, whereas its *vulnerability* derives solely from John’s commitment to the Christian *kerygma*, which would have been most striking to those outside the church. Morton, *One upon the Throne and the Lamb*, 159–60.

<sup>111</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 74.

<sup>112</sup> Johns, *The Lamb Christology of the Apocalypse*, 183. This means that the two images must be taken together. Barr has well summarized this reality: “It is only when we see the lion as a lamb and the

my argument that the victory of Christ, the divine warrior, is achieved through his death and resurrection. The imagery of the slain Lamb in 5:6 reinterprets and redefines the nature of victory depicted in 5:5. Thus, in the light of the above analysis, such forced interpretive dichotomy that Christ in his first coming is described as the Lamb, and in his second coming as a conquering Lion is to be avoided.<sup>113</sup> In light of the above analysis, the image of Christ as the slain lamb standing indicates that his victory is accomplished through his death and resurrection.

### **The Conquering of Christ in Revelation 17:14**

#### *The Identity of Christ: The Warrior Lamb as Divine Warrior*

The third and final use of νικάω in reference to the conquering of Christ occurs in future tense νικήσει in 17:14 in the third strategic place, where Christ's victory is described as the warring activity of the warrior lamb. This theme is then further developed in 19:11–2, the clearest picture of Christ as a divine warrior in Revelation. The verse in question reads as follows: οὔτοι μετὰ τοῦ ἀρνίου πολεμήσουσιν καὶ τὸ ἀρνίον νικήσει αὐτούς, ὅτι κύριος κυρίων ἐστὶν καὶ βασιλεὺς βασιλέων καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ κλητοὶ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ καὶ πιστοί. As I will discuss shortly, the use of νικήσει in 17:14 is closely linked with the third and last major vision of Christ as the divine warrior coming in judgment (19:11–16), even though there is a gap in space between these two passages.

As for the identity of the Lamb portrayed in 17:14, it is evident that the Lamb in 17:14 is the same as the lionlike Lamb in 5:5–6. This is indicated by the connection

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lamb as a lion that we understand John's characterization of Jesus. The two images merge into one. The lamb does the work of the lion, but always remains a lamb." David L. Barr, *Tales of the End: A Narrative Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Salem, OR: Polebridge Press, 2012), 125.

<sup>113</sup> For instance, John Walvoord is one of the major proponents of this view. See John F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 111. A better approach is, as Beale insightfully points out, to interpret these two contrasting images in light of "already and not yet" framework of John's eschatology, which means that Christ certainly has defeated the enemy in the past as a "lion" in an ironic manner through death and suffering as a "lamb," but in the future, the final defeat of the enemy will be more straightforward. Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament*, 46.

between Christ's title "Lamb" and "King" in chapter 17 and the songs of adoration sung in chapter 5.<sup>114</sup> Although the subjects of the verb *νικάω* ("conquer") in verses 5:5 (the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David) and 17:14 (the Lamb) appear to be different, this apparent discrepancy may be solved when attention is given to the figure of the slain Lamb, who is the one truly responsible, as argued earlier, for the act of conquering symbolized by the breaking of the seals. The close connection established by these two passages carries an important soteriological implication that the slain Lamb, the divine warrior, who conquered Satan and initiated the salvation of God's people, will ultimately consummate it. Thus, the Lamb's final victory is in continuity with his inaugural victory. They are no other than two facets of the same victory Christ won on the cross.

The identity of the Lamb in 17:14 in its immediate context is identified as "the Lord of lords" and "the King of kings." Many commentators aptly recognize that this title is normally applied to God,<sup>115</sup> especially in reference to the sovereign God of the Old Testament (Deut 10:17; Ps 136:3; Dan 2:37; 2:47; 4:37), intertestamental literature (2 Macc 13:4; 1 Enoch 9.4), and the New Testament (1 Tim 6:15). The titles "the Lord of lords," and "the King of kings" function as qualifiers and serve to express the superlative idea.<sup>116</sup> The purpose seems clear: to show the reality that anyone who determines to fight him faces a losing battle and utter ruin by highlighting the absolute sovereignty, authority, and power of the Lamb. Beckwith drives home this point by saying, "the supreme lordship of the Lamb gives assurance of his victory over the Beast."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Wong, "The Johannine Concept of Overcomer," 89.

<sup>115</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 322; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 438; Osborne, *Revelation*, 624; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, CCGNT (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 220; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 476.

<sup>116</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 476.

<sup>117</sup> Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 701.



In addition, the identity of the Lamb is further clarified when seen in connection with 19:11–21, where the clearest use of the Divine Warrior motif is identified, and a fuller picture of Christ’s execution of the final judgment on the forces of evil is given. The warrior Lamb described in 17:14 is to be seen as the divine warrior coming in judgment, as portrayed in 19:11–21. This is indicated by the repetitive use of the same title “the King of kings and the Lord of lords” in 19:16,<sup>118</sup> just as in 17:14, but in reverse order. Furthermore, the fact that the enemies of God are depicted as the kings of the earth in both places (17:12–14; cf. 19:19) further strengthens this point.<sup>119</sup> Another reason why the Lamb in 17:14 can be equated with the divine warrior in 19:16 is that they are equally pictured as the protagonist accompanied by a host.<sup>120</sup>

In fact, the use of these overlapping features of the warfare shared by these two sections is perhaps due to the fact that they may be referring to the same eschatological warfare. To bolster this point, Shin emphatically notes that it is not possible to separate section 19:11–21 from the previous one, 17:1–19:10, for this section is a realization or the fulfillment of the destruction of the enemies of God, such as great harlot, the beasts and the kings predicted in previous chapters.<sup>121</sup> Larondelle adds insight into how the apocalyptic war in Revelation needs to be interpreted. According to Larondelle, the apocalyptic war needs to be interpreted in accordance with its *progressive clarification* within the book of Revelation so that its theme fits harmoniously and organically within

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<sup>118</sup> This claim is further supported by Moyise’s argument that this title makes it virtually certain that the Lamb is to be identified with the figure on the white horse in chapter 19. Steve Moyise, ed., “Does the Lion Lie Down with the Lamb,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 183.

<sup>119</sup> Kim, “Νικάω as an Over-Arching Motif,” 229.

<sup>120</sup> Aune argues that these two texts look like versions of the same eschatological event since the beast and his allies are conquered by a protagonist accompanied by a host. David E. Aune, “Stories of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Contours of Christology in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker, McMaster New Testament Studies (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 316.

<sup>121</sup> Eun-Chul Shin, “More than Conquerors: The Conqueror (ΝΙΚΑΩ) Motif in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., Pretoria University, 2006), 194.

the Christocentric structure of Revelation.<sup>122</sup>

Not surprisingly, this interpretative approach has led him to see the “Armageddon” war (16:13–18), the section of the conquering Lamb (17:12–14), and the portrait of the divine warrior (19:11–21) as organically interconnected, with the “Armageddon” war being further unfolded progressively in 17:12–14 and subsequently in 19:11–21.<sup>123</sup> If this analysis is correct, then the function of νικήσει in 17:14 is to proleptically point forward to the final victory scene of the divine warrior in 19:11–21. Thus, it is not far-fetched to say, in the light of the progressive and Christocentric nature of the divine warfare stated above, that the conquering Lamb in 17:14 is to be equated with the divine warrior in 19:11–21.

*Soteriological Function of Νικήσει in 17:14:  
Consummation of Salvation*

Νικήσει refers to the not-yet aspect of Christ’s victory won on the cross. But this should not be taken to mean that there will be a final battle, but rather, that the present reality of the victory of Christ will be fully revealed to the whole world. The primary soteriological significance of νικήσει is that it describes the role of God’s sovereign grace through the work of his agent, the Lamb, in bringing the salvation of believers to its completion, which he himself initiated (5:5). God is both the initiator and the perfecter of the salvation of his people. The immediate context in which the future tense νικήσει occurs is Revelation 17:1–18, which deals with the judgment on Babylon depicted as the great whore (17:1). The term πόρνη symbolizing Babylon denotes her alluring and seductive nature in attempting to draw people away from Christ.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies, Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1992), 148.

<sup>123</sup> LaRondelle, “Contextual Approach to the Seven Last Plagues,” 147–48.

<sup>124</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 848.

The final victory of the Lamb conveyed by the future tense *νικήσει* in 17:14 anticipates the actual process of divine judgment beginning in chapter 19.<sup>125</sup> To be more specific, the vision of 17:1–19:10 is the development and expansion of the seventh bowl of divine wrath, which is, in light of the broad literary unity 17:1–22:9, part of the “last judgment” scene beginning in 19:11.<sup>126</sup> The implications of the cry following the seventh bowl, “it is done” (16:17), entail the description of the Parousia of Christ as divine warrior (19:11–16) and the subsequent events.<sup>127</sup> Thus, 17:14 anticipates the final victory of the Lamb implied by the cry “it is done” (16:17), while 19:11–21 portrays the beginning of the actual accomplishment of the final victory through divine judgment.

One important aspect of the final conquest of Christ, the messianic warrior depicted in 19:11–21, is that it is to be understood, in light of the story of salvation guided by Exodus typology in Revelation, as the typological fulfillment of the hope of a new conquest of the new promised land,<sup>128</sup> symbolized by the imagery of the new Jerusalem (21–22).<sup>129</sup> The soteriological implication of the final conquest of Christ is significant. Just as God’s purpose of salvation through judgment depicted earlier in the throne-room vision (4–5) was initiated by the accomplished victory of Christ (5:5), its finalization will also be done through the already accomplished victory of Christ in the Parousia. Thus, *νικήσει*, by its placement in a strategic place referring to the final victory of Christ (17:14; cf. 19:11–21) and related to the “judgment/new conquest” of Exodus

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<sup>125</sup> Smalley argues that chapters 19–20 provide the first glimpse in Revelation of the actual process of divine judgment rather than its anticipation. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 520.

<sup>126</sup> Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 103.

<sup>127</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 277.

<sup>128</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 2, *Revelation 12–22*, ITC (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 294; James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 548.

<sup>129</sup> Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS 526 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 171; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 35.

tradition, portrays the final phase of divine salvation through judgment which will securely deliver the people of God to the new promised land.

It should be emphasized, however, that the main function of the future tense *νικήσει*, is not confined to merely referring to its action as occurring in the future but to add the notion of certainty and expectation.<sup>130</sup> The sense of certainty attached to *νικήσει* stems from the fact that the Lamb is “Lord of lords,” and “King of kings.”<sup>131</sup> But the reason why the Lamb is called “Lord of lords,” and “King of kings,” at this point, before the future conflict followed by the final victory, is because the decisive battle is long over, which took place at the cross. The final victory depends on the inaugural victory of the Lamb on the cross, together with the victory he makes possible for the vast throng of martyrs.<sup>132</sup>

Thus, it is important to realize that *ἐνίκησα* (3:21), and *ἐνίκησεν* (5:5), and *νικήσει* (17:14) all converge in one same battle, though differentiated due to the inaugurated eschatology—the battle at the cross, which Jesus had already fought and won the victory. In this regard, it can be said that both the decisiveness and the finality of the inaugural victory of Christ on the cross (3:21; 5:5) yields the certainty of the future victory of the Lamb indicated by *νικήσει*. Therefore, the future victory of Christ the Lamb

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<sup>130</sup> David L Mathewson, *Verbal Aspect in the Book of Revelation: The Function of Greek Verb Tenses in John's Apocalypse*, Linguistic Biblical Studies 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 112. In his discussion of the two future tenses *πολεμήσουσιν* and *νικήσει* in 17:14, Mathewson argues that their tense is derived from the future referring nature of the visions. This explanation is good as far as it goes, but it is not satisfactory to account for, at the very least, the use of the future tense *νικήσει*. In my view, a better approach is to interpret it in light of the inaugurated eschatology of Revelation and see it as the not-yet aspect of the victory won by Christ on the cross, which is to be considered as the major contributing factor to the temporal aspect of *νικήσει*. This means, in light of the salvation conceptualized as victory in Revelation, that *νικήσει* in 17:14 refers to the not-yet aspect of salvation pointing to the consummation of salvation initiated by the victory of the Lamb on the cross as described in 5:5. My contention is supported by Caird's assertion that one of the ways that the threefold tense of salvation is illustrated is through the imagery of warfare in the sense that the decisive victory has been won, but the war goes on until no enemies are left to challenge the sovereignty of God. G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, ed. L. D. Hurst (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 119–20.

<sup>131</sup> Indicated by the causal conjunction *ὅτι*. Also, notice the present tense *ἐστίν*, which suggests the present reality of the sovereignty of Christ, a natural outcome of the inaugural victory he won on the cross.

<sup>132</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 220.

is neither a new victory nor a completion of Christ's partial victory on the cross. Rather, it is the full manifestation of the inaugural victory of Christ accomplished at the cross (3:21; 5:5).

*“Robe Dipped in Blood”: The Sign of Christ's Death and Resurrection*

The use of *νικάω* in future tense in 17:14 consistently portrays the victory of Christ in terms of his death and resurrection, as it did in the early chapters of the book (3:21; 5:5). However, there is a significant problem in achieving this goal because the immediate context of 17:14 offers no clues about the death and resurrection of the Lamb. This interpretive difficulty is easily resolved when adequate attention is given to the relationship previously established between the two figures of the Lamb in chapter 17 and the divine warrior in chapter 19. Aune's comment is particularly helpful here. He thinks that 17:12–14 appears to be a succinct summary of 19:11–21, where the essential features of 17:14 are described with greater detail.<sup>133</sup> Thus, section 19:11–21 appears to be a better place to search for clues that point to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The narrative of 19:11–21 centers on one significant eschatological event: the grand story of the triumph of Jesus Christ and his role as God's agent, namely the future judge of the world in rebellion against God.<sup>134</sup> As is the case with the typical war and judgment scene, the most graphic depiction of war and violent imagery of judgment in the book is portrayed in this section. The eyes of Christ, the divine warrior, are blazing with fire and his robe is dipped in blood (19:12–13). Christ, the divine warrior, is further described as having a sharp sword coming from his mouth and treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty (19:15). Of all the enemies of God, the beast, the false prophet is captured and cast into the lake of fire, while the kings of the earth,

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<sup>133</sup> Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 953.

<sup>134</sup> Aune, “Stories of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John,” 316.

and their armies are killed by the sword from Christ's mouth (19:20–21). However, this violent image of warfare should not be understood as referring to a different battle from the original conflict Christ fought on the cross. It is not that Christ won the initial victory through the suffering and death on the cross and subsequently wins the final victory through destructive conquest. This line of thought, as Sherlock points out, would call into question the whole character of the work of the Lamb.<sup>135</sup>

As suggested above, attention must now turn to the discussion of possible clues, if any, that describe the victory of Christ in terms of his suffering and death. In my opinion, these potential clues might most likely be related to the qualifiers descriptive of the person of Christ in 19:11–21. Trafton's list of nine characterizations of the rider is, in this sense, worth noting.<sup>136</sup> However, it is pointless to enumerate them all here, as it is irrelevant to the purpose of this chapter. Thus, full attention will be given, for the sake of my argument, to the discussion of its sixth characterization, which comes closest to the idea of Christ's victory through his suffering and death symbolized by the blood imagery—*clothed in a robe dipped in blood* (19:13).

Given the multivalent layers and meanings of the symbolism in Revelation, the question of whose blood is on the robe, as expected, has generated considerable debate among scholars. As a result, scholars and interpreters of Revelation are divided over the source of the blood on the robe in 19:13. At least three major views have been proposed.<sup>137</sup> First, most modern commentators and interpreters believe the blood on the

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<sup>135</sup> Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 371.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph L. Trafton observes that John characterizes the rider in nine following ways. First, the rider is called "Faithful and True." Second, the rider "judges and makes war" in righteousness (19:11). Third, the rider's eyes are "like a flame of fire" (19:12). Fourth, the rider has "many diadems" upon his head (19:12). Fifth, the rider has "a name inscribed which no one knows but himself" (19:12). Sixth, the rider is "clad in a robe dipped in blood" (19:13). Seventh, the rider's name is "the Word of God" (19:13). Finally, the rider has "a name" inscribed "on his robe and on his thigh" as "Kings of kings and Lord of lords" (19:16). Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 178–82.

<sup>137</sup> I have excluded two minor views from the list above, which few have embraced. The first one sees the blood on the robe as that of Christ's own in union with the martyr blood of his followers. The

robe to be that of Christ's enemies.<sup>138</sup> The primary ground on which they base their argument is that the imagery of the bloodstained divine warrior in 19:13 is drawn from the description of God as a divine warrior returning from battle covered with the blood of his enemies recorded in Isaiah 63:1–6, which fits the picture of Christ, the divine warrior, coming to destroy his enemies in 19:11–16. Second, some understand the blood on the robe to be that of the saints.<sup>139</sup> Lastly, others argue that the blood on the robe is intended to be that of Christ's own.<sup>140</sup> This is the second most popular view among modern commentators after the one mentioned in the first place. As deSilva notes, this view goes as far back as Origen<sup>141</sup> and Patristic writers such as Oecumenius,<sup>142</sup> Andrew of Caesarea,<sup>143</sup> and Bede the Venerable.<sup>144</sup>

In my view, the best understanding is to view the blood on the robe as Christ's

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main proponents of this view are Boring, *Revelation*, 196, and Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 564. The second one sees the blood on the robe as that of Christ's own as well as the blood of his enemies. The main proponent of this view is Brighton, *Revelation*, 506.

<sup>138</sup> The major proponents of this are as follows: Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 386; Osborne, *Revelation*, 683; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 957; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 521; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1057; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 353–54; Longman, *Revelation*, 273; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 254; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 270; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 218; Alan S. Bandy, "Vengeance, Wrath and Warfare as Images of Divine Justice in John's Apocalypse," in *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem*, ed. Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 127.

<sup>139</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 243; Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, 280.

<sup>140</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 274; Reddish, *Revelation*, 367; Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 544; Koester, *Revelation*, 755; Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 298; Colijn, "Call to Endurance," 303; Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 167; Sweet, *Revelation*, 283; Stevens, *Revelation*, 494.

<sup>141</sup> David A. deSilva, *Discovering Revelation: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, Discovering Biblical Texts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 168. For the detailed exposition of Origen on the topic in question, see William C. Weinrich, ed., *Revelation*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 310.

<sup>142</sup> Oecumenius, *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, trans. John N. Suggit, Fathers of the Church 112 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 164.

<sup>143</sup> Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, ed. Gerald L. Bray and Thomas C. Oden, trans. William C. Weinrich, ACT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 186.

<sup>144</sup> Victorinus of Petovium et al., *Latin Commentaries on Revelation*, trans. and ed. William C. Weinrich, ACT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 186.

own blood. The following are the reasons given by those who are in favor of this view with which I agree. First, the bloodstains on the rider's garments are visible before he engages his foes in combat.<sup>145</sup> The decisive reason why the blood on the rider's robe is identified as Christ's own prior to the battle is because, as Gorman points out, the battle has already been won in his death.<sup>146</sup> This is probably why there is no battle recorded in the concluding verses of chapter 19.<sup>147</sup> Second, the identification of the blood on the rider's robe as Christ's own blood shed on the cross is consistent with the ironic notion of conquering by shedding Christ's own blood and his followers' found elsewhere in Revelation (e.g., 5:5–10; 12:11). To do justice to the figurative depictions of the person and the work of Christ in Revelation requires reading the texts in question consistently in intra-textual concert with other texts found within Revelation. Third, the verb βάπτω (“to dip”) in 19:13 must be speaking of Christ's death because of parallel uses of it found in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, which speak of the death of Jesus as a baptism.<sup>148</sup> This points to the fact that the texts of Revelation, especially the ones related to militaristic violence, are to be read in intertextual concert, in addition to the intra-textual mentioned above, with those texts from the wider New Testament narrative. This, in turn, creates hermeneutical constraints on the interpretation of Revelation's symbolism.<sup>149</sup> The

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<sup>145</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 173; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 274.

<sup>146</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness, Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 153.

<sup>147</sup> Sherlock argues that the whole character of the end as a battle must be questioned since there appears to be no battle recorded in the concluding verses of chapter 19 save the description of the assembling of God's enemies for war (19:19) followed by their immediate capture and doom (19:20–21). See Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 375. Similarly, Gorman asserts that there is no actual final battle in Revelation because the images of battle are supposed to suggest to readers the *promise* and *reality* of God's defeat of evil, but they are not the *means* of that defeat. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 155.

<sup>148</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 283.

<sup>149</sup> Hays provides a helpful insight for the interpretation of Revelation's symbolism by arguing that one of the major hermeneutical implications of reading Revelation within the canonical framework of the New Testament is to serve as a corrective on interpretations that seek to read the violent militaristic imagery of the apocalypse literally; therefore, if Jesus wins victory over the world through his faithful death on the cross as all the New Testament documents insist, the expression “clothed in a robe dipped in blood” (19:13) then must be referring to his *own* blood. See Richard B. Hays, “Faithful Witness, Alpha, and



intertextual reading of 19:13 within the broader context of the New Testament<sup>150</sup> combined with the intra-textual one unequivocally indicates that John interprets scriptural images of divine and messianic violence, including Isaiah 63, Christologically, that is, in a nonviolent way.<sup>151</sup>

Of all the three reasons provided above, the one that is most relevant for the argument of this chapter is the second one, the ironic notion of conquering in Revelation. In addition to what has been said already, this notion needs to be further unpacked and elaborated from a soteriological standpoint to support my interpretive choice that the blood on the rider's robe must be Christ's own.

Thus far, I have argued in this chapter that the verb *νικάω* has been used in a paradoxical way to refer to the accomplished victory through Jesus' death and resurrection. I have also noted that it conveys the idea of divine grace in salvation. This soteriological truth is displayed explicitly by means of the direct use of *νικάω* (3:21; 5:5). In Revelation, this same truth is also conveyed by its related imagery of the blood (1:5; 5:9; 7:14), which tells its readers the character of Jesus and shows the way how he achieves victory: "not by shedding his others' blood, but by shedding his own blood."<sup>152</sup>

Interestingly, the blood imagery has been used four times elsewhere in Revelation in a redemptive context (1:5; 5:9; 7:14; 12:11). Notably, All four references to the term "blood" are related, both directly and indirectly, to the divine warfare motif, that

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Omega: The Identity of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John," in *Revelation and the Politics of Apocalyptic Interpretation*, ed. Richard B Hays and Stefan Alkier (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 81.

<sup>150</sup> This differs from the intertextual reading involving the NT use of the OT since many texts from the OT are reinterpreted Christologically in the context of the NT.

<sup>151</sup> Michael J. Gorman, "Psalms of Solomon and Revelation 19:1–21: Messianic Conquest of God's Enemies," in *Reading Revelation in Context: John's Apocalypse and Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 158. Likewise, Bauckham says, "The distinctive feature of Revelation seems to be, not its repudiation of apocalyptic militarism, but its lavish use of militaristic language in a non-militaristic sense. . . . Therefore, instead of simply repudiating apocalyptic militancy, he reinterprets it in a Christian sense, taking up its reading of Old Testament prophecy into a specifically Christian reading of the Old Testament." Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 233.

<sup>152</sup> Gorman, "Psalms of Solomon and Revelation 19:1–21," 158.

is, to the theme of victory.<sup>153</sup> Here, it is important to note that 5:9 and 12:11 are directly related to the theme of victory conveyed by the verb *νικάω*. In 5:9, the initial redemption of God's people is explained to be the result of the blood shed by the slain Lamb on the cross, a metaphor used for the Lamb's conquering (*ἐνίκησεν*) in 5:5, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. As argued above, it denotes the idea of inaugurated salvation of the believers. Similarly, 12:11 portrays the paradoxical nature of the conquering of all the saints (*ἐνίκησαν*), as I will discuss later, in the inter-advent period by means of the blood of the Lamb. The conquering of believers expressed through *ἐνίκησαν* in 12:11 also conveys the ironic idea that they conquer by shedding their own blood just like the Lamb, not by shedding the blood of their enemies as evidenced in 13:7.

Thus, in light of the previously established connection between 17:12–14 and 19:11–21, the future conquering of Christ, conveyed by *νικήσει* in 17:14 and further unfolded in 19:11–21, must also be accomplished through his own blood, not the blood of his enemies in order to maintain interpretative consistency.<sup>154</sup> In other words, the dominant Christological image in Revelation, if taken to be the slaughtered Lamb (5:6), then the blood on the rider's robe (19:13) must be that of the slaughtered Lamb as well. Homcy nicely summarizes this point by saying, “the fact that his robe is dipped in blood reminds us that this is the consummation of the victory purchased at the cross.”<sup>155</sup> Also, Barr eloquently sums up this truth, which is worth being directly quoted:

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<sup>153</sup> As opposed to 5:9, which clearly speaks of the exodus-like redemption as a result of the Lamb's victory in the divine warfare as indicated by *ἐνίκησεν* in 5:5, there appears to be no clear description of the redemption in 1:5 as the result of the victory in the divine warfare. However, this redemptive truth can be inferred from the fact that the depiction of the exodus-like redemption in 1:5–6 is immediately followed by the use of the divine warrior motif in 1:7, which serves as the overture, as Longman notes, to John's development of the divine warrior motif. See Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 181. As for the use of the blood imagery in 7:14, it must be remembered that it is used in the context of doxology, where *σωτηρία* is used, as argued earlier, with the overtones of victory, and the church is described as the messianic army in its immediate context.

<sup>154</sup> In this sense, Reddish rightly notes that, in the apocalypse, Christ conquers not by shedding the blood of his enemies, but by shedding his own blood for his enemies. Reddish, *Revelation*, 368.

<sup>155</sup> Stephen L. Homcy, “‘To Him Who Overcomes’: A Fresh Look at What ‘Victory’ Means for the Believer According to the Book of Revelation,” *JETS* 38, no. 2 (June 1995): 200.

Thus, victory over evil is procured not by physical violence but by verbal power. Surely this story is built on the mythology of holy war (and that itself may be ethically problematic), but just as surely John demythologizes the war—or perhaps more accurately, remythologizes the warrior with the suffering savior so that the death of the warrior and not some later battle is the crucial event. At every juncture in this story where good triumphs over evil a close examination shows that the victory is finally attributed to the death of Jesus.<sup>156</sup>

To rephrase the same idea from a soteriological point of view, the initiation and the completion of the salvation of believers are all carried out through the conquering of the Lamb, the divine warrior, which symbolizes his shed blood on the cross. This soteriological statement serves as the foundational principle upon which the entire soteriological argumentation of Revelation is built. Its implication is that the entire salvation process of believers is wholly dependent on the sovereign grace of God, revealed through the work of his agent, Christ the Lamb. Christ not only inaugurates the divine plan of salvation but also brings it to its ultimate fulfillment through his death and resurrection, conceptualized as the military victory in warfare.

In summary, it is to be concluded that the bloodstain on the rider's robe is that of Christ's own, symbolizing his death and resurrection, as this interpretation best aligns with the consistent portrait of Christ the Lamb as the slaughtered savior throughout Revelation.

### **Other Imagery and Language in Reference to Divine Grace in Salvation**

The aim of this section is to demonstrate that, in Revelation, the notion of salvation as a gift from God is secondarily described through various redemptive imagery and language, in addition to its primary way of doing so, namely the accomplished victory through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ conveyed by the verb *νικάω*. It should be made clear, however, that the following list is intended neither to be exhaustive nor complete but illustrative and selective since it is impossible to survey all the

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<sup>156</sup> Barr, "Violence in the Apocalypse of John," 101.

redemptive images in such a limited space, which goes beyond the scope and purpose of this study. Thus, the examples that follow are representative of the imagery and language of Revelation that portray the idea of divine grace in salvation.

### **The Divine Passive**

The divine passive occurs frequently throughout Revelation through the singular use of ἐδόθη (“was given”), which occurs twenty-one times (6:2, 4[2x], 8, 11; 7:2; 8:3; 9:1, 3, 5; 11:1, 2; 13:5[2x], 7[2x], 14, 15; 16:8; 19:8; 20:4) and the plural form ἐδόθησαν (“were given”) twice (8:2; 12:14).<sup>157</sup> The primary idea suggested by the repeated use of the divine passive is the sovereignty of God. In Revelation, God’s sovereignty is demonstrated by his powerful intervention in the events of history, which means that both physical and spiritual events directly result from God’s initiative.<sup>158</sup> Thus, a divine passive points to God’s control of these events.<sup>159</sup> In other words, its repeated use denotes actions that occur only because he allows them to.<sup>160</sup>

John uses the divine passive ἐδόθη multiple times in soteriological contexts, where salvation is described as a gracious gift of God (6:11; 12:14; 19:8).<sup>161</sup> However, it is used more frequently in reference to the violence of both God and the forces of evil. When a divine passive is used with reference to the forces of evil, it highlights the fact that even the actions of the forces of evil, especially clustered in the passages of the four

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<sup>157</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 394–95; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 151. They both say that ἐδόθη occurs twenty-two times in Revelation, but according to my own count, it occurs twenty-one times. For a more comprehensive list of the divine passive usage in Revelation, see Alexander E. Stewart, “Authority and Motivation in the Apocalypse of John,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 4 (2013): 551.

<sup>158</sup> Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), 1:42.

<sup>159</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 32.

<sup>160</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 569.

<sup>161</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 81.

horsemen (6:1–8) and the activities of the beast (13:5–15), are controlled by God.<sup>162</sup> For example, twice the beast is mentioned in Revelation (11:7; 13:7) as the “conqueror.”<sup>163</sup> On both instances, however, the victory is only temporary because the Beast’s authority is given by God and is not inherent to him, as indicated by the divine passive ἐδόθη in 13:7.<sup>164</sup> This compelling example well demonstrates the fact that God’s victory is never in question in the entire book of Revelation, which also means, in light of the idea of salvation conceptualized as victory, that God’s redemptive purpose for believers is never thwarted by the forces of evil but is secure through the divine grace.

Similarly, when a divine passive is used in reference to the violence of God, it denotes the wrath of God expressed in the judgments carried out on behalf of his people. These judgments are presented in Revelation by three septet series of judgment commonly known as the seals (6:1–17; 8:1), trumpets (8:2; 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19), and bowls (15:1, 8; 16:1–21), and they are carried out by God’s agents, the heavenly angels. God’s violence, seen through the lens of divine justice, is justified in Revelation since it is carried out in response to the cries of God’s people (6:9–11).<sup>165</sup> Considering the fact that the three septets series of judgments in Revelation typologically follow the pattern of the plagues against Egypt in the Exodus,<sup>166</sup> they are most probably carried out with a redemptive purpose in view, namely the Exodus-like redemption of God’s people.

Thus, these divine passives, as used in the contexts of both salvation and judgment, indicate that God has sovereign control over both of them. They reinforce the conviction, albeit in a hidden manner, that everything that was taking place and would take place, including the violent activity of the dragon and the two beasts and the three

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<sup>162</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 32.

<sup>163</sup> Interestingly, this is the divine passive.

<sup>164</sup> Töniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, 75.

<sup>165</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Tabb, *All Things New*, 139–40.

septet series of judgment, finds its ultimate source in God and is under his control.<sup>167</sup>

Thomas and Machia nicely summarize the above statement regarding the divine passive in the following way: “the divine passives of Revelation, in which God is the implied agent, indicate that the divine hand is providentially the source of grace or judgment throughout all of the affairs of history, even those that seek to thwart God’s redemptive purposes.”<sup>168</sup> In this respect, the divine passive is one of the ways John uses to present the idea of God’s sovereign grace in salvation by applying it not only to the context of salvation but also to that of judgment, which is the flip side of salvation.

### **Life (ζωή)**

The term ζωή occurs seventeen times in Revelation (2:7, 10; 3:5; 7:17; 11:11; 13:8; 16:3; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:6, 27; 22:1, 2, 14, 17, 19). Life is an important theme in Revelation, which implicitly suggests the idea of salvation as “eternal life.”<sup>169</sup> It is consistently used with a noun as its qualifier, that is, an adjectival genitive. Of all the nouns that occur in combination with ζωή, those carrying the connotations of divine grace in salvation are the tree of life (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19), the crown of life (2:10; 3:11<sup>170</sup>), the book of life (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27), and the water of life (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17).

To begin with, the imagery of the “tree of life” occurs four times in Revelation (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). It evokes images of the garden of Eden, as it is frequently associated with the original paradise mentioned in the Old Testament (Gen 2:9; 3:23–24). There has been debate over the referent of the tree of life. There has been a debate over the referent

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<sup>167</sup> Stewart, “Authority and Motivation in the Apocalypse of John,” 551.

<sup>168</sup> John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 407.

<sup>169</sup> Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes*, vol. 3, *General Letters & Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 347.

<sup>170</sup> Even though the term crown lacks ζωής (of life) here in 3:11, the context suggests that it refers to the same crown as in 2:10, which is given to the conqueror.

of the tree of life. While some argue that the tree of life symbolizes the cross of Christ, others claim that it represents immortality or eternal life in New Jerusalem.<sup>171</sup> According to Wong, both of these explanations are reasonable, as neither poses a real problem in understanding that the tree of life represents eternal life, although the latter is to be preferred.<sup>172</sup>

In the message issued to the church at Ephesus, Christ promises the conquerors that they will eat of the tree of life, which finds its fulfillment in the New Jerusalem (22:2). By this connection, it becomes clearer that the tree of life, as Kuykendall rightly points out, is much more than a vision of tasty, fruit-laden branches on a tree, as it symbolizes life in the full presence of God, reclaimed from the fall of Adam, and realized at the end of history.<sup>173</sup> The eternal life symbolized by the imagery of the tree of life points to the divine grace in salvation in the sense that Christ gives it as a reward to those who conquer (2:7), not something earned by human effort.

The term *στέφανος* (crown/wreath) occurs eight times in Revelation (2:10; 3:11; 4:4; 10; 6:2; 9:7; 12:1; 14:14). Two out of these eight instances refer to the conqueror's crown as a promised reward for faithful believers (2:10; 3:11). The "crown of life" found in these two passages signifies "eternal life" granted by God to them,<sup>174</sup> while the remaining six instances include the twenty-four elders who wear crowns (4:4, 10); the rider on the white horse in the scene of the first seal, given a crown; demonic locusts wearing something like crowns (9:7); the woman clothed with the sun wearing a crown (12:1); and one like the son of man wearing a crown (14:14). All these depictions

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<sup>171</sup> For the full discussion on this topic, see Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155, no. 618 (April 1998): 211–226.

<sup>172</sup> Wong, "The Tree of Life in Revelation 2:7," 219–20.

<sup>173</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 77.

<sup>174</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 71; Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 241; Reddish, *Revelation*, 57.

convey the ideas of victory, honor, and power whether for good or evil.<sup>175</sup>

The crown of life is also linked to the victory motif (2:11), and it draws on three types of associations: (1) athletics, (2) military, and (3) public service.<sup>176</sup> In my view, the martial character of the verb *νικάω* (2:11b) and the use of the “fear not” formula (2:10a) in its immediate context, often used in holy war accounts,<sup>177</sup> strongly suggest that the second view is to be preferred. Probably, the term “crown” mentioned in 3:11 has the same meaning, though it lacks the qualifier “life,” as in 2:10, namely the eschatological salvation symbolized by eternal life. This is indicated by the fact that the second instance also occurs in the context of the conquering motif. Therefore, although a specific crown is not identified in 3:11, the general meaning of victory attached to the crown remains, suggesting that this is the same crown of life as in 2:10. All in all, the phraseology the “crown of life” symbolizes the eschatological salvation freely given as a reward by Christ, the Conqueror par excellence, who accomplished victory through his death and resurrection.

The next imagery is the “book of life.” The phrase “book of life” is found six times (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27) in Revelation. The book of life is generally recognized as a divine register of all believers<sup>178</sup> or the names of the saved.<sup>179</sup> In other words, it is a metaphor for saints whose salvation has been determined.<sup>180</sup> For example, the expression “the blotting out of names from the book of life” recorded in 3:5 is far from suggesting the possibility of losing personal salvation. Instead, it emphasizes the

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<sup>175</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 241.

<sup>176</sup> Koester, *Revelation*, 277–78.

<sup>177</sup> Norbert Lohfink, *ἡγήνησθε*, *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 368–96.

<sup>178</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 130.

<sup>179</sup> Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 315; David J. MacLeod, “The Sixth ‘Last Thing’: The Last Judgment and the End of the World (Rev 20:11-15),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 627 (July 2000): 324.

<sup>180</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 701.



note of grace confirmed by the fact that Christ is addressing the conqueror upon whom the security of the salvation of the faithful conqueror is contingent.<sup>181</sup> The same soteriological truth is described in 21:27, which also speaks of the security of the salvation of God's people as contingent on the sovereign grace of God.

The genitive τοῦ ἀρνίου (“of the lamb”), a genitive of either possession or source, further qualifies “the book of life” in 13:8 and 21:27, intentionally referring to Lamb's sovereignty over who receives life and who does not.<sup>182</sup> The phrase “written in the book of life” in both 13:8 and 17:8 is used negatively in terms of God's rejection of unbelievers.<sup>183</sup> In these two passages, the stress is on those who will not receive the salvific protection of the book.

The last two instances of the “book of life” (20:12, 15) are found in the same pericope (20:11–15) as the “book of deeds.” It is not insignificant that these two books simultaneously appear in the final judgment scene. The whole point is that they both seem to stress the universality of God's final judgment in the sense that all humankind is judged based on their deeds.<sup>184</sup> In this respect, the focus seems to be on the book of deeds. However, the greater focus of this passage, as Thomas notes, is on the other book, “the book of life.”<sup>185</sup> For this reason, Boring writes that these two books picture the paradox of works and grace in that humans are ultimately responsible for what they do, with eternal consequences, and, at the same time, God is ultimately responsible for their

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<sup>181</sup> John Henry Bennetch, “The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ for the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 96, no. 383 (July 1939): 358.

<sup>182</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 866–67.

<sup>183</sup> According to Osborne, the phrase “written in the book of life” refers both to the security of believers in 3:5 and 21:27 and to God's rejection of unbelievers in 13:8 and 17:8. Osborne, *Revelation*, 616.

<sup>184</sup> Paulsen, “Sanctuary and Judgment,” 288. The idea of universal judgment according to deeds is attested in both testaments (Ps 62:12; Jer 17:10; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Pet 1:17).

<sup>185</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 431.

salvation because it is his deeds that save.<sup>186</sup> All in all, the phrase “written book of life” indicates divine grace in salvation, referring to believers whose salvific life has been secured or, with the negative, to unbelievers who do not have such security.

The final expression that needs to be discussed is the “water of life.” It occurs four times in Revelation (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17). Water is a multifaceted image in Revelation, and it could be interpreted either positively or negatively depending on the context. Kuykendall provides five possible interpretive options for the water imagery used in Revelation. Of all the five options, the fifth one, “eternal life,” best accounts for the reference “water of life.”<sup>187</sup> To be more specific, this imagery is linked to paradise imagery.<sup>188</sup> It symbolizes “eternal salvation” and the eternal fellowship of believers with God, the Lamb, and the Spirit in New Jerusalem.<sup>189</sup>

The first image of “water of life” (7:17) appears within the pericope of Revelation 7:9–17, which, combined with the preceding verse 7:16, derives its image from Isaiah 49:10.<sup>190</sup> Isaiah 49:10 as the background to this image suggests that just as God guides the exiles liberated from Babylon to fountains of water, so the Lamb will lead the redeemed to “springs of the water of life.”<sup>191</sup> Thus, the Lamb's pivotal role should receive the most attention in this salvific scene. He is the one who shares the throne of

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<sup>186</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 212. Similarly, Stuhlmacher notes that while the idea of human responsibility is the focal point here, it is even truer that believers are saved by God's grace alone since the book of life is the unmerited recording of their names. Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Daniel P. Bailey and Jostein Adna, trans. Daniel P. Bailey and Jostein Adna (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 696.

<sup>187</sup> According to Kuykendall, the image of water in Revelation could be interpreted in five different ways: (1) persecution, (2) judgment, (3) people, (4) the sovereign power and greatness of Christ at his second coming, (5) and eternal life. Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 78–79.

<sup>188</sup> Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 762.

<sup>189</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 69.

<sup>190</sup> Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, 1st ed. New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 156; Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 94; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 148.

<sup>191</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 201.

God's sovereignty (7:9–10), goes at the head of the faithful through his death and resurrection, and shepherds believers, leading them to participate in eternal life.<sup>192</sup>

The other three instances are found in chapters 21–22 (21:6; 22:1, 17). In addition to Revelation 7:17, these three passages further describe and reinforce the concept of divine grace in salvation. The symbolic meaning of “water of life” as eternal life or salvation and the idea that God gives it to the redeemed as a free gift is brought into sharper focus by means of the grammar, allusions, and language employed in them.<sup>193</sup>

### **New Jerusalem**

The term “New Jerusalem” occurs only twice in the Bible. Ironically, all its occurrences are found within Revelation (3:12; 21:2). The picture of the New Jerusalem broadly signifies the end-time “eschatological salvation.”<sup>194</sup> To be more precise, it represents the intimate presence and fellowship that the redeemed will eternally enjoy

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<sup>192</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 201–2.

<sup>193</sup> For example, the epithet “Alpha and Omega” applied to God in Revelation 21:6 emphasizes God's sovereign control over all things. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 448; Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 266; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 312; Osborne, *Revelation*, 738; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, vol. 52C. World Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1126. God's sovereign control over all things applies to the salvation of humankind as well. On the basis of God's epithet “the beginning and the end,” Caird claims that all that man has and is, but above all the salvation of humankind, is from start to finish the work of God. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 266. Beasley-Murray argues that the primary application of the image of the “spring of the water of life” is to the believer who has come, trusts in the Christ, and faces the testing described in earlier chapters of Revelation (especially chs 12–13) while doubtless it could extend to all who will come forward and drink the water in the future (22:17). Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 313. Another notable example is the use of the preposition ἐκ in 22:1. This living water or life-giving water is said to flow from (ἐκ) the throne of God and the Lamb. This living water or life-giving water is said to flow from (ἐκ) the throne of God and the Lamb. After observing this feature, most scholars conclude that God and the Lamb are the very source (ἐκ) of the river of the water of life, denoting that both God and the Lamb are the source of salvation. One last example is the rendering of δωρεάν as “without money and price” in 21:6 and 22:17. The dominant biblical influence that stands behind the living water tradition of both Revelation 21:6 and 22:17 is Isaiah 55:1, which highlights the fact that the eternal life is freely given to the people of God. Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994).

<sup>194</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 190; Boring, *Revelation*, 169, 178; Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1174. Against this majority view, Moloney argues, from the vantage point of the ongoing effects of Jesus's death and resurrection, that the notion of the new Jerusalem may not be eschatological, in the traditional sense of the destruction of evil and reward for the faithful; rather, it refers to the earthly reality of the Christian church. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 15.

with God (21:3).<sup>195</sup> The New Jerusalem portrays the pinnacle of salvation, signifying the ultimate fulfillment of the entire salvation history that concludes the Bible story and sums up all the promises made to the conquerors in the seven messages to the churches in Revelation 2–3.<sup>196</sup> In other words, it represents the perfect city, the final destiny of the redeemed, that consummates the story that God began in the first garden.<sup>197</sup>

Moreover, an essential soteriological aspect discernible in John’s use of this image is that he employs it to contrast with Babylon and presents it as the soteriological antithesis to Babylon within a particular literary setting— the tale of two cities (17:1–22:9). Put differently, John endeavors to stress the New Jerusalem’s salvific nature by identifying Babylon as the counterfeit New Jerusalem. While New Jerusalem stands for the system of salvation founded by God as the expression of divine grace, Babylon symbolizes a futile human endeavor to obtain salvation apart from God.<sup>198</sup>

In these two passages, the former looks forward to the reality, which the latter describes in detail later in chapters 21–22.<sup>199</sup> The initial mention of the New Jerusalem appears in the promise made to the church in Philadelphia (3:12). Despite the possibility of various interpretations for the meaning of four symbols in this verse (pillar, name of God, name of the city of God, the new name of Christ),<sup>200</sup> the four elements of the promise, as Beale suggests, are not to be interpreted as four distinct promises but as different aspects of the same promise concerning eschatological fellowship and

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<sup>195</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 113.

<sup>196</sup> Du Rand, “The New Jerusalem as Pinnacle of Salvation,” 298–99.

<sup>197</sup> Du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” 496.

<sup>198</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 531.

<sup>199</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 1.

<sup>200</sup> For a detailed interpretation on the significance of these four elements, see Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Pillar and the Throne in Revelation 3:12, 21,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156, no. 623 (1999): 297–307.

identification with Christ.<sup>201</sup>

The second occurrence of the new Jerusalem is in verse 21:2. The description of the New Jerusalem here differs significantly from that of 3:12 in that it is described as “a bride adorned for her husband.” John’s primary purpose in utilizing the bridal imagery in relation to the new Jerusalem<sup>202</sup> appears to be describing the relationship between Yahweh and his faithful people.<sup>203</sup> To that end, he employs marriage symbolism,<sup>204</sup> building on the Old Testament nuptial imagery, particularly Isaiah 61:10 and 54:11–12.<sup>205</sup>

The primary soteriological implication of the New Jerusalem imagery is that salvation is undoubtedly a matter of divine grace freely given, a gift resulting from God’s unconditional and sovereign provision. In Revelation 21:2 and 21:10, the New Jerusalem is described as “coming down out of (ἐκ) from (ἀπὸ) God.” The same prepositions are utilized in describing the New Jerusalem mentioned in Christ’s promise to the church in Philadelphia (3:12). The preposition ἐκ refers to the place of origin, whereas ἀπὸ indicates the divine originator.<sup>206</sup> By reference to the location (heaven) of the redeemed

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<sup>201</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 293.

<sup>202</sup> According to Matthew Y. Emerson, John regularly uses multiple images to describe the same reality, especially in describing the church as God’s redeemed people; the combination of the bride imagery with that of the new Jerusalem is a good example. Matthew Y. Emerson, *Between the Cross and the Throne: The Book of Revelation*, Transformative Word (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 42–43. Despite the correlation between those two images, however, the bridal imagery is intentionally excluded from being treated along with that of the new Jerusalem because it is a typical example that shows that human faithfulness (*the fine linen: righteous deeds of the saints*) is a direct result of divine grace (*it has been granted*). Therefore, it will be treated separately later in the section “Imagery and Language of the Dual Notion of Divine Grace and Human Faithfulness.”

<sup>203</sup> Jan Fekkes III, ““His Bride Has Prepared Herself”: Revelation 19–21 and Isaian Nuptial Imagery,” *JBL* 109, no. 2 (1990): 269. Similarly, J. Lanier Burns states that marriage is nothing less than a governing metaphor for God’s relationship with his people and their glorious future. See J. Lanier Burns, “The Biblical Use of Marriage to Illustrate Covenantal Relationships,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 173, no. 691 (July-September 2016): 295.

<sup>204</sup> According to Fekkes, the bride theme is divided into three major parts: (1) 19:7–9, where the Lamb’s bride is announced as *prepared*; (2) 21:2, where the bride is *introduced*; and (3) 21:9–21, where the bride is *described*. Fekkes, “His Bride Has Prepared Herself,” 269.

<sup>205</sup> Fekkes, “His Bride Has Prepared Herself,” 269.

<sup>206</sup> Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 751.

community and their source (God),<sup>207</sup> the redemption of God’s people is depicted as perfected by God himself.

This point is further enhanced by the perfect passive participle used in portraying the holy city as “prepared (ἡτοιμασμένην) as a bride (21:2).” The passive form of perfect participle indicates that the bride had no part in her preparation.<sup>208</sup> All in all, the bride-city’s descent to earth on the last day denotes its establishment by God rather than human endeavor, namely the divine grace in salvation.

### **Measuring Rod / Seal of God**

The mention of the measuring rod is in 11:1–2 and 21:15–17, and the seal of God in 7:2 and 9:4. “Measuring rod” and “seal of God” are presented here together in the same space, for they serve the same function: an indicator of God’s empowerment of Christian faithfulness.<sup>209</sup> They broadly signify God’s ownership, protection, security, and eternal presence.<sup>210</sup>

The noun σφραγίς (“seal” or “signet”) occurs thirteen times in Revelation, two of which are referred to as the “seal of the living God” (7:2; 9:4). The remaining eleven refer to the seven seals (5:1, 2, 5, 9; 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12; 8:1). The verb σφραγίζω (“to seal”) occurs eight times throughout Revelation, five of which are found in chapter 7 as applied to the sealing of the hundred and forty-four thousand (7:3, 4 [x2], 5, 8). The sealing was often done with a “signet ring,” which was an instrument used by oriental rulers to authenticate and preserve official documents by way of a clay or wax impression.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Charles H. Talbert, “Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness of Human Faithfulness in the Revelation of John Viewed within Its Apocalyptic Context,” in *Getting “Saved”: The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament*, ed. Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 280.

<sup>208</sup> Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ*, 2:141.

<sup>209</sup> Talbert, “Divine Assistance and Enablement,” 278.

<sup>210</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 135, 138.

<sup>211</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 181.

The most likely conceptual background, though several have been proposed,<sup>212</sup> to the concept of God’s seal being used to mark the servants of God is found in Ezekiel 9. The account of Ezekiel 9 provides a helpful clue for a better understanding of how John uses the seal symbolism. The purpose of the marking in Ezekiel 9 is to protect the righteous remnant of Israel from the coming wrath of God, which will be inflicted by the Babylonians and suffered by the unfaithful Israelites.<sup>213</sup> In John’s visionary world, it serves the same purpose. Those who have the seal of God on their foreheads are protected from the coming wrath of God and the Lamb (6:17; 16:14).<sup>214</sup>

To be more specific, the sealing signifies the protection of God’s people during the tribulation, preventing them from apostatizing.<sup>215</sup> Thus, the sealing enables them to respond in faith(fulness)<sup>216</sup> to the trials, ensuring that their faith and salvation are protected from the various sufferings inflicted on them.<sup>217</sup> Boxall provides an apt summary of the function of the sealing: “What their sealing does do is mark them out as God’s servants, sustained through the great tribulation, and destined for ultimate salvation.”<sup>218</sup>

Another metaphor that denotes divine grace in salvation is the “measuring rod.” The verb *μετρέω* (“to measure”) is found five times in two passages (11:1–2; 21:15–17), and the act of measuring is performed by a measuring rod (11:1; 21:15). As for the

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<sup>212</sup> The two key OT backgrounds that have contributed to the picture of God’s sealing in Revelation are the story of Exodus and Ezekiel’s vision of seven angels. Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 122; Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 96–97.

<sup>213</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 409.

<sup>214</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 138.

<sup>215</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 36.

<sup>216</sup> Smalley chooses the noun “faithfulness” over “faith” as opposed to Beale, emphasizing more the active side of faith. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 182.

<sup>217</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 409.

<sup>218</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 122.

background to its usage, Ezekiel 40 and Zechariah 2 seem to have most influenced John's account of the measuring.<sup>219</sup> The measuring of the temple in the vision of the prophet Ezekiel signifies God's promise for the rebuilding of the temple, the return of his glory to the temple, and Yahweh's eternal presence among his people.<sup>220</sup>

Similarly, the measuring of Jerusalem mentioned in the vision of the prophet Zechariah symbolizes God's promise that he would protect the city and that he would also be his glory.<sup>221</sup> Hence, measuring generally means securing and establishing his presence among his people, denoting divine protection for believers, which is precisely the point of John's vision of the earthly temple and heavenly city being measured.<sup>222</sup>

In sum, the brief investigation conducted on the images of the measuring rod and the seal of God demonstrates that they primarily emphasize the fundamental role of God's redemptive grace in salvation. Both the sealing of God's people and the measuring of the temple are symbolic ways of declaring God's preservation of his people and divine protection for them. These two images, however, do not merely indicate complete security against physical suffering and death but, more likely, against spiritual danger and possible apostasy of God's people.<sup>223</sup> Talbert aptly summarizes this soteriological reality, noting that both the measuring and the sealing speak of God's enablement of Christian faithfulness,<sup>224</sup> which ensures the believers' entrance into the eschatological salvation offered by God.

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<sup>219</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 326; Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 154; Brighton, *Revelation*, 285.

<sup>220</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 285.

<sup>221</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*.

<sup>222</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 136.

<sup>223</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 568–69; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 213.

<sup>224</sup> Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 278.



## Summary

In this chapter, I endeavored to demonstrate the following three points. First, the concept of salvation in Revelation is primarily portrayed in terms of victory in holy war, which is most effectively conveyed by the theme of conquering. Second, the idea of divine grace in salvation is expressed through the conquering language applied to Christ's redemptive victory found in three strategic places (3:21, 5:5; 17:14), each related to a portrait of Christ as the divine warrior and performing a specific soteriological function—initiation of salvation, motivation in the present, and the consummation of salvation, showing that salvation is through divine grace alone from beginning to end. Finally, there are other redemptive imagery and language in Revelation, other than the concept of Christ's conquering, that denotes the idea of divine grace in salvation, including “divine passive,” “life,” “new Jerusalem,” and “measure of God/seal of God.” The following is a summary of the findings from the research on these topics.

First and foremost, based on the lexical study of *σωτηρία* in such passages as 7:10, 12:10, and 19:1, I concluded that *σωτηρία* could be translated as “victory” in Revelation, with Christ, as the agent of this victory, assuming the role of divine warrior that was originally ascribed to God. It has been observed that the death and resurrection of Christ are the primary means through which this redemptive victory is achieved, indicating divine grace in salvation. In light of this, I proposed that the conquering motif, as the key concept of the holy war motif, serves as an effective tool to analyze the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation since it contains all the ideas related to the notion of salvation as victory mentioned above.

Next, I have examined the application of *νικάω* to Christ's redemptive victory in three strategic locations: 3:21, 5:5, and 17:14. These three places are strategic in the sense that they are related to three major portraits of Christ as divine warrior—the Son of Man, the slain lamb standing, and the warrior lamb/the coming divine warrior. This means that *νικάω*, related to each one of these portraits of Christ as the divine warrior,

indicates the warring activity of Christ as the divine warrior through which he accomplished the salvation of God's people. However, the images of the "exalted Christ," the "slain lamb standing," and the "robe dipped in blood," each related to one of three major portraits of Christ as the divine warrior, reinterpret Christ's military victory in terms of his death and resurrection. This suggests that salvation comes only through Christ's death and resurrection. I also argued that each application of *νικάω* to Christ's victory performs a specific soteriological function: initiation of salvation (5:5), motivation in the present (3:21), and consummation of salvation (17:14), indicating that salvation is the work of divine grace from start to finish.

Finally, I have surveyed other redemptive imagery and language denoting the notion of divine grace in salvation to show that Revelation uses other imagery and language than the concept of victory to convey the idea of divine grace in salvation. The examples surveyed are "divine passive," "life," "new Jerusalem," and "measure/seal of God."

CHAPTER 3  
HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION:  
CONQUERING AS CONDITION  
FOR SALVATION

**Introduction**

This chapter demonstrates that the verb *νικάω* is not only used to convey the idea of divine grace in salvation expressed through the accomplished victory of Christ through his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) but also to communicate the idea of human responsibility in salvation (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). To be more specific, this chapter intends to clarify and define the nature of believers' conquering in relation to salvation. The point to be proven is twofold. First, conquering is an essential condition for salvation. Conquering for believers is not optional (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7), but it is the *sine qua non* for salvation that all believers should practice without fail to attain the final salvation. In this section, I will consider various aspects implied in the conquering language in relation to salvation. Second, conquering is the expression of saving faith. Although believers' conquering emphasizes their good works, it is no more than the external proof of their inner saving faith. Thus, faith is the only human responsibility required of believers for their salvation. Conquering is a pictorial language used to provide a vivid portrait of "faith" in action. The findings of this chapter will be used as the foundation on which I will build the arguments of subsequent chapters.

**The Call to Conquer: Condition for Salvation**

The main argument of this dissertation is, as previously noted, that the theme of victory conveyed by the verb *νικάω* portrays divine grace and human responsibility in

the process of salvation as two concurrent realities that must be equally recognized without sacrificing one for the other. In the previous chapter, I examined how three instances of *νικάω*, referring to the victory of Christ as a divine warrior (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), are programmatically used to depict the idea of divine grace in salvation. The theme of believers' victory conveyed by the same verb *νικάω*, on the other hand, implies human responsibility in salvation (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), which is enabled only by God's grace.<sup>1</sup>

However, this does not change the fact that believers must also conquer the same way Christ did to attain the final salvation. This implies that the “victory” achieved by believers becomes an essential condition for salvation. As argued in the previous chapter, salvation is a gift from God accomplished through Christ's victory on the cross. Yet, this does not negate human responsibility for salvation, which in Revelation is primarily conceptualized as the conquering of believers. The act of conquering on the part of believers remains a distinctly human endeavor. Thus, conquering is an essential condition that believers must fulfill to attain final salvation. The conditionality of salvation is expressed most evidently through the conquering language in two key passages: Revelation 2–3 and 21:7.

### **Conquering as Condition for Salvation in Revelation 2–3**

The main argument of this section is that the formulaic expression, the “one who conquers” (*ὁ νικῶν*), primarily centered in chapters 2–3 and featured in the

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<sup>1</sup> It is generally recognized that divine grace and human responsibility in salvation go together; the question of how one works with the other has been perennially debated in Christian theology. See Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles, eds., *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2012), xi. This is not to say, however, that the relationship between these two matters is not indistinguishable. Peter Sammons correctly points out that while divine sovereignty precedes human responsibility and can exist on its own, human responsibility, on the other hand, is derived, created, thus cannot exist on its own independently of God's sovereignty. See Peter Sammons, *Reprobation and God's Sovereignty: Recovering a Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2022), 218. How believers' conquering is enabled by divine grace will be discussed more in detail in the subsequent two chapters.

concluding section of the letters to the seven churches, is programmatically used as a summary statement for all the ethical imperatives commanded by Christ that must be fulfilled for salvation. Thus, the theological significance of the expression in question is not simply ethical or ecclesiological but also soteriological, as indicated by the seven promises given to those who conquer at the end of seven letters. All of these promises are symbolic representations of the assured eternal life.

The conquering language, applied to believers to signify both the conditionality and, at the same time, the very means of salvation, has been affirmed by various scholars. Thomas R. Schreiner argues that conquering is not optional, asserting that only those who conquer will ultimately enjoy the final inheritance.<sup>2</sup> Also, G. K. Beale contends that *νικᾶω* is consistently reiterated in the concluding promises of all the letters as the condition for inheriting salvation.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, Richard D. Phillips claims that the purpose of Jesus's appeals in the seven letters to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 is to ensure that salvation would come only to "the one who conquers."<sup>4</sup> This view is implicitly supported by several other scholars.<sup>5</sup>

Some scholars, including Olutola Peters, argue that the writing of Revelation

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "Justification Apart from and by Works: At the Final Judgment Works Will Confirm Justification," in *Four Views on the Role of Works at the Final Judgment*, by Robert N. Wilkin et al., Counterpoints Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 94–95.

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 234.

<sup>4</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 193.

<sup>5</sup> Bradley Green points out that the expression the "one who conquers" in Revelation 2–3 does not simply point to Christ himself but indicates Christians' relationship to Christ in such a way that they are to conquer by being bound up with Christ. Thus, conquering is not optional but is an essential component of new covenant life. See Bradley G. Green, *Covenant and Commandment: Works, Obedience, and Faithfulness in the Christian Life*, NSBT 33 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 28. M. Eugene Boring emphasizes that the goal of the expression, the "one who conquers," is to provide Revelation's theological perspective on Christian responsibility. See M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 97. Richard Bauckham argues that conquering is the only way through which believers may reach their eschatological destiny. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 92.

was primarily prompted by ethical concerns and considerations.<sup>6</sup> However, it should be noted that the ethics of Revelation cannot be understood independently of its soteriology, as they are inextricably related. As G. B. Caird notes, believers' earthly conduct has eternal significance because their deeds will be judged (20:12), and their eschatological destiny will depend on whether or not their names are written in the book of life.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the formulaic expression, "the one who conquers," should not be interpreted merely as conveying a general sense of ethical mandates, but also as denoting the idea of human responsibility for salvation in Revelation. Human actions are soteriologically important because they point to soteriological consequences.

The basic logic of the soteriological argument as presented in Revelation 2–3 is clear: (1) if one succeeds in conquering, then (2) he will be granted salvation.

#### *The Background of the Conditional Salvation in Revelation 2–3*

The presentation of salvation in conditional terms in Revelation 2–3 can be attributed mainly to two factors. First, the early Christian apocalyptic literature may have influenced the notion of salvation presented in Revelation.<sup>8</sup> Second, the prophetic tradition from the Old Testament would have played a vital role in shaping the content of Revelation 2–3. However, considering the form and the content of Revelation 2–3, which closely resembles the style of the oracles recorded in Hebrew prophets, the latter option

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<sup>6</sup> Olutola K. Peters, *The Mandate of the Church in the Apocalypse of John*, StBibLit 77 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 141. Most importantly, what is central to the participatory theology is that, whether speaking of ethics or soteriology, Christology stands at the center of it. Thus, both ethical and soteriological aspects implied in the conquering language should be understood Christologically. The reason why believers are required to produce a faithfulness that mirrors that of Christ is because their participation in Christ requires them to conform to the pattern of faithfulness as shown by Christ.

<sup>7</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2nd ed., BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1984), 297.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Joseph Spano is a major proponent of this view, who emphasizes that the conditional understanding of eschatological salvation was not foreign to the apocalyptic literature of the early Christianity, and John would likely have used this genre and the motif of the conditional nature of eschatological salvation because both fit the purpose of his writing. Eric Joseph Spano, "Erasure and Endurance: Aspects of Soteriology in Revelation" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 10.

better explains why the notion of salvation in Revelation 2–3 is described in conditional terms.

According to Schüssler Fiorenza, the form of the seven messages is best understood as either royal edicts<sup>9</sup> or divine oracles.<sup>10</sup> But most commentators and interpreters of Revelation favor “prophetic oracles” or “covenantal lawsuit.”<sup>11</sup> This implies that Christ’s seven proclamations given to the seven churches should be understood as reflecting the relationship between a suzerain and his vassals.<sup>12</sup> More specifically, Christ appears in Revelation 2–3 as a suzerain who scrutinizes the new covenant people of God to promote desired behaviors through judgment and the promise of salvation.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the whole unit of Revelation 2–3 can be taken as a covenant document in which strong covenantal overtones permeate its overall structure.

When seen in this light, all the blessings and warnings of chapters 2–3 are to be interpreted against the backdrop of the covenant theme. In this sense, the promises

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<sup>9</sup> The main proponent of this view is David E. Aune, “The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2–3),” *New Testament Studies* 36, no. 2 (April 1990): 182–204.

<sup>10</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 46. Beale argues that either perspective has its own interpretative strengths. If the background of the pagan royal edict is in mind, then Christ is presenting himself as a king addressing his subjects and is portraying himself as the true sovereign in contrast to the pseudo-kingship of the Roman emperor. If the covenantal background is in view, this perspective enhances the OT prophetic speech form and helps to see the church as the continuation of true Israel and a new covenant community who is now in covenantal relationship with Christ. Therefore, if the church is faithful, it will inherit the covenantal blessings originally promised to Israel, but her unfaithfulness will bring the covenantal curse of exclusion from the blessings. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 227–28.

<sup>11</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 72; Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 3; Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 47; William H. Shea, “The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1983): 71–84; David A. deSilva, *Discovering Revelation: Content, Interpretation, Reception*, *Discovering Biblical Texts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 71–72; Alan S. Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit in the Book of Revelation*, *New Testament Monographs* 29 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 158–75; David Graves, *The Seven Messages of Revelation and Vassal Treaties: Literary Genre, Structure, and Function*, *Gorgias Dissertations Biblical Studies* 41 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), 122–23.

<sup>12</sup> Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit*, 169.

<sup>13</sup> Bandy argues that just as the OT oracles instruct the Israelites to obey and then expect God’s grace and salvation or else experience God’s judgment, the seven letters exhibit the same pattern in the admonition section and the promise to the overcomers. See Bandy, *The Prophetic Lawsuit*, 175.

given to the seven churches can be viewed as covenant blessings and the warnings as covenant curses, all of which are the future consequences of believers' obedience or disobedience to their sovereign suzerain Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> G. K. Beale rightly points out that the inheritance of the covenantal blessings of the new creation, originally promised to Israel, and the experience of the curse of exclusion from these blessings exclusively depends on the church's faithfulness to Christ as the inaugurated new covenant community.

It should be noted, however, that the author employs an idiosyncratic expression to convey the notion of covenantal faithfulness to Christ, namely "the one who conquers" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). Those who conquer will receive the reward of eternal salvation as a covenant blessing, including eating from the tree of life (2:7), deliverance from the second death (2:11), the gift of the white robe (3:5), and so forth. Conversely, those who fail to conquer will experience the consequence of their lack of faithfulness to Christ, that is, the covenant curse, including excommunication (2:5; 3:16), war (2:16), and death (2:23). Marvin C. Pate insightfully argues in support of the view that the author seems to have replaced obedience to the Torah with following Christ as the condition for entering the eschatological covenantal blessings.<sup>15</sup>

In this light, it can be established that while the conquering of Christ the Lamb (3:21; 5:5), as explored in the previous chapter, indicates that the divine side of the covenant has been fulfilled, the human side of the covenant still remains to be fulfilled by living a life of faithfulness to Christ the suzerain.<sup>16</sup> This is implied in believers' act of

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<sup>14</sup> Beatrice S. Neall, "Sealed Saints and the Tribulation," in *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies, Book 1*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, DRCS, vol. 6 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists], 1992), 247.

<sup>15</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 104.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Surridge explains that the verb *νικάω* used to describe the victory of the Lamb through his death and resurrection in 5:5 indicates the fulfillment of the divine side of covenant by his victory, while the human side of covenant needs to be fulfilled by believers' living a life of a conquest over



conquering as the new covenant people. Thus, the conditional understanding of salvation in Revelation 2–3 is best viewed as stemming from its reuse of the covenantal theme of the Old Testament or, more precisely, the prophetic genre called “prophetic oracle” and/or “covenant lawsuit,” following its general pattern but freely adapted and modified to suit the purpose of the author’s writing.

However, this should not be taken to mean that one’s salvation is achieved by human endeavor. While it is true that the conquering of believers involves human works expressed in terms of covenant fidelity to Christ, the idea of victory must be seen as a divine gift rather than human achievement. Jeffrey A. D. Weima gives two specific reasons in support of this view. First, the verb “to give” is used to convey the idea that victory is something graciously granted by Christ to believers. Second, the addition of the phrase “just as I also conquered” in 3:21 suggests that believers’ victory is ultimately not due to one’s own strength but to Christ’s previous victory.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps a brief example that could shed light on the complexity of the concept of victory as both human responsibility for salvation and a gift of God is the wedding imagery found in 19:7–8. Typically, the imagery of marriage and wedding feast is used in Revelation as a metaphor for salvation.<sup>18</sup> In this imagery, the white robe, a frequently used metaphor for salvation in Revelation (cf. 7:14), symbolizes both the redemption accomplished by Christ and the perseverance in faith accomplished by the martyred Christians.<sup>19</sup> This is why 19:8 says that while the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints, it is also said to have been given to them. This passage sets the overall tone for

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sin. See Robert Surridge, “Redemption in the Structure of Revelation,” *Expository Times* 101, no. 8 (May 1990): 234.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *The Sermons to the Seven Churches of Revelation: A Commentary and Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 48–49.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 138.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 178.

understanding two important soteriological concepts consistently portrayed throughout Revelation: the human responsibility for salvation and the divine grace that enables it.<sup>20</sup> Having grounded his interpretation of the salvific meaning of conquering in this imagery, Fred D. Layman argues that having obeyed the exhortations to the conquerors (2–3) through the enabling power of the Lord, those who persevere faithfully to the end are made ready to receive the fulfillment of the promises granted to the conquerors.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of victory as a divine gift certainly creates tension with the concept of victory as covenantal faithfulness, as the latter notion is connected to the works of obedience on the part of believers. However, this apparent soteriological tension will dissolve, as I will argue later, when attention is given to the divine enablement of believers' victory through the accomplished victory of Christ and the empowerment of the Spirit. At this juncture of my argument, I will not provide the details of how this is made possible. For now, suffice it to say that this is made possible by the accomplished victory of Christ and the empowering presence of the Spirit within believers.

### *The Content of Conquering*

Conquering is an essential condition to be met for believers to be saved. Given the pervasiveness of the covenantal theme in the overall structure of Revelation 2–3, conquering signifies one's response to covenantal responsibility, which can be generally defined as showing covenantal faithfulness to Christ. This suggests that, although the

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<sup>20</sup> Keith Marriner offers two ways to interpret the apparent contradiction between the fine linen as the righteous deeds of the saints and their righteous deeds as something that God has granted them. First, he says that it is possible to view the "righteous deeds" as evidence of one's salvation, which simply are fruit that is consistent with one's faith in Christ. This is not works-righteousness since the garments that the bride wears have already been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. Second, the "righteous deeds" may also be taken as God's just deeds, which are God's saving actions on behalf of his people. See Keith T. Marriner, *Following the Lamb: The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 189. Whichever interpretation one chooses, the idea of the primacy of divine grace is emphasized over the human responsibility in salvation in that the former enables the latter.

<sup>21</sup> The same logic can be found in the metaphor of the water of life. James Rosscup explains that while the access to the water of life is "without cost" (21:6), access to the springs of the water of life occurs after believers have washed their robes in Christ's blood and have come out of tribulation. See James E. Rosscup, "The 'Overcomer' of the Apocalypse," *Grace Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (1982): 267–68.

New Covenant is the covenant of grace, God expects the same kind of righteous obedience and faithfulness from believers as his covenant partners, just as he did from the ancient Israelites.<sup>22</sup> Covenant faithfulness involves adherence to covenant stipulations and, therefore, involves works. An important question then arises: What comprises the content of conquering?

According to Alexander E. Stewart, “conquering” is a rather general concept; thus, its specific content needs to be filled out with actions such as repentance, perseverance, worship, witness, and obedience (good works).<sup>23</sup> This means that the theme of conquering serves as an overarching concept that includes all the imperatives required to be fulfilled for the acquisition of salvation. However, there are others who regard the theme of conquering as less central. For instance, Osborne discusses the theme of “perseverance of the saints” as the main soteriological theme of Revelation, placing conquering alongside endurance, faithfulness, witness, and obedience, which are five key themes that carry the idea of perseverance of the saints.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Lunde helpfully explains that although the New Covenant graciously provides—in contrast to the Old Testament covenants—a transformation and enablement, the expectation of righteousness from its covenant partners remains the same. See Jonathan Lunde, *Following Jesus, the Servant King: A Biblical Theology of Covenantal Discipleship*, Biblical Theology for Life (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 112. Matthew Emerson and Heath Thomas helpfully pinpoint the foundational difference between the covenant of the Old and the New by noting that while Israel was permitted to live within God’s created order by the law given at Sinai in order to serve as a light to the rest of the world, which is also true of the new covenant stipulations, the new covenant is distinct from the old in such a way that new covenant laws are not given within the context of Israel’s inability to obey but in the context of restored Israel, the church, receiving the Spirit so that they can obey. See Matthew Y. Emerson and Heath A. Thomas, *The Story of Scripture: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, Hobbs College Library (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 40. Therefore, what distinguishes the new covenant from the old is the role of the Spirit in enabling believers to obey the stipulations of the new covenant. This will be discussed in more detail in due course.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander E. Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, Gorgias Dissertations Biblical Studies 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 76. However, Stewart treats the last two themes as less emphasized in Revelation compared with the first three themes. Benjamin Steen Stubblefield provides a rather different list than Stewart in that he considers the theme of witness as part of the ecclesial mandates and excludes perseverance. For more details, see Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, “The Function of the Church in Warfare in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 182–205.

<sup>24</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 42. Although Osborne rightly points out that the theme of perseverance is an important soteriological theme portraying the idea of human responsibility in salvation, in my view, his argument that perseverance of the saints is a larger concept that includes the concept of conquering is somewhat off the mark. Rather, I agree more with I. Howard Marshall’s view that the way through which John expresses the theme of

Granted, interpreters have different lenses through which to perceive what is more important and less important, and different lenses bring other things into focus. However, the fact that the expression the “one who conquers” appears at the concluding part of the letters to the seven churches suggests that it most likely functions as an all-encompassing term for various human responses related to the concept of human responsibility in salvation as found within Revelation 2–3. These responses are later woven into the central visions of Revelation, usually with further development. Jürgen Roloff argues in support of this view that the author, in the seven conquering sayings, summarizes both the admonitions and warnings based on the community's actual circumstances.<sup>25</sup>

But what, then, are the works that exemplify what it means to conquer? Although this question has been briefly answered above, it still requires a more in-depth examination. The answer to this question need not be lengthy and can be visually represented as follows:

Table 2. Faithful works, exhortations, and rewards

Church	Faithful Works	Exhortations	Rewards
Ephesus	Toil / patient endurance (2:2–3) / hating the deeds of Nicolaitans (2:6)	Remember from where have fallen/repent/do the first works (2:5)	Tree of life (2:7)

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perseverance is the theme of “victory” or “overcoming.” See I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 174.

<sup>25</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. John E. Alsup, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 46.

Church	Faithful Works	Exhortations	Rewards
Smyrna	Enduring Tribulation/poverty/slander of Jews who are the synagogue of Satan (2:9)	Not to fear suffering and death (2:10) / be faithful until death (2:10)	Crown of life (2:10) / deliverance from the second death (2:11)
Pergamum	Holding fast to Christ's name and his faith even in the days of Antipas (2:13)	To abstain from eating idol meat and practicing sexual immorality (2:14) / not to hold to the teaching of Nicolaitans (2:15) / repent (2:16)	Hidden manna (2:17) / white stone (2:17) / new name only known to the recipient (2:17)
Thyatira	Love, service, faith, patient endurance, and latter works exceeding the first (2:19)	Repent of the works of Jezebel, such as eating food sacrificed to idols, practicing sexual immorality (2:20–22) / holding fast to what they have until the return of Christ (2:25)	Authority over the nations (2:26) / rule with an iron scepter (2:27) / Morning star (2:28)
Sardis	None except that there are a few names who have not defiled their garments (3:4)	Wake and strengthen what is about to die (3:2) / remember and keep what they received and heard (3:3) / repent (3:3)	White garments (3:5) / book of life (3:5) / confession of name (3:5)
Philadelphia	They have kept the word of Christ (3:8) / have not denied Christ's name (3:8) / have kept Christ's command to persevere (3:10)	Hold fast to what they have (3:11)	Pillar in the temple (3:12) / the name of God, the city of God, and the new name of Christ written (3:12)

Church	Faithful Works	Exhortations	Rewards
Laodicea	None	Buy from Christ gold, white garments, and eye salve (3:18) / repent (3:19)	Sit on the divine throne with Christ (3:21)

As seen in the chart above, faithful works refer to the practices upheld by believers in the seven churches in accordance with the spiritual criteria provided by the exalted Christ. In contrast, exhortations are actions that fall short of the standard set by Christ. They are not optional but must be heeded and practiced at all costs to attain salvation, regardless of the local situations and situational differences within the seven churches. The content that completes what it means to conquer includes both continuing the practice of the faithful works and the deeds that fall short of the standard of the risen Christ.<sup>26</sup>

The rewards promised to those who conquer are lasting salvation and eternal life, formulated through a variety of images ranging from the tree of life (2:7) to sitting on the divine throne with Christ (3:21).<sup>27</sup> Given its placement at the end of each letter, the formulaic expression “the one who conquers” serves as the summary statement that functions to encourage all believers of the seven churches to hold fast to already existing faithful works and urges them to perform the works that fall short of the spiritual criteria provided by Christ to reach the eschatological salvation.

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<sup>26</sup> Some argue that only the exhortations must be heeded and practiced. For example, Stephen Homcy advocates this position. For further details, see Stephen L. Homcy, “‘To Him Who Overcomes’: A Fresh Look at What ‘Victory’ Means for the Believer According to the Book of Revelation,” *JETS* 38, no. 2 (June 1995): 199. My argument gains further support when proper attention is paid to the description of the works of the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia. The exhortations that Christ has given to them refer to and encourage them to hold firm to the faithful works they were already practicing. Paul Decock supports this view by noting, “The churches are encouraged to persevere wherever their works are good, and they are challenged to repent where their works fall short.” See Paul B. Decock, “The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful in the Apocalypse of John,” *Neotestamentica* 41, no. 1 (2007): 44.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Lambrecht, *Collected Studies on Pauline Literature and on the Book of Revelation*, AnBib 147 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 2001), 383.

Based on the above analysis, the presentation of conquering as a condition for salvation in Revelation 2–3 reveals one side of Revelation’s soteriological picture: humans do not helplessly wait for the completion of salvation but actively participate in the salvation process. As examined above, conquering involves a wide range of works such as faithfulness (3:10, 11), witness (2:13), repentance (2:5, 16; 3:3, 19), and worship (2:14, 20, 21),<sup>28</sup> some of which are further developed and clarified in the central visions of Revelation.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the formulaic expression the “one who conquers,” located at the end of the seven letters (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), is to be viewed as the all-encompassing term reflecting the soteriological reality that humans are held responsible for their actions, and these actions will eventually impact their eschatological destiny.

### **Conquering as Condition for Salvation in Revelation 21:6c–8**

A conditional promise of salvation, indicated by the formulaic expression the “one who conquers,” is repeated in 21:7, which reads ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός. In verse 21:7 is found the final reference to the conquering sayings found within Revelation. As many have pointed out, the promise of salvation articulated here echoes the repeated promises given to the conquerors in the letters to the seven churches (2–3).<sup>30</sup> Structurally speaking, 21:6c and 21:7 should be read

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander Stewart helpfully clarifies that references to sexual immorality in these verses likely refer to idolatry and *false worship* as spiritual adultery. See Alexander Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation: Five Principles for Interpretation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 86.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure, and Exegesis*, SNTSMS 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 193n340. While Pattemore’s analysis that many motives from the seven messages in chapters 2 and 3 are woven into the narrative of Revelation is convincing, I disagree with his claim that “conquering” motif is to be placed alongside many other motives found in chapters 2–3. But the language of conquering, as I have argued, should rather be understood as the summary statement of the whole range of works found within chapters 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 592; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 623–24; Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 360; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox

as one unit of thought as follows: ἐγὼ τῷ διψῶντι δώσω ἐκ τῆς πηγῆς τοῦ ὕδατος τῆς ζωῆς δωρεάν. ὁ νικῶν κληρονομήσει ταῦτα καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός.<sup>31</sup> The promise of salvation presented here is not the eighth promise, in addition to the seven promises given to the seven churches. Instead, it should be regarded as a summary expression of all the promises given to the seven churches, portraying the blessed state of God’s people in the new creation.<sup>32</sup> However, it is crucial to note that this promise is contingent on the conquering lifestyle of believers.

As previously noted, the expression ὁ νικῶν in 21:7 implies human endeavor. However, when read in connection with the preceding verse 21:6c,<sup>33</sup> it becomes evident that the reward promised to the conquerors—the eschatological salvation—is not a self-effected human achievement but a gift freely given without payment.<sup>34</sup> Thus, what is implicit in Revelation 2–3 is made explicit in 21:6c–7: conquering, while a human act, is a gift from God. Once again, the concepts of victory as the gift from God and victory as human responsibility in salvation, as was the case with Revelation 2–3, seem to be in

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Press, 2009), 382; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 385–86; David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1129; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 535; Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 110; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 541.

<sup>31</sup> It is so because the characteristic expressions δώσω and ὁ νικῶν are found together in these two verses just as in 2–3. According to Mark Wilson, the dative participle τῷ διψῶντι is used here instead of the typical τῷ νικῶντι as in the letter to the church in Ephesus and in Pergamum. Mark W. Wilson, *The Victor Sayings in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 174.

<sup>32</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 313. Similarly, Craig Koester argues that all the promises declared in 2–3 are summarized and reaffirmed here in the promise in 21:7. See Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 190. Also, Louis Brighton contends that the conclusions of the seven letters to the seven churches, taken together, are a sevenfold description of the blessed state of those who will live in the new heaven and earth. See Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 604. Külli Tõniste, by reference to ταῦτα, argues that the conquerors’ inheritance specified as “these things” in 21:7 refers to the new creation in general, as well as the list of promises given in Revelation 2–3 in particular. See Külli Tõniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, 154.

<sup>33</sup> This verse describes the fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah 55:1.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 195. Also, Caird supports this point by saying, “All that man has and is, but above all man’s salvation, is from start to finish the work of God.” See Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John: A Canonical and Intertextual Reading of Revelation 21–22*, LNTS 52 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 266.



tension with each other.

Paul A. Rainbow nicely captures the soteriological implication of the apparent tension between these two ideas. He argues that this passage indicates that salvation is offered gratuitously. Yet, the one who will inherit the blessings of the new creation is “he who conquers,” implying the necessity of keeping Christ’s works to the end, as noted in 2:26.<sup>35</sup> Phillips provides a more detailed explanation by closely examining two descriptions, τῷ διψῶντι and ὁ νικῶν, asserting that believers first receive salvation by bringing our thirst to God in simple faith, but subsequently they walk in that faith to persevere until the end.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the soteriological implication of the conquering language, “the one who conquers,” found in 21:7, is that while it expresses the idea of human responsibility for salvation, the believers’ entry into the new Jerusalem described in chapters 21 and 22, a symbol for eschatological salvation, is the result of the work of divine grace.

Once again, the ideas of divine grace and human responsibility for salvation become fused into a single motif in 21:6c–7, the motif of conquering. On the one hand, the conquering language, “the one who conquers,” functions to describe the necessity of human responsibility in the process of salvation (21:7). On the other hand, it also suggests that salvation is ultimately the work of God. It is entirely a gift of grace, as it is given freely without payment (21:6c). I will address how this is possible in the subsequent chapters.

### **Covenantal Nature of Conquering**

The covenantal overtones continue to reverberate in 21:7 through the expression “the one who conquers.” As discussed earlier, the conquerors’ inheritance of

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<sup>35</sup> Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 315.

<sup>36</sup> Phillips, *Revelation*, 625.

eschatological salvation is portrayed using covenantal language, signifying that receiving salvation depends on keeping various covenant obligations encapsulated in the all-encompassing term “the one who conquers.”

Many have argued that the author presents the promise of eschatological salvation to the conquerors by alluding to 2 Samuel 7:14 because it highlights the inheritance of divine sonship as part of the restored covenant relationship between God and his people.<sup>37</sup> The covenant imagery found in 21:7 further develops the thought of 21:3 by using inheritance language instead of marital imagery.<sup>38</sup> The theme of inheritance is soteriologically important in the New Testament, as the salvation of God’s people is often referred to as the inheritance (e.g., 1 Pet 1:5).<sup>39</sup> However, only Revelation brings this promised inheritance to its fulfillment.

What is at stake here is not simply that conquerors inherit eschatological salvation as a reward for their faithfulness. Instead, the covenant language primarily highlights God’s covenant faithfulness to his people, reflecting that the Davidic promise has now been fulfilled in Christ.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, through identification with Christ—the true Davidic heir (5:5; 22:16)—all those who conquer will also enter a close relationship

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<sup>37</sup> David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21:1–22:5*, JSNTSup 238 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 88; see also Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 267; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 313; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 542; Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 296–97; G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough, “Revelation,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1151. By contrast, Paul Hoskins argues that by emphasizing the covenantal language “I will be God to him” in 21:7, these words point back to God’s promises to Abraham in Genesis 17:1–8, which ends by saying, “I will be God to them.” See Paul M. Hoskins, *The Book of Revelation: A Theological and Exegetical Commentary* (North Charleston, SC: ChristoDoulos, 2017), 433–44. Osborne, rather, takes an eclectic position and argues that the phrase *ἔσομαι αὐτῷ θεὸς καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι υἱός* in 21:7 sums up both the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:7) and Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:14). See Osborne, *Revelation*, 740.

<sup>38</sup> The nuptial imagery is frequently used both in the OT and NT to portray the covenantal relationship between God and his people. For more details, see the section “marital covenant” in Tōniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, 146–53.

<sup>39</sup> Robert A. Peterson, *The Assurance of Salvation: Biblical Hope for Our Struggles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 49.

<sup>40</sup> Tōniste, *The Ending of the Canon*, 156.

with their Father God. G. R. Beasley-Murray drives home this point by noting that believers are God's sons derivatively through their relation to Christ.<sup>41</sup>

According to the logic of 21:7, the one who will be God's son is the one who conquers. Thus, the expression "the one who conquers" indicates the covenantal requirement that needs to be fulfilled to inherit eschatological salvation. Covenantally speaking, the benefits of the covenant blessings are summarized in 21:6–7. In contrast, the eight vices listed in 21:8 represent hypothetical examples of breaking covenant obligations, suggesting that the failure to show appropriate obedience would eventually disrupt full communion with God.<sup>42</sup> Based on this interpretation, it can be inferred that the expression "the one who conquers" in 21:7 equates the idea of human responsibility for salvation with keeping the covenantal obligations demanded by God.

In fact, the passages 21:6c–7 and 21:8 are described in terms of Old Testament blessings and curses.<sup>43</sup> Verse 21:8 is a list of vices, and it reveals that all the vices listed in this verse indicate failures of the so-called Christians facing the threat or reality of persecution.<sup>44</sup> According to David L. Mathewson, this vice list in 21:8 possibly refers to an early Christian usage of the Ten Commandments to establish what is considered appropriate moral conduct for Christians.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, he goes on to state that this vice list has been placed in a new setting, influenced by the Old Testament, and designed to work in tandem with 6c–7 as a salvation–judgment oracle, adding the element of a "threat" and consequently, confronting the readers with prophetic exhortation and

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<sup>41</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 314.

<sup>42</sup> W. Gordon Campbell, *Reading Revelation: A Thematic Approach*, Foundations in New Testament Criticism (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 322.

<sup>43</sup> Stefanovic is one of the main proponents of this view. See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 591.

<sup>44</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 1059.

<sup>45</sup> Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 91.

warning.<sup>46</sup>

The primary function of 21:6c–8 is thus to motivate the audience of Revelation to adopt a particular course of action by confronting them with opposing options in terms of Old Testament blessings and curses.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the expression “the one who conquers” enhances the idea of human responsibility in salvation by being placed in the covenantal context of 21:6c–8 and contrasted with the actions recorded in the vice list in 21:8. These passages persuade and motivate John’s readers to respond positively and adopt acceptable moral behaviors for Christians upon which their final salvation is contingent.

### **Conquerors as “All the Genuinely Saved”**

The fact that the conquering language is utilized to denote the condition for salvation signifies that the conquerors can be said to be saved, as they have fulfilled the requirements of salvation. On the contrary, those characterized by the vices specified in 21:8 are the unsaved. This is supported by the claims of several scholars who point out that those who belong to the vice list of 21:8 can be classified as the “unsaved”<sup>48</sup> and the logic contained within passage 21:6c–8 itself.

Stated differently, the unsaved mentioned in 21:8 are those excluded from the inheritance, while the saved are those faithful believers named “conquerors” in 21:7 to

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<sup>46</sup> Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*, 92. This point leads to the conclusion that 21:6c–7 and 21:8 should be read as one unit of thought.

<sup>47</sup> Stephens calls 21:6c–8 a “hortatory section,” which reminds the audience that participation in the new creation is dependent upon continuous faithfulness in worshipping God, thereby tying God’s speech to the rhetorical context of Roman Asia. See Mark B. Stephens, *Annihilation or Renewal? The Meaning and Function of New Creation in the Book of Revelation*, WUNT 2. Reihe 307 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 239. Similarly, Stewart speaks more emphatically of the motivational aspect of the conquering language—that the whole book is designed to motivate its readers to overcome in life no matter the cost, and these final visions continue that focus. See Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 182. Also, Schüssler-Fiorenza argues that the catalog of evildoers 21:7–8 is not comprehensive or descriptive but exhortative. See Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation*, 110.

<sup>48</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 330; Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), 2:148; Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation: Outlined Studies* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1964), 356.

whom the participation in the new Jerusalem is promised. Thus, these two kinds of people stand in stark opposition to each other in terms of their eschatological destiny. In this regard, Kenneth A. Strand rightly states that only two classes of people exist—conquerors and non-conquerors.<sup>49</sup> This view fits the overall context of Revelation, especially given its ethical dualism, which affirms the freedom of human beings as rational creatures to choose whether to obey or disobey God.<sup>50</sup> However, the conquering language not only signals ethical dualism but also soteriological dualism—and thus exclusivism—since human conduct matters eternally and determines one’s eschatological destiny.<sup>51</sup>

As a matter of fact, the conquering language, especially used in the context of chapters 2–3 and 21:6–8, has long invited debate concerning the soteriological identity of conquerors. There is one camp of scholars<sup>52</sup> who identify three classes of people within 21:6–8. Joseph C. Dillow, a representative of this camp, argues that the first class is specified in verse 6 as those who have freely received salvation, referring to all the saved saints, while the second group is described in verse 7 as those who have earned a special reward by victorious perseverance in addition to salvation. The third group, in contrast to

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<sup>49</sup> Kenneth A. Strand, “‘Overcomer’: A Study in the Macrodynamics of Theme Development in the Book of Revelation,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 28, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 251.

<sup>50</sup> Rob Dalrymple emphasizes that the use of dualism in Revelation is central to understanding the entire book of Revelation. It is the way in which John views the world in terms of two diametrically opposed kingdoms, that is, the kingdom of the world and the kingdom of Christ. See Rob Dalrymple, *Follow the Lamb: A Guide to Reading, Understanding, and Applying the Book of Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 139. According to Cato Gulaker, this is oftentimes referred to as *ethical dualism*, in which choices made by men divide the population into two opposing categories: the good and the evil. See Cato Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man: A Narrative Analysis of the Function of Satan in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 638 (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 18. However, as Adela Yarbro Collins and Vern Poythress point out, it should not be considered an ethical dualism of deterministic type. See Adela Yarbro Collins, review of *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire*, by Leonard L. Thompson, *JBL* 110, no. 4 (1991): 750; Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 46.

<sup>51</sup> Newton mentions that the two vice lists found in 21:8 and 22:15 serve as a proof that while there exist some dissimilarities, John’s ethical and soteriological dualism and exclusivism come into play in both passages. See Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 385.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph Dillow and Zane C. Hodges are the prominent representatives of this camp, who support what is called “Free Grace Theology.”

the two distinct classes of believers in 21:6–7, is presented in verse 8 as unbelievers who will suffer eternal punishment in the lake of fire.<sup>53</sup>

James E. Rosscup, a representative of the second camp of scholars, pushes back against the claim of the first group, arguing that the passage in question distinguishes between only two broad classes of people, with the text of 21:7 referring to any saved person, which is immediately contrasted by those who are unbelieving in 21:8, thus unsaved.<sup>54</sup> He incisively comments that if an interpreter asserts that he discovered a third group, he reads it in from a preconceived system rather than from a straightforward exegesis of what the text says and, therefore, the expression “the one who conquers” refers to any saved person, not to one special group among the saved—a more victorious believer in contrast to a believer who is supposedly not a victorious one.<sup>55</sup>

In my view, the second view is to be preferred over the first on the following grounds. First, it does more justice to the author’s two-dimensional worldview. As argued above, dualism is central to understanding the theology of Revelation. It functions as an overarching framework through which to interpret the thought-world of Revelation. Thus, the second view that sees the people of the world as the saved belonging to God and the unsaved belonging to the world is more convincing. Second, it rightly recognizes the connection between faith and work implied by the conquering language. Proponents of the first view reject the second based on their misinterpretation of the implied meaning of the conquering language, particularly used in the context of Revelation 2–3. For instance, Zane C. Hodges critiques the second view by emphatically stating that taking the promises given to the conquerors as the destiny of every saved individual is an eclipse of grace, since achieving the status of a conqueror means that there is no salvation apart

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<sup>53</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th ed. (The Woodlands, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018), 676–77.

<sup>54</sup> Rosscup, “The ‘Overcomer’ of the Apocalypse,” 265.

<sup>55</sup> Rosscup, “The ‘Overcomer’ of the Apocalypse,” 265.

from good works.<sup>56</sup> However, the claim being made here is unfounded, as he fails to see that genuine faith in Christ produces good works, meaning that faith translates itself into Christian commitment expressed in action. Conquering, as I will argue later, is synonymous with believing in Revelation and, therefore, intimately bound up with one's salvation. Rosscup sees the connection between conquering and believing implied in the use of the verb *νικάω* and notes that in Revelation 2–3, John also employs the present tense of *νικάω*, emphasizing that continuing victory is a characteristic of the saved just as continuing faith is as described in 1 John 5:1.<sup>57</sup> But it should also be noted that faith involves good works in the context of Revelation, as evidenced in 2:19.<sup>58</sup>

Based on the analysis above, the soteriological identity of the conquerors in Revelation is that they are “all the genuinely saved” or “any saved person.” Conquering is synonymous with believing in Revelation. It unambiguously has in view the victorious faith expressed, as argued previously, in many shapes and forms of works. Yet it is not for meriting special rewards reserved for a special category of conquerors, but for holding onto the salvation that believers are already given by continuing acts of faith in the

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<sup>56</sup> Zane C. Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer: The Hungry Inherit, The Gospel under Siege, and Grace in Eclipse* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2011), 372.

<sup>57</sup> Rosscup, “The ‘Overcomer’ of the Apocalypse,” 264. Free grace scholars push back against this claim by noting that the notion of victory in 1 John is very different from that of Revelation 2–3 because they are not only found in different books but also in contexts different from each other; at the same time, Hodges emphasizes that equating conquering with believing is totally invalid because all good interpretations must take place in context. See Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer*, 372. For Hodges, what 1 John affirms is that believing in Christ is a singular, and thus permanent victory over the unbelieving world, whereas conquering in Revelation 2–3 is a continuous battle that every Christian should strive to win in daily Christian life; some may lose the fight while others may succeed so as to attain the promised rewards in addition to the salvation they already possess. This is why he goes on to say that victory is not a certainty but aspiration, and not a collective right but an individual attainment. See Hodges, *A Free Grace Primer*, 372. In support of this view, Dillow adds, “In the book of Revelation, John unambiguously has in view a victorious perseverance in the midst of trials by which a Christian merits special rewards in eternity, not the initial act of becoming a Christian in which sense all Christians have ‘overcome the world’ by believing.” Dillow, *Final Destiny*, 675. This view is problematic in that the work of divine grace is confined to the initial salvation of believers and does not extend to the Christian's life, distinguishing between initial salvation and discipleship, that is, sanctification, thus failing to view the entire Christian's life as the ongoing work of salvation.

<sup>58</sup> Notice that in Revelation 2:19, the term “faith” is used alongside other terms related to works such as love, service, and patient endurance. Most importantly, this verse starts by saying, “I know your works!”

present. The promises given to the conquerors are not special rewards in addition to eternal salvation, but they represent the reward of salvation itself symbolized by various images.<sup>59</sup>

### **Conquering as Warfare**

The conquering language, as applied to the saints (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:7, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), is a war-like term and, therefore, has martial overtones. However, according to William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste, the military aspect of the idea of conquering conveyed by *νικάω* is often missed by English readers.<sup>60</sup> The military aspect of the conquering language, as applied to believers, must thus be understood in the context of warfare.

The above claim is supported by several scholars. For instance, Richard Bauckham argues that the call to “conquer” demands the readers’ active participation in the divine war against evil.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, David de Silva asserts that the call to conquer (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) functions to strategically frame the current situations of the believers of the seven churches as one of contest or even war with specific goals to win, that is, identify antagonists or enemies and resist them.<sup>62</sup> Also, Craig R. Koester claims that the language of conquering anticipates scenes of holy war, where local issues facing the churches become part of a cosmic battle.<sup>63</sup> There are others, such as Vern S. Poythress and Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, who, without clearly defining the relation between conquering and human actions, claim that human responsibility and ecclesial

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<sup>59</sup> See my argument about various images of salvation expressed through the term ζωή on pages 108–12.

<sup>60</sup> William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste, *Bloody, Brutal and Barbaric? Wrestling with Troubling War Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 340.

<sup>61</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 88.

<sup>62</sup> deSilva, *Discovering Revelation*, 77.

<sup>63</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* AYB, vol. 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 270.



mandates must be understood in the context of warfare.<sup>64</sup> Roloff nicely summarizes the main point of and reason for the use of warfare motif as context for believers' conquering:

This central idea in Revelation likewise describes the goal of the pilgrimage of Christ (5:5; 17:14) as well as of Christians. Behind it stands the notion that all that transpires in this world is an uninterrupted struggle between God and the satanic powers. Christ himself has indeed already won the victory on the cross, but God's enemies on earth still have occasion for their battle against those who belong to Christ. For them, therefore, it means that they should not withdraw from such confrontations and that they should resist the hostile powers until they are finally overcome by Christ at the end of history. Thus, overcoming is the goal and fruit of the endurance commanded to all Christians.<sup>65</sup>

Set within the context of warfare, the following implications can be derived from the notion of conquering.

First, there is an enemy to be defeated for believers' salvation to be fully realized. Satan is described as the main enemy to be defeated in Revelation. He is the archenemy of God and humanity, to whom numerous titles have been assigned, such as "the great dragon," "the devil and Satan," "the old serpent,"<sup>66</sup> and "the accuser" (12:9–10).<sup>67</sup> Cato Gulaker also understands Satan, the accuser of God's people, to be the object of conquest based on his reading of 12:10.<sup>68</sup> Louis A. Brighton effectively describes the nature of Satan as the sum total of all enemy forces by referring to the title "the beast" in 11:7, noting, "This designation refers to the dragon who operates against the church

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<sup>64</sup> Poythress argues that Revelation does not eliminate human responsibility and the significance of human actions. This concept is depicted by the spiritual war in which God and his agents are described as engaged in war against Satan and his agents. See Poythress, *The Returning King*, 43. Similarly, Stubblefield contends that ecclesial mandates of Revelation are to be situated and understood in context of war. See Stubblefield, "Function of the Church in Warfare," 182.

<sup>65</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 46.

<sup>66</sup> Especially, the term "serpent" (ὄφις) refers to the enemy of the faith (12:9, 14, 15; 20:2; cf. 2 Cor 11:3). See Mark Scott, "Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon," in *Dragons, John, and Every Grain of Sand: Essays on the Book of Revelation in Honor of Dr. Robert Lowery*, ed. Shane J. Wood (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2011), 127.

<sup>67</sup> Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation: Profiles from the History of Interpretation*, LNTS 487 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 316–17.

<sup>68</sup> Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 147.

through the two beasts of and who is thus a symbol of all the forces (human in particular) who are under demonic influence and control.”<sup>69</sup> However, the enemy with whom believers are directly engaged in battle is not Satan but the beast, who is described as the principal enemy of God’s people. This is suggested by the application of the verb *νικάω* (11:7; 13:7).<sup>70</sup> The imagery of the beast has often been associated with Rome or its imperial power.<sup>71</sup> It is, however, a better approach to view it as emphasizing the transtemporal nature of the worldly system throughout the church age, embodying Satanic power and opposing God’s rule, which all Christians must resist to the end.<sup>72</sup> Thus, the enemy that all believers are called to conquer is the embodiment of the evil forces, whether political, religious, or economic, that stand in opposition to God’s rule and appear in many forms and continue throughout the church age.

Second, conquerors, under this light, can be redefined as “the holy warriors of the Lamb” or “the messianic army.” According to Bauckham, an important symbolic theme of Revelation that enables the readers to see the essential unity of Christ’s work,

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<sup>69</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 297.

<sup>70</sup> Hal Harless, “666: The Beast and His Mark in Revelation,” *Conservative Theological Journal* 7 (2003): 354. Harless seems to interpret the image of the rider on the white horse in 6:2 as an enemy of God, thus the subject of verbal construction *νικῶν καὶ ἴνα νικήσῃ* interpreting it as an action of the enemy of God’s people. However, I have purposefully excluded this verse because there is a great deal of controversy over the interpretation of the identity of the rider on the white horse, which, according to David MacLeod, can largely be interpreted in three different ways: (1) the rider as Christ, (2) the rider as the world-wide proclamation of the gospel, and (3) the rider as Antichrist. See David J. MacLeod, “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (Rev. 6:1–8),” *Emmaus Journal* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 8. For a fuller discussion on this topic, see MacLeod, “The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,” 5–20.

<sup>71</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 67; Blount, *Revelation*, 229; George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, Intertextual Bible Commentary (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 131.

<sup>72</sup> This is the most common approach taken by many interpreters of Revelation, with some including first-century Rome as the contemporary embodiment of the beast or of Babylon. See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 438; Francis J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 192; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 686. Thus, this approach anticipates multiple manifestations of the embodied evil throughout history. According to Osborne, confining the image of beast to first-century Rome is of the preterist view. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 19. In contrast to the preterist view, this dissertation generally follows the idealistic approach since it acknowledges the transtemporal meaning of the image of the beast. More precisely, the approach of this dissertation fits most within the category of eclecticism or a redemptive-historical form of idealism proposed by Beale, acknowledging past, present, and future aspects of the events described in Revelation. For more details on this approach, see Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48–49.

from the cross to Parousia, is the theme of the messianic war.<sup>73</sup> Crucial to this notion is that Christ establishes God's kingdom on earth as the promised Messiah by defeating all the opposing powers to God's rule. Those who share his victory and rule are not national Israel but the international people of God.<sup>74</sup> Joshua W. Jipp adds an important insight to the theme of the messianic war by noting that Revelation conceptualizes its audience as active participants in the messianic battle against Satan and his powers, with Revelation 2–3 functioning as an exhortation for believers to engage in active participation in Christ's messianic battle.<sup>75</sup> An important soteriological implication that can be derived from the militaristic Davidic messianism is that just as Christ conquered and established his kingdom through the cross and a rejection of violence (5:5), those who belong to him and his kingdom follow the same pattern of their messianic king. They engage themselves in active resistance to a pagan lifestyle that may lure them into compromising with the idolatrous surrounding culture and endure in faithfulness and loyalty to God and the Lamb alone. Interestingly, this key principle of the messianic war is conveyed by the conquering motif.<sup>76</sup> Thus, all the genuinely saved are those who participate in the messianic war. They heed the exhortations given to them (2–3) and do the works of obedience summarized by the conquering language.

Third, conquering thus suggests the participatory nature of Revelation's soteriology. According to Grant Macaskill, a major participatory language used in Revelation is the conquering language, especially the formulaic expression "the one who

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<sup>73</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 67.

<sup>74</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 68.

<sup>75</sup> Joshua W. Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 296–97. Thus, according to Jipp, all those passages describing the people of God as militant in the central visions of the book, such as 7:4–17, 12:1–14:5, and 19:11–21, are to be seen as further depictions of the conquerors of chapters 2–3.

<sup>76</sup> Bauckham notes that the concept of conquering, derived from this militant messianism, is applied both to the Messiah himself (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and to his people (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:7, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), who share his victory. See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 69.

conquers” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).<sup>77</sup> A basic logic attached to the participatory soteriology is that the fate of the Christians is bound together with Christ and their brothers and sisters, with the deep ethical and ecclesial implication that participation in Christ entails conformity to the pattern of sacrificial love that he embodied and enacted on their behalf.<sup>78</sup> Jipp adds an important insight to the nature of participatory soteriology as he explains that the answer to the question, “How does Jesus save?,” is that humans are saved by being conjoined to the Messiah and, more specifically, to his entire life and narrative, including incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, sharing in the benefits of the ongoing rule of the resurrected, enthroned Messiah.<sup>79</sup> Although this is said specifically of Pauline soteriology, the same participatory logic can also be observed in the pattern in which the conquering language is employed in Revelation. A good example that illustrates this point is 3:21, where God’s people are promised to actively share in the benefits of Christ’s rule just as he shares God’s throne as a result of his victory through his sacrificial death (5:5–6).<sup>80</sup> Thus, the concept of conquering, in addition to other terminology including “in Jesus” (1:9), “in the Lord” (14:13), and the image of “the marriage of the Lamb” (19:7, 9),<sup>81</sup> functions somewhat like a Johannine parallel to that of the Pauline expression “in Christ” signifying believers’ spiritual union with Christ. This

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<sup>77</sup> Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 287. Also, Klaus Scholtissek emphasizes the participatory nature of the conquering language in Revelation 2–3 as well as its last occurrence in 21:7: “Die formgeschichtlich als Überwinder-Sprüche bezeichneten Verheibungen begegnen jeweils zum Abschluss der sieben Sendschreiben in Offb 2,7.11.17.26; 3,5.12.21 und darüber hinaus auch in 21,7. Alle diese Worte folgen dem gleichen Aufbau: Wer siegt, dem werde ich (Christus) geben Ihr Charakteristikum ist das Moment der partizipation an dem durch Jesus Christus erwirkten Heil.” See Klaus Scholtissek, “Mitteilhaber an der Bedrängnis, der Königsherrschaft und der Ausdauer in Jesus (Offb 1,9),” in *Theologie Als Vision: Studien Zur Johannes-Offenbarung*, ed. Knut Backhaus, Stuttgarter Bibeldtudiben 191 (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Biblewerk, 2001), 191.

<sup>78</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Reading with the Grain of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 177.

<sup>79</sup> Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, 345.

<sup>80</sup> Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament*, 299.

<sup>81</sup> These are the three references to the concept of union with Christ mentioned by Peterson. Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit: Union with Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 269.

reality is well explained by Bradley G. Green, who notes that conquering is related to the Christian's relationship to Christ in that the Christian conquers by being bound up with Christ and what he has accomplished, and consequently, Christians' conquering occurs only because they are united to Christ through faith alone in an inseparable union.<sup>82</sup> To summarize, the participatory nature of believers' conquering suggests that Christ is continually present with them, and as a result, they share the same fate with him. As Caird points out, if they suffer, it is in "Jesus" (1:9); if they die, it is "in the Lord" (14:13).<sup>83</sup> But it is also true that believers conquer (12:11; 15:2) because Christ the Lamb has conquered (3:21; 5:5), and through conquering they appropriate the salvific benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, namely the eschatological salvation.

Fourth, conquering primarily means participating in the suffering of Christ to the point of death. The natural corollary of being engaged in the conquest of Satan and his minions is the experience of suffering to the point of death, akin to the way Christ suffered (3:21; 5:5; 17:14).<sup>84</sup> The faithful works of the Christians in the seven churches of Asia Minor would likely have put them in conflict with the surrounding world.<sup>85</sup> Understood against this background, the challenge to conquer signifies that believers must not withdraw from confrontations with evil powers. Instead, they must continue resisting them through their uncompromising faithfulness to Christ, even if it means going as far as death.<sup>86</sup> Martyrdom, although a key characteristic of the faithful people of

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<sup>82</sup> Green, *Covenant and Commandment*, 28–29.

<sup>83</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 297.

<sup>84</sup> Ragnar Leivestad argues that martyrdom is the ultimate consequence of the conflict between the righteous and the hostile world, with Jesus being the ideal martyr in Revelation (3:21; 5:5). See Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 257. He adds further insight, stating, "The sharper the dualism the more inevitable is this outcome." This claim further enhances the pervasiveness of dualism in Revelation.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation: A New Contribution to an Old Polemic," *Review of Ecumenical Studies, Sibiu* 9, no. 3 (December 2017): 441.

<sup>86</sup> The idea of believers' suffering to the point of death is indicated by the verbs *νικάω* (11:7; 13:7) and *σφάζω* (6:9; 18:24), which denote the killing of believers at the hands of enemy.

God in Revelation,<sup>87</sup> should not be pressed too far as the identity marker of the conquerors in Revelation since martyrdom is no more than the consequence of believers' unwavering faithfulness to Christ. Rather, the chief point intended by the notion of conquering is participation in Christ's victory to the limit,<sup>88</sup> which allows no room for compromise. Thus, although many aspects are applied to the church's struggle, the predominant one is moral-martyrological.<sup>89</sup>

Fifth, conquering thus means not to fight one's own fight but to participate in the battle that Christ has already decisively won. This statement is concerned with the question of whether believers actively contribute to the fight that has already been decisively won by Christ.<sup>90</sup> Stated differently, if believers' conquering is understood as the very means of salvation, the question above could be reframed, "Is believers' conquering an active contribution to salvation already accomplished by Christ?" It appears to be so, especially when such passages as 12:11 and 15:2 are considered. This impression derives mainly from the fact that the subject of the verb *νικάω* is identified as the people of God in both passages, suggesting that the action of conquering is not carried out by Christ but by believers themselves.<sup>91</sup> From a soteriological perspective, the image of conquering, therefore, points out the value of the active participation of humans in the

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<sup>87</sup> As seen in the examples of Antipas (2:13), the souls under the altar (6:9), and the two witnesses (11:7).

<sup>88</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 79. See also Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 86; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 46.

<sup>89</sup> According to Leivestad, the forms of conflict in the NT can be largely divided into four categories: (1) dynamistic, (2) moral and martyrological, (3) forensic, and (4) dramatic-mythical, all of which are a figurative presentation of the idea of conflict except for the moral-martyrological model. See Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 272. However, as I have argued, martyrdom should not be seen as a quality made inherent to every conqueror, but a more balanced view of conquering would be that it is a very likely consequence for those who have had lived a faithful life for Christ. For a more detailed explanation on these categories, see Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 241–85.

<sup>90</sup> This point will be discussed more in detail in the subsequent chapter.

<sup>91</sup> This has led some interpreters, including Blount, to argue that verses such as 12:11 somehow support the idea of a human-divine partnership. See Blount, *Revelation*, 150. While the act of conquering described in this verse is an undeniably human act, it should not be taken, as I will argue later, as if it were a synergistic work between God and humans for the salvation has already been fully accomplished by Christ through his victory on the cross.

salvation process.<sup>92</sup> However, it should be noted that the victory of believers is no new victory because the Lamb has already decisively won the battle against Satan and, therefore, it is best seen as no more than the working out of the decisive victory already won by the Lamb on the cross.<sup>93</sup> It follows that believers' conquering in this sense is to be viewed not as a human achievement but rather as an act of sharing the salvific benefits flowing from the already accomplished victory of the Lamb. This signifies that, as Paul B. Decock insightfully argues, the emphasis on "participation" falls on the gift of God by which human beings are enabled to be in communion with God and to embody the love of God, which is expressed in a history of human works.<sup>94</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that this stage is the middle of all three stages of Christ's redemptive work depicted by the imagery of conquering,<sup>95</sup> which differs in one important respect from both the initial (5:5) and the consummation of Christ's victory (17:14):<sup>96</sup> the stress is on the active role of believers as the messianic army. The Soteriological significance of this stage is that the sanctification process of believers is accentuated.

### **Conquering as Sanctification**

Conquering, as observed above, expresses the condition that must be met for believers to be saved. But where does it fit into the process of salvation? Does believers'

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<sup>92</sup> Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 443.

<sup>93</sup> Bauckham emphasizes that the continuing and ultimate victory of God is no more than the working-out of the decisive victory that the Lamb has already accomplished on the cross. See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Decock, "The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful," 62–63.

<sup>95</sup> Bauckham adds insights into the usage of the conquering language in Revelation, arguing, "We should note also that the language of conquering is used of all the three stages of Christ's work: he conquered in his death and resurrection (3:21; 5:5), his followers conquer in the time before the end (12:11; 15:2), and he will conquer at the Parousia (17:14)." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 70.

<sup>96</sup> In the previous chapter, I have argued that in both the initial stage (5:5) and the final stage of Christ's victory (17:14), the main actor in achieving redemptive victory was Christ the Lamb, the divine warrior, without any human involvement at all.

conquering have to do with entering into salvation, thus connected to initial conversion? Or does it pertain to the process of sanctification, given its emphasis on human effort and work? Perhaps the pervasiveness of the warfare imagery in Revelation can shed light on this question, particularly the fact that believers' conquering, as mentioned above, belongs to the middle stage of Christ's victory. This suggests that the active role of believers is played in this stage.

The New Testament is replete with passages that portray the entire Christian life as warfare, using this imagery pictorially to describe sanctification and emphasize the believer's responsibility to be obedient. A representative passage that describes sanctification in terms of warfare is Ephesians 6:10–18.<sup>97</sup> The entire pericope of Ephesians 6:10–18 portrays the spiritual warfare of believers in which Paul charges readers to put on “the whole armor of God” against cosmic powers and the spiritual forces of evil. According to Constantine R. Campbell, verses 6:10–17 carry a sense of union with Christ in spiritual warfare, with 6:10 (“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”) stressing the idea of union with Christ.<sup>98</sup> Peterson argues that 6:10 offers the reason why believers are to be strong: because they are united with the powerful Christ.<sup>99</sup> From a soteriological perspective, the main point of this passage is that sanctification comes through union with Christ, the savior.<sup>100</sup>

In Revelation, we find a parallel idea to this: the conquering motif. J. Hampton Keathley argues that warnings and challenges to the church in Revelation 2–3 and throughout the rest of the book are virtually an extended commentary on the spiritual

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<sup>97</sup> A similar idea is also found in 1 Timothy 6:12.

<sup>98</sup> Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2012), 151–53.

<sup>99</sup> Peterson, *Salvation Applied by the Spirit*, 191.

<sup>100</sup> According to Barrett, Ephesians 6:10 is one of those NT texts that connect union with Christ and sanctification, including 1 Corinthians 1:4–5; 2 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 1:3, 15; 6:10; Philippians 2:5; 4:7, 19; Colossians 1:4; 2:20; and 1 Thessalonians 4:1. See Matthew Barrett, *40 Questions about Salvation*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2020), 92.



warfare described in Ephesians 6:12 and, therefore, what is revealed in this book is the climax of the church's struggle against rulers, principalities, and powers under the control of Satan.<sup>101</sup> In this light, the good works of believers, expressed by the all-encompassing language of conquering, portray the sanctification process of the Christian life, as this language functions (as argued above) somewhat like the Pauline expression "in Christ," indicating believers' spiritual union with Christ. Thus, conquering is to be considered the pursuit of holiness—an effort to grow to be more Christlike—a process taking place throughout the entire Christian life.

This claim is further reinforced by the pattern in which the conquering language is employed. According to Beale, the substantival participle *ὁ νικῶν* conveys a sense of the continuing victory of the genuine believer, representing the entirety of the Christian life, a process completed at death.<sup>102</sup> The emphasis is thus on the Christian life as a whole rather than on the initial conversion. Rainbow emphasizes that Christian life is laborious, and conquering explicitly involves keeping Christ's works to the end (2:26). Therefore, there is a distinction between the beginning and end of salvation, as indicated by 21:6b–7.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the connection between Christ's conquering and that of believers provides additional evidence. Robert L. Reymond asserts that believers' conquering (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), patterned after that of Christ (3:21), suggests that they must exhibit their sanctification by conquering their sins through such qualities

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<sup>101</sup> J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation: Christ's Victory over the Forces of Darkness* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1999), 17.

<sup>102</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 271. This is further supported by Fred Layman's claim that the two aorist tenses *ἐνίκησαν* (12:11) and *τοὺς νικῶντας* (15:2) describe the conquering of believers as an accomplished reality, viewing it from the perspective of having completed their earthly pilgrimage. See Fred D. Layman, "Salvation in the Book of Revelation," in *An Inquiry in the Book of Revelation from a Biblical Theological Perspective*, ed. John E. Hartley and R. Larry Shelton, NovTSup (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 1981), 235.

<sup>103</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 315.

as endurance (2:2, 19), love (2:19), and faithfulness (3:8).<sup>104</sup> Conquering, understood in this light, means to replicate the faithfulness of the same kind as that produced by Christ, or more precisely, to strive to grow more Christlike.

This conclusion can also be deduced from the overall context of Revelation 2–3. Decock claims that the emphasis of the letters in Revelation 2–3 is not merely on the gift of salvation that believers have already received but especially on the responsibility to hold on to that gift, with warnings against the precarious condition of their state of salvation.<sup>105</sup> This suggests that what is at stake here is not the “already” of salvation, but the “not-yet” of salvation, which is to be gradually realized throughout the entire Christian life. Stewart spells out this point more eloquently as he argues that the indicative (the “already” of salvation) is not used as the primary grounds for the imperatives in Revelation. However, the non-possessed aspect of future salvation serves as the primary ground for all the imperatives of Revelation, as the believers in the seven churches would not receive final salvation if they did not conquer.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, considering the overall tone of Revelation 2–3, the challenge to conquer is to be taken as a call to sanctification.

Finally, there are two crucial additional points that need to be considered regarding the concept of conquering as sanctification. First, conquering is not limited to the idea of sanctification. In fact, it is a broader concept than sanctification, encompassing various other salvific benefits that believers receive through their participation in the victory of Christ. For instance, 12:10 communicates the forensic idea

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<sup>104</sup> Robert L. Reymond, *John, Beloved Disciple: A Survey of His Theology* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 168.

<sup>105</sup> Decock, “The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful,” 47.

<sup>106</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, 196–97. This is further supported by Abner Chou’s claim that Revelation 2–3 describes how churches should live in light of the upcoming consummation of Christ’s eschatological victory rather than merely providing practical implications for the church. See Abner Chou, *I Saw the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 196.

of conflict, thus portraying the concept of Christ's conquest of Satan and victory in terms of the justification of believers.<sup>107</sup> Because of Christ's victory and the resulting fall from heaven of Satan the accuser (12:10), believers are no longer prosecuted before God.<sup>108</sup> Charles Sherlock helpfully notes that Christ's victory of suffering on the cross, a parallel idea to justification in Paul, is the means by which Satan's power to accuse believers is taken away.<sup>109</sup> However, it must be emphasized that the idea of sanctification still takes precedence over justification since the overall context of Revelation suggests that the book's emphasis is on the active obedience of believers.<sup>110</sup> Second, believers' conquering as sanctification is the work of divine grace and not of themselves. This is supported by Daniel Mihoc's argument that the image of victory, closely related to works in Revelation, functions somewhat like a close parallel to Philippians 2:12–13, where Paul exhorts believers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (2:12), knowing that it is God who is at work in them (2:13).<sup>111</sup> In her discussion of this passage, Judith M. Gundry-Volf comments: "The command 'work out your salvation with 'fear and trembling'" (Phil 2:12) refers to the active role of believers in sanctification based on the fact that ('for,' *gar*) 'God is the one who is working in you both the willing and the working' (Phil 2:13)."<sup>112</sup> She adds an important insight into the role of divine grace in

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<sup>107</sup> Charles Sherlock, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture*, RSCT 6 (Lewiston, NY: Rutherford House, 1993), 368; Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 262. Also, Gulaker argues that the conquest of Satan conceptualized as persevering with the satanic ordeals is the very means of salvation for the believing community as it was for Christ to provide it. See Gulaker, *Satan, the Heavenly Adversary of Man*, 147. This statement implies that both initial conversion (justification) and continuing in salvation (sanctification) are accomplished by the conquering.

<sup>108</sup> Craig Keener, *The IVP Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 753.

<sup>109</sup> Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 368.

<sup>110</sup> According to Leivestad, the cosmic victory of Christ, apart from John and Romans 8, is for the most part not expressed in forensic terms. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 262–63.

<sup>111</sup> Mihoc, "The Works and the Mystery of Salvation in the Book of Revelation," 443.

<sup>112</sup> Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Apostasy, Falling Away, Perseverance," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 40.

enabling believers' continuing in salvation as well as the certainty of their final salvation by noting that for Paul, salvation is by divine grace alone, and thus, believers have nothing to contribute to their salvation such that their failure to do so would jeopardize the final outcome.<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, what is true of Philippians 2:12–13 with respect to sanctification as the work of divine grace is equally true of believers' victory as sanctification in Revelation. The conquering of believers is nothing more than the working out of the accomplished victory of Christ. It is God's work in and through the lives of believers. Even though the conquering language applied to believers gives a decisive place to works, thus exposing the readers to a false impression of synergistic salvation, their salvation wholly depends on God's grace revealed through the victory of Christ, the divine warrior, on the cross.

In summary, both “getting in” and “staying in” salvation depends on God's grace, which is revealed in the accomplished victory of Christ on the cross. Admittedly, human responsibility is accentuated in the latter stage. However, the tension between divine grace and human responsibility for salvation dissolves when our attention, as Beasley-Murray notes, is not exclusively fixed on our own victory but directed to the victor par excellence who makes the victory possible.<sup>114</sup> God sustains his people in a life of progressive obedience and completes believers' salvation by continuously applying the accomplished victory of Christ through the Spirit.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gundry-Volf, “Apostasy, Falling Away, Perseverance,” 40.

<sup>114</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 78.

<sup>115</sup> The soteriological role of the Spirit in the victory of believers will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5.

### **Conquering in Revelation 2–3 and 21:6c–8 as Bookends for the Concept of Human Responsibility in Salvation**

The idea of human responsibility conveyed by the formulaic expression “the one who conquers” found in passages 2–3 and 21:6c–8 serves as bookends that bracket the idea of human responsibility in salvation. To be more specific, the promises made to the conquerors at the end of the seven messages (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), coupled with the final promise to the conquerors in 21:7, form an *inclusio* by means of the key term  $\delta \nuικτω\acute{\nu}$ . This *inclusio* serves the rhetorical purpose of highlighting the idea of human responsibility in salvation that runs throughout Revelation.<sup>116</sup> In other words,  $\delta \nuικτω\acute{\nu}$  mentioned at the end of the messages to the seven churches in chapters 2–3 and its repetitive use in 21:7 form a rhetorical unity, with the former marking its beginning and the latter its ending.

As argued above, the use of  $\delta \nuικτω\acute{\nu}$  in both sections, chapters 2–3 and 21:7, function as bookends for the concept of conquering and serve as a rhetorical device to motivate the readers toward fulfilling the requirements for salvation so that they may be finally saved.<sup>117</sup>

The specifics of what it means to conquer are then developed and described in the central part of the book (12:11; 15:2) as mainly participating in the conflict and victory of Christ as part of the messianic army.<sup>118</sup> Thus, it is not an overstatement to

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<sup>116</sup> The expression the “one who conquers” is used not only to refer to the human responsibility in salvation, but also, as I have argued in previous chapters, to underscore its dependency on the enabling power of divine grace as seen in 5:5, 17:14, albeit not in the same verbal form. The clearest example is found in 12:11, where the redeemed is described to have conquered by the “blood of the Lamb” (divine grace) as well as by the “word of their testimony” (human responsibility).

<sup>117</sup> Of course, as we have argued, all true believers will heed these warnings—which must be understood, then, as an instrument of God’s divine grace to bring about the fulfillment of his promises.

<sup>118</sup> According to Bauckham, the promises made to the conquerors at the conclusion of the seven messages in verses 2–3 and the vision of the new Jerusalem that closes Revelation serve to compel readers to take part in the eschatological battle described in the central part of the book and thus earn a place in the new Jerusalem rather than simply be mere spectators. See Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 213. Also, deSilva points out the connectedness between the exhortations to conquer in each of the seven oracles in 2–3 and the images of conquering throughout the visions. See deSilva, *Discovering Revelation*, 77.

claim that the theme of conquering is programmatically used at the outset (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21), the middle (12:11; 15:2),<sup>119</sup> and the end of Revelation's story (21:7), to emphasize the idea of human responsibility in salvation by means of its thematic development throughout the book.<sup>120</sup> This means that the theme of the church's conquering as the messianic army is not static but progressive, whose description progresses and develops throughout the book by means of many ecclesial images referring to the same group, namely the conquerors.

As argued above, conquering is a pictorial language that primarily refers to believers' sanctification, which emphasizes the obedient works of believers. The images of conquerors found in 12:11 and 15:2 further develop this idea. Nevertheless, an important question must be asked about the nature of these works. Should believers' conquering be taken as a sign that Revelation somehow promotes salvation by works? Answering this question will be the goal of the following section.

### **Conquering as Faith in Action: The Soteriological Role of the Conquerors**

This section delves into the question of what it means to conquer. Its purpose is to identify and define the soteriological meaning and nature of believers' conquering. As discussed earlier, the conquering of believers is not optional for salvation but is an indispensable condition for salvation. Conquering refers to fulfilling the human side of the covenantal requirements, and, therefore, it inevitably involves the faithful works of believers.

I contend that the notion of believers' conquering, primarily conveyed through

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<sup>119</sup> Bauckham provides a helpful explanation to better make sense of the purpose of the use of *νικᾶω* in the middle part of the book by saying, "The visions that intervene between the seven messages to the churches and the final vision of the New Jerusalem are to enable the readers to move from one to the other, to understand what conquering involves." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 88.

<sup>120</sup> For a comprehensive treatment on the thematic development of the conqueror motif in Revelation, see Strand, "Overcomer," 237–54

the phrase “the one who conquers” (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7) and secondarily through various verbal forms of *νικάω* (12:11; 15:2), is nothing but the outward expression of the saving faith of believers. This implies that faith is the only condition for salvation. Thus, conquering through faith is the only soteriological role believers should fulfill to be saved. In other words, just as faith is the means of “getting in salvation,” it is also the means of “staying in salvation.” In essence, faith is the very means of both justification and sanctification. The conquering of believers thus expresses the idea of “sanctification by faith.” True faith not only performs a receptive function but is also an operative power, enabling believers to grasp their union with Christ continually; consequently, they produce spiritual fruits.

With this definition in mind, my argument for the present section unfolds in two parts. First, in light of the fact that *πίστις* in Revelation comes closer to the meaning of “faithfulness,” conquering means to have a faith that works, not faith plus works. This clarifies why the conquering language is employed as a summarizing expression for the various good works of believers in Revelation. Faith is the source of believers’ conquering works expressed in diverse forms. Second, the application of the verb *νικάω*, both to Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and his followers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), suggests that conquering entails maintaining a persevering faith in the accomplished victory of Christ. Given that Christ’s faithfulness reached its climax on the cross, conquering also encompasses remaining faithful to the way of the cross, even in the face of suffering and death. Through persevering faith, believers continue to share Christ’s victory to the end and receive the final salvation. Thus, Christ’s accomplished victory on the cross becomes the object of believers’ faith. In the following pages, I will show the validity of each of these arguments.

### **Πίστις as Faithfulness in Revelation**

The term *πίστις* occurs four times throughout Revelation (2:13, 19; 13:10;

14:12). Notably, in all its usages, *πίστις* is accompanied by words referring to actions. For instance, in 2:13, the risen Christ commends the believers in the church of Pergamum for not denying their faith in him, even in the face of potential martyrdom, as exemplified by Antipas, the faithful witness. The phrase *οὐκ ἠρνήσω τὴν πίστιν μου* may possibly be connected to the cause of the death of Antipas, as he is identified as *ὁ μάρτυς μου ὁ πιστός μου*. Here, the connectedness between *πίστις* and *πιστός* is observable.<sup>121</sup> In verse 2:19, *πίστις* is juxtaposed with words referring to various works, such as *ἔργον*, *ἀγάπη*, *διακονία*, and *ὑπομονή*. In 13:10, *πίστις* is coupled with *ὑπομονή*, implying that the kind of faith depicted here is one of perseverance. In support of this view, Beale argues that every use of “faith” (*πίστις*) or “faithful” (*πιστός*) in Revelation is of humans on earth speaking of enduring faith in the face of persecution.<sup>122</sup> In 14:12, *καί* is used exegetically, thus *τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ* more fully explicates what *τὰς ἐντολὰς τοῦ θεοῦ* implies.<sup>123</sup>

This point has not gone unnoticed by interpreters of Revelation. For instance, Nijay K. Gupta argues, based on his observation on the use of faith language in Revelation, that it is evident that *πίστις* in Revelation regularly involves loyalty, faithfulness, and sacrificial witness, sharing affinities with Paul’s use of *πίστις* in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians.<sup>124</sup> Isbon T. Beckwith, in his exposition of 13:10, notes that faithfulness, as opposed to faith, better suits the connection between *ἡ ὑπομονή* and *ἡ πίστις*.<sup>125</sup> R. H. Charles renders *πίστις* as “faithfulness” in passages 2:19 and 13:10, while

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<sup>121</sup> Aune sees this connectedness between *πίστις* and *πιστός* as wordplay. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 184.

<sup>122</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 705.

<sup>123</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 277.

<sup>124</sup> Nijay K. Gupta, *Paul and the Language of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 91–92.

<sup>125</sup> Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 639.



maintaining a traditional rendition of πίστις as “faith” in 2:13 and 14:12.<sup>126</sup> David E. Aune contends that πίστις in 2:19 can be rendered as either “dependability” or “faithfulness.”<sup>127</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels almost always translates πίστις as “faithfulness” in his commentary on Revelation except for 2:19.<sup>128</sup> Likewise, Grant R. Osborne emphasizes that, in the context of Revelation, πίστις always refers to an active and persevering trust in Christ and is equivalent to πιστός.<sup>129</sup>

From the observation above on the usage of the term πίστις, two noteworthy points emerge. First, the faith of believers is directed towards Christ (2:13; 14:12). Second, faith is closely associated with perseverance or endurance, which is evident by the use of ὑπομονή in proximity to πίστις (2:19; 13:10; 14:12). Taken together, these two characteristics of faith, as shown above, indicate that “faith” in Revelation should be interpreted as “faithfulness to Christ to the end.”<sup>130</sup> This interpretation underscores the

<sup>126</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:61.

<sup>127</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 202.

<sup>128</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 78, 160, 175.

<sup>129</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 142.

<sup>130</sup> In fact, the question of which rendition is the most adequate for the term πίστις in Revelation is hotly debated among scholars, with special focus on the use of πίστις in 14:12. According to Sigve Tonstad, major English translations offer three main alternatives for the expression ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ, “the faith of Jesus (subjective genitive),” “faith in Jesus (objective genitive),” and “faithfulness to Jesus (objective genitive)” and commentaries argue in support of one of these choices. For a detailed discussion, see Sigve K. Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation*, LNTS 337 (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 165–67. Tonstad further argues that “the faithfulness of Jesus (subjective genitive)” is as legitimate as any of the other options. This is a lexical option that is not found in any major translations based on the following criteria: (1) the conditioning of the storyline of Revelation; (2) the explicative quality of the doublet τὰς ἐντολάς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ; (3) the Christology of Revelation; (4) the relationship between ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ and ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ and similar terms in Revelation; and (5) the nuances of the verbal qualifier of τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ. See Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 167–68. While his interpretation is possible, seeing τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ as merely the faithfulness of Jesus is a clear misunderstanding of the syntactical evidence or even of the storyline of Revelation. τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ in 14:12 obviously behaves as the direct object of the participle οἱ τηροῦντες, which is appositional to τῶν ἁγίων. This means that τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ is to be considered as something that the saints do. Another evidence that supports my view is the use of the verb νικάω in the storyline of Revelation. As I have argued thus far, this verb is utilized in application to both to Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and his followers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). The fact that the same verb has been applied both to Christ and his people indicates that while the victory in the cosmic conflict is primarily achieved by Christ, his people also participate in it and work out the victory already won by Christ by showing the same kind of persevering faith as Christ did on the cross, albeit not by their own strength but by God’s. Based on the above evidence, I am more in agreement with the arguments of scholars such as

importance of persevering and remaining steadfast in faith solely toward the Lord Jesus Christ. In this regard, Roloff rightly notes that “faith” means “faithfulness to Christ” throughout Revelation.<sup>131</sup>

The above analysis reveals that the term πίστις carries a sense of πιστός and, therefore, has an active meaning. Having faith implies being faithful. As J. Scott Duvall points out, true believers are defined by their faithfulness.<sup>132</sup> All in all, based on the arguments presented thus far, it can be asserted that πίστις in Revelation does not merely convey a receptive sense. Rather, it is used synonymously with πιστός and conveys an active meaning, emphasizing persevering and remaining faithful to Jesus Christ until the end.

### **The Conquering of Believers: Faith in the Accomplished Victory of Christ**

It has been demonstrated above that faith is used in the sense of faithfulness in Revelation, with Christ as its object (2:13; 14:12). If faith is interpreted as faithfulness, it can be said to be “obedience that has Christ as its object,” with a specific emphasis on his accomplished victory (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). I argue that this is the intended meaning of νικάω when the author applies this term to believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:7, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7) throughout Revelation. Thus, as applied to believers, the concept of conquering in Revelation can be defined as “faithfulness flowing from faith in the

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Simon Kistemaker, who claims that even though there is a place for both subjective and objective faith, the second choice is to be preferred in that those believers who put their faith in Jesus must prove their constant faithfulness to him. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 413. Another approach is that the expression τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ is to be taken as plenary genitive, a genitive that includes both ideas of subjective and objective genitive, since τὴν πίστιν Ἰησοῦ seems to have both ideas of “faithfulness of Jesus,” and “the faithfulness of saints to Jesus” in the sense that the faithfulness that is shown by saints to Jesus is to be of the same kind of faithfulness shown by Jesus himself. For a detailed explanation on plenary genitive, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 119–21.

<sup>131</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 54.

<sup>132</sup> J. Scott Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the 10 Essential Themes of the Bible's Final Book*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 56.

accomplished victory of Christ,” expressed through various forms of good works.

There are a host of scholars who support the view that the verb *νικάω*, when applied to believers, is none other than the expression of saving faith on the part of believers. Among the major proponents of this view are A. T. Robertson,<sup>133</sup> Osborne,<sup>134</sup> Rosscup,<sup>135</sup> Daniel K. K. Wong,<sup>136</sup> Alexander E. Stewart,<sup>137</sup> Stephen S. Smalley,<sup>138</sup> and Beale.<sup>139</sup> However, it should be noted that the term *πίστις*, as previously mentioned, is not merely employed in a receptive sense in Revelation. Rather, it is used in an active sense as the equivalent of *πιστός*, with characteristics of persistency and steadfastness by being linked to the word *ὑπομονή* (2:19; 13:10; 14:12). Brenda B. Colijn affirms this point by saying, “In Revelation, the act of believing receives less emphasis than the steadfastness of one’s belief.”<sup>140</sup>

For this reason, the verb *νικάω*, an active verb used to convey the meaning of

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<sup>133</sup> A. T. Robertson states, “*νικάω* is a common Johannine verb. . . . Faith is dominant in Paul, victory in John, faith is victory (1 John 5:4).” A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 6:300.

<sup>134</sup> Osborne shares a similar view to Robertson by arguing that conquering in Revelation is analogous to *πιστεύω* (*pisteuō*, believe) in Paul’s writings, referring to an active trust in God that leads to faithfulness in the difficult situations of life lived for Christ. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 123.

<sup>135</sup> Rosscup asserts, by paying attention to the participial use of *νικάω* in Revelation 2–3, that “he who overcomes” is virtually the same as “he who believes.” See Rosscup, “The ‘Overcomer’ of the Apocalypse,” 264.

<sup>136</sup> After studying the word group for “conquering” (*νικάω*, *νίκη*, and *νίκος*) in both a Jewish and Christian background, Daniel K. K. Wong concludes that the spiritual meaning of *νικάω*, that is, the spiritual conquering, is synonymous with “saving faith” and that both Jewish and Christian writers understood the moral and spiritual victory to be something not obtained by human strength but by God’s power, resource, or transforming work. See Daniel K. K. Wong, “The Johannine Concept of Overcomer” (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995), 294.

<sup>137</sup> Stewart notes that saving faith is unstated but assumed to be the basis for one’s overcoming behavior. See Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, 294.

<sup>138</sup> In his discussion of the themes of Revelation, Smalley notes that the initial vision (1:9–3:22) speaks of the relationship between faith and works in the daily life of Christians. See Stephen S. Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John’s Revelation and John’s Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 75.

<sup>139</sup> In his analysis of the expression *ὁ νικῶν*, Beale argues that conquering is to be understood primarily as persevering in faith and good works, though the stress is actually on faith; therefore, conquering refers to the victory of one’s whole life of faith. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 271.

<sup>140</sup> Brenda B. Colijn, “Call to Endurance,” in *Images of Salvation in the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 301.

faith in action, should not be understood as a term simply referring to cognitive faith—the act of believing that something is true. Instead, it should be seen as an expression referring to the active faith of believers, manifested in visibly recognizable actions in a persistent and, more importantly, cruciform manner. The understanding of faith as faithfulness is evident in Revelation. This idea carries over into the verb *νικάω*, which takes the place of the verb *πιστεύω* in Revelation, taking on the sense of faithfulness. Several scholars such as Stephen Finamore,<sup>141</sup> Laszlo Gallusz,<sup>142</sup> Duvall,<sup>143</sup> and Sigve K. Tonstad<sup>144</sup> have aptly observed the usage of the verb *νικάω* in this sense in Revelation. Such an understanding of *νικάω* as “faithfulness to Christ,” or, technically speaking, “faithfulness to Christ to the point of death,” has two main characteristics.

First, conquering is modeled on the conquering of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). Put differently, conquering is to put faith in the accomplished victory of Christ, through which believers replicate the same kind of faithfulness produced by Christ. For example, the one who conquers in 2:11 is described as the one who is “faithful unto death” (2:10). Antipas receives Christ’s own title *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός* (1:5; 3:14) for the witness he bore to Christ, leading to his martyrdom (2:13). He belongs in this sense to the category of “the one who conquers.” In verse 2:26, the expression *ὁ νικῶν* is equated with *ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου* (“the one who keeps my works to the end”). As many have rightly

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<sup>141</sup>Drawing parallels between the usage of *νικάω* in 4 Maccabees and Revelation, Stephen Finamore argues that the way in which this verb is used in 4 Maccabees may well have influenced the way *νικάω* is employed in Revelation, as both books apply this verb to the martyrs depicted in them; consequently, this parallel idea present in both books reinforces the conviction that Revelation’s use of *νικάω* is related to the idea of faithfulness to the point of death. See Stephen Finamore, *God, Order and Chaos: René Girard and the Apocalypse* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 144.

<sup>142</sup> Gallusz asserts that *νικάω*, the most characteristic military term, is consistently used in the description of the faithful followers of Christ in Revelation. See Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, 320.

<sup>143</sup> Duvall claims that to be victorious means to stay faithful, which leads to the conclusion that to be a victorious Christian is to be a faithful Christian. See Duvall, *The Heart of Revelation*, 56–57.

<sup>144</sup> Tonstad contends that the expression *ἡ πίστις Ἰησοῦ* in 14:12 as an objective genitive “faithfulness to Jesus” makes good sense in terms of echoing the central concern in the book, which is also reflected in numerous usages of various forms of *νικάω*. See Tonstad, *Saving God’s Reputation*, 192n117.

observed, in the message to Thyatira believers, a second substantival participle ὁ τηρῶν (the one who keeps) is added to the first substantival participle ὁ νικῶν, further delineating the specific meaning of ὁ νικῶν.<sup>145</sup> Thus, the “one who conquers” is simultaneously the “one who keeps the works of Christ to the end.” In light of this, it can be said that ὁ τηρῶν ἄχρι τέλους τὰ ἔργα μου functions as an equivalent expression for ὁ νικῶν, denoting the idea of faithfulness to Christ.<sup>146</sup> This reveals a profound truth about the true nature of saving faith and the good works as its fruit and evidence: only the works that mirror those of Christ as a consequence of faith put in him will ultimately count toward salvation in the final judgment. Perhaps this is what led Smalley to conclude that Revelation, as a whole, was primarily written to address the needs of the seven churches of Asia Minor, specifically the need for adequate faith and right conduct as the consequence of right belief.<sup>147</sup> This also explains why the symbol of the conquering Lamb through obedience to death, the focal point of faith in Revelation, becomes a normative pattern for imitation (3:21; 5:5) in Revelation.<sup>148</sup> This imagery reinforces the idea that only through the reenactment of Christ’s pattern of the conquering lifestyle will one reach the promised salvation. The application of the same verb νικάω to both Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and his followers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:7, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7) effectively communicates this reality. In this respect, it is not an overstatement to

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<sup>145</sup> Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, 208; Fanning, *Revelation*, 155; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 231. This is because the function of the conjunction καὶ introducing ὁ τηρῶν is explanatory, meaning “that is,” or “namely.” See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 77.

<sup>146</sup> According to Osborne, both ideas of the conquering of believers and keeping the works of Christ to the end form a part of a larger unit of thought in connection with the idea of holding fast until the return of Christ expressed in 2:25. This establishes an ABA pattern: hold firm until I come-overcome-keep my works to the end. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 165.

<sup>147</sup> Smalley, *Thunder and Love*, 134.

<sup>148</sup> David deSilva persuasively argues that the symbol of the Lamb conquering through obedience unto death is the most prominent of a number of symbolic guises through which Jesus, the focal point of the early Christian faith, appears in Revelation, which becomes the normative pattern for imitation. See David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 101–2.

say that the conquering of believers has as its object of faith the victory of Christ the Lamb, from which inevitably flows the faithful works of believers resembling those of Christ.

Second, another important aspect to note regarding the conquering of believers as an act of faithfulness to Christ is its continuous nature, or better yet, its persevering nature. As argued above, faith is understood to be closely related to the idea of perseverance. My argument is that the conquering of believers, conveyed by *νικάω*, expresses the same meaning. This point is evident in the treatment of the tense of the verb *νικάω*. As previously observed, the present tense of the expression *ὁ νικῶν* in chapters 2–3 and 21:7 indicates that the faithfulness to Christ conceptualized as believers’ conquering is to be of a continuous and habitual nature. In addition, it portrays the tension between the already and the not yet of believers’ victory, signifying that they have not yet completed their faith journey on the earth and, therefore, are still in the process of conquering.<sup>149</sup> The not yet of salvation is the reason why believers must persevere in faithfulness to the end because the final salvation has yet to be consummated. The persevering nature of believers’ conquering is further confirmed by the aorist tense of *νικάω* as used in 12:11 and 15:2. The application of the aorist tense of *νικάω* to believers in these two verses suggests that the aorist of *νικάω* is employed only when they have successfully persevered to the end as is the case with Christ (3:21; 5:5). Thus, the two aorist tenses *ἐνίκησαν* and *τοὺς νικῶντας* do not negate the persevering nature of *νικάω* but rather reinforce it.

Based on the above analysis, the verb *νικάω* used of believers in Revelation should be interpreted as an alternative, replacing *πίστις* and its verbal form *πιστεύω*. This verb is used to denote the idea of believers’ persevering faith in Christ, which is inevitably expressed in continuing faithfulness to Christ to the end. It has been

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<sup>149</sup> Layman, “An Inquiry into Soteriology,” 235.

demonstrated that the two characteristics of the term “faith,” its persevering nature and the fact that it is directed to Christ, form the core meaning of the concept of conquering. Therefore, the conquering language, when applied to believers in Revelation, provides a vivid picture of the characteristics of the truly saved: the persevering faith in Christ, even to the point of death. Conquering, understood as faith expressed in faithful obedience to Christ, is the sole condition to be met for believers to attain the promised salvation.

### **Conquering as Salvation by Faith**

It is apparent from the analysis conducted thus far that, in Revelation, salvation is by faith alone. The works of obedience listed in Revelation 2–3 and their further descriptions in the central visions of the book show that they are no more than the fruits of the true faith placed in the accomplished victory of Christ through his death and resurrection. A major characteristic of the saving faith in Revelation is that it perseveres to the end and, as examined above, this is conveyed by the conquering language applied to believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:7, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). In this regard, Beasley-Murray correctly notes, “the essential characteristic of the conqueror, therefore, is that he participates in Christ’s conquest by faith, and through persistence in faith he continues to share in Christ’s victory to the end—whether the end be death or the Parousia of Christ.”<sup>150</sup>

As mentioned earlier, conquering, in a stricter sense, refers to sanctification in the salvation process through union with Christ. In this stage, believers live in the time between Christ’s initial victory on the cross (3:21; 5:5) and its consummation (17:14). To put it differently, they live between the “already” of salvation and the “not-yet” of salvation. God’s kingdom has already been inaugurated by Christ’s victory accomplished through his death and resurrection, but its ultimate realization is yet to come. Thus,

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<sup>150</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 79.

believers' conquering, as a reference to persevering faith, implies that salvation is yet to be consummated. Although salvation has been inaugurated in the new covenant community, a present reality, believers must persevere to the end to attain the final salvation because it still awaits its consummation. This means that sanctification, or "staying in salvation," is intimately connected to perseverance, as the former is completed through the latter.

Perhaps this is why numerous passages in Revelation emphasize the need for endurance. This idea is also portrayed through other parallel expressions. Believers are encouraged to have endurance (*ὑπομονή*) in the face of suffering and struggle (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12); they must "hold fast" (*κρατέω*) to what they have (2:13, 25; 3:11); they must "bear up" (*βαστάζω*) for Christ's name's sake (2:3). If necessary, they must be prepared to suffer martyrdom (2:10, 13; 6:9–11; 11:7; 12:11; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 19:2). In this light, it is not an overstatement to say that believers' conquering ultimately conveys the idea of "sanctification by faith."

However, it must be reiterated that believers' conquering reveals two sides of the same coin: divine grace and human responsibility for salvation. When divine grace is at work, human responsibility is bound to follow. Therefore, whenever the author speaks of believers' conquering, he always thinks of two aspects of one concept: salvation by grace, which assumes both the idea of divine grace and human response of faith because of divine grace. Rainbow nicely captures the essence of this statement: "The saints will persevere because God preserves them, but divine preservation operates precisely through the agency of their faithful perseverance."<sup>151</sup> He adds, "A concurrence of the divine and the human factors is an inescapable condition for a saved person to enter into final salvation."<sup>152</sup> This explains well the very nature of the sanctification process implied

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<sup>151</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 346.

<sup>152</sup> Rainbow, *Johannine Theology*, 346.



in believers' conquering. While it is a human act, it is not a human achievement since it is enabled by divine grace through the accomplished victory of Christ.

The argument above may be further substantiated by turning to the exegetical analysis of 12:11 and 15:2, in which the two thoughts of the accomplished victory of Christ and the conquering of believers are presented side by side. The passages 12:11 and 15:2 further expound the idea of conquering introduced in Revelation 2–3 and thus provide additional insights into what it means to conquer. A detailed analysis of these two specific passages should prove fruitful for understanding the role of divine grace in enabling the human response of faith conceptualized as believers' conquering.

### **Summary**

In the present chapter, I have broadly explored the soteriological meaning of conquering as a condition for salvation. Conquering language, “the one who conquers,” found in both Revelation 2–3 and 21:7, describes the condition for salvation. It is a rather broad term used to refer to various good works of believers, such as repentance, faithfulness, witness, worship, and so forth. From a covenantal perspective, this expression refers to stipulations that must be obeyed on the part of God's people to attain salvation. In this respect, the conquerors can be soteriologically defined as “all the genuinely saved” who have successfully fulfilled the covenantal requirements and met the condition for salvation.

However, the faithful works of believers are no more than the fruits flowing from believers' saving faith. The object of their faith is the accomplished victory of Christ on the cross. Therefore, believers inevitably emulate the model of Christ's conquering, which signifies faithfulness to the point of death (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). The stress on the obedient works of believers suggests that their conquering is closely related to the sanctification process. The works of faith inevitably put believers in conflict with the surrounding pagan culture, which is under the dominion of Satan. However, their

victory, thus their salvation, is assured because Christ has already decisively won the victory over the enemy on the cross. Their victory is no new victory apart from Christ's. Believers are called to participate and share in the victory of Christ by faith. The participatory nature of the conquering language indicates that believers receive various salvific benefits flowing from their union with Christ, including justification and sanctification. In this sense, both "getting in" and "staying in" salvation are the works of divine grace, though the latter certainly requires a human response of faith. Thus, their victory is not a human achievement but a gift from God. Conquering, therefore, means salvation by grace through faith alone.

## CHAPTER 4

### HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION: DIVINE ENABLEMENT OF BELIEVERS' CONQUERING THROUGH THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

#### **Introduction**

This chapter expounds on the conclusion of the previous chapter by thoroughly examining what is meant by the statement that human responsibility in salvation, conceptualized as the victory of believers, is enabled by participation in the salvific power flowing from the accomplished victory of Christ the Lamb. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that, just as both the beginning of believers' salvation and its consummation are gifts of God's grace through the work of his agent, Christ the Lamb, so too is the continuing victory of believers living in the interim stage between the initial victory of Christ the Lamb (5:5, 9) and its consummation (17:14; cf. 19:11–21). In other words, the work of salvation accomplished by Christ's victory through his death and resurrection continues to be the basis for believers' present experience of salvation in the time between Christ's first coming and his second coming.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is an unsettled debate revolving around the temporal aspect of the central section of Revelation mainly comprised by the visions of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. The main question over which commentators and scholars are divided is whether to view those visions chronologically or thematically. G. K. Beale notes that the former position essentially understands the order of the visions as generally representing the order of future end-time events, while the latter views the series of visions as repeating or "recapitulating" themselves concerning both chronology and subject matter. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 116. In this respect, the seals, trumpets, and bowls are not three separate plagues but each one repeats the same story with higher degree of intensity in comparison to the preceding one. For a more detailed treatment on the different views of the chronological movement versus recapitulation, see Jonathan Menn, *Biblical Eschatology* (Eugene, OR: Resource, 2013), 208–10. As for the purpose of the recapitulation, Adela Yarbro Collins notes that the totality of the various formulations represents the message intended by the author more fully than any single expression, which seems to be an essential characteristic of mythic language. See Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 44. For a more in-depth treatment on recapitulation in Revelation, see, Collins, *The Combat Myth*, 32–44. Among various interpretive approaches to Revelation, the idealist approach is the one that advocates the recapitulation theory and sees the symbolic number 1,260 days as symbolizing the church age, which serves as the temporal background of the passages 12:11 and 15:2–3. For a comprehensive explanation of the different

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the distinctive feature of this interim stage is that the role of human responsibility for salvation appears to be stressed as much as that of divine grace expressed in terms of Christ's victory, thus creating a strong impression of synergistic salvation.<sup>2</sup> In the interim stage, however, what is to be remembered is that, regardless of however strong the role of human agency is highlighted, the continuing victory of believers is no more than the working out of the decisive victory that Christ the Lamb had already accomplished on the cross, which is appropriated by faith. In this regard, while a human act, the ongoing victory of believers as the experience of present salvation should not be seen as a meritorious work for salvation because it is no more than the result of divine enablement by means of believers' union with Christ. If this is true, it is not far-fetched to say that even human faith depends on God's grace.<sup>3</sup>

While there are many ecclesial images describing the triumphant church, or better said, conquerors,<sup>4</sup> I will consider only two specific examples where this

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views on these passages, see Steve Gregg, *Revelation: Four Views Revised and Updated, A Parallel Commentary*, rev. ed (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 269–70, 369. In light of what has been said above, this dissertation views the passages 12:11 and 15:2–3 as having profound relevance and significance for all believers living in the church age since the accomplished victory of Christ described in those passages impacts the present state of the salvation of all believers living throughout the course of the inaugurated end-time church age. Beale helpfully notes that the proponents of the recapitulation theory view 4:1–22:21 as a threefold temporal reference to events associated with (1) the redemptive work of Christ's first coming, (2) the course of the inaugurated latter-day church age, and (3) the second coming of Christ and the consummation of cosmic history. Therefore, this dissertation agrees with the recapitulation view, and thus automatically with the idealist approach, in that it acknowledges a threefold temporal division of the accomplished victory of Christ on the cross: the victory in the past, the first coming (3:21; 5:5); the ongoing outworking of Christ's victory through his followers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15: 2; 21:7) in the present church age, and the future victory (17:14), which is none other than the consummation of the decisive victory that Christ has already won on the cross.

<sup>2</sup> As opposed to the beginning (3:21; 5:5) and the consummation of salvation (17:14), where no hint of human involvement is found.

<sup>3</sup> How this is made possible will be discussed more fully in the following chapter dealing with the role of the Spirit in enabling believers' conquering.

<sup>4</sup> According to Ragnar Leivestad, the aspects of conflict and victory in Revelation are presented in two forms: the first category, moral-martyrological and mythical-eschatological, applies to the suffering of the saints and to the death of Christ, while the second category relates to the enthronement of Christ, Parousia, the establishment of his millennial reign, and the final destruction of his enemies. However, no sharp line can be drawn between the ethical and mythical aspects because these two categories overlap with each other in the following way: the moral-martyrological concepts are related to the mythical-eschatological concepts, for the victory of the martyrs is not complete until the ultimate

relationship is most clearly described by means of the expressions ἐνίκησαν and “by the blood of the Lamb” in 12:11, and τοὺς νικῶντας and the “song of the Lamb” in 15:2–3.

### **The Victory of Believers “by the Blood of the Lamb” and by “the Word of Their Testimony” (12:8–12)**

The texts to be examined in this subsection are as follows:

8 καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσεν οὐδὲ τόπος εὐρέθη αὐτῶν ἔτι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. 9 καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς, ὁ πλανῶν τὴν οἰκουμένην ὅλην, ἐβλήθη εἰς τὴν γῆν, καὶ οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἐβλήθησαν. 10 καὶ ἤκουσα φωνὴν μεγάλην ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ λέγουσαν·

ἄρτι ἐγένετο ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ δύναμις  
καὶ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν  
καὶ ἡ ἐξουσία τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ,  
ὅτι ἐβλήθη ὁ κατήγωρ τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν,  
ὁ κατηγορῶν αὐτοὺς ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτός.  
11 καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου  
καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν  
καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου.  
12 διὰ τοῦτο εὐφραίνεσθε, οἱ οὐρανοὶ  
καὶ οἱ ἐν αὐτοῖς σκηνοῦντες.  
οὐαὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν,  
ὅτι κατέβη ὁ διάβολος πρὸς ὑμᾶς  
ἔχων θυμὸν μέγαν,  
εἰδὼς ὅτι ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει.

In the following pages, I will show that although the victory of believers (ἐνίκησαν) seems to consist of the elements of both divine grace (διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου) and human responsibility (διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν), in the end, it is all attributed to divine grace, for the latter is enabled by the former.

### **Literary Considerations**

Revelation 12:11 is one of the clearest passages in Revelation that provides the

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victory. See Ragnar Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror: Ideas of Conflict and Victory in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1954), 237–38. Strong martyrological association with the theme of conquering is also emphasized by others as well. See Paul Middleton, *The Violence of the Lamb: Martyrs as Agents of Divine Judgment in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 586 (New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 224–25; Eun-Chul Shin, “More than Conquerors: The Conqueror (NIKAΩ) Motif in the Book of Revelation” (PhD thesis, Pretoria University, 2007), 317–18. According to this criteria, many ecclesial images, aside from the images of conquerors in 12:11 and 15:2, can be said to fall within the category of conquerors, including the images of the souls of those who had been slain (6:9), the 144,000 (7:4; 14:1–5), the two witnesses (11:3–13).

most explicit description of the relationship between the role of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. Prior to discussing the relation between the idea of divine grace in salvation expressed through the phrase “by the blood of the Lamb” and that of human responsibility conveyed by the expression ἐνίκησαν (“they conquered”), it will be helpful to examine the literary context that surrounds the passage in question in order to properly interpret the relationship between these two elements of salvation as presented in 12:11.

This passage is part of a larger literary unit, 12:1–15:4, whose main topic is the cosmic warfare instigated by Satan against God, his Messiah, and the people of God. Although some commentators argue that 15:1–4 is to be excluded from the literary unit mentioned above,<sup>5</sup> in keeping with the structural characteristic of Revelation labeled as “interlocking” or “interweaving,”<sup>6</sup> 15:1–4 should be seen as both the conclusion to the preceding chapters 12–14 and the introduction to the seven bowls.<sup>7</sup> This view does justice to the repetitive or recapitulative nature of Revelation, through which a thematic progressive intensity is achieved among the three septets of seals, trumpets, and bowls.

After the seventh trumpet of 11:15–19 brought the story to its end, the visions recorded in chapters 12–14 carry the readers back in time, telling the stories before Jesus’s birth, showing the results of Jesus’s death and resurrection, describing history as a time of conflict, and finally concluding with the final judgment.<sup>8</sup> Situated within the

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Grant R. Osborne is a major proponent of this view. See Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 453.

<sup>6</sup> Brian J. Tabb notes that one of the key structural features of Revelation is that the visionary sections deliberately overlap with each other. See Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Among the advocates of this view are Beale, J. Ramsey Michaels, Ranko Stefanovic, and Alexander E. Stewart. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 126; Michaels, *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 64; Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2009), 25–26; Alexander Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation: Five Principles for Interpretation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart, *Reading the Book of Revelation*, 129.

broader context of this grand cosmic story, chapter 12 depicts a battle that occurs due to Christ's death, resurrection, and exaltation. According to Robert H. Mounce, visions shared in chapter 12 form the theological heart of the entire book in that they portray God's engagement with Satan in the ultimate battle of the Holy War as well as his defeat of Satan and the forces of evil by means of the redemptive triumph of Christ in his death and resurrection.<sup>9</sup> This is an appropriate evaluation that demonstrates the heart of this chapter, as "war in heaven" (12:7) in the ancient world is closely linked to the holy war motif in which the deity fights on behalf of his believers.<sup>10</sup>

The holy war background thus serves as the context for the interpretation of the victory of believers as a consequence of the accomplished victory of Christ, the divine warrior. From a soteriological perspective, chapter 12 communicates an important message related to the salvation of believers by telling the story of Satan's efforts to thwart God's plan of salvation through Christ and his people.

As for the literary division of chapter 12, it is generally considered to have three scenes: the description of the woman, the dragon, and the male child (12:1–6), the defeat and the casting out of Satan (7–12), and the persecution of the woman and her offspring (13–17).<sup>11</sup> However, others also assert that it can be broken down even further into four parts: a confrontation between the dragon and the woman (12:1–6), a war in heaven between Michael and the dragon (12:7–9), a commentary by a great voice in heaven (12:10–12), and a continuation of the conflict between the dragon, the woman,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 230.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Antonysamy Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Revelation 12, 7–12*, European University Studies 547 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 1995), 85. Likewise, Osborne claims that ἡ σωτηρία (salvation) occurs three times (7:10; 12:10; 19:1) and follows its OT thrust of "deliverance" or "victory." Osborne, *Revelation*, 473.

<sup>11</sup> G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 481; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 229–230; Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 348.

and her offspring (12:13–18).<sup>12</sup> In my view, the latter shows literary sensitivity and avoids obscuring an important theological message contained in 12:10–12.

To elaborate, 12:10–12 is the key to understanding the cosmic conflict scene portrayed in the preceding verses. It functions as a commentary on the war in heaven by a great voice in heaven.<sup>13</sup> In support of this point, James L. Resseguie argues that the hymn in 12:10–12 serves to interpret the significance of the war in heaven, and, as is frequently the case in Revelation, what John hears interprets what he sees.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Mitchell G. Reddish contends that the key to John’s understanding of this scene is found in the hymnic pronouncement from heaven because the overthrow of Satan is celebrated as the arrival of God’s salvation, power, kingdom, and the authority of the Messiah.<sup>15</sup> According to Steven Grabiner, the fundamental function of the hymns, as an integral part of the storyline, is to participate in the refutation of Satan’s accusations and proclaim that those accusations have been overcome.<sup>16</sup> This is virtually the salvific effect of the salvation wrought by Christ in history.<sup>17</sup>

The function of the literary unit of 12:10–12 as commentary on the significance of the war waged in heaven also demonstrates the soteriological relevance of this war, which is directly concerned with the main question that this chapter attempts to answer: “Is believers’ experience of ongoing salvation in the present the result of the synergistic work of both divine grace and human responsibility?” This question can also

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph L. Trafton, *Reading Revelation: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 116.

<sup>13</sup> Trafton, *Reading Revelation*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse*, Biblical Interpretation Series 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 173.

<sup>15</sup> Mitchell G. Reddish, *Revelation*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 235–36.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, LNTS 511 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 225.

<sup>17</sup> Jan A. du Rand, *Johannine Perspective: Introduction to the Johannine Writings, Part 1* (Halfway House: Orion, 1997), 315.



be reframed: “Is the conquering of believers (human responsibility) to be considered meritorious toward salvation as well, in addition to the conquering of Christ (divine grace)?”

To answer this question, the literary unit of 12:10–12 must be further broken down into two divisions, 12:10 and 12:11–12, with each division being dealt with on its own terms. This is because each division is concerned with different issues: the former being linked to the part played by Christ in this conflict, and the latter to the role played by believers and its consequence. For the analysis of 12:10, verses 8–9 will be taken together since 12:8–10 form a thematic unit in such a way that the combat of Michael in heaven (12:8–9) is the reflection of the earthly warfare and triumph of Christ (12:10).<sup>18</sup>

### **Temporal Considerations**

There are some temporal issues related to verse 12:11, which, if left untreated, would severely obscure the soteriological significance of believers’ conquering expressed through *ἐνίκησαν*. The first issue concerns the timing of the victory of Christ accomplished through his redemptive death, which is conveyed by the image of warfare (12:7–9). The second one is related to the timing of believers’ conquering, expressed through the aorist verb *ἐνίκησαν*. Do these two events transpire at the same time, or does the former event occur at a different time than the latter?

From an early period, Revelation 12 was often cited as evidence for the primeval fall of Satan.<sup>19</sup> While the list of those who adhere to this view is mostly limited to ancient commentators and goes as far back as Origen, the vast majority of modern

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<sup>18</sup> Abir convincingly argues that 12:8–9 is to be taken together with 12:10 for a thematic purpose since the combat of Michael in heaven is taken up by Christ in this world on behalf of the church. See Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 133.

<sup>19</sup> For the history of interpretation on Revelation 12 as evidence for the primeval fall of Satan, see Judith Kovacs, Christopher Rowland, and Rebekah Callow, *Revelation: The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 138–39. This reading finds its support in passages such as Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.

commentators agree that the casting out of Satan from heaven occurs at the death of Christ on the cross.<sup>20</sup> As Reddish rightly notes, John is not concerned with the origin of evil but with its defeat.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Ian Boxall emphasizes that the significant story is not Michael and Satan in heaven or the primeval fall of Satan but the earthly story of Jesus Christ and his followers.<sup>22</sup>

The emphasis of this story is thus on the earthly event, whose effect is then reflected in the heavenly realm. M. Eugene Boring drives home this point by stating that the evil forces are defeated in the transcendent sphere as a result of the incarnation, crucifixion/resurrection, and witness of Christians on the earth.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the defeat of Satan is brought about by the Christ event on the earth, even though the war in heaven appears to be waged by Michael against Satan. This point is further supported by the application of the verb *νικάω* to the victory of Christ on the cross (3:21; 5:5; 17:14). As examined previously, these three references to the victory of Christ are all used to describe the complete victory he won over Satan through his death on the cross. This confirms that the warfare imagery, as portrayed in 12:7–9, is a metaphor referring to the accomplished victory of Christ in the past.

On the other hand, the event of believers' conquering conveyed by the aorist verb *ἐνίκησαν*, when carefully examined within its immediate context as well as the larger context of the conquering motif, appears to refer to the ongoing victory of all faithful believers living in the interim stage between Christ's two advents. As emphasized

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<sup>20</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 184; Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 231; Reddish, *Revelation*, 235; Osborne, *Revelation*, 476; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 636–37; Richard D. Phillips, *Revelation*, REC (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), 355–56. This truth is also attested by other NT texts such as Luke 10:17 and John 12:31. Though excluded from the discussion above, there is a third interpretation that takes the fall of Satan as yet-future event. For the details on this view, see Fanning, *Revelation*, 356.

<sup>21</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 235.

<sup>22</sup> Ian Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 183.

<sup>23</sup> M. Eugene Boring, *Revelation*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 159.

previously, believers' victory is the direct result of Christ's accomplished victory on the cross. The phraseology "result" assumes that the victory of Christians occurs subsequently to the victory of Christ. This is confirmed by verse 12:17, where the opponents of the enraged dragon with whom he went off to declare war upon are identified as the "rest of the woman's children" (12:17) who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. This is a symbolic expression for the persecuted Christians of the New Testament church.<sup>24</sup> The time period during which Satan wages war against and persecutes the New Testament church is depicted by a variety of expressions such as "1,260 days" (12:6), "a time, times, and half a time" (12:14), and "forty-two months" (13:5), all of which refer to one and the same time period.<sup>25</sup> G. K. Beale notes, "This is a limited time period that extends from the resurrection of Christ until his second coming."<sup>26</sup> The theological significance of these temporal designations is that Satan has decisively lost the battle to Christ with the result that the days of Satan's last act of defiance against God are short, temporary, and will come to an end soon at the return of Christ. The victory of believers is an event that takes place after the fall of Satan to earth. This leads to the final issue related to the chronology of the victory of believers. How, then, is it possible that the heavenly voices (12:10–12) can celebrate the victory of God's redeemed people over Satan as already obtained? In fact, the victory of believers described as complete in verse 12:11 chronologically follow verse 12:17, where the Christians are portrayed as persecuted by the dragon. According to Simon J. Kistemaker, verse 12:11 paints a picture of the redemption of God's people, a picture that is not limited by chronological time; thus, he writes in the past tense as if all God's people have

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<sup>24</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 664.

<sup>25</sup> Onesimus Ngundu, "Revelation," *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary Written by 70 African Scholars*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 1589.

<sup>26</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 646.

already entered into glory.<sup>27</sup> He further argues that this verse emphasizes the certainty of the victory of believers even though the time of Christ's return has not yet come, for John's perspective is not from earth—still without victory—to heaven, but rather from heaven—triumphant in victory—to earth.<sup>28</sup> In other words, the outcome of the eternal struggle between good and evil has already been decided by the decisive victory of Christ on the cross. This is why the past tense ἐνίκησαν is used with the sense of completeness.<sup>29</sup> This indicates that the salvific effect of the past victory of Christ remains in full force in the continuing victory of the saints in the present and continues into the future. Thus, the decisive victory of Christ accomplished on the cross is what guarantees the ongoing victory of believers in the present age.

### **Spatial Considerations**

The church's experience of persecution and suffering during the inter-advent period, aside from the aforementioned temporal designations, is expressed in spatial terms as well. The temporal images, according to Beale, echo Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.<sup>30</sup> This is confirmed by 12:6, where the description of the woman fleeing into the wilderness is linked with the temporal designation "1,260 days," during which period the woman is nourished in a place prepared by God. Here, the image of the woman symbolizes the personified people of God made up of both Jews and Gentiles, a picture of

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 364.

<sup>28</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 364. Similarly, Fanning asserts that the aorist translated "overcame" declares believers' victory to be already accomplished in heaven's eyes. See Fanning, *Revelation*, 357. Also, Friedrich Düsterdieck states that the victory of believers can be celebrated as one already gained because the victory won over Satan in heaven has rendered him an overcome enemy also to believers on earth. See Friedrich Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Revelation of John*, trans. Henry E. Jacobs, CECNT (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887), 349.

<sup>29</sup> Fanning adds insight by arguing that this aorist verb probably has been used as a consummative aorist with focus on actual accomplishment despite opposition. See Fanning, *Revelation*, 357n40. Also, Brian K. Blount contends that this aorist verb indicates that the promise has been fulfilled since the aorist of νικάω as used in 5:5 describes the completed conquest of the Lamb. See Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 238.

<sup>30</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 647.

the believing community.<sup>31</sup>

The theological significance of the use of the wilderness imagery of the Exodus tradition in Revelation 12 has been explored by many commentators. Some have argued that wilderness can only be a place of spiritual refuge and divine provision, negating the possibility that it could also be a place where one is tested, facing the temptations of idolatry and immorality.<sup>32</sup> However, this interpretive choice does not do justice, as Buist M. Fanning points out, to the multivalent nature of the pattern of Israel's experience in the wilderness, where sinful rebellion, exile, and judgment by God were frequently mentioned as part of Israel's wilderness experience.<sup>33</sup> Rather, it is more convincing to see the image of wilderness as having dual connotations, both positive and negative. For instance, Beale argues that while the wilderness is a place of protection for the people of God amid a hostile world, the church, like Israel, faces the temptation of idolatry and immorality in the wilderness.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Fanning claims that while God's faithful deliverance of Israel from Egypt and protection in the wilderness served as a reminder of that deliverance, they also served as a call to trust the Lord in difficult circumstances and not rebel against him.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the typological significance of the dual nature of the wilderness in Revelation 12 lies in the fact that it helps the readers to see the interim time period between Christ's exaltation and his second coming as a time of both God's faithfulness to his people and vice versa by means of spatial imagery, namely the wilderness. In this

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<sup>31</sup> Barbara A. Isbell, *The Past Is Yet to Come: Exodus Typology in Revelation*, Studies in Jewish and Christian Literature (Dallas: Fontes Press, 2022), 128.

<sup>32</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 234.

<sup>33</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 353. He cites the following passages as evidence of his argument: Exodus 14:11–12; Numbers 14:2, 32–35; 26:64–65; 32:10–15; Psalms 78:17–22, 40–41; 95:8–11; 106:13–18.

<sup>34</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 646.

<sup>35</sup> Fanning, *Revelation*, 353.

respect, Michael Kuykendall helpfully explains, emphasizing the typological continuity between the old and the new exodus, that the wilderness references in Revelation 12 are patterned after the wilderness wanderings of the old exodus and symbolize the current wilderness-like experiences of believers portrayed by the imagery of the woman.<sup>36</sup> The life of God's people in this world is a pilgrimage through a wilderness, during which time God protects and sustains his people.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is also a time of "testing" in which they are also called to demonstrate a life of loyalty and faithfulness to God.

The notion of "testing" implied in the wilderness imagery thus establishes a link with the concept of believers' conquering that pervades the entire chapter of Revelation 12. Kuykendall notes that the added component of testing in the imagery of the woman escaping into the wilderness symbolizes that even if it means dying for their witnessing faith, Christians must not shrink back from being witnesses for Christ.<sup>38</sup> This interpretation fits perfectly well with the implied meaning of believers' conquering, that believers conquer through their persevering faith to the point of death.

From a narrative perspective, the master plot of Revelation is the journey of the people of God to the new promised land in search of their home, which is envisioned as arriving at the new Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> James L. Resseguie argues that the wilderness is, as with the Israelites, the place where the church dwells during the in-between times.<sup>40</sup> In the Exodus tradition, the theme of holy war forms an important part. It plays a vital role in the progression of the narrative, stretching from the exodus of Israel from Egypt to the

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<sup>36</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 81.

<sup>37</sup> This is suggested by the image of the "two wings of the great eagle" (12:14), which is a symbol for God's care and protection for his people. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 482.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 81.

<sup>39</sup> James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 46–47.

<sup>40</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 47.

arrival in the promised land of Canaan. According to Thomas B. Dozeman, while the story of the Exodus focuses on Yahweh, not the Israelites, thus on the war between Yahweh and Pharaoh, the attention shifts significantly to the Israelites as they enter the wilderness and march through it toward the promised land, indicating that the Israelites' act of war becomes more central to the narrative, which probes their courage and faith to participate in a life-and-death situation, trusting that Yahweh fights along with them.<sup>41</sup> This is probably why the community of Israelites was described as arranged like an army, a movable camp that would travel through the wilderness until it reached and conquered the promised land.<sup>42</sup>

As with the Israelites in the wilderness, conquerors in Revelation can also be corporately called “the marching army of Christ,” journeying through the wilderness until they reach the new promised land, namely the new Jerusalem. This is substantiated by the vision of the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude in Revelation 7, which is evocative of the census of Israelites in the wilderness, an act of numbering the military strength of the nation.<sup>43</sup> It later becomes more apparent from 14:4 that the 144,000, by reference to the term *παρθένος*, a holy war terminology for ritual purity in the Lord's army (Deut 23:9–14; 1 Sam 21:5; 2 Sam 11:9–13),<sup>44</sup> are identified as the messianic army, a faithful remnant of Israel, protected by God and preparing for eschatological battle.<sup>45</sup> Their task is not to engage in a literal war but maintain the faithful witness as far as death.<sup>46</sup> Thus,

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 177.

<sup>42</sup> R. E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 821.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T&T Clark, 1993), 217.

<sup>44</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 231.

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Skaggs and Thomas Doyle, “Revelation 7: Three Critical Questions,” in *Imagery in the Book of Revelation*, ed. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, CBET 60 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 178.

<sup>46</sup> Skaggs and Doyle, “Revelation 7: Three Critical Questions,” 178.

the statement 14:4 moves from holy war imagery to sacrificial imagery, reinterpreting the holy war concept of cultic purity as moral purity.<sup>47</sup> In this sense, William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste keenly point out that the thematic connection between Yahweh's holy war within the Old Testament and the apocalyptic war in Revelation suggests that at the heart of both the Old Testament holy war and that of Revelation is found God's purpose of eliminating idolatry.<sup>48</sup>

The vision of the 144,000 and the innumerable multitude in Revelation 7, connected through the theme of wilderness, thus serve as complementary images of the conquerors described in 12:11 and informs the nature of believers' salvation. Their victory over the beast is the courageous expression of their trust in Christ shown through their participation in a life-and-death struggle against idolatry and false worship of the beast and his image (13:8, 12, 15; 14:11; cf. 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). All in all, when read in light of the spatial context of wilderness, believers are identified as the marching army of Christ through the wilderness toward the new promised land. The time of their journey on the earth, symbolized as wilderness, is undeniably a time of God's protection and sustenance for believers. However, it is also a time in which believers must show their loyalty and trust in him by participating in the holy war against the beast to the point of death. This is the kind of faith that is required of believers to receive salvation.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Believers' Conquering in 12:11**

This section intends to offer the exegetical basis for two arguments I made at the conclusion of the previous chapter. First, conquering as the sanctification process of believers, situated between the initial triumph of Christ on the cross and its consummation at the Parousia, is the in-between time during which both the elements of

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<sup>47</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 232.

<sup>48</sup> William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste, *Bloody, Brutal and Barbaric? Wrestling with Troubling War Texts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 342.



divine grace and human response of faith are required for “staying in” salvation. Second, the latter should not be considered a human achievement and thus a meritorious work for salvation, since the latter, while a human act, is enabled by the former. God enables believers to do what he commands. Thus, the gift of salvation is appropriated by faith through union with Christ, but this faith entirely depends on God’s grace.

*The Victory of Christ: Divine Grace (12:8–10)*

The literary units 12:8–10 and 12:11–12 speak of the role of both divine grace and human responsibility in salvation in terms of the victory of Christ and that of believers, respectively. Verse 12:10 clearly states that salvation, that is to say, the victory,<sup>49</sup> has come as a result of his defeat of Satan, the accuser. In the same way, 12:11 states that believers also conquer. Does this mean that the conquering of believers can be considered qualitatively equal to Christ’s, thus meritorious toward salvation?

The perceived problem in this question is that it describes believers’ ongoing experience of salvation as if it were a product of the synergism between God and human beings. The solution to this perceived problem may be found in the analysis of the contextual data of chapter 12 and the theme of conquering in light of the broader context of the warfare motif in Revelation.

First and foremost, according to the logic of 12:10, there is no doubt that the salvation, the power, the kingdom of God, and the authority of Christ are all described as a direct result of the defeat of Satan in heavenly conflict. Ragnar Leivestad insightfully argues that the position of chapter 12 in the scheme of the book is analogous to that of chapter 5 since it deals with the same topic as chapter 5, “the victory of Christ,” with

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<sup>49</sup> The term “salvation” in Revelation can be used interchangeably with “victory” in light of the overarching context of warfare that pervades Revelation. For more details on this topic, see my discussion on pages 45–46.

12:10 being a close parallel to 5:9,<sup>50</sup> which provides the portrait of the new Exodus salvation accomplished by the victory of the slain Lamb (5:5).

The parallelism between 12:10 and 5:9 suggests that the casting down of Satan from heaven is nothing less than a pictorial description of the consequence of the victory of Christ the Lamb, accomplished at the specific time in the past, that is, in the event of his death and resurrection,<sup>51</sup> or more specifically, in the event of the cross.<sup>52</sup> This is indicated by the temporal adverb ἄρτι (“now”). According to David E. Aune, the temporal adverb ἄρτι, together with the aorist verb ἐγένετο, suggests the fact that the ascriptions of deliverance, power, and kingship to God are grounded in the specific temporal occurrence of Satan’s expulsion from heaven narrated in 12:9, whether it is the cross or both the cross and resurrection.<sup>53</sup> This temporal indicator refers to the cross as the turning point in world history.<sup>54</sup> The adverb ἄρτι along with the aorist verb ἐγένετο expresses the definite and immediate reality of the kingdom of God that has been established as a result of the defeat of the dragon.<sup>55</sup> The time reference of “now,” though started from the cross, covers the whole period of the salvation-historical era between Easter and the Parousia.<sup>56</sup>

From a soteriological viewpoint, the term σωτηρία 12:10 thus does not merely

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<sup>50</sup> Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror*, 226.

<sup>51</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 658; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 149; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 363.

<sup>52</sup> G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 2nd ed., BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1984), 153–54; John Sweet, *Revelation*, Trinity Press International New Testament Commentary (London: SCM Press, 1990), 201; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 203. That Satan’s fall in 12:10 is attributed to the cross is further reinforced by the fact that 12:10 is remarkably similar to John 12:31–33, where Jesus’s death on the cross is portrayed as the execution of the judgment and dethronement of Satan. See Beale and Gladd, *The Story Retold*, 660; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> David E. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word, 1998), 699.

<sup>54</sup> Sweet, *Revelation*, 201.

<sup>55</sup> Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 156.

<sup>56</sup> Jürgen Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, trans. John E. Alsup, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 149.

anticipate future salvation, that is, the future establishment of God's kingdom, but it refers to the full salvation that has come actually, fully and completely.<sup>57</sup> Robert H. Mounce reinforces this point by saying, "The salvation, power, and kingdom of God are present realities."<sup>58</sup> Beale offers a more detailed explanation of the experience of God's kingdom and salvation as a present reality. He asserts that the phrase "now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come," as a description of the kingdom of God in the already-and-not-yet fashion, emphasizes the inaugurated phase of the kingdom immediately following the resurrection of Christ. Therefore, 12:10 does not merely anticipate the future kingdom but celebrates it as a present reality following Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>59</sup> However, some refuse to see the expulsion of Satan in connection with the accomplished victory of Christ on the cross as past and completed. Rather, they view it as still to transpire in the future as a consequence of the victory of Michael. This places unnecessary emphasis on the eschatological chronology.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, neither the view that sees Satan's fall as occurring in the primeval time, nor the view that transfers this event to the eschatological future, does justice to Christ's all-encompassing and complete victory on the cross. Both of these views do nothing but bring the efficacy of the redemptive work of Christ into question. Charles Sherlock rightly observes that there is no mention of any fighting by the angelic forces under Michael but simply the remark that the dragon and his angels fought but failed to

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<sup>57</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1935), 378.

<sup>58</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 238.

<sup>59</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 658.

<sup>60</sup> Robert L. Thomas is a major proponent of this view. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 133–34.

prevail.<sup>61</sup> Why so? It is because the victory of Michael in heaven is the heavenly correspondent to Christ's earthly conflict and victory on the cross, which has been completed. Thus, the overthrow of Satan is to be attributed wholly to the death and resurrection of Christ through which the salvation of believers has come fully and completely. The passive form of the verb "was cast down" indicates that the expulsion of the dragon from heaven is from start to finish divine action.<sup>62</sup> This is the work of God's grace carried out by his warrior agent Christ the Lamb.

The problem emerges when close attention is paid to the following verse, 12:11. This verse seems to portray the victory of believers as a necessary addition to that of Christ in order for them to be saved. Does this mean that believers have a part to play in the overthrow of Satan? Or, does this signify that there is something lacking in the accomplished victory of Christ, and thus, there is something to be added by believers? Sherlock argues that 12:7–12 is best seen as the outlook of the heavenly assembly on the earthly victory of Christ at the cross.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that the victory of believers described in 12:11–12 should also be seen as the victory of Christ, though the victory of believers conveyed by the aorist verb ἐνίκησαν (12:11) still implies human action, thus active quality.

The meaning of the ironic statement mentioned above is fairly well explained by Abir: "Although the conquest over the Dragon is accomplished only by the slain Lamb, the consequence and the realization of the conquest is to be seen in the church."<sup>64</sup> Thus, the victory of believers expressed through the phrase αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν is not a

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<sup>61</sup> Charles Sherlock, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture*, RSCT 6 (Lewiston, NY: Rutherford House, 1993), 368.

<sup>62</sup> Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 695.

<sup>63</sup> Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 368.

<sup>64</sup> Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 195.

soteriological accomplishment but a soteriological consequence.<sup>65</sup> It is an act of faith that appropriates salvation that Christ has fully accomplished via his victory on the cross, which must be revealed openly and made manifest in the lives of believers. Faith, conceptualized as participation in Christ's victory, is the one thing believers contribute. However, it is not the instrumental cause of believers' salvation; it is the means by which they participate in the salvation that Christ has fully and completely accomplished through his death and resurrection. In this sense, it is to the victory of Christ that the expulsion of Satan from heaven is to be attributed, leaving nothing for believers to add. All that has been said above, however, necessitates a further examination to which now the attention is to be given.

*The Victory of Believers: Human Responsibility (12:11–12)*

If the notion of divine grace in salvation is expressed through the victory of Michael in the heavenly realm in 12:8–10, which is the reflection of the earthly conflict and victory of Christ at the cross, the idea of human responsibility in salvation finds its expression in the victory of believers described in 12:11–12. More specifically, 12:11 offers the most data as to how believers achieve their victory, thus, it may provide an answer to the question about whether or not believers have a part to play in the overthrow of Satan in the sense that it is to be considered meritorious toward salvation.

The initial observation on 12:11, particularly the phrase *αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν* (“they conquered him”), seems to suggest that believers play an active part in the expulsion of Satan from heaven, with the pronoun *αὐτὸν* referring back to the dragon in 12:10 by means of the epithet *ὁ κατήγωρ* (“the accuser”). This is shorthand for the

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<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that, according to du Rand, all the references to the conquering of believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11, 15:2; 21:7) are to be considered as soteriological consequences, not soteriological accomplishments. Jan A. du Rand, “Soteriology in the Apocalypse of John,” in *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt, NovTSup 121 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 472.

accusatorial role of Satan in heaven, and it thus describes the nature of the war waged between Christ and Satan as a legal one.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the picture of believers' conquering presented in 12:11 is to be understood in this light. R. C. H. Lenski rightly captures the judicial aspect of believers' victory when he argues that this conquest paints a picture of the brothers standing before God's judgment seat to accept their verdict from the Judge, and when their case is before the court, they win.<sup>67</sup> However, one question remains: can they be said to have contributed to the overthrow of Satan, thus a meritorious work for salvation?

Some tend to put too much weight on the central role of human action in the overthrow of Satan. For instance, Jon K. Newton has boldly argued that the victory of Michael's army is only made possible because of what the believers did (12:11), which emphasizes the centrality of human action.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Mitchell G. Reddish argues that the martyrs have contributed to the overthrow of Satan by virtue of faithful witnessing.<sup>69</sup> Also, Resseguie asserts that although the victory has been won, Christians add to that victory by their faithful testimony even unto death.<sup>70</sup> In my view, this is too literalistic an interpretation of 12:11 and fails to take sufficient cognizance of the completeness of the redemptive work of Christ accomplished on the cross as well as the already-not-yet aspect of salvation influenced by the inaugurated eschatology of Revelation.

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<sup>66</sup> Many have observed that the epithet ὁ κατήγορος in 12:10 is used to describe Satan's accusatorial role in heaven, thus suggesting the nature of the war in heaven as a legal one. See Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 157; Peter J. Leithart, *Revelation*, vol. 2, *Revelation 12–22*, ITC (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 32; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 183; Osborne, *Revelation*, 475. Sherlock argues that the victory of Christ is thus won in a lawcourt setting rather than a battleground, which parallels the Pauline concept of justification since Christ's victory on the cross is precisely the means by which Satan's power to accuse the saints is taken. See Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 368. A parallel Pauline idea of justification is found, for example, in Romans 8:33, which says, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies."

<sup>67</sup> Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 379.

<sup>68</sup> Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 230.

<sup>69</sup> Reddish, *Revelation*, 237.

<sup>70</sup> Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 174.

In contrast to those who see the victory of believers described in 12:11 as a necessary addition to Christ's already accomplished victory on the cross (12:8–10), the claims of scholars like G. R. Beasley-Murray and G. B. Caird appear to be more convincing and well-founded. Beasley-Murray argues, with a particular emphasis on the phrase “they did not love their life even unto death,” that this is not to be interpreted as if believers assisted in the overthrow of Satan by their martyrdom but rather as their continuance in faith and obedience towards him in whose victory they participate through unity with him.<sup>71</sup> He adds that those who maintain the word of their testimony share in the power of redemption Christ has achieved.<sup>72</sup> It follows that believers do not achieve their victory or add anything to the victory of Christ but simply enter into it via faith. In the same vein, Caird contends that the only reason that the martyrdom, thus their victory, can be treated as a *fait accompli* is because the work of salvation was fully accomplished on the cross, with Christ's victory through death being all-inclusive.<sup>73</sup> In this respect, Jan A. du Rand rightly points out that 12:11 is a dramatic retelling of the Christ event.<sup>74</sup> Thus, 12:11 is not a new story of how believers achieve a new victory in addition to Christ's. Rather, it is a story of divine grace recounting how the accomplished victory of Christ extends to the believers.

I provide two grounds for the above claim that believers in no way contribute to the overthrow of Satan, namely to the salvation accomplished on the cross. First, the chronology of the two events—the victory of Christ on the cross and the subsequent victory of all believers living between Easter and the Parousia—suggests that believers do not contribute to the overthrow of Satan. Even though Revelation as a whole

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<sup>71</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 204.

<sup>72</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 204.

<sup>73</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 156.

<sup>74</sup> Jan A. du Rand, “‘Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come . . .’ a Narrative Perspective on the Hymns in Revelation 12–15,” *Neotestamentica* 27, no. 2 (1993): 322.

is less concerned with the chronology of events than with the timeless truth contained in them, the two events of Christ's victory at the cross and that of believers are presented sequentially. This is confirmed by the use of the pronoun *αὐτοὶ* in 12:11. To whom is the pronoun *αὐτοὶ* referring? Here, *αὐτοὶ* refers to *τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν* ("brothers and sisters") in the preceding verse 12:10, and, therefore, those accused by the dragon.<sup>75</sup> They are the faithful still living and bearing witness to Christ in word and deed.<sup>76</sup> They collectively represent the earthly church struggling against the constant attack of the defeated dragon.<sup>77</sup> Considering that 12:11 chronologically follows 12:17,<sup>78</sup> *αὐτοὶ* can also be said to be referring to the offspring of the woman, who is in constant danger of attack from the enraged dragon. The attack of the dragon against believers is the result of his defeat in heaven. In this respect, believers' victory over the dragon can be said to be subsequent to the decisive victory of Christ through which the dragon was thrown down to earth. From a literary perspective, while Christ's decisive victory and its results are described in 12:8–10, believers' conflict and victory are portrayed in 12:13–17.<sup>79</sup> This continues into chapters 13 and 14. The victory of Christ is thus qualitatively different from that of believers. The former is the decisive moment that settles the outcome of the eternal struggle between good and evil, while the latter is the consequence of the former.

In contrast, the victory of believers is won in skirmishes against the defeated Satan and his allies. The sole reason believers' future victory can be treated as a *fait accompli* is because salvation was fully accomplished by the decisive victory of Christ on

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<sup>75</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 237; Düsterdieck adds a further detail that *αὐτοὶ* does not include the archangel Michael described in verse 7. See Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook*, 348.

<sup>76</sup> Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 197.

<sup>77</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 150; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Revelation*, ACNT (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 243.

<sup>78</sup> James Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, in vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. William Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran, 1897), 427.

<sup>79</sup> This is why the heavenly voices in 12:12 sing a song of joy but, at the same time, also issue a solemn warning to earth and sea. See Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 156.



the cross, embracing the whole scope of salvation from past to future.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the fact that the victory of believers sequentially follows that of Christ indicates that their victory is simply the consequence of and the outworking of the already accomplished victory of Christ being realized in and through the lives of believers.

Second, in the twopositional phrases, *διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου* and *διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν* of 12:11, the force is not identical. This verse states the necessity of the human response of faith for salvation by way of the phrase *αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτόν*.<sup>81</sup> Although the aorist verb *ἐνίκησαν* conveys the idea of completion, the victory of believers is proleptic since it is not until 12:17, that the defeated dragon is depicted as beginning to persecute the faithful Christians who are symbolized as the seed of the woman. Thus, the overriding goal of 12:11 is to assure believers that they can achieve victory over the dragon because he is nothing but a defeated foe, as he begins to battle against them only after he has lost the battle over their souls.<sup>82</sup> One question arises: what does 12:11 indicate about what decides the victory of believers? Verse 12:11 can be divided, according to the syntactical function of each element, as follows: (a) *καὶ αὐτοὶ*

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<sup>80</sup> This statement, “the conquering of Christ: divine grace in salvation,” has been proven because the victory of the conquering Lamb (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), in both past and future, is attributed to his shed blood on the cross. This is also supported by Daniel Gard’s response to Tremper Longman’s view on Jesus’s return as the completion of his victory won at Calvary. Gard critiques Longman’s view for interpreting the victory of Christ at Calvary as incomplete and thus still in progress. Instead, he offers an alternative view that Easter is to be seen as the completion of that victory; thus, the victory is already won with the last day and its judgment being the final imposition of *herem* as the manifestation of the victory won at Calvary and sealed on Easter. See Tremper Longman III, “The Case for Spiritual Continuity,” in *Show Them No Mercy: 4 Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, by C. S. Cowles et al., Counterpoints: Exploring Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 203–4.

<sup>81</sup> This point is further reinforced by the fact that the whole chapter 12 is written in accordance with the rhetorical purpose of Revelation as a whole. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza explains that the visionary rhetoric of Rev 10:1–15:4 aims to persuade the audience to choose God’s worship over the worship of the beast, which is demonstrated to be headed to failure and destruction and that in addition to trying to persuade Christians that this is the proper choice, Revelation also tries to get them to risk their lives for it. See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, “The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Social-Political Situation,” *Semeia* 36 (1986): 134. Most likely, the purpose of this vision is to further emphasize the overarching rhetorical goal of Revelation, that is, the theme of conquering, which most prominently appears in chapters 2–3. As David deSilva notes, John wants his hearers to become conquerors and conquer the challenges to faithful discipleship to keep the commandments of God and keep faith in Christ. Daniel A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 70.

<sup>82</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663.

ένικησαν αὐτὸν, (b) διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου, (c) διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν, and (d) ὅκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου. Both (b) and (c) syntactically modify the verb ένικησαν in (a), and (d) is in a coordinate relationship with (a). Scholars remain divided over the interpretation of the relationship between these elements and, consequently, over what decides the believers' victory. In short, I am more inclined to agree with those who view (b) as the ground and (c) as either the result of (b)<sup>83</sup> or the means<sup>84</sup> by which believers appropriate the accomplished victory of Christ, though there are others who interpret the relationship between (b) and (c) in various ways, usually viewing them as functioning coordinately.<sup>85</sup> In my view, this interpretive tendency may be attributed to the fact that most scholars see τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου as grammatically parallel to τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν.<sup>86</sup> However, the force is not identical.<sup>87</sup> The former signifies the saving work accomplished by the victory of Christ on the cross, and the latter believers' faith<sup>88</sup> by which they appropriate the victory of Christ, thus the

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<sup>83</sup> Among those who see (b) as the ground of (c), and (c) as the result of (b) are found Louis Brighton and Ian Boxall. Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 323; Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 183.

<sup>84</sup> Abir is a major advocate of this view that sees (b) as the ground of believers' victory and (c) as the means of their victory, thus he translates the phrase διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου and διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν as "on account of the blood of the Lamb" and "by the word of their testimony." See Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 199.

<sup>85</sup> For example, those who see both (b) and (c) as the grounds or basis for (a) are Osborne, Düsterdieck, Beale, and R. H. Charles. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 476; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663; Düsterdieck, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook*, 349; Fanning, *Revelation*, 358; R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 1:329. There are others who see both (b) and (c) as either the cause of or reason for (a) are Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 135; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 379; J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation: Christ's Victory over the Forces of Darkness* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1999), 214. Surprisingly, Keathley includes (d) as a reason for believers' victory. Ladd, on the other hand, views both (b) and (c) as the means of (a). See George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 172.

<sup>86</sup> This is supported by Charles, who sees τὸν λόγον as parallel to τὸ αἷμα. See Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 329.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, Louis A. Brighton emphasizes that the force of the two phrases, "the blood of the Lamb" and "the word of their testimony," cannot be identical since the former is the true and ultimate cause of and basis for the Christians' victory of faith and witness, which is the result (not the cause) of God's grace at work in them. See Brighton, *Revelation*, 323.

<sup>88</sup> As I have argued thus far, the conquering of believers is the outward expression of their saving faith in various forms of obedience, which is also true of 12:11. Many agree that the testimony of

saving work of Christ. If (c) were to be taken as the result of (a), the logical conclusion would be that the testimony borne by believers to Christ is enabled by “the blood of the Lamb.”

The claims above are further reinforced by other contextual evidence, such as the relation of 12:10 to 12:11 and God’s protection of the church during the wilderness period on earth, which is primarily conveyed by the expression “the two wings of the great eagle” (12:14). First, the *καὶ* occurring at the beginning of 12:11 can be taken as describing 12:10 as the basis for 12:11 or may denote that 12:11 is a result of 12:10.<sup>89</sup> This suggests that the relation of 12:11 to 12:10 is identical to that of “the word of their testimony” to “the blood of the Lamb.” It follows that the salvation accomplished through the victory of Christ, stated in 12:10, is the ground and basis for the victory of believers described in 12:11. This is probably what is intended by Blount when he states, “The repetition of *καὶ* (and), then, does not so much add new content as it extends what has already been stated.”<sup>90</sup> Given the participatory nature of the conquering language, the victory of believers is no new victory or a new addition to the victory of Christ already accomplished on the cross. Rather, it is believers’ participation in the ongoing victory of Christ through union with him by faith in the time between Christ’s two comings. Thus, believers’ testimony is no different from the blood of the Lamb in 12:11 since they all constitute Christ’s single act of conquering, though its description is presented in different stages because of the inaugurated eschatology of Revelation.<sup>91</sup>

The persecution of the dragon against the church and God’s protection of her

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believers mentioned in 12:11 is the expression of, or the result of their faith in Christ. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663; John Sweet, *Revelation*, 202.

<sup>89</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663.

<sup>90</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 239.

<sup>91</sup> Blount argues that believers’ witness is not different from the blood, for three different clauses of 12:11 ratchet up the author’s expectation for the single act of contemporary witnessing. Blount, *Revelation*, 239.

during the period of wilderness offers another contextual evidence. At first glance, the persecution of the dragon seems to refer to the overpowering force of Satan. It must be reiterated, however, that Satan's attack against believers takes place as a result of his defeat by the cross of Christ. Thus, the suffering of Christians is a sign of their victory over the devil rather than his victory.<sup>92</sup> Johnson Puthussery rightly notes that even though the dragon continues to exercise its power over believers on earth, the outcome of the war is already determined, for the victory of believers is inevitably secured on their part.<sup>93</sup> Satan's loss of power and the assured victory of the faithful believers underlie the notion of divine protection for the woman during the time span covered by the vision of the wilderness, which is conveyed by temporal indicators like "one thousand two hundred and sixty days" and "time, times, and half a time," referring to the transitory phase prior to reaching the promised land.<sup>94</sup> God's preservation and care of his people during this time period is primarily exemplified by the image of "eagle's wings." This imagery symbolizes divine enablement<sup>95</sup> or divine deliverance as a gift<sup>96</sup> by alluding to Deuteronomy 32:10–12, where God's sustenance of Israel in the desert, like an eagle hovering over its young, is described. Secondly, the image of the earth swallowing the flood coming out of the dragon's mouth (12:15), the phrase "his time is short" (12:12), and the temporal designation "time, times, and half a time" all denote the idea of the divine protection of the church in addition to the image of eagle's wings.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 663.

<sup>93</sup> Johnson Puthussery, *Days of Man and God's Day: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Ἡμέρα in the Book of Revelation*, Tesi Gregoriana Serie Teologia 82 (Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2002), 207.

<sup>94</sup> Puthussery, *Days of Man and God's Day*, 214.

<sup>95</sup> Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 241.

<sup>96</sup> Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 553.

<sup>97</sup> Abir explicitly mentions that there are five elements that indicate the positive outcome of conflict which underlie the divine protection of the church symbolized by the image of woman: (1) the wings of the eagle; (2) the image of earth swallowing the flood; (3) the phrase "his time is short"; (4) a

## The Victory of Believers and “the Song of the Lamb” (15:2–4)

The texts to be examined in this subsection read as follows:

2 Καὶ εἶδον ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ καὶ **τοὺς νικῶντας** ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ ἐστῶτας ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν τὴν ὑαλίνην ἔχοντας κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ. 3 καὶ ᾄδουσιν τὴν ᾠδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ **τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου** λέγοντες·

**μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου,**  
κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ  
δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναὶ αἱ ὁδοὶ σου,  
ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν.  
4 τίς οὐ μὴ φοβηθῆ, κύριε,  
καὶ δοξάσει τὸ ὄνομά σου;  
ὅτι μόνος ὁσῖος,  
ὅτι πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἤξουσιν  
καὶ προσκυνήσουσιν ἐνώπιόν σου,  
ὅτι τὰ δικαιώματά σου ἐφανερώθησαν.

In the following pages, I will show how the three elements in bold consecutively refer to human responsibility (τοὺς νικῶντας), the agency of the Lamb in salvation (τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου), and God’s redemptive sovereignty (μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου). However, they are not separated from each other but portray a unified work of salvation accomplished by divine grace alone, with human responsibility in salvation (τοὺς νικῶντας) being enabled by divine grace (τὴν ᾠδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου/μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ τὰ ἔργα σου).

### Literary Considerations

Literarily speaking, the passage 15:2–3a describing the victory of believers and that of Christ is part of the section (15:2–4) portraying the choir and the hymn reflective of Israel’s song of victory.<sup>98</sup> Thus, the literary unit 15:2–4 can be called “the song of the

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temporal designation “for a time and a time”; and (5) the defeat of Satan, which is a sign of the coming of God’s kingdom. For more details, see Abir, *The Cosmic Conflict of the Church*, 146–50.

<sup>98</sup> According to Steven Grabiner, chapter 15 can be divided into three major sections: (1) the first (15:1) sets the scene for the upcoming plagues and introduces the seven angels, which are evocative of the plagues that befell Egypt; (2) the second (15:2–4) depicts the choir and the hymn they sing, which is reminiscent of Israel’s anthem of victory; and (3) the final (15:5–8) is introduced with καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα εἶδον and signals the shift to the last scene. Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns*, 179.

conquerors.”<sup>99</sup> The subdivision 15:2–4 occupies a special place within the literary structure of chapter 15, which mainly speaks of the victory celebration in the heavenly worship<sup>100</sup> and serves largely as a sort of celestial interlude to introduce the judgment scene of the seven bowls described in chapter 16. This facilitates an understanding of the above judgment scene.<sup>101</sup>

At first glance, 15:2–4 seems to be separated from 15:1 as well as from 15:5–8 both literarily and thematically, just like 12:10–12. This may be attributed to the fact that they function as something called “in-between scenes,” usually consisting of visions or hymns of eschatological protection and deliverance that interrupt the flow of the narrative.<sup>102</sup> However, as Beale notes, the best explanation of 15:2–4 is that they serve both as a conclusion to 12:1–14:20 and an introduction to the bowls of judgment in 15:5–16:21. They perform an “interlocking function,” concluding what precedes and introducing what follows both literarily and thematically.<sup>103</sup> Therefore, 15:2–4 principally extends the theme of the last judgment in 14:14–20 and secondarily serves as a literary and thematic link between the subsequent series of bowls and the earlier section.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, it can be said that 15:2–4 provides a fitting conclusion to the story of God’s people marching through the wilderness described in previous chapters, as it depicts the

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<sup>99</sup> Trafton, *Reading Revelation*, 141.

<sup>100</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 172.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 228.

<sup>102</sup> Jan du Rand explains that in Revelation the flow of the narrative is often interrupted by “in-between scenes” usually consisting of visions or hymns of eschatological protection and deliverance (7:1–17; 11:15–19; 12:10; 14:15; 15:2–4; 19:1–9; 20:4–6), which serve as commentaries linking the present with the apocalyptic future with focus on God’s judgment, salvation, and God’s control over all. See du Rand, *Johannine Perspective*, 296.

<sup>103</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 784. Many others share the same view. See Paul M. Hoskins, *The Book of Revelation: A Theological and Exegetical Commentary* (North Charleston, SC: ChristoDoulos, 2017), 284; du Rand, ““Now the Salvation of Our God Has Come,”” 326; Beale and Gladd, *The Story Retold*, 484. Stephen S. Smalley, at least, recognizes that 15:2–4 is connected to the scenes of eschatological judgment in 14:6–20, though he makes no explicit mention of its connection to the following section of the bowls judgment. See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 383–84.

<sup>104</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 785.

consummated salvation in the promised land.<sup>105</sup>

Thematically speaking, the function of 15:2–4 is to celebrate the new exodus,<sup>106</sup> or, more specifically, the victory over the beast.<sup>107</sup> Barbara A. Isbell, after observing many characteristic features of the exodus, concludes that the various thematic allusions to the exodus show, despite the fact that verbal connections are admittedly few, that the main theme of Revelation 15, which comes before the final set of seven judgments, appears to be the enactment of a new exodus.<sup>108</sup> Jay Smith Casey even goes a bit further to argue that the cluster of elements taken from the exodus tradition is presented in chapter 15 in the order that closely follows the sequence of the exodus texts.<sup>109</sup> As is frequently the case with the New Testament authors,<sup>110</sup> the purpose seems clear. The author seems to be seeking to interpret the experiences of himself and his audience as eschatological deliverance of God’s people at the end of time that has its typological correspondence in Israel’s divine deliverance from bondage followed by a subsequent journey to the promised land.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 91.

<sup>106</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 383.

<sup>107</sup> Jan du Rand, “The Song of the Lamb Because of the Victory of the Lamb,” *Neotestamentica* 29, no. 2 (1995): 204.

<sup>108</sup> Isbell, *The Past Is Yet to Come*, 103.

<sup>109</sup> Jay Casey argues that the order of the vision of new Exodus in Revelation 15 follows closely the Exodus sequence in such a manner that it remains, for the most part, unaltered: the plagues (15:1), the crossing of the sea (15:2), the engulfing of the pursuer (15:2), the song of Moses (15:3–4), the erection of the tent of testimony (15:5), and the smoke that accompanies Yahweh’s presence (15:8). See Jay Casey, “Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation” (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981), 191.

<sup>110</sup> According to Daniel Smith, the New Testament authors sought to incorporate their experiences of Jesus and the early Christian community into the great web of Exodus imagery permeating the Jewish scriptures, guided by the compelling images of Israel’s divine deliverance from slavery and subsequent trip to the Promised Land. See Daniel Lynwood Smith, “The Uses of ‘New Exodus’ in New Testament Scholarship: Preparing a Way through the Wilderness,” *CurBR* 14, no. 2 (2016): 236.

<sup>111</sup> According to Bauckham, the Exodus theme serves as a soteriological pattern or paradigm for the salvific acts of God for apocalyptic salvation in a future in which God will bring definitive salvation to his people, surpassing the first exodus. See Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 70.

However, the new exodus motif is not used alone in 15:2–4 but in combination with the warfare motif. According to du Rand, the war and exodus motifs are integrated into Revelation 15 to sketch God’s kingship on earth.<sup>112</sup> Based on Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler’s analysis of the hymns of Revelation, the author of Revelation tries to paint his unique picture of the sovereignty of God, the viceregency of the Lamb, the salvation of the people of God, and the total conquest of the adversary in the coming eschatological age.<sup>113</sup> This suggests that the theological, Christological, and soteriological pictures presented in 15:2–4 should be understood as interwoven in the sense that the new exodus salvation is achieved as a consequence of the warfare waged by God against the enemy through his warrior agent, the Lamb, which resulted in the redemption and restoration of the people of God.

Thus, the use of various components drawn from the Exodus tradition in 15:2–4 show the roles of the sovereignty of God and the viceregency of the Lamb in the salvation of the people of God. It even provides a lens through which to see the role of the people of God in reaching to the promised eschatological salvation by way of the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας* (“those who had conquered”) recorded in 15:2. Three aspects of salvation, therefore, are presented successively within the literary unity of 15:2–4: (1) the human responsibility in salvation (15:2), (2) the agency of the Lamb in the salvation process (15:3a), and (3) the sovereignty of God in salvation (15:3b–15:4). The preliminary conclusion to be drawn from this is that regardless of how strong the role of human responsibility in salvation may appear, the accomplishment of salvation must be solely attributed to the absolute primacy of the work of divine grace through the agency of Christ the Lamb.

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<sup>112</sup> du Rand, “The Song of the Lamb Because of the Victory of the Lamb,” 209.

<sup>113</sup> Justin P. Jeffcoat Schedtler, “The Hymns in Revelation,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 119.



## Temporal Considerations

According to du Rand, 15:2–4 serves as one of the “in-between scenes” functioning as a commenting link between the present and the apocalyptic future, which usually consists of visions or hymns of God’s eschatological protection and deliverance.<sup>114</sup> This suggests that this vision is also proleptic, just as in 12:10–12, anticipating what God will do with respect to the salvation of his people through the judgment of his enemy. Thus, the picture of the salvation of God’s people as depicted here is to be viewed as in the process of completion and has a future component.

However, the view that believers’ salvation is still in process should not be taken to mean that the picture of victory painted here signifies a partial victory, thus a partial defeat of Satan, calling into question the completeness of Christ’s victory on the cross; rather, it is a total and complete victory seen from the perspective of the end, namely from the perspective of the cross. God’s future redemptive actions are so certain that the believers’ victory is described as already accomplished (15:2).<sup>115</sup> The reason why God’s future redemptive actions are so certain is because Christ’s redemptive work is complete. This is why the present participle *τοὺς νικῶντας* in 15:2 should be interpreted in the perfect tense since the saint’s task of conquering the devil is portrayed as though it had been already completed.<sup>116</sup> Thus, the proleptic nature of this vision does not necessarily mean the incompleteness of the victory of Christ, which will be completed in the future. Rather, it signifies, in light of the inaugurated eschatology, the unfolding of the already accomplished eschatological salvation through Christ’s victory in phases.

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<sup>114</sup> du Rand, *Johannine Perspective*, 296.

<sup>115</sup> This is already indicated in 15:1 where the description of the pouring of God’s wrath through plagues is presented as if it were already completed through the aorist verb *ἐτελέσθη*. See John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 267.

<sup>116</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 431. See also R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 2:33; See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 852. Some others insist that *τοὺς νικῶντας* should be taken as present participle, thus being in the process of conquering. See Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 268; Ford, *Revelation*, 257.

The proleptic nature of this vision thus suggests that the conquering of believers is yet in the process of the ongoing outworking in space and time, even though it has already been fully accomplished in the past by Christ through his victorious death and resurrection. The main point is that although the final victory is not yet realized on earth, seen from the heavenly perspective, it is already accomplished and thus celebrated in heaven in the present.<sup>117</sup> This is confirmed by the rhetorical function of the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας* in 15:2, which functions to persuade and encourage the audience of Revelation to endure victoriously in spite of their present hardships and trials and gain the entry into the eschatological salvation.<sup>118</sup> Therefore, the intended audience to whom the salvific message of this vision is directed is, first and foremost, the members of the seven churches in chapters 2–3, and secondarily, all believers living in the time between Christ’s death and resurrection and the Parousia.<sup>119</sup>

In summary, the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας* in 15:2 shows more interest in the eschatological interpretation of believers’ victory, that is, in the future consummated salvation, which is already being experienced in the present rather than the past act of Christ’s victory. The victory of believers conveyed by the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας*

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<sup>117</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 173.

<sup>118</sup> This view is supported by the fact that the entire section of the doxological hymn 15:2–4 is designed, as du Rand notes, to be persuasive, that is to say, to encourage the reader to endure because God’s salvation and judgment have yet to be executed. See du Rand, *Johannine Perspective*, 290; Similarly, Koester argues that John underscores the urgency of endurance and hope by repeating the heavenly visions connected to the theme of conquering, such as the conquering of the Lamb to redeem others (5:5–6), the conquering of believers by remaining faithful to God and to Christ at the cost of their lives (12:11), and the constant call issued to Christians in the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) by remaining faithful to God and the Lamb, all of which stress the fact that this is the future that God and the Lamb want for his people. See Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 140–41.

<sup>119</sup> They are undoubtedly the church members of the seven churches who, despite the repercussions for their own futures, stand firm in the face of the empire’s religious claim to authority in the present and the near future. In their obedience and faithfulness to God and Christ, they refuse to join in the cult of Caesar in spite of the consequences. See Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 183. However, it should be remembered that the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας* also includes all the believers existing in the interadvental period since the heavenly vision in which *τοὺς νικῶντας* occurs is described from the perspective of the end of history. Stewart, in support of this view, notes that the Apocalypse’s visions are about the present and its continuation until Christ’s return, which will be marked by increased persecution, tribulation, and martyrdom. See Alexander E. Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, Gorgias Dissertations Biblical Studies 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 100.

places more emphasis on the present and future aspects of believers' salvation than the past one.

### **Spatial Considerations**

The spatial designation relevant to the argument of this section is ὡς θάλασσαν ὑαλίνην μεμιγμένην πυρὶ (“something like a sea of glass mixed with fire”). This expression is mentioned only twice in Revelation 4:6 and 15:2. The spatial reference “sea of glass” mentioned in 15:2 should be interpreted as the sea of glass encountered before the heavenly throne in 4:6, as is supported by many scholars.<sup>120</sup> Surprisingly, this sea imagery has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Some understand it positively as emphasizing God’s majesty, holiness, and divine providence.<sup>121</sup> Yet there are others who understand it negatively as connoting cosmic evil and chaos.<sup>122</sup> Each interpretive option has its own strengths and weaknesses. Thus, as Kuykendall points out, it is a better approach to put these two ideas together and understand them as an example of God’s sovereign authority over such powers.<sup>123</sup>

The above conclusion is further reinforced by the descriptive detail “mixed with fire” added to the expression “sea of glass,” which is not found in 4:6. Several options are offered as to the intent of this added description. The most likely one is that it symbolizes divine judgment derived from God’s holiness, as the image of “fire” is frequently used in Revelation to denote the idea of God’s judgment (1:14; 2:18; 4:5; 8:4–

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<sup>120</sup> Leithart, *Revelation: 12–22*, 118; Amos Yong, *Revelation, Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 186; Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 271; Phillips, *Revelation*, 433; Lehman Strauss, *The Book of Revelation: Outlined Studies* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1964), 278; Osborne, *Revelation*, 561; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 870; Boring, *Revelation*, 172.

<sup>121</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 427–28; Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John*, MNTC (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 300; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 232; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 455. The positive understanding of the sea, according to Osborne, is common in the OT, which harks back to such texts as Genesis 1:7, 1 Kings 7:23–26, and Ezekiel 1:11. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 561–62.

<sup>122</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 284; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 789; Phillips, *Revelation*, 434.

<sup>123</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 73.

5; 9:17–18; 10:1; 11:5; 14:10; 16:8; 17:6; 18:8; 19:20; 20:9). The link between the notion of fire and that of judgment is further strengthened in view of the judgment of the seven bowls plagues, which are about to unfold in subsequent verses. There are many who have opted for this view.<sup>124</sup>

The real intent of the author in employing this imagery is to bring to the fore the redemptive purpose of divine judgment executed over the oppressors of God's people by creating a typological association with the exodus event, though there are some who reject this view.<sup>125</sup> This view is supported by various commentators. For example, Roloff argues that with the statement “mixed with fire,” the author intends to create a typological correspondence to the exodus with the purpose of describing the deliverance of the conquerors through the sea that became the place of judgment for their enemies, which was the case for the Israelites in the crossing of the Red Sea at the time of the exodus.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, Stephen S. Smalley asserts that John views the “sea” in 15:2, a symbol of demonic powers, as the place where Satan and his allies have been conquered, just as Pharaoh and his allies were conquered by divine power at the time of the exodus.<sup>127</sup> Beale associates the picture of the sea of glass with the Lamb's agency in judging the beast and argues that 15:2, in fulfillment of Daniel 7, shows that the sea has become the place where the Lamb has judged the beast.<sup>128</sup> Given the connection between the divine judgment, the Exodus typology, and the agency of the Lamb, the focus of the

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<sup>124</sup> Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 235; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 384; Peter S. Williamson, *Revelation*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 256; Krodel, *Revelation*, 278; John F. Walvoord, *Revelation*, John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries (Chicago: Moody, 2011), 233; Sweet, *Revelation*, 239.

<sup>125</sup> For example, Osborne rejects the typological link between the concept of divine judgment conveyed by the phrase “mixed with fire” and the exodus event, arguing that this interpretation seems a bit too allegorical. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 562.

<sup>126</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 183.

<sup>127</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 384.

<sup>128</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 789–90.

whole verse of 15:2 is on God's redemptive sovereignty.<sup>129</sup> His redemptive sovereignty is shown in the redemptive judgment of the beast, which is implemented through the agency of the Lamb. The "conquerors" are saved through the agency of the Lamb by having safely passed through the sea of glass, emblematic of evil forces,<sup>130</sup> and finally standing before the throne of God.

The phraseology "mixed with fire," however, may alternatively have a secondary meaning, referring to the fiery trials or purging that believers must undergo. Despite the rejection of this view by some scholars,<sup>131</sup> many others think it conveys the fiery trials endured by believers. For instance, though he does not refer to the phrase "mixed with fire," Caird argues that the sea of glass is the barrier the saved must pass through in a new exodus to enter the promised land.<sup>132</sup> Also, James Moffat contends that the sea is a place where the faithful endure the threats, troubles, and persuasions in order to stand safe at the heavenly sea.<sup>133</sup> Similarly, Boxall thinks it may evoke the fiery purging that believers had to undergo as the Lamb's witnesses, namely sacrificial victims in imitation of the Lamb.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, George Eldon Ladd asserts that this imagery may possibly be referring to the bloody persecution through which the conquerors had to pass.<sup>135</sup> An important question arises: what is suggested by this interpretation? This means that believers, in contrast to the passive role of Israel in the old exodus, have an

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<sup>129</sup> Notice the passive construction of the verb *μειγμένην* ("mixed") in 15:2, indicating God's agency.

<sup>130</sup> Ngundu defines the conquerors in 15:2 as the saved who have passed through the sea of glass, even as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea. See Ngundu, "Revelation," 1594.

<sup>131</sup> Both Beale and Smalley reject this view based on the fact that "fire" never connotes the saints' fiery trials because it is usually a metaphor of divine judgment in Revelation. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 789; Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 384.

<sup>132</sup> Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 65.

<sup>133</sup> Moffat, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, 5:443.

<sup>134</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 217.

<sup>135</sup> Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*, 204.

active role to play in the crossing of the fiery sea of glass, which leads to their definitive salvation in heaven.

Therefore, the spatial designation “the sea of glass” combined with the descriptive detail “mixed with fire” primarily underscores the concept of salvation through judgment by alluding to the old exodus in which God’s redemptive judgment has been shown for his people by defeating Pharaoh and his army. This is a foreshadowing of the divine judgment implemented through the agency of the Lamb over the beast in the new exodus. Secondly, this imagery also stresses the fact that, in contrast to the Israelites of the old exodus, who could only stand by the sea and watch how God accomplished the victory for them, God’s people of the new exodus actively participate in the salvation effected through the victory of Christ on the cross.

Overall, the spatial designation “the sea of glass mixed with fire” provides context for interpreting the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation as described in 15:2 and, by extension, the whole literary unit of 15:2–4.

### **Exegetical Analysis of Believers’ Conquering in 15:2–4**

As with the exegetical analysis of 12:11, this section intends to provide the exegetical basis for understanding the human response of faith conveyed by conquering language (15:2) as enabled by divine grace, which is expressed through the phrase “the song of the Lamb” (15:3a). However, 15:2 is distinguished from 12:11, though both passages express the same idea of divine enablement of believers’ victory, in the sense that the author adds the idea of God’s sovereignty in salvation (15:3b-4) in a more explicit way than in 12:8–12.

#### *The Victory of Believers Human Responsibility*

The significance of human behavior implied in the expression τοὺς νικῶντας (“those who had conquered”) has been variously acknowledged. For example,

Christopher Rowland argues that the description of believers' victory expressed through τοὺς νικῶντας is a metaphor of non-conformity and the rejection of the beast's dominion and way of life, an action considered equivalent to the redemptive crossing of the threatening sea to God's side.<sup>136</sup> Bryan D. Estelle compares the vision of the new exodus described in 15:2–4 to the old exodus and concludes that there is an advancement of the image in that, in contrast to the old exodus where Israel could only stand and watch, believers are involved in combat with the sea beast in this vision.<sup>137</sup> Along the same lines, Isbell contends that the saints have actively participated in the Lamb's battle against the beast and the unbelieving world in the waters of conflict by enduring faithfully and refusing to compromise with the world unto death.<sup>138</sup> The significance of human action indicated by the phrase "those who had conquered" carries an important soteriological implication that although salvation is entirely the work of divine grace through the agency of the Lamb, the role of human responsibility for salvation is neither mitigated nor negated.

Further symbolism, such as the posture of the conquerors as "standing on" the sea of glass and "holding harps of God," enhances this idea. First of all, scholars are divided over the question of whether John envisions the conquerors as standing *beside* the sea or *on* the sea, which is attributed to the possibility of the rendering of the preposition ἐπὶ as either "upon" or "beside." Many agree that the translation "on" is preferable because it suggests the victorious posture of the conquerors, symbolic of their victory over the sea of chaos and, by implication, the dragon and the beast who belong

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<sup>136</sup> Christopher Rowland, "The Lamb and the Beast, the Sheep and the Goats: 'The Mystery of Salvation' in Revelation," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honor of J. P. M. Sweet*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 184–85.

<sup>137</sup> Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 308.

<sup>138</sup> Isbell, *The Past Is Yet to Come*, 105–6.

there.<sup>139</sup> Interestingly, some also argue that the posture of “standing” perhaps includes the idea of resurrection.<sup>140</sup> In considering this from a soteriological standpoint, this imagery creates an impression that human action is so significant that it somehow contributes to achieving one’s own salvation. Similarly, the image of “holding harps of God” appears to describe the conquerors as achieving salvation as a consequence of their victory.<sup>141</sup>

However, do the images of believers’ victory over the beast, their standing on the sea, and holding harps of God speak of human contribution to or cooperation with the salvation already accomplished by Christ? The description of believers’ victory expressed through τοὺς νικῶντας appears with the preposition ἐκ<sup>142</sup> depicting them as having achieved victory in the conflict with three things: the beast, his image, and the number of his name. However, this threefold pattern is to be taken as no more than the emphasis on the completeness of the victory they have achieved over the ways of the beast.<sup>143</sup> The verbal connection between τοὺς νικῶντας in 15:2 and other verbal forms of νικάω used elsewhere in Revelation in application to believers suggests that the conquerors in 15:2 are identified with those members of the seven churches and conquerors of 12:11 who, as

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<sup>139</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 218; Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 205; Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 632; Isbon T. Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John: Studies in Introduction with a Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 674.

<sup>140</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 791; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 268–69.

<sup>141</sup> Boxall argues that, as a consequence of their victory, the harps of God are given to them by God himself, and therefore they have gained membership of the angelic choir to sing heavenly songs. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 218. The angelic choirs in heaven suggest that the conquerors have attained the final salvation with the result that they are now before the throne of God singing the heavenly songs.

<sup>142</sup> Brighton rightly points out that the use of ἐκ after νικῶντας is a strange grammatical construction, namely a solecism. See Brighton, *Revelation*, 395. This is an accurate assessment because a genitive (ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου) is used where the accusative would have been appropriate. For several possible interpretations of this unusual grammatical construction, see Osborne, *Revelation*, 574; See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 871–72. Each interpretive choice has its strengths and weaknesses, but I most agree with scholars such as Smalley, Beale, and Beckwith; the most likely interpretation is that the people of God have “come victoriously from” the ways of the beast. See Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 385; Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John*, 674; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 790. Or, it may simply indicate the notion of “victory over.” See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 790.

<sup>143</sup> Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed*, 205; According to Kuykendall, the number three, as used in Revelation, indicates completeness and unity, especially with reference to deity or counterfeit deity. See Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 294.



a result of their faith in the victory of Christ, are enabled to remain steadfast in keeping the works of Christ to the end and maintain their testimony to Christ unto death (12:11).<sup>144</sup>

Thus, as concluded in the previous study of 12:11, the victory of believers conveyed by the expression *τοὺς νικῶντας*, while a human act of obedience flowing from believers' faith in the ultimate triumph of Christ, should not be taken to mean that it somehow contributes to the accomplishment of their salvation. It is so because, as Beale rightly notes, the conquering of the Lamb has paved the way for believers' conquering of the beast at sea, and the only reason why they are victorious is because the Lamb has already conquered the beast and granted them a share in his victory at sea.<sup>145</sup> The Lamb has accomplished the complete victory over the beast, and believers participate in it by faith, which finds its expression in their act of refusing to conform to the ways of the beast. They are able to stand on the sea because of God's faithfulness in upholding his own in keeping with his divine character.<sup>146</sup>

In this sense, it is made clear that the harps of God given to them, as John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia note, are of divine origin, and thus they are to be understood as a divine gift or reward,<sup>147</sup> not something they have gained by their own strength. It is so because these musical instruments symbolize joy, praise, and worship in celebration of God's end-time victory and righteous judgment.<sup>148</sup> The harps of God are

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<sup>144</sup> Various scholars emphasized the connection between the conquerors mentioned in 15:2 and other places where the images of conquerors were described in variegated forms. For details, see Krodel, *Revelation*, 75; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 215–16; Francis J. Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 231–32; Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 183; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 233; Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), 2:3; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 268; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 285; Reddish, *Revelation*, 291; Williamson, *Revelation*, 256.

<sup>145</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 790.

<sup>146</sup> Walvoord, *Revelation*, 233.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 269.

<sup>148</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 265.

given to the redeemed to celebrate not their own victory, but God's eschatological victory accomplished through his co-agent, the Lamb, in the new exodus of his people. This is confirmed by the phrase "the song of the Lamb" in 15:3a.

*"The Song of the Lamb": The Agency of the Lamb (15:3a)*

The text of 15:3a paints a picture of the redeemed people of God, the conquerors, singing "the song of Moses" and "the song of the Lamb." This vision calls to mind Israel's deliverance at the Red Sea as a result of God's judgment and victory over the Egyptians and the hymn of deliverance sung by the Israelites. There is still much debate over the question of which scriptural background has been most influential for this imagery and whether the redeemed people of God sing one song or two. But, as Reddish notes, it is best to view this song presented in 15:3–4 as a composite drawn from several texts in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>149</sup> However, the most prominent influences on the presentation of the song in question are most likely Exodus 15 and Deuteronomy 32,<sup>150</sup> though it is commonly said that the song of 15:3–4 is closer to that of Exodus 15 in its content and structure. This is supported by Casey when he says that the wording of the song characteristically has little connection with either Exodus 15 or Deuteronomy 32, which suggests that it is intended to reproduce the scene found in Exodus 15.<sup>151</sup> Thus, the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are not intended to mirror the exact wording of their sources but to emphasize the typological likeness between the old exodus and the new exodus.

In this light, the phrases "the song of Moses" and "the song of the Lamb" seem

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<sup>149</sup> For the list of texts that may have influenced this song, see Reddish, *Revelation*, 291.

<sup>150</sup> Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation," 192; Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 235; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 792–93.

<sup>151</sup> Casey, "Exodus Typology in the Book of Revelation," 192–93.

to point to one song, not two different songs.<sup>152</sup> To be more specific, John elaborately interweaves the exodus theme with his eschatological vision of salvation through judgment to illustrate his new context, namely the new exodus indicated by the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.<sup>153</sup> The purpose of using this exodus imagery in 15:3–4 seems clear. The author intends to highlight the end-time salvation of God’s people that has come through the judgment of God’s warrior-agent, the Lamb, by means of emphasizing the typological continuity between the old exodus and the new. Just as Moses and the Israelites sang after their deliverance from Pharaoh at the Red Sea (Exod 15), now the people of the new exodus standing on the heavenly Red Sea sing a new song to God for accomplishing a far greater deliverance from the beast through the agency of the Lamb.

The emphasis thus falls on the song of the Lamb, not the song of Moses. While highlighting the salvific acts of God accomplished in both the old and new exodus, by placing the old context (“the song of Moses”) and the new context (“the song of the Lamb”) side-by-side, the author intends to redefine “the song of Moses” as the one sung by the redeemed for the great salvific act accomplished by God in the end-time through the victory of the Lamb. This structural pattern seems hardly accidental and has often been observed elsewhere in Revelation, such as “the Lion and the Lamb” (5:5–6) and “Balaam and the Nicolaitans” (2:14–15). In these expressions, the old context (the Lion/Balaam) functions to redefine and accentuate the meaning of the new (the Lamb/Nicolaitans).

The Christological focus of this song has been stressed by scholars such as

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<sup>152</sup> Based on the fact that both phrases “the song of Moses” and “the song of the Lamb” have a definite article, some commentators, including Walvoord, jump to hasty conclusion that two songs are in view rather than one. See Walvoord, *Revelation*, 234.

<sup>153</sup> Son catches the significance of John’s use of the Exodus theme in this vision as to illustrate his new context by interweaving the Exodus theme in his eschatological judgment vision and developing the old context by mixing other sources such as the later OT sources or intertestamental literature. See HaYoung Son, *Praising God beside the Sea: An Intertextual Study of Revelation 15 and Exodus 15* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 90.

HaYoung Son and David A. de Silva. Son points out that if the song is one, then it most probably will be “the song of the Lamb” because, throughout Revelation, it is the Lamb who is constantly exalted and praised alongside God for his redemptive work (e.g., 5:9–14; 7:9–10; 14:1–5).<sup>154</sup> de Silva argues that the linking of the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb unmistakably reveals John’s appreciation of the exodus as a paradigm of the redemption now come in Christ.<sup>155</sup> In light of the above analysis, the phrase “the song of the Lamb” is a symbolic expression that attributes the judgment of the beast exclusively to the warring activity of the Lamb,<sup>156</sup> who has accomplished salvation on behalf of his people at the cross without any human involvement.

Therefore, the idea of human responsibility in salvation implied in the expression “those who had conquered” (15:2) is to be seen as enabled by the victory of the Lamb accomplished at the cross; the conquerors sing the “song of the Lamb,” solely attributing their salvation to God’s ultimacy realized on earth by the agency of the Lamb. God’s redemptive grace always precedes and empowers human responsibility in salvation by being operative, active, and effective in the lives of believers. However, the salvation of believers as a result of the accomplished victory of the Lamb is not the whole story. There remains one last component of this heavenly vision, which functions as closure to the soteriological argumentation presented in it: the role of God’s sovereignty in the salvation of believers described in 15:3b–4.

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<sup>154</sup> Son, *Praising God beside the Sea*, 91. Also, Beale supports this view by arguing that “the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb” is the same as the “new song” of 5:9 and 14:3, though the qualifier “new” (*καίνος*) is missing, because the saints not only sing the old “song of Moses” but also the “song of the Lamb” which has hitherto not been sung. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 793.

<sup>155</sup> de Silva, *Seeing Things John’s Way*, 163.

<sup>156</sup> Charles Homer Giblin argues that the OT texts, as refashioned in the victors’ hymn titled the “song of Moses and the Lamb,” serve to attribute the victory solely to the Lord’s acting on behalf of his own people. Charles Homer Giblin, *The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy*, GNS 34 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 146.

*Great and Marvelous Works: God's Redemptive Sovereignty (15:3b–4)*

When verses 15:3b–4 are read closely, it becomes evident that the content of the song described in this passage actually proclaims the saving actions of God, not the Lamb's. What this suggests is that in the light of the close connection between theology and Christology in the thought world of Revelation, the works of God and the works of Christ are held in inseparable unity, especially in the work of salvation.<sup>157</sup>

Verse 15:3b celebrates the great and wondrous works of God's judgment and depicts God as the originator of salvation. The words of praise, "great (μεγάλα) and marvelous (θαυμαστά) are your works (τὰ ἔργα σου)," are given to God in 15:3b. The "great and marvelous works of God" (15:3b) are his works of salvific judgment, a sign originating in heaven (15:1). The linguistic parallelism between the phrase the works of God described in 15:3b as "great and marvelous" (μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά) and the sign in heaven that is described in 15:1 as "great and marvelous" (μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν), a pointer to God's wrath in the form of seven plagues, indicates that the deeds of God that are particularly in view are the plagues that are about to unfold in chapter 16.<sup>158</sup>

The final line of 15:1 ἐν αὐταῖς ἐτελέσθη ὁ θυμὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ("in them the wrath of God is finished") throws further light on the deeper meaning implied in the phrase "great (μεγάλα) and marvelous (θαυμαστά) are your works (τὰ ἔργα σου)." First, the divine passive ἐτελέσθη indicates that God is the ultimate agent who brings history to its completion with the last seven plagues.<sup>159</sup> Second, the "wrath of God," frequently associated with God's judgment throughout Revelation,<sup>160</sup> brings to mind, in combination

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<sup>157</sup> Paul B. Decock, "The Works of God, of Christ, and of the Faithful in the Apocalypse of John," *Neotestamentica* 41, no. 1 (2007), 98.

<sup>158</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 219.

<sup>159</sup> Beale and Gladd, *The Story Retold*, 484; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation*, 454; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 267.

<sup>160</sup> Revelation 11:18; 14:9–10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19. Talbert clearly notes that the plagues are expressions of God's wrath, which are equal to his resistance of evil in his creation. See Charles H. Talbert, *The Apocalypse: A Reading of the Revelation of John* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 69.

with “great and marvelous” (μεγάλα και θαυμαστά),<sup>161</sup> the mighty salvific works of God described in the Old Testament, particularly the judgment of God poured upon the army of Pharaoh at the exodus, at the Red Sea.<sup>162</sup> The title ὁ παντοκράτωρ ascribed to God in 15:3b focuses on God’s sovereignty with emphasis on his authority over all.<sup>163</sup> Thus, the phrase μεγάλα και θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ in 15:3b emphasizes the redemptive sovereignty of God revealed through judgment upon his enemies by connecting the judgments of the seven bowls to the judgment upon the Egyptians.

It can be inferred from this that the redemptive work of the Lamb expressed through the phrase “the song of the Lamb” in 15:3a is, at the same time, God’s sovereign work of salvation. In this regard, the phrases μεγάλα και θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ (15:3b) and τὴν ὁδὴν Μωϋσέως τοῦ δούλου τοῦ θεοῦ και τὴν ὁδὴν τοῦ ἀρνίου (15:3a) collectively demonstrate the unity of God and Christ in the work of the new exodus salvation, though their respective role played in the work of salvation must be correctly discerned and clearly distinguished from each other.<sup>164</sup>

While 15:3b celebrates the great and wondrous works of God’s judgment, 15:3c details the rationale for God’s judgments with a focus on the justice and truth of God.<sup>165</sup> According to Grant R. Osborne, the expression δίκαιαι και ἀληθιναι (“just and

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<sup>161</sup> Exodus 15:11; Psalms 92:5; 98:1–2; 111:1–2; 118:1; 139:14; 1 Chronicles 16:9. In support of this view, Isbell argues that the expression “great and marvelous,” as in 15:1, links the coming bowl judgments with the wondrous works of God through salvation history (Ps 110:2–4; Deut 28:59–60; Job 42:3). See Isbell, *The Past Is Yet to Come*, 107.

<sup>162</sup> Son argues that, among the many thematic parallels between Revelation 15 and Exodus 15, is the depiction of the great work God did against the Egyptians, which is recorded in 14:31, then illustrated in detail in 15:4–7 (e.g., “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army cast into the sea”). See Son, *Praising God beside the Sea*, 87–88.

<sup>163</sup> Thomas provides a detailed analysis of the term ὁ παντοκράτωρ, a term used nine times in Revelation. Thomas notes it is a term used in LXX to translate שַׁדַּי (šadday, “Shaddai”) in Job and שִׁבְאֹת (šēbā’ōt, “hosts”) in the rest of the OT, which, etymologically is equivalent to ὁ πάντων κρατῶν (ho pantōn kratōn, “the one who holds all”) or ὁ πάντων ἐξουσιάζων (ho pantōn exousiazōn, “the one who has authority over all”). Thomas, *Revelation 1–7*, 81.

<sup>164</sup> While God plays the role of the originator of salvation, Christ the Lamb is the agent who actually carries out the plan of salvation.

<sup>165</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 565.

true”) is an allusion to Deuteronomy 32:4, which is primarily a “covenant lawsuit”<sup>166</sup> The focal point of Deuteronomy 32 is the wrathful judgment of God against apostate Israelites resulting from his sovereign justice.<sup>167</sup> Deuteronomy 32 as a background, in addition to Exodus 15, to the “song of Moses and the song of the Lamb,” adds another dimension to the concept of salvation through judgment contained in this scene—the covenantal idea contained in the vision of God’s bowl judgments.

To elaborate, the followers and worshippers of Satan, who are in rebellion against God, have broken the new covenant with God and will consequently face divine wrath in terms of the pouring out of the seven bowl judgments.<sup>168</sup> The scene of the heavenly voice calling the people of God out of Babylon the great (18:4), the name written on the forehead of the great prostitute (17:5), suggests that the apostate church will also suffer the same fate.<sup>169</sup> The covenantal idea contained in the bowl judgment of God brings to light the deeper meaning of the victory of believers over the beast by

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<sup>166</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 565.

<sup>167</sup> Beale and McDonough, “Revelation,” 1133. Osborne similarly argues that Deuteronomy 32, known as the “farewell of Moses,” focuses on the sovereign justice of Yahweh and is a warning to rebellious Israel of his justice and wrath. See Osborne, *Revelation*, 565.

<sup>168</sup> According to W. Gordon Campbell, the idea of God’s wrathful judgments being poured out upon those who have broken his covenant or who stood opposed to his people were already found in the Septuagint in passages such as Ezekiel 14:19, Jeremiah 10:25, and Zephaniah 3:8. See W. Gordon Campbell, *Reading Revelation: A Thematic Approach*, Foundations in New Testament Criticism (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 304.

<sup>169</sup> Scholars have widely differing views of the identity of the great prostitute, the symbol of Babylon, introduced in 17:1. They have tended to identify the great prostitute in three main ways. Some favor the view that it refers to the sinful Roman political, economic, and religious system. See Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 513–14; Osborne, *Revelation*, 608. Others insist that it must be identified only with the apostate pseudo-church who has committed spiritual adultery against God. See Walvoord, *Revelation*, 254; Brighton, *Revelation*, 436–37; Carl August Auberlen, *The Prophecies of Daniel and the Revelations of St. John: Viewed in Their Mutual Relation, with an Exposition of the Principal Passages*, trans. Adolph Saphir (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1856), 274–96. Others adamantly argue that it should be referring exclusively to the unfaithful Israel. See Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, 169. Each view has its own strengths and weaknesses, thus it is a better approach, as Beale notes, to see these identifications as not mutually exclusive, though the focus is more on the wicked religious-economic culture of the Roman world system and less on the apostate church and unbelieving Israel. See G. K. Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament*, JSNTSup 166 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 311. Thus, the vision of the seven bowls judgment would have functioned rhetorically to warn the first hearers against not committing apostasy by conforming to the wicked Roman world system, for they may have connected the great prostitute with the apostate church who had broken the new covenant of God and consequently would suffer the same fate as the wicked worldly system. For more details on how the imagery of the prostitute has been interpreted over the centuries, see Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 289–90.

equating it with the fulfillment of the covenantal requirement. Thus, the phrase τοὺς νικῶντας ἐκ, functioning as a compressed expression for maintaining one's faith by separating oneself from any compromising alliances,<sup>170</sup> signifies that the redeemed have satisfied the requirement of new covenant salvation by participating in the accomplished victory of the Lamb through which they receive the reward of the promised salvation.

Verse 15:4 sheds further light on the idea of God's redemptive sovereignty. The opening line of verse 15:4, "who will not fear you, Lord, and glorify your name?" functions as a rhetorical question by alluding to Exodus 15:11<sup>171</sup> to emphasize God's salvific sovereignty, which finds its best expression in his acts of judgments arising from his justice and righteousness. Richard Bauckham argues that one of the main points that is likely to have been of significance in John's reading of the song in Exodus 15, particularly Exodus 15:11, is God's incomparable superiority to the pagan gods demonstrated in his mighty acts of judgment.<sup>172</sup> He adds that this point is particularly relevant to Revelation's major concern with demonstrating the incomparability of the one true God against the idolatrous pretension of the beast. This point is illustrated in the comparison between 13:4,<sup>173</sup> the parody of the words from the song of Moses in Exodus 15:11.<sup>174</sup>

This aids in making better sense of 15:4. In light of Bauckham's argument, a link can be established between 13:4 and 15:4. This means that the words praising God in 15:4, given the new exodus context of 15:2–4, serve to describe God's demonstration of

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<sup>170</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 790.

<sup>171</sup> "Who is like you among the gods, Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?" (Exod 15:11). Son argues that Revelation 15:4b and Exodus 15:11 are connected to each other in the sense that both verses emphasize God's holiness and glory. See Son, *Praising God beside the Sea*, 87–88.

<sup>172</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 301.

<sup>173</sup> "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it" (Exod 13:4).

<sup>174</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 301.



his incomparable deity to the whole world shown in his redemption of his people from the beast through his acts of judgment.<sup>175</sup> Thus, the entire verse 15:4 acts as a counter-image to 13:4 by refuting the beast’s false claim to deity and stressing the fact that he is the only true God whom the nations must fear and give glory to. In this regard, the concluding line of 15:4, “for your righteous acts have been revealed,” is a deliberate reference to God’s just judgments,<sup>176</sup> which is at the same time his saving acts done in fulfillment of his covenant promises on behalf of his people.<sup>177</sup>

### **Other Images Related to Human Responsibility in Salvation**

This section intends to survey secondary images or wordings employed to describe the concept of human responsibility in salvation in addition to John’s primary way to describe it, namely the imagery of participation in the conflict and victory of Christ primarily conveyed by the use of the verb *νικάω* in application to believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7). It should be made clear, however, that the following list is intended neither to be exhaustive nor complete, but illustrative and selective since it is impossible to survey all the redemptive images in such a limited space as this short section. The foundational aspect of these soteriological images is that, as is the case with the conquering of believers, the idea of human responsibility conveyed by

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<sup>175</sup> Newman helpfully notes that in Revelation, the sovereign deity of God is nowhere more evident than in the expression of his judgment, found in many places dispersed throughout the entire book. God’s judgment illustrates God’s omnipotence, implying that there is only one God powerful enough to render judgment. See Carey C. Newman, “God,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 428.

<sup>176</sup> Several argue that the phrase *τὰ δικαιώματά σου* refers to God’s righteous judgments. See Brighton, *Revelation*, 403; Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God’s Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 129. Although Aune favors the translation “righteous action” for *τὰ δικαιώματά σου*, he notes that “righteous judgments” could also be a translation option for *τὰ δικαιώματά σου* since it conveys the sense of the punishment of the ungodly and just decree or sentence of condemnation. See Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 876.

<sup>177</sup> Koester, who views *τὰ δικαιώματά σου* as referring to God’s acts of justice, argues that this phrase, like the just ways mentioned in 15:3, include God’s saving acts on behalf of his people and his judgments against the rebellious world that have preceded and follow this section (16:5–7). See Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 633.

them is always described as dependent on and enabled by the divine grace shown in the victory of Christ on the cross. The following examples are representative of those images relating to the concept of human responsibility in salvation in Revelation.

### **White Robes / Wash Their Robes<sup>178</sup>**

The idea of “washing robes” is conveyed by the verb πλύνω (wash), which occurs twice in Revelation (7:14; 22:14). Beasley-Murray claims that this is a metaphor for the spiritual cleansing that believers receive from Christ through salvation and continual perseverance.<sup>179</sup> Similarly, Beale argues that this image is a metaphor for the saint’s endurance or perseverance throughout the church age identified with that of Jesus’s own suffering.<sup>180</sup> It follows that this imagery expresses the efficacy of Christ’s redemption in the lives of God’s people. The salvific significance of the idea of “washing the robes” can be understood in the light of the relationship between 7:14 and 7:15. Most commentators agree that verse 7:14 indicates the reason for the following verse 7:15.<sup>181</sup> This signifies that because the people of God have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (7:14), they now can stand before the throne of God (7:15). The salvific significance of the “washing the robes” is further confirmed in 22:14. Here, the tree of life symbolizes eternal life in the full presence and fellowship of God realized at the end of history.<sup>182</sup> Regardless of the relationship indicated by ἵνα in 22:14 as either “purpose”

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<sup>178</sup> These two different expressions will be analyzed together in this same section because they are two different ways to express the same idea of human responsibility in salvation in Revelation.

<sup>179</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 249.

<sup>180</sup> Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 436.

<sup>181</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 198; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 498; Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation*, 263; Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 165; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 439; Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, 475; Henry Barclay Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, CCGNT (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 101.

<sup>182</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 77.

or “result,”<sup>183</sup> the result is the same: the act of “washing the robes” is the basis for believers’ full access to the eternal salvation symbolized by the image of the “tree of life.”

The term “white clothes or robes” occurs multiple times in Revelation (3:4–5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13; 19:14; 22:14), and it symbolizes eternal life and heavenly rewards given to the faithful as a result of their persevering faith.<sup>184</sup> Jürgen Roloff argues that the white robe represents the salvation granted to the faithful on the basis of Christ’s salvific act and to be preserved in faithful obedience.<sup>185</sup> Along the same lines, Louis A. Brighton contends that the white robe symbolizes the salvation garment of Christ, which now covers the saints so that they may stand pure and righteous before God.<sup>186</sup> He goes on to say that the white robes remind the martyred Christians described in 6:11, to each of whom a white robe was given.<sup>187</sup> This white robe is thus an external sign of the salvation they have received.<sup>188</sup> It is noteworthy that in Revelation, the term “white robes” are always used in reference to the faithful people of God, who also represent the saved: the faithful at Sardis (3:4–5), the martyrs under the altar (6:11), the great multitude (7:9, 13), and the armies of heaven (19:14).

In this light of, it appears that the ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation appear interwoven in the images of “washing robes” and “white clothes or robes.” The dialectic relationship between these two components of

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<sup>183</sup> Thus, if taken as purpose clause, the rendering of this verse would be “Blessed are the those who wash their robes, *in order that* they may have the right to the tree of life.” If taken as a result clause, the rendering would look like “blessed are those who wash their robes, *as a result* they may have the right to the tree of life.” Whatever choice is made, there would be no significant change of meaning of the phrase “washing the robes,” which indicates the salvation given to the genuine believers.

<sup>184</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 251.

<sup>185</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 90.

<sup>186</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 170.

<sup>187</sup> Brighton, *Revelation*, 170.

<sup>188</sup> Roloff, *The Revelation of John*, 98.

salvation is described most explicitly in two passages: 7:14 and 19:8. Those who come out of the great tribulation are the ones who have washed their robes and made them white. However, the robe is washed in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). The white robe given to the saints is undoubtedly their righteous act. Still, it was divinely given to them (19:8). But does this mean that responsibility for salvation is divided into God's part and the believers' part?

This question may be answered by considering the theme of conquering studied so far. As is confirmed by the theme of conquering, the conquering of Christ (divine grace) is what enables believers' participation in the conflict and victory of Christ (human responsibility in salvation) through the work of the Spirit. According to Bauckham, the phrase "they have washed their robes" is a description of victory in a holy war. Thus, the phrase "those who come out of the great tribulation" could be taken to mean "those who emerge victorious from the eschatological war."<sup>189</sup> He further argues that the concept of washing the robes with the blood of the Lamb is a decisive reinterpretation of the holy war motif in that the washing of garments was part of the ritual purification required both before participation in worship and after shedding blood (e.g., Num 31:19–20, 24).<sup>190</sup> In 7:14, the thought of victory implied by the idea of washing the robes, appears to be fused with that of purification, and this probably means their active participation in the salvation won for the saints by Christ and not that their deaths atone for their sins.<sup>191</sup>

If this analysis is correct, the image of both "washing the robes" and "white robes" serves to function as a metaphor denoting "the victory of believers," which, as I have argued thus far, refers to believers' active participation in the victory of Christ

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<sup>189</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 226.

<sup>190</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 226.

<sup>191</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 229.

through their persevering faith to the point of death.

To summarize, the two expressions “white robes” and “washing robes” are used as descriptions of the dialectic relationship existing between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. However, this should not be taken to mean that the idea of human action implied in these expressions could somehow be considered a contribution toward the salvation already accomplished by Christ. Instead, in light of their close association with the notion of the conquering of believers, it is more appropriate to interpret that while the human element is certainly present in these expressions, it is the result of the work of divine grace. Human responsibility is always dependent on divine grace.

### **The Books of Deeds**

The term “book of deeds” never occurs in Revelation. Yet, it is mentioned in 20:12 that the unbelieving dead will be judged according to their deeds. The book of deeds records the deeds of all humankind,<sup>192</sup> a record of all good and bad deeds of people.<sup>193</sup> The deeds recorded in this book reveal the true nature of their spiritual condition.<sup>194</sup> The context in which the book of deeds is mentioned is the scene of the final judgment before the great white throne (20:11–15), at which all people, great and small, will stand before the divine throne and be judged according to their deeds. One salient feature of this scene is that the book of deeds is described alongside the book of life, a book generally recognized as a divine register of all believers<sup>195</sup> or the names of the

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<sup>192</sup> Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 316.

<sup>193</sup> B. J. Oropeza, *Churches under Siege of Persecution and Assimilation: The General Epistles and Revelation*, *Apostasy in the New Testament Communities*, vol. 3 (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 213.

<sup>194</sup> Keathley, *Studies in Revelation*, 363.

<sup>195</sup> Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb*, 130.

saved.<sup>196</sup> This suggests that they are thematically connected to each other and, therefore, are intended to be interpreted together.

In support of this view, Charles H. Talbert notes that judgment is conducted on the basis of two books, the book of life and the book of deeds, in which the paradox of works and grace is portrayed.<sup>197</sup> These two sets of books thus provide another dialectical picture in which both divine grace and human responsibility in salvation are affirmed. Talbert confirms this by saying that only those who persevere are written in the book of deeds, while the book of life states that the ones who endured do so only because of God's grace.<sup>198</sup>

Does this mean that the basis for the judgment of the saved is different from that of those condemned? Jan Paulsen answers this question by noting that the point being made by these two books is not simply that the book of life is the record of the saved only by grace while the book of deeds is the record of the damned only based on the record of evil deeds, but that all humanity is judged on the basis of their deeds.<sup>199</sup> Does this indicate that human actions somehow can contribute to one's salvation? Various scholars have pointed out that although the final judgment is given based on the works of believers and unbelievers alike, the picture of the book of life offers a vivid reminder that salvation is a matter of divine grace, not a human achievement. For example, Boring argues that although we are ultimately responsible for what we do, for it

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<sup>196</sup> Moloney, *The Apocalypse of John*, 315; David J. MacLeod, "The Sixth 'Last Thing': The Last Judgment and the End of the World (Rev 20:11–15)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 157, no. 627 (July-September 2000): 324.

<sup>197</sup> Charles H. Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness in the Revelation of John Viewed within Its Apocalyptic Context," in *Getting "Saved": The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament*, ed. Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 278.

<sup>198</sup> Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 98.

<sup>199</sup> Jan Paulsen, "Sanctuary and Judgment," in *Symposium on Revelation: Exegetical and General Studies, Book 2*, ed. Frank B. Holbrook, DRCS, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute [General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists], 1992), 288.

has eternal consequences, God is the one who is ultimately responsible for our salvation because it is his deeds that save, not man's.<sup>200</sup> Many others follow this line of interpretation.<sup>201</sup>

The reasoning behind this interpretation is that divine grace and human responsibility are held in tension with each other in the picture of the book of life and the book of deeds, and consequently, they stand unharmonized alongside each other since the exact relationship of divine grace and human responsibility is beyond human understanding. Perhaps a clue for solving the problem posed by the dialectic relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation may be found in the letters to the seven churches, which are primarily concerned with challenging believers to become conquerors.

In fact, within the context of the letters to the seven churches (2–3), the concept of the judgment according to one's works (2:23) and having one's name written in the book of life as a sign of salvation (3:5)<sup>202</sup> is already found. The appearance of these soteriological concepts within the overall context of the theme of conquering is suggestive of their close association with the victory of believers. As argued previously, becoming a conqueror is presented as a condition for receiving salvation in the context of the seven letters. Given the use of the two concepts in the context of the challenge to conquer, it can be inferred that one's being favorably judged and consequently receiving eternal salvation by having his name written on the book of life depends on one's successful carrying out of the conquering lifestyle.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Boring, *Revelation*, 212.

<sup>201</sup> Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 291; Talbert, *The Apocalypse*, 98; Reddish, *Revelation*, 389; Boring, *Revelation*, 212; Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, 547; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 431; Leithart, *Revelation 12–22*, 332; Phillips, *Revelation*, 372; Sydney H. T. Page, "Revelation 20 and Pauline Eschatology," *JETS* 23, no. 1 (March 1980): 42.

<sup>202</sup> This idea is negatively expressed as "not erasing one's name from the book of life."

<sup>203</sup> This is suggested by the fact that the formula "the one who conquers," which is equated with keeping the works of Christ (2:26), is used within the context of rebuking those who follow the path of

In returning to the question of whether it could be said that human works have anything to contribute to salvation, the answer is negative on the following grounds.

First, the close association between the conquering of believers and the final judgment of humankind based on their deeds recorded in the books of life and deeds suggests that salvation can only be achieved by faith. As explained previously, the conquering of believers is the outward expression of believers' active faith, namely their faithfulness. Thus, the deeds recorded in these two sets of books are not merely human works apart from faith, but rather, faith expressed in works. Paulsen rightly points this out by saying that there is no tension between the concept of all mankind being judged based on their deeds and that of being saved by faith because faith has no other way of expressing itself except by deeds.<sup>204</sup>

Second, faith is enabled by the accomplished victory of Christ. The close link established between the victory of believers and the concepts of judgment according to one's deeds and having one's name written in the book of life suggests that just as the persevering faith of believers conceptualized as victory is enabled by the victory of Christ, so too is having the deeds of the saved recorded in the book of deeds acceptable as well as having their names written in the book of life. Scholars have variously argued that the element of divine grace is portrayed as critical to understanding the paradox of works and grace presented in the picture of the books of life and deeds.<sup>205</sup> Given the fact that the idea of divine grace in salvation is, for the most part, described by the image of Christ's

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Jezebel, immediately followed by Christ's words, "I will give to each one of you according to your deeds." (2:23). Similarly, Christ's promise, "I will not erase his name from the book of life," is a promise given to "the one who conquers" (3:5), suggesting that a close link is established between these two elements.

<sup>204</sup> Paulsen, "Sanctuary and Judgment," 288.

<sup>205</sup> For instance, Talbert claims that if one's record in the book of deeds is acceptable, it is because one's name had already been written in the book of life. See Talbert, "Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness," 278–79. Likewise, Beasley-Murray argues that in the judgment, God's justice and grace are neither divorced from each other nor set in conflict with each other because all that the saved ever possessed or performed—including their decision for God and their continuance in faith—comes from the gracious giving of God, who sovereignly works his will among his people. See Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, 302.



victory in Revelation, it can be deduced that the salvation described in the overall context of final judgment (20:11–15) through the picture of the book of life and the book of deeds is the result of divine grace at work through Christ’s accomplished victory on the cross, which enables believers to work out their already received salvation.

Thus, regardless of the apparent conflict between the book of life and the book of deeds, salvation is to be attributed only to the power of divine grace manifested through Christ’s victory on the cross.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have examined the relationship between the role of divine grace and that of human responsibility in salvation with a particular focus on two specific passages: 12:8–12 and 15:2–4. In the former passage, this relationship is described by means of the imagery of the overthrow of Satan (12:8–10) and the victory of believers (12:11), while in the latter passage, this relationship is portrayed through the image of the victory of believers (15:2) and the phrase “the song of the Lamb” (15:3a) combined with that of “great and marvelous works” (15:4). This chapter aimed to demonstrate that just as both the beginning of believers’ salvation and its consummation is a gift of God’s grace through the work of Christ the Lamb, so too is the ongoing salvation of believers in the present time. I have shown exegetically that the accomplished victory of Christ through his death and resurrection continues to be the basis for believers’ present experience of salvation in the same way that when believers first entered into salvation, thus enabling believers’ ability to continuously work out the accomplished salvation by Christ on the cross in and through their lives.

Based on the analysis of 12:8–12 and its surrounding material, it is to be concluded that the victory of believers does not contribute anything to the overthrow of Satan, thus to the salvation Christ has accomplished through his victory on the cross. Although it is true that the conquering of believers is their own act of obedience unto

death flowing from their faith in the triumph of Christ, their strength and capacity to do so, as Jöel Rochette rightly points out, do not come from themselves but through the blood of the Lamb; thus, their victory is divinely enabled by the victory of Christ.<sup>206</sup> In other words, the condition of human responsibility for salvation, defined as “the word of their testimony,” is fulfilled by the power of divine grace expressed through “the blood of the Lamb,” to which alone the overthrow of Satan is to be attributed. Christ the Lamb has fully accomplished the salvation of his people by defeating the dragon through his victory on the cross, and his people only continue this victory by the power of grace granted to them.

I have further examined this relationship in the passage 15:2–4. It has been observed that there are three different characters being described, each one playing a different soteriological role than the others. While God is the originator of salvation, the Lamb is the actual agent of salvation, and believers participate in the benefits of accomplished salvation by faith. However, they must be viewed as intimately connected and interrelated to each other, describing different facets of the single work of salvation. The distinctive force of the roles played by each one of these characters must also be distinguished. The accomplishment of salvation was solely achieved by God and the Lamb. Believers only enter into it by faith. The victory of believers over the beast expressed in the form of non-conformity and rejection of its dominion and ways of life unto death are, as observed in 12:11, no more than the outward expression of their saving faith enabled by the victory of the Lamb. In the end, however, the victory of the Lamb turns out to be the great and marvelous work of God. Thus, God initiates the divine plan of salvation for his people, Christ the Lamb accomplishes it, and believers participate in it

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<sup>206</sup> Rochette notes, “Les croyants peuvent vaincre, ils en ont la force et en sont capables; ils peuvent être les acteurs de leur victoire. Mais leur force et leur capacité ne leur viennent pas d’eux-mêmes : c’est par le sang de l’agneau que leur victoire est possible et prend sens, par la seule victoire que l’agneau lui-même a réalisée dans le don qu’il a fait de sa propre vie.” Rochette, *La rémission des péchés dans l’Apocalypse: Ébauche d’une sotériologie originale*, Tesi Gregoriana: Series Teologica 167 (Roma: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2008), 494.

by persevering in faith unto death.

Finally, I have examined two representative images through which the idea of human responsibility in salvation is conveyed in addition to the image of believers' victory: white robes/washing robes and the book of deeds. These two images, through their connection to the conquering motif, provide a similar depiction of the idea of human responsibility in salvation as conveyed by the image of believers' victory. This further reinforces the idea that human responsibility is enabled by divine grace.

In summary, believers have absolutely nothing to contribute to their salvation since it is all the work of divine grace accomplished through the agency of Christ the Lamb. However, there remains some ambiguity about the statement "the victory of believers is enabled by the victory of the Lamb." How is this made possible? To answer this question, attention will now turn to the following chapter dealing with the role of the Spirit in the application of Christ's victory to believers.

## CHAPTER 5

### HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION: THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN ENABLING THE VICTORY OF BELIEVERS

#### Introduction

The role of the Spirit in Revelation has not received as much scholarly attention as has the pneumatology in other books of the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> However, as John Christopher Thomas notes, the pneumatology of Revelation is equally important to other major pneumatological voices found within the New Testament.<sup>2</sup> This is confirmed by the fact that a fair amount of research has been produced to contribute to an understanding of the role of the Spirit in Revelation.<sup>3</sup> The major areas of study, according

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Mark J. Keown notes that the Spirit does not appear in Revelation as much as in Paul's letters and John's Gospel. See Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes*, vol. 3., *General Letters and Revelation* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press), 2022; Likewise, John Christopher Thomas affirms that the role of the Spirit in Revelation as well as the pneumatology of the Spirit have received little attention when compared to other portions of the biblical canon. See John Christopher Thomas, "Revelation," in *Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, ed. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (London: SPCK, 2014), 257.

<sup>2</sup> John Christopher Thomas, "The Spirit in the Book of Revelation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester, Oxford Handbooks Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 254.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, "The Spirit in the Book of Revelation," 240–55; Thomas, "Revelation," 257–66; Jacobus C. de Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation—Nomenclature," *Neotestamentica* 28, no. 1 (1994): 229–44; Jacobus C. de Smidt, "Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit in the Book of Revelation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7, no. 14 (April 1999): 27–47; Jan A. du Rand, ". . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . .': The Functional Role and Theological Meaning of the Spirit in the Book of Revelation," *Ex auditu* 12 (1996): 43–58; Richard L. Jeske, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse," *New Testament Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1985): 452–66; Michael Kuykendall, "An Expanded Role for the Spirit in the Book of Revelation," *JETS* 64, no. 3 (September 2021): 527–44; Robby Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 30 (Blandford Forum, UK: Deo, 2006); John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 475–78; Dennis E. Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb: A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001), 33–35; David E. Aune, *Revelation 1–5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas: Word, 1997), 36; Russell L. Penney, "Pneumatology in the Book of Revelation," in *A Bible Handbook to Revelation*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001), 114–21; Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 109–25; Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 150–73; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 141–48; Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament*

to Thomas, have been the topics of “the seven spirits,” the phrases “in the Spirit” and the “Spirit of prophecy,” and the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The study I attempt to conduct in the following pages, however, is not confined to mere examinations of the typical aspects of the role played by the Spirit connected to the topics mentioned above. Instead, I will focus more on showing their soteriological relevance for believers’ ongoing experience of salvation in the present.

More precisely, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the Spirit enables or empowers believers’ ongoing participation via their faith in the accomplished victory of the Lamb on the cross, upon which is contingent their final salvation. This means that the soteriological function of the Spirit in Revelation is not so much focused on believers’ past entry into salvation as it is on the divine enablement of believers to “stay in” salvation until the day of its completion.<sup>5</sup> The Spirit, as the manner of Christ’s presence in the world and especially in the church, equips believers to manifest the accomplished victory of Christ in and through their lives by strengthening their faith through the

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*Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 501–5; Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 67–86.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, “The Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 241. Bauckham similarly argues that references to the Spirit of God in Revelation can largely be divided into three categories: (1) four occurrences of the phrase ἐν πνεύματι (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10); (2) ten other references to the Spirit (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; 19:10; 22:17); and (3) four references to the seven Spirits (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 150. Kuykendall, in addition to the themes mentioned by Thomas, adds a few more themes in relation to the role of the Spirit in Revelation, arguing that the Spirit in Revelation revolves around six major themes: (1) the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Spirit; (2) the theme of discipleship; (3) the theme of witness; (4) the theme of prophecy; (5) the presence of the Spirit with implications of worship; and (6) the Spirit’s role in end-time judgment. See Michael Kuykendall, *Lions, Locusts, and the Lamb: Interpreting Key Images in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 35. Kuykendall believes that the Spirit’s role in Revelation is much larger than previously thought. For a comprehensive list of the Spirit’s role in Revelation, see Kuykendall, “An Expanded Role for the Spirit,” 527–44.

<sup>5</sup> This point is most obvious in Revelation 2–3, where Christ’s words of both commendation and judgment are proclaimed either to commend the faithful works of the members of the seven churches or to rebuke their works falling short of his spiritual criteria in the present phase of salvation. It is noteworthy that the present participle ὁ νικῶν is used to convey the idea of the works of faith in the context of Revelation 2–3. Also, it should be noted the seven eschatological blessings that Christ promised to the faithful believers at the end of the messages to the seven churches are future-oriented. As I will argue shortly, the activity of the Spirit is thus concerned with enabling believers’ ability to continue conquering in the present until they inherit the eschatological blessings mentioned in Revelation 2–3, namely the eschatological salvation.

mediation of Christ's words and power. Therefore, if the question of *what* enables the human responsibility of believers for salvation has been answered in the previous chapter, the present chapter tackles the question of *how* this human responsibility is enabled. Thus, addressing the *how* of salvation is the focal point of this chapter.

It is by the agency of the Spirit that the accomplished victory of Christ is applied to the lives of believers, through which they are enabled to fulfill the requirements of salvation by continuing in the accomplished victory of Christ, that is, doing faithful works flowing from their saving faith. With this in mind, I will consider how the Spirit enables believers' faith to continue in Christ's accomplished victory, which ensures their arrival at the promised eschatological salvation.

### **The Spirit as the “Spirit of God and of Christ”**

To properly understand the Spirit's role in enabling believers' ability to continue in the accomplished victory of Christ and inherit the promised salvation, one must first determine the relation of the Spirit to God and Christ as portrayed in Revelation. In short, the Spirit is depicted as being intimately connected to God and Christ in Revelation.

The close association of the Spirit with God is primarily described by the phrase “the seven Spirits,” which occurs four times in Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). In the prologue, the seven Spirits are said to be located before the throne of God (1:4). In the remaining three occurrences, they are identified as the seven Spirits of God (3:1; 4:5; 5:6). Scholars have been divided over the identity of the seven Spirits, with some contending that the phrase “the seven Spirits” actually refers to the seven angelic beings, not to the divine Spirit.<sup>6</sup> However, as most scholars agree, the seven Spirits should be

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed survey of the proponents of each view, reasons for opting for a particular position, see Thomas, “The Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 241–44.

understood as a symbol of the divine Spirit, namely the Spirit of God.<sup>7</sup>

The intimate relationship between Christ and the Spirit is indicated by the phrase “the one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” in addition to the phrase “the seven Spirits” found near the end of each prophetic message proclaimed to the seven churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). In the Trinitarian formula (1:1–10), the phrase the seven Spirits is mentioned second—not third—which signifies that the seven Spirits are not only in close relationship with God but in an interactive relationship with both the Father and the Son.<sup>8</sup> The seven Spirits are then again linked to Christ in 3:1 and 5:6. In 3:1, Christ is described as the one who has “the seven Spirits of God” and the seven stars. Verse 5:6 is perhaps the clearest reference to the close relationship between the seven Spirits and Christ in which the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb are identified with the seven Spirits sent out into all the earth. The phraseology “the one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22) shows that the words prophetically spoken by Christ are also the words of the Spirit.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that the relationship between Christ and the Spirit in Revelation is an especially close one<sup>10</sup> and that they work in tandem.

An important question must be asked at this juncture: What does the close

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Schreiner argues that it is more likely that the seven spirits refer to the Holy Spirit because, as is to be expected, in Revelation the number seven is symbolic and thus the phrase the seven spirits likely refers to the perfection of the Spirit. See Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 145. Likewise, Bauckham claims that the phrase “the seven Spirits” symbolizes the divine spirit in Revelation. See Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 110; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 162. Tabb agrees with this line of interpretation by stating that “the seven Spirits” in Revelation is John’s distinctive idiom for the divine spirit with the number seven signifying the fullness or totality of God’s Spirit. See Tabb, *All Things New*, 70.

<sup>8</sup> De Smidt, “Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit,” 42.

<sup>9</sup> Paul A. Rainbow explains that each of the oracles to the seven churches consists of the words coming from the one like a Son of Man, who appears in 1:12–20. See Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 247; Schreiner adds a further detail to Rainbow’s view, that the content of the seven letters recorded in Revelation 2–3 claim to come from the Son of Man, for in the introduction to each letter are found references to “words” of Christ (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 501.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, “Revelation,” 259. Thomas further notes that this declaration is reminiscent of the relationship between Jesus and the Spirit of Truth in the fourth Gospel.

relation of the Spirit to God and Christ have to do with the Spirit's soteriological function of enabling believers to fulfill the indispensable role of conquering unto salvation? The answer to this question is found in Zechariah 4 and Isaiah 11:2–3, which seem to lie behind the four references to “the seven Spirits.” While some argue that Zechariah 4 is the key Old Testament text for John's understanding of the role of the Spirit's activity in the world described in Revelation,<sup>11</sup> some others hold that Isaiah 11:2–3 is to be considered as the main source for the phrase “the seven Spirits.”<sup>12</sup> Considering the central message of each Old Testament passage alluded to above: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of Hosts” (Zech 4:6) and “the future reign of the Messianic ruler by the power and guidance of the sevenfold Spirit of the Lord” (Isa 11). The purpose of intertextual connections intended by the author in his use of Zechariah 4 and Isaiah 11 seems clear: to emphasize how God is going to establish his reign on earth through the Messiah, Jesus Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

The complex nature of God's work of establishing his kingdom on earth through the work of Christ empowered by the Spirit is best explained in Bauckham's discussion of 5:5–6:

While God himself, the One who sits on the throne, dwells in heaven, not yet on earth, and while the Lamb, victorious through his death on earth, now shares his Father's throne in heaven, the seven Spirits are the presence and power of God on earth, bringing about God's kingdom by implementing the Lamb's victory throughout the world. Thus, John's understanding of the seven Spirits corresponds broadly to the common early Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit's relation to God and to Christ, as the divine power, which is now the Spirit of Christ, the manner of the exalted Christ's presence in the world and of the present effect of

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<sup>11</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 162–163; u Rand, “. . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . .,” 47.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Penney is one of the major proponents of this view. See Penney, “Pneumatology in the Book of Revelation,” 116. However, there are some who believe that both passages of Zechariah 4 and Isaiah 11 are in view. See Kuykendall, “An Expanded Role for The Spirit,” 533; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 189–90. According to Terence P. Paige, only older interpreters including patristic interpreters and a few modern interpreters adhere to this view. See Terence P. Paige, “Spirits,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 1120.



Christ's past work.<sup>13</sup>

From the above statement, not only the close relationship between the three persons of the Trinity is discernible, but also the distinctive function of each person in the work of salvation: (1) salvation originates with the sovereign God who dwells in heaven and sits on the throne; (2) the Lamb has victoriously accomplished the divine plan of salvation ordained by the Father through his death while on earth and now shares his Father's throne in heaven; and (3) the Spirit, the divine power and the Spirit of Christ, is the manner in which the exalted Christ establishes his presence in the world in the present and maintains the ongoing effect of the Lamb's past victory, namely the salvation accomplished through his death and resurrection. This is probably what is meant by the imagery of the Lamb having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth (5:6). The distinctive function of the Spirit as Christ's power to implement his victory throughout the world as well as the manner of his presence in the world suggests that the Spirit is the bridge between heaven and earth.<sup>14</sup>

There is one final thing that needs to be said concerning the nature of the Spirit's activity on the earth: the Spirit's activity on earth should be understood in warfare terms, for the Spirit is the Spirit of God the Almighty and Christ the Divine Warrior. The epithet most frequently used of God in Revelation is *ὁ παντοκράτωρ*, which occurs nine times in Revelation (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22). In LXX, it is frequently used to translate the OT title "Lord of Hosts," or "Lord Sabaoth,"<sup>15</sup> which often conveys the notion of complete dominion and victory over all enemies (e.g., 2 Sam

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<sup>13</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 112–13. Similarly, du Rand notes that John likely used the exegetical foundation from Zechariah 4 to show how God will establish his dominion on earth through his Spirit in opposition to what seemed to be the beast's indomitable might. However, he does not mention Isaiah 11 as a possible background to the use of the phrase "the seven Spirits" in Revelation. See Du Rand, ". . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . ." 47.

<sup>14</sup> This is probably why Smalley describes the activity of the Spirit in Revelation as being at work in both dimensions bringing heaven and earth together. See Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation to John: A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>15</sup> In Hebrew יהרה צבארת

7:8; Amos 4:13; 9:5; Hag 2:6–9).<sup>16</sup> According to Stephen S. Smalley, this description speaks of God’s eternal power and sovereignty achieved through his victory over the powers of evil in the final battle.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the epithet *ὁ παντοκράτωρ* has military connotations. This point is further reinforced by its occurrences in hymnic contexts such as 1:8, 4:8, 15:3, 16:7, and 19:6, in which God is praised because of the victory that he has gained in the controversy and the ensuing results.<sup>18</sup> According to J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, the references to the Spirit’s location before God’s throne (1:4; 4:5) indicate that the Spirit’s primary role is to make God’s powerful presence known in the world.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, given the fact that the title *ὁ παντοκράτωρ* has warfare overtones, the Spirit’s role is more likely to make known God’s powerful presence as the victor who conquers all that is unholy, as is suggested by the phrase “seven lamps of fire burning before the throne” (4:5).<sup>20</sup>

However, as examined in the previous chapter, God achieves victory over evil through the work of Christ on the cross (3:21; 5:6; 17:14). Although the title *ὁ παντοκράτωρ* in Revelation is reserved for the Father alone and functions to preserve the prime position of God the Father, at the same time, it also displays the equality of the Father and the Son.<sup>21</sup> One of the scenes in which the equality between the Father and the

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<sup>16</sup> Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 88.

<sup>17</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 290. Also, David Seal claims that the military connotation associated with the title “Almighty” (*ὁ παντοκράτωρ*) suits the context of Revelation, for it addresses an audience ruled by a pagan authority and may have been encouraged by the message of a leader commanding the forces of heaven against God’s enemies in a final battle. See David Seal, “A Performance-Critical Analysis of Revelation 1:5b–8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175, no. 698 (April-June 2018): 227.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Grabiner, *Revelation’s Hymns: Commentary on the Cosmic Conflict*, LNTS 511 (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 137.

<sup>19</sup> J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 313.

<sup>20</sup> Schreiner argues that the burning torches probably signify the holiness of the Spirit, a holiness that cannot tolerate any evil, which is a frequently mentioned trait associated with the Spirit in the OT (e.g., Isa 4:4; Mal 3:2). See Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 146.

<sup>21</sup> Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation*, CC (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 44.

Son is best articulated is the enthronement scene of the victorious Lamb in Revelation 5. In this scene, the Lamb is deemed worthy of praise along with God the Father (5:11–12) due to the Lamb’s victory accomplished through his death and resurrection (5:5–6). The content of the new song testifies that the Lamb fought against the enemy on behalf of God and won the victory by being slaughtered and spilling blood (a symbol for combat)<sup>22</sup> through which he purchased people for God (5:9). The phrases “being slaughtered” and “blood” hark back to the conquering act of the Lamb in 5:5. This data supports the idea that the Lamb shares the role of divine warrior with God and that he has fought and won the victory in warfare against the evil as God’s agent.

It follows that, in light of the close association of the Spirit with God and Christ, the Spirit is involved in the same conflict as God and Christ and plays a distinct role in accomplishing the full victory over all evil powers. Broadly speaking, the primary role of the (seven) Spirit(s) is to make God’s victory accomplished through the work of the Lamb universally effective. This is why the seven Spirits are described as the seven horns and seven eyes of the Lamb, which have been sent into all the earth (5:6). Here, the horns and the eyes of the Lamb represent his power and prophetic discernment. Thus, the Spirit performs the role of the divine warrior in place of the Lamb in the world with the same power and discernment as the Lamb.

However, more strictly speaking, the Spirit’s primary role is to make the accomplished victory of the Lamb effective within the church and then to equip the people of God to become witnesses through whom the victory of the Lamb is made universally effective. Thus, it can be said that the role of the Spirit in Revelation, if not entirely, is related to soteriology since maintaining victory over evil is closely linked to the idea of human responsibility in salvation. The Spirit converts the people of God into

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<sup>22</sup> Brian K. Blount helpfully notes that numerous references to blood in Revelation generally refers to traditional notions of the bleeding that comes as a result of combat, suffering, or both. See Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 115n114.

conquerors and enables them to continue to participate in the accomplished victory of Christ so they may reach their eschatological destiny.

### **The Spirit as the “Revealer of Divine Knowledge”**

#### **The “Spirit of Prophecy” as the Central Role of the Spirit in Revelation**

As noted, the prime role assigned to the Spirit is to make universally effective God’s victory accomplished through Christ’s work on the cross, which is closely related to the phrase “the seven Spirits.” This point is confirmed by the function of Zechariah 4 as the primary exegetical basis for the phrase “the seven Spirits,” which suggests that God is going to establish his reign on earth by the divine Spirit, not by worldly power like the beast. The Spirit carries out this mission through the people of God by enabling them to become faithful witnesses to Christ’s finished work on the cross. To put it differently, God’s people are the vehicles empowered by the Spirit through whose work of faithful witness, the decisive victory won by Christ is made known universally.

While the phrase “the seven Spirits” represents the fullness of divine power in close relation to God, to Christ, and the church’s prophetic ministry of witnessing, references simply to “the Spirit” are distinguished from “the seven Spirits” in that the former concerns the activity of the Spirit through the Christian prophets within the churches.<sup>23</sup> One example illustrating this point is the seven messages proclaimed to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3, where the words of the Spirit are equated with the words of the exalted Christ by way of the phrase, “Let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”<sup>24</sup> This suggests that the risen Christ and the Spirit work in tandem.

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<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 115. Du Rand in this sense divides the role of the Spirit largely into two categories: (1) the prophetic category including witnessing to the churches, and (2) the universal category related to the activity of the seven Spirits. See du Rand, “. . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . .,” 45–49.

<sup>24</sup> Bauckham notes that the seven messages to the churches are what the Spirit says to the churches equated with the words of the exalted Christ. See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 160; Similarly, M. Eugene Boring goes a bit further to say that the speaker in letters oscillates between Jesus and the Spirit and that the Spirit not only speaks for the risen Jesus, but also for God, creating a blurring of the

However, this does not mean that these are two disconnected ideas. As Bauckham insightfully notes, prophecy connects them in the sense that the Spirit’s message through prophets to the churches is designed to equip and empower them to give their Spirit-inspired prophetic testimony to the world.<sup>25</sup> These two ideas most clearly appear as united in 19:10, in which the Spirit is referred to as “the Spirit of prophecy” (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας), which implies that the same Spirit that speaks prophetically to the Church is the same Spirit that speaks prophetically to the world.<sup>26</sup>

Several have argued that “the Spirit of prophecy” is a key text for any examination of the Spirit’s role in Revelation,<sup>27</sup> while some downplayed its significance for the study of Revelation’s pneumatology.<sup>28</sup> The phrase “the Spirit of prophecy” actually occurs in the statement “for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (19:10). Out of all the interpretive issues raised by this phrase, the one that is most relevant for the subject under discussion is the interpretation of the meaning of the first constituent part of 19:10, “the testimony of Jesus,” in connection with its second

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distinction between God and Jesus. See M. Eugene Boring, “The Voice of Jesus in the Apocalypse of John,” *Novum Testamentum* 34, no. 4 (October 1992): 343; Koester, however, emphasizing the distinction between the risen Jesus and the Spirit, contends that all the messages to the churches are introduced as words of the risen Jesus, yet in the end it is the Spirit that speaks. See Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 38A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 264. Although the Spirit is portrayed to be in close relationship with God and Christ, the distinctness of the roles played by the three divine persons is to be maintained.

<sup>25</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 118–19. Likewise, du Rand asserts that the Spirit is narrated as a dominant power in the prophetic witness to the Church as well as to the world. See du Rand, “. . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . .,” 51.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas, “Revelation,” 264.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, Smalley notes that a key text for any examination of John’s view of the Spirit in Revelation is to be found at Revelation 19:10b (“the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy”). See Smalley, *Thunder and Love: John’s Revelation and John’s Community* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 153. The assertions made by John in Revelation about the Spirit should be interpreted in the context of the book’s overall prophetic direction, which centers on the text found in Revelation 19:10. See Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 759.

<sup>28</sup> For example, Aune argues that the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς προφητείας, “the Spirit of prophecy,” occurs only here in Revelation and is therefore certainly not characteristic of the author. See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, WBC, vol. 52C (Dallas: Word, 1998), 1039.

constituent part, “the Spirit of prophecy.”<sup>29</sup>

The most debated issue concerning the interpretation of the phrase “the testimony of Jesus” revolves around whether the grammatical construction ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ is subjective genitive or objective genitive. Leon Morris notes that if the former is accepted, the phrase means “the testimony which Jesus bore,” that is, the message that Jesus gave, which is the heart of all prophecy is now committed to his servants.<sup>30</sup> If the latter meaning is accepted, it might mean “the testimony borne to Jesus,” that is, the testimony concerning Jesus implies that the authentic essence of prophecy is consistently revealed through the act of bearing witness.<sup>31</sup>

In my view, both meanings are intended by this phrase because at this point in the narrative, as Thomas explains, both dimensions of the testimony motif have been described.<sup>32</sup> For example, Jesus himself is “the faithful witness” par excellence (1:5; 3:14), but at the same time, his own faithfulness has become an example to be emulated by his faithful followers such as Antipas (2:13), John (1:2, 9), the souls under the altar (6:9–11), and the two prophetic witnesses symbolizing the church (11:3, 7). Jacobus C.

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<sup>29</sup> For a more complete list of the interpretive issues surrounding the phrase “the Spirit of prophecy,” see Thomas, “The Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 248.

<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 217. A major proponent of this view is Bauckham, who says that this phrase always means “the witness Jesus bore,” thus the difficult statement in 19:10 means that the witness Jesus bore is the content of Spirit-inspired prophecy. See Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 161. Another major proponent of this view is G. B. Caird, who speaks more emphatically that this phrase can only mean the word of God and the testimony borne by Jesus or the word spoken by God and attested by Jesus. See G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, 2nd ed. BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1984), 237.

<sup>31</sup> Morris, *Revelation*, 218. A major proponent of this view is Aune, who emphasizes that the word Ἰησοῦ should be interpreted as an objective genitive, and the phrase ἡ μαρτυρία Ἰησοῦ should be taken to indicate “the testimony about Jesus,” which believers should bear. See Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, 1039. Also, Blount argues that by stressing the role of human witnesses, the author is not speaking here about the spirit of God but about the role of human witnesses whose testimony reveals the truth about God’s rule over creation and requires all humans to respond appropriately. Blount, *Revelation*, 348.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas points out that because both aspects of Jesus’s witness have been recounted up to this point in the story, it is doubtful that the listeners would have felt forced to choose between the two. Thomas, “The Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 249. Similarly, Ian Paul asserts that it is conceivable for it to have the dual meaning of being both about Jesus and given by Jesus, ensuring that the accurate testimony is consistent with what Jesus firmly asserts and genuinely reveals about himself. Ian Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 20 (London: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 311.

de Smidt supports this view by saying that Jesus and the truth he had proclaimed, as it appears in Revelation, had become the responsibility of John and the believers.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the evidence shows that both interpretations are possible, or, better said, they are mutually inclusive and complementary. The testimony that Jesus bore has become that which his followers are called to commit themselves. Conversely stated, the content of the testimony that believers are commanded to bear is that which Jesus had borne in his life, culminating in his death.

However, two questions still remain: What is the meaning of the phrase “the Spirit of prophecy,” and how does it relate to the phrase “the testimony of Jesus”? Sarah S. U. Dixon argues that despite the fact that a number of interpretations of the phrase “the Spirit of prophecy” have been proposed, the most plausible way to understand it is to view it as a reference to the Holy Spirit who inspires prophecy.<sup>34</sup> De Smidt similarly argues that a possible translation of “the Spirit of prophecy” could be “the Spirit that gave the prophecy,” meaning that the Spirit plays an instrumental role in delivering to the congregations the truth that Jesus had revealed.<sup>35</sup> By stressing the Spirit’s role in inspiring the saints to have a prophetic imagination, Hee Youl Lee contends that “the Spirit of prophecy” persuades the saints to be alert to God’s coming during the present time and motivates them to do their best in everything they do here and now, and equips them to become witnesses or spiritual warriors in their lives.<sup>36</sup>

Thus, although the way to describe the meaning of the statement “for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy” may vary from interpreter to interpreter, this

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<sup>33</sup> De Smidt, “The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 242.

<sup>34</sup> Sarah S. U. Dixon, *The Testimony of the Exalted Jesus in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 570 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 106.

<sup>35</sup> De Smidt, “Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit,” 38.

<sup>36</sup> Hee Youl Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation: A Theological Reflection on the Functional Role of the Holy Spirit in the Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 84.

is its essence: the Spirit as the agent of God and Christ fuels or enables believers' participation in the faithful witness of Jesus, that is, the testimony which he bore during his lifetime on earth. The keyword here is "the faithful witness of Jesus," which is to be continued by his people. In this sense, the whole statement, "for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy," directs attention primarily to Jesus. It also emphasizes the significance of his entire earthly life as a testimony to God and to the need for believers to follow the same path of testimony guided by the Spirit of prophecy. Thus, this phrase is a compelling example that ties the work of the Spirit to Jesus Christ.

### **The Spirit of Prophecy as the Revealer of the Divine Knowledge**

The phrase "the Spirit of prophecy" is thus an overarching term to refer to the role of the Spirit in empowering the church's prophetic witness, and it enables believers to participate in the accomplished victory of Christ, that is, to stay in the salvation accomplished by Christ. The fundamental role of "the Spirit of prophecy" can be best explained in terms of "revelation," or "knowledge," or better said, the "revealing of the divine knowledge." "The Spirit of prophecy," as the agent of revelation and visions, reveals what it means to hold to the testimony of Jesus, that is, to conquer.<sup>37</sup> This very role of the Spirit is well summarized by Robby Waddell:

The role of the Spirit in the Apocalypse is best defined as the Spirit of prophecy. Closely related to both God and Christ, the Spirit serves as the primary agent of revelation for John and the church. John is in the Spirit when he receives his visionary experience, and the churches must hear what the Spirit is saying in order to conquer and receive their reward.<sup>38</sup>

According to Charles H. Talbert, the knowledge of the certainty of judgment with its rewards and punishment functions in Revelation as a means of divine assistance

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<sup>37</sup> Notice that the testimony motif is closely related to the conquering motif in Revelation as evidenced in 12:11.

<sup>38</sup> Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, 191. In short, the primary role of the Spirit of prophecy throughout Revelation is related, as Boxall notes, to the Spirit's activity in mediating the message of the risen Lord. See Boxall, *The Revelation of Saint John*, 51.



to produce human faithfulness,<sup>39</sup> meaning that “staying in salvation” is motivated by revealed knowledge of an assured future. The knowledge of the certainty of judgment, conversely stated, is the vision of the certainty of the victory in Christ resulting in salvation.

The knowledge of an assured future propels one to act rightly in line with the vision of victory in Christ and its rewards. More precisely, this goal is achieved by the Spirit’s activity in directing one’s attention to Christ and in unfolding the meaning of the finished work of Christ on the cross through which he had conquered and accomplished salvation for his people. Michael J. Gorman captures the essence of this reality, as he argues that part of the role of the Spirit is to make the faithful death of Jesus tangible for the Christian community so that they may replicate this faithfulness.<sup>40</sup> As explored earlier, the idea of Christ’s faithfulness and the necessity of believers to emulate his faithfulness to the point of death is what is expressed by the verb *νικάω*.

Therefore, the activity of the Spirit as the revealer of the divine knowledge about an assured future can undoubtedly be said to be what enables victory on the part of believers so as to maintain their salvation. However, the Spirit’s role, largely defined as “the revealer of the divine knowledge,” can be further divided into several specific forms of functions.

### **Diverse Roles of the Spirit in Enabling the Victory of Believers**

The process of the activity of the prophetic Spirit, as mentioned earlier, does not happen instantly, but takes place in phases: (1) the Spirit reveals the divine

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<sup>39</sup> Charles H. Talbert, “Divine Assistance and Enablement of Human Faithfulness in the Revelation of John Viewed within Its Apocalyptic Context,” in *Getting “Saved”: The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament*, ed. Charles H. Talbert and Jason A. Whitlark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 280.

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014), 73.

knowledge to Christian prophets like John; (2) the Spirit then imparts the divine knowledge to the church through prophets like John; and (3) afterward, the church imparts this divine knowledge to the world through their faithful witness. Spatially speaking, the Spirit begins to work within the church through the agency of prophets, and then the Spirit is sent out into all the earth through the church's mission to the world to make the accomplished victory of Christ universally known. Functionally speaking, the Spirit performs various functions stemming from his primary role as the revealer of the divine knowledge about who Christ is and what he accomplished. Though the list of functions slightly varies from interpreter to interpreter, these functions include pneumatic discernment, discipleship, sanctification, the role of eschatological orientation, and the role of life-giving.<sup>41</sup>

Phases 1 and 2 of the Spirit's activity exclusively refer, in a limited sense, to the Spirit's activity within the church through Christian prophets like John by means of simple references to "the Spirit," which is broadly understood as "the Spirit of prophecy" (19:10). Phase 3 is linked more closely to the Spirit's activity as "the seven Spirits" in the world through the church.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Kuykendall gives a list of seven different functions of the Spirit: (1) the Spirit and the churches (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22); (2) "in the Spirit" (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10); (3) "the seven Spirits" (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6); (4) "the Spirit says" (14:13; 22:17); (5) "the Spirit of prophecy" (19:10); (6) "spiritually speaking" (11:8); (7) "Spirit of life" (11:11). Kuykendall, "An Expanded Role for The Spirit," 531–36. De Smidt argues, under the rubric of "a congregational perspective," that the work of the Spirit in Revelation is aimed at the life of the congregations and gives the following list of specific roles played by the Spirit in various areas of the life of congregation: (1) the Spirit in relation to the salvation of the congregation, (2) the Spirit and the sanctification of the congregations, (3) the Spirit and worship, (4) the Spirit and discipleship, (5) the Spirit and the witness of the congregations in the world, (6) the Spirit and the unity of the congregations, (7) the Spirit and the omega-point prayer in the congregations, (8) the Spirit and the life-generating Spirit, (9) the Spirit and the covenant. See de Smidt, "Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit," 34–41. Thomas, unlike previously mentioned interpreters, does not give a comprehensive list of various functional roles of the Spirit, yet devotes to detail the role of "the Spirit of prophecy" in pneumatic discernment. See Thomas, "The Spirit in the Book of Revelation," 251–53; Bauckham seeks to understand the role of the Spirit in Revelation more simply in light of the following four rubrics: (1) the Spirit of vision, (2) the Spirit of prophecy, (3) the seven Spirits, and (4) the Spirit and the eschatological perspective. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 150–73.

<sup>42</sup> The idea of the prophetic witness of the church to the world is best presented in the account of the two witnesses in 11:3–13 and, according to Bauckham, the seven Spirits are related to this account via allusions to Zechariah 4, which appears to have been the key OT passage for John's understanding of the role of the Spirit in the divine activity in the world. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 162–63.

However, the prophecy addressed to the churches should not be completely distinguished from the churches' prophetic witness to the world since both are the witness of Jesus and the Word of God concerning the establishment of God's kingdom on earth.<sup>43</sup> In this respect, Jan A. du Rand rightly argues that both activities of the Spirit in and through the church fulfill the indispensable role of conquering in the sense that the Spirit first conquers the church to be God's eschatological people in their prophetic witness, and the seven Spirits enable them to fulfill its prophetic ministry to the world proclaiming God's kingship on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>44</sup> This means that the Spirit is involved in the entire process of the conquering of believers and enables the continuous victory of believers by strengthening their faith in Christ and reaching the final salvation.

Therefore, the Spirit assists believers in their journey to final salvation by providing them with functional means by which they are enabled to become conformed to the image of Christ and consequently replicate his faithfulness demonstrated in his life and death, which is the core meaning of "conquering" in Revelation. Various functions of the Spirit, all derivative from and congruent with the foundational role of the Spirit as the revealer of the knowledge, come together in each phase of the Spirit's activity both in and through the church to enable them to conquer so as to stay in salvation. Now the attention must be given to each stage of the Spirit's activity in enabling the victory of believers.

### **Phase 1 of the Spirit's Activity**

The very first phase of the Spirit's activity involves the imparting of divine knowledge to Christian prophets like John. In this phase, the Spirit as the agent of visionary experience grants John access to the knowledge from above and assists him in interpreting the prophetic message of Revelation and understanding it in a new light. This is expressed by the phrase *ἐν πνεύματι* ("in the Spirit"), and it occurs four times at

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<sup>43</sup> Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 121.

<sup>44</sup> Du Rand, ". . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . ." 56.

strategic locations throughout Revelation (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10).<sup>45</sup> Throughout the history of interpretation of ἐν πνεύματι, interpreters of Revelation took different approaches to the study of the phrase in question,<sup>46</sup> with special attention given to its function as a literary/structural marker in Revelation and to the discussion about John's experience of the Spirit as either a trance-like experience or spirit possession.<sup>47</sup>

The relevance of ἐν πνεύματι, as a reference to the Spirit's prophetic activity for enabling believers to continue in the victory of Christ, comes from the Spirit's role as interpreter of history through the author, with a focus on the story of salvation through judgment accomplished by the victory of Christ on the cross. The Spirit is the interpreter of the visions revealed to John in that the Spirit opens up the human world below and grants him the heavenly perspective from which to view and interpret what is happening on earth to himself as well as to the congregations in Asia Minor.<sup>48</sup>

However, as du Rand insightfully notes, history, according to Revelation, is subject to eschatology and primarily obtains its meaning from the future.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the Spirit, as the Spirit of visions, gives John the vision of victory in Christ, not only the past

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<sup>45</sup> According to Bauckham's claim, the four references to the phrase "in the Spirit" are strategically placed, as he argues: "The four references are strategically placed: at the two beginnings of John's whole vision, on earth among the churches (1:10) and in heaven in the divine throne-room (4:2), and at the beginnings of the two parallel visions of Babylon (17:3) and the New Jerusalem (21:10). The effect is not merely to associate parts of John's visionary experience with the Spirit, but to attribute the whole of it to the agency of the divine Spirit." Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 116. Also, Thomas and Macchia argue that the phrase "in the Spirit" occurs at key places in Revelation serving to introduce each new act in the unfolding revelatory drama. Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 476.

<sup>46</sup> For a detailed survey of the history of interpretation of this phrase, see de Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation," 233–38.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Thomas, "The Spirit in the Book of Revelation," 244–46. For an extended discussion on the topic of ἐν πνεύματι as a literary marker, see also Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, 138–50. For an extended discussion on the topic of John's visionary experience either as trance-like experience or Spirit possession, see Leonard L. Thompson, "Spirit Possession: Revelation in Religious Studies," in *Reading the Book of Revelation*, ed. David L. Barr, Resources for Biblical Study, vol. 44 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 137–50; Jeske, "Spirit and Community in the Johannine Apocalypse," 452–66.

<sup>48</sup> See de Smidt, "Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit," 44; de Smidt, "The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation," 240; Penney, "Pneumatology in the Book of Revelation," 117.

<sup>49</sup> See du Rand, *Johannine Perspective*, 283.

victory but the present victory and the future victory in the consummated form seen from the perspective of the eschaton. As a result, as his visionary experience ἐν πνεύματι progresses throughout the book,<sup>50</sup> John, a Christian prophet, is given a spiritual perspective, particularly a glimpse into the future from which to interpret and make theological sense of the meaning of the difficult situations he and his congregation had to face, all in light of the accomplished victory of Christ.<sup>51</sup>

As a result, by way of being ἐν πνεύματι, John rightly understands the soteriological significance of his and his audience's suffering—that is, their victory in Christ—and becomes equipped to orientate the church's life toward Parousia. Thus, the ἐν πνεύματι formula signifies the eschatological perspective John is given by the Spirit through which he is empowered to strengthen the church's faith and motivate the church to live a victorious life in light of the accomplished victory of Christ. In this respect, the ἐν πνεύματι formula may well have more than one possible meaning as it relates to ecclesiology and even the soteriology of Revelation. The Spirit saves the church by empowering her and strengthening her faith through the vision of victory in Christ

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<sup>50</sup> As noted, the phrase ἐν πνεύματι occurs at four key locations: (1) at the beginning of the seven letters (1:10); (2) at the beginning of the visions of the septet series (4:2); (3) at the beginning of the judgment on Babylon (17:3); and (4) at the beginning of the New Jerusalem (21:10), the symbol for the eschatological salvation. It should be emphasized that each occurrence of ἐν πνεύματι is related to the victory of Christ seen from different angles. Verse 1:10 opens with a vision of the exalted Christ who, as the consequence of his victory on the cross, addresses the seven churches through the Spirit-inspired words of John. Verse 4:2 describes how the victory of Christ on the cross (5:5) sets off the process of salvation through judgment by initiating the three septets series of judgment. Verses 17:3 and 21:10 open visions of final judgment and salvation, which are the end results of the victory of Christ on the cross. Thus, it is not an overstatement to say that, by being ἐν πνεύματι, John is enabled to interpret the whole history, especially the history of salvation accomplished by Christ in the light of his accomplished victory on the cross. Fanning's explanation of the use of ἐν πνεύματι in Revelation supports my view, as he argues that each occurrence of the expression ἐν πνεύματι signals a new phase in the complex of visions that began in 1:9–10, are subsequently extended in 4:1–2, and will be extended further in 17:3 and 21:10. These are all descriptions of judgment and salvation through the work of Christ interpreted by John from a heavenly perspective. See Fanning, *Revelation*, 193.

<sup>51</sup> According to Boring, the biblical prophet's function is not so much to indulge in flights away from history into some other world as much as it is to guide the path of the believing community by interpreting contemporary events as a Spirit-empowered interpreter of history. M. Eugene Boring, "The Theology of Revelation: 'The Lord Our God the Almighty Reigns,'" *Interpretation* 40, no. 3 (July 1986): 261–63.

mediated through the Christian prophet John.<sup>52</sup> This idea becomes more apparent in the second phase of the Spirit's activity within the church.

### **Phase 2 of the Spirit's Activity**

In phase 2, the Spirit imparts divine knowledge to the church through John and empowers the church to cling to the salvation already received. This idea is expressed by the phrase “the one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” which occurs in a sevenfold repeated pattern at the conclusion of the letters to the seven churches. Although the function of the Spirit of God in Revelation is multilayered, there can be identified at least three specific salvific functions of the Spirit within Revelation 2–3, where the seven sayings of the Spirit are found: (1) pneumatic discernment, (2) ethical transformation, and (3) eschatological orientation.

#### *Pneumatic Discernment*

Pneumatic discernment<sup>53</sup> is a function performed by the Spirit, who speaks to the churches through Christian prophets like John by bringing to them the words of the exalted Christ.<sup>54</sup> According to Edwin E. Reynolds, Revelation contains two differing worldviews and two different groups of people: one worldview associated with the truth of God held by his people and the other one associated with the deceptions of the dragon

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<sup>52</sup> De Smidt, “The Holy Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 241.

<sup>53</sup> As Thomas rightly points out, the interpretive, discerning process that the book's readers are urged to engage in is not only a Christological endeavor but a pneumatological one as well. Thomas, “Revelation,” 259.

<sup>54</sup> Many interpreters of Revelation agree that the words spoken by the Spirit to the churches are the words of the exalted Christ. See Thomas, “Revelation,” 259; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 476; Brandon D. Smith, *The Trinity in the Book of Revelation: Seeing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in John's Apocalypse*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 170; Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation*, 89; Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 143; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 160.

and the earth-dwellers (οἱ κατοικοῦντες ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς)<sup>55</sup> who identify with him.<sup>56</sup> He further argues that one of the key purposes of Revelation is thus to aid the people of God in discerning the true from the false so they can make discerning choices and honor God appropriately.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, the Spirit helps the people of God discern the mind of Christ<sup>58</sup> and reveals what it means to truly obey him.<sup>59</sup> This means that it is not an overstatement to say that the phrase, “the one who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” as a concept intertwined with “in the Spirit,”<sup>60</sup> helps believers to interpret what it means to live in the light of the victory of Christ, that is, to conquer as he did by granting them a changed perspective on and perception of the community’s reality.

### *Ethical Transformation*

The ability to discern the true from the false by means of the words of Jesus

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<sup>55</sup> According to Beale, this expression is used throughout Revelation as a technical term for unbelieving idolaters (3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 290. This clearly suggests that the discernment of the truth of God is part of the condition of continuing in salvation, while falling for the deceptions of Satan is the antithesis to discerning the truth of God, which only results in judgment.

<sup>56</sup> Edwin Reynolds, “The True and the False in the Ecclesiology of Revelation,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 17, no. 2 (Autumn 2006): 18.

<sup>57</sup> Reynolds, “The True and the False,” 35.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 476.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, “The Spirit in the Book of Revelation,” 252.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Koester emphasizes the interconnectedness between the expressions “in the Spirit” and “what the Spirit says to the churches” by arguing:

Although this message began as a word from Christ, it concludes by saying that “the Spirit” speaks to the assemblies (2:7). The Spirit mediates the word of the risen Jesus in two ways. First, the Spirit enables John to receive the words of the risen Christ through his vision. John said that he received his message while “in the Spirit” (1:9). This expression likens him to the biblical prophets, who were moved by the Spirit to convey a word from God. Second, the Spirit enables the *readers* to receive the risen Christ’s words through John’s text. Communication is complete when the word given to *John* in visionary form is received by the readers in written form. In this process the Spirit shares Christ’s authority: both speak (*legei*) as one (2:1, 7). (Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation*, 270)

Du Rand also argues that the expression “in the Spirit” and the seven occurrences of “Spirit” in the seven letters in fact belong to the same “prophetic category” in which the former describes John’s prophetic experience (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10) and this category accommodates the latter in the similar saying to the churches: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). Du Rand, “. . . Let Him Hear What the Spirit Says . . .” 43.

mediated through the Spirit and delivered by John to the churches inevitably leads to ethical transformation. Some have argued that ethical transformation is the end result of the life-changing effects brought about by the Spirit in the lives of believers. For instance, Richard Bauckham argues that the pneumatology of Revelation has often been misconstrued as defining the Spirit only as the Spirit of prophecy rather than as a moral or life-giving power in the Christian life.<sup>61</sup> However, he speaks emphatically that the Spirit should also be seen as having life-giving and life-changing effects. The Spirit brings to the churches Christ's powerful words of rebuking, encouraging, promising, warning, touching, and drawing the hearts and minds of its hearers, thus directing the lives of believers towards the coming of Christ.<sup>62</sup> There are others who support this view.<sup>63</sup>

However, it should be noted that the ethical transformation only comes as a result of the victory in the battle against falsehood and sin. This cannot be achieved simply by human endeavor, but only by the Spirit's activity in bringing the powerful words of the exalted Christ to the churches, whose function is to expose them to the objective truth in Christ. To stand in the presence of the words of Christ spoken by the

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<sup>61</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 160.

<sup>62</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 161.

<sup>63</sup> For example, Thomas and Macchia contend that the discernment not only is conceptual but involves many qualities of wisdom for life such as repentance, patient endurance, and faithful living through which the Spirit consecrates the people of God for life and witness by working in tandem with the risen Christ. Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 476. Similarly, de Smidt accentuates that in Revelation the Spirit plays a pivotal role in discipleship of the people of God as shown in the following list:

(1) hear (i.e. obey and repent in the light of) the Word of the Lord (2.17; 3.22; 22.17; cf. 1.3; 3.3); (2) endure suffering (2.17; 3.21; 14.10, 12; cf. 1.9; 2.2; 7.4; 12.11; 13.10); (3) be faithful to the point of death (2.10; 11.3; 14.13; cf. 12.11; 20.4); (4) understand the significance of names as marks of true identity (2.17; cf. 14.1, 9; 20.4); (5) affirm publicly the apostolic definition of orthodoxy, especially affirmation by the community's teachers (2.4, 5, 11; cf. 2.2, 15, 20); (6) undergo self-evaluation leading to correction and repentance (2.21, 22, 29; 3.3, 6, 19, 22; cf. 2.5, 16; 9.20, 21; 16.9, 11); (7) witness the gospel publicly by overcoming evil and living for God, which is orthopraxy (2.7, 11, 17, 26, 29; 3.4–6, 15–22; 5.5–6; 15.2; 17.3, 14; 21.7; cf. 12.11; 14.4; 18.4; 22.11, 14); and (8) worship God and God's lamb publicly (4.8, 11, 15; 15.6, 9–10; 11.5, 17; 15.3; cf. 1.17; 5.12–13; 7.10; 11.15; 16.5; 19.1, 5–6). (de Smidt, "Hermeneutical Perspectives on the Spirit," 37)



Spirit through the prophet John means to be placed in a combat situation.<sup>64</sup> The Spirit wages war against the worldliness infecting the seven churches and urges faithfulness to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus by showing them their current state of spiritual blindness and deception, which prevents them from rightly perceiving both the weakness and the strength of each church.<sup>65</sup> The nature of the Spirit's activity as warfare is best described in his summoning of the seven churches to "conquer" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). According to Lee, the Spirit joins in this spiritual warfare, albeit implicitly, by asking the seven churches to conquer.<sup>66</sup>

It can be inferred from this that believers' ability to "conquer," a summary term for wide-ranging moral behaviors expected of the truly saved, is made possible only by the direct involvement of the Spirit in the lives of believers. Thus, the Spirit, by way of bringing Christ's words of rebuking, threatening, and judging to believers, constantly wages warfare against the falsehood and sinfulness creeping into the churches. This inevitably results in bringing about ethical transformation to believers so that they may eventually inherit the promised salvation.

### *Eschatological Orientation*

Another aspect of the Spirit's salvific activity implied in the phrase, "the one who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches," concerns eschatology. Alexander E. Stewart argues that John's motivational argumentation is not primarily grounded on the indicative reality, though it is assumed, but instead on the fact that the believers in the seven churches were in danger of not receiving final salvation if they did

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<sup>64</sup> Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 127.

<sup>65</sup> Rainbow argues that John and his "brethren the prophets" continue to proclaim through the power of God's Spirit against worldliness contaminating the churches, just as he did through the ancient prophets against Canaanite idolatry infiltrating Israel.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation*, 168.

not conquer.<sup>67</sup> He goes on to state that John does not, therefore, seek to draw attention to believers' possessed salvation, security, and present identity as God's people, but focuses on the non-possessed aspect of future salvation, which they still might fall short of gaining if they failed to conquer.<sup>68</sup> This means that final salvation cannot be attained by a temporary change of heart or behavior but by having persevering faith to the very end, whether it means one's death or Parousia.

This is the core meaning of the call to conquer.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the purpose of the invitation of Christ to conquer is soteriological in that it is meant for believers' salvation. It is an invitation to respond in active faith so that they may inherit eschatological promises described at the conclusion of each letter to the seven churches. In this process, the Spirit's role can be said to be eschatological because the Spirit's activity in and through the churches is directed towards the fulfillment of the victory of Christ in the eschatological future through the lives of his followers.<sup>70</sup> In order to achieve this goal, the Spirit does not simply predict the events of the end but enables them to see their present from the perspective of the future.<sup>71</sup>

In my view, the fact that the seven sayings of the Spirit always occur in close proximity to the seven promises given to "the one who conquers" suggests that the role played by the Spirit is most likely eschatological since he directs believers' sight and lives toward the future inheritance of the eschatological salvation. Thus, although the seven promises of the risen Christ are presented in conditional terms, they are not to be taken as descriptions of conditional salvation, but rather as assurances of salvation that

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander E. Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, Gorgias Dissertations Biblical Studies 61 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 197.

<sup>68</sup> Stewart, *Soteriology as Motivation in the Apocalypse of John*, 197.

<sup>69</sup> The technical formula "the one who conquers" (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21) focuses on the ongoing obedience of believers to the very end as indicated by the present participle *ὁ νικῶν*.

<sup>70</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 166.

<sup>71</sup> Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 166–67.

Christ has already won the victory and will therefore assist them in continuing his victory until they reach the promised final salvation.<sup>72</sup>

### **Phase 3 of the Spirit's Activity**

The final phase of the Spirit's activity in relation to the conquering of believers is best illustrated in the symbolic depiction of the prophetic ministry of the two witnesses in 11:1–13. Here, the universal church, represented as the two witnesses,<sup>73</sup> carries out the task of bearing prophetic witness to the world by being empowered by the Spirit through which they make the victory of Christ effective throughout the world.

The performance of this task is thus related to the work of the Spirit as “the seven Spirits,” whose main function is to make the victory of the Lamb effective throughout the world by being sent out into all the earth (5:6).<sup>74</sup> In this light, even though the verb *νικάω* never occurs in application to the people of God within the context of the account of the two witnesses, it is not far-fetched to assume that the two witnesses, a symbolic expression for the people of God of all ages, are to be identified as “conquerors.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ellul's explanation is very clear on this point: “The victory has already been won by Jesus Christ; the one who accepts being engaged in this combat is assured of the assistance of the Word of God and he shares in the victory of Jesus.” Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 128.

<sup>73</sup> Dean Flemming points out that the task of bearing prophetic witness applies to the whole church. Dean Flemming, *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 107; Waddell spells this out more explicitly: “John is not describing the historical churches in Asia Minor nor the eschatological church at the end of ages, but rather 11:1–13 serves as a prophetic call to the people of God to be faithful witness.” Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, 174.

<sup>74</sup> It is to be remembered that the two phrases “the Spirit” and “the seven Spirits” are nothing more than two different terms to describe the two aspects of the essential function of the Spirit broadly understood as “prophecy.”

<sup>75</sup> Although there is no direct mention of the conquering of believers within the context of the story of two witnesses, it can be inferred from the reference to the beast's killing of the two witnesses described in 11:7. Based on the fact that Christ conquers by dying throughout Revelation (3:21; 5:5; 17:14), the death of two witnesses implicitly suggests that they participate in the victory of Christ by conquering in the same way he did, namely through their own deaths. Thus, the real victor is not the beast, but the martyrs. In this respect, Bauckham rightly notes, “The perspective of heaven must break into the earth-bound delusion of the beast's propaganda to enable a different assessment of the same empirical fact: the beast's apparent victory is the martyrs'—and therefore God's—real victory.” Bauckham, *The Theology of*

As observed, the verb “conquer” (νικάω) is the overarching term for wide-ranging good works<sup>76</sup> stemming from believers’ genuine faith in what has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ, which should be kept and practiced at all costs in order to be saved, even if it means death. The theme of witness is one among many themes that emerges most clearly in relation to the theme of conquering in the account of two witnesses.

Thus, although there is no explicit use of the verb “conquer” in this account, it can be said that the theme of conquering, a theme begun in Revelation 2–3, is developed further by one of its sub-themes,<sup>77</sup> namely the theme of witness. The theme of witness described in 11:1–13, therefore, conceptually refers to the conquering of believers throughout all ages and means that believers must conquer by bearing witness to the truth of God, even if it means death, just as Christ conquered by his suffering witness.

How does the Spirit enable their ongoing and victorious witness? The Spirit performs two major functions in enabling believers’ role of prophetic witness to the point of death: (1) the pneumatic discernment, and (2) the granting of the resurrection life.

### *Pneumatic Discernment*

The Spirit enables believers’ ability to spiritually discern and interpret the nature of their prophetic ministry of witness in terms of participation in the victory of Christ. The place where this role of the Spirit is described most explicitly is 11:8. In this verse, the term *πνευματικῶς* is used to attribute the divinely given perception of the

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*the Book of Revelation*, 91. This point is further reinforced by the link established between the conquering and bearing witness to truth until the point of death in 12:11.

<sup>76</sup> For the list of the wide-ranging good works included in the verb “conquer,” see page 111.

<sup>77</sup> Bauckham rightly says that the themes of messianic war and the theme of witness serve to interpret each other, but he seems to make distinction and treats them as two separate themes. Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 91. Against Bauckham, I am more in agreement with Stubblefield’s argument that all the ecclesial mandates including repentance, witness, worship, and other minor mandates must be understood in light of the overarching motif of Revelation, which is the motif of warfare. For more details, see Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, “The Function of the Church in Warfare in the Book of Revelation” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 182–205.

people of God wholly to the Spirit, that is to say, a spiritual lens through which to interpret their present vocation and future destiny.<sup>78</sup>

The people of God, through the assistance of the Spirit, are enabled to see the spiritual character of the great city as associated with Sodom and Egypt, symbols for any ungodly realm on earth where their Lord is crucified. The whole story provides a paradigm of faithful witness, which the church is called to follow, even if it means suffering, rejection, and martyrdom. From the heavenly perspective, the death of two witnesses as a consequence of their faithful witness is nothing more than their complete and permanent victory over the beast. Conversely, the apparent victory of the beast is a limited and temporary victory (11:7), thus a pseudo-victory permitted only by the sovereignty of God.<sup>79</sup> By way of the Spirit-given perspective, the people of God are enabled to see their present suffering and struggle resulting from their prophetic ministry of witness as participation in the victory of Christ.

However, the role of the Spirit as the giver of the pneumatic discernment is not only limited to providing them with a spiritual perspective on their present situation, but extends to direct Christian life towards the Parousia by giving them eschatological hope of final salvation portrayed by the imagery of resurrection and ascension in 11:11–12. The result of the eschatological hope of salvation invariably motivates believers to step into a meaningful present by following the path of the crucified Christ. Thus, a preview of the perspective from the end certainly enables believers to view their present situations

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<sup>78</sup> Many interpreters agree that the term *πνευματικῶς* refers to the spiritual perception of true reality given to the church as a result of the Spirit's activity, even though they describe this idea in varied terminology. Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation*, 182; Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy*, 169; Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 592; David C. Aune, *Revelation 6–16*, WBC, vol. 52B (Dallas: Word, 1998), 620; Osborne, *Revelation*, 427; Kuykendall, "An Expanded Role for The Spirit," 535; Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 205; Paul, *Revelation*, 202.

<sup>79</sup> According to Joe Luceford, the verbs *πολεμέω* and *νικάω* are used in Revelation (11:7; 13:7) to describe the beast's temporary waging of battle and conquest as the counterimage to the permanent conquest and eternal victory of the Lamb. Joe E. Luceford, *Parody and Counterimaging in the Apocalypse* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 133. Thus, the death of witnesses described in 11:7 is to be interpreted as an act of participation in the eternal victory of the Lamb, who also conquered by witnessing to the truth of God to the point of death.

as the way from death to eternal life.

### *The Granting of the Resurrection Life*

The Spirit enables believers to continue in the victory of Christ so that they may reach final salvation by granting them resurrection life. It has been argued that the passage 11:11–12 describes the deliverance of God’s people.<sup>80</sup> Many commentators adopt the translation “the breath of life” for the phrase *πνεῦμα ζωῆς* in 11:11 based on its close connection either to the vision of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:1–14<sup>81</sup> and/or the creation of the first humans in Genesis 2:7.<sup>82</sup> However, this interpretive choice misses the important point that the resurrection of the two witnesses is wholly attributed to the agency of the Spirit. Grant R. Osborne offers a better alternative, that the expression *πνεῦμα ζωῆς* likely has a double meaning here: (1) the life-giving Spirit” as the means of (2) the new life breathed into two witnesses.<sup>83</sup>

However, the word *πνεῦμα* should not be taken as directly speaking about the person of God’s Spirit but about a particular quality derived from him, that is, the empowering force of the Spirit.<sup>84</sup> It follows that the life-giving Spirit is the very agent who perfects salvation, as *ζωῆς* is frequently associated with salvation in Revelation,

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<sup>80</sup> For example, J. Hampton Keathley argues that the passage 11:11–12 depicts the ultimate deliverance of God. J. Hampton Keathley III, *Studies in Revelation: Christ’s Victory over the Forces of Darkness* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1999), 192. Similarly, R. H. Charles asserts that 11:11–13 disclose God’s mercy and redemption. R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1920), 1:268; Smalley contends that verses 11:9–12 virtually describe the universal disclosure of the sovereignty and reign of God, his judgment and salvation. Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 290. Beale argues, focusing on the description on the ascent of the witnesses, that at least this scene figuratively affirms a final, decisive deliverance and vindication of God’s people at the end of time. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 597.

<sup>81</sup> Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 284; George Eldon Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 158; Wilfrid J. Harrington, *Revelation*, SP 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 122; Thomas, *Revelation 8–22*, 98.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, Stefanovic adopts this rendering on the basis of its association with Genesis 2:7 and Ezekiel 37:1–10. Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 360.

<sup>83</sup> Osborne, *Revelation*, 430.

<sup>84</sup> Blount, *Revelation*, 215.

given to the people of God. But how does the Spirit make this possible? While it is possible to interpret the imagery of two witnesses being brought back to life as literal resurrection at the end of time, it can also be taken to mean a spiritual resurrection actualized in the here and now of the life of all believers by which they are empowered to courageously continue their prophetic ministry of witnessing to the very end,<sup>85</sup> which is at the same time, their participation in the victory of Christ.

Perhaps this is what is meant by the phrase δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσίν μου (“I will give to my two my witnesses”) in 11:3, a phrase reminding that God always provides the resources necessary to accomplish whatever he commands his people to do.<sup>86</sup> This is further reinforced by the use of Ezekiel 37:1–14 as background for the account of the two witnesses. What is implied by the use of Ezekiel 37:1–14, a prophecy often understood as referring to the restoration of Israel from the Babylonian exile,<sup>87</sup> in the description of the two witnesses, is that God will ultimately restore the church, the true Israel, from captivity by the resurrection power of the Spirit.

However, this should not be interpreted as referring only to literal resurrection but also, in light of the symbolic context of Ezekiel 37,<sup>88</sup> to nonliteral resurrection, that is,

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<sup>85</sup> Beale implicitly argues for this passage’s connection to the spiritual resurrection of believers by pointing out that although 11:11–12 could be understood as literal resurrection from the dead, this does not appear to be the focus since the conquering of the witnesses did not entail all of their literal deaths; this is indicated by the parallels to this episode elsewhere in Revelation in which a community of believers still exists and God vindicates them by destroying their oppressors (e.g., 20:7–10, which is based on Ezek 38). Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 597. Lee claims more explicitly that “the Spirit of life” in 11:11 is not only connected to a role to resurrect the churches or people of God after their death, but also to revive the churches or people of God spiritually, namely spiritual revival in the witnessing ministry itself. Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation*, 85.

<sup>86</sup> Keathley, *Studies in Revelation*, 192.

<sup>87</sup> Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 360.

<sup>88</sup> Beale argues that figurative understanding is fitting for Revelation 11:11–12 because it is intended by Ezekiel’s prophecy, which uses nonliteral resurrection language to describe Israel’s restoration from captivity. See Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 597. Also, Newton contends that the vision of dry bones coming to life and standing up on their feet signifies the life of the Spirit indwelling the resurrected Israelites. See Jon K. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, ed. Christopher L. Carter, Pentecostal Old and New Testament Commentaries (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2021), 209.

spiritual restoration, which enables new obedience to the commandments of God.<sup>89</sup> To put it differently, the vision of dry bones coming to life and standing up on their feet described in Ezekiel 37:1–14 informs the imagery of the resurrection of two witnesses in 11:11–12. This is God’s great act of new creation by the Spirit of life, which dramatically transforms the people of God into the messianic army, namely conquerors.<sup>90</sup>

In a nutshell, the Spirit enables the prophetic witness of the church symbolized by the two witnesses by bringing spiritual revival to them. The imagery of the two witnesses coming to life as described in 11:11 not only signifies the literal resurrection at the end of time, but also the spiritual restoration given to the people of God in the present by which they are empowered to continue their prophetic ministry of witnessing to the truth of God disclosed through the life and death of Christ.

The task of prophetic witness, if taken to mean a parallel concept for conquering, is understood as a condition for salvation in Revelation. This means that the Spirit is the one who perfects the salvation accomplished by the work of Christ on the cross. Thomas and Macchia drive this point home beautifully by noting, “The Spirit reveals God, gives life, sanctifies, raises the dead, and perfects the redemption that the Son came to give.”<sup>91</sup> To sum up, the salvific role of the Spirit in the final phase of the Spirit’s activity in relation to the conquering of believers is best presented in the image of the two witnesses. Here, the prophetic ministry of the church is equated with conquering. The Spirit’s salvific role in enabling believers to continue their prophetic witness in the present is expressed by two wordings: πνευματικῶς (11:8) and πνεῦμα ζωῆς (11:11). The

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<sup>89</sup> Tabb insightfully argues that the prophecy of Ezekiel 37 should be read in tandem with Ezekiel 36 because the role of the Spirit in the restoration of Israel features prominently in these two chapters, thrice emphasizing Yahweh’s promise: “I will put my Spirit into you” (Ezek 36:27; 37:6, 37:14). This divine action brings new life, knowledge of God, and restoration from exile (37:6, 14), as well as new obedience to Yahweh’s statutes and judgments (36:27). See Tabb, *All Things New*, 75.

<sup>90</sup> This is a point argued by several scholars such as Newton, Beale, and Johnson. Newton, *A Pentecostal Commentary on Revelation*, 209. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 597; Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb*, 173.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 491.



former assists believers in spiritually discerning their current situation from the perspective of the end, while the latter refers to the resurrection power that restores the church spiritually by which they are enabled to bear the prophetic witness of Christ to death. This results in their eternal and permanent victory over and against the beast's temporary and empty victory. Therefore, the Spirit first establishes God's rule within the church by converting believers into conquerors, and then the Spirit conquers the world and establishes God's rule within it through the church, the community of faith.

### **Other Places Referring to the Soteriological Activity of the Spirit**

The pattern of the soteriological role played by the Spirit in the account of two witnesses continues throughout the entire book. For instance, the victory of believers over the beast through their testimony to the point of martyrdom, which is described in 12:11 and 15:2, are parallel stories of the victory of the two witnesses described in 11:1–14. Within the overall context of 12:1–15:4, to which 12:11 and 15:2 belong, the Spirit's role in relation to the victory of believers has been variously explained. Thomas explains that the Spirit continues to play an active role with the implicit call to pneumatic discernment by means of the two key phrases in 13:9<sup>92</sup> and 14:13,<sup>93</sup> reminding the readers that death is not the end, but the blessing for the dead who die in the Lord extends beyond death.<sup>94</sup> Interestingly, the idea of “rest from the labor” expressed in 14:13 is closely linked to the concept of victory in that this phrase can also be reinterpreted as “rest from enemies in

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<sup>92</sup> “If anyone has an ear, let him hear.”

<sup>93</sup> This is a beatitude spoken by Christ, which reads, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!” “Yes” says the Spirit, “so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them.”

<sup>94</sup> Thomas, “Revelation,” 264. Also, Anthony Garland emphasizes that the role of the Spirit in relation to the victory of the saints conceptualized as testimony to the point of martyrdom is identified in the beatitude of 14:13 in that the phrase, “yes, says the Spirit,” indicates the Spirit's intimate involvement in the lives of the saints during the trials through which those who are martyred are able to hold their testimony to the end. Anthony C. Garland, *A Testimony of Jesus Christ: A Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Camano Island, WA: SpiritAndTruth.org, 2004), 2:557.

victory.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, the Spirit enables believers to spiritually see their death as a victory over enemies resulting in eternal salvation.

The role of the Spirit in enabling the faith of believers conceptualized as victory is also identifiable in the account of conquerors recorded in 15:2–4. Lee argues that by pairing the fire mixed with the sea of glass (15:2) with the burning fire of the divine Spirit located in front of the throne in 4:5, one significant conclusion can be drawn: the fire of the divine Spirit is involved in the messianic war with conquerors and aids them in winning the victory over the beast, its image, and the number of its name.<sup>96</sup> An ancient commentator, Andrew of Caesarea, draws on the story of God’s appearance to Moses in fire and the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire and argues that the fire possibly indicates both the divine knowledge and the grace of the life-giving Spirit.<sup>97</sup>

The final place that deserves mention is 21:6–7. Michael Kuykendall has made a case that although the term “water” is used in Revelation in contrasting ways and thus could mean something good or bad in Revelation, the phrase “the water of life” is certainly a reference to the Spirit.<sup>98</sup> Thomas makes it clear that this phrase is an implicit reference to the Spirit’s active role in the offer of salvation.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the formulaic expression “the one who conquers” observed in 21:7, while it is still a condition for salvation and thus logically involves human action, should be taken as an assurance of salvation, as the Spirit is the true source of their power and victory and will lead them to the final salvation.

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<sup>95</sup> Chee-Chiew Lee, “Rest and Victory in Revelation 14.13,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 3 (March 2019): 356.

<sup>96</sup> Lee, *A Dynamic Reading of the Holy Spirit in Revelation*, 101.

<sup>97</sup> Oecumenius and Andrew of Caesarea, *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, trans. William C. Weinrich, ed. Thomas C. Oden, ACT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 168.

<sup>98</sup> Kuykendall, “An Expanded Role for The Spirit,” 537–38.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas, “Revelation,” 265.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the question of how the Spirit, as the manner of both God's and Christ's presence in the world and the church, plays a pivotal role in enabling the ongoing victory of believers so they can reach the final salvation. The primary role of the Spirit is, first and foremost, to make the accomplished victory of Christ effective within the church, then within the world, through the transformed lives of believers. To this end, the Spirit imparts the divine knowledge of God's redemptive work accomplished through the faithful witness of Christ to believers through Christian prophets like John. Believers then impart this knowledge to the whole world by their faithful witness to Christ, which is their participation in the continuing victory of Christ by faith. In doing so, the Spirit enables believers' capacity to discern what it means to conquer and live in light of the accomplished victory of Christ, that is to say, to spiritually discern good and evil and make the right ethical decisions in conformity with the standard of Christ. More precisely, the Spirit plays a number of specific roles in enabling the continuing victory of believers by strengthening their faith, such as pneumatic discernment, ethical transformation, and eschatological orientation. This conclusion further enhances my argument that the victory of believers does not contribute anything to their salvation since the power to accomplish it is not their own, but comes from the Spirit.

CHAPTER 6  
TYPOLOGICAL USE OF THE THEME OF HOLY WAR  
IN THE SOTERIOLOGICAL ARGUMENT  
OF REVELATION

**Introduction**

This chapter aims to elucidate the central role played by the holy war tradition of the Old Testament in shaping the soteriological argument of Revelation through the conquering motif. As numerous scholars have noted, there is compelling evidence that Revelation develops and amplifies important themes from the Old Testament, with the theme of holy war standing out prominently.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the author's treatment of the Old Testament material, he maintains a high respect for its thematic context. Rather than relying heavily on a singular Old Testament book, the author strategically engages with various passages spanning different books. These selected passages effectively capture and convey the thematic ideas inherent in Revelation, aligning with the author's specific areas of focus.<sup>2</sup> This approach suggests thematic continuity between the theme of holy war as depicted in the Old Testament and its recapitulation in the Book of Revelation. Consequently, it accentuates the imperative of adopting a typological approach when

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<sup>1</sup> According to the list provided by G. K. Beale, Tremper Longman, Richard Bauckham, and Charles Homer Giblin are the major contributors to the study of the thematic use of holy war in Revelation. G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 88–89. In contrast to these scholars who saw the OT as the primary background of the thematic use of holy war in Revelation, there are others who have sought to conduct the study of the holy war motif in Revelation in light of the early Jewish literature. See Luca Arcari, "Early Jewish Background of the War Scenes in John's Revelation," in *Ancient Christian Interpretations of "Violent Texts" in the Apocalypse*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, Tobias Nicklas, and Andreas Merkt (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 9–27; Loren L. Johns, "Identity and Resistance: The Varieties of Competing Models in Early Judaism," in *Qumran Studies: New Approaches, New Questions*, ed. Michael Thomas Davis and Brent A. Strawn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 254–77. Especially, see "The War Scroll and the Apocalypse of John" (pp. 268–76).

<sup>2</sup> Jan Fekkes insightfully argues that it would be missing the point to ask which OT book is more important to John since it is not the author or the book that dictates his choice of passages, but the topic. Jan Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation, Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 103.

analyzing Revelation's utilization of Old Testament themes, including the pivotal theme of holy war.<sup>3</sup>

As stated by Charles Homer Giblin, Revelation contains an exceptionally high percentage of characteristics associated with the holy war ideology, perhaps all of them.<sup>4</sup> Of all these characteristics, the two most pertinent to the argument of this chapter are (1) the faith exhibited by the people of God as the indispensable condition for victory and (2) the notion of God fighting single-handedly on behalf of his people through miraculous intervention devoid of any human military contribution except for faith and works accompanying it on the part of God's people. It is my assertion that this monergistic holy war pattern, wherein God stands as the sole combatant and believers are only required to believe and not fear, continues into the narrative of Revelation.<sup>5</sup> To be more specific, the author redefines and reinterprets this holy war paradigm in light of the redemptive victory of Christ achieved through his death and resurrection, as well as believers' active participation in his victory via their faith. In doing so, the author endeavors to construct the soteriological argument of Revelation with careful attention given to the interplay between the role of divine grace and human responsibility.

In the subsequent sections, I will show how the monergistic paradigm of holy war observed in the Old Testament, particularly within prophetic writings, if not

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<sup>3</sup> For the detailed argument on the necessity of typological approach to John's use of the OT in Revelation, see Buist M. Fanning, *Revelation*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 40–49.

<sup>4</sup> Giblin provides a list of eight key elements of the holy war as inferred from the historical books of the OT. For a comprehensive list of these characteristics of the holy war, see Giblin, *The Book of Revelation*, 26–27.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Bauckham argues, in support of this view, that this tradition of warfare predominates both the proto-apocalyptic and apocalyptic proper texts of the OT, which seem to emerge as the expectation for the future eschatological warfare. Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 210–11. This point can be further reinforced by the fact that the language of holy used in Revelation, for the most part, reflects the OT prophetic tradition. For more details on the use of the holy war language from the OT, see Jan Fekkes III, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation: Visionary Antecedents and Their Development*, JSNTSup 93 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 78.

entirely,<sup>6</sup> provides an interpretive lens through which to make sense of the soteriological argumentation of Revelation presented through the conquering motif. In pursuit of this goal, I will closely examine a few select accounts of holy war in the Old Testament Scripture and see how the monergistic pattern of holy war emerges as the dominant paradigm for the future battle. Such accounts include the Exodus event, the conquest narrative, and the book of Isaiah. Also, I will consider a couple of the New Testament passages to demonstrate that the monergistic holy war model drawn from the Old Testament not only shapes the soteriological argument of Revelation but also permeates the entire New Testament. This further bolsters my assertion that God saves believers monergistically without human involvement. Passages to consider are Ephesians 6 and 1 John, focusing on 2:13–14, 4:4, and 5:4–5.

### **Select Accounts of Holy War in the Old Testament**

I aim to illustrate two key points through the following accounts of holy war recorded in the Old Testament. First, these accounts of holy war show that God fights alone without human participation. In other words, this perspective perceives warfare as solely orchestrated by God, devoid of any divine-human cooperation.<sup>7</sup> This monergistic pattern of holy war within the context of Israel subsequently found its way into the

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<sup>6</sup> The monergistic holy war model is best exemplified in the exodus event in which God fought alone through miracle on behalf of his people, and all that is required of God's people is that they must not fear but must believe (Exod 14:13–14). The soteriological nature of holy war waged by Yahweh in the exodus event is well explained by Martyn John Smith, who argues that salvation is an event of warfare through God's violent intervention, which has two sides: the violent destruction of the enemy and victory for God and redemption of his people. See Martyn John Smith, *Divine Violence and the Christ Victor Atonement Model: God's Reluctant Use of Violence for Soteriological Ends* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 51.

<sup>7</sup> Both Millard Lind and Susan Niditch see the exodus as the fundamental paradigm of holy war in the OT supporting the view of the monergistic holy war model whose focal point is the power of God and the helplessness of human fighters. See Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel*, Christian Peace Shelf Selection (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), 47; Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 144. Contra Lind and Niditch, Patrick Miller views the conquest as the ideal holy war and therefore maintains that victory in a holy war was the result of a fusion of divine and human activity, supporting the view of holy war as synergism. See Patrick D. Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 5 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 156–57, 160. As argued thus far, this dissertation supports the former.

prophetic tradition and extended into the New Testament. Second, the primary role to be played by God's people, as the army of God in a holy war, entails placing unwavering faith and trust in God's intervention and might rather than contributing their military efforts. A striking aspect of Israel's holy war was the disregard for the numerical strength and quality of weapons in securing victory.<sup>8</sup> The significance lay not in numbers and armaments but in the presence of God, the divine warrior, fighting on the side of his people. This point shows that God is the sole combatant, shifting the focus to God as the ultimate conqueror rather than the human participants.

### **The Exodus**

The battle at the Red Sea, mainly depicted in Exodus 14–15, marks a pivotal moment within the exodus narrative. This account vividly portrays God's paramount role as the divine warrior, highlighted in its most intense form. John Goldingay astutely observes that this narrative provides a paradigmatic example of the significance of Yahweh's action rather than that of the human army.<sup>9</sup> Embedded within the holy war ideology, the theme of the divine warrior provides the most central principle of holy war: God manifests his presence on the battlefield alongside his people, acting as the divine warrior who secures victory for the faithful.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of God as the divine warrior extends beyond the confines of Exodus 14–15, and thus it can also be discerned across Exodus 1–13.<sup>11</sup> However, the

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<sup>8</sup> Many OT passages support this understanding of holy war (e.g., Deut 20:1, Judg 7; 1 Sam 17:45–46). Interestingly, even counting the size of an army was seen as a sign of the lack of faith (Exod 30:12; 2 Sam 24:1–10).

<sup>9</sup> John Goldingay, "The Man of War and the Suffering Servant: The Old Testament and the Theology of Liberation," *Tyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976): 91.

<sup>10</sup> Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 47.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed analysis on God's warring activity as divine warrior throughout Exod 1–14, see Charlie Trimm, "YHWH Fights for Them!" *The Divine Warrior in the Exodus Narrative*, Gorgias Biblical Studies 58 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2014), 43–67.

former passage distinctly offers the most vivid depiction of God’s role as the divine warrior and God’s people in a holy war. In the climactic moment of the exodus narrative within chapter 14, God single-handedly dismantles and destroys Pharaoh’s army amidst the waters of the Red Sea. The victorious outcome of the conflict between God, the divine warrior, and Pharaoh was foretold through Moses’s words addressed to the people of Israel: “But Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will perform for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again, ever. The LORD will fight for you,<sup>12</sup> while you keep silent’” (Exod 14:13–14).

Within these two verses, the theocentric nature of the exodus salvation is well summarized. The salvation exclusively belongs to God because he fights for his people and accomplishes salvation on their behalf. The narrative paints God as the primary actor in the unfolding drama of the exodus deliverance. God hardened the heart of Pharaoh (14:4, 8, 17–18). God drove back the sea by a strong eastern wind all night, transforming it into a path of dry land as Moses extended his hands over it (14:21). Subsequently, he threw the army of the Egyptians into panic or confusion, tangling their chariots and hindering their advance. Notably, even the Egyptians discerned God’s hand in this battle, acknowledging his defense of the Israelites (14:25b).<sup>13</sup> Upon God’s command, Moses once more extended his hands over the sea, prompting the waters to engulf and drown the Egyptian army (14:26–28). As a conclusion to the prose story of the exodus deliverance, 14:30–31 functions somewhat like 14:13–14, focusing on the activity of God as the sole efficacious cause of the exodus deliverance and the helplessness of Israelites and their

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<sup>12</sup> The LXX translates the verb  $\text{קָרַב}$  with  $\text{πολεμέω}$ , a verb frequently used in Revelation (2:16; 12:7; 13:4; 17:14; 19:11) to describe the war between Christ and the dragon plus his allies.

<sup>13</sup> After making this observation, Scott Ryan comments, “In a turning of the tables, the Egyptians claim they are the ones who need to be freed from the Israelites because of God’s campaign against them.” Scott C. Ryan, *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior: Listening to Romans and Other Jewish Voices*, WUNT 2. Reihe 507 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 27.



place to only trust in God’s power: “So the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. When Israel saw the great power which the LORD had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in His servant Moses” (Exod 14:30–31).

Several scholars agree that the salvation of Israel is solely achieved through divine agency. For instance, Charles Sherlock adamantly argues that these texts unmistakably depict God as the sole combatant, as the entire rescue operation unfolds under his command, and Israel’s role was only to trust him amid their seemingly insurmountable situation.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Scott Ryan contends that the narrative consistently underscores God’s initiative to wage war to deliver Israel from the power of its oppressors.<sup>15</sup> This point is further reinforced by the following chapter (Exod 15), wherein fervent praises towards God punctuate the recounting of the victory at the Red Sea for the exodus deliverance.

Exodus 15:1–18, often referred to as the “Song of the Sea,”<sup>16</sup> is an ancient poem. As articulated by Millard Lind, its central focus is on the display of military might and the decisive victory of Yahweh over Pharaoh and his chariots at the sea.<sup>17</sup> The idea of victory as solely achieved by the hand of God permeates the entire chapter. First of all, the song of praise, sung in the aftermath of the victorious battle, acknowledges that the victory was a gift from God to his people.<sup>18</sup> In verses 15:2–3, the destruction of the Egyptians is recounted, explicitly identifying God as the object of Israel’s adoration. Particularly noteworthy is verse 3, where the declaration “the Lord is a warrior” not only

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Sherlock, *The God Who Fights: The War Tradition in Holy Scripture*, RSCT 6 (Lewiston, NY: Rutherford House, 1993), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Ryan, *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior*, 28.

<sup>16</sup> It is also called the Song of Moses.

<sup>17</sup> Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 43. Another example is the song of Deborah (Judg 5:4–5).

characterizes God as the divine warrior but also reveals that war was part of the divine plan of salvation. Lind notes that Exodus 15:3 is the first instance where God is first referred to as a “warrior,” with no indication of Israel’s participation in the fight, as God’s judgment is executed through nature miracles.<sup>19</sup> Lind aptly captures this sentiment: “This ancient poem presents Yahweh as a warrior God not in that he is merely the leader of Israel’s armies, but in that he alone overthrows and destroys the army of Pharaoh in the Sea.”<sup>20</sup> The praise of God’s victory over Pharaoh and his army continues until 15:12.

A notable shift in tone and content occurs at 15:13, signaling a change in the poem’s thematic trajectory. From this juncture onward, the poem speaks of the march of God with his people to his holy abode (15:13), mountain, and sanctuary (15:17) from where God will eternally reign. Sherlock postulates that the reference seems to be to the conquest, either in anticipation or hindsight.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Miller contends that the reference is to the march through the wilderness and the conquest.<sup>22</sup> Lind insightfully interprets the significance of these spatial designations by emphasizing that the motif of the miracle at the Red Sea sets the character both of the conquest and God’s kingship because the poem unites it with the march to Canaan, the conquest, and God’s eternal kingship.<sup>23</sup> If this analysis is correct, it can be deduced that the description of holy war in 15:15–16 is in anticipation of the conquest in which the victory will be accomplished not by the might of numbers or weapons but by terror and dread (15:16) wrought by God. This point substantiates the notion that the monergistic paradigm of holy war exemplified at the Red Sea, with God as the sole combatant, is destined to be the prevailing paradigm

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<sup>19</sup> Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 49.

<sup>20</sup> Millard C. Lind, “Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament” 16 (1971): 20.

<sup>21</sup> Sherlock, *The God Who Fights*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Miller, *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel*, 115.

<sup>23</sup> Millard C. Lind, “Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament,” *Biblical Research* 16 (1971): 21–22.

for the forthcoming conquest of Canaan.

But what role is designated for the Israelites in the exodus salvation story? Another puzzle piece of holy war that should receive attention concerns the human component: “the faith of God’s people.” Notably, it is not Israel’s active involvement in warfare that leads to triumph but rather their unwavering faith and reliance on God, the divine warrior, who fights for them.<sup>24</sup> In truth, Israel’s response of faith is already anticipated in the signs given to Israel through Moses and Aaron (4:31) and in their compliance with God’s commands during the final plague (12:1–27a).<sup>25</sup> However, the most lucid illustration of this concept is found in Moses’s exhortation to Israel to place their trust in God (14:13–14). Their trust stems from God’s commitment to his people, prompting him to fight on their behalf, and the actual realization of their faith is vividly portrayed in 14:30–31. In these passages, the interwoven ideas of God’s singular role as the divine warrior securing victory for his people and faith in God’s power as the essential role of God’s people stand in the forefront. In this context, two important characteristics about the nature of faith can be observed.

First, God’s action is prevenient to God’s people’s response of faith. Several scholars support this point.<sup>26</sup> A prominent theme that is tied to the story of the exodus

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Waltke and Charles Yu argue that God does not fight through Israelite arms; rather, he fights for and apart from Israel, and victory is achieved by faith in the I Am of hosts. See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 395.

<sup>25</sup> According to Trimm, the stories of trust in Yahweh already appear in early chapters of Exodus: the midwives saving the newborn males (Exod 1:15–21) and Moses’s parents risking their lives to protect him (Exod 2:1–10). However, he goes on to state that the stories of broad Israelite faith are narrated in three major places: (1) in the context of Moses and Aaron performing signs Yahweh had given them to show before the Israelites (Exod 4:31); (2) in the midst of tenth plague in which Israelites obeyed the commands that Yahweh had given them (Exod 12:1–28); and (3) after the Red Sea event (Exod 14:30–31). See Trimm, “*YHWH Fights for Them!*”, 73–74.

<sup>26</sup> For example, Horst Preuss explains that the faith of Israelites is the result occasioned by the Red Sea event. See Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, vol. 2, Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 163; Similarly, Thomas Dozeman asserts that the destruction of Pharaoh is the decisive moment at which the Israelites began to acquire faith in Moses and in Yahweh. See Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 114. The pattern of acquiring faith on the basis of what God did for his people is also found 4:30–31. Trimm rightly observes that Israelites acquire faith (4:31)

deliverance is *Israel's grumbling and disobedience*, whose focal point is the disbelief in God's power to deliver despite his wondrous works they had seen.<sup>27</sup> A pivotal moment encapsulating this theme is found in 14:10–12, which is immediately followed by Moses's urge for Israel not to fear but to believe in 14:13–14. Moses's words recorded in this passage are, in fact, his stern rebuke aimed at their lack of faith, an indictment that they doubted God's power to secure victory on their behalf. This point is corroborated by the ensuing verses. Their faith in God and his ability to win victory on their behalf solidified only after they witnessed the destruction of the Egyptian army and their own safe passage through the sea (14:19–29). It was then, as recorded in 14:30–31, that they finally “feared” (וַיִּירָאוּ) God and “believed” (וַיִּאֱמִינוּ) in both him and his servant Moses (14:30–31). The catalyst for their trust in God was their recognition of God's exercise of his military might against their adversaries.

Second, true faith works. Nahum M. Sarna provides valuable insight into this concept when discussing 14:31, elucidating that “faith” in the Hebrew Bible does not merely entail doctrinal convictions or adherence to a set of beliefs but instead embodies trust and loyalty manifest through obedience and wholehearted commitment.<sup>28</sup> The idea of faith being translated into obedience becomes evident in 14:15. Here, God commands Moses to tell the people of Israel to “go forward” (וַיִּסָּעוּ). While in the preceding verse (14:14) the people of Israel were instructed to “be still” (תִּחַרְרֵשׁוּן) since God will undertake the battle on their behalf, this does not imply that they should remain passive. Rather, the command to “be still” signifies that their role in the battle is not their military participation but their stance of faith, rooted in trust in God's ability to liberate them from

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immediately after Aaron's performance of three signs before them (14:30). See Trimm, “*YHWH Fights for Them!*”, 73.

<sup>27</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, eds., “Exodus, Book Of,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 252.

<sup>28</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 75.

Egypt.<sup>29</sup> Their faith, in turn, must become palpable and be enacted through obedience by going through the sea on dry ground (14:16).<sup>30</sup>

All in all, the story of the exodus deliverance described in Exodus 14–15 provides the clearest example of the ideal form of holy war in which the roles to be played by God and the people of God are most clearly explained. Yahweh is a warrior (15:3) who fights for Israel and delivers them from Egypt. He needs no human help because he battles alone and accomplishes the victory over the enemy. The role of Israel is to stand still (14:14) in a posture of patient trust and then proceed through the parted sea (14:15), which represents the embodiment of faith in action. This compellingly demonstrates that true faith is neither inert nor passive but a dynamic force that constantly propels God’s people to comply with God’s commands.

### **The Conquest**

Before delving into the issue of divine grace and human responsibility as portrayed in the narrative of the conquest of the promised land, several key aspects of the conquest in relation to the holy war must be considered for the purpose of this study.

First, conquest must be apprehended not merely as a human-centric act of warfare but as a manifestation of divine judgment. It stands as a manifestation of divine retribution aimed at the Canaanites for their idolatrous practices, which greatly offended God due to their distortion and perversion of the divine image in human beings.<sup>31</sup> The divine mandate for the complete destruction of the Canaanites, as detailed in

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<sup>29</sup> William Propp offers three possible options to interpret the expression “to be still”: (1) “you may stay calm” in contrast to “Yahweh will fight” (14:14); (2) “you be quiet” in contrast to “Israel’s sons cried” (14:10); (3) R. Meir’s interpretation, which he mentions as a third, less likely possibility: “Yahweh would fight for you even if you were still.” He regards the first option as the best. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 496–97.

<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, the book of Hebrews portrays Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea as an act of faith (Heb 11:29)

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Special Grace Covenants (Old Testament)*, vol. 2 (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book, 2014), 267.

Deuteronomy 7:1–6, gives another rationale for the conquest: safeguarding God’s people from the contamination of sin so they may be God’s holy people.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, the conquest narrative takes on eschatological significance: the destruction of the pagan Canaanites and the burning of their cities with fire serves as a type of Christ’s eschatological triumph over an unbelieving world with the destruction of the world and its inhabitants.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the conquest narrative prefigures the final judgment executed by Christ at the end of the world.

Second, the notion of land as a bestowed gift and as an object to be conquered sets the context for understanding the intertwined concepts of God’s military intervention (divine grace) and Israel’s expression of faith (human responsibility) found within the conquest narrative. The idea of the land as Israel’s inheritance finds its roots in the promises God made to the patriarchs.<sup>34</sup> Particularly in the book of Deuteronomy, which offers the most comprehensive elaboration on the land as the fulfillment of patriarchal promises,<sup>35</sup> references emphasizing the land as the realization of these promises abound. (e.g., Deut 1:8, 21, 35; 4:1; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:13; 8:1; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 19:8; 26:3; 28:11). In this sense, the book of Joshua is ultimately about Israel’s inheritance of the land, bringing the patriarchal promises to fulfillment.<sup>36</sup> An intriguing aspect that surfaces in these passages, linked to Israel’s inheritance of the land, is the juxtaposition of the verbs

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<sup>32</sup> Niehaus, *Biblical Theology*, 2:267.

<sup>33</sup> Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1999), 28. Similarly, Merrill comments: “The conquest narrative here, then, serves as a template against which not only Israel’s role as an extension of divine sovereignty was on display but also as one that serves to suggest the eschatological triumph of the Lord God over all things.” Eugene H. Merrill, “The Conquest of Jericho: A Narrative Paradigm for Theocratic Policy?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169, no. 675 (July-September 2012): 312.

<sup>34</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order: Biblical Eschatology in Focus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 53.

<sup>35</sup> Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, NSBT, vol. 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 81.

<sup>36</sup> Harstad summarizes the primary theme of the book of Joshua as follows: “The Lord fulfills his promise to give the land of Canaan to his covenant people Israel as an inheritance.” Harstad, *Joshua*, 26.

denoting divine sovereignty and human responsibility: נתן (“to give”) and ירש (“to possess” / “to inherit”). A good example is Deuteronomy 2:31. Discussing Israel’s taking of Sihon’s land, James M. Hamilton points out that while God’s giving Sihon over to Israel reflects divine sovereignty, it is the human responsibility of Israel to take possession and occupy the land.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the apparent tension between the land as a bestowed gift and a territory to be conquered and claimed resolves when the spotlight is exclusively directed toward God. The only reason why Israel will possess the land as an inheritance is that God will take it from the inhabitants of the land and give it to her.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, faith takes the shape of covenant obedience. Taking possession of the land through holy war and retaining it as a gift hinged upon Israel’s obedience to the Mosaic covenant.<sup>39</sup> Marten Woudstra keenly observes that the initial chapter of Joshua, serving as a preamble to the book, contains various elements and themes that will be further developed in subsequent chapters. One such theme is the call for covenant obedience mentioned in Joshua 1:3, 7–8, 13, 17–78, which is further developed in later chapters. This theme is prominent in scenes like Achan’s covenant transgression in chapter 7 and covenant renewal at Shechem in chapter 24.<sup>40</sup> One crucial aspect of covenant obedience deserves mention: its inseparability from faith. Covenant obedience is not a detached human action from faith; rather, it is faith actualized through obedience to God’s commands.<sup>41</sup> Without a doubt, this faith demonstrated through covenant

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<sup>37</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 121–22.

<sup>38</sup> Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Niehaus, *The Special Grace Covenants*, 265.

<sup>40</sup> Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 56.

<sup>41</sup> John Scott Redd, “The Abrahamic Covenant,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 143. Charles Ryrie helpfully explains that though the Mosaic covenant involved the exercise of faith, it was not by command but by implication because the covenant relationship implies that Israel must have an attitude of trust toward God and, therefore, there is no disharmony between faith and works under the law. See Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1963), 46. In the

obedience appears to be the key to the success of the conquest, as demonstrated by the contrasting events of the battle at Jericho in chapter 6 (success) and Achan's transgression of the covenant in chapter 7 (failure).<sup>42</sup>

With these foundational points in mind, let us now direct our attention to the holy war portrayed in the conquest narrative. Here, we can observe how God alone takes charge, fighting on behalf of his people and securing the promised land for them. The sole requirement for Israel was to place trust in him and uphold the covenant rather than actively participate in warfare.

The conquest narrative portrays that the presence of God in war and his warring activity is the sole cause of Israel's victory over the enemy, leaving no room for human contribution to this victory. A set of passages and narratives from the book of Joshua testify to divine monergism, primarily clustered in chapters 1–12. Beginning with 1:2, the verb נתן (“to give”; δίδωμι) is frequently used throughout the book (e.g., 1:2, 3, 15; 2:9; 18:3; 20:2; 21:43; 23:15; 24:13) with emphasis on a singular action of God, stressing the central theme of the book: *God himself freely gives the land to his covenant people*.<sup>43</sup> God enables Israel's crossing of the Jordan river (3–4) by drying it up.<sup>44</sup> He

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Mosaic covenant, obedience from the heart (Exod 19:5) was intimately connected to faith in God (Exod 19:9).

<sup>42</sup> Jerome Creach argues that while Joshua 5:13–6:27 is an illustration of Israel's faith, accepting God's gift of Jericho, Joshua 7, the story of Achan's transgression of the covenant, depicts quite the opposite situation. Jerome F. D. Creach, *Joshua*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 68.

<sup>43</sup> Harstad, *Joshua*, 59. This verb is also used specifically in a holy war context by way of expression “given into your hands.” A good example is Joshua 8:1c: “I have given into your hand the king of Ai, and his people, and his land.”

<sup>44</sup> According to Dozeman, the crossing of the Jordan River is a story about holy war conceived as a conquest of the land as suggested by the presence of the ark. Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 64. The presence of the ark during warfare was important, as it represented the presence of the warrior God with his people. See Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 40. Lind insightfully argues that the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River should be seen as a recapitulation of the event at the Red Sea suggesting that the pattern of the exodus was used to symbolize the conquest, meaning that there was no fighting and Yahweh was the leader. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior*, 78, 82.



alone brings down the walls of Jericho as Israel's chief commander (6, cf. Exod 15:3).<sup>45</sup> Also, he threw the enemy into confusion (10:10), hurled hailstones from heaven (10:11), and even made the sun and moon stand still (10:13–14), enabling Israel to win the victory and take possession of the land. He hardens the heart of the enemy so that they may be annihilated and, as a result, Israelites may occupy the land (11:20). After all, Israel drove the Canaanites from the land and took possession of it only because God fought for them (10:42; 23:3).

In addition to the concept of the warrior God who fights for his people, another essential holy war principle remains consistent throughout the conquest narrative: the faith of God's people expressed in covenant obedience. The book of Joshua records the accounts of both the success and failure of Israel in their conquest mission. While the recurring pattern of the blessing as a result of covenant obedience is evident in chapters 3–4, 6, and 8, the divine judgment resulting from covenant transgression finds its most poignant illustration in the account of Achan's violation of covenant in chapter 7.<sup>46</sup> The juxtaposition of these two contrasting outcomes within the confines of the conquest narrative serves to illuminate the role of Israel's faith during the period of conquest with greater clarity.

The motif of faith demonstrated through covenant obedience emerges as significant from the very outset of the book. God commands Joshua to believe in his

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<sup>45</sup> The first battle at Jericho is introduced by the appearance of the commander of the army of the Lord (5:13–14). Gordon Mitchell adds an important insight into this scene: "The position of this text immediately before the battle at Jericho shows that the human effort is only a faint shadow of the divine." Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land: A Reading of the Book of Joshua*, JSOTSup 134 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 49. This is probably why, as Creach rightly observed, the subsequent account of the battle at Jericho in chapter 6 hardly reports any recognizable military action on the part of Israel. See Jerome F.D. Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, IRUSC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 115. In addition, Both Lind and Paul Hinlicky agree that the army of Israel, for the most part, executes a mop-up operation in Joshua, particularly after the fall of Jericho. See Lind, "Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament," 29; Paul R. Hinlicky, "The Theology of the Divine Warrior in the Book of Joshua," *Word & World* 37, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 274. Interestingly, Niehaus views the divine commander as the preincarnate Son. See Niehaus, *The Special Grace Covenants*, 274.

<sup>46</sup> Harstad, *Joshua*, 35.

promises (1:5–6) and to keep the covenant given through Moses, upon which hinges the prosperity and success of Israel (1:7–8). Joshua heeds and follows the divine instructions imparted by the “commander of Yahweh’s army” (5:14).<sup>47</sup> Joshua and the Israelites obeyed everything God commanded them, which resulted in the tearing down of Jericho’s formidable walls (5:13–6:27).<sup>48</sup> In stark contrast, the narrative of Israel’s breach of faith through Achan’s covenant transgression underscores that the land could be forfeited due to covenantal disobedience (7).<sup>49</sup> Strikingly, the testimony of the faith

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<sup>47</sup> The encounter of Joshua with the commander of God’s army provides a significant point of continuity with Revelation’s visions of holy war since this scene repeats in almost the same manner in Revelation. In support of this point, Warren Austin Gage argues that there are several typological patterns that recapitulate in Revelation: John receives an unexpected vision of a divine warrior (Rev 1:12–19); Jesus, the true Joshua, appeared with a sword proceeding out of his mouth (1:16); Jesus commands John to write letters to the seven churches, calling them to purity for holy war (2:1–3:22); John fell before the feet of the divine warrior as though dead (1:17). See Warren Austin Gage, *Essays in Biblical Theology* (Fort Lauderdale, FL: Warren A. Gage, 2010), 59. One striking feature of this account that should be noted is that the divine commander seems not to be, as Trent Butler notes, automatically tied either army, thus siding with neither party of Israel and Canaanites. Trent C. Butler, *Joshua 1–12*, 2nd ed., WBC, vol. 7A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 340. This point is confirmed by Joshua’s question: “Are you for us, or for our adversaries?” (5:13). One possible explanation for the enigmatic neutrality of the divine commander is provided by Gregory A. Boyd, who explains that the appearance of this neutral angelic commander provides a confirming indication that the extremely violent conquest was not Yahweh’s idea. See Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2017), 2:976. Yet another possible interpretive option is to interpret it in light of the role of faith in entering into a favorable relationship to warrior God. This is supported by the contrast between the story of a faithful pagan prostitute, Rahab, and that of an unfaithful Israelite, Achan. If one has true faith in God, even a pagan prostitute is saved (2:12–14), whereas God even departs from his own people if they renounce their faith in him and break covenant (7:11–12).

<sup>48</sup> Creach claims that human achievement in this battle is all but denied, for Jericho’s defeat was a great sign of Israel’s trust in God. Creach, *Joshua*, 58. The writer of Hebrews captures well the essence of the battle at Jericho as the wholehearted trust in the power of God: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days” (Heb 11:30). Paul House also supports this view by arguing that Jericho fell because of Israel’s faith in divine power, not because of a long and successful siege against the fortified city. See Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 204.

<sup>49</sup> The destruction of Achan is related to two important ideas of holy war ideology: (1) *hērem* and (2) the reversal of holy war. According to Longman, the Hebrew word *hērem* is variously translated as “banned” or “devoted things.” Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 46. Jackey A. Naudé provides a fuller explanation on the meaning of this word by saying that its verbal form, *hāram*, is used only in the causative stems (*hiphil* [48x] and *hophal* [3x]), referring to a special act of consecration involving consecration of something or someone as a permanent and definitive offering for the sanctuary, or during the period of war, the consecration of a city and its inhabitants to destruction, with the clearest example being provided by the stories of Jericho’s fall (Josh 6) and the disobedience of Achan (Josh 7). See Jackey A. Naudé, “הָרַם, הָרַם,” in *NIDOTTE*, 276. The former tells a story of total destruction of Jericho commanded by God (Josh 6:17), while the latter speaks of Israel’s defeat through Achan’s disobedience (Achan’s taking of the devoted things; 7:1), which can be reversed only by destroying the devoted thing (Achan in his sin) from their midst (7:12). Thus, *hērem* was the reaction of Yahweh against sin. Stephen B. Chapman adds an important insight into the close relation between *hērem* regulation and the faith of Israel in God, stating that when set within the battle narratives, its nature is treated as a test of full obedience to God. See Stephen B. Chapman, “Martial Memory, Peaceable Vision: Divine War in the Old Testament,” in *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem*, ed. Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan

provided by both Rahab (2:9–13) and the Gibeonites (9:3–10) enabled them to find favor in the eyes of the God of Israel and escape his wrathful judgment.<sup>50</sup> The farewell speech of Joshua at the close of the book of Joshua (23) and the story of the covenant renewal at Shechem (24) clearly show that Israel’s success and failure in a holy war are closely tied to their adherence to or violation of the covenant.

In conclusion, the conquest narrative furnishes yet another piece of evidence for the theocentric nature of holy war. God fights alone on behalf of his covenant people, and all that is required of them is not their military participation but their complete trust in God.

### **The Book of Isaiah**

Holy war is a recurring theme in the prophetic literature of ancient Israel.<sup>51</sup> The quintessential model of holy war, vividly portrayed in the exodus and conquest narratives, reverberates throughout the Old Testament narratives<sup>52</sup> and subsequently finds

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(Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 59. This brings us to the next point to be considered: the reversal of holy war. In contrast to the concept of God fighting for his people, on some occasions, he decides to fight against his own people. The decision to fight for, or, against his people is made on the basis of the covenantal faithfulness of Israel. According to Longman, the relationship between the divine warrior and the covenant in the blessings and curses of Israel is best explained in Deuteronomy 28, which describes both his protection for Israel as a result of their covenant obedience (28:7) and their defeat before their enemies as a result of their covenant disobedience (28:25). See Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 49. The failure in the conquest of Ai because of Achan’s disobedience (7:2–5) and the subsequent victory in the conquest of Ai (8) as a consequence of Israel’s rededication to God in covenantal allegiance well illustrate this aspect of the reversal of holy war and the close ties between the act of divine warrior and the covenant. The concepts of both *hērem* and the reversal of holy war are also present in the book of Revelation. Such passages as Revelation 2:12, 16, 18 describe Jesus Christ as a divine warrior who is ready to fight against the new covenant people if they break the covenant with him. Also, the Greek word *κατάθεμα* is used in Revelation 22:3, which is the equivalent term for the Hebrew word *hērem*. Although LXX translates *hērem* with *ἀνάθεμα* throughout the OT (Num 2:13; Deut 7:26; Josh 7:1; Judg 1:17; 1 Chr 2:7), the basic meaning remains the same. The description of Jesus Christ as divine warrior fighting against the new covenant people and the presence of the *hērem* idea in the book of Revelation show that Revelation makes use of various elements of holy war tradition to shape its theology.

<sup>50</sup> For a detailed discussion on this topic, see Cory Barnes, “Testimonies of Faith and Fear: Canaanite Responses to YHWH’s Work in Joshua,” *Themelios* 46, no. 2 (2021): 279–89.

<sup>51</sup> For the representative texts concerning the theme of holy war in the Prophets, see F. R. Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and Gordon J. McConville, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 830–32.

<sup>52</sup> Lind provides the following list of the battle narratives of the OT affected by the theology of the monergistic holy war in which Yahweh fights alone with no human involvement: (1) deliverance from Egypt (Exod 14); (2) Joshua’s battle at Jericho (Josh 6); (3) Deborah’s victory over the Canaanite coalition

its way into the prophetic literature.<sup>53</sup> Yet, a notable shift in perspective regarding warfare surfaces in the prophetic writings. While the early prophets tended to endorse the might of human armies (e.g., 2 Kings 13:14–19), thus departing from the paradigmatic pattern of holy war, the later prophets were critical of it, including reliance on foreign alliances (e.g., Isa 30:1–2; 31:1; Hos 10:13).<sup>54</sup> According to Gerhard von Rad, the tradition of the monergistic holy war found its entry into prophetic books such as Amos, Micah, Ezekiel and Zechariah.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, a peculiar use of the theme of holy war arises with the Old Testament apocalyptic texts such as Daniel 7 and Zechariah 14—the eschatological use of this concept dealing with the message of the future hope of salvation when God returns once again as a mighty warrior to save his people.<sup>56</sup>

Even though examples of passages portraying divine monergism in the holy war abound across the prophetic writings, I will focus exclusively on a few representative passages from the book of Isaiah. The rationale for this selective approach is best

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(Judg 5); (4) Gideon against the Midianites (Judg 6:7); (5) Samuel’s battle with the Philistines (1 Sam 7:5); (6) David’s battle with Goliath (1 Sam 17); (7) the king of Syria and Elisha (2 Kgs 7); (8) Benhadad and Elisha (2 Kgs 7); (9) Isaiah’s counsel to Ahaz (Isa 7:1–9); (10) Isaiah and Sennacherib (2 Kgs 19); (11) and Jehoshaphat against the people of the East (2 Chr 20:1–30). See Lind, “Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament,” 30. In contrast, some scholars like Albert Curry Winn views some of these events of war as synergistic. For more details on this position, see Albert Curry Winn, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More: Biblical Ambiguity and the Abolition of War* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 46–50. According to Curry, traces of the monergistic holy war model are also found in the poetic books like Psalms (e.g., Pss 33:16–17; 34:7; 44:2–3; 106:9–11). Winn, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More*, 42–46.

<sup>53</sup> In support of this point, Ames argues that the motif of the divine warrior in the prophetic books builds upon the exodus and conquest tradition that Yahweh fights for the nation of Israel. See Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” 829. According to Preuss, the pattern of holy war in which human participation is more emphasized, as opposed to divine activity, increasingly recedes into the background until the culmination is reached in the Chronicles, especially evidenced in 2 Chronicles 20, which clearly expresses that the war does not belong to humans but to God (2 Chr 20:29). See Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:132. For a detailed discussion on this idea contained in 2 Chronicles 20, see Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible*, 145–49.

<sup>54</sup> Charles H. H. Scobie, *Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 825–26.

<sup>55</sup> von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 109–13.

<sup>56</sup> For more details on this topic, see Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 61–71. Wars described in the apocalyptic texts are, for the most part, monergistic, but they undergo a radical transformation in that these wars are no more about the defense of Israel from historic foes or divine punishment of Israel by those foes; rather, they are the final judgment on the whole earth, the whole cosmos, ushering in a final peace. Winn, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More*, 112.

explained by von Rad, who argues that no other prophets stand as close as Isaiah to the old faith tradition, especially the narrative of Exodus 14, where all human military activity is utterly rejected, thus rejecting any human synergism.<sup>57</sup> F. R. Ames lends further support to this view by contending that in Isaiah, divine warfare is characterized as a royal prerogative, for he is a sovereign king of the earth who reigns from the heavens (Isa 6:1–13).<sup>58</sup> I will not enter the detailed debates about the select texts but simply identify a few passages that illustrate the concepts of divine monergism in holy war and faith as the sole requirement for God’s people. Additionally, I will briefly discuss the Zion tradition as the conceptual framework within which the above two concepts must be understood.

In his comprehensive examination of the divine warrior motif in Isaiah, Ryan concludes that depictions of God’s engagement in warfare found in Isaiah are closely connected to the theme of Israel’s ultimate restoration.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, T. R. Hobbs asserts that the vision of restoration in Isaiah is particularized for Israel and finds its locus in Zion, designating Zion as the spatial center of Israel’s future restoration.<sup>60</sup> Hence, in order to get a proper understanding of the use of the theme of holy war in the context of Isaiah, the key lies in interpreting it against the canvas of the Zion tradition, which consists of God’s promises for Israel’s restoration at Zion and his unwavering will to

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<sup>57</sup> von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 108. He emphasizes that it is from this tradition that he got the idea of faith, the rejection of armaments and alliances, and the motif of looking to Yahweh and of standing still (p. 107).

<sup>58</sup> Ames, “Warfare and Divine Warfare,” 830.

<sup>59</sup> Hobbs argues that regardless of how this motif is used—whether to show the disciplinary aspect of his warring activity for a rebellious people using foreign armies, the establishment of divine justice through his agent, or arriving in person to defeat enemies—the visions of God’s warring activity should be understood against the background of the restoration of Israel. See Ryan, *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior*, 107. For a comprehensive analysis of this motif in Isaiah, see Ryan, *Divine Conflict and the Divine Warrior*, 78–107.

<sup>60</sup> T. R. Hobbs, *A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament*, Old Testament Studies 3 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 219–20. The Zion tradition also enters the book of Revelation. A good example is Revelation 14:1–5, which is a description of the multitude of the redeemed people of God standing on Mount Zion with the Lamb.

bring this plan of redemption to pass, even if it means to fight against all the evil forces opposing this plan.<sup>61</sup>

With this context in mind, the following passages referring to divine monergism in holy war and the faith of God's people must be understood. Isaiah 7:1–9 is perhaps the most representative example in which the concepts of divine monergism in holy war and trust in God as the essential requirement for God's people emerge as coalescing themes. Nested within the broader section of chapters 7–39, which underscores the contrast between trust in the nations and trust in God, and chapters 7–12, an introduction to this unit, Isaiah 7:1–9 spotlights Ahaz's lack of faith in God's deliverance and his reliance on foreign nation Assyria, which resulted in the destruction of Israel's land, leaving hope that God will restore Israel from captivity.<sup>62</sup>

It is within this context that Isaiah's exhortation for Ahaz not to be afraid but rather trust in God must be understood: "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint" (Isa 7:4 NRSV); "if you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (Isa 7:9 NRSV). According to von Rad, there is parallelism between Exodus 14 and Isaiah 7 suggesting that Yahweh's command to be still and not to fear can only mean that the prophet proclaims this war as a holy war for Yahweh and, therefore, calls the people of God to faith in the absolute miracle of Yahweh.<sup>63</sup> Lois Barrett, referencing this verse, argues that God would work through the faith of his people, not their military

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<sup>61</sup> Vernard Eller helpfully points out the connection between the warring activity of God and his plan for the restoration of Zion and notes that Isaiah agrees with Joshua: Yahweh has a purpose and a plan, and regardless of all sorts of resistance, war cannot be frustrated. Vernard Eller, *War and Peace: From Genesis to Revelation* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1981), 64. He goes on to state that the Zion tradition embedded in Isaiah shows that the cause of God's peace cannot suffer final defeat, and the coming of that peace is guaranteed by God himself (pp. 66–67).

<sup>62</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 193–94.

<sup>63</sup> von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 102–3.

participation.<sup>64</sup> Vernard Eller adds an important insight that faith in Isaiah is the faith in the preservation of Zion and the accomplishment of its peace, which later becomes faith in the Prince of Peace, who will establish and sustain that peace with justice and righteousness (Isa 9:5–7).<sup>65</sup>

Another instance where divine monergism in holy war and faith in God as the sole requirement for God’s people converge is found in Isaiah 30:15–16, which reads, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength. But you refused and said no! We will flee upon horses” (NRSV). This passage is a critique against trust in human weapons<sup>66</sup> but, at the same time, a message of hope and salvation.<sup>67</sup> As part of the prophecies in Isaiah 28–31 dealing with the motif of Hezekiah’s difficulty to trust in Yahweh,<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 30:15–16 speak of the rejection of any human military co-participation and total dependence on Yahweh through faith in him, emphasizing divine monergism. Von Rad adamantly argues that the Hebrew word גְבוּרָה (“strength”) most likely means military strength, which does not depend on horses but on “keeping quiet,” suggesting that faith in Isaiah refers to the absolute miracle of Yahweh.<sup>69</sup> John Oswalt similarly contends that terminology like “returning,” “trust,”

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<sup>64</sup> Lois Barrett, *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1987), 39.

<sup>65</sup> Eller, *War and Peace*, 68. According to Andrew Abernethy, there are four main passages (9:6–7; 11:1–10; 16:5; 32:1) that speak of a future Davidic ruler, describing the key characteristics of this Davidic ruler as (1) an extension of God’s own plan, (2) a savior and deliverer, and (3) an agent of justice and righteousness. See Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, NSBT 40 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 125–37. Considering Revelation’s allusion to Isaiah 11:10 in Revelation 5:5b and 22:16b, the object of faith implied in these Isaianic passages is most likely the Davidic king Jesus Christ, who reigns now as the heavenly Davidic king as suggested by Revelation 5:5b and 22:16b. For the use of Isaiah 11:10 in Revelation 5:5b and 22:16b, see Fekkes, *Isaiah and Prophetic Traditions in the Book of Revelation*, 150–53.

<sup>66</sup> Winn, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More*, 96.

<sup>67</sup> S. H. Widyapranawa, *Isaiah 1–39: The Lord Is Savior, Faith in National Crisis*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 188.

<sup>68</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 60.

<sup>69</sup> von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, 102–3.

“rest,” and “quietness” in Isaiah 30:15 are used chiastically with “returning” paralleling “trust” and “rest” paralleling “quietness,” which collectively suggest relinquishing one’s own efforts.<sup>70</sup> He goes on to state that this is the same message delivered by Moses to Israel (Exod 14:13) and by Isaiah to Ahaz (Isa 7:3–9).<sup>71</sup> The connection between Isaiah 30:15, Exodus 14:13, and Isaiah 7:3–9 further reinforces the idea that divine monergism in holy war and trust in God are the fundamental ideas underlying the message of Isaiah 30:15–16.

The motif of divine monergism in holy war undergoes a radical transformation toward the end of the book. Isaiah 59 stresses both the ideas of warfare as God’s sole prerogative and the hopelessness of the human predicament of sin. Structurally speaking, while Isaiah 59: 1–8 consists of a prophetic attack on sinful Israel, 59:9–13 speaks of the people recognizing their present sinful state and consequently making a confession of sin, which prompts the divine warrior in 59:15–17 to arise and come to Israel’s aid.<sup>72</sup> Surprisingly, God’s enemies against whom he conducts warfare are identified as sinful Israel, those who have broken the covenant with God.<sup>73</sup> Thus, God’s threats against Israel are because of their lack of moral qualities such as justice, peace, and righteousness, which signals that holy war in Isaiah 59 takes on ethical and spiritual character.<sup>74</sup> In this hopeless situation, where there seems to be no “man” to bring solution to this plight (59:16a), God prepares for battle by clothing himself with armor, helmet, a tunic, and a cloak and arises to make war against the chief enemy of his people as a divine warrior

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<sup>70</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, 555.

<sup>71</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, 555.

<sup>72</sup> Mark J. Boda, “Return to Me”: *A Biblical Theology of Repentance*, NSBT 35 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 74.

<sup>73</sup> This is a theme not at all foreign to the holy war ideology of the OT as evidenced in the account of Achan’s covenant disobedience (Josh 7), which resulted in God fighting against Israel.

<sup>74</sup> Annang Asumang, “‘Resist Him’ (1 Pet 5:9): Holiness and Non-Retaliatory Responses to Unjust Suffering as ‘Holy War’ in 1 Peter,” *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)* 11, no. 3 (March 2011): 21–22.



(59:16b–17).<sup>75</sup> It was “his own arm” that has brought salvation (59:16b), which emphasizes the absolute divine monergism, leaving no hint of reliance on human military strength. According to Mark D. Owens, the reference to God’s arm bringing salvation in verse 16 connects this passage with Isaiah’s new exodus theme (Isa 40:10; 51:9; 52:10), which sheds light on the significance of the restored Zion/Jerusalem described in Isaiah 60–62 as the goal of Isaiah’s new exodus. Therefore, Isaiah 59, after all, is a message of hope for the restoration and salvation of God’s people (59:20) through divine intervention, not the account of vengeful judgment for human sinfulness.<sup>76</sup>

So, what is the role designated for the people of God in this context? Isaiah 59 portrays that all faith and righteousness have vanished from the world, including Israel. Consequently, the judgment of God stands as a grim reality facing the people of God. Despite the dire description of the fate of God’s people, 59:20 speaks of the hope for their redemption. According to Mark Boda, this verse identifies “repentance” as the key to the redemption of Zion, which relates to Israel’s confession of sin in 59:9–13.<sup>77</sup> Oswalt identifies the divine warrior depicted in 59:15b–21 and later depictions of the divine warrior (61:1–3; 63:1–6) as the future conquering Messiah.<sup>78</sup> This subtly suggests that perhaps the repentance of God’s people can be seen as the result of their hopeful faith in God’s future intervention through the conquering Messiah, who will fight and defeat the sin of his people and restore them to Zion. He will accomplish this task by providing his

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<sup>75</sup> Mark D. Owens, “Spiritual Warfare and the Church’s Mission According to Ephesians 6:10–17,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 67, no. 1 (2016): 91.

<sup>76</sup> After his analysis of the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 59, Thomas Neufeld concludes that God’s warring activity gives primacy to assurance that God’s plan to restore the covenant community will not finally be thwarted since he himself will see to their vindication by purging his people of their impiousness. See Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, “*Put on the Armour of God*”: *The Divine Warrior from Isaiah to Ephesians*, JSNTSup 140 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 47. For his full analysis on the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 59, see Neufeld, “*Put on the Armour of God*”, 42–47.

<sup>77</sup> Boda, “*Return to Me*”, 74–75.

<sup>78</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 616.

people with a “covenant,” which will have as its central feature the empowerment of the indwelling of his Spirit (59:21).<sup>79</sup>

To summarize, the book of Isaiah provides another lens through which to see the elements of divine monergism and faith of God’s people in a holy war as understood in the prophetic context. In Isaiah, the restoration of Zion/Jerusalem serves as the background against which one must understand the warring activity of God as a divine warrior and the role of God’s people as trusting in him. The theme of holy war in Isaiah takes on ethical and spiritual dimensions as God wages war against sin, which generally refers to the lack of God’s moral qualities, such as justice, peace, and righteousness. Annang Asumang emphasizes that the reinterpretation of the holy war motif in apocalyptic, eschatological, and ethical directions continues into the New Testament.<sup>80</sup>

### **Select Holy War Texts in the New Testament**

The theme of holy war continues into the New Testament with a further development of its thoughts. However, it not only further develops but undergoes a radical transformation in the person and work of Jesus Christ. At least three significant differences set apart the New Testament portrayal of holy war from that of the Old Testament. First, in the New Testament, the theme of holy war becomes spiritualized.<sup>81</sup> Holy war is no longer waged against “flesh and blood” enemies but rather against the fallen spiritual forces that operate behind sinful humanity; this idea is most prominent in Ephesians and Revelation.<sup>82</sup> Second, since the battle is no longer against flesh and blood,

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<sup>79</sup> Oswalt notes that Isaiah 59:21 undoubtedly refers to the covenant of prophet, wherein the Spirit of God descends upon the people of God as a whole to empower them to deliver God’s message to the world. See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 531.

<sup>80</sup> Asumang, “‘Resist Him’ (1 Pet 5:9),” 23.

<sup>81</sup> However, this is not at all to say that this war is unrelated or irrelevant to earthly realities since the war waged in the spiritual realm brings about earthly consequences as seen in Revelation’s description of the martyrdom of believers as a consequence of their faithfulness to Christ.

<sup>82</sup> Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*, 2:1085.

it requires no forces of arms but the cruciform lifestyle in imitation of Christ,<sup>83</sup> meaning that holy war in the New Testament takes on ethical character. Third, the emphasis on the empowerment of believers enabled by the Spirit takes center stage. These differences show how the New Testament builds upon the ideas of holy war hinted at in prophetic writings such as Isaiah 59.

Despite these differences, however, one thing remains unchanged: divine monergism and trust in God as the essential role of God's people. The Old Testament's language and pattern of the monergistic holy war are frequently echoed in the New Testament. For instance, the war cry "fear not," which is predominantly associated with the monergistic holy war contexts (e.g., Exod 14:13–14; Josh 8:1; 10:8; 10:25; 11:6), reverberates throughout the New Testament (Matt 1:20–23; Mark 6:50; John 12:14–15; 16:33; Rev 1:17–18; 2:10). Moreover, Jesus is depicted as a divine warrior in the pattern of Yahweh in the exodus. The account of Jesus walking on the water evokes the image of Yahweh's control of the sea in the exodus (Mark 6:45–52).<sup>84</sup> The terminology "signs" or "wonders" (John 4:48) and "finger of God" (Luke 11:20), often found in the Gospels' stories of healings and miracles, are the words used in the story of the exodus to refer to the saving acts of God the divine warrior.<sup>85</sup> Also, just as God fought on behalf of Israel and brought victory for them through people's faith, likewise, the people's faith saved them and brought victory for them (e.g., Luke 8:50; Mark 10:52; 1 John 5:4).

One last crucial point is the manner in which the theme of holy war is employed in the New Testament. According to Tremper Longman, the theme of holy war serves two specific purposes in the New Testament: (1) to describe the death and

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<sup>83</sup> Lusk, "Holy War Fulfilled and Transformed: A Look at Some Important New Testament Texts," in *The Glory of Kings: A Festschrift in Honor of James B. Jordan*, ed. Peter J. Leithart and John Barach (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 81.

<sup>84</sup> Trimm, "YHWH Fights for Them!," 240.

<sup>85</sup> Barrett, *The Way God Fights*, 64.

resurrection of Christ as a cosmic war waged against Satan and the forces of evil,<sup>86</sup> which stand behind the sinful humanity, and (2) to illustrate the Christian life as an ongoing struggle against the “powers and principalities.”<sup>87</sup> Christ defeated Satan, the archenemy, in the war he waged on the cross, settling the outcome of warfare. However, this victory has not yet been fully realized in practice, meaning there is still work to be done by the church. Thus, Christ’s victory, as Longman notes, has an already/not yet character.<sup>88</sup> It is against this backdrop that (1) divine monergism in salvation and (2) faith as the human responsibility of God’s people must be understood. While Christ has successfully and fully achieved victory over the enemy, the church is tasked with manifesting and applying this victory through their unwavering faith during the period between the “already” of Christ’s triumph and the “not yet” of its final fulfillment.

However, the work of the church, while a human act, should not be misconstrued as a human contribution, for Christ himself carries out this work through the Spirit.<sup>89</sup> The Christian life as both divine gift and human responsibility bears a typological relation to the concept of the land, particularly in the period of the conquest during which God repeatedly assures the army of Israel that he has already given the land (Josh 2:24; 6:2, 16) or enemies (Josh 8:1; 10:8, 19) into their hands. But Israel still needed to show human responsibility to conquer by responding to God’s commands through trust in him (Josh 7).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> In fact, the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ in its entirety should also be viewed as warfare he waged as a divine warrior against the spiritual enemy in that the casting out of demons and miracles he performed during his earthly ministry were actually early signs of the climactic moment of his battle against Satan upon the cross, which he decisively won. For more details on this topic, see Winn, *Ain’t Gonna Study War No More*, 142–46; Longman and Reid, *God Is a Warrior*, 91–135.

<sup>87</sup> For a full discussion on this topic, see Tremper Longman III, “The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif,” *WTJ* 44, no. 2 (Fall 1982): 302–35.

<sup>88</sup> Longman, “The Divine Warrior,” 304.

<sup>89</sup> Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 239.

<sup>90</sup> Waltke and Yu provide the following general analysis on the typological similarities between Israel’s land and the church and its life in Christ: (1) both are a divine gift (Gen 15:7, 18; Deut 1:8;

With these distinctive features of the New Testament use of the holy war motif in view, I will briefly discuss aspects of divine monergism and faith as the role of God's people as understood in the holy war texts of the New Testament. I will only look at the two places in the New Testament that describe the Christian life in warfare terms: Ephesians 6:10–20 and 1 John, focusing on 2:13–14, 4:4, and 5:4–5.

### **Ephesians 6:10–20**

Ephesians 6:10–20 vividly portrays the spiritual battle between the forces of Satan and believers. Some scholars go so far as to state that the ideology of holy war permeates the whole letter, shaping its entire argument.<sup>91</sup> Various scholars have stressed that the idea of divine monergism in warfare is prominent in this passage. For instance, Longman asserts that this passage describes the Christians as fighting in true holy war fashion in that the real power is not found in human participants but rather in the power of God.<sup>92</sup> Michael S. Heiser similarly argues that true holy war ideology can be found in this passage in such way that the real power is not found in human participants but in the power of Jesus, the divine warrior-king, with the details of armor described in 6:13–20 conveying the message that the Spirit of Yahweh, the divine warrior of Israel, will fight for his people.<sup>93</sup> Along the same lines, Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld claims that this passage portrays the church, as in 1 Thessalonians 5, as being drawn into the divine agency to

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Rom 6:23); (2) both are entered by faith alone (Num 14:26–45; Josh 7; John 3:16); (3) both are an inheritance (Deut 4:21; Acts 20:32; Eph 1:14); (4) both uniquely offer blessed rest and security (Exod 23:20–31; Deut 11:12; 12:9–10; 28:1–14; Matt 11:28; John 1:5a; 14:9; Heb 4:2–3); (5) both offer God's unique presence (Deut 7:21; Rev 21:3–4); (6) both demand persevering faith (Deut 28:15–19; Heb 6; 10); (7) both have an already-not-yet quality (Heb 11:39–40; Rev 21:1–22:6). See Waltke and Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, 584.

<sup>91</sup> A representative scholar who supports this approach is Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

<sup>92</sup> Longman, "The Divine Warrior," 305. He cites the Isaianic expression, "his own arms worked salvation for him" (Isa 59:16), as the basis of this argument, for he sees it as linked with the expression, "full armor of God."

<sup>93</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 226–27.

continue to do the work of the Messiah as his body.<sup>94</sup>

The above claims can be substantiated by the close examination of the context of Ephesians 6:10–20. First, the fact that Isaiah 59 serves as the typological background for Ephesians 6:10–20 strongly indicates divine monergism in this passage. Paul draws on Isaiah 59, particularly 59: 17–19, to shape his argument in Ephesians 6:10–20 and, therefore, the force of the image of the armor of God in this passage derives from the recognition that the armor is God’s.<sup>95</sup> Isaiah 59 portrays that God puts on the armor himself because there was “no one” (Isa 59:16). However, in Ephesians 6:10–20, a major change occurs in that it is the believers who put on the armor, playing the role of divine warrior.<sup>96</sup> But this passage should not be seen as describing a different reality than Isaiah 59 because it is still Christ himself, the divine warrior, who carries out the work through the indwelling Spirit in the church. Thus, the notion of God’s own arm accomplishing salvation (Isa 59:16b) remains unchanged in Ephesians 6:10–20.

Second, related to the first point, the phrase ἐνδυναμοῦσθε ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ (“be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might”) indicates that believers’ power to wage war against all forces of evil (Eph 6:12) does not emanate intrinsically; rather, it derives from the strength made available to them through the death and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. This power represents the very resurrection power exhibited through Christ’s own resurrection and his conquering of all opposing forces (1:19–21), a power that continues to fortify the heart of believers day by

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<sup>94</sup> Thomas R. Yoder Neufeld, *Killing Enmity: Violence and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 147.

<sup>95</sup> Neufeld, “Put on the Armour of God”, 131.

<sup>96</sup> Gombis argues that Ephesians 10–18 functions as a rhetorical conclusion in which Paul describes the church as intimately identified with the exalted Lord Jesus, and based on this, he exhorts the church to continue to do what Christ has accomplished as divine warrior by putting on God’s own virtues and playing the role of divine warrior on earth. See Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians*, 156–58.

day (3:16–19).<sup>97</sup> S. M. Baugh notes that the power of Christ depicted in 1:19 through the phrase *κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ* is virtually repeated here in 6:10.<sup>98</sup> Timothy Gombis significantly accentuates the necessity of viewing Christ’s resurrection and exaltation through the lens of warfare, as depicted in Ephesians 1:20–23. He contends that the cosmic rulership of Christ depicted in this passage stems from his triumph over the powers and dominions; consequently, he now reigns as Lord over them in the heavenly realm.<sup>99</sup> In other words, Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation should be understood as his conquest of the powers, leading to his cosmic sovereignty. Hence, Christ’s victory over powers and dominions through his resurrection and exaltation unquestionably embodies the essence of divine monergism in the holy war. Christ’s conquest of powers and authorities through his death, resurrection, and exaltation mirror God’s past battles for Israel without human involvement.

However, even though Christ has already conquered powers and authorities, thereby securing salvation for his people, believers bear the responsibility to put on the armor of God and actively respond to God’s commands, as indicated by the imperative use of active verbs found in the “whole armor of God” pericope. According to Donna R. Reinhard, the “whole armor of God” pericope functions as a summary of the whole letter of Ephesians, encapsulating both its indicative (chapters 1–3) and the imperative sections (chapters 4–6), with the phrase “full armor of God” expressing an aspect of divine provision and the command to “put on” (*ἐνδύσασθε*) describing the element of human responsibility.<sup>100</sup> The dual concepts of the “full armor of God” and “putting on” create

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<sup>97</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, AYB, vol. 34A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 760.

<sup>98</sup> S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 539.

<sup>99</sup> Timothy G. Gombis, “The Rhetoric of Divine Warfare in Ephesians,” in *Holy War in The Bible: Christian Morality and An Old Testament Problem*, ed. Heath A. Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 92.

<sup>100</sup> Donna R. Reinhard, “Ephesians 6:10–18: A Call to Personal Piety or Another Way of Describing Union with Christ?,” *JETS* 48, no. 3 (September 2005): 529. Reinhard goes on to argue that the

tension between the bestowed divine gift and human responsibility to appropriate what God has graciously provided. For Reinhard, “putting on the full armor of God,” based on Paul’s Christocentric use of the verb ἐνδύω elsewhere in his writings, is equivalent to “putting on Christ” through the work of the Spirit, which conveys the idea of “union with Christ.”<sup>101</sup> Thus, she stresses the total dependence of believers upon Christ for strength to continue the victory he won on the cross in and through their lives. Divine grace enables human responsibility. They need not fight since Christ has already fought for them and accomplished victory. This is why believers are not urged to win the victory but stand (στῆναι) firm against the onslaught of the devil (6:11).<sup>102</sup>

The final point to address in this section is related to the question of how the believers’ act of putting on the full armor of God can be seen not merely as a human endeavor but as the result of their faith in Christ. My argument is that a connection, albeit somewhat loose, can be established between the notion of putting on the full armor of God and faith in the light of the broader context of Ephesians. The word πίστις occurs eight times in Ephesians (1:15; 2:8; 3:12, 17; 4:5, 13; 6:16, 23). Among these occurrences, the one most relevant to the present argument is found in 3:17. This verse is situated within the larger context of Paul’s second prayer for the strengthening of believers (3:14–21). According to Reinhard, the motif of the strengthening of believers described in Paul’s prayer, particularly in 3:16–19, is echoed in 6:10, where he urges believers to be made “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” with the

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indicatives of this passage appear in the development of each piece of armor as divine gift, with the passive use of the key verbs ἐνδυναμοῦσθε and ἐνδύσασθε, highlighting the dependency of believers on God, while the imperatives are indicated by the imperative use of these verbs, calling believers to respond actively to these commands. Reinhard, “Ephesians 6:10–18,” 531.

<sup>101</sup> Reinhard, “Ephesians 6:10–18,” 529–31.

<sup>102</sup> In his discussion of the phrase πρὸς τὸ δύνασθαι ὑμᾶς στήναι πρὸς τὰς μεθοδείας τοῦ διαβόλου, Benjamin L. Merkle comments as follows: “it is significant that believers are not urged to win the victory since that has already been secured by Christ. Rather, believers are urged to stand firm against the onslaught of the devil.” Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 212.



purpose of prompting believers to live in the reality of what he has prayed for them.<sup>103</sup> In this light, 6:10 may be referring to the role of believers in appropriating the divine provision through their faith.

Faith, indeed, assumes a central role, as expounded in 3:16–17, in the process of appropriating divine provisions bestowed by God in relation to the strengthening of believers: firstly, the strengthening of believers' inner being (3:16), and secondly, the indwelling of Christ in their heart (3:17). The two phrases *δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι* and *κατοικῆσαι τὸν Χριστόν* are the parallel expressions denoting divine gift as indicated by their syntactical dependence on the preceding aorist subjunctive verb *δῶ*.<sup>104</sup> More importantly, as David I. Starling rightly notes, the appropriation of these divine gifts takes place through the instrumentality of *faith* (3:17).<sup>105</sup> He continues to stress that this faith can only exist and persevere to the extent that it is enabled and strengthened by God.<sup>106</sup> It is the mighty work of the Spirit in the inner being of believers (3:16). Thus, the enabling of faith within believers is the result of God's sovereign act through the work of the Spirit.

Considering a close connection between 3:16–19 and 6:10, the instrumental role of faith in appropriating divine provision highlighted in Paul's earlier prayer for the strengthening of believers (3:17) is also implied in 6:10, in the phrase "be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might." Thus, it can be deduced from the "full armor of

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<sup>103</sup> Reinhard, "Ephesians 6:10–18," 527.

<sup>104</sup> Merkle helpfully argues that although some take *κατοικῆσαι* as exegetical to *κραταιωθῆναι*, a better approach is to take both as parallel ideas dependent on the preceding verb *δῶ* behaving as its direct objects, indicating that the Spirit's strengthening is identical to Christ's dwelling and the inner man is essentially the same as the heart. See Merkle, *Ephesians*, 105. A major proponent of the view that sees *κατοικῆσαι* as exegetical to *κραταιωθῆναι* is William J. Larkin, *Ephesians*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>105</sup> David I. Starling, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Reading the New Testament, 2nd Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2020), 76.

<sup>106</sup> Starling, *Reading Ephesians and Colossians*, 76. He also notes that this is what Paul implies in 1:15 and 6:23 as well.

God” holy war text of Ephesians (6:10–20) that faith as the sole requirement for God’s people in a holy war remains the same as in the holy war of the ancient Israel. Paul’s call for human responsibility, vividly conveyed through the image of “putting on the full armor of God,” is not a call to contribute to the warfare of Christ. Rather, it is a call to trust that Christ will continue to fight for them through the Spirit within them. This faith, however, is far from static. It enables believers to be fully responsible for working out each divine virtue contained in each piece of divinely provided armor. But the working faith implied by the image of “putting on the full armor of God” is not merely a human act, portraying the warfare against malevolent forces as a fusion of human responsibility and divine sovereignty. This very task is carried out by God himself, executed through the agency of the Spirit within believers, fortifying their faith. Humans are entirely responsible because God is entirely sovereign.

#### **First John 2:13–14; 4:4; 5:4–5**

Divine monergism and faith as the sole requirement for God’s people in a holy war appear together once again in 1 John by being substantially connected in the closest manner with the conquering motif of Revelation through the use of the verb *νικάω*, which occurs six times throughout 1 John (2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4 [2x], 5). First John, among the books of the New Testament, perhaps gives the most direct information about the opponent over whom believers must win victory (“the evil one” [2:13, 4]; “them” [4:4]; “the world” [5:4, 5]), divine monergism (4:4), and faith as the sole requirement for believers in the holy war against the enemy (5:4). Colin G. Kruse explains well the author’s understanding of believers’ victory in 1 John by piecing these ideas together: “Putting all this together, we can say that the author understands believers’ victory over the evil one to be achieved because God himself abides in them (he is greater than the evil one) and his Son, Jesus Christ, protects them; as a result, they are able to overcome

the evil one through their faith in God.”<sup>107</sup>

Although 1 John does not give us a direct description of warfare, it can be deduced from its context. The war-like term *νικάω* has “the evil one” (2:13, 14),<sup>108</sup> “them”<sup>109</sup> (4:4), and “the world”<sup>110</sup> as its objects, which, taken together, represent the forces antithetical to God in 1 John. This suggests that believers are engaged in warfare with those evil forces. The passage 3:8 further suggests that the purpose of believers’ conquering is to continue the decisive victory won by Christ, who came to the world to “destroy the works of the devil.”

First John 4:4 shows the divine monergism in the warfare against these united forces of evil. The phrase *ὅτι μείζων ἐστὶν ὁ ἐν ὑμῖν ἢ ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* states the reason why believers are able to conquer the false prophets mentioned in the chapter’s first verse: believers are able to conquer because (*ὅτι*) the “one who is in them is greater than the one who is in the world.” The referent of the first nominative masculine singular article *ὁ* has been variously identified as God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, or all three members of the Godhead.<sup>111</sup> But it is best to interpret the first *ὁ* as the Holy Spirit, and thus, the second *ὁ* automatically as the Spirit of Antichrist.<sup>112</sup> It is so because, as

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<sup>107</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 2nd ed., PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 98.

<sup>108</sup> According to Stephen Smalley, *τὸν πονηρὸν* here suggests the enemy in the conflict as “the Satan,” the personification of evil, and not evil in the abstract. See Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC, vol. 51 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 75.

<sup>109</sup> The pronoun *αὐτούς* (“them”) refers to the “false prophets” of 4:1, who have incorrect and deceptive ideas about Jesus and manifest “the spirit from the antichrist” (4:3). See Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 226. These false prophets show their close relationship with the world as they are described to have gone into the world (4:1).

<sup>110</sup> The term *κόσμος* is employed in the letters and Gospel of John with two basic meanings: the created universe, or life on earth (3:17; 4:17; cf. John 1:10) and sinful humanity, temporarily controlled by the power of evil and organized in opposition to God (4:3–5; 5:19); it is mostly with the latter meaning that *κόσμος* is used in the letters of John, especially in 1 John 2:15–17. See Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 81.

<sup>111</sup> For a comprehensive list of the proponents of each positional view, see Gary W. Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, EEC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 407.

<sup>112</sup> Alternatively, *ὁ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ* can be viewed as referring to “the evil one” in 3:10. See R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), 490.

Raymond E. Brown points out, the immediate context indicates that the contrast between “the one who is in you” and “the one who is in the world” continues the contrast between “the Spirit which belongs to God” and “the Spirit of the Antichrist which does not belong to God” (4:2–3).<sup>113</sup> The focal message of this verse is not believers’ victory by their own unaided efforts but by the power of the one who is in them.<sup>114</sup> God’s power at work within believers is what conquers.<sup>115</sup> This power comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit within believers, which enables believers to win the victory over the evil forces in opposition to God.

Another piece of evidence that shows this verse to be underscoring divine monergism in this conflict is the arresting use of the perfect tense *νενικήκατε*. John uses the perfect tense to make six major statements about the true Christians in 2:12–14, with the intended sense of a past action with ongoing consequences.<sup>116</sup> The author’s primary intention in making three perfect-tense affirmations (*ἀφέωνται* [2:12]; *ἐγνώκατε* [2:13a, 13c, 14a]; *νενικήκατε* [2:13b, 14b]) about the Christians is to characterize the divine benefits the believers have received.<sup>117</sup> Thus, the focus of this pericope is on what God has graciously done for his people through the agency of Christ,<sup>118</sup> not on what believers did. The use of the perfect tense *νενικήκατε* in 2:13b and 14b, and subsequently in 4:4

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<sup>113</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: Translated, with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AYB, vol. 30 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 497–98. Another reason is that in the transformed holy war in the NT, it is always through the indwelling Spirit within believers that God fights against the forces of evil.

<sup>114</sup> Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 160.

<sup>115</sup> James E. Rosscup, “The ‘Overcomer’ of the Apocalypse,” *Grace Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (1982): 263. Rosscup provides a soteriological perspective on the interpretation of this verse, arguing that the contrast described in this verse is between “the saved” and “those of the world” (p. 265).

<sup>116</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 75.

<sup>117</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 118.

<sup>118</sup> In discussion of the expression *τὸν ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς* in 2:13a, Brown argues that this expression should not be taken to mean that it somehow emphasizes the preexistence of the Son from before creation; rather, it underscores believers’ knowledge of the importance of Jesus’s earthly life. Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 303.

should be understood in this light. An important question to ask is, If the perfect tense refers to the past with an enduring effect, which past event does the author specifically have in view when using *νενικήκατε*? Based on the use of the same perfect tense of *νικάω* (*νενίκηκα*) in John 16:33, both Raymond Brown and Robert Yarbrough conclude that *νενικήκατε* references the victory Christ won on behalf of believers in his life and death.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the reason why the victory of believers, described as “young people” in this context and subsequently as “little children” (4:4), is portrayed as a *fait accompli* is because Christ has already decisively won the victory on their behalf, and now they are enabled to continue this victory as a consequence of Christ’s victory.

What, then, is the role of believers in the warfare against the united forces of evil? First John 5:4 clearly states that faith directed toward Jesus as the Son of God is the very means of believers’ victory. This is the only place in the New Testament that most explicitly connects the concept of believers’ victory with “faith” (*πίστις*).<sup>120</sup> The use of *νίκη* in the same verse is significant in the sense that it is a metonymy for the means with the implied meaning of “conquest” or “conquering power.”<sup>121</sup> This point leads to the conclusion that the conquering power comes through the faith of believers. The close identification of *ὁ νικῶν* and *ὁ πιστεύων* in 5:5 further demonstrates that “the one who conquers” is equated with “the one who believes.” Should the faith of believers as victory be viewed as a human contribution to the already accomplished victory of Christ? The Christocentric understanding of the victory is crucial to correctly answering this question.

The author uses two different tenses of the verb *νικάω* in 5:4–5. He first uses

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<sup>119</sup> Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 304; Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 120. Especially, Yarbrough incisively points out that in this particular context, John does not clearly explain which part of Jesus’s life and work marked the ultimate defeat of the devil, and as a result, the triumph seems to be connected to the entirety of Christ’s activity rather than being confined to a specific deed or event.

<sup>120</sup> It is not insignificant that this is the only place in Johannine writings where the noun “faith” is found since the author prefers to use the verbal form *πιστεύω*, portraying faith in a more dynamic fashion. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 187.

<sup>121</sup> Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 501.

the present active indicative νικᾷ, then the aorist participle νικήσασα, and afterward the present participle ὁ νικῶν. Colin Kruse argues in reference to the last two tenses that the aorist participle νικήσασα portrays the victory of faith as a complete action and the present participle ὁ νικῶν as an ongoing process.<sup>122</sup> David Smith similarly argues in reference to the first two tenses that while the present indicative νικᾷ portrays the fight as in progress, the aorist participle νικήσασα describes the victory as assured.<sup>123</sup> Here, the aorist participle νικήσασα requires further attention since it seems to provide clues as to what makes believers' victory complete.

To what conquest is νικήσασα referring?<sup>124</sup> Although it is possible to understand νικήσασα as referring to the victory won by the readers of John, like their conversion or their rejection of the false teachers (cf. 4:4),<sup>125</sup> this does not preclude the possibility that it has the accomplished victory of Christ in view.<sup>126</sup> Gary Derickson argues in support of this view that the aorist participle νικήσασα indicates not a battle, but the war that has been won, carrying a sense of the conclusive victory as there are no other battles left to be fought.<sup>127</sup> Evidently, the aorist participle νικήσασα looks back to the accomplished victory of Christ.

Nevertheless, one should not overlook that this victory is still portrayed as a consequence of the believers' act of believing as indicated by the noun πίστις in

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<sup>122</sup> Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 188.

<sup>123</sup> David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in vol. 5 of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: George H. Doran, 1897), 194.

<sup>124</sup> According to Derickson, the answer can be divided into five groups: (1) it describes Jesus's victory over the world, death, and the devil; (2) it refers to the readers' salvation and thus it relates to their conversion; (3) it refers to the victory of the Johannine community over the false teachers, namely the secessionists; (4) all three of them are intended; and (5) John is intentionally ambiguous. Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 502.

<sup>125</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Letters of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 19 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 174.

<sup>126</sup> Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 276; John Painter, *1, 2, and 3 John*, SP, vol. 18 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 298; Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 502.

<sup>127</sup> Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 502.

opposition to αὐτή.<sup>128</sup> In my view, it is thus best to interpret the aorist participle νικήσασα as portraying both divine grace and human responsibility. In other words, it implies the accomplished victory of Christ on the cross serving as the grounds of faith and at the same time, the victory appropriated by believers through faith emphasizing its finality. This victory needs to be continuously appropriated in the lives of believers as indicated by the present tense νικᾷ and ὁ νικῶν. This is perhaps what I. Howard Marshall intends when he states, “To believe that Jesus has been victorious is to have the power that enables us also to win the battle, for we know that our foe is already defeated and therefore powerless.”<sup>129</sup> The christological focus of faith expressed by the combination of the substantival participle ὁ πιστεύων with ὅτι, introducing the content of what is to be believed (Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) in 5:5, further reinforces this view. Faith in the accomplished victory of Christ is thus described as the sole requirement for believers in order to win the victory over the enemies in opposition to God and the church. But this victory is not a human contribution to the already accomplished victory of Christ because all it does is to appropriate the already accomplished victory of Christ, and this is made possible only by the indwelling Spirit within believers.

Before concluding this section, there remains an important feature of faith as victory that should be briefly addressed: its ethical character. The word πίστις as used in 5:4 refers to beliefs, not deeds, that is, doctrinal truths about Jesus Christ rather than believers’ practices or their faithfulness.<sup>130</sup> First John 5:4, where the term πίστις occurs, is virtually the concluding verse of the larger literary unit 4:7–5:4, in which both ethical exhortation and theology appear intertwined as nowhere else in 1 John.<sup>131</sup> Set within this

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<sup>128</sup> Martin M. Culy, *I, II, III John: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 123.

<sup>129</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 229.

<sup>130</sup> Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 503.

<sup>131</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 271.

context, 5:4 is connected with the preceding verse 5:3 through the causal ὅτι, explaining why keeping God’s commandments is not burdensome.<sup>132</sup> When seen in this light, John appears to define “victory” as a love for God through faith that enables believers to joyfully keep God’s commandments.<sup>133</sup> Thus, the notion of believers’ victory can be said to be connected with the Christian’s ongoing duty to keep God’s commandments. How, then, can believers continue to keep God’s commandments? According to 5:4a, the renewed inner being of believers (πάν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) is what enables believers to conquer the world (νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον). The phrase πάν τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ points to God as the source of believers’ spiritual birth and, therefore, their victory (νικᾷ τὸν κόσμον). The notion of being born of God metaphorically refers to the divine power that enables believers to overcome the world with all its temptations, which would prevent believers’ obedience to God’s commandments.

The holy war idea expressed in 1 John through the conquering language, particularly in 2:13–4, 4:4, 5:4–5, provides another example of the New Testament presentation of divine monergism and faith as the only role of God’s people in the transformed holy war of the New Testament, serving as a point of continuity with the ideal form of the holy war of the Old Testament tradition.

### Summary

This examination of a few select accounts and passages in the Old and New Testaments illustrates that victory in a holy war is attained when two fundamental conditions are fulfilled: (1) the active presence of God among his people, fighting on their behalf as a divine warrior, and (2) the faith of believers in God’s power. To put it differently, the only effective cause of victory in a holy war is God’s warring activity, and the sole requirement for God’s people is their faith in God’s actions, not their

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<sup>132</sup> Derickson, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 499–500.

<sup>133</sup> Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, 276.



military participation.

In the event of the exodus deliverance, God is praised as a divine warrior (15:3) because he fought on behalf of his people and delivered them from Egypt. God does all the work to deliver Israel from Egypt, and Israel contributes nothing to her deliverance. God single-handedly intervenes to fight for Israel. He hardened the heart of Pharaoh (14:4, 8, 17–18) and drove back the sea and turned it into dry land (14:21). He also threw the army of the Egyptians into panic and clogged their chariots, making them drive with difficulty (14:25). God caused all the Egyptians to be engulfed in the returning water and be drowned (14:26–28). On the contrary, Israel's role was simply to remain still (14:14) and move forward (14:15). Thus, the Exodus story focuses on the activity of God as the sole efficacious cause of Israel's deliverance and the Israelites' helplessness and position to only trust in God's activity as divine warrior.

In the conquest narrative and throughout the book of Joshua, the verb נתן (“to give”; *δίδωμι*) is frequently used throughout the book (e.g., 1:2, 3, 15; 2:9; 18:3; 20:2; 21:43; 23:15; 24:13), suggesting that the land is freely given to Israel through the divine military intervention by God. He dries up the Jordan River (3–4), and he alone brings down the walls of Jericho (6). In addition, numerous passages testify that the conquest was successful because God fought on behalf of Israel (10:10, 11, 13–14, 42; 11:20; 23:3). In the conquest mission, all that was required of Israel was to trust in God, manifesting through their commitment to the covenant (1:7–8). When Israel obeyed God's commandments, God brought victory to them, as seen in the conquest of Jericho (5:13–6:27). Conversely, when they disobeyed, God punished them by permitting their defeat at the hands of the enemy, as observed in the story of Israel's battle against Ai (7).

This ideal form of holy war extends into the prophetic writings. In the book of Isaiah, passages like Isaiah 7:1–9 and Isaiah 30:15–16, both of which emphasize the rejection of any human military co-participation and total dependence on Yahweh through faith, draw on the exodus narrative (Exod 14). One also observes that in the

chapters near the end of Isaiah, though the basic principle of divine monergism in a holy war remains the same (59:16), it undergoes a radical transformation in the sense that the holy war takes on both ethical and spiritual character. God no longer wages war against flesh and blood but wars against sin, that is, the lack of his moral qualities, including justice, peace, and righteousness.

The transformation of holy war towards eschatological, spiritual, and ethical directions, as prefigured in the prophetic books such as Isaiah, found its ultimate realization in the person and work of Christ. Although the concept of holy war underwent a radical change as it continued into the New Testament, the two essential principles remained the same: trust in Christ, who assumes the role of the divine warrior in place of God, and faith in his accomplished victory on the part of believers. I have examined this point through the lens of two case studies on the New Testament holy war texts: Ephesians 6:10–20 and 1 John, focusing on 2:13–14, 4:4, and 5:4–5.

In Ephesians 6:10–20, one observes that the function of Isaiah 59 as typological background for Ephesians 6:10–20, the close connection between the phrase “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might” (6:10), and the picture of Christ’s subjugation of all powers through his resurrection and exaltation in 1:19–21, indicate divine monergism in the holy war against the rulers, authorities, and spiritual forces in the heavenly realm (6:12). But it was also argued that the command to “put on” (*ἐνδύσασθε*) expresses an aspect of human responsibility, emphasizing believers’ duty to appropriate what God has graciously provided to believers in each piece of armor. These divine attributes must be worked out in the life of the believer. However, this should not be considered as a human contribution to the accomplished victory of Christ (1:19–21) because it is no more than an outward expression of believers’ faith in Christ’s power as suggested by the close relation of 6:10 to 3:16–19, where the instrumental role of faith in appropriating divine provision is depicted (3:17). In this light, the command to “put on the full armor of God,” following 6:10, is a call to trust in Christ and his power given to

them through the indwelling Spirit within them (3:16).

First John provides the clearest example demonstrating the divine monergism and faith as the only role of God's people in the transformed holy war of the New Testament, particularly the passages of 2:13–14; 4:4; 5:4–5. First John is the only place in the New Testament that most explicitly mentions that the victory is attributed to the work of the Spirit (4:4), and the only human responsibility of believers is to place their faith in Jesus, the Son of God (5:4–5), which enables them to continue the accomplished victory of Christ in and through their lives. Strikingly, 1 John is distinguished from other New Testament holy war texts in that it uses the same language as the book of Revelation in portraying the ideas of divine monergism and faith as the sole responsibility of God's people, namely the conquering language expressed through the verb *νικάω*.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

This chapter will synthesize the findings and draw a conclusion. This dissertation has aimed to address the question: What is one of Revelation's primary ways to convey the concept of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation? To address this question, I have argued that the conquering motif, expressed through the verb *νικάω*, serves as an effective soteriological framework for analyzing the relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation within the book of Revelation. To assess the validity of this argument, I have examined three foundational ideas that underlie the conquering motif. First, the application of the verb *νικάω* to the accomplished victory of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) conveys the idea of divine grace in salvation. Second, the application of the verb *νικάω* to God's people expresses the idea of human responsibility in salvation. Third, these two concepts can be best understood when interpreted through the lens of the monergistic pattern of holy war in the Old Testament. The following is the synthesis of the findings from the conducted research.

#### **Conquering Motif as Framework for the Interpretation of Divine Grace and Human Responsibility in Salvation**

The conquering of Christ demonstrates the divine monergism in salvation within the context of Revelation, illustrating how God accomplishes salvation through his agent Christ, who assumes the role of divine warrior, without human involvement. This is indicated by the use of the verb *νικάω* in connection with Christ's victory in three strategic places, each tied to three major depictions of Christ as a divine warrior: (1) in relation to the image of the Danielic Son of Man (3:21); (2) in relation to the image of the slain lamb standing (5:5); and (3) in relation to the image of the warrior lamb (17:14),

which is further elaborated as the eschatological divine warrior in 19:11–21. All three depictions indicate that Christ’s conquering is best understood as his active role as a divine warrior, ultimately leading to the new exodus salvation of God’s people (5:5–6; 5:9). However, self-descriptions such as “I am the Living One” and “I have the keys of Death and Hades” in 1:18, “Lamb standing as though it had been slain” in 5:6, and “robe dipped in blood” in 19:13, reframe Christ’s victory in terms of his death and resurrection. These phrases indicate that in Revelation, Christ’s death and resurrection are portrayed as the primary means by which the salvation of God’s people is achieved. This study has also asserted that each instance of *νικάω* serves a specific soteriological purpose: (1) the initiation of salvation (*ἐνίκησεν*; 5:5); (2) motivation in the present (*ἐνίκησα*; 3:21); and the consummation of salvation (*νικήσει*; 17:14). While the conquering of Christ reinterprets the Old Testament concept of Yahweh’s bloody warfare in terms of his death and resurrection, one truth remains constant: Christ single-handedly fights to achieve salvation of God’s people without human participation. The usage of *νικάω* in all three stages of Christ’s redemptive victory (past, present, and future) supports this assertion.

The concept of believers’ conquering conveys the notion of human responsibility in salvation. I have closely examined the notion of human responsibility in salvation as conveyed by the conquering language applied to believers, focusing on two key ideas: (1) conquering as an expression of one’s saving faith, and (2) divine enablement of believers’ conquering, which suggests that their conquering does not make a human contribution to the already accomplished salvation through Christ’s victory. Conquering represents an essential condition that believers must fulfill to attain the final salvation (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12; 3:21; 21:7). While conquering involves various good works on the part of believers, such as repentance, faithfulness, worship, and perseverance, it should not be misconstrued as the basis for salvation by works. Instead, it should be viewed as nothing more than the natural outcome of one’s genuine saving faith. Genuine faith invariably leads to righteous deeds. Although the conquering language

carries martial undertones, when considered through identification with Christ's conquering, it should be interpreted nonviolently. This implies that believers' victory is achieved in the same manner as Christ's: through unwavering faith even unto death. Hence, the conquering of believers amounts to nothing more than persevering faith in Christ unto death. Furthermore, the emphasis on believers' good works suggests a connection between believers' conquering and the process of sanctification. He initiated salvation (5:5) and will consummate it (17:14). However, during the inter-advent period, the salvation achieved by Christ must be worked out and actualized through the actions of believers. This period coincides with the time of the soteriological function (motivation) performed by Christ's conquering in the present (3:21). This implies that while believers' conquering undeniably involves human agency, it should not be misconstrued as a human contribution to the already completed salvation accomplished by Christ. This assertion is further substantiated by two case studies involving the use of *νικάω* in two specific instances: 12:11 and 15:2. In these cases, believers' conquering unequivocally depends on and is made possible by Christ's victory, as expressed through the phrases "by the blood of the Lamb" and "the song of the Lamb," respectively.

Lastly, this study has examined the role of the Spirit. The Spirit, serving as the embodiment of both God's and Christ's presence in the world, assumes a central role in the application of Christ's accomplished victory to believers. It is the Spirit that empowers believers to maintain their ongoing victory, allowing them to ultimately inherit the final salvation. The Spirit fulfills this critical soteriological role by fortifying believers' faith through pneumatic discernment, ethical transformation, and eschatological orientation. In sum, the overall analysis of the conquering motif firmly supports the idea that salvation for God's people in Revelation is entirely a result of divine grace. This perspective leaves no room for a synergistic understanding of salvation, as even human responsibility in salvation is divinely enabled.

## **The Influence of Old Testament Holy War on the Soteriological Argument of Revelation**

This study has also demonstrated how Revelation draws extensively from Old Testament material to shape its theology, especially its soteriology. Specifically, it observes that the imagery and language of the divine warrior (e.g., 1:13–16; 19:11–21) as well as holy war (e.g., 2–3; 12:1–15:4) permeate nearly every part of Revelation. The presence of ideas related to the themes of divine warrior and holy war in Revelation underscores the importance of recognizing the typological relationship between the Old Testament holy war and that depicted in Revelation, as these themes find their origins in the Old Testament. In light of this context, this dissertation has argued that Revelation employs typology by drawing from two fundamental Old Testament holy war concepts to shape its ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation: (1) God, as the divine warrior, single-handedly fights for his oppressed people to rescue them from their enemies without human involvement; and (2) the sole requirement for victory is faith on the part of God’s people. These two foundational ideas from the Old Testament holy war tradition are carried over into the conquering of Christ (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and that of believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7), respectively.

To further substantiate these claims, three instances of holy war in the Old Testament have been closely examined: (1) the exodus deliverance, (2) the conquest narrative, and (3) three passages from the book of Isaiah. The conclusion drawn from the analysis of these three cases of holy war in the Old Testament is that Israel experienced victorious salvation when two fundamental conditions were met: (1) the active presence of Yahweh among Israelites, fighting for them as the divine warrior and (2) their unwavering trust placed in him. Consequently, the concepts of divine monergism in salvation and the necessity of faith on the part of God’s people were evident. In the exodus narrative, God fought single-handedly for his people with no human participation (Exod 15:3), while all that was required of Israel was to be still (Exod 14:14) and go forward (Exod 14:15). In the conquest narrative, numerous passages affirm that the

conquest was successful because God fought on behalf of Israel (Josh 10:10, 11, 13–14, 42; 11:20; 23:3), with the conquest of Jericho (Josh 6) being a prime example of this divine intervention. All that was required of Israel was to trust God, demonstrating their faith through their commitment to the covenant (Josh 1:7–8). However, when they disobeyed, they experienced defeat at the hands of their adversaries (Josh 7). This monergistic pattern of holy war continues into the prophetic writings. An examination of three passages from the book of Isaiah, specifically 7:1–9, 30:15–16, and 59, reveals that these passages emphasize the rejection of any human military cooperation and total dependence on Yahweh through trust in him. The idea of holy war in Isaiah 59, while maintaining divine monergism in salvation (59:16), undergoes a radical transformation in eschatological, spiritual, and ethical directions, suggesting that this transformed pattern will be the predominant model for future holy wars.

The monergistic paradigm of holy war, foreshadowed in the exodus, the conquest, and in prophetic books such as Isaiah, continues into the New Testament and finds its ultimate realization in the person and work of Christ. While preserving the elements of divine monergism in salvation and faith on the part of God's people, several points of transformation have been observed in comparison with the Old Testament holy war. First, Christ's victory through his death and resurrection emerges as the predominant lens through which to interpret the concept of God fighting on behalf of his people without human involvement. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ assumes the role of divine warrior. Second, holy war is spiritualized in the sense that it is no longer waged against flesh and blood, but against the devil (Eph 6:12; 1 John 2:13). Third, holy war acquires an ethical dimension, implying that victory over adversaries is primarily achieved through faith expressed in ethical works (Eph 6:10–20; 1 John 5:2–3). Fourth, the central role of the indwelling Spirit in applying Christ's victory to believers becomes the predominant pattern for waging holy war (Eph 3:16; 1 John 4:4). To support these arguments, I have examined two specific New Testament passages related to holy war:



Ephesians 6:10–20 and 1 John, with a particular focus on 2:13–14, 4:4, and 5:4–5.

All of these patterns of holy war are amplified in Revelation, representing an escalated typological fulfillment of holy wars depicted in the exodus, the conquest, and prophetic books. Particularly, a soteriological use of these patterns is perceived in the book, utilizing the two foundational holy war ideas of God fighting single-handedly on behalf of his people with no human participation and faith on the part of God's people as the sole requirement for victory. These patterns, as also observed in the transformed holy war of Ephesians 6:10–20 and 1 John (2:13–14; 4:4; 5:4–5), significantly shape Revelation's notions of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation, primarily conveyed through the conquering motif.

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## ABSTRACT

### SALVATION AS VICTORY: A STUDY ON DIVINE GRACE AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN SALVATION IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE CONQUERING MOTIF

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Very little has been written on the themes of divine grace and human responsibility for salvation in the book of Revelation. This dissertation argues that the conquering motif, conveyed by the verb *νικάω* and grounded in the theme of Old Testament holy war, serves as an effective soteriological framework through which to analyze the intricate relationship between divine grace and human responsibility in salvation as understood within the context of the symbolic thought-world of Revelation. The rationale for this argument is that the concept of salvation in Revelation is generally understood in terms of “victory.”

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis, history of research, and methodology. Chapter 2 examines all three instances of *νικάω* occurring in reference to Christ’s victory (3:21; 5:5; 17:14) and portraying Christ as the divine warrior (the Son of Man, the slain lamb, and the warrior lamb/divine warrior), suggesting that the conquering of Christ is to be interpreted as the warring activity of divine warrior. However, such images as the “exalted Christ,” the “slain lamb,” and “robe dipped in blood” reinterpret his warring activity in terms of his death and resurrection, indicating that Christ’s death and resurrection are the primary means through which the salvation of God’s people is achieved. Each occurrence of *νικάω* performs a specific soteriological function: initiation

of salvation (5:5), motivation in the present (3:21), and consummation of salvation (17:14), indicating that salvation, from beginning to end, is a matter of divine grace.

Chapters 3–5 address human responsibility in salvation. Chapter 3 lays an interpretive foundation for how to analyze the notion of human responsibility expressed by the application of conquering language to believers (2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21; 21:7). The burden of this chapter is to demonstrate that the nature of human responsibility for salvation is not mere human work but the external proof of one's inner saving faith. Chapter 4 builds on this foundation by thoroughly analyzing 12:11 and 15:2, where *νικάω* occurs in reference to believers' conquering, and demonstrating how believers' victory, while a human act, is divinely enabled through Christ's victory. Chapter 5 investigates the role of the Spirit in salvation, focusing on how the Spirit applies Christ's accomplished victory to believers, enabling them to conquer and consequently inherit final salvation.

Chapter 6 probes the central role of the Old Testament holy war tradition in shaping the concept of salvation as victory in Revelation, arguing that in light of the typological relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Revelation contains the two essential typological ideas drawn from the monergistic pattern of holy war and uses them to shape its ideas of divine grace and human responsibility in salvation. These two basic ideas are: (1) God fights on behalf of his people with no human involvement, showing that God's saving grace is monergistic; (2) faith on the part of God's people is the sole requirement for them to win victory. These ideas are carried over into the conquering of Christ and that of believers. Chapter 7 synthesizes the study's findings.

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